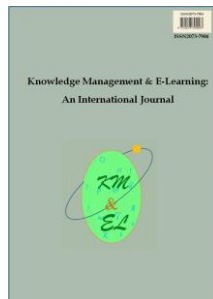


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**Fun at work and knowledge sharing: The mediating role of organizational inclusion and moderating role of authentic leadership**

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## **Fun at work and knowledge sharing: The mediating role of organizational inclusion and moderating role of authentic leadership**

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**Abstract:** Workplace fun is believed to be an important workplace factor influencing employees' behaviour. But how it influences employees' knowledge sharing is an area that has not gained researchers' attention. Building upon organizational support theory, this study proposes and empirically investigates this relationship through the mediation of organizational inclusion and moderation of authentic leadership. The study uses time lag approach to elicit responses of IT employees, where all in all 494 useful responses are received and used for analysis purpose. The findings reveal that fun at work influence knowledge sharing behavior both directly and through partial mediation of organizational inclusion. The authentic leadership strengthens the relationship between fun and organizational inclusion. This study proposes and empirically investigations the role of fun in improving knowledge sharing. It also covers the role of organizational inclusion and leadership in translating fun into outcomes. The mechanism has largely been unattended in existing literature.

**Keywords:** Authentic leadership; Fun at work; Knowledge sharing; Organizational inclusion

**Biographical notes:** Ishfaq Ahmed is director/Associate Professor at University of the Punjab, Jhelum Campus, Jhelum, Pakistan. His research interests include leadership, organizational behaviour, human resource management, and knowledge management. He has been in teaching and research of the aforementioned areas for more than 15 years.

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### **1. Introduction**

The dynamic business environment requires organizations to create and disseminate knowledge at all levels (Ahmed et al., 2023; Arsawan et al., 2022; Islam et al., 2024; Umer et al., 2023; Wang et al., 2019). But knowledge sharing requires employees' involvement as they are considered to be the major stakeholders in knowledge creation and dissemination (Khattoon et al., 2024; Renzl, 2008). However, it is a daunting task to foster an employee knowledge sharing behavior. A profound analysis of the literature highlights that knowledge sharing at work is the outcome of various factors at the

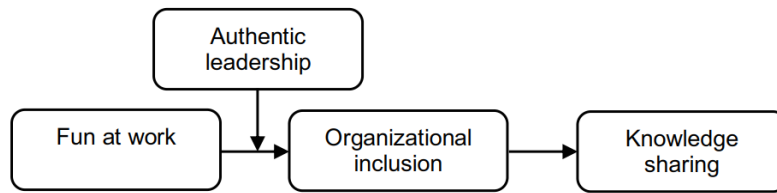
individual and organizational level (e.g., Al-Kurdi et al., 2020; Azizi et al., 2023; Hosen et al., 2021; Wang et al., 2022). In order to sum up, it can be inferred that the meta-analysis carried out by Nguyen et al. (2019) highlights that knowledge sharing can be determined by the motivation of employees. Nevertheless, the latest meta-analysis by Lim and Ok (2021) highlights that motivation to share knowledge is largely influenced by the organizational factors.

One of the possible organizational level determinants could be fun at work, which includes interpersonal and social activities covering playful, humorous and frivolous acts eliciting the feelings of enjoyment, amusement and pleasure among the employees (Fluegge, 2008). The extant literature highlights that fun can also influence the organization positively e.g., glorify corporate image (Tews et al., 2012) and increase applicants' attraction (Tews et al., 2017). Due to fun, employee senses embeddedness with the organization (Tews et al., 2015), feels more satisfied (Karl and Peluchette, 2006; Peluchette and Karl, 2005), displays high level of trust (Karl et al., 2005), intends to stay with the organization for long (Tews et al., 2014) because he feels emotionally secure at work (Michel et al., 2019). However, the relationship of fun and knowledge sharing has largely been ignored in empirical literature. The relationship between fun and knowledge sharing seems to be organic, as knowledge sharing has been largely influenced by the organizational culture (Razmerita et al., 2016), and fun is the depiction of positive working environment and culture. Pereira and Mohiya (2021) also cherished the value of culture in the following words, "positive environment and openness in an organization can lead to collaborative work arrangement between employees, thus reducing knowledge hiding and encourage knowledge sharing" (p. 377).

Additionally, the way fun can influence employees' behaviors has always been a question needs to be explained. For instance, Taheri et al., (2022) highlighted that the mechanism between fun and workplace learning is largely under-investigated. Recent studies have observed that the fun and learning at work is mediated by the motivation and workplace friendships (e.g., Lee et al., 2022; Taheri et al., 2022). Another potential mechanism is employees' feelings of organizational inclusion, defined as the level up to which employees consider themselves valued as the members of the organization, its processes, and have access to resources and information (Mor Barak, 2015). It is also defined as one's sense of belonging with the organization and its members (Shore et al., 2018), and acceptance of diversity (Daya, 2014). It is considered one of the important workplace realities as it influences employees' satisfaction, involvement, happiness, loyalty and performance (Lee et al., 2019; Mousa et al., 2021). But explanatory role of inclusion between fun and knowledge sharing has not been hypothesized and tested previously. The same can be valued by the calls of Mousa et al., (2021), where they called for studies on antecedents and outcomes of inclusion. In their latest study Mousa et al., (2023) have highlighted the role of workplace and managerial interventions in predicting employees' inclusion. As fun can be nurtured with the managerial support it is expected that inclusion would emerge as an outcome and possible mechanism between outcomes of knowledge sharing.

While looking at the fun and its outcomes, another important aspect is pointed by Tews et al., (2019), as they highlighted 'fun is translated differently by individuals'. They observed that due to fun, sometimes, a discomfort situation comes into existence as employees may make unwanted sexual desires, for acts of fun by colleagues with opposite gender. So, fun can be translated as either positively or negatively. Building on this premise, this study assumes that inclusion would arise as an outcome of fun. It is expected that similar unwelcomed desire and choice may come into existence, which may require some organizational level coping mechanisms like leadership. The same is valued

by Le and Lei (2019) as they highlighted that leaders influence the way cultures are shared and translated by individuals. Gui et al., (2022) also pointed that leadership along with organizational culture influences the innovation and knowledge sharing at work. Thus, this study proposes and investigates the boundary condition of authentic leadership between fun and employees' perceptions of organizational inclusion. The role of authentic leadership seems organic as such leaders enhance trust and positive working environment (Avolio et al., 2004). Because of high level of trust in the leader, the followers may consider fun as a controlled activity that may change the meanings of fun. Moreover, such leaders through their balanced processing, moral perspective, and relationship transparency would foster an environment of trust among members which would upsurge the impact of fun at employees' perceptions of inclusion. This concept has not been theorized and empirically tested, which is the basic contribution of the current study (see Fig. 1). The following section covers the literature and development of hypotheses on the same.



**Fig. 1.** Conceptual framework

## 2. Literature background & hypotheses development

### 2.1. Fun at work, knowledge sharing and organizational inclusion

Fun at work may take various forms including organic fun (unstructured variety that naturally arise in the workplace like jokes), task fun (related to an individual's enjoyment with his/her work) and managed fun (presumed to operate on managerial terms) (Plester et al., 2015; Bolton and Houlihan, 2009). Fun is a workplace reality that has gained researchers' attention in the recent past because not only activities related to that are important (Chan, 2019), but also the way employees perceive those acts are of great significance (Tetteh et al., 2022). The same has been valued by Fleming (2005), by highlighting that fun part of the culture is perceived by employees as "the company do care about us (i.e., employees) and looking out for us" (p.295).

Despite the fact that, people consider fun differently (Gin Choi et al., 2013), its value has been cherished. This can be attributed to the cultural differences due to which fun activities are seen differently, as mentioned by Tews et al., (2014) "not all fun activities are equal" (p. 923), and because "there can be a mismatch between the intended fun environment as presented by the organisation, and the interpretation and experience of fun by the individual" (Clancy and Linehan, 2019, p. 523). It is therefore valued to study the fun activities and their consequences in different cultures.

At work fun activities may cover all interpersonal relations through the promotion of amity, amusement, kindness and friendliness (Karl et al., 2005). Organizations with customer centric approach and strategies often value such an environment (Chan and Mak, 2016), because it can create various positive workplace outcomes e.g., attachment with the organization (Becker and Tews, 2016), commitment (Kim and Liu, 2017),

embeddedness (Tews et al., 2015), satisfaction (Chan and Mak, 2016), trust in management (Chan and Mak, 2016), and employee performance (Gin Choi et al., 2013; Tews et al., 2013). However, how fun can foster knowledge sharing is an area that has not gained researchers' attention. While looking at the empirical literature it is evident that past studies have valued the role of positive working environment in improving information sharing practices (Bhatti et al., 2021). This may be attributed to the fact that employees tend to imitate the working environment (Gochhayat et al., 2017), and therefore may indulge in knowledge sharing acts. The link can also seem organic as due to the encouraging environment (i.e. fun) employees tend to adopt behaviors that may foster learning (Lee et al., 2022). As fun is such an encouraging environment, it is expected that employees would share more knowledge. The same can be believed about the fact that due to fun co-workers have high level of trust among one another which increases propensity of knowledge sharing (Yen et al., 2009). Dale (2014) found out that due to environmental factors (like fun) employees tend to indulge in pro-organizational acts, and knowledge sharing is one of such behaviors. Based on the given debate the following assertion is drawn:

**H1:** Fun at work positively predicts knowledge sharing.

Though fun can offer various workplace outcomes, but still it is questioned 'how fun can offer such outcomes?'. While looking at its nature it is evident that it possesses a multi-foci nature (as it includes fun activities, support for fun and coworkers' socialization) (Tews et al., 2014), and can influence employees at emotional and psychological levels (Becker and Tews, 2016). One of such psychological level outcomes is organizational inclusion, which is defined as the level up to which employees consider that they have access to resources & information, are part of organizational processes, and can participate in decision making (Mor Barak, 2015). It also includes one's sense of belonging with the organization (Shore et al., 2018), covers the diversity and differences and the ways those are valued and translated as a strength (Daya, 2014). Such psychological state is important as it increases employees' involvement, satisfaction, happiness, loyalty and performance (Lee et al., 2018; Mousa et al., 2021). But how feelings of inclusion are influenced by the various workplace determinants is an area that has not gained due attention.

This study proposes that fun at work can affect employees' perceptions about the inclusion because the aspects of fun can influence employees' psychological feelings. Fun covers numerous (task, interpersonal and social) activities that support humor and playfulness at work and can create amusement, enjoyment and pleasure at work (Fluegge, 2008). For instance, fun activities, support for fun and socialization foster such an environment where others are accepted, valued and honored by all (Clouse and Spurgeon, 1995). Fun is also important as it reduces the negative workplace states (Karl and Peluchette, 2006; Tremblay and Gibson, 2016). In presence of such an environment, employees tend to feel psychological safety and consider themselves part of the organization (Zeng et al., 2020). The same can be asserted on the ground that fun is a form of culture (Holmes, 2007), and its presence may vary across settings (Holmes and Marra, 2002). Fun, being culture, transmits from one to the other through formal and informal interactions, while often firms set fun like formal environment (Plester and Hutchison, 2016). It can be therefore established that fun can be initiated by either employees or managers (Michel et al., 2019; Tews et al., 2021). The given discussion helps us assume:

**H2:** Fun at work will positively influence organizational inclusion perceptions.

Inclusion is also found to influence workplace outcomes. Through inclusion individuals with different backgrounds feel treated fairly and they are given value (Nishii, 2013). Such an environment fosters social and cultural inclusion (Azmat et al., 2015). When individuals feel that they are treated fairly, they consider themselves respected and feel empowered (Bodla et al., 2018; Hundschell et al., 2022). These perceptions influence the perceptions of friendly environment, psychological safety, frequent communication and knowledge sharing (Men et al., 2019; Ye et al., 2021). It has been highlighted that knowledge sharing requires high level of trust, cooperation and cohesiveness, which is ensured by the inclusive environment (Kim and Park, 2021; Masood et al., 2023; Nishii, 2013; Ye et al., 2021). The inclusive environment fosters workplace bonds, social capital and thus improves knowledge sharing (Han et al., 2014). The relationship between inclusion and knowledge sharing also seems obvious, as the inclusion creates feelings of empowerment (Prasad and Eylon, 2001), that results in open communication and information sharing (Castellani et al., 2021; Masood et al., 2023). In situation of inclusion, employees tend to indulge in more knowledge sharing behavior because they feel it compulsory to share information at work (Kang et al., 2017). Thus, following assertion is made:

**H3:** Organizational inclusion positively influences knowledge sharing.

As the previous sections highlights that fun leads to the feelings of inclusion, which in turn increases the propensity to share knowledge, it is expected that organizational inclusion may mediate the relationship of fun and knowledge sharing. The same has been hypothesized below:

**H4:** Organizational inclusion mediates the relationship of fun at work and knowledge sharing.

Hypotheses 1 to 4 can be built on Organizational Support Theory (i.e. OST, Eisenberger et al., 1986), which proposes that employees build a general perception about the value they are given for their contribution and the extent to which organization takes care for their well-being. The perceptions of OST are built when they feel that the organization, its environment and actors (e.g., managers and leaders) value them and take care for them. Furthermore, in presence of positive perceptions of support about the organization, employees tend to reciprocate to their organization. Based on this premise, it is assumed that fun at work may be considered as a care and act of well-being offered by the organization to their employees, which creates positive perceptions about the organization (i.e. inclusion) and employees tend to reciprocate it positively by indulging in knowledge sharing behavior.

## 2.2. Moderating role of authentic leadership:

The environmental dynamism requires the incomparable role of leadership (Ahmad et al., 2023; Islam et al., 2024). A leader, through role modelling and system development, can become a catalyst to change (Ahmad et al., 2021). The leader's role is also important due to his ability to foresee the environmental and market changes and making organization ready for those (Ragins and Cornwell, 2001; Nishii, 2013). Leaders display various styles but change always demands a style where leader can be trusted by the followers, so that the change is considered a positive phenomenon (Church and Rotolo, 2013; Kuknor and Bhattacharya, 2022). It is valued because the leader's actions set organizational wide behaviors that set the direction and actions of other organizational members, ultimately structuring a culture. One of such leadership styles is authentic leadership, which covers leadership act of fostering a pleasant working environment by manifesting personal

values (Luthans et al., 2006), which are transparent, genuine and self-aware (Walumbwa et al., 2008). Such leaders instead of doing things on people, attempt to do with the people and due to high level of trust employees tend to work with them and incline to follow them unconditionally (Arici, 2018; Sidani & Rowe, 2018). Such leaders, through their consistent words and actions, build an environment where followers prefer to value co-existence (Lee et al., 2019).

The current study proposes that authentic leaders, along with the fun environment, would tend to influence the overall outcomes. The idea has not been investigated empirically but past studies have valued such an investigation. For instance, Le and Lei (2019) and Gui et al., (2022) highlighted that both leadership and organizational culture influence employee level outcomes as leadership may reduce the negative impacts of environment while fostering the positive aspects. The role of leadership is also valued as the fun is considered context specific (Georganta and Montgomery, 2019), and often employees tend to translate it negatively (Tews et al., 2019). In such a situation, it's the supervisor or leader who can translate the perceptions of employees differently and a question of "whether the fun should be managed?", requires an immediate answer (Tews et al., 2019). It is therefore important to consider the leadership as boundary condition.

Against this backdrop, the current study values the role of authentic leader as boundary conditions between fun and its outcomes. The relationship is not tested empirically but the same can be considered organic and explained with theory and literature. The authentic leaders, through their behaviors of self-awareness, balanced processing, internalized moral perspective, and relational transparency, influence the workplace and its environment (Walumbwa et al., 2008). By adopting balanced processing, the leader tends to make fair and unbiased evaluation of information before coming to a decision. Through internalized moral perspectives, they tend to set moral standards and build an environment where all are invited to work on those. Relational transparency creates perceptions of fairness and followers to be treated indifferently (Arici, 2018). As different people translated fun differently it is expected that through adopting these behaviors, leader would create an authentic environment through which employees may consider fun positively. The given debate can also be supported by underlying theoretical premise of OST (Eisenberger et al., 1986) which propose that support from the organization or/and its actors influences employees' perceptions about the organization and they tend to reciprocate in the same manners. Here authentic leader may be considered as the organizational agent that may help in building the perceptions about the organization (organizational inclusion) and make employees reciprocate favorably (knowledge sharing). Thus, following assertion is made:

**H5:** Authentic leadership moderates the relationship between fun at work and organizational inclusion such that the relationship is stronger when the leader is authentic and vice versa.

### **3. Research methodology**

#### *3.1. Participants and methods*

This study is based on the data collected from IT firms, because their employees are required to have high level of soft skills and such individuals are difficult to retain (Mardis et al., 2018). Organizational level interventions (e.g., fun) are important source of getting retaining them at work (Tews et al., 2021). Additionally, such firms are

characterized as highly knowledge intensive (Zhang and Guo, 2019; Islam and Asad, 2024), and it is important to study the factors influencing knowledge sharing over there (Bhatti et al., 2021). Using these factors as the benchmark, employees with at least one-year experience were selected as sample, because they can adequately report about the workplace culture and knowledge sharing practices. Non-probability (convenience) sampling was used to access the respondents while the sample size was determined using sample-to-items ratio (20:1, sample size of 600) (Costello and Osborne, 2005).

Data was collected in two lags, because this approach reduces the chances of common method bias (CMB) (Podsakoff et al., 2012). At time-1, 600 questionnaires were distributed comprising items of fun at work and organizational inclusion, while only 535 useful responses were received. At time-2 (four weeks later), these respondents were approached with measures of authentic leadership and knowledge sharing. This time only 504 respondents were available while only 494 useful responses were obtained. Majority of the respondents were male ( $n = 367$ ), with average age between 21-30 years ( $n = 356$ ), with university degree ( $n = 274$ ), and average experience of more than three years ( $n = 289$ ).

### 3.2. Measurement

#### 3.2.1. Fun at work

The study used Tews et al.'s (2014) 17 items scale for fun at work as it covers dimensions like coworkers socialization, fun activities, and manager's support for fun. Sample items include, "my coworkers and I socialize at work" (from coworker's support for fun); "parties for work achievement" (from fun activities); and "my manager allows employees to have fun on the job" (from manager support for fun).

#### 3.2.2. Organizational inclusion

Mousa et al., (2021) six items scale was used to measure organizational inclusion. It covered items like "My organization appreciates all employees regardless of their differences".

#### 3.2.3. Knowledge sharing

Three items scale of Hsu and Chang (2014) was used to measure the knowledge sharing. An example item was "I frequently share my knowledge with my colleagues".

#### 3.2.4. Authentic leadership

Authentic leadership was operationalized via 14 items scale adopted from Neider and Schriesheim (2011). The scale is widely used and covers items like "My leader asks for ideas that challenge his/her core beliefs".



## 4. Findings

### 4.1. Preliminary analysis

Initially, the data was assessed for missing values, outliers and normality, where no missing values or outliers were reported. The normality was assessed using Skewness and Kurtosis, where the estimated values did not exceed the threshold values of +1 and +3 respectively. Harman’s single factor was applied to test the CMB, and the single factor accounted for only 25.14% variance (< 50%) showing absence of issue of CMB (Podsakoff et al., 2012).

### 4.2. Structural equation modelling (SEM)

In follow up, structural equation modelling (SEM) was used for confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) and validity of measures. The same was followed by the descriptive statistics and correlation analysis (see Table 1). The CFA verified that the four-factor model was the best fit ( $\chi^2/df = 1.99 < 3.00$ , CFI = 0.91 > 0.90, RMSEA = 0.54 < 0.80, and SRMR = 0.030 < 0.10) (Joseph et al., 2010; Williams et al., 2009), thus the absence of CMB was further ensured. All the measures were reliable (Cronbach’s alpha values ranged between 0.81 – 0.93 > 0.70), and discriminately and convergently valid (AVE values range between 0.54 – 0.73 > 0.50). Table 2 comprises the results of descriptive statistics and correlation analysis. The correlation analysis reveals that fun is positively related with organizational inclusion ( $r = 0.36^*$ ) and knowledge sharing ( $r = 0.33^{**}$ ). Similarly, organizational inclusion is also positively related with the knowledge sharing ( $r = 0.25^{**}$ ). These results helped researcher move a step further with hypotheses testing.

**Table 1**  
Factor analysis, descriptive statistics and correlation

	Factor analysis				Discriminant validity		
	Loading	AVE	CR	FW	AL	OI	KS
FW	0.51–0.69	0.61	0.91	0.75			
AL	0.70–0.81	0.64	0.82	0.45	0.67		
OI	0.68–0.75	0.59	0.79	0.39	0.42	0.70	
KS	0.53–0.59	0.68	0.81	0.75	0.52	0.48	0.68

Note. Model Fitness Indices:  $\chi^2/df = 2.03$ ; CFI = 0.93; RMSEA = 0.54; SRMR = 0.030; FW = fun at work, AL = authentic leadership, OI = organizational inclusion, KS = knowledge sharing

**Table 2**  
Descriptive statistics and correlation

Variables	Descriptive Mean (SD)	Correlation			
		FW	AL	OI	KS
FW	4.11 (0.364)	0.91			
AL	3.91 (0.461)	0.11**	0.87		
OI	3.77 (0.479)	0.36*	0.31*	0.79	
KS	3.98 (0.431)	0.33*	0.19*	0.25*	0.80

Note. \* $p < .001$ , \*\* $p < .05$ ; Reliability values given in diagonal line

Results for hypotheses testing are provided in Table 3, where it is evident that fun has a positive impact on knowledge sharing ( $\beta = .29$ ,  $p = .001$ ) and organizational

inclusion ( $\beta = .27, p = .002$ ), therefore, H1 and H2 are supported. The table also highlights that organizational inclusion positively influences knowledge sharing ( $\beta = .41, p = .001$ , H3 supported). The table also contains the mediation results, where it is clear that fun and knowledge sharing relationship is mediated by organizational inclusion ( $\beta = .13, p = .001$ ), and the relationship is partial in nature (H4 also supported). The moderation effects are provided in the same table and Fig. 2. It is evident that the interaction of FW\*AL significantly changes the relationship of fun and organizational inclusion ( $\beta = .29, p < .001$ ). The slope of moderation shown in Fig. 2 also depicts that the presence of moderator strengthens the relationship of fun and organizational inclusion, thus H5 is supported.

**Table 3**  
Results of hypotheses testing

Relationships	<i>B</i>	<i>SE</i>	<i>t</i> -value	Bootstraps @ 95%		<i>P</i>
				LLCI	ULCI	
FW → KS	0.29	0.104	2.810	0.046	0.314	0.001
FW → OI	0.27	0.090	3.012	0.301	0.309	0.002
OI → KS	0.40	0.099	3.991	0.417	0.811	0.001
AL → OI	0.21	0.108	2.011	0.501	0.709	0.002
Indirect effects						
FW → OI → KS	0.13	0.101	1.304	0.492	0.841	0.001
Interactional effects						
FW × AL	0.29	0.062	4.690	0.501	0.638	0.001

Note. U = upper limit, L = lower limit, CI = confidence interval, Bootstrap sample size 5,000

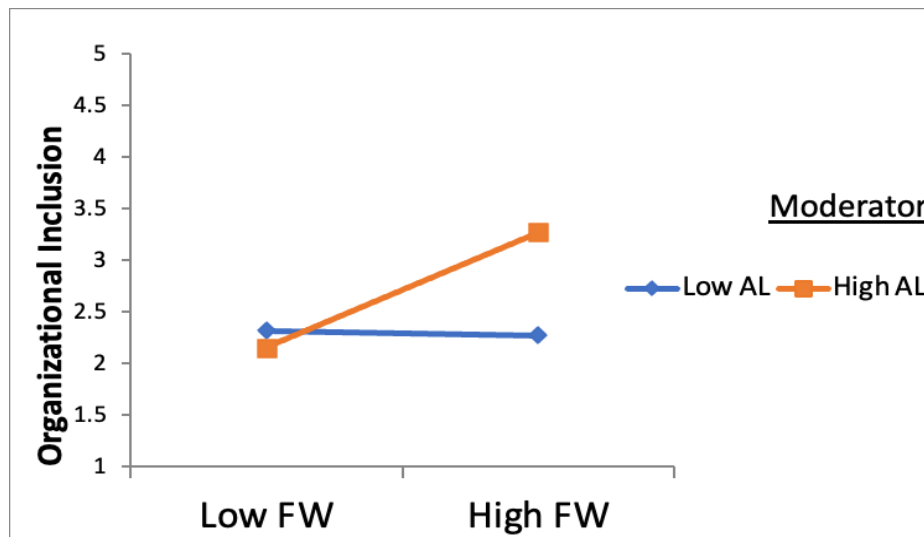


Fig. 2. Slope of moderation

## 5. Discussion, implications and conclusion

Building on OST (Eisenberger et al., 1986), this study proposes and empirically tests the influence of fun at work on knowledge sharing through organizational inclusion and

boundary condition of authentic leadership. The study proposes five hypotheses, where all of them are statically proved. The findings therefore highlight that fun is an important workplace element that offers positive outcomes for organizations. Nevertheless, extant of literature has assumed and proved the psychological, cognitive, attitudinal and behavioral outcomes of fun (e.g., Becker and Tews, 2016; Chan and Mak, 2016; Kim and Liu, 2017), but there is dearth of literature on fun and knowledge sharing relationship. The study highlights some notable benefits of fun, for instance, H1 which assumes the impact of fun on knowledge sharing which is statistically proved in the IT context where the interdependent tasks require high level of knowledge sharing (Bhatti et al., 2021; Zhang and Guo, 2019; Islam and Asad, 2024). The study also extends the literature further by considering the explanatory mechanism of organizational inclusion (H2), thus answers the calls of some latest studies (e.g., Mousa et al., 2021; Mousa et al., 2023). The results reveal that in presence of supportive and positive environment employees develop positive feelings (e.g., inclusion), which is in line with the findings of Tews et al., (2019). Such feelings create situation of reciprocation as employees feel themselves bound to share knowledge (Kang et al., 2017). In this way, H3 and H4 were supported and the theoretical premise is also fulfilled and empirically supported by the results.

Lastly, through H5 the current study moves a step further to dig-down-deep into the popular belief of fun as an important workplace element. Tews et al., (2019), also highlighted that fun may be translated differently by employees. Such situation may create need for some organizational level conditional factors that can influence such perceptions and their later outcomes. This study considers the boundary condition of authentic leadership, as such leaders through their self-awareness, balanced processing, moral perspectives and relational transparency may influence employees' perceptions about fun. The findings prove that when leader is authentic the influence of fun on inclusion increases, thus it's the leadership that matters along with the working environment and even this role is vital as signified by the past studies (e.g., Georganta and Montgomery, 2019; Gui et al., 2022; Le and Lei, 2019).

### *5.1. Theoretical implications*

The findings of the study have some important theoretical insights, where the foremost is the role of fun at workplace where knowledge sharing is required (i.e. IT firms). The findings highlight that the knowledge sharing could be nurtured by merely converting the workplace environment. The study also assumes and empirically supports the mediation (inclusion) and moderation (authentic leadership) between fun and knowledge sharing which is largely unattended research aspect. But the same can be an important contribution as the fun is not always translated positively by all (e.g., Tews et al., 2019) and therefore the role of a leader arises (Georganta and Montgomery, 2019; Gui et al., 2022; Le and Lei, 2019), as leaders can influence the way things are perceived at workplace. The findings also extend the theoretical premise of OST (Eisenberger et al., 1986), which proposes that the feelings of support at workplace (organizational support), through psychological needs fulfillment (feelings of inclusion) makes the recipients reciprocate to the organization (here knowledge sharing). Furthermore, the findings also prove the notion that the acts of organizational actors are translated as the organizational act (here leader is considered as organizational actor). Therefore, the study provides a new implication of the theory by hypothesizing a novel mechanism of fun (organizational act) and knowledge sharing (employees' reciprocation).

### *5.2. Practical implications*

The study is equally useful for management of IT firms. The findings reveal that fun is an important workplace element and it can influence employee behaviors. Thus, the management of IT firms should emphasize on their working environment and put a close eye on its development. The study reveals that fun (a positive working environment) pays back positively (in terms of inclusion). Furthermore, the findings also reveal that in such a situation the employees tend to share knowledge which is a desired behavior in IT firms (Bhatti et al., 2021; Zhang and Guo, 2019; Islam and Munir, 2022). The study also uncovers the myth of whether fun should be managed or not? as its often translated differently by individuals (Tews et al., 2019). The study reveals that in such situations the role of leadership is crucial as they can influence the working environment as well as the way it is translated by the employees. The study therefore offers some meaningful lessons for management and leadership, where the foremost is to focus on the working environment. If the management wants that their employees should display positive behaviors at work, the environment should be supportive and conducive. The findings also highlight that employees' behaviors can be managed through a better work environment. The study also highlights that the leadership role is also very important, as the leaders can influence the effects of environment and can work as control mechanism. Therefore, the study offers a blend of acts that can bring positive outcomes for management, leadership and employees in tandem.

### *5.3. Limitations and future directions*

Despite a rigorous research endeavour this study is still prone to some limitations. The foremost is consideration of only IT sector as knowledge intensive firms while the same could be replicated to other knowledge intense sectors. Second, though this study uses lag approach to overcome CMB (Podsakoff et al., 2012), the causality can better be judged through longitudinal design or experimentation. As the fun covers a multi-perspective approach, it should be tested for its dimensions and their independent influence on the employees' outcomes. The biographical differences should be given value while looking at the way employees translate fun. One of the factors that can influence the way fun may be translated is one's personality, e.g., agreeable individuals tend to consider fun as something acceptable then those with low agreeableness. Similarly, emotionally stable individuals may consider fun as something positive when compared with their counterparts. Future studies should also consider the outcomes of knowledge sharing and test the composite model of fun, knowledge sharing and its outcomes e.g., knowledge utilization – only frontline and primary element of knowledge management process (Umer et al., 2023) and performance (Usmani, 2023). Future studies should also consider the fun at different levels, as people may translate fun differently and the flip side of the fun (Tews et al., 2019) should also be considered by the future researchers. Researcher can also consider the knowledge hiding behavior at work, which is an important workplace reality (Chughtai et al., 2022), while the flip side of fun may increase such behaviors.

### **Author Statement**

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