

Full Length Research Paper

The relevance Knowledge management and Social Capital with Staff Empowerment

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The aim of this study was to investigate the relationships between Knowledge management and social capital and staff empowerment among education personnel in the city of Ardabil (Iran). The population in the present descriptive-correlational study consisted of all male education personnel in the city of Ardabil (n=250) in 2014. Using Jersey-Morgan table and stratified random sampling method, 145 people were selected as the study's samples. The data were collected through the Staff Empowerment Questionnaire (Reinhart and Short, 1995), the Knowledge management Questionnaire (Mirza Asefi, Rajaei Pour and Jamshidian, 2011) and the Social Capital Questionnaire (Ownegh, 2005). The data were analyzed using Pearson Correlation and Multiple Regression Analysis. The results showed significant relationships between Knowledge management and staff empowerment and between social capital and staff empowerment. Among the components of Knowledge management, *externalization* and *understanding legal and economic issues related to the use of information* had respectively the highest (0.523) and the lowest (0.470) predictive power in predicting staff empowerment. Among the components of social capital, *trust* and *commitment* had respectively the highest (0.589) and the lowest (0.488) predictive power in predicting staff empowerment.

Keywords: Knowledge management, Social Capital, Empowerment, Human relationships

INTRODUCTION

Some numbers of management experts to help the development of knowledge management among them are the limitations that scientists such as Peter Drucker, Paul Strassman and Peter Senge pointed out in America. Drucker and Strassman growing importance of information and knowledge as enterprise resource limitations and Peter Senge emphasis on organizational learning as an important aspect of knowledge management is emphasized. Grace also Argyris, Bartlett, Leonardo Barsvlyn of knowledge management at Harvard Business School analyzed from different angles to the special accident forms. The most important factor in organizations and the entire society is human resources. There is no doubt that the prosperity of any society depends on the improvement of its human resources. Empowerment is a concept that has been proposed in line with the development of human

resources. Transferring more authority and responsibility to staffs is the common feature of all definitions proposed for the concept of empowerment (Ebrahimi, 2011, p: 5). Today's organizations are affected by factors such as increasing global competition, rapid changes, the need for quality and after-sale services and limited resources. After years of experience, people have come to the conclusion that organizational success depends on the availability of expert, creative and motivated human resources. Human resources are the real assets of an organization. One of the major concerns of successful organizations is recruiting intelligent and educated human resources who are able to make organizational changes. Appropriate use of human resource potential is a huge advantage in any organization. An organization uses a series of staffs' talents and skills in organizational development. The

Table 1: Historical development of the concept of empowerment (Nave Ibrahim and Abdollahi, 2006)

Decade	Concepts related to empowerment	Explanation
1950s	Human relationships	Managers have friendly relationships with staffs
1960s	Sensitivity training	Managers are sensitive to staffs' needs and motivation
1970s	Staff participation	Managers involve staffs in decision-making
1980s	Total Quality Management	Managers emphasize teamwork
1990s	Staff empowerment	Managers help staffs activate their potential

activation of human resources' potential and capabilities leads to the development of staffs and organizations. Therefore, effective management of human resources is necessary in order to achieve organizational objectives. In this context, the growth, development, prosperity and improvement of staffs' capabilities (recently referred to as *staff empowerment*) are of interest to scholars and experts in the field of human resources management. Empowerment is a new and effective technique to improve organizational efficiency by taking advantage of staffs' capabilities. Due to their Knowledge management, experience and motivations, staffs have a potential power which can be activated by the process of empowerment. This technique activates potential sources of human capacities and proposes a balanced way between being completely controlled by the management and being completely free (Deniss, 2005). Empowerment has two important organizational benefits: 1) empowered staffs are more motivated and committed to meet organizational challenges; 2) many of the challenges faced by human resources management are rooted in staffs' powerlessness (Hashemi and Pour Amin Zad, 2011).

The strength of the potential and ability of the individual, group or organization comes so others to be required to do certain things. The emphasis on the ability (potential) is very important (seifollahi 2016). Scott and Jaffe (1991) stated that 'empowerment is a fundamentally different way of working with each other'. This means that people feel that they are responsible not only for doing their own tasks, but also for improving the whole organization. Moreover, work teams have to continuously work together to improve their performance and achieve higher levels of productivity (Iran Zadeh, 2010). Bowen and Lawler (1992) defined empowerment as staffs' involvement in four organizational elements of information, bonuses, decision-making and Knowledge management. Foy (1997) believed that empowerment is the distribution of decision-making power among those who don't have it.

With reference to the above mentioned issues, it can be concluded that managers can empower staffs if organizational information is accessible to them, organizational structure is modernized, hierarchy is replaced by work teams and educational opportunities are provided for all staffs (they are all parts of the empowerment process) (Nave Ibrahim and Abdollahi,

2006). Other authors have defined empowerment based on their beliefs and attitudes towards the role of staffs in the organizations. Conger and Kanungo (1988) believed that empowerment is the development of an increasing sense of self-efficacy in people through the identification and elimination of sources of their powerlessness. In a study entitled 'the empowerment process: the unity of theory and practice', they defined empowerment as a motivational approach focusing on people's capabilities (not authority). Therefore, staff empowerment refers to the process of increasing staffs' self-efficacy through the identification and elimination of sources of their weaknesses (Table 1).

One of the variables affecting staff empowerment is Knowledge management. In the present age of information, externalization is an essential skill for everyone. This skill is referred to as Knowledge management. Knowledge management is a set of abilities enabling people to recognize when information is needed; these abilities help people locate, evaluate and effectively use the needed information (Mirza Safi, et al., 2011). Quinn (2005) stated a number of factors affecting staff empowerment and focused on three factors of providing good information, providing the necessary resources and communication with the outside. These three factors can have a decisive influence on the process of empowerment only through the application of Information Technology (IT) (Knowledge management is one of the aspects of IT). Lak and Javadian (2011) concluded that IT infrastructures can be influential in police forces empowerment. They mentioned increasing speed and accuracy, reducing physical size of data sources, eliminating redundant administrative processes, enabling remote collaboration and reducing costs of police organization as issues resulting from the empowerment of police forces. Kamalian, Salar Zehi and Oliaei (2013) showed that there is a significant positive relationship between IT application and staff empowerment and that IT application can explain %41 of the variance in staff empowerment. The term 'Knowledge management' was coined by Paul Zurkowski in 1974. In a report to the National Commission on Libraries and Information Science, he explained the objectives of achieving Knowledge management. He believed that a person has Knowledge management if s/he is trained in using information resources and able to solve problems by

using information appropriately (Hall, 2008). Jami (2009) defined Knowledge management as effective performance of people in an information society. This definition includes critical thinking, awareness of personal and professional ethics, interaction with professionals and internalization to solve problems and make decisions. The Association of College and Research Libraries (ACRL) (2003) determined a set of standards to measure Knowledge management. These standards include 5 main components: 1) Externalization; 2) Socialization; 3) Combination; 4) Internalization; and 5) Understanding legal and economic issues related to the use of information. In a study entitled 'A needs analysis for Knowledge management provision for research: a case study in University College Dublin', Patterson (2009) tried to establish Knowledge management among graduate students and found that most of the examined students faced problems, such as lack of self-confidence- in understanding research questions and using advanced search techniques. Computer literacy is needed to read and write information. In fact, without computer literacy, it is i to achieve Knowledge management. In a study entitled 'The relationship between Knowledge management and entrepreneurial capabilities of graduate students of Isfahan University', Mirza Safi and colleagues (2011) found a significant relationship between Knowledge management and entrepreneurial capabilities of graduate students ($R=0.60$). They also showed that entrepreneurial capabilities have the highest and the lowest correlations with Combination ($R=0.60$) and Internalization (0.560) respectively.

Another factor that can play a role in staff empowerment is social capital. Generally, economic development is based on natural capital, physical capital or production and human capital which are all known as national assets. It has been recently found that these three types of national assets can only determine a part of the process of economic development because economic development is mostly achieved through the interactions between economic actors. Therefore, to solve problems between countries with equal status, social capital can be considered (Kiamarsi and Momeni, 2013). Social capital refers to the ability of people to work together in order to achieve common goals in different groups and organizations. Social capital can also be considered as the result of mutual trust, reciprocal social interaction, social groups, a sense of collective identity, having a shared picture of the future and team work in a social system (Pour Kiani and Bahrami Nejad, 2012). Danchev (2006) defined social capital as network structures developed based on trust and informal relationships between organizational members. Trust, expectations and mutual commitments make informal mechanisms that help people understand and achieve their objectives more easily. Keshavarzi, Hoseini, Heidari Nasab and Amadeh (2011) conducted a

study on the relationship between social capital and staff psychological empowerment and concluded that there are significant relationships between structural, cognitive and relational dimensions of social capital and psychological empowerment of staffs. They also reported the highest correlation between relational dimension of social capital and psychological empowerment. Accordingly, the present study was conducted to examine the relationships between Knowledge management and staff empowerment and between social capital and staff empowerment among education personnel in the city of Ardabil (Iran).

METHODOLOGY

Regarding objectives, the present study was an applied research and concerning methodology, it was a descriptive-correlational study. The population in the present study consisted of all male education personnel in the city of Ardabil ($n=250$) in 2014. Using Jersey-Morgan table and stratified random sampling method, 145 people were selected as the study's samples. The data were analyzed using Pearson Correlation and Multiple Regression Analysis.

Instruments

The Staff Empowerment Questionnaire (EEQ)

The EEQ was developed by Short and Reinhardt in 1995. This 38-item questionnaire measures six dimensions of respect, professional growth, self-efficacy, decision-making and self-determination. The EEQ is scored on a 5-point Likert scale ranging from 1 to 5. Using Cronbach's alpha, the reliability of this questionnaire was determined in the present study (0.78).

The Knowledge management Questionnaire (KQ)

The ILQ was developed by Mirza Safi and colleagues (2011) based on the components of Knowledge management set by the American Association of School Librarians (AASL). This 35-item questionnaire is scored on a 5-point Likert scale. The ILQ measures five dimensions of Internalization, Socialization, Externalization, Combination, and Understanding legal and economic issues related to the use of information. In the present study, a Cronbach's alpha of 0.83 was determined for this questionnaire. Similarly, Mirza Safi and colleagues (2011) reported a Cronbach's alpha of 0.82 for the questionnaire.

The Social Capital Questionnaire (SCQ)

The SCQ, developed by Ownegh (2005), measures seven dimensions of networks, trust, cooperation, mutual understanding, relations, values and commitment. This 28-item questionnaire is scored on a 5-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to

5 (strongly agree). Ownegh determined the reliability of this questionnaire by using Cronbach's alpha (0.93). In the present study, a Cronbach's alpha of 0.83 was determined for the questionnaire.

RESULTS

Using Pearson Correlation test, significant relationships were observed between Knowledge management and staff empowerment and between social capital and staff empowerment.

Table 2: Correlation coefficients between Knowledge management and its dimensions and staff empowerment

Correlation coefficient	Empowerment			
	R	P	R ²	N
Knowledge management	0.532	0.000	0.46	145
Socialization	0.489	0.001	0.29	145
Externalization	0.478	0.000	0.29	145
Combination	0.499	0.001	0.32	145
Internalization	0.487	0.001	0.21	145
Knowledge Management Situation	0.476	0.001	0.26	145

As shown in table (2), there was a significant relationship between Knowledge management and staff empowerment ($R=0.60$). There were also significant positive relationships between the five components of Knowledge management and staff empowerment. Accordingly, among the components of Knowledge management, effective access to Knowledge had the highest correlation ($R=0.560$) and Knowledge Management Situation had the lowest correlation with staff empowerment ($R=0.496$). Correlation coefficients between other components of Knowledge management and staff empowerment were as follows: Determination of the extent and nature of Knowledge ($R=0.548$), Effective use of Knowledge ($R=0.544$) and Evaluation of Knowledge critically ($R=0.510$).

According to table 3, the best predictors of staff empowerment were Effective access to Knowledge , Determination of the extent and nature of Knowledge , Effective use of Knowledge and Evaluation of Knowledge critically. Among the components of Knowledge management, Knowledge Management Situation was not significant in the regression equation indicating that this component is unable to predict staff empowerment.

As shown in table 4, there was a significant relationship between social capital and staff empowerment ($R=0.65$). The coefficient of determination (0.47) showed that the variance of social capital is

common with the variance of staff empowerment. There were also significant positive relationships between the seven components of social capital and staff empowerment. Accordingly, among the components of social capital, trust had the highest correlation ($R=0.590$) and commitment had the lowest correlation with staff empowerment ($R=0.498$). Correlation coefficients between other components of social capital and staff empowerment were as follows: Networks ($R=0.581$), Cooperation ($R=0.541$), Relations ($R=0.545$), Values ($R=0.511$) and Mutual understanding ($R=0.524$).

According to table 5, the best predictors of staff empowerment were Trust, Networks, Relations and Cooperation. Among the components of social capital, Mutual understanding, Values and Commitment were not significant in the regression equation indicating that these components are unable to predict staff empowerment.

Table 3: Multiple regression analysis between the components of Knowledge management and staff empowerment

		Non standardized coefficient		Standardized coefficient	T value	Sig.
		B	Std. error	Beta		P value
First step	Constant value	75.49	6.94		9.76	0.001
	Effective access to Knowledge	2.84	0.361	0.553	8.7	0.001
Second step	Constant value	55.47	8.63		6.20	0.001
	Effective access to Knowledge	1.47	0.387	0.423	5.35	0.001
	Determination of the extent and nature of Knowledge	1.70	0.212	0.342	4.55	0.001
Third step	Constant value	73.50	8.27		5.72	0.001
	Effective access to Knowledge	1.23	0.417	0.287	3.61	0.001
	Determination of the extent and nature of Knowledge	1.47	0.337	0.313	4.12	0.001
	Effective use of Knowledge	0.985	0.353	0.223	2.76	0.004
Fourth step	Constant value	45.46	9.14		5.35	0.001
	Effective access to Knowledge	0.918	0.333	0.212	2.78	0.001
	Determination of the extent and nature of Knowledge	1.28	0.334	0.262	3.54	0.005
	Effective use of Knowledge	0.734	0.342	0.173	2.34	0.022
	Evaluation of Knowledge critically	0.715	0.339	0.177	2.67	0.035

Table 4: Correlation coefficients between social capital and its components and staff empowerment

Correlation coefficient	Empowerment			
	R	P value	R ²	N
Social capital	0.65	0.000	0.47	145
Trust	0.590	0.001	0.29	145
Networks	0.541	0.000	0.30	145
Cooperation	0.581	0.001	0.32	145
Relations	0.515	0.001	0.31	145
Values	0.541	0.001	0.29	145
Mutual understanding	0.524	0.001	0.21	145
Commitment	0.498	0.000	0.23	145

Table 5: Multiple regression analysis between the components of social capital and staff empowerment

		Non standardized coefficient		Standardized coefficient	T value	Sig.
		B	Std. error	Beta		P value
First step	Constant value	75.33	7.89		9.84	0.001
	Trust	2.20	0.260	0.576	8.57	0.001
Second step	Constant value	52.56	8.91		6.28	0.001
	Trust	1.55	0.286	0.405	5.44	0.001
	Networks	1.38	0.310	0.333	4.50	0.001
Third step	Constant value	47.75	8.90		5.66	0.001
	Trust	1.11	0.319	0.295	3.57	0.001
	Networks	1.25	0.309	0.305	4.14	0.001
	Relations	0.963	0.331	0.225	2.87	0.005
Fourth step	Constant value	43.67	9.06		5.10	0.001
	Trust	0.933	0.329	0.244	2.85	0.004
	Networks	1.05	0.319	0.261	3.39	0.001
	Relations	0.742	0.344	0.175	2.18	0.028
	Cooperation	0.713	0.341	0.179	2.09	0.031

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

The aim of this study was to investigate the relationships between Knowledge management and social capital and staff empowerment among education personnel in the city of Ardabil (Iran).

The obtained correlation coefficient showed a significant relationship between Knowledge management and staff empowerment. Accordingly, with the increase of Knowledge management, staffs become more empowered to perform their tasks. This finding was in line with the results of other studies conducted by Lak and Javadian (2011), Kamalian, Salar Zehi and Oliaei (2013) and Mirza Safi and colleagues (2011). They concluded that the development of IT infrastructures in the process of staff empowerment can lead to increased speed and accuracy, reducing physical size of data sources, eliminating redundant administrative processes, enabling remote collaboration and reducing costs of the organization. Moreover, they showed that there is a significant positive relationship between IT application and staff empowerment and that IT application can explain %41 of the variance in staff empowerment. Considering the extensive changes occurred in different aspects of staffs' work life and the phenomenon of globalization, organizations must focus on empowering their staffs and take the necessary measures to increase their competitiveness. Today's organizations must design their programs appropriately so that they can take advantage of their staffs' skills and potential to achieve organizational objectives. Therefore, managers can develop their organizations by empowering their staffs. According to the results of this study, Knowledge management provides a fertile ground for enhancing staffs' capabilities in various fields. Knowledge management includes the skills needed by organizational members to perform their everyday tasks (Nik Pour, Tavakoli and Rajaei Nejad, 2011). These skills help staffs perform their tasks appropriately, align themselves with various internal and external changes, and become creative. The education organization, as an important institution, must pay more attention to its staffs' levels of Knowledge management in order to empower them.

The obtained correlation coefficients and the results of regression analysis showed that among the components of Knowledge management, Effective access to Knowledge has the highest correlation with staff empowerment and therefore, is the best predictor of empowerment. These findings were in line with the results of a study conducted by Ali Ahmadi, Ahmadi and Hatami Naghani (2010). To explain these findings, it can be stated that staffs need to obtain the needed Knowledge from different channels including internet, libraries, consultation and participation in various seminars relevant to their jobs. Managers should provide

their staffs with the necessary facilities to obtain the needed Knowledge .

The results indicated a significant relationship between social capital and staff empowerment. Accordingly, higher levels of trust, relations, commitment and other components of social capital make staffs more empowered. This finding was in line with the results of a study conducted by Keshavarzi, Hoseini, Heidari Nasab and Amadeh (2012). In a study entitled 'the relationship between social capital and psychological empowerment (case study: Qom Governor), these researchers found significant relationships between structural, cognitive and relational dimensions of social capital and psychological empowerment of staffs (the highest correlation was found between the relational dimension of social capital and psychological empowerment). Social capital is a new concept that has been recently raised in social and economic studies in modern societies. This concept refers to the critical links and communication among members of a network that leads to the realization of organizational goals by creating norms and mutual trust. The presence of this subject in many social debates indicates the importance of social capital in social development, especially educational social development (Nazok Tabar and Veisi, 2008).

The results also showed significant relationships between components of social capital and staff empowerment in line with the results of studies conducted by Ali Ahmadi and colleagues (2010) and Grinson (2011). Ali Ahmadi and colleagues (2010) conducted a study on the directors of Caravans for the Hajj pilgrimage and found that those directors can be highly empowered by changing their beliefs, values, symbols and skills (technical, humanitarian and perception).

Spritzer (1995) mentioned factors affecting staff empowerment as follows:

- 1) Personal factors: education, work experience, gender, race, locus of control and self-esteem;
- 2) Collective factors: group effectiveness, group importance, intragroup trust, understanding the group impact on managers
- 3) Organizational factors: role ambiguity, locus of control, access to Knowledge , political-social support, one's place in organizational hierarchy, collaborative work unit (Ali Ahmadi, et al., 2010).

In this study, the results indicated relationships between trust, cooperation, relations and group importance which were in line with the collective and organizational factors stated by Spritzer (1995).

According to Spritzer (1995), intragroup trust, collaborative atmosphere and group importance affect staff empowerment. A rich social capital leads to the prosperity of society and people living in that society; thus, one of the responsibilities of education personnel is to obtain and increase social capital. To be successful,

education personnel should design a particular pattern of social capital by considering its dimensions and components. Social relationships positively affect staff empowerment. Considering Mayo's studies in human relationships, it must be noted that organizational efficiency is affected by staffs' relationships with each other and informal communication networks rather than by physiological features of the work environment. Since trust is the most important component of social capital, organizations should create it by using staffs' views in decision-making situations, helping them promote occupationally and considering bonuses for them.

Social capital improves Knowledge flow and increases trust, harmony and organizational stability to achieve organizational goals. The increase of staffs' Knowledge management helps them obtain the needed Knowledge from different channels and leads to the elimination of redundant processes and reduction of organizational costs. Moreover, high levels of Knowledge management cause inter-organizational competitions. Therefore, to achieve organizational goals, managers must invest in and pay attention to staffs' empowerment by increasing their Knowledge management and enhancing their social capital.

According to the results of this study, the following recommendations are made:

- It is recommended to conduct similar studies on the relationships between staff empowerment and other variables (e.g. E-learning and Computer self-efficacy).
- The Education Organization is required to provide the needed facilities for its staffs for having access to Knowledge
- Given that staff empowerment is highly associated with trust, higher levels of mutual trust must be built between staffs and organizational executives by transferring responsibility and authority to lower level staffs.
- It is also recommended to develop multiple channels of communication between staffs.

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