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Improving Group Identity by Job Design in Academic
Libraries

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Abstract

Group identity in academic library determinants the intention of knowledge sharing and knowledge quality. However, the investigation of job design and task characteristics influences group identity and internal library knowledge sharing is still very rudimentary. The study indicated that group identity is important in improving knowledge sharing intentions in academic libraries. Group identity is associated with different kinds of task characteristics. Both organizational prestige and task characteristics are able to explain significant amounts of variance of group identity.

Keywords: *Group identity; Job design; Task characteristics; Academic libraries; Knowledge sharing*

Introduction

Numerous studies have stressed group identity, and the fact that individual attitudes are important factors in the knowledge sharing in their or-

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ganization (McElroy & Morrow, 1993; Somers & Birnbaum, 2000; Graves, Ohlott & Ruderman, 2007). However, knowledge sharing studies based on libraries are still under-researched and under-discussed. It has been proposed in the knowledge management literature that group identity is one of the most significant determinants of knowledge sharing and knowledge quality (Shaw & Edwards, 2005). The research indicated that there are significant relationships between knowledge sharing intention, group identity and knowledge quality (Hislop, 2003; Jabr, 2007). The literature investigates the antecedents of group identity and knowledge sharing intention. The research results point out that these are strongly related to task characteristics. The different job design and task characteristics often lead to different group identity and knowledge sharing intentions. Moreover, little attention has been paid to the question of whether job design and task characteristics can enhance the knowledge creation and development of group identity within libraries. Theoretical models of the task characteristics, knowledge sharing and group identity in libraries need to be confirmed and modified through empirical evidence. However, our knowledge of how job design and task characteristics influence group identity and internal library knowledge sharing is still very rudimentary. The study we present in this paper is an attempt to supplement the findings of these earlier studies. It is similar to previous studies discussed above, in that the focus is in a task characteristics perspective. It differs from previous studies, especially, in the context of libraries. In the light of those concerns, the contribution of this paper is that we contribute to the conceptualization of group identity by emphasizing task characteristics as important aspects of the knowledge sharing capacity at the organizational level. To ground our theoretical discussion, in the next section, we first review the literature on knowledge sharing, group identity and task characteristics. Based on the literature review, we develop

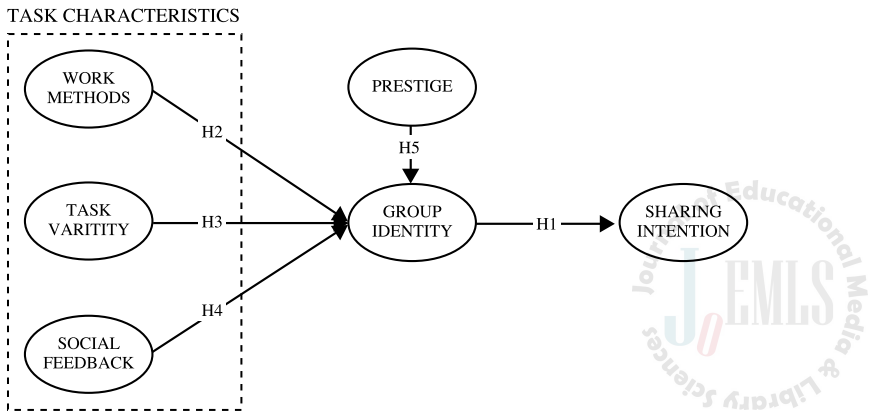


Figure 1 Research Model

hypotheses on: 1. the relationship between knowledge sharing and group identity in the personal perspective; and 2. task characteristics at the organizational level. Finally, we explain the methodology employed, followed by a discussion of the results and implications of the study. A research model is proposed that aims to understand and group identity in academic library and how knowledge sharing and group identity can be affected by task characteristics (Figure 1).

Theoretical Background and Hypotheses

Group identity and knowledge sharing

Group identity refers to an employee's loyalty to the organization and identification with the organization (Mowday, Steers & Porter, 1982; McGee & Ford, 1987). The importance of group identity lies in the complex relationship between the organization and the individual and the extent to which commitment to an organization promotes other positive work behavior. Understanding and promoting commitment to the organization is essential to the efficiency and effectiveness of the organization (Griffin & Hepburn, 2005). Social identity and interpersonal attachments affect the development and use of specialized knowledge. Sharing knowledge and information is a kind of cooperative behavior. Cooperative behavior is more likely when the team members are connected strongly either directly or indirectly through mutual colleagues and friends (Reagans & McEvily, 2003). A positive attitude towards knowledge sharing among the members of a given organization is the most basic precondition for knowledge creation. Constant et al. assert that an organization should shape its employees' attitudes for information sharing by establishing an organizational norm, so that information sharing is socially desirable (Constant, Kiesler & Sproull, 1994; Bock & Kim, 2002). This implies that a knowledge sharing mind is not an outcome that is automatically obtained by implementing knowledge management, but rather a type of capability that should be developed for successful knowledge management. An interesting avenue of investigation might be to consider whether employees with more group identity will have better knowledge quality. Given the few studies that assessed directly the influence of group identity on knowledge sharing, there remains a clear need to continue to explore this relationship.

Hypothesis 1: Group identity has a positive impact on librarians' knowledge sharing intention.

Task characteristics and group identity

Theories of job design and group identity focus on rather different aspects of work that motivate people to invest more or less effort and persistence. The job design approach considers task characteristics, like task variety and task feed-

back, as more or less motivating, whereas the social identity approach focuses on inter-group relations and self-categorization processes with respect to social categories. Therefore, it seems plausible that these different forces are, to a large extent, independent of each other. People might like the task they do (e.g. teaching schoolchildren) dislike the organization in which this happens (the school) because this organization, for example, is managed by an incompetent head-teacher. In the same vein, employees can identify strongly with an organization but may not like their boring tasks or how their work is organized (e.g. routine office work without any autonomy). Conceptualizing the motivational incentives linked to task design and social relations as rather independent from each other, however, does not imply that interactions between these factors are impossible. Interactions might be observed, for example, because highly committed employees experience higher self-esteem and this reduces the potential impact of organizational stressors (Pierce, Gardner, Dunham & Cummings, 1993). According to the Affective Events Theory (AET), the work events modeled include hassles, tasks, autonomy, job demands, emotional labor and uplifting actions. These work events affect employees positively or negatively. The employees' mood predisposes the intensity of their reaction. This emotional response intensity, therefore, affects job performance and satisfaction (Weiss & Cropanzano, 1996; Wegge, Dick, Fisher, West & Dawson, 2006). Thus, the group identity might be strengthened towards greater work motivation and well-being, if job design is perceived as suboptimal (Isic, Dormann & Zapf, 1999). Given the lack of studies examining both group identity and job design, our predictions are somewhat exploratory. The existing evidence, however, supports the following hypothesis:

Hypothesis 2: Work method has a positive impact on librarians' group identity.

Hypothesis 3: Task variety has a positive impact on librarians' group identity.

Hypothesis 4: Feedback from job has a positive impact on librarians' group identity.

Perceived prestige

Another related hypothesized antecedent of identification is the perceived prestige of the institution (March & Simon, 1958; Mael, & Ashforth, 1992). This follows from the earlier argument that the individual identifies with a group partly in order to enhance his/her self-esteem. The more prestigious the organization, the greater the potential boost to self-esteem through identification (Cameron & Ulrich, 1986). Document how the new president of a liberal arts college was able to rekindle support for the institution by gradually transforming its image from one of creeping mediocrity to one of excellence. This research, therefore, proposes that there should also be a linkage between perceived prestige and group

identity among librarians. We thus formally hypothesize:

Hypothesis 5: Perceived prestige has a positive impact on librarians' group identity.

Research Method

Sample

Since the dawning of the Internet, the library has become a hot spot as a knowledge resources centre. Working in a knowledge centre, librarians are required to have the capability to solve various questions about information retrieval. Knowledge sharing will be helpful when the librarian needs to finish a job. Therefore, it is important to understand how to improve the librarians' knowledge sharing intention and knowledge quality. The different kinds of libraries in Taiwan are the major research environment for investigating the antecedents of knowledge sharing intention and group identity for knowledge sharing in libraries. Five librarians in each sixty academic libraries have been chosen in this study. Two additional librarians were volunteers. A total of 302 librarians from academic libraries were asked to participate in the survey. The respondents were requested to complete the survey in a cover letter from the research team that explained the scope of the study, and a standardized, self-administered questionnaire was attached. The questionnaires were distributed and collected in a given unit by one of the librarians there, who was commended to support this study. This

Table 1 Demographic Characteristics of the Respondents n=139

Demographic characteristics	Freq.	Percentage
Gender		
Female	116	83.5
Male	23	16.5
Work experience		
Below 1 year	10	7.2
1–5 years	40	28.8
6–10 years	26	18.7
Over 10 years	63	45.3
Work title		
Employee	109	78.4
Base Supervisor	18	12.9
Middle Supervisor	10	7.2
High Supervisor	2	1.4
Face reader		
Yes	79	56.8
No	60	43.2
Education		
High school	1	0.7
College	8	5.8
University	86	61.9
Advanced degree	44	31.7

study collected data using pen-and-paper questionnaires. In this way, anonymity and a confidential treatment of the answers were guaranteed. Thirty academic libraries were responded and surveyed in this study. Finally, 139 fully completed and usable questionnaires were returned within a week, which corresponds to a return rate of approximately 46%. According to Martinez-Ebers (1997), a 47% return rate with no incentive and a 64% return rate with incentive. This study collects the questionnaires with no incentive and return rate approximately 50% is satisfactory (Church, 1993). Table 1 lists the respondent's demographic characteristics, including gender, work experience, educational level, library types, and facing the reader.

Measurement

This study adapted the measures used to operationalize the constructs included in the investigated model from relevant previous studies, making minor word changes to tailor these measures to the context of libraries. The core variable in this study is group identity. The measures of group identity were adapted from Smidts et al. (Smidts & Riel, 2001). We examined the intention of knowledge sharing based on the well-design measurement items from Syed-Ikhsan and Rowland (Syed-Ikhsan & Rowland, 2004). Perceived organizational prestige is defined as the degree to which the institution is well regarded both in absolute and comparative terms in Mael and Ashforth's study (Mael, Ashforth, Mael & B.E. Ashforth, 1992). Task characteristics were developed on the basis of the studies of Morgeson and Humphrey (Morgeson & Humphrey, 2006). The measurement items are shown in Table 2. All items are assessed on a five-point Likert scale with anchors from strongly disagree (1) to strongly agree (5).

Table 2 Measurement Items

Constructs	Items	References
Knowledge Sharing Intention	5	(Syed-Ikhsan & Rowland,2004)
Prestige	4	(Mael, Ashforth, Mael & B.E. Ashforth ,1992)
Group Identity	5	(Smidts & Riel,2001)
Work Method	3	(Morgeson & Humphrey,2006)
Task Variety	4	(Morgeson & Humphrey)
Social Feedback	3	(Morgeson & Humphrey)

Data Analysis and Results

Structural Equation Modeling (SEM) was adopted for the causal relationships data analyses between the constructs. SEM analysis was chosen over regression analysis, because SEM can analyze all of the paths in one analysis (Barclay, Thompson & Higgins, 1995; Gefen, Straub & Boudreau, 2000). The Partial Least Squares (PLS) approach was superior to other SEM approaches for

this study because of its flexibility for distributional assumptions, its small sample size requirements, and its strength in handling complex predictive models (Fornell & Bookstein, 1982; Hulland, 1999; Ko, Kirsch & King, 2005). The computer program used for this analysis was SmartPLS version 2.0 (Ringle, Wende & Will, 2005). Because this study focuses on theory development rather than theory testing (Marcoulides & Saunders, 2006). On the other hand, PLS supports exploratory research, so this study uses PLS as the research model, since it is consistent with all of the currently available theoretical knowledge, and collects data to test the theory (Efron & Gong, 1983). The procedure of data analysis was followed and chosen using a bootstrapping method to determine the significance of the paths within the structural model (Chin, 1998). The standard errors of the parameters were computed on the basis of 500 bootstrapping runs, as recommended by Chin (Efron, 1979). The bootstrapping method is a modern, computer-intensive, general purpose approach to statistical inference, falling within a broader class of resampling methods. It has gained great popularity in the statistical research literature as a method for solving tougher problems (Barclay, Thompson & Higgins, 1995). The sample size of 139 exceeded the recommended minimum threshold, which represented 10 times of: 1. the number of items comprising the most complex constructs; or 2. the number of independent constructs directly influencing a dependent construct (Wixom & Watson, 2001; Hulland, 1999). According to Hulland's procedure, a PLS model is analyzed and interpreted in two stages. In the first stage, the measurement model has to be tested by performing validity and reliability analyses on each of the measures of the model to ensure that only reliable and valid measures of the constructs are used before conclusions about the nature of the constructs relationships are drawn. In the second stage, the structural model is tested by estimating the paths between the constructs in the model, determining their significance as well as the predictive ability of the model.

Reliability and convergent validity

The adequacy of the measurement models was evaluated using the criteria of reliability, convergent validity, and discriminant validity. Reliability and validity were tested with regard to: 1. individual item reliability; 2. the convergent validity of the measures associated with individual constructs; and 3. discriminant validity. Firstly, reliability was examined using the composite reliability values. Table 3 shows that all values are above 0.8, which is the commonly accepted level for explanatory research. The convergent validity of the scales was verified by using two criteria suggested by Fornell and Larcker (Fornell & Larcker, 1981). 1. all indicator loadings should be significant and exceed 0.7; and 2. the average variance extracted (AVE) by each construct should exceed the variance due to the measure-

ment error for that construct (i.e., AVE should exceed 0.50). For the current measurement model, most indicator loadings were above the 0.70 threshold (see Table 4). The AVE ranged from 0.64 to 0.87 (see Table 3). Hence, both conditions for convergent validity were met.

Table 3 Reliability and Convergent Validity

Constructs	AVE	Composite Reliability	R Square	Cronbach's Alpha
Social Feedback	0.79	0.92		0.86
Group Identity	0.75	0.94	0.57	0.92
Prestige	0.87	0.94		0.92
Sharing Intention	0.64	0.90	0.25	0.86
Task Variety	0.80	0.97		0.86
Work Method	0.78	0.91		0.86

Table 4 PLS Confirmatory Factor Analysis and Cross-loadings

	FB	GI	PE	SH	VA	WM
FB01	0.84	0.35	0.24	0.26	0.12	0.40
FB02	0.89	0.39	0.18	0.35	0.24	0.35
FB03	0.92	0.46	0.27	0.34	0.13	0.37
GI01	0.33	0.82	0.44	0.49	0.41	0.49
GI02	0.41	0.90	0.52	0.41	0.37	0.38
GI03	0.44	0.87	0.56	0.43	0.35	0.39
GI04	0.39	0.87	0.62	0.42	0.33	0.47
GI05	0.39	0.87	0.63	0.40	0.26	0.46
PE01	0.22	0.56	0.91	0.35	0.27	0.26
PE02	0.26	0.65	0.93	0.42	0.29	0.33
PE03	0.22	0.59	0.90	0.36	0.30	0.27
PE04	0.22	0.49	0.84	0.28	0.24	0.14
SH01	0.28	0.38	0.37	0.80	0.18	0.25
SH02	0.20	0.31	0.32	0.73	0.23	0.19
SH03	0.32	0.45	0.42	0.82	0.34	0.41
SH04	0.35	0.44	0.25	0.84	0.19	0.30
SH05	0.24	0.38	0.23	0.79	0.26	0.35
VA01	0.15	0.34	0.29	0.26	0.89	0.33
VA02	0.12	0.32	0.24	0.24	0.87	0.28
VA03	0.21	0.33	0.21	0.27	0.73	0.26
VA04	0.15	0.34	0.28	0.26	0.87	0.29
WM01	0.37	0.46	0.30	0.34	0.33	0.89
WM02	0.41	0.47	0.27	0.30	0.28	0.88
WM03	0.34	0.41	0.17	0.38	0.30	0.87

Legends: FB, Social Feedback; GI, Group Identity; PE, Prestige; SH, Sharing Intention; VA, Task Variety; WM, Work Method.

Discriminant validity

Discriminant validity implies that the measures of a given construct differ from each other. The discriminant validity of the scales was assessed using the square root of the AVE from the construct, which should be greater than the correlation shared between that construct and others in the model. Table 5 lists the cor-

relations between the constructs, with the square root of the AVE on the diagonal. All of the diagonal values exceed the inter-construct correlations; hence, the test for discriminant validity was acceptable. Therefore, we conclude that the scales should have sufficient construct validity.

Table 5 Latent Variable Correlation Matrix

Constructs	FB	GI	PE	SH	VA	WM
Social Feedback	0.89					
Group Identity	0.45	0.86				
Prestige	0.26	0.64	0.93			
Sharing Intention	0.36	0.50	0.40	0.80		
Task Variety	0.18	0.39	0.31	0.30	0.89	
Work Method	0.42	0.51	0.29	0.38	0.34	0.88

Square root of AVE is on the diagonal

Path coefficients and predictive ability

The assessment of the structural model involves estimating the path coefficients and the R² value. The path coefficients indicate the strength of the relationships between the independent and dependent variables, whereas the R² value is a measure of the predictive power of a model for the dependent variables. Table 6 and Figure 2 show the path coefficients, their significance level and the R² values of the endogenous variables. The PLS analysis results (Figure 2) show that only one hypothesis has a negative effect, while the other hypotheses are supported; thus the proposed theoretical model in Figure 1 is partially supported. In this study, the model accounts for 25 to 58 percent of the variances (R² scores). In addition, all of the paths are significant at the level of 0.05 (Figure 2). Thus, the fit of the overall model is good. Group identity increases knowledge sharing intention in academic libraries ($\beta = 0.50, p < 0.01$). Work method ($\beta = 0.24, p < 0.01$), task variety ($\beta = 0.13, p < 0.05$) and social feedback ($\beta = 0.20, p < 0.01$) increase group identity. Additionally, organizational prestige ($\beta = 0.48, p < 0.01$) in this study has a strong effect on group identity. The R² values of the endogenous constructs are 0.58 (group identity) and 0.25 (knowledge sharing intention). Thus, it can be concluded that the hypothesized model is fully supported by the data.

Table 6 Summary of the Hypothesis Test Results

Hypothesis	Casual path	Path coefficients	t-Value	Supported
H1	GI -> SH	0.50	6.83**	Yes
H2	WM -> GI	0.24	3.76**	Yes
H3	VA -> GI	0.13	2.00*	Yes
H4	FB -> GI	0.20	3.24**	Yes
H5	PE -> GI	0.48	7.85**	Yes

* Significant at p < 0.05 level.
 ** Significant at p < 0.01 level.

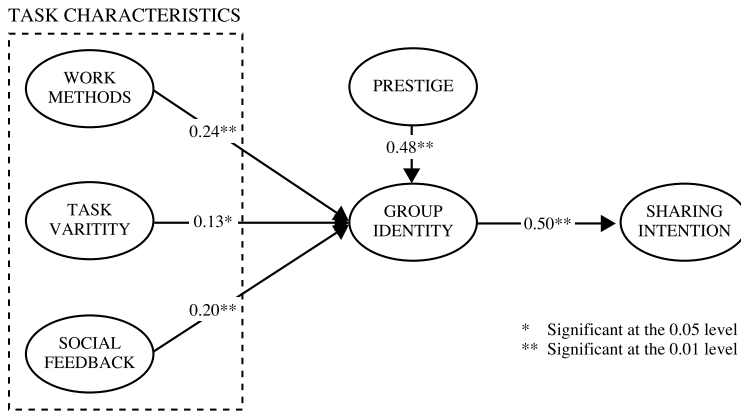


Figure 2 Structure Model and Results of Path Analysis

Discussion

The results show a striking effect of job design and organizational prestige on group identity in libraries. In terms of the relationships between task characteristics, knowledge sharing and organizational prestige, the results were also what were expected and reasonably reliable. Clearly, the finding indicates that task characteristics and organizational prestige have a strong effect on improving group identity. Group identity has a significant effect on intention to engage in knowledge sharing. All of the constructs were strongly positively correlated. Overall, the results have been very positive and in line with previous studies.

Theoretical implications

Several theoretical implications can be drawn from this study. This research extends the previous work on the perspective of job design in group identity. Task characteristics and organizational prestige have been shown to be positively correlated with group identity. Therefore, our research has suggested that task characteristics have a potentially important influence on the group identity of librarians. These findings support the claim, reported above, that librarians with more group identity derive from a better job design. Job design for task variety, work methods and social feedback are beneficial in improving group identity. Organizational prestige was also significantly associated with group identity in this study. A significant improvement in group identity will be obtained, as the libraries emphasize task characteristics and organizational prestige at the organizational level.

Practical implications

Since group identity significantly affects knowledge sharing intention, it may be necessary for library managers to enhance their overall job design and organi-

zational prestige. The studied task characteristics are verified as significantly affecting group identity. Therefore, the libraries can improve group identity through task characteristics. Better job design, such as work methods, task variety and social feedback make it possible to gain higher levels of group identity and so, in turn, a higher knowledge sharing intention because of their involvement in goal setting and in making decisions that affect their work. Besides, organizational prestige is another important factor that determines group identity. This study has taken a step in the direction of defining the relationship between task characteristics and group identity in libraries. The contribution of this study is critical to the literature on group identity and organizational prestige in libraries by integrating the job design, as these tasks' characteristics links have never been studied before.

Limitations and future research

Even through this body of research has the undeniable merit of offering valuable insights into group identity and job design in libraries, is suffers from certain limitations, which suggest some directions for possible extensions in the future. The first limitation concerns the data collected only from academic libraries in Taiwan. Although there may be some commonality among all of the libraries, readers should be cautious about generalizing the results, especially to affiliates in other countries or cultures. Thus, the generalization of the results to other populations with different countries and cultures may be limited. Future research may be conducted in order to verify these results by library science researches located in a variety of regions. The second limitation of the current study is the fact that it focuses on only one type of library, associated with the organizational and individual perspective, while other types, such as school, public, special and national libraries were deficient. Thirdly, mutual trust is a significant factor for group identity, knowledge sharing, and knowledge quality (Tanis & Postmes, 2005; Voci, 2006; Ying & Chris, 2009). However, the main purpose of this study is investigating the relationship between group identity and task characteristics so this study did not take the factor "trust among group members" into account. The final limitation is that longitudinal evidence of how job design has evolved in libraries. If one can examine the changes in job design and group identity at different stages of the knowledge sharing process, this would be more helpful in identifying the specific causality, according to the longitudinal data analysis.

Conclusion

To sum up the salient features of the analysis, five of these findings are worth summarizing. Firstly, the results indicate that group identity will improve the intention of knowledge sharing in academic library. It can be viewed as a

behavioral motivation that creates a positive attitude towards knowledge sharing. Secondly, the characteristics of task play an important role for group identity between librarians. Consistent with previous studies, job design is related to the employee attitudes. In academic library, work methods autonomy can improve the group identity. As the job allows librarian to make decisions about what methods to complete the work or librarian considerable opportunity for independence and freedom will encourage the librarian to share their knowledge. Thirdly, the job involves a great deal of task variety or requires the performance of a wide range of tasks will also improve group identity. As the librarians have more opportunities to do a number of different things, they will more identify their job value. Fourthly, social support of task characteristics is another important force to group identity. As the librarians have the opportunity to develop close friendships in their job, they will have more to get to know other people and improve their group identity. Finally, external prestige is based upon the individual's evaluation of the library. The result indicated external prestige is a significant positive factor of group identity. Therefore, a high level of external prestige might cause a positive effect on group identity. We can conclude that both organizational prestige and task characteristics are able to explain significant amounts of variance. This study proposed that knowledge sharing intention may be improved through group identity. Group identity is associated with different task characteristics and organizational prestige. The empirical test of the job design found the model to be strongly supported. The most important finding from those data suggests that the library could improve the group identity in terms of both job design and organizational prestige. Such findings underscore the importance of recognizing task characteristics from different perspectives. Future research in knowledge sharing about different task characteristics is obviously required, but this is an exciting first step. The findings of this study highlight the need for research in order to investigate many of the above issues and, in particular, methods for improving knowledge sharing strategy use.

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工作設計對大學圖書館 團體認同之影響

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摘要

團體認同度影響大學圖書館工作人員知識分享的意圖和品質。目前，從館員職務設計和工作任務特點角度，探討團體認同度和圖書館內部知識共享之影響的相關研究尚不多。本研究發現團體認同度對於改善大學圖書館的知識共享意圖和品質有其重要影響，而職務設計和工作任務的適當與否，亦影響館員的團體認同度。

關鍵詞：團體認同，職位設計，任務特性，大學圖書館，知識分享

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