

Conversations to solutions: Exploring the role of social interaction in the workplace.

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ABSTRACT

Purpose- This research explores the role of social interaction in the learning and development of employees. Further, determine the relevance of the transfer and exchange of knowledge to develop novel approaches and solve unforeseen problems of an organization to remain competitive in the market.

Study Design/Methodology/Approach - The unstructured, in-depth interview approach under the qualitative research paradigm is used to gather data from employees of the manufacturing and service sectors. The theories of situated learning, community learning, and organizational learning underpin the study.

Findings- Data findings depicted that social interaction in organizational settings has an instrumental role in employees' performance. Further, findings identify that the transfer of knowledge based on formal training programs provides a set of knowledge that is not sufficient for organizations to remain competitive in the market, whereas the exchange of knowledge based on constructive social interaction discussion encourages employees to develop novel ideas and resolve unforeseen problems of their firms to get a competitive edge. Moreover, the exchange of knowledge is an indispensable element in an individual's learning, which is mostly ignored by many organizations causing the failure of firms amid throat-cutting competition.

Research Implications- The study opens new avenues for researchers to expand their research to identify further dimensions and programs of social interaction linked with individual learning. It provides an in-depth understanding and activities of employees' social interaction to practitioners to solve their startling problems and develop innovative thoughts to lead in the market.

Originality/Novelty-This is one of the few research studies that have been conducted in the context of Pakistan.

Keywords: Social interaction, transfer of knowledge, exchange of Knowledge, Individual learning, conversion

1 | INTRODUCTION

Business firms across the world are constantly investing in the learning of employees to develop innovative products and gain a competitive edge ([Isichei et al., 2023](#); [Jelenic, 2011](#); [Memon et al., 2020](#); [Pahuja et](#)

[al., 2024](#)). However, many of them failed to achieve the results in the hard-hitting competition of the twenty-first century because these firms are still following the traditional patterns of formal learning programs for employees, like education, training, seminars, and workshops. The formal learning is designed to be conducted in a controlled environment where employees are forced to follow the rules and regulations. Furthermore, these conventional approaches focus on the transfer of knowledge limiting the experts from sharing their expertise and know-how with employees and ignoring the creativity element of an individual's learning process. Continuous learning of employees leads them to develop competitive advantages for improved performance ([Isichei et al., 2023](#); [Pahuja et al., 2024](#)). For instance, the formal programs teach employees like a ringmaster teaches his lion to perform in a circus, where individuals perform their duties and think in a limited parameter as per directions of their bosses. Subsequently, these programs limit the creative factor of individuals and bind them to work in a defined circle. This type of individual learning is not sufficient to resolve the unforeseen and complex problems of firms where creativity is a prerequisite ([Memon et al., 2020](#)).

According to [Sternberg \(1999\)](#), social interaction among talent at the workplace is indispensable to developing innovative solutions to problems wherein employees are not restricted to expressing their ideas. It provides an uncontrolled and informal environment to think outside of the box. A couple of studies recognized the countless benefits of knowledge sharing in various contexts including higher education, health, the social sector, and banks ([Johnson, 2022](#); [Kumpunen et al., 2023](#); [Marzocchi et al., 2023](#); [Memon et al., 2020](#); [Roberts, 2023](#); [Santhosé & Lawrence, 2023](#); [Zhou & Baines, 2024](#)). Deng et al. (2023) emphasized and proved the role of digital technology in knowledge sharing, knowledge gains, and improved performance of employees. Ojha et al. (2023) investigated relationship networks between business partners like buyers and suppliers and found an effective role in knowledge sharing and innovation based on social relationships.

Many leading firms in Western countries have revised their traditional learning programs and focus on employees' social interaction activities within and outside the firms. These organizations argued that formal learning and development programs are necessary but inadequate to handle an uncertain business environment. Thus, the social interaction activities within an organization build trust and cooperation among employees to focus on creativity towards achieving the company's objectives ([Pinho et al., 2012](#)). Social interaction is one of the fastest-growing means to learn new knowledge through the exchange of knowledge. In this process, the individuals share their knowledge with other individuals in an informal environment, do not follow any rules as well as no restrictions on any behavior and are free to share or learn the knowledge. Thus, these organizations give freedom to their employees at the workplace and encourage them to enhance their social interaction, so that effective sharing of ideas can be exchanged among employees ([Reed et al., 2010](#)).

The essence of social interaction is grounded in informal settings where the employees share their ideas, expertise, skills, and experiences with other individuals without any firm's restrictions but within certain limits; and these limits are usually defined by the common interest, trust and mutual understanding among the individuals. Furthermore, the individual's learning process can vary from person to person. For instance, some individuals get new knowledge in the first interaction, whereas others need many sessions of interaction to acquire new knowledge. However, this process mainly depends on an individual's intrinsic characteristics such as emotional intelligence, psychological empowerment, mutual understanding, and trust between two individuals. Knowledge sharing with true spirit occurs when there is mutual understanding, empowerment,

and trust between the individuals ([Ali et al., 2018](#)). According to [Warr \(2007\)](#), the purpose of learning is to develop creative thinking, which is possible in social interaction. In this process, creativity is a natural phenomenon, and social interaction is the platform where two or more experts exchange their ideas to develop creative thinking ([Sidawi, 2012](#)).

1.1 | Research Problem

Pakistan's manufacturing and service sectors have the great advantage of geo-economic strategic location and infrastructure [Asrar-ul-Haq \(2015\)](#), considerable government policy backing, and potential talent to increase the performance of business firms and lead in global competition ([Shah & Syed, 2018](#)). However, these firms have not only failed to compete in the international markets but also remained unsuccessful in local markets in meeting customers' requirements in terms of product innovation, quality, and cost-effectiveness. There are many reasons for these business firms' failure, however, one of the major reasons for their flop is the effective learning and development of their potential talent to think outside of the box to design and develop innovative and cost-effective products ([Mujtaba & Mubarik, 2022](#)).

To overcome these challenges, many firms in Pakistan are investing millions of rupees in the learning and development of their employees in various formal programs like education, training, seminars, and workshops. Despite spending a huge amount on learning, these firms remain unsuccessful in competing with international firms within and outside the country ([Duffield & Whitty, 2016](#)). Unfortunately, these firms have failed to understand the importance of individual creativity is mainly based on sharing knowledge of potential talent in social interaction in the workplace. Social interaction among employees is a critical and unavoidable component of any knowledge management system in the age of globalization. Further, individual learning is continuously evolving due to frequent changes in social interaction and market demand; therefore, it may be seen as a continuous and two-way process that every firm needs to adopt to sustain itself in the business market ([Ali et al., 2018](#)).

To comprehend the complexity of an individual's learning, social interactions, and relations at the workplace, there is a need to research to explore each aspect's intricacies and relationships in the context of developing countries ([Ali et al., 2018](#)). New avenues of knowledge need to be discovered in the context of knowledge management and knowledge-sharing practices within different sectors, countries, and regions ([Santhosé & Lawrence, 2023](#)). This research will contribute by exploring the role of social interaction in the learning and development of employees in business settings. Further, determine the relevance of the transfer and exchange of knowledge to develop novel approaches and solve unforeseen problems of an organization to remain competitive in the market. Moreover, provides the patterns of how social interaction activities may be introduced and encouraged at the workplace for individual learning.

2 | LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 | Theoretical Exposition

This study is mainly grounded on situation learning theory. The philosophy of this theory argues that an individual's learning is based on a social process whereby new knowledge is constructed, it is implanted in a specific social and physical setting, it is unintentional and embedded within activities and this process is a legitimate peripheral participation. The learning of individuals affects their decisions and actions in the workplace ([Lave & Wenger, 1991](#)). Secondly, community learning theory also backs this study; this concept

explains the collective approach of learning wherein learners are connected with an epistemic community (e.g., profession, working group, industry) and interact with each other. During their interactions, they share their knowledge and experiences to resolve their complex problems and build an innovative community within business settings ([Wang & Ramiller, 2009](#)). Further, organizational learning theory also supports this study because the learning process occurs when employees interact with each other within organizations. This theory is based on two behaviors, espoused theory (following formal rules and procedures and being restricted to resolving specific problems of the organization) and theory in use (attention to interaction with colleagues and peers, and developing innovative ideas). Thus, organization learning theory focuses on those organizations that wish to raise productivity and create a learning environment, indeed, they adopt this theory in use to improve the behavior of employees to gain a competitive edge ([Crossan et al., 2023](#); [Zeb et al., 2023](#)).

2.2 | Social Interaction

The importance of employees' social interactions within or outside of organizations is dramatically increasing in quest of learning new things because social interaction is a platform in which employees get solutions to various problems on an immediate basis and without paying any amount in the context of the employer's benefits. From the perspective of employees, individuals acquire new knowledge from other employees in a friendly atmosphere, which supports them in timely completing their various tasks to get recognition from employers in terms of promotion and rewards ([Ali et al., 2018](#)). Social interaction among employees plays a major role in increasing their capabilities to find solutions to problems and helps in developing innovative ideas to take the lead in the organization ([Marzocchi et al., 2023](#); [Pahuja et al., 2024](#)). The situated learning theory focuses on the association between individual learning and social circumstances where it happens and learning is a procedure where knowledge is developed among individuals in a specific framework and in a particular physical environment, which influences their actions ([Lave & Wenger, 1991](#)).

According to [Burke and Kraut \(2016\)](#), play at the workplace is the best way of social interaction, which creates a very conducive environment for an increase in productivity and creativity of employees of all ages. [Petelczyc et al. \(2018\)](#), argued that the dearth of attention on play activities in firms is problematic today because due to changes in technology have created some space among employees and decreased the face-to-face interaction, which is a platform of individual learning in a true sense, this face-to-face interaction boost the energy of employees. According to [Finkelstein et al. \(2018\)](#), the business environment of the world is very volatile due to expansion in advanced technology, and it has dramatically changed the business strategies of firms from long term to short term, this situation also compels the top management of organizations to develop contingent plans along with short term plans, and develop those skills and potential learning environment and trends at the workplace to solve the problems on immediate basis and continuously, develop new ideas to lead in the business market against the competitors ([Petelczyc et al., 2018](#)).

2.3 | Transfer of Knowledge and Exchange of Knowledge

According to [Milhem et al. \(2014\)](#), transfer of knowledge is a planned process of organization in which one individual is required to shift knowledge to other individuals in the sense that it is a duty to do in return for something through training programs, seminars, and workshops. This process happens formally under well-defined rules and regulations, where all participants are required to follow the list of protocols under a controlled environment; otherwise, the learner can be asked to leave the program or one may be punished as

per the rules of the organization. These types of learning programs provide limited knowledge (Bratton & Gold, 2007).

According to [Lekhawipat et al. \(2018\)](#), the exchange of knowledge is a competitive advantage and abstract opportunity for firms. It is an interaction where individuals informally meet with each other and share their learning and experiences without following any rules, regulations, or protocols and where every individual is free to enter or exit from this atmosphere ([Petelczyc et al., 2018](#)). The concept of play at the workplace increases the social interaction towards exchanging knowledge willingly and boosting the energy to do something different than others ([Beauregard & Henry, 2009](#)). However, many authors have asserted the role of transfer of knowledge and exchange of knowledge in building superior capabilities of employees and competitive advantages, which result in gaining performance standards and goals of organizations ([Isichei et al., 2023](#); [Johnson, 2022](#); [Kumpunen et al., 2023](#); [Marzocchi et al., 2023](#); [Memon et al., 2020](#); [Ojha et al., 2022](#); [Pahuja et al., 2024](#); [Roberts, 2023](#); [Santhosé & Lawrence, 2023](#); [Zhou & Baines, 2024](#)).

2.4 | Individuals Learning

Learning is a fundamental and inseparable characteristic of social practice. It is an activity of constant interaction among individuals that provides a new understanding and learning of new experiences of the world that ultimately create a unique identity of a person. Furthermore, learning is a dynamic and constructive process ([Lave & Wenger, 1991](#)). Traditional theories of education and training based on the cognitive process have failed to develop effective learning for employees because learning is not a mental process that can be gained by an individual through education or training. It is a process of social interaction among employees and the most valuable way of learning based on social relations with peers and experts in an organized community or firm bound by common interest ([Ali et al., 2018](#)). Sizes of organizations, groups, or teams and participants in any task also strongly influence individual learning; as you decrease the size, the interaction among employees will increase and they make more quick decisions and easily develop the solutions to problems. Furthermore, it is also found that social interaction generates new ideas in individuals' minds, which help transform organizations in various ways including serving the customers at best, innovating products and services, beating or surviving and thriving in the competition, creating long-run sustainable competitive edges and making their human capital happy and committed ([Ojha et al., 2022](#); [Ruzzier & Ruzzier, 2015](#); [Santhosé & Lawrence, 2023](#)).

3 | METHODOLOGY & DESIGN

The qualitative method was used to collect data by conducting unstructured, in-depth interviews under the philosophical stance of phenomenology to reach the real essence of this study. The phenomenological approach is helpful in understanding the unique and complex problems that are connected with individuals ([Goulding, 2005](#)). It provides in-depth knowledge of an individual's lived experience and uncovers the reality behind the conscious lived experience ([Jopling, 1996](#)).

The population of this study was manufacturing and service sectors. The sample size of this research was ten employees of senior management level of business firms. In general, a sample size of eight to ten is considered good for individual interview procedures, if individuals consist of middle or top-level management

who have rich experience in their fields. Ultimately, it depends on the saturation point to stop taking further interviews, when no new information emerges (Bashir et al., 2017; Hirose & Creswell, 2023). The interviews were conducted in separate office spaces of respondents in a conducive environment. The time duration of the interviews ranged from 55 to 96 minutes.

Data interpretation was made by adopting the fifteen-step procedure of Hycner (1985) as exhibited in Table 1. This procedure is designed explicitly for the phenomenological analysis of interview data and is very supportive of spelling out everything in verbal as well as nonverbal communication of the interviewees.

Table 1

Procedure of Data Analysis and Interpretation

Steps	Descriptions
I	Preparing transcriptions
II	Bracketing or phenomenological reduction
III	Listening to interviews as a judgment of the whole
IV	Delineating components of the general meaning
V	Delineating components of meaning related to research questions
VI	Verification regarding components of relevant meanings
VII	Eliminating redundancies
VIII	Clustering components of relevant meanings
IX	Deciding categories from clusters
X	Preparing a summary for each interview
XI	Returning to participants for verification of categories and summary
XII	Modifying summary and categories
XIII	Classifying general themes from all interviews
XIV	Contextualizing themes
XV	Writing composite summary

Source: Hycner (1985)

At every step of data interpretation, the researchers were bound to keep themselves neutral at every step of judgment, they were bound to bracket their presupposition and involve the panel of experts in making decisions about the finalization of statements, categories, and themes.

4 | DATA FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Data were collected by conducting interviews with middle and senior management employees of the manufacturing and service sectors. The profile of the participants is exhibited in Table 2.

Table 2*The Profile of the Participants*

Profile	Number	Percentage
Gender		
-Male	7	70%
-Female	3	30%
-Others		
-Prefer not to say		
Age (years)		
-30 to 40	1	10%
-41 to 50	3	30%
-51 to 60	4	40%
-Above 60	2	20%
Education		
-Graduation (16 years)	3	30%
-Master (18 Years)	7	70%
Designation		
-Manager/ Senior Manager	2	20%
-General Manager/ Consultant/ Director	5	50%
-Chief Executive Officer	3	30%
Experience (years)		
-10 to 15	2	20%
-16 to 20	3	30%
-Above 20	5	50%
Sector		
-Manufacturing	5	50%
-Service	5	50%

Table 2. exhibits that out of 10 respondents of middle and senior management level employees of manufacturing and service sectors, 07 were males and 03 females. They all falls within the age bracket of 30-60 years. Having education of graduation and master. Further, they all hold rich experience in the range of 10-20 years. A sample size of 8 to 10 is considered good for individual interview procedures if individuals consist of middle or top-level management who have rich experience in their fields. Ultimately, it depends on the saturation point to stop taking further interviews, when no new information emerges ([Bashir et al., 2017](#); [Hirose & Creswell, 2023](#)).

4.1 | Categories

In this section, authors will present categories that emerged out of interviews. These categories are extracted by adopting the fifteen-step procedures of [Hycner \(1985\)](#). Further, the authors present the words of respondents, however in some places, disguised names have been used to highlight the important quotes of participants.

4.1.1. Frequent changes in customer demands evolve the patterns of learning

Most respondents articulated that there was a time when business firms launched their new products once in five or ten years by considering infrequent changes in customer demand. The firms used to develop long-term strategies and trained their potential talent through informal training programs for a period from 3 to 12 months. These programs were conducted in a controlled environment and provided a set of limited knowledge to employees. Subsequently, after completion of training, the employees behaved according to what they were

taught in programs and organizations easily met their long-term plans. But today, the market dynamics are entirely changed wherein the organizations are equipping their employees to adopt a problem-solving approach and develop those skills that can handle short-term business plans of months instead of years due to frequent changes in customer behavior and technology. Further, the firms are engaging their employees in short training programs (i.e., 2 to 7 days), which provide them with the necessary or specific knowledge that trains them to develop those products that only meet the existing demand of customers. The respondent, Mr. Saleem Ahmed, CEO of a renowned firm highlights the importance of social interaction in the learning and development process of individuals and he quotes Statement ‘A’:

Statement ‘A’:

‘The firm needs a smart worker instead of a hard worker, and the smart worker is the core product of social interaction.’

Statement ‘A’ was discussed with other participants, seven participants agreed and expressed that the formal training programs provide one side of information, which can make employees hard workers. Still, firms need smart workers in a harsh competitive environment who can use the formal training program as the foundation of learning and then polish it with an exchange of knowledge (EK) by discussing it with colleagues. EK has a long-lasting influence on an individual's mind and supports individuals to become leaders. It occurs when two or more employees exchange their ideas with a mutual understanding. Moreover, respondents elaborated that the transfer of knowledge (TK) tells how the machine works, whereas the EK gives multiple ideas for effective machine utilization. Therefore, the employee needs to be equipped with both types of knowledge so that his organization can compete in local as well as international markets.

4.1.2. Individual learning becomes incomplete without social interaction

Many respondents uttered that there are various methods and platforms of individual learning, but it does not mean that every method or platform provides learning or advances the existing knowledge or skill of an individual. For effective learning of potential talent, there is a need for an individual's motivation, passion, and willingness to learn new knowledge wherein he feels free to express his point of view without any fear (i.e., boss and subordinate gap) towards reaching new ideas. They argued that there are two phases of employee learning. For instance, once a potential talent starts a career, he needs to learn core skills to perform his assigned tasks with the provision of TK on the job or off the job. Later, he grips on those essential skills, and then the organization expects him to solve unforeseen problems and develop novel ideas to take the lead in competition. Thus, in a later phase, TK does not provide complete knowledge to solve unpredictable problems because TK provides fixed knowledge under a controlled environment, which helps to solve certain fixed problems. It limits the cognitive power of an individual in a circle and stops his own creativity. However, the strong social connections among employees help them to solve their unexpected problems professionally. The respondent, Mr. Javed Iqbal, General Manager of a multinational firm quotes the statement ‘B’.

Statement ‘B’:

‘Exceptional and quick learning is possible through internal social interaction.’

The same statement was also endorsed by other participants. Further, they expounded that if the individual has a social interaction circle within their own organization, then it is much better than the social circle outside the organization because their colleagues/ experts exactly understand the actual problem due to the same culture of the organization. Hence, individual learning is incomplete without social interaction and it is better to say that as much as the employee has strong social interaction within the organization, then it is quicker to solve problems and effectively manage the assignments with value addition. Social interaction is one of the imperative elements of learning for an employee within organizations that keep employees updated and productive. The respondent, Mr. Jamil Ahmed, Consultant human affairs quotes the statement 'C'.

Statement 'C':

'Social interaction is an exercise of mental health, whereas healthiness of mind is a prerequisite for individual learning.'

Further, he argued that if the organization avoids social interaction at the workplace, the employee becomes sick, which may create serious mental health issues with the employee. Moreover, he shared the example that "Human is a social animal and if you keep an individual away from all interactions and close them in a room alone for an uncertain period, then within a few years, one becomes mad and even loses his memory". Thus, social interaction is essential for individual learning; without this, the individual's knowledge is incomplete.

4.1.3. Spirit of individual learning starts from awareness of the word "why "

In this category, the respondents highlight statement 'D'.

Statement 'D':

'The motivational point of individual learning starts from the awareness of the word-why.'

They reasoned that it is a big problem for employees of many firms that while they perform their duties, they only know what they are doing but they do not know why they are doing it. It is indispensable to convey to the employees their role contributions in achieving organizational goals because this awareness gives employees motivation to perform their tasks with dedication. This type of motivation develops a supportive environment within an organization wherein every employee care for others. Share his knowledge with other colleagues in social interaction forums. Moreover, the participants discussed that social interaction is like a union of minds wherein individuals openly share their knowledge without fear and develop new knowledge. When employees know the purpose of doing their work and their contributions to the goals of the organization, then automatically they keep their focus on the positive side and detach themselves from employees' politics, trade unions, professional jealousy, conflict, and grievances.

4.1.4. Need to change the culture of the organization and mindsets of employees

All the participants were on one page about the change in the culture of organizations. However, eight participants agreed to change the mindset of employees. Firms need to develop a conducive culture wherein

employees feel respect, trust, fairness, recognition, ethics, and supporting attitude of their bosses. The respondent, Mr. Nafees Khan, Director of a reputed firm quotes the statement ‘E’

Statement ‘E’

‘Every employee leaves his/her ego at the doorstep of the firm while entering in organization’

Participants also articulated that it is a prerequisite to change the mindsets of employees before assigning them any tasks. It is also necessary to give them confidence through coaching and mentoring so that they can come out of their comfort zone and believe in collaborative work. Arrange and engage potential talent in social interaction activities so that they learn from each other experience and expertise. Focus on minimizing the gap between boss and subordinate. For instance, the CEO or Head of Departments of an organization needs to "adopt the policy of walk and talk". They must visit their subordinates’ cubicles instead of calling them in their office rooms so that everyone can feel equal treatment. Further, it is the responsibility of supervisors to encourage their subordinates and show them a bright career. The respondent, Mr. Akhter Sharif, Manager of human resources (HR), quotes statement ‘F’:

Statement ‘F’:

‘Focus on breaking the iceberg of the comfort zone of individualism.’

4.1.5. Encourage social activities in the organization

Few companies in Pakistan regularly arrange social interaction activities of sports within the premises of organizations so employees can interact, come close to each other, and exchange their expertise. The respondent, Ms. Sadaf Jamal, Senior Manager of one of the leading firms quotes statement ‘G’:

Statement ‘G’:

‘The firms need to focus on play at work.’

Several participants expounded that due to rapid changes in consumer behavior, it is difficult for many leading firms to sustain themselves in the market. Management of these organizations is worried about developing a novel idea to make their products distinct from their competitors. Further, respondents posited that besides sports activities, the organizations may also arrange other social interaction activities at each departmental level like celebrating employees’ birthdays, achievements, promotions, work anniversaries, or retirements. These small activities develop an environment of closeness and trust among employees to exchange knowledge. Moreover, participants quote the statement ‘H’

Statement ‘H’:

‘Social interaction at each departmental level brings closeness among employees that encourages them to go an extra mile for their company.’

Many respondents argued that there is a need to develop social activities within the organization irrespective of departmental level gathering at the mid-day (lunchtime). Like, games (i.e., chess, table tennis, snooker, board, cards, etc.) can be played between two or more individuals of different departments. In addition, every month there should be a game competition among employees, and winners must be rewarded with various home appliances, air tickets for family trips, etc. Furthermore, in these monthly events, the employee of the month awards must be given to employees who come up with a new idea leading to the progress of the organization. The participants quote the statement 'I'.

Statement 'I':

'Social interaction at interdepartmental level develops trust among employees, which encourages them to achieve the milestone of the company professionally.'

Many participants uttered that there is a need to arrange social interaction activities within families of employees on an annual basis. The family is the priority of every individual and this kind of interaction platform will compel the employees to think that their organization is also taking care of their family. The respondents quote statement 'J'.

Statement 'J':

'Social interaction at the family level develops permanent relations and individuals remain ready to help each other beyond office hours.'

The participants also argued that firms have to arrange brainstorming sessions and open discussion forums in an informal environment wherein employees feel the freedom to express their views. The organizers ensure maximum involvement of diversified talent of their organizations to discuss new ideas, innovation, and competitors' strategies and policies. These types of activities provide employees with knowledge as a whole and identify various solutions to problems. The respondents quote statement 'K'.

Statement 'K':

'Social interaction for brainstorming and discussions among diversified talent develops multiple solutions to the problem.'

4.1.6. Social interaction of employees at the workplace is merely a waste of time

While conducting interviews, two participants disagreed and argued that social interaction or such activities at the workplace are a waste of time and do not improve individual learning. It provides a platform for employees to build up trade unions against the management. Further, in these activities, most male employees try to come close to female employees with wrong intentions. Hence, employees should only focus on their assigned tasks during office hours or beyond office hours. Because, the purpose of gathering in the organization is to meet organizational goals, which can only be achieved through work. However, when the opposite opinion of two participants was discussed with the remaining participants. They reacted that it is the

misconception that those employees who always remain available at their desks are productive. These employees are physically available at the workplace but emotionally (i.e., by heart and soul), they are not present at the workplace. They solve the programmed problems and fail to resolve unprecedented problems. These employees are hard workers, not smart workers. However, due to rapid changes in customer behavior organizations need employees who think outside the box and develop distinct features of products to attract and retain their potential customers.

5 | DISCUSSION

The findings elaborate those constant deviations in customers' demands have changed the pattern of learning. Many respondents articulated that the 21st century has created many challenges for firms to meet the frequent changes in customer demands. For this, firms have engaged themselves to focus on short-term planning instead of long-term planning. However, to achieve short-term planning, the firms use two approaches to train their employees. Firstly, the firms provide short training programs that give employees the necessary knowledge (TK- transfer of knowledge) but not sufficient knowledge. These findings are in line with the results of previous studies in the context of knowledge sharing ([Isichei et al., 2023](#); [Johnson, 2022](#); [Kumpunen et al., 2023](#); [Marzocchi et al., 2023](#); [Memon et al., 2020](#); [Ojha et al., 2022](#); [Pahuja et al., 2024](#); [Roberts, 2023](#); [Santhose & Lawrence, 2023](#); [Zhou & Baines, 2024](#)). However, to complete knowledge, firms encourage their potential talent to participate in social interaction activities at the workplace to fill the gap of remaining knowledge (EK- exchange of knowledge). The previous research work also supports these findings. As [Lave and Wenger \(1991\)](#) described individual learning and social interactions are inseparable, and learning is the procedure where knowledge is built up with discussions. According to [Ali et al. \(2018\)](#), learning is evolving due to frequent changes in relationships in the social context and market demand; therefore, it may be seen as a continuous process at the workplace by adopting various social interactions among employees. In light of this study's findings, it has been observed that the pattern of individual learning has changed due to the short span of product life; therefore, TK (i.e., formal) programs are not sufficient to resolve the unprecedented problems of the firm, there is also need of EK (i.e., social interaction) programs.

Furthermore, the respondent also argued that strong social connections and the mental health of individuals help employees solve unforeseen problems in a professional way. The previous research studies also support these findings. According to [Lave and Wenger \(1991\)](#), communities of practice (CoP) theory focuses on the forming of a group by different experts and experiences of individuals who join a group of their own will and share their experiences, tacit and information on a different topic or on the point of consideration toward deepening and increasing the knowledge and skills of all group members. [Petelczyc et al. \(2018\)](#) discussed that face-to-face interaction boosts the energy and motivation of employees to learn more knowledge. [Dust et al. \(2018\)](#) argued that social interaction decreases the stress level and energizes the individual to rethink various solutions to a problem. Moreover, many participants pointed out that "The motivational point of individual learning starts from the awareness of word why". Employees should know the purpose of doing their job and their contribution to organizational goals because this kind of familiarity creates a positive impact on individual attitudes and detaches them from employees' politics, trade union, professional jealousy, conflict, and grievances. Previous research work also supports this point, as [Lekhawipat et al. \(2018\)](#) pleaded that social interaction removes the hurdles of the organization collectively to meet the

challenges of the firm and it provides a platform of knowledge sharing, which is a competitive advantage and also abstract opportunity for the organization.

Participants also uttered that it is also essential to change the mindsets of existing employees. Move employees from their comfort zones and engage them in social interaction activities for learning. The extant literature (i.e. Bashir et al., 2020) supported these findings. Many participants agreed that firms should focus on individual learning and encourage productive social interaction activities at the workplace related to celebration, fun, and games. The previous research works also support these findings, such as [Burke and Kraut \(2016\)](#) posited that play at the workplace is the best way of social interaction, which creates a very conducive environment for an increase in productivity and creativity of employees of all ages. Many companies have established different types of playrooms, halls, and grounds with the provision of the latest facilities to create interaction among employees at lunchtime or beyond office hours or on holidays. These organizations encourage their employees to leave their work desks and join to play a game or at least join as an audience to watch the game. In these types of activities, free of cost lunch or refreshment items are served, so that employees should interact with each other and exchange their ideas ([Petelczyc et al., 2018](#)). Playing a game at the workplace also increases job satisfaction ([Jung et al., 2002](#)). In light of previous research work and the findings of this research, it is illustrated that constant variation in customer demand has changed the pattern of learning at the workplace, where social interactional activities play an inevitable role in individual learning.

6 | CONCLUSION

Pakistan's business firms have not only failed to compete in the international markets but have also failed to capture local markets to meet customers' requirements in terms of product value addition, quality, and cost-effectiveness. There are many reasons for these business firms' failure, however, one of the major reasons for their flop is the effective learning and development of their potential talent to think outside of the box to design and develop innovative and cost-effective products. Thus, this research aimed to explore the role of social interaction in the learning and development of employees. Data findings of this research depicted that social interaction in organizational settings has an instrumental role in employees' performance. Further, findings identify that the transfer of knowledge based on formal training programs provides a set of knowledge that is not sufficient for organizations to remain competitive in the market, whereas the exchange of knowledge based on constructive social interaction discussion encourages employees to develop novel ideas and resolve unforeseen problems of their firms to get a competitive edge. Moreover, the exchange of knowledge is an indispensable element in an individual's learning, which is mostly ignored by many organizations causing the failure of firms amid throat-cutting competition.

5.1. Implications and Future Areas of Study

This research contributes to the literature by providing a solid base for researchers to expand their research on the relationship between social interaction and individual learning. Identify various dimensions of learning and development to improve the performance of individuals in the workplace. Further, the research will support the exploration of more social interaction programs linked with individual learning so that organizations effectively utilize their potential talent. This research develops ground for the researchers to identify the right leadership styles to change the mindset of individuals and develop constructive social interaction sessions in business settings. Moreover, this research provides practitioners in-depth understanding

of the difference between the transfer and the exchange of knowledge while training and developing their potential talent. Further, it provides the instrumental effect of social interaction to solve startling problems of organizations. Furthermore, it provides practitioners with various social interaction activities to engage their potential talent to develop innovative thoughts to lead in the market.

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