

The relationship between effective factors in the empowerment and knowledge management of social security insurance employees in Zabol and Hirmand counties (a descriptive correlational study)

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ABSTRACT

This study is an attempt to determine the relationship between the factors affecting the empowerment and knowledge management among social security insurance employees in Zabol and Hirmand counties. This descriptive-correlational research was performed in 2017. The statistical population is comprised of all social security employees in Zabol and Hirmand counties and the statistical sample consists of 43 participants. The sampling method is complete enumeration (consisting of all subjects). The instruments used for data collection were the questionnaires of effective factors in empowerment developed by Kafashi and Hatami Nejad (2009) with a reliability of 0.71, and a researcher-made questionnaire of knowledge management with a reliability of 0.73. The content validity of the questionnaires has also been approved by university professors and experts. The Pearson correlation coefficient was used to analyze the data in SPSS-21. In this research, the results demonstrated that there is no significant relationship between the effective factors in employee empowerment and the knowledge management of social security insurance employees in Zabol and Hirmand counties. Furthermore, there is no significant relationship between the factors affecting employee empowerment and knowledge management and the gender of social security employees in Zabol and Hirmand counties.

Keywords: Factors affecting empowerment, knowledge management, employees

Introduction

With respect to the progress and development in knowledge, science and technology, the urgent need for boosted and efficient knowledge management is discerned more in different societies, where employees should know how to manage their knowledge as the main factor in the generation of knowledge. Strategic, technical and operational goals are achieved and effectively considered in knowledge management in order for its benefits to be applied in organizational situations. Nevertheless, there are different approaches and ideas in this regard and complex ideas concerning the nature of knowledge and its use in organizations are still ambiguous. Not only is knowledge management created by economic pressure, but also an important aspect of knowledge management is the effective behavior of individuals. In today's knowledge management, there is an emphasis on the development of the ability to think and analyze issues among individuals, so that they can be entrusted with intellectual duties rather than manual labors. Employees

should be given intellectual freedom to express their opinions regarding their work. These perceptions of knowledge management have not occurred by chance; rather, they have been formed due to long work and experience ever since the 1980s (Seif and Karami, 2004; quoted in Sanoukesh, 2019). As the formation of the components of knowledge management process requires facilities, the enablers of the organization play a key and basic role in shaping knowledge management. Knowledge management enablers consist of four elements, namely culture, technology, strategy and leadership, and measurement (Liao, 2003). As a management strategy to achieve sustainable development, organizational empowerment is practically very difficult and time-consuming in empowering a process and requires management as it is the case in other processes. Nonetheless, given the multidimensional nature of the issue, it is not possible to achieve it holistically with a specific method of management or skillset. To do this, the entire social systems must undergo basic change (Aghlmand and Akbari, 2009). Employee empowerment is one of the effective techniques to increase the productivity and efficacy of employees and develop the optimal use of their individual and group capacities and abilities in line with organizational goals. Empowerment is a process in which continuous enhancement and improvement is upgraded through the development and expansion of the strengths and capabilities of individuals and teams. In other words, empowerment is a strategy of organizational development and prosperity (Sehat and Setvati, 2012). The efficacy of empowerment as a management technique is predicated on environmental conditions. The composition of the driving and inhibiting factors in the organizational environment determines the degree of its effectiveness. The prejudice that empowerment is always beneficial and helpful for the organization has no strong basis in logic. Empowerment does not guarantee success in all situations and is not an end in itself. Its effectiveness depends on adaptation to the needs, goals, and culture of the organization and the structure and attitude of employees (Ghorbanizadeh and Aghaverdi, 2013). Presently, the need for knowledge management has been raised as a strategic tool to promote employee empowerment and competitive positions. This indicates that it cannot be used to empower the organization without considering the principle of knowledge management and knowledge of the organization. Thus, it should be noted that knowledge management is an endless subject which always helps the organization in empowering employees and calls for constant support and attention. As a strategic tool, what can ensure its success is considering individuals as the owners of knowledge. Likewise, organizational processes should be such that knowledge can be disseminated throughout the organization to empower the employees. The management of organizations should depend on superior knowledge to make logical decisions on important issues and improve knowledge-based practices. Knowledge management is hence an important category by which the organizations seek to explain how to transform information, individual and organizational knowledge, and employee empowerment into individual and group knowledge and skills. Therefore, creating an environment for sharing, transferring and exchanging knowledge among the members of the organization is one of the primary goals considered necessary for this purpose. The reason is that knowledge management can enable a range of employee empowerment features by allowing an organization to improve smarter capabilities (Wiig, 1999). Having performed a review of relevant literature, papers and sites, no source was found to examine the paradigms of knowledge management and organizational reputation with respect to organizational excellence. However, the studies conducted by Azari and Hamidi, 2013 (The effect of key factors of transformational leadership on improving the implementation of knowledge management of Khorasan Regional Electricity Company), Shafiei Nikabadi and Sadeghpour, 2015 (The role of knowledge-based management in the development of research and development units and designing this model in Khorasan Regional Electricity Company), Mahmoudi and Sepahyar, 2017 (Investigating the factors affecting the empowerment of employees of Ahvaz Social Security Organization), Safdarian et al., 2015 (Investigating the factors affecting the empowerment of employees at Isfahan University of Medical Sciences) have performed a similar line of enquiry. Therefore, according to the above discussion, the objective of this study is to determine the relationship between the factors affecting empowerment with the knowledge management of social security employees in Zabol and Hirmand counties. This research would encourage the employees to pay more attention to the factors affecting empowerment and be more aware of their positive effects. Moreover, on-the-job workshops can be dedicated to special knowledge management following the results of this research. Therefore, the Social Security Insurance Organization

and stakeholders such as employees, managers, and consultants can apply the findings of this research. Other related institutions can also benefit from these results and similar cases.

Research methodology

In terms of purpose, the present study is considered applied research and, in terms of research method, it is regarded as a descriptive-correlational study. The statistical population of this study is comprised mainly of all social security employees of Zabol and Hirmand counties in 2017 and the statistical sample consists of 43 participants. The sampling method is complete enumeration (in which the whole statistical population is considered as a sample). Data analysis was performed in SPSS-21, where after inserting the information about the individuals into the computer, the indicators of each variable (using the sum of the questionnaire scores and specifications of each variable) were first calculated for each person and the results were reported using the Mean and Standard Deviation. The relationship between the independent variable (i.e. factors affecting empowerment) and the dependent variable (i.e. knowledge management) was determined by Pearson correlation coefficient.

The research proposal was reviewed by the Ethics Committee of Social Security Insurance in Zabol and Hirmand counties and received the ethics code of

Having obtained the code of ethics and research license, necessary arrangements were made and the researcher visited the social security insurance offices in Zabol and Hirmand counties. The purpose of the study and the method used in filling the questionnaires were explained to the employees upon visiting the research site (i.e. social security insurance offices of Zabol and Hirmand counties). The respondents were asked to fill the questionnaire honestly and ask for clarification in case there were any questions. The employees were assured that the answers would remain completely confidential and there was no need to mention their names and details. Then, the employees participated in the research and completed the questionnaires with consent out of their own volition. Then, the employees received and filled the questionnaires. In the present study, the instruments of measurement were two questionnaires:

1-Factors affecting the empowerment: In order to assess the factors affecting the empowerment of employees, the questionnaire of factors affecting the empowerment developed by Kafashi and Hatami Nejad (2009) was used. This questionnaire has 30 questions and its objective is to assess staff empowerment (public participation in information, delegation of autonomy by setting boundaries, moving teams in hierarchy, respect, and feedback). The rating is based on a 5-point Likert scale, with a minimum score of 30 and a maximum score of 150. To obtain validity, the opinions of relevant experts and professors (i.e. three professors) were used. As for the reliability, the questionnaire was implemented with a group of 20 to 30 respondents and its Cronbach's alpha coefficient was calculated as 0.89.

2-Knowledge management: In order to assess the knowledge management of employees, a researcher-made questionnaire of knowledge management was employed. The questionnaire is comprised of 20 questions. According to the type of questions, the respondents can choose scores from 1 to 5 for each item on the Likert scale. The minimum and maximum scores in this questionnaire are 20 and 100 respectively. Due to the fact that the present questionnaire was designed by the researcher, the validity and reliability of the questionnaire are described in the final section of the instruments. Content validity was considered to determine the validity of the questionnaires in the present study. In doing so, the questionnaires were approved by professors and experts. Moreover, the Cronbach's alpha coefficient was used to determine the reliability of the questionnaires and the values of the coefficients obtained for the questionnaire were as follows. The effective factors in empowerment were 0.71 and knowledge management was 0.73.

Research Findings

In the present study, 43 social security employees were studied in Zabol and Hirmand counties. Of these participants, thirty-six were in Zabol (83.7%) and seven were in Hirmand (16.3%). Five participants had an Associate's degree (11.6%), 31 participants had a Bachelor's degree (72.1%), and seven participants had a Master's degree (16.3%). In terms of age, 29 participants had 25 to 35 years of age (67.4%) and 14 participants aged 36 to 46 (32.6%). Twenty participants were in management positions (46.5%), 22 participants were experts (51.2%) and one participant was a receptionist (2.3%). In terms of work

experience, 16 participants had a work history of less than 5 years (37.2%), 8 participants had a work experience of 5 to 10 years (18.6%), 9 participants had a work experience of 10 to 15 years (20.9%), 8 participants had a work experience of 15 to 20 years (18.6%) and there were two participants with over 20 years of work experience (4.7%). To examine the research variables, their Mean and Standard Deviation are reported in Table 1.

Table 1: Mean and standard deviation of the participants in the studied variables

Total Sample	Standard Deviation± Mean	Variable
43	4.12±21.56	Factors affecting empowerment
43	3.42±17.68	Knowledge Management

Source: Research Findings

Based on the findings of the above table, the mean and standard deviation of the variables affecting empowerment is (4.12 ± 21.56) and the knowledge management variable is (3.42 ± 17.68). To examine the relationship between the factors affecting the empowerment and knowledge management of social security employees in Zabol and Hirmand counties, Pearson correlation coefficient test was used in the first stage, the findings of which are reported in Table 2.

Table 2: Correlation coefficients of factors affecting empowerment and knowledge management

Empowerment	Feedback	Respect	Team Movement with a Hierarchy	Autonomy Delegation by Determining the Boundaries	Public participation in information	Variable	
-0.043	0.041	-0.010	-0.023	-0.097	-0.059	R	Knowledge Management
0.786	0.793	0.951	0.886	0.538	0.705	Sig	

Source: Research Findings

Table (2) shows the results of Pearson correlation coefficient test, indicating that there is no significant relationship between the factors affecting employee empowerment and knowledge management of social security employees in Zabol and Hirmand counties. In order to investigate the relationship between the factors affecting employee empowerment and knowledge management according to the gender of social security insurance employees in Zabol and Hirmand counties, Pearson correlation coefficient test was used in the second stage, the findings of which are reported in Table 3.

Table 3: Correlation coefficients of factors affecting employee empowerment and knowledge management based on gender

Empowerment	Variable		
-0.148	R	Male	Knowledge Management
0.402	Sig		
0.540	R	Female	
0.134	Sig		

Source: Research Findings

Table (3) shows the results of Pearson correlation coefficient test, indicating that there is no significant relationship between the factors affecting employee empowerment and knowledge management with regard to the gender of social security employees in Zabol and Hirmand counties.

Summary and Conclusion

The present study was an attempt to investigate the relationships between the factors affecting employee empowerment and knowledge management among the employees of social security insurance in Zabol and Hirmand counties. The findings suggested that there is no significant relationship between the factors affecting employee empowerment and knowledge management of social security insurance employees in these counties. Furthermore, there is no significant relationship between the factors affecting employees' empowerment and knowledge management with regard to the gender of social security insurance employees in these counties. No study was found in the review of literature examining the relationship between factors affecting employee empowerment and knowledge management of social security insurance employees. However, the research performed by Azari and Hamidi, 2013, Shafiei Nikabadi and Sadeghpour, 2015, Mahmoudi and Sepahyar, 2017, and Safdarian et al., 2015 were similar. Generally, it can be concluded that the factors affecting empowerment and knowledge management are not related. Thus, the senior managers of social security insurance are advised to conduct more widespread research to find ways to promote this important quality among social security insurance employees in Zabol and Hirmand counties. It is also suggested that the benefits of the factors affecting empowerment and knowledge management be explained to employees with specialized techniques and appropriate strategies. It is recommended that these categories be formulated and implemented in the form of regular and documented programs to promote positive organizational characteristics. The reason is that the employees would be more efficient in the organization and, consequently, their level of job satisfaction will increase. Moreover, after the necessary pathologies, further research should be performed on the factors affecting empowerment and knowledge management.

Conflict of interest

The authors state that there is no conflict of interest.

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