

# **THE ROLE OF INTERNAL MARKETING IN FACILITATING KNOWLEDGE MANAGEMENT PRACTICES: A CASE OF THE EGHTEHAD NOVIN BANK**

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## **Abstract**

*In the knowledge-based era knowledge management (KM) is considered as the primary task of organizations striving to utilize their intellectual capitals effectively. Hence it is vital to understand carefully the appropriate contexts and enablers of knowledge management practices. The human-based nature of KM makes necessary the empowering and enthusiastic participating of employees in such a process. In the other hand, in service organizations such as banks the human element has a vital role in high quality service delivery and implementing quality-improver plans as KM. Hence this research tries to explore the effect of internal marketing on knowledge management practices. It will investigate the way in which the dimensions of internal marketing can facilitate KM practices. The population of the research consists of 1958 person of managers and senior experts of the Eghtesad Novin Bank, Iran. A sample of 322 subjects was selected as statistical sampling. According to the research findings,*

*internal marketing and all of its dimensions have a considerable effect on facilitating KM practices. These findings support the necessity of adopting a more humanistic approach for implementing knowledge management more effectively. According to these results some theoretical and practical suggestions are presented.*

*Keywords: Internal Marketing, Knowledge Management, Knowledge Creation, Knowledge Sharing*

## **INTRODUCTION**

Today, most of the firms for example in the banking industry are working in a highly competitive and dynamic environment. In such conditions, successful and pioneer firms follow extended and various programs in order to guarantee their survive, productivity and growth .In this case, one of the critical success factors of service companies is their ability to provide high quality services quickly. This has effects on attracting and retaining customers and as a result, their growth and profitability. For this purpose, a variety of strategies and techniques have been proposed. One of the most effective and the most common methods is efforts for providing high quality services. Offering continuous and high quality service to customer ends in creating competitive advantage for an organization. Therefore very successful service firms continuously seek to find methods to improve their service quality and customer satisfaction with their help. Because satisfied customers are lucrative source of organization and improving customer satisfaction increases profitability of organization.

One of the best and the most common methods that can have remarkable effect on improving the performance and quality of bank services is the successful implementation of knowledge management in organization. Nature of the service businesses such as banking services are such that the human factor has important effect on provided service and customer satisfaction. To have technical knowledge and job-related experience can also improve the ability of bank employees to provide high quality service. Thus, many pioneer banks including Eghtesad Novin bank, Iran has considered successful implementation of knowledge management plans as their main excellence program in order to exploit and effective development of these knowledge sources. Recruiting experienced and retired state bank managers and efforts to implement knowledge management system are all in this regard.

Knowledge management is the systematic and coherent process of harmonization of extensive activities including acquiring, creating, storing, sharing, and applying knowledge by individuals and groups to achieve organizational objectives (Rastogi, 2000: 42).Knowledge management is a complex process that cannot be implemented overnight. Effective

implementation and application of knowledge management require accurate and clear understanding of factors that influence knowledge management process (Ye et al., 2006, quoted by Shami, 2010). Although these factors are mostly known as knowledge management enablers in knowledge management literature, other terms are also used to describe them such as “infrastructure”, “prerequisite”, “context”, “influencing factors” and “readiness” (Shami Zanjani, 2010). To this end, authors have introduced and investigated various structural, cultural, technological, leadership, human resources, etc. factors, as the appropriate infrastructure needed for successful implementation of knowledge management (Asgari, 2011).

Because knowledge management has mostly human nature than other aspects and also plays a unique role that human factor has in performance of service organizations including banks. In this study, of various infrastructures and enablers, determining and vital role of human factor is considered to facilitate measures of knowledge management and there are efforts to explain the effect of internal marketing on facilitating knowledge management implementation in a validated way.

Internal marketing is an academic, scientific and commercial knowledge in a field of improving customer satisfaction and employees (internal customers of organization) and involves activities such as absorption, development, motivation, continuity of staff quality via their jobs as a product and meeting their needs. In other words, internal marketing is a philosophy of relationship and link between customers and employees (Cahill, 1995). This branch of marketing is highly influenced by quality management and service marketing that emphasizes importance and necessity of creating quality in all processes of providing services, this area of marketing considers the relationship between customers and internal suppliers of organization in order to make value for external customers. This can appear as a chain of value and tools to develop quality of products, services and interaction inside and outside of organization (Ling, 2000). Thus, the goal of internal marketing is to ensure the satisfaction of employees and consequently efforts to develop the quality of products and services to achieve the satisfaction of external customers.

The relationship between knowledge management and internal marketing is related to their common goal; one of the main goals of these two areas is to improve organizational performance through improving the quality of products that are considered as key factors to guarantee survival and productivity of organization. In this regard, organizations require developing organizational abilities to provide high quality products and services. Employees as internal customers of organization play the main role. Therefore, development, motivation, quantitative and qualitative improvement of value-making abilities, continuous improvement of providing services and enhancing the quality of working as a product and their involvement in

doing processes with the help of management, lead organization to improve the quality of products and services that consequently increase the external customer satisfaction.

Given the essence and stated purpose for internal marketing, it seems reasonable to suppose that internal marketing can provide appropriate context for successful implementation of knowledge management measures with development of mental and working maturity of employees. Thus, the subject that has to be considered in this study is “how and to what extent marketing influences facilitation of knowledge management measures in banking industry and how we can use elements of internal marketing to implement knowledge management in banking industry successfully?

## **THEORETICAL BACKGROUND**

### **Knowledge management (KM)**

In today's competitive world, knowledge has become the strategic resource of most organizations (Barney, 1991: 100). Nonaka believes that in the current unstable situation, the only reliable source to gain a sustainable competitive advantage is knowledge (Nonaka, 1994: 15). Therefore, knowledge management has become one of the most important tasks of organizations that seek to exploit it (Monavarian and Asgari, 2008: 190). KM is the systematic and coherent process of harmonization of extensive activities including the acquisition, creation, storage, sharing, and applying knowledge to achieve organizational objectives by individuals and groups (Rastogi, 2000: 42).

### ***Knowledge creation***

In fact, knowledge comes from skills and experience of the staff .Knowledge is created when individuals find a new way to get things done or to develop substantive knowledge (Bose, 2004: 460). Knowledge creation is a result of social interactions and organizational cooperation (Alavi and Leidner, 2001: 112). Nonaka describes four knowledge creation models which are resulted from the interaction between implicit and explicit knowledge at various levels of organization: socialization, externalization, combination and internalization (Nonaka and Takeuchi, 1995, quoted by Asgari, 2011: 31).

### ***Knowledge sharing***

When knowledge is created, should be shared between the members of the organization, in order to be able to act as a foundation for future innovation and knowledge creation. Creating and sharing knowledge with the aim of creating new knowledge is possible through collaboration and synergies resulting from the combination of experiences and backgrounds of

members(Wood, 2005, quoted by Asgari, 2011).Some believe knowledge transfer is same as knowledge sharing and have defined it as a process of knowledge diffusion. This can be done among individuals, groups and organizations that can use any kind of communication channels(Alavi and Leidner, 2001: 113).Other researchers have considered knowledge transfer as same as knowledge flow and believe it included five main pillars: the value of knowledge source, willingness of source to share knowledge, media richness of communication channel, recipient willingness to get knowledge and the ability of recipient to compensate (Gupta and Davinranjan, 2000: 74).

Table 1: Interaction types between implicit and explicit knowledge

	To tacit knowledge	To explicit knowledge
From tacit knowledge	1. Socialization	2. externalization
From explicit knowledge	4. internalization	3. Combination

Source: Nonaka and Takeuchi (1995)

### Internal marketing

Internal marketing concept was first introduced in 1981 by Berry. His basic premise is to consider employees as customers; this means that as external customers, internal customers also want to satisfy their needs. In fact, internal marketing is defined as a look at the employees as internal customers and businesses as internal products (Berry,1981). The logic of this concept is that an organization will have better status to provide high quality services to meet the needs of external customers by meeting needs of internal customers. Also, this concept assumes that by meeting needs of employees, their motivation is increased and preserved and consequently their higher satisfaction leads to increase the possibility to create external satisfaction and loyalty (Ahmed& Rafiq, 2003). In fact, the concept of internal marketing shows that in order to have satisfied customers, company must also have satisfied employees. Satisfied employees will satisfy customers with higher loyalty and as a result will have more benefits for organization. Satisfied employees should be motivated to reach better level of performance and to improve the relationship of internal and external customers. Therefore, employees with high motivation and satisfaction, play the main role in the success of service organizations (Akroushet al., 2012).

### ***Internal market dimension***

- Job security: means to provide reasonable assurance for employees about the absence of dismissal, even during periods of economic hard (Bansal et al., 2001). This is defined as employee's expectation of continued job security in the employment status (Davy et al., 1997) and includes features of job satisfaction like promotion, opportunities, current conditions and long-term careers and job opportunities (Borg & Elizur, 1992) .
- Extensive training: In fact, it is considered as means to provide better service to the customer (Bansal et al., 2001). According to research conducted, it has been determined that investing in ongoing and updated training will have tangible results that will improve the attitudes, skills enhancement in relation with enhancing the quality of services and satisfaction and loyalty of employees (Soleimani, 2012).
- Empowerment: It means to raise the working motivation of employees by delegating authority to the lowest levels of organization where technical decisions are made (Thomas & Velthouse, 1990).
- Information Sharing: In order to communicate and share information, organizations should make information flow through using various methods. The importance of this flow is in creating facilities to decide and to create an appropriate mechanism of feedback (Younesi far et al, 2013).
- Offering rewards: Providing higher salary and benefits than average level of industry and payment commensurate with performance and productivity (Soleimani, 2012)
- Reduction of the gap between employees: By reducing the gap between the working classes, they can easily express their ideas and, therefore, creativity, honesty and trust and job satisfaction are increased. Two methods of reducing the difference in position is to reduce the difference in salary levels within the organization and to create organizational symbols for corporate communications based on the development of a culture of honesty and trust and organizational justice (Soleimani, 2012).

### **Conceptual model**

The relationship between KM and internal marketing is related to their common goal; one of the main objectives of these two subjects is to improve organizational performance throo enhancing the quality of products which is key factor to guarantee survival and productivity of organization. In this case, organizations require developing organizational abilities in order to provide high quality products and services. Employees as internal customers of organization play the main role in this regard. Therefore, development, motivation and quantitative and qualitative abilities to make value, continuous improvement of providing services and enhancing quality level of

working as a product and their involvement in doing processes with the help of management, guide organization to provide high quality products and services that consequently will increase the satisfaction of external customers.

Due to the nature and the target defined for marketing, it seems logical that internal marketing can provide appropriate context to do KM measures successfully by developing mental and working maturity of employees. Thus, the subject that is considered in this study is how and to what extent marketing influences facilitation of KM measures in banking industry and how we can use elements of internal marketing to do KM successful in banking industry.

In line with the objectives of the study and based on literature review and empirical research conducted in the field of internal marketing and knowledge management, this study examines the relationship between these two categories. In this article, management of internal relationship has been chosen of four main approaches to describe internal marketing (mixed perspective of internal marketing, strategic internal marketing, collective internal marketing and management of internal relationship (that were proposed by Viome (2000). This chosen approach focuses more in human resource management in achieving organizational objectives. Because this approach is a development process of relationships that integrate independence and knowledge of employees in order to create new organizational knowledge and challenges internal activities to enhance quality of relationships in market area.

To assess the measures of knowledge management of those measures in relation to knowledge management, two are considered that have vital effect in this process and human factor is more important in doing them (Asgari, 2011).

## **Hypotheses**

According to above discussion and the conceptual model (see figure 1) about effect of internal marketing on measures of knowledge management, following hypotheses have been proposed:

### ***Main hypothesis***

Internal marketing has a positive and significant effect on facilitating measures of knowledge management.

### ***Sub-hypotheses***

H1: Empowerment of employees has a positive and significant effect on facilitating measures of knowledge management.

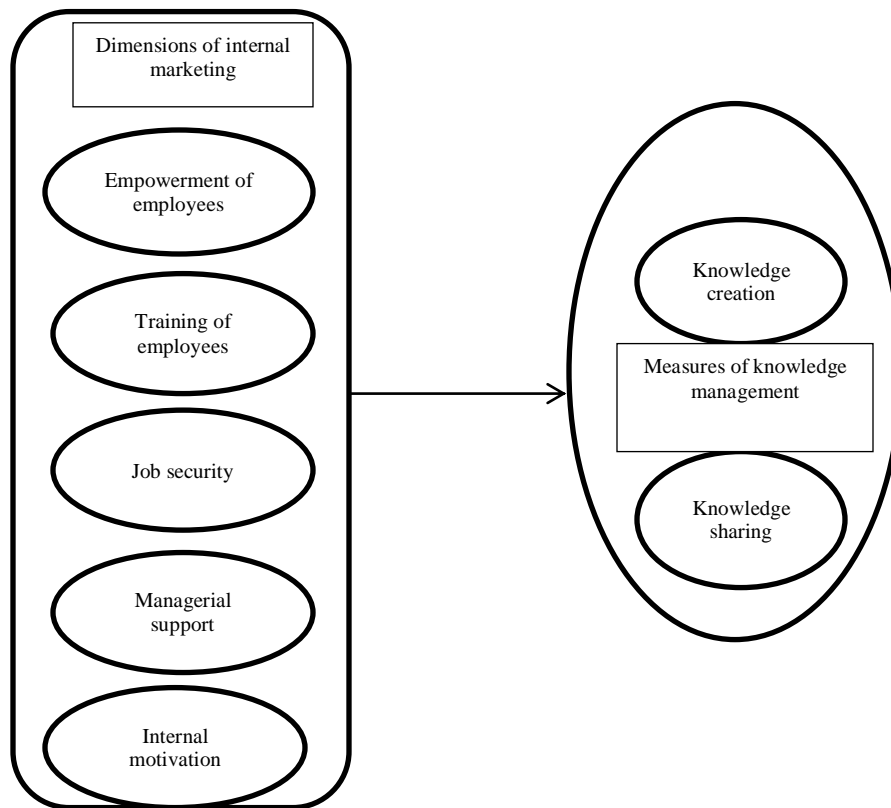
H2: Training of employees has a positive and significant effect on facilitating measures of knowledge management.

H3: Job security has a positive and significant effect on facilitating measures of knowledge management

H4: Managerial support has a positive and significant effect on facilitating measures of knowledge management.

H5: Internal motivation of employees has a positive and significant effect on facilitating measures of knowledge management.

Figure 1. Conceptual Framework



## METHODOLOGY

The present study is an applied research in terms of research objective, because its results are used to solve specific problems within organization. From data collection point of view, it is considered descriptive survey; because it tries to get required information about status quo of statistical sample by using questionnaire. Also, in terms of time it is cross-sectional and in terms of type of data it is quantitative.



### **Statistical territory**

The statistical population of the study consists of directors and employees of branches of Eghtesad Novin bank in Tehran, Iran as a total of 1958 subjects. The simple random sampling has been used as the sampling technique. The sample size is 322 subjects determined by means of Cochran formula. In order to guarantee the collection of questionnaire with sufficient numbers, 350 questionnaires were distributed among directors and experts and 325 questionnaires were collected.

### **Tools to collect data**

A tool to collect initial data is 22- item field questionnaire that has been used as a spectrum of Likert. In order to measure numbers of independent variables i.e. internal marketing, questionnaire of Alhavari et al (2013) and in order to measure dependent variables i.e. knowledge creation and sharing , questionnaire of Wang and Ahmed (2003) have been used. In order to test reliability of questionnaire, initial sample includes 30 pre-test questionnaire and Cronbach's alpha has been calculated as 8 using data collected and SPSS, confidence coefficient has been obtained as %92.

### **Methods of data analysis**

In this study, in order to analyze statistical data obtained from the sample and the presence or absence of simultaneous relationships between variables, structural equation modeling by means of Lisrel was used.

### **ANALYSIS**

In structural equation modeling, relations between latent traits are studied based on collected data that have been extracted according to the theory. In this model, there are 22 obvious variables (including research questions) and 6 latent variables (dependent and independent variables expressed).

After modeling to assess the validity of model, specific indicators are used are including the ratio of chi-square to degrees of freedom which must be less than 3, the mean square root of error of approximation that its authorized amount must be less than 0.08 and  $\pi$  must be less than 0.05 and modified fit index must be greater than 0.9.

To determine the significance of effect of leadership styles and to assess the quality of this effect significance model and standard model are used, respectively. About significance of numbers it can be said that the test of hypotheses is done at confidence level of % 95, there are

significant numbers that are not between 1.96 and -1.96. It means if any number is between 1.96 and -1.96, it will not be significant.

**Test of hypotheses**

Here, route analysis in structural equation test was used to study predicted relationships in hypotheses. Figure 2.shows structural equation modeling of main hypothesis in the standard estimation. Standardized coefficient obtained is equal to 0.65, which indicates a strong correlation between the internal marketing and facilitating measures of KM in Eghtesad Novin bank. The coefficient of determination ( $R^2$ ) Obtained is equal to 0.42, i.e. internal marketing explains 42 % of changes in measures of KM.

Figure 2. Structural equation modeling of main hypothesis (route analysis) in standard estimation

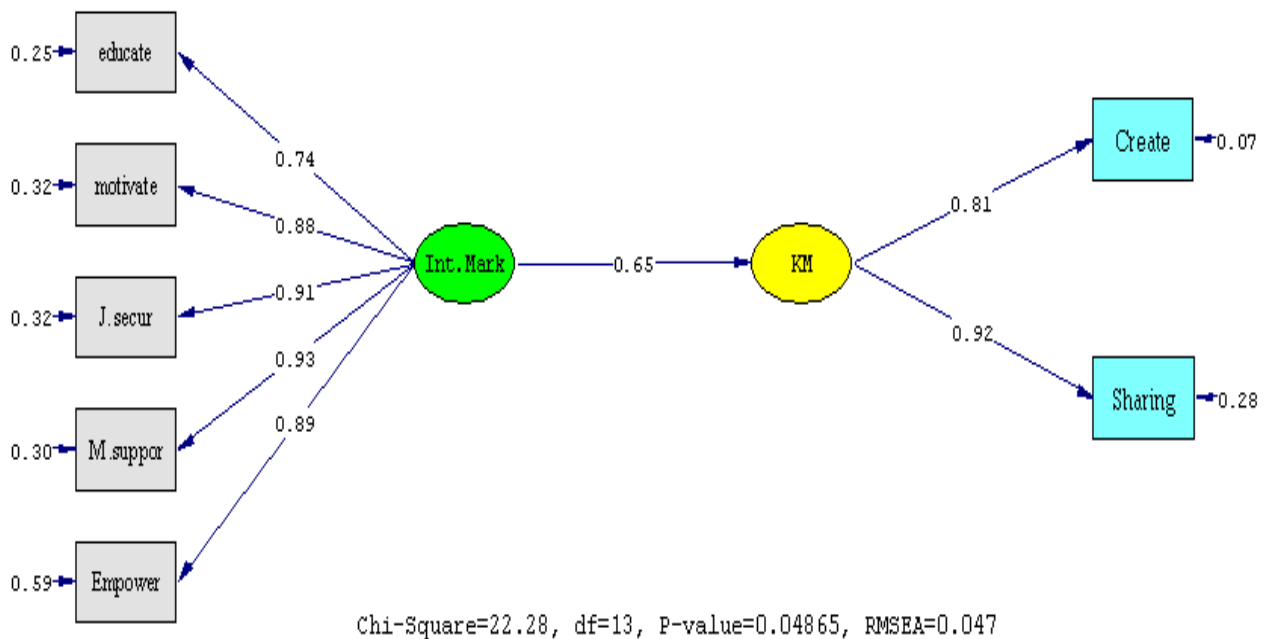


Figure 3 shows structural equation modeling of main hypothesis in significance of numbers. According to this figure , obtained significant number is greater than absolute value of 1.96 ( T-Value= 19.58 ) and in this case ,main hypothesis is confirmed at confidence level of %95 and it can be said that internal marketing has a positive and significant effect on facilitating knowledge management in Eghtesad Novin bank.

Figure 3. Structural equation modeling of main hypothesis (route analysis) in significance of numbers

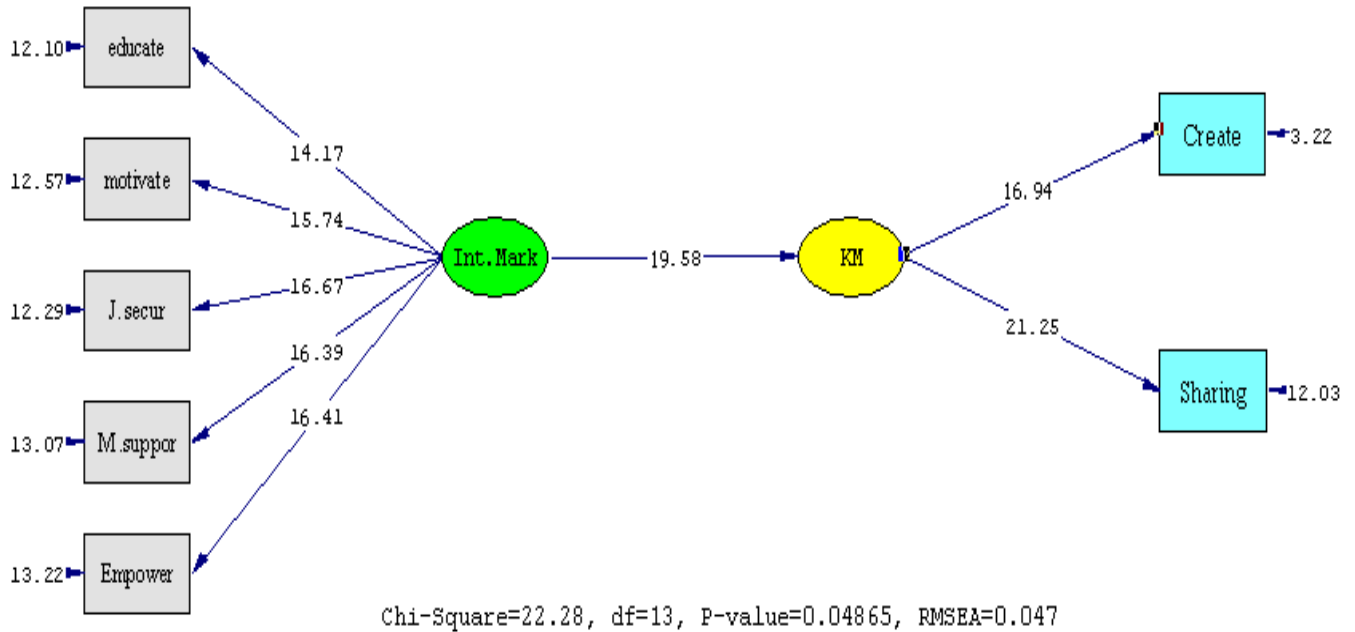


Table 2: Fitness indices

X <sup>2</sup> / df	IndexAGFI	IndexGFI	IndexRMSEA
1.71	0.90	0.93	0.047

As can be seen, the indicator of RMSEA = 0.047 < 0.08 and indexes of GFI = 0.93 and AGFI = 0.90, both of which are greater than 0.9; in total, these indexes confirm the fitness of model.

Table 3: Results of hypotheses investigation

Hypothesis	Route	Standard rate	Significant numbers	The result
The main	Positive effect of internal marketing on facilitating measures of KM	0.65	19.58	Confirmation
1	Positive effect of empowerment of employees on facilitating measures of KM	0.54	12.99	Confirmation
2	Positive effect of training of employees on facilitating measures of KM	0.48	10.83	Confirmation
3	Positive effect of job security on facilitating measures of KM	0.45	10.36	Confirmation
4	Positive effect of managerial support on facilitating measures of KM	0.55	13.96	Confirmation
5	Positive effect of internal motivation on facilitating measures of KM	0.57	14.49	Confirmation

As can be seen the significance number is not between 1.96 and -1.96, it can be said that internal marketing and all dimensions have positive and significant effect on facilitating knowledge management. Among all these, the highest effect is for internal motivation and the least is for job security.

## CONCLUSION

The present study aimed to evaluate the effect of internal marketing in facilitating knowledge management measures. For this purpose, the effect of 5 main dimensions of internal marketing (empowerment, education, job security, managerial support and motivation) on two major measures of KM, knowledge creation and sharing are studied. Evaluation of research variables was done using questionnaire and opinion poll of experts and directors of Eghtesad Novin bank and data was analyzed using LISREL software and test of structural equation modeling. These results show that internal marketing and other mentioned dimensions have positive and significant effect on facilitating measures of KM. In the following, we will study the quality of this effect of internal marketing and its dimensions on facilitating measures of knowledge management.

The positive and significant effect of internal marketing on facilitating measures of knowledge management is because KM is a human process and conducting it requires human factor. Efforts to create and share knowledge require enabling members of organization to involve in this process voluntarily. The positive and significant effect of empowerment of employees on facilitating measures of KM is because employees with higher qualification will increase the capacity of knowledge creation in organization. Those employees with higher knowledge, skills and qualifications, have more ability to create knowledge and have more valuable experiences that can share with others and this increases knowledge creation in organization. Employees with higher capabilities can facilitate KM implementation more. Knowledge is created in the mind of people; so people with more capabilities have more valuable sources of implicit knowledge and with their power of analyzing, they can help to create knowledge.

The positive and significant effect of training of employees on facilitating measures of knowledge management is because of the role importance of human knowledge and skills in knowledge management; the more knowledge and skills they have, they can more help effectively to do measures of knowledge management. Knowledge is created in the mind of people; so people with more capabilities have more valuable sources of implicit knowledge and with their power of analyzing, they can help to create knowledge and as a result, valuable

knowledge will be available to share it with others. Training can help to develop this knowledge, skills and capabilities.

The positive and significant effect of job security on facilitating measures of knowledge management can be explained this way that in order to prevent members of not to feel threatened by sharing their knowledge and experiences, their feeling of job security should be invigorated and they should be ensured that the goal of knowledge sharing is synergies, collective learning and organizational performance improvement. Such recognition should be promoted among members who share their knowledge and learn more in general, and also they benefit from it.

The positive and significant effect of managerial support on facilitating measures of knowledge management can be explained this way that an appropriate style of knowledge management is the one that gives enough freedom, authority to people to gain real experiences and they can have innovations and understand what happens during their experiences. In other word, knowledge creation and sharing is done effectively in organizations to give people authority to think about what they do. Of those measures emphasized by leaders we can name: encouraging employees to exchange their knowledge and experiences, to hold collective meetings to exchange ideas, creating friendly and trustful atmosphere among employees, collective discussion in order to decide about special cases, increasing interaction between employers and employees, easy access of employees to information related to their job, increasing interaction among employees whose job is related.

The positive and significant effect on facilitating measures of knowledge management can be explained this way that knowledge does not flow and grow spontaneously and grow; these are people who create, share and use knowledge and should have an incentive to do this so. Analyzing behaviors of members as logical creatures, it can be expected that their active involvement in measures of KM depends on logical reasons and meeting needs and their personal demands. Also in most cases, there are efforts to create and share knowledge with the presence of internal motivations such as feelings of self-sufficiency and gaining reputation, and feeling of belonging among colleagues. When a person provides his knowledge and experience to others, will be known as an experienced, skilled individual and it causes him to feel more competent. Also, people tend to gain a reputation among their peers. These impulses make people transfer their experiences to others in order to be admired by them.

## **RECOMMENDATIONS**

Given the poor state of knowledge management in organization under study, it is necessary to take measures to optimize the implementation of knowledge management in the company. To

this end, first this recognition must be created among directors and employees that knowledge management can play a determining role in optimizing performance and then they have to try to do it the best. According to the results, the following recommendations can be used to optimize the performance of each of measures of knowledge management:

- **Knowledge creation:** Given the significant effect of studied indexes to create knowledge, we can offer recommendations to promote knowledge creation based on these indexes. Paying more attention to new ideas of employees, efforts to provide new solutions for working problems using experiences of others, increasing participation of directors and employees in seminars and educational courses and providing more opportunities of employees ' learning from each other with interaction can increase knowledge creation in this organization.
- **Sharing Knowledge:** One of the important objectives of knowledge management is to avoid duplication, working in parallel and costly mistakes in the organization. For this purpose, knowledge management must be able to share valid, valuable, accurate knowledge and help members in appropriate time to benefit that knowledge to solve working problems and optimizing their performance. Some of methods that can help more to share knowledge, such as : Creating group environment and informal collaboration to help employees to solve working problems, more attention to business meetings for consultation on organizational issues, to take into account the exchange of knowledge and experiences among members in informal meetings, Holding meetings to share experiences and storytelling, using training methods of coaching and master-apprentice training methods and use of new technologies to share knowledge and experiences of employees with each other

## MANAGERIAL IMPLICATIONS

Also, in order to improve the status quo of internal marketing in studied statistical population and other organizations to which we can generalize statistically evaluated results, practical recommendations are provided as below:

*Improving employee empowerment:*

- Development of skills and abilities required by employees to perform job duties effectively
- To provide sufficient authority to employees to act based on recognition and personal initiative at work issues
- Promoting self-esteem of employees to perform job responsibilities optimally.

*Improving training of employees:*

- To hold regular necessary training courses to enhance the knowledge and job skills of employees
- To provide training tailored to the new technologies used in organization
- Sending employees to related conferences and exhibitions

*Improving job security among employees:*

- To ensure employees of not having unnecessary transfers and dismissals
- Effort of directors to keep employees in difficult conditions and declining productivity

*Improving internal motivation of employees:*

- Paying attention to importance for having a reputation among colleagues for employees
- Encouraging employees to offer new ideas for solving business problems
- Encouraging employees to perform the job duties and responsibilities
- Fostering a sense of pride in doing job responsibilities

*Improving managerial support:*

- Supporting critical spirit of employees by directors
- The belief of directors in worthiness of employees as the most important capital of organization
- Belief of employees in directors to support them

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