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Paradigmatic Model of Tacit Knowledge Sharing from the Perspective of Psychology Experts in Iranian Universities: A Grounded Theory Approach

Gholamali. Roudi[1], Fateme. Momeni[2*], Elham. Mostafavi[1], Fateme. Sagha[1]

[1] Lecturer, Department of Psychology, Faculty of Humanities, Non-Governmental and Non-Profit University of the North, Amol, Iran
[2] Assistant Professor, Department of Psychology, Faculty of Humanities, Non-Governmental and Non-Profit University of the North, Amol, Iran

*** Corresponding author email address**: f.momeni@shomal.ac.ir

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A B S T R A C T

In the contemporary knowledge-based era, organizations—particularly universities—have become increasingly reliant on their knowledge capital. Within this context, tacit knowledge, as a hidden yet strategic resource, plays a critical role in enhancing the quality of education, research, and innovation. Unlike explicit knowledge, tacit knowledge is formed through experience, intuition, and personal skills, and is transmitted only through social interactions and human relationships. Despite the importance of this concept, academic research in Iran has largely focused on explicit knowledge, and no comprehensive model of tacit knowledge sharing from the perspective of academic psychologists has been proposed. The aim of the present study was to design a paradigmatic model of tacit knowledge sharing in Iranian universities using a grounded theory approach. This qualitative study was conducted through semi-structured interviews with psychology experts. The data were analyzed using open, axial, and selective coding, and the final model was extracted in the form of five core categories: causal conditions, contextual conditions, intervening conditions, strategies, and consequences. The results indicated that factors such as trust, motivation, interpersonal skills, organizational culture, and managerial support play a key role in tacit knowledge sharing. The outcomes of this process include the empowerment of psychologists, improved performance, increased creativity, and enhanced quality of psychological services. The findings suggest that tacit knowledge sharing is a dynamic and multi-level process shaped through the interaction between organizational structures and psychological components. By focusing on the perspectives of psychologists and integrating a psychological approach with grounded theory, this study represents a novel step toward the localization of knowledge management theories within the context of higher education in Iran.

Keywords: *Tacit knowledge; Grounded theory; Empowerment; Academic psychologists*

1. Introduction

In the contemporary knowledge-based societies, organizations increasingly rely on intangible assets rather than physical resources to achieve effectiveness, innovation, and sustainability. Among these intangible assets, knowledge has been widely recognized as a critical strategic resource that enables organizations to adapt to complex environments, enhance performance, and maintain competitive advantage. Universities and higher education institutions, in particular, function as knowledge-intensive organizations in which the creation, dissemination, and application of knowledge constitute their core missions. Within such contexts, the ability of academic staff and professionals to share knowledge effectively is central to improving teaching quality, research productivity, professional practice, and organizational learning. However, not all forms of knowledge are equally visible or easily transferable, and growing attention has therefore been directed toward tacit knowledge as a pivotal yet underexplored dimension of organizational knowledge systems (Burnette, 2017; Fan & Beh, 2024).

Tacit knowledge refers to deeply embedded, experience-based, and context-specific knowledge that is difficult to formalize, codify, or communicate through written or explicit means. It is rooted in individual cognition, professional judgment, intuition, values, and skills that develop through prolonged practice and social interaction. Unlike explicit knowledge, which can be documented and transferred through manuals, databases, or formal training programs, tacit knowledge is primarily shared through observation, dialogue, mentoring, storytelling, and collaborative engagement. As such, tacit knowledge sharing is inherently relational and socially constructed, relying heavily on trust, mutual understanding, and shared professional norms (Gubbins & Dooley, 2021; Obrenovic et al., 2020). In academic and professional settings, tacit knowledge plays a decisive role in complex decision-making, problem-solving, creativity, and the refinement of professional practice.

Recent scholarship has emphasized that tacit knowledge sharing is particularly salient in higher education environments, where academic work involves not only the transmission of disciplinary knowledge but also the cultivation of critical thinking, ethical reasoning, and professional judgment. Academics accumulate tacit knowledge through years of teaching, research supervision, clinical or applied practice, and engagement with diverse learners and colleagues. This accumulated knowledge often manifests in subtle pedagogical strategies, diagnostic reasoning, interpersonal sensitivity, and adaptive responses to ambiguous situations. Despite its significance, tacit knowledge remains largely invisible within formal organizational structures, and its sharing is often left to informal networks and individual initiative (Fan & Beh, 2024; Shahzad et al., 2024).

The literature on knowledge sharing has expanded considerably over the past two decades, addressing antecedents, processes, and outcomes of both explicit and tacit knowledge exchange. Systematic reviews have highlighted that knowledge sharing is influenced by a complex interplay of individual, relational, organizational, and technological factors, including motivation, leadership, organizational culture, communication channels, and reward systems (Castaneda & Rojas, 2024; Yeboah, 2023). Within this body of research, tacit knowledge sharing has emerged as a distinct phenomenon requiring specific enabling conditions, given its personal, experiential, and often non-verbal nature. Studies have shown that relational social capital, altruism, enjoyment of sharing, and psychological safety significantly shape individuals' willingness to share tacit knowledge (Gubbins & Dooley, 2021; Obrenovic et al., 2020).

In higher education contexts, organizational culture has been identified as a critical determinant of tacit knowledge sharing. Cultures that emphasize collaboration, openness, trust, and continuous learning are more likely to facilitate informal exchanges of experiential knowledge among academics and professionals. Conversely, competitive climates, rigid hierarchies, and excessive performance pressures may inhibit knowledge sharing by fostering fear of judgment, loss of power, or reduced individual advantage (Roudi et al., 2019; Yıldız et al., 2025). Empirical evidence from universities and academic libraries suggests that leadership styles, participatory decision-making, and supportive institutional policies can significantly enhance the flow of tacit knowledge among staff (Roudi et al., 2019; Shahzad et al., 2024).

Beyond organizational culture, individual psychological factors play a crucial role in tacit knowledge sharing. Research grounded in psychological and behavioral perspectives has demonstrated that emotional intelligence, psychological capital, intrinsic motivation, and prosocial orientations are positively associated with individuals' engagement in knowledge sharing behaviors. For example, emotional intelligence enables individuals to navigate

interpersonal dynamics, manage emotions, and communicate effectively, thereby facilitating the exchange of nuanced and sensitive knowledge (Li & Li, 2024). Similarly, psychological capital—comprising hope, efficacy, resilience, and optimism—has been shown to foster innovative behaviors through the mediating role of tacit knowledge sharing (Hu et al., 2023). These findings underscore the importance of integrating psychological dimensions into models of knowledge sharing, particularly in professional and academic environments.

Tacit knowledge sharing has also been linked to a wide range of positive organizational outcomes. At the individual level, it contributes to professional development, skill enhancement, and increased self-efficacy. At the group and organizational levels, it supports creativity, innovation, problem-solving capacity, and performance improvement. Studies conducted across diverse sectors, including education, health, finance, and technology, consistently indicate that organizations that effectively leverage tacit knowledge are better positioned to adapt to change and sustain long-term effectiveness (Kucharska & Erickson, 2023; Varghese & Rao, 2024). In academic settings, tacit knowledge sharing among faculty has been associated with improved teaching practices, collaborative research, mentoring quality, and institutional learning (Burnette, 2017; Fan & Beh, 2024).

In recent years, digitalization and the proliferation of online communication tools have added new dimensions to tacit knowledge sharing. While tacit knowledge has traditionally been associated with face-to-face interaction, emerging evidence suggests that virtual platforms, when used effectively, can also support the exchange of experiential knowledge by enabling reflection, dialogue, and collaborative sense-making. During the COVID-19 pandemic, online meeting tools played a significant role in sustaining tacit knowledge sharing among knowledge workers, highlighting both opportunities and challenges associated with digital environments (Abidi et al., 2023). Nevertheless, scholars caution that technology alone cannot substitute for the relational and contextual foundations of tacit knowledge sharing, emphasizing the continued importance of trust, engagement, and shared meaning (Castaneda & Rojas, 2024).

Despite the growing body of international research, there remains a notable gap in context-specific and theory-driven studies that explore tacit knowledge sharing within higher education systems of developing and emerging economies. In particular, the Iranian higher education context presents unique cultural, organizational, and professional characteristics that may shape knowledge sharing processes in distinct ways. Prior studies in Iran have primarily examined tacit knowledge sharing in libraries, health organizations, or administrative settings, often focusing on leadership, organizational culture, or managerial practices (Jamshidi et al., 2018; Roudi et al., 2019). While these studies provide valuable insights, they do not fully capture the perspectives of academic psychologists, whose professional roles involve complex cognitive, emotional, and relational processes.

Psychologists working in universities occupy a multifaceted position that encompasses teaching, research, clinical or counseling practice, supervision, and community engagement. Their professional effectiveness relies heavily on tacit knowledge, including clinical judgment, diagnostic reasoning, therapeutic skills, ethical sensitivity, and interpersonal attunement. The sharing of such knowledge among psychologists is essential not only for individual professional growth but also for improving the quality of psychological services, education, and research. However, tacit knowledge sharing among academic psychologists has received limited empirical attention, particularly within non-Western contexts. Qualitative investigations that foreground practitioners' lived experiences and meaning-making processes are therefore needed to deepen understanding of this phenomenon (Fan & Beh, 2024; Shahzad et al., 2024).

Grounded theory offers a particularly suitable methodological framework for exploring tacit knowledge sharing as a complex, process-oriented, and context-dependent phenomenon. By generating theory inductively from empirical data, grounded theory allows researchers to capture participants' perspectives, interactions, and interpretations without imposing predefined models. Previous qualitative studies have successfully employed grounded theory to examine tacit knowledge exchange among educators, managers, and professionals, revealing dynamic mechanisms and contextual conditions that are often overlooked in quantitative research (Ariani et al., 2025; Shahzad et al., 2024). In the Iranian context, grounded theory approaches have been used to explore mechanisms of tacit knowledge utilization and sharing, highlighting the importance of cultural norms, professional identity, and organizational support (Ariani et al., 2025; Jamshidi et al., 2018).

Furthermore, contemporary debates in knowledge management increasingly emphasize the integration of tacit and explicit knowledge, rather than treating them as separate

or hierarchical forms. Research suggests that organizational creativity and innovation are maximized when both forms of knowledge are actively shared and mutually reinforcing (Kucharska & Erickson, 2023; Yıldız et al., 2025). This integrative perspective aligns with broader discussions on sustainable leadership, intellectual capital, and organizational resilience, particularly in knowledge-intensive sectors such as higher education (Niguse et al., 2025; Zavatin et al., 2023). Understanding how tacit knowledge sharing unfolds within academic psychology can therefore contribute not only to the literature on knowledge management but also to policy and practice aimed at strengthening higher education systems.

In light of these considerations, there is a clear need for an in-depth, contextually grounded exploration of tacit knowledge sharing from the perspective of psychology experts in Iranian universities. Such an investigation can illuminate the causal conditions, contextual factors, strategies, and consequences associated with this phenomenon, while also integrating psychological and organizational dimensions into a coherent explanatory framework. By adopting a grounded theory approach, the present study seeks to move beyond fragmented findings and offer a paradigmatic model that reflects the lived experiences of academic psychologists and the realities of the Iranian higher education context (Ariani et al., 2025; Fan & Beh, 2024; Yıldız et al., 2025).

The aim of this study is to develop a paradigmatic model of tacit knowledge sharing from the perspective of psychology experts in Iranian universities using a grounded theory approach.

2. Methods and Materials

This study is qualitative in nature and was conducted using a grounded theory approach. The purpose of this approach is to generate a theory grounded in empirical data in order to explain a social phenomenon within its real-life context. The present study aimed to design a paradigmatic model of tacit knowledge sharing from the perspective of psychology experts in Iranian universities. The study population included psychology experts, faculty members, and higher education specialists who had teaching and research experience in Iranian universities in the areas of knowledge transfer, organizational learning, or psychological processes related to knowledge sharing. Purposeful sampling was used to select participants who possessed the greatest level of knowledge and experience regarding the phenomenon under investigation. Sampling continued until theoretical saturation was achieved, meaning that no new data or codes emerged from additional interviews. In total, 12 in-depth semi-structured interviews were conducted with eligible experts. The data collection instrument was a semi-structured interview guide developed based on the research objectives and a review of the relevant literature. The interview questions focused on themes such as the concept of tacit knowledge from psychologists' perspectives, facilitating and inhibiting conditions for its sharing in the university environment, behavioral and managerial strategies, and its individual and organizational outcomes. During the interviews, probing and follow-up questions were used to clarify responses and deepen the researcher's understanding. The average duration of each interview was approximately 60 minutes. All interviews were audio-recorded with participants' consent and transcribed verbatim. All stages of the study were conducted in accordance with research ethics principles. Prior to each interview, the purpose of the study, confidentiality of information, and participants' right to withdraw were explained, and informed consent was obtained. No personally identifiable information was disclosed in the final report.

The interview data were analyzed using the three-stage coding procedure proposed by Strauss and Corbin—open, axial, and selective coding (Strauss & Corbin, 1998). During open coding, key concepts were extracted from the interview data. In axial coding, similar codes were organized into broader categories. In selective coding, the core categories were integrated within a paradigmatic framework consisting of causal conditions, contextual conditions, intervening conditions, strategies, and consequences, ultimately leading to the development of a paradigmatic model of tacit knowledge sharing from the perspective of psychology experts. To ensure internal credibility, participant checking and expert co-coding were employed. In addition, the trustworthiness of the data was evaluated using the four criteria proposed by Lincoln and Guba (Lincoln & Guba, 1985), namely credibility, dependability, confirmability, and transferability. To enhance credibility, field notes were maintained and data were reviewed by participants. To strengthen dependability, the coding procedures were documented and reported in detail. Furthermore, the findings were reviewed and confirmed by two independent researchers to ensure confirmability of the data.

3. Findings and Results

Through constant comparative analysis of the data, codes that were conceptually similar were merged. From the set of secondary codes within lexical concepts such as individual skill development, reconstruction and strengthening of skills, knowledge documentation, and individual knowledge transfer, broader categories were formed, including enhancement of individual knowledge, individual knowledge sharing, collective reflection, and effectiveness of therapeutic approaches. These categories were ultimately organized into higher-level classes, namely fostering a collaborative mindset, professional interaction, and decentralization.

Table 1

Secondary Codes, Conceptual Codes, Categories, and Classes Generated for Research Question One

Class	Category	Concept	Secondary Codes
Fostering a collaborative mindset	Enhancement of individual knowledge	Individual skill development	Sharing deep experiences; professional interaction; accurate decision-making; effectiveness of therapy sessions; achieving success; presenting therapeutic roadmaps; teamwork; increased therapeutic self-efficacy; collective reflection; handling sensitive situations; emotion regulation in therapy sessions; expansion of individual experiences; training for individual effectiveness; experiential learning; skill development
Professional interaction	Individual knowledge sharing	Reconstruction and strengthening of skills	
Decentralization	Collective reflection	Knowledge documentation	
	Effectiveness of therapeutic approach	Individual knowledge transfer	

Table 2

Initial Coding of the Impact of Tacit Knowledge Sharing on the Diagnosis and Treatment of Psychological Disorders (Research Question Two)

Interview Text	Initial Codes
Tacit knowledge significantly influences our analytical processes in diagnostic formulation. If this knowledge is inaccurate or flawed, it may sometimes lead to irreversible errors in diagnosis and treatment. Therefore, by sharing knowledge with others, individuals can become aware of their potential errors as well as changes introduced by advances in contemporary science. Tacit knowledge is the product of years of clinical experience and careful observation; by sharing this knowledge with colleagues, I can benefit from their perspectives and experiences to enrich assessments, achieve more accurate diagnoses, and select more appropriate therapeutic interventions.	Necessity of precise understanding of analytical processes; appropriate diagnostic formulation; reduction of cognitive errors in treatment; necessity of keeping pace with scientific developments and updating knowledge; enrichment of assessment processes; more accurate and appropriate diagnoses; selection of appropriate therapeutic interventions

In the initial coding related to the second research question, a total of 56 codes were identified. Through constant comparison, unrelated codes were removed and conceptually similar codes were merged, resulting in 30 remaining initial codes. Similar initial codes were then grouped into preliminary classes. This initial categorization began with the earliest interviews in order to progressively clarify the emerging classes.

Table 3

Secondary Codes, Conceptual Codes, Categories, and Classes Generated

Class	Category	Concept	Secondary Codes
Diagnostic formulation	Integrative therapeutic approach	Identification of capacities and treatment plans	Identification of subtle behavioral and cognitive patterns; integrative therapeutic perspectives; effective treatment plans; reduction of diagnostic–therapeutic errors; improvement of quality of care; effectiveness of analytical and diagnostic processes; reduction of errors arising from clinical experience and observation; sharing clinical experience; accurate collection of family history; increased treatment effectiveness; enriched assessments; selection of appropriate therapeutic interventions; updating scientific knowledge; problem identification; selection of appropriate solutions
Treatment effectiveness	Appropriate assessment and diagnosis	Reduction of diagnostic and treatment errors	
Therapeutic interventions	Appropriate therapeutic solutions	Selection of appropriate therapeutic interventions	

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Through constant comparative analysis, conceptually similar codes were merged. From secondary codes related to lexical concepts such as identification of capacities and treatment plans, reduction of diagnostic and treatment errors, and selection of appropriate therapeutic interventions, broader categories were formed, including integrative therapeutic approach, appropriate assessment and diagnosis, and appropriate therapeutic solutions. These were ultimately organized into the classes of diagnostic formulation, treatment effectiveness, and therapeutic interventions.

Table 4

Secondary Codes, Conceptual Codes, Categories, and Classes Generated for Research Question Three

Class	Category	Concept	Secondary Codes
Development of professional networks	Communication skills	Client retention and maintenance	Verbal communication; formation of therapeutic alliance; emotional responsiveness; empathy; active listening; client satisfaction; development of professional networks; client attraction and retention; responding to client resistance; management of therapy sessions; sense of client safety; trust building; indirect client engagement; motivation for psychological well-being; communication skills; body language; regulation of session environment; more humane and effective therapeutic approaches; increased client awareness; deep experiential knowledge
Comprehensive attention to clients	Active listening	Client trust	
Increased client awareness	Nonverbal communication	Client safety	

Through constant comparison, conceptually similar codes were merged. From secondary codes related to lexical concepts such as client retention, trust building, and client safety, categories including communication skills, active listening, and nonverbal communication were formed, which ultimately resulted in the classes of professional network development, comprehensive attention to clients, and increased client awareness.

Table 5

Secondary Codes, Conceptual Codes, Categories, and Classes Generated for Research Question Four

Class	Category	Concept	Secondary Codes
Monitoring and evaluation of tacit knowledge processes	Determination of evaluation indicators	Identification of evaluation indicators	Identification of strengths and weaknesses; revision of therapeutic approaches; dynamic nature of knowledge; group dialogue; familiarity with new scientific developments and achievements; comparison of one's performance with others; professional reflection; strengthening individual experiences; self-observation; self-performance review
Evaluation	Determination of individual performance evaluation indicators	Identification of empowerment criteria	—

Through constant comparison, conceptually similar codes were merged. From secondary codes related to identifying evaluation indicators and empowerment criteria, categories such as determination of employee evaluation indicators and determination of individual performance indicators were developed, leading to the classes of monitoring and evaluation of tacit knowledge processes and evaluation.

Table 6

Secondary Codes, Conceptual Codes, Categories, and Classes Generated for Research Question Five

Class	Category	Concept	Secondary Codes
—	Continuous and ongoing evaluation	Individual performance evaluation	Therapist expertise; internalization and externalization of knowledge; expansion of experiential scope (collective knowledge); experiential learning; skill development; creativity and innovation; increased self-confidence; acquisition of technical and specialized skills; future-oriented thinking; accurate identification of strengths and weaknesses; increased achievements; precise identification of needs, goals, and planning; decision-making quality; learning from past mistakes; enhancement of individual performance; revision of individual worldview
Determination of skill-development indicators and criteria	Identification of needs and demands	Enhancement of individual knowledge	
Knowledge enhancement	Individual and group training	Increased individual awareness	

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Through constant comparison, conceptually similar codes were merged. From secondary codes related to individual performance evaluation, enhancement of individual knowledge, and increased individual awareness, categories such as continuous evaluation, identification of needs and demands, and individual and group training were formed, ultimately resulting in the classes of determining tacit skill-development indicators and knowledge enhancement.

Table 7

Secondary Codes, Conceptual Codes, Categories, and Classes Generated for Research Question Six

Class	Category	Concept	Secondary Codes
Content development	Necessity of interpersonal communication	Development of educational and therapeutic content	Development of new therapeutic approaches; initiation of group discussions; novel diagnostic and therapeutic methods; solving complex problems; completion and refinement of tacit knowledge; development of integrative treatment methods; design of specialized therapeutic exercises; creation of innovative educational and therapeutic methods; design of applied workshops; strengthening autonomy; enhancement of intrinsic motivation
Transdiagnostic therapy	Identification and analysis of client needs	Refinement of individual knowledge	
Design of applied workshops	Improved interaction with clients	Enhancement of service quality; updating therapeutic methods	

Through constant comparison, conceptually similar codes were merged. From secondary codes related to educational and therapeutic content development, refinement of individual knowledge, enhancement of service quality, and updating therapeutic methods, categories such as necessity of interpersonal communication, identification and analysis of client needs, and improved client interaction were formed, leading to the classes of interaction and content development, transdiagnostic therapy, and design of applied workshops.

Table 8

Secondary Codes, Conceptual Codes, Categories, and Classes Generated for Research Question Seven

Class	Category	Concept	Secondary Codes
—	Individual training	Identification of individual knowledge	Writing articles; narrative writing; participation in educational workshops and lectures; building professional collaborator networks; recording podcasts or educational videos; reconstruction of experiential language; formation of reflective groups; writing clinical reports; mentoring; use of supervision; participation in group supervision; enhancement of tacit knowledge; dissemination of educational content; holding peer meetings to analyze complex cases
Educational content production	Knowledge documentation	Documentation of knowledge	
Specialized networking	Publication of clinical reports	Specialized collective reflection	

Through constant comparative analysis, conceptually similar codes were merged. From secondary codes related to dissemination of educational content, knowledge documentation, and specialized collective reflection, categories such as identification of individual knowledge, documentation of knowledge, and publication of clinical reports were developed, ultimately resulting in the classes of individual training, educational content production, and specialized networking.

Table 9

Findings Derived from Axial Coding and Subcategories

Examples of Open Codes	Subcategories	Causal Conditions
Necessity of training highly skilled specialists; necessity of transferring technical and specialized skills; necessity of holding training workshops; necessity of transferring mental experiences; necessity of transferring lived experiences; necessity of transferring skills in an applied manner; necessity of converting tacit knowledge into explicit knowledge	Acquisition of individual skills; strengthening the learning orientation	Causal conditions

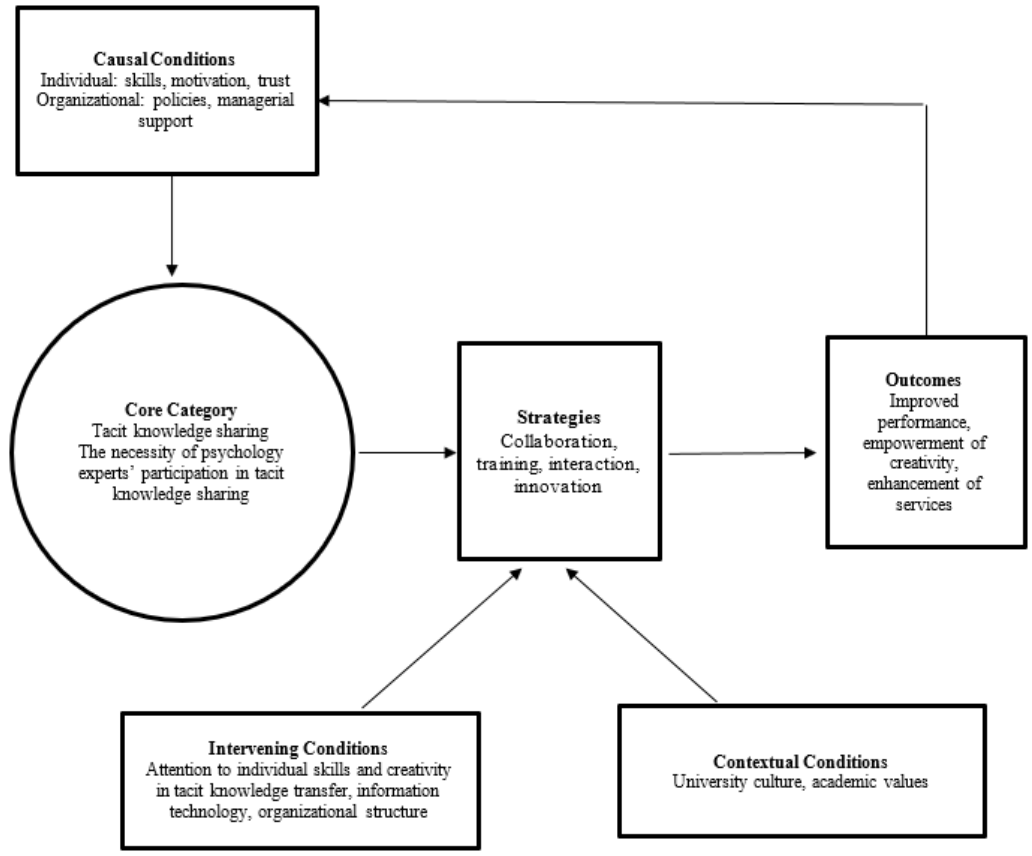
Efforts to ensure maximum participation of all psychology specialists in tacit knowledge sharing; efforts to increase individual motivation; efforts to transfer technical and specialized skills and competencies	Necessity of participation of psychology specialists in tacit knowledge sharing	Core category
Necessity of selecting evaluation indicators; evaluation process; individual performance evaluation; necessity of increasing the level of empowerment; comparative assessment of competencies; foresight ability; determination of success criteria; monitoring performance outcomes; increased self-confidence; higher work motivation; sense of usefulness; understanding others' abilities; holding training courses; knowledge enhancement; improvement of scientific level; clarification of ambiguities; increased responsiveness	Monitoring and evaluation of tacit knowledge processes and appraisal	Strategies
Increasing training courses; designing training workshops; forming specialized meetings and reflective groups	Participation in reflective and workshop-based professional groups	Conditions influencing strategy formulation
Generation of new ideas; acceptance of scientific innovations; faster understanding of technological changes; establishment of professional communication; increased motivation; enhancement of communication skills; dissemination of knowledge; trust in one's own knowledge; scientific communications	Updating knowledge; qualitative improvement of professional activities	Outcomes
Utilization of other specialists' competencies		

Axial coding constitutes the second stage of analysis in grounded theory. The purpose of this stage is to establish relationships among the generated categories. The relationships of other categories with the core category are articulated across five dimensions: causal conditions, the core phenomenon, strategies and actions, the governing context, and consequences.

By establishing links among categories, information is reconnected in a new and integrated manner. The relationships among the main categories and the identified dimensions of the study are illustrated in Figure 1.

Figure 1

Paradigmatic Model (Visual Representation) of the Study



To ensure the accuracy and credibility of the qualitative data coding process, the inter-coder agreement method was employed. In this approach, two researchers independently coded the data, and the level of agreement between them was subsequently calculated. Coding reliability was computed using the formula proposed by Miles and Huberman (1994).

Table 10

Results of Inter-Coder Reliability Assessment

No.	Interview Title	Total Number of Data Units	Number of Agreements	Number of Disagreements	Reliability Percentage
1	First interview	45	39	6	87
2	Second interview	50	46	4	92
3	Third interview	42	37	5	88
4	Fourth interview	48	43	5	89
5	Fifth interview	40	35	5	87
Total	—	225	200	25	88.6%

As shown, the total number of codes extracted by the two coders (the researcher and the academic collaborator) was 225. Of these, agreement was recorded for 200 codes and disagreement for 25 codes. Based on the inter-coder reliability formula, the obtained reliability coefficient was calculated as 88.6%, which exceeds the minimum acceptable threshold of 60%. Accordingly, the trustworthiness of the coding process is confirmed.

4. Discussion

The present study sought to develop a paradigmatic model of tacit knowledge sharing from the perspective of psychology experts in Iranian universities using a grounded theory approach. The findings reveal that tacit knowledge sharing among academic psychologists is a multidimensional, process-oriented phenomenon shaped by the interaction of individual, relational, organizational, and contextual factors. The extracted model demonstrates that tacit knowledge sharing is not a spontaneous or purely individual act, but rather a dynamic process embedded within professional cultures, psychological dispositions, and institutional structures. This result aligns with contemporary knowledge management literature, which emphasizes that tacit knowledge exchange unfolds through complex social and cognitive mechanisms rather than through formalized systems alone (Burnette, 2017; Yeboah, 2023).

One of the central findings of the study concerns the role of causal conditions, particularly the necessity of skill development, experiential learning, and the transformation of tacit knowledge into more shareable forms. Participants emphasized that tacit knowledge accumulated through years of teaching, research, and clinical practice becomes valuable only when opportunities exist for its articulation and transmission. This finding is consistent with prior studies indicating that tacit knowledge sharing is strongly driven by professional competence, reflective practice, and the perceived usefulness of experiential knowledge (Ariani et al., 2025; Jamshidi et al., 2018). The emphasis on applied skill transfer and lived experience also echoes international research highlighting that tacit knowledge is most effectively shared through mentoring, collaborative problem-solving, and joint practice rather than through formal documentation (Gubbins & Dooley, 2021; Shahzad et al., 2024).

The results further demonstrate that participation and motivation of psychology experts constitute a core phenomenon in the tacit knowledge sharing process. The findings suggest that psychologists are more inclined to share tacit knowledge when they perceive psychological safety, professional recognition, and intrinsic motivation. This supports the argument that tacit knowledge sharing is closely linked to affective and motivational states, such as enjoyment of sharing, altruism, and a sense of professional responsibility (Li & Li, 2024; Obrenovic et al., 2020). In academic psychology, where professional identity and ethical commitment are particularly salient, motivation to contribute to collective learning appears to play a decisive role in sustaining knowledge-sharing behaviors. These results are in line with studies demonstrating that emotional intelligence and psychological capital enhance tacit knowledge sharing by facilitating empathy, trust, and effective interpersonal communication (Hu et al., 2023; Li & Li, 2024).

Another key finding relates to the contextual and intervening conditions influencing tacit knowledge sharing, notably organizational culture, leadership support, and opportunities for professional interaction. The study shows that cultures characterized by collaboration, dialogue, and continuous learning provide fertile ground for tacit

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knowledge exchange, whereas hierarchical or competitive environments tend to inhibit such processes. This finding strongly aligns with previous research conducted in higher education and public-sector organizations, which identifies organizational culture and leadership style as critical enablers of tacit knowledge sharing (Castaneda & Rojas, 2024; Roudi et al., 2019). In particular, participatory leadership and supportive managerial practices were perceived by participants as signals that knowledge sharing is valued and rewarded, thereby legitimizing informal exchanges of experiential knowledge. Similar conclusions have been drawn in studies examining academic communities and professional educators, where leadership support was found to enhance trust and openness in knowledge-sharing relationships (Shahzad et al., 2024; Yıldız et al., 2025).

The strategies identified in the paradigmatic model—such as forming reflective discussion groups, designing applied workshops, and establishing professional networks—highlight the practical mechanisms through which tacit knowledge sharing is enacted. These strategies emphasize interaction, dialogue, and collective reflection as core practices. This is consistent with the broader literature suggesting that tacit knowledge is transmitted through socialization processes, including communities of practice, storytelling, and collaborative inquiry (Burnette, 2017; Gubbins & Dooley, 2021). The prominence of workshops and peer discussion in the findings also mirrors evidence from recent studies indicating that structured yet flexible forums can bridge the gap between informal knowledge exchange and organizational learning (Fan & Beh, 2024; Kucharska & Erickson, 2023).

The outcomes identified in this study further reinforce the strategic value of tacit knowledge sharing in academic psychology. Participants reported outcomes such as enhanced diagnostic accuracy, improved therapeutic effectiveness, increased creativity, professional empowerment, and higher quality of services. These findings align with prior research demonstrating that tacit knowledge sharing contributes to innovation, problem-solving capacity, and performance improvement across sectors (Kucharska & Erickson, 2023; Varghese & Rao, 2024). In particular, the link between tacit knowledge sharing and creativity resonates with studies showing that the integration of tacit and explicit knowledge fosters organizational creativity and breakthrough innovation (Hu et al., 2023; Yıldız et al., 2025). In psychology-related contexts, where nuanced judgment and adaptive responses are essential, the sharing of tacit knowledge appears to be especially consequential.

An important contribution of the present study lies in its context-specific focus on Iranian universities and psychology experts. While international studies have examined tacit knowledge sharing among academics and professionals, fewer have explored this phenomenon within non-Western higher education systems using an inductive, qualitative approach. The findings suggest that cultural norms, professional values, and institutional realities in Iran shape tacit knowledge sharing in distinctive ways, particularly through strong emphasis on interpersonal trust, collective reflection, and moral commitment to professional growth. These insights complement earlier Iranian studies conducted in libraries and health organizations, while extending the scope to academic psychology and offering a more integrative explanatory model (Jamshidi et al., 2018; Roudi et al., 2019).

The use of grounded theory in this study allowed for the emergence of a paradigmatic model that captures the complexity and dynamism of tacit knowledge sharing. Rather than treating tacit knowledge sharing as a static outcome, the model conceptualizes it as an evolving process shaped by causal conditions, contextual factors, strategic actions, and outcomes. This process-oriented understanding is consistent with recent qualitative research emphasizing that tacit knowledge exchange unfolds over time through interaction and sense-making (Ariani et al., 2025; Shahzad et al., 2024). Moreover, by integrating psychological constructs with organizational dimensions, the model responds to calls for more interdisciplinary approaches in knowledge management research (Fan & Beh, 2024; Yeboah, 2023).

5. Conclusion

Overall, the findings support and extend existing theories of tacit knowledge sharing by highlighting the central role of psychological expertise, motivation, and professional interaction in academic settings. They also underscore the importance of aligning organizational structures and cultures with the inherently social and experiential nature of tacit knowledge. In doing so, the study contributes to the localization of knowledge management theories within the context of Iranian higher education and offers insights that may be relevant to other knowledge-intensive professional domains (Niguse et al., 2025; Yıldız et al., 2025; Zavatin et al., 2023).

Despite its contributions, the present study has several limitations that should be acknowledged. First, the qualitative design and purposive sampling strategy, while appropriate for theory generation, limit the generalizability of the findings to other disciplines or national contexts. Second, the study relied on self-reported data from psychology experts, which may be influenced by social desirability or retrospective bias. Third, the focus on academic psychologists means that tacit knowledge sharing processes in other professional groups within universities were not examined. Finally, although efforts were made to ensure rigor and trustworthiness, the interpretation of qualitative data inevitably reflects the researchers' analytical perspectives.

Future studies could build on the present findings by employing mixed-methods or quantitative designs to test and refine the proposed paradigmatic model across larger and more diverse samples. Comparative research across disciplines, universities, or countries could provide deeper insight into contextual variations in tacit knowledge sharing. Longitudinal studies would be particularly valuable for examining how tacit knowledge sharing evolves over time and how it influences professional development and organizational outcomes. Additionally, future research could explore the role of digital platforms and hybrid environments in facilitating or constraining tacit knowledge sharing among academics and professionals.

From a practical perspective, universities and academic leaders can foster tacit knowledge sharing by creating supportive cultures that value collaboration, reflection, and professional dialogue. Establishing regular peer discussion groups, mentoring systems, and applied workshops can provide structured opportunities for sharing experiential knowledge. Encouraging participatory leadership and recognizing knowledge-sharing efforts may further enhance motivation and trust among faculty members. Finally, integrating tacit knowledge considerations into professional development programs can help ensure that valuable experiential insights are preserved, shared, and translated into improved educational and psychological practices.

Authors' Contributions

G.R. conceptualized the study, designed the grounded theory framework, and supervised the overall research process. F.M. conducted the semi-structured interviews, participated in data collection, and contributed to open coding. E.M. was responsible for axial and selective coding, data analysis, and development of the paradigmatic model. F.S. contributed to the literature review, interpretation of findings, and drafting the initial manuscript. All authors collaboratively discussed the results, revised the manuscript critically for intellectual content, approved the final version, and take full responsibility for the accuracy and integrity of the study.

Declaration

In order to correct and improve the academic writing of our paper, we have used the language model ChatGPT.

Transparency Statement

Data are available for research purposes upon reasonable request to the corresponding author.

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Declaration of Interest

The authors report no conflict of interest.

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Ethical Considerations

The study protocol adhered to the principles outlined in the Helsinki Declaration, which provides guidelines for ethical research involving human participants.

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