

The Relationships Between Information Literacy and Social Capital with Employee Empowerment

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Abstract: The aim of this study was to investigate the relationships between information literacy and social capital and employee empowerment among education personnel in the city of Kohgiluyeh (Iran). The population in the present descriptive correlational study consisted of all male education personnel in the city of Kohgiluyeh ($n = 270$) in 2014. Using Jersey Morgan table and stratified random sampling method 152 people were selected as the study's samples. The data were collected through the employee empowerment questionnaire the Information literacy questionnaire and the social capital questionnaire. The data were analyzed using Pearson correlation and multiple regression analysis. The results showed significant relationships between information literacy and employee empowerment and between social capital and employee empowerment. Among the components of information literacy, effective access to information and understanding legal and economic issues related to the use of information had respectively the highest (0.575) and the lowest (0.490) predictive power in predicting employee empowerment. Among the components of social capital, trust and commitment had respectively the highest (0.590) and the lowest (0.498) predictive power in predicting employee empowerment.

Key words: Information literacy, social capital and empowerment, multiple regression analysis, education personal, Iran

INTRODUCTION

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 employees is the common feature of all definitions proposed for the concept of empowerment. 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 employees' talents and skills in organizational development. The activation of human resources' potential and capabilities

leads to the development of employees 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 employees' capabilities (recently referred to as employee 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 employees' capabilities. Due to their knowledge, experience and motivations, employees 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. Empowerment has two important organizational benefits, empowered employees are more motivated and committed to meet organizational challenges, many of the challenges faced by human resources management are rooted in employees' powerlessness.

Scott and Jaffe 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

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

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

whole organization. Moreover, work teams have to continuously work together to improve their performance and achieve higher levels of productivity (Iran and Bahrami, 2010). Bowen and Lawler defined empowerment as employees' involvement in four organizational elements of information, bonuses, decision-making and knowledge. 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 employees if organizational information is accessible to them, organizational structure is modernized, hierarchy is replaced by work teams and educational opportunities are provided for all employees (they are all parts of the empowerment process) (Abdollahi and Ibrahim, 2006). Other researchers have defined empowerment based on their beliefs and attitudes towards the role of employees 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, employee empowerment refers to the process of increasing employees' self-efficacy through the identification and elimination of sources of their weaknesses (Table 1).

One of the variables affecting employee empowerment is information literacy. In the present age of information, effective access to information is an essential skill for everyone. This skill is referred to as information literacy. Information literacy 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 (Mirzasafi *et al.*, 2011). Quinn (2005) stated a number of factors affecting employee 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) (information literacy is one of the aspects of IT). Lak and Javadian 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 *et al.* (2013) showed that there is a significant positive relationship between IT application and employee empowerment and that IT application can explain 41% of the variance in employee empowerment. The term 'information literacy' 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 information literacy. He believed that a person has information literacy if s/he is trained in using information resources and able to solve problems by using information appropriately (Hall, 2008). Jami (2009) defined information literacy as effective performance of people in an information society. This definition includes critical thinking, awareness of personal and professional ethics, interaction with professionals and effective use of information to solve problems and make decisions. The Association of College and Research Libraries (ACRL) (2003) determined a set of standards to measure information literacy. These standards include 5 main components effective access to information determination of the extent and nature of information evaluation of information critically effective use of information and understanding legal and economic issues related to the use of information.

In a study entitled 'A needs analysis for information literacy provision for research: a case study in University College Dublin', Patterson (2009) tried to establish information literacy 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 information literacy. In a study entitled 'The relationship between information literacy and entrepreneurial capabilities of graduate students of Isfahan University', Mirzasafi *et al.* (2011) found a significant relationship between information literacy and entrepreneurial capabilities of graduate students ($R = 0.686$). They also showed that entrepreneurial capabilities have the highest and the lowest correlations with evaluation of information critically ($R = 0.686$) and Effective use of information (0.578), respectively.

Another factor that can play a role in employee 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. 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 *et al.* (2011) conducted a study on the relationship between social capital and employee psychological empowerment and concluded that there are significant relationships between structural, cognitive and relational dimensions of social capital and psychological empowerment of employees. 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 information literacy and employee empowerment and between social capital and employee empowerment among education personnel in the city of Kohgiluyeh (Iran).

MATERIALS AND METHODS

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 Kohgiluyeh ($n = 270$) in 2014. Using Jersey-Morgan table and stratified random sampling method, 152 people were selected as the study's samples. The data were analyzed using Pearson correlation and multiple regression analysis.

Instruments

The Employee 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 1-5. Using Cronbach's alpha, the reliability of this questionnaire was determined in the present study (0.78).

The Information Literacy Questionnaire (ILQ): The ILQ was developed by Mirzasafi *et al.* (2011) based on the components of information literacy 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 effective use of information, determination of the extent and nature of information, effective access to information, evaluation of information critically and Understanding legal and economic issues related to the use of information. In the present study, a Cronbach's alpha of 0.87 was determined for this questionnaire. Similarly, Mirzasafi *et al.* (2011) reported a Cronbach's alpha of 0.85 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 1-5 (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 AND DISCUSSION

Using Pearson correlation test, significant relationships were observed between information literacy and employee empowerment and between social capital and employee empowerment.

As shown in Table 2, there was a significant relationship between information literacy and employee empowerment ($R = 0.697$). There were also significant positive relationships between the five components of information literacy and employee empowerment. Accordingly, among the components of information literacy, effective access to information had the highest correlation ($R = 0.575$) and Understanding legal and economic issues related to the use of information had the lowest correlation with employee empowerment ($R = 0.496$). Correlation coefficients between other components of information literacy and employee empowerment were as follows: Determination of the extent and nature of information ($R = 0.548$), Effective use of information ($R = 0.544$) and evaluation of information critically ($R = 0.510$).

Table 2: Correlation coefficients between information literacy and its dimensions and employee empowerment

Correlation coefficient	Empowerment			
	R	P	R ²	N
Information literacy	0.697	0.000	0.46	152
Determination of the extent and nature of information	0.548	0.001	0.29	152
Effective access to information	0.575	0.000	0.29	152
Evaluation of information critically	0.510	0.001	0.32	152
Effective use of information	0.544	0.001	0.21	152
Understanding legal and economic issues related to the use of information	0.496	0.001	0.26	152

Table 3: Multiple regression analysis between the components of information literacy and employee empowerment

Variables	Non-standardized coefficient		Standardized coefficient (β)	t-value	Sig. p-values
	B	SE			
First step					
Constant value	78.49	7.940		9.87	0.001
Effective access to information	2.24	0.261	0.578	8.60	0.001
Second step					
Constant value	56.47	8.93		6.32	0.001
Effective access to information	1.57	0.287	0.404	5.47	0.001
Determination of the extent and nature of information	1.40	0.312	0.333	4.50	0.001
Third step					
Constant value	75.50	8.870		5.68	0.001
Effective access to information	1.13	0.317	0.293	3.59	0.001
Determination of the extent and nature of information	1.27	0.307	0.303	4.16	0.001
Effective use of information	0.965	0.333	0.221	2.91	0.004
Fourth step					
Constant value	46.46	9.04		5.13	0.001
Effective access to information	0.938	0.327	0.241	2.86	0.001
Determination of the extent and nature of information	1.08	0.317	0.257	3.41	0.005
Effective use of information	0.754	0.342	0.173	2.20	0.027
Evaluation of information critically	0.725	0.339	0.177	2.14	0.032

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

Correlation coefficient	Empowerment			
	R	p-values	R ²	N
Social capital	0.650	0.000	0.47	152
Trust	0.590	0.001	0.29	152
Networks	0.581	0.000	0.30	152
Cooperation	0.541	0.001	0.32	152
Relations	0.545	0.001	0.31	152
Values	0.511	0.001	0.29	152
Mutual understanding	0.524	0.001	0.21	152
Commitment	0.498	0.000	0.23	152

According to Table 3, the best predictors of employee empowerment were effective access to information, determination of the extent and nature of information, effective use of information and evaluation of information critically. Among the components of information literacy, understanding legal and economic issues related to the use of information was not significant in the regression equation indicating that this component is unable to predict employee empowerment.

As shown in Table 4, there was a significant relationship between social capital and employee empowerment ($R = 0.65$). The coefficient of determination (0.47) showed that the variance of social capital is common with the variance of employee empowerment. There were also significant positive relationships between the seven components of social capital and employee empowerment. Accordingly, among the components of social capital, trust had the highest correlation ($R = 0.590$)

and commitment had the lowest correlation with employee empowerment ($R = 0.498$). Correlation coefficients between other components of social capital and employee 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 employee 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 employee empowerment.

The aim of this study was to investigate the relationships between information literacy and social capital and employee empowerment among education personnel in the city of Kohgiluyeh (Iran).

The obtained correlation coefficient showed a significant relationship between information literacy and employee empowerment. Accordingly with the increase of information literacy, employees 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 *et al.* (2013); Mirzasafi *et al.* (2011). They concluded that the development of IT infrastructures in the process of employee empowerment can lead to increased speed and accuracy, reducing physical size of data sources, eliminating redundant administrative

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

Variables	Non standardized coefficient		Standardized coefficient (β)	t-value	Sig.
	B	SE			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

processes, enabling remote collaboration and reducing costs of the organization. Moreover, they showed that there is a significant positive relationship between IT application and employee empowerment and that IT application can explain 41% of the variance in employee empowerment. Considering the extensive changes occurred in different aspects of employees' work life and the phenomenon of globalization, organizations must focus on empowering their employees 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 employees' skills and potential to achieve organizational objectives. Therefore, managers can develop their organizations by empowering their employees. According to the results of this study, information literacy provides a fertile ground for enhancing employees' capabilities in various fields. Information literacy includes the skills needed by organizational members to perform their everyday tasks. These skills help employees 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 employees' levels of information literacy in order to empower them.

The obtained correlation coefficients and the results of regression analysis showed that among the components of information literacy, effective access to information has the highest correlation with employee empowerment and therefore, is the best predictor of empowerment. These findings were in line with the results of a study conducted by Ali *et al.* (2010). To explain these

findings, it can be stated that employees need to obtain the needed information from different channels including internet, libraries, consultation and participation in various seminars relevant to their jobs. Managers should provide their employees with the necessary facilities to obtain the needed information.

The results indicated a significant relationship between social capital and employee empowerment. Accordingly, higher levels of trust, relations, commitment and other components of social capital make employees more empowered. This finding was in line with the results of a study conducted by Keshavarzi *et al.* (2011). 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 employees (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.

The results also showed significant relationships between components of social capital and employee empowerment in line with the results of studies conducted by Ali *et al.* (2010). Ali *et al.* (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 mentioned factors affecting employee empowerment as follows
- Personal factors: education, work experience, gender, race, locus of control and self-esteem
- Collective factors: group effectiveness, group importance, intragroup trust, understanding the group impact on managers
- Organizational factors: role ambiguity, locus of control, access to information, political-social support, one's place in organizational hierarchy, collaborative work unit (Ali *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.

According to Spritzer, intragroup trust, collaborative atmosphere and group importance affect employee 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 employee empowerment. Considering Mayo's studies in human relationships, it must be noted that organizational efficiency is affected by employees' 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 employees' views in decision-making situations, helping them promote occupationally and considering bonuses for them.

CONCLUSION

Social capital improves information flow and increases trust, harmony and organizational stability to achieve organizational goals. The increase of employees' information literacy helps them obtain the needed information from different channels and leads to the elimination of redundant processes and reduction of organizational costs. Moreover, high levels of information

literacy cause inter-organizational competitions. Therefore, to achieve organizational goals, managers must invest in and pay attention to employees' empowerment by increasing their information literacy and enhancing their social capital.

RECOMMENDATIONS

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

- It is recommended to conduct similar studies on the relationships between employee empowerment and other variables (e.g., e-Learning and computer self-efficacy)
- The education organization is required to provide the needed facilities for its employees for having access to information
- Given that employee empowerment is highly associated with trust, higher levels of mutual trust must be built between employees and organizational executives by transferring responsibility and authority to lower level employees
- It is also recommended to develop multiple channels of communication between employees

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