

## **THE ROLE OF PSYCHOLOGICAL EMPOWERMENT IN SHARING TACIT KNOWLEDGE**

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### **Abstract**

*One of the main measures of the knowledge management process is knowledge sharing that has the crucial impact on promoting innovation ability and as a result success and the competitiveness of knowledge-based organizations. Effectively sharing knowledge, especially tacit knowledge requires employees to have desire and special empowerments. Thus, the present study examines this issue that how and to what extend the dimensions of psychological empowerment can facilitate tacit knowledge sharing in organization. Research method is descriptive and correlational. The population includes 1958 managers and experts of a Bank in Tehran where 332 subjects were selected using random sampling. Results suggest that all aspects of psychological empowerment have positive and significant impact on tacit knowledge sharing in organization.*

*Keywords: Knowledge Management, Tacit Knowledge, Knowledge Sharing, Psychological Empowerment*

## INTRODUCTION

Nowadays, most businesses and enterprises, including the banking industry work in the highly competitive and dynamic environment. In such situations, successful and leading enterprises choose a wide variety of programs to guarantee survival, productivity and growth. Meanwhile, one of the important factors for success of service firms is their ability to provide high quality and appropriate speed services. This has a great impact on attracting and retaining customers, and consequently their growth and profitability. To this end, a variety of strategies and techniques have been introduced. One of the most effective and the most common ones is their efforts for providing high quality services. Provision of such services to customers continuously results in creating competitive advantage. Hence, many of successful service enterprises seek methods consistently in order to enhance the quality of their services and as a result customer satisfaction. Because satisfied customers are considered as the profitability resource of organization and improving customer satisfaction leads to increase profitability of organization.

One of the best and the most common methods that can have a remarkable impact on improving performance and the quality of banking services is to implement knowledge management successfully. The nature of service businesses including banking services is such that the human factor has high impact on provided service quality and customer satisfaction. Have the technical knowledge and job-related experience can enhance the ability of bank's employees in providing services with higher quality. Therefore, many of leading banks including the investigated bank put the successful implementation of knowledge management plans in their main excellent agenda in order to use and develop these knowledge resources successfully. Recruiting retired and experienced managers of state-owned banks and efforts to implement knowledge management system have been conducted in this regard.

Knowledge management refers to a systematic and integrated process of coordinating enterprise-wide activities including the acquisition, creation, storage, sharing, and applying knowledge by individuals and groups in order to achieve organizational goals (Rastogi, 2000: 42). Among the measures of knowledge management, knowledge sharing, particularly tacit knowledge which is lied in the minds of hose have it, has a human nature and accomplishing it requires special willingness and ability of individuals.

Knowledge management is a complex process that its implementation cannot be done overnight. Implementation and effective use of knowledge management requires fully clear understanding of factors that influence knowledge management process (Yee et al., 2006). Thus, researchers have introduced and reviewed various structural, cultural, technological, leadership, human resources, etc. factors as the needed and appropriate infrastructure for successful implementation of knowledge management.

Since knowledge management has human nature more than any other aspect and also unique role of human factor in performance of service organizations such as banks, in this research the vital and determining role of human factor in facilitating measures of knowledge management has been considered among various infrastructures and empowering factors and it is tried to explain the impact of psychological empowerment on the tacit knowledge sharing in a valid and reliable way.

It seems that empowering employees can help the creation and development of such favorable conditions. However, those studies that have been done in this area are not rich enough and have investigated his issue less empirically. According to what was said, in this study we try to study and explain the impact of psychological empowerment on tacit knowledge sharing in organization and show how and to what extend each dimension of psychological empowerment can facilitate tacit knowledge sharing in organization; how is the ratings of the impact of these dimensions, and what are practical solutions for improving knowledge sharing using each dimension of psychological empowerment.

With regard to the debate on the impact of psychological empowerment on tacit knowledge sharing, formulated hypotheses of this study are:

1. Sense of competency has a significant and positive impact on tacit knowledge sharing.
2. Sense of meaningfulness of jobs has a significant and positive impact on tacit knowledge sharing.
3. Sense of having choice has a significant and positive impact on tacit knowledge sharing.
4. Sense of having impact a significant and positive impact on tacit knowledge sharing.
5. Sense of trust in organization has a significant and positive impact on tacit knowledge sharing.

## **THEORETICAL BACKGROUND**

### **Knowledge Sharing**

Knowledge sharing was expressed by McDermott (1999) in a way that when say someone is sharing his knowledge, we mean that person guides another person using his knowledge, insight and thoughts to help him see his position. Additionally, the person who shares his knowledge is ideal and should be informed of the objective of shared knowledge and its application and also needs and informational gaps of a person who receives knowledge.

Hislop (2009) believes the potential benefit of knowledge sharing is in the rewards or incentives. Incentive can be used as a tool to extract, enhance and maintain knowledge sharing behavior among employees. However, a study conducted by Wu and Zhu (2012), Zhang and Ng (2012); Anitha (2006) and Habiba (2010) showed that incentives do not have any impact on

knowledge sharing behavior. It is like trigger for knowledge sharing and cannot be such a force to keep it in shaping attitudes of a person. In many situations, organizational factors such as job involvement and job satisfaction, performance evaluation, recognition, organizational culture, top management support and organizational communication act as a stimulus to increase knowledge sharing behavior among employees (Sizlivati and Heng, 2015: 233).

### ***Importance of Knowledge Sharing***

Many believe that effective knowledge sharing is one of the most reliable ways of applying core competencies and gaining competitive advantage. Knowledge sharing is of such importance that many have acknowledged that the success of knowledge management depends on effective knowledge sharing, as Bock and Kim (2002) believe that knowledge sharing is the most important part of knowledge management. In fact, the means by which knowledge is shared and the factors that facilitate the sharing and transfer of knowledge are the basis for knowledge management (Renzel, 2008: 212). Knowledge sharing can be seen as an organizational innovation through its fundamental role in creating new ideas and creating business opportunities through the process of socialization and personnel learning.

### ***Key Success Factors of Knowledge Sharing***

Effective and efficient knowledge sharing brings the sustainable competitive advantage for organizations that are not easily imitated by competitors. But knowledge sharing itself is worthless for employees and the organization, unless the people, who need special knowledge, get it and apply it at the right time. One of the problems the majority of research in the field of knowledge management face it, is the absence of a theory and general guidelines for knowledge sharing that is applicable to all organizations, and there is no shortcuts that guarantees the success in the field of knowledge sharing and every organization has to identify key factors that will ensure their success in this field, with the investment and attention to these factors (Mac Derkot and O'Dell 2001 : 80).

### **Empowerment**

Empowerment of human resources means the creation of required capacities on employees to enable them to create added value in the organization and carrying out effective and efficient role and responsibility in the organization which are responsible for (Babaii, 2003). Empowerment is not giving the power to individuals. People themselves are very powerful (as a wealth of knowledge and motivation) that do their job excellent. Empowerment means to release this power (Jafari Qushchi, 2001). In fact, empowerment is different from giving power to

people. The power is transferred directly to individuals, but to empower we should create conditions in which people can empower themselves (Whetten and Cameron, 2004). Empowerment is a concept beyond the devolution of power to employees. While empowering, not only are the tasks assigned to the employee, but also the conditions are provided so that they can decide to perform these tasks themselves (Aghayari, 2003).

### ***Cognitive Dimensions of Empowerment***

In one of the most famous experimental studies about empowerment, Spreitzer (1992) referred to four cognitive dimensions (factors) for empowerment. In this study, based on research by Mishra (1992) a dimension has added to these aspects. In addition, these five key dimensions of empowerment are explained:

#### *Sense of Competency*

When people are empowered, they feel self-efficacy, i.e. they feel that they have the necessary ability and skills for a successful work (Benins & Nanus, 1985). Such a feeling determines that whether they will attempt to do the hard work and have perseverance or not. (Bandura, 1986).

#### *Sense of Meaningfulness*

Empowered people feel to be meaningful. They believe what they do, is valuable. Ideals and standards are consistent with what they do. Empowered people care about what they are doing, and to believe it, they have a sense of identity because of this (Benins & Nanus, 1985).

#### *Sense of having Choice*

Self-determination means to have a right to choose their personal tasks. They consider themselves as creators and self- initiated and they are able to carry out their own initiatives, to make independent decisions and put new ideas to the test (Vogt & Murrell, 1990).

#### *Sense of having Impact*

Empowered people have a sense of personal control over their results. They believe that they can make changes by influencing the environment in which they work (Dover, 1999).

#### *A Sense of Trust in Others*

Empowered people feel that they will be treated fairly. They are certain that the final result of their work, would be justice not harm. In other words, this sense of trust means having a sense of personal security (Mishra, 1992).

## Experimental Background

Table 1 shows a summary of some of the most important studies in the field of facilitators of knowledge sharing. Among these factors, this study investigated the impact of a comprehensive and deeper psychological empowerment.

Table 1: Empowering Factors Related to Knowledge Sharing in Related Research

Author	Factors of knowledge sharing
The & Sun (2010)	Job satisfaction, job involvement, organizational commitment, organizational citizenship behavior
Wu & Zhu (2012)	Incentives, mutual benefits, increasing the credibility, loss of strength, the joy of helping others, and organizational climate and technology
Hendriks (1999)	Achieving success, responsibilities, recognition, operational strength, promotion opportunities, job challenge
Zhang & Ng (2012)	Perceived embarrassment, bonuses, reducing workload, knowledge feedback, personal relationships, self-competence of knowledge
Eze et al (2013)	Knowledge technology, motivation, reward system, confidence, leadership abilities, formalization
Fathi et al (2011)	Individualism, collectivism, social networks, trust, common purpose, stimulus system, metaphor orientation, self-competence, attitudes
Chatsgilio & Varmiki	Attitude, intention, method of using personal technology
Anitha (2006)	Incentives, mutual benefit, enhancing reputation, loss of knowledge power, enjoy helping others, technology, organizational climate
Yee (2010)	Loss of personal competition, trust, anticipation, participation, learning, ability, fairness, supportive leadership, openness and information and communication technology
Jolaei (2012)	Attitudes, self-competence, subjective norm, rewards, social networks, trust

Source: Sizlivati and Heng, 2015, 233-234

## Conceptual Model

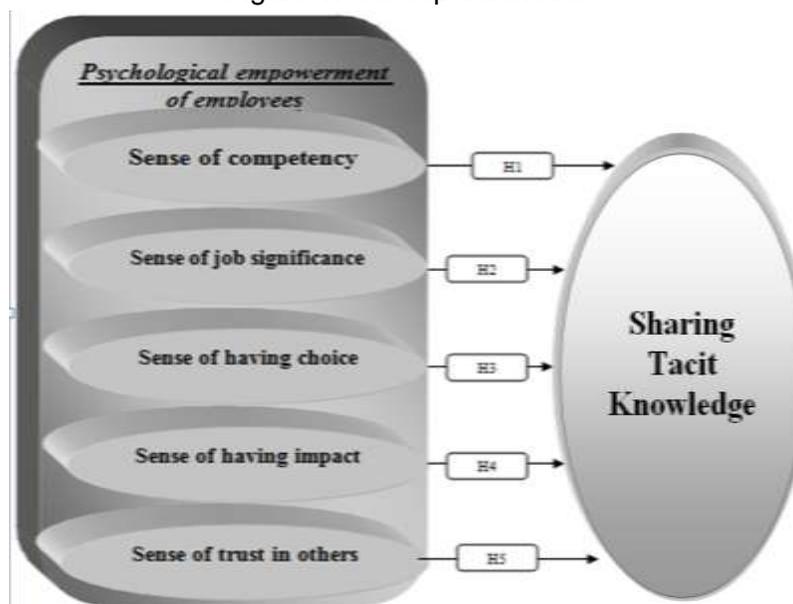
Knowledge management has the social- human nature more than any other aspect of (Hislop, 2012) and the ability and willingness of employees to participate has a significant impact on the implementation of its knowledge management practices (Asgari, 2011). Thus, human resource management practices can significantly impact the necessary capability and readiness to participate actively in these actions (Hislop, 2012). One of the most effective measures in the field of human resource management is employee empowerment that can help to develop facilitating behaviors and attitudes of knowledge management. One way to explain this relationship is related to the concept of "psychological contracts". Psychological contract reflects expectations or unwritten obligations that exist between employees and their employer organization (Hislop, 2012). Some scholars have described the psychological contract of employees, how behaviors affect knowledge. Based on these studies the fulfillment of

psychological contracts, lead to enhance commitment and sense of identity among employees and an increase in desire and motivation to participate in knowledge management activities such as knowledge sharing (Hislop, 2002; O'Neill & Adya, 2007).

The part of most important demands of knowledge workers of the organization is to provide conditions for them to be able to develop their personal capabilities (Hislop, 2012). From the perspective of knowledge workers who are responsible for the main role in the process of knowledge creation, jobs must be challenging and satisfying, and provide opportunities for employees to use their existing knowledge and skills and be able to develop their knowledge and skills continuously (Robertson & O'Malley Hammersley, 2000; Vogt & Murrell, 1990). For example, a research by Horowitz et al (2003) showed in a survey of knowledge workers in Singapore that providing challenging job is the most important factor that managers can do to maintain their knowledge workers (Hislop, 2015). However, in the case that how psychological empowerment of employees can facilitate tacit knowledge sharing, there is no sufficient and comprehensive empirical research. This issue will be examined in this study.

In this study in terms of mentioned literature, cognitive aspects of psychological empowerment have been considered as independent variables and knowledge sharing is considered as a dependent variable. To assess the dimensions of psychological empowerment, adjusted model of Spritzer (Spreitzer, 1992) and to measure knowledge sharing in the organization, the standard questionnaire of Sizlivati and Heng (2015) have been used. The connection between these two categories has been used based on the concept of psychological contract (McDonald & Makin, 2000). Based on this, conceptual model can be shown as figure 2.

Figure 1: Conceptual Model



## METHODOLOGY

The present study is an applied research in terms of objectives because its results are used to solve specific problems within the organization. From the perspective of how to collect data, it is considered as a descriptive-correlational study because the required information about the status quo of the sample is obtained using a questionnaire. And in terms of time, it is cross-sectional and in terms of data types, research is quantitative.

### Population and Sampling

Population examined in this study included a sample of 1958 managers and experts of the investigated Bank in Tehran, of which 322 subjects were selected using a random sampling as sample.

### Questionnaire

A self developed questionnaire has been used for data gathering. In order to collect primary field data, a 30-item questionnaire was used based on five-level Likert scale. The first 10 questions were to measure the knowledge sharing and to assess any of psychological empowerment, 4 questions have been considered. To test the reliability of the questionnaire, a primary sample containing 30 questionnaire was pre-tested and then reliability coefficient was calculated using Cronbach's alpha (Table 2).

Table 2: Reliability of the Questionnaire and Each of the Variables and Dimensions

	Empowerment	Sense of competency	Sense of job meaningfulness	Sense of self-determination	Sense of having impact	Senses of having trust	sharing	Total questionnaire
Reliability coefficient	%81	%75	%72	%74	%76	%78	%86	%87

### The Method of Analyzing Information

In this study, to analyze the data and determine the presence or absence of the simultaneous relationship between the variables, confirmatory factor analysis and structural equation modeling were used.

### Confirmatory Factor Analysis

To examine the relationship between indicators and concepts, confirmatory factor analysis has been used in two stages. In the first stage, the quality and extend of relationship between the

measuring indicators of each dimension (questions of questionnaire) and mentioned dimensions have been studied and in the second stage, the quality and extent of the relationship between each dimension and the main concept (empowerment) has been assessed (factor analysis of knowledge sharing included only the first phase). In other words, in the first stage it is checked that to what extent each of the indicators used in the questionnaire can explain the dimension of the psychological empowerment, and at the second stage it is reviewed that to what extent each dimension is in relation to the psychological empowerment and can explain it. Results obtained from factor analysis of the dimensions of psychological empowerment are shown in table 3.

Table 3: Results of Factor Analysis of Psychological Empowerment Components

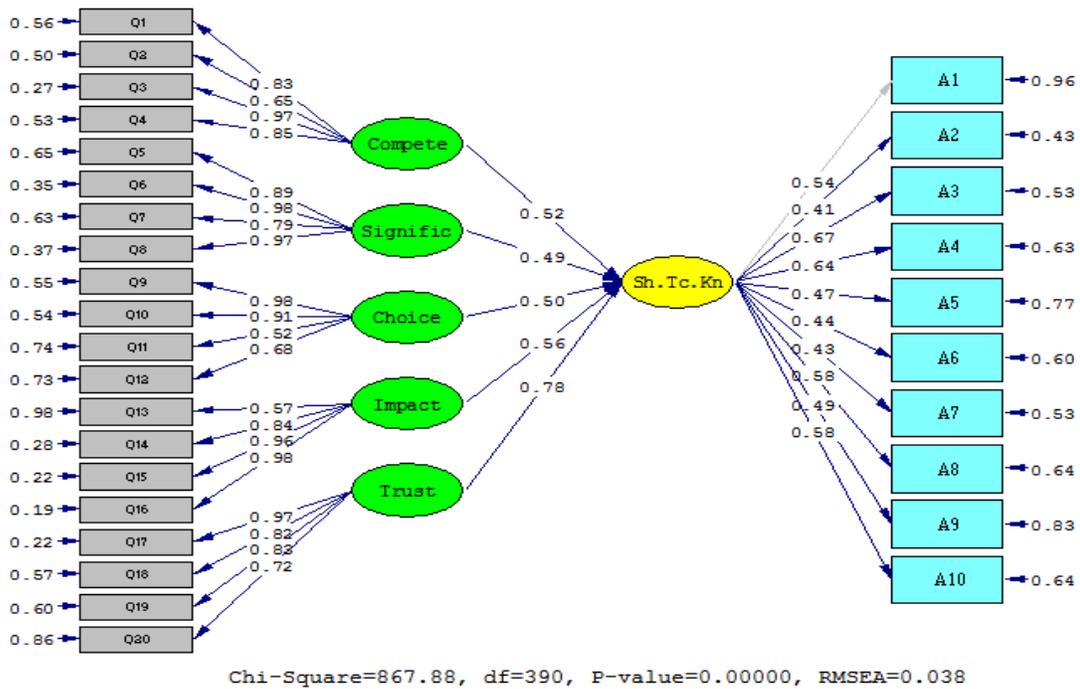
Factor	Dimension	Standard coefficient	Significance number	Result
<b>Employees' Psychological Empowerment</b>	Sense of job meaningfulness	.68	12.05	Confirmed
	Sense of job competency	.47	11.10	Confirmed
	Self determination	.64	9.18	Confirmed
	Sense of having impact	.56	8.18	Confirmed
	sense of trust in colleagues	.63	10.32	Confirmed

According to the results presented in table 4, the significance of the effects of all variables considered for psychological empowerment, have been confirmed because their value was not between 1.96 and -1.96.

## RESEARCH FINDINGS

To investigate the relationship expressed in the hypotheses, first by using significance model the significance of every predicted relations will be studied and then by using standard model, the extend and quality of impact will be evaluated. Figure 2 shows the significance of psychological empowerment on tacit knowledge sharing.

Figure 2: Model of Psychological Empowerment Impact on Tacit Knowledge Sharing in Significance Mode



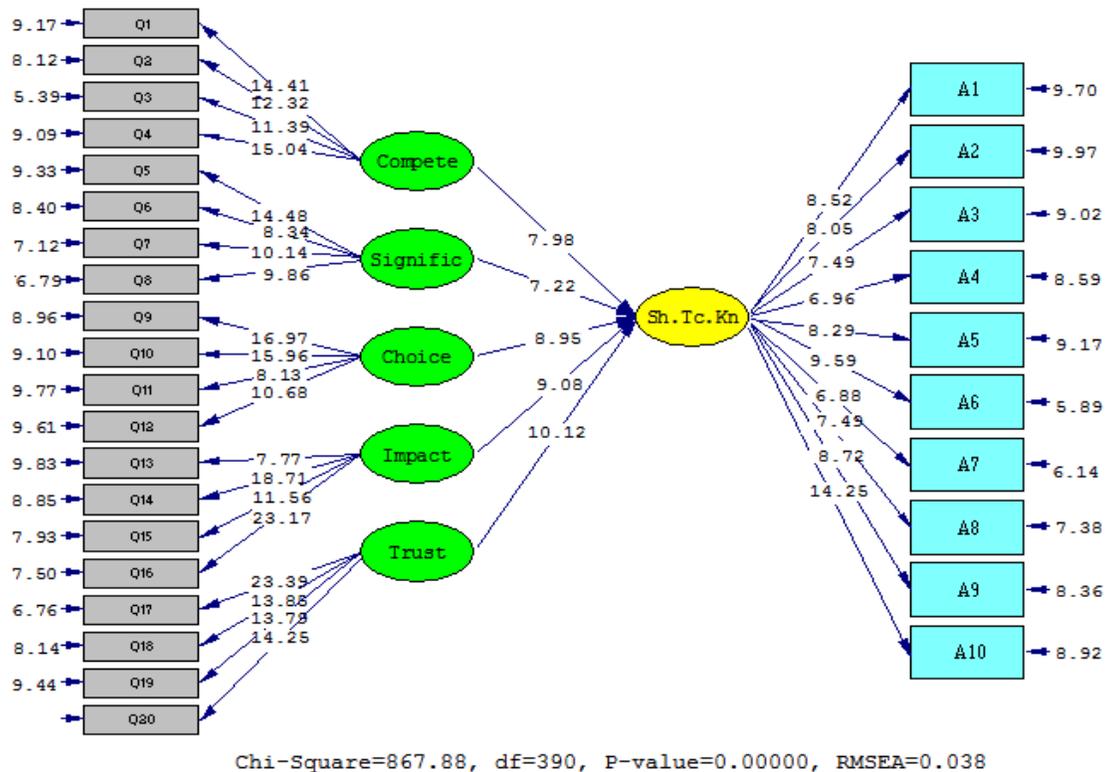
Based on the indicators outlined in table 4, the fitness of model can be judged.

Table 4: Fitness Indicators of Impact Model Psychological Empowerment on Tacit Knowledge Sharing

Indicators	Allowable Value	Numbers Obtained	Result
Chi-square to the degree of freedom ratio	$\chi^2 / df < 3$	2.22	Fit
P-Value	$p < .05$	.0000	Fit
RMSEA	$.05 > RMSEA > .08$	.038	partly fit

The fitness indicators of the appropriateness of model shows the measurement model of variables; because chi square to degree of freedom ratio equals 2.22 and less than 3, RMSEA (.038) not in appropriate limit and P-value (.0000) is less than .05. Based on this model, the impact of psychological empowerment dimensions on sharing tacit knowledge is significant because their values are higher than the 1.96. In addition, using the standard model we can also evaluate the impact of relationships that their significance have been confirmed in this study.

Figure 3: Model of Intellectual Capital Impact on Knowledge Creation and Sharing in Standard Mode



The significance model showed the impact of the psychological empowerment dimensions on sharing tacit knowledge is significant. The model in standard mode also shows that to what extend each dimension of psychological empowerment explains the changes of tacit knowledge sharing. The summary of findings of the data analysis related to these hypotheses presented in table 5 and is concluded in this regard.

Table 5: The Results of Hypotheses Test

Hypothesis	Path: the significant and positive impact of the ...	Standard Factor	Significant Numbers	The Result
1	sense of competency on knowledge sharing	.52	7.98	Confirmed
2	sense of job meaningfulness on knowledge sharing	.49	7.22	Confirmed
3	self-determination on knowledge sharing	.50	8.95	Confirmed
4	having impact on knowledge sharing	.56	9.08	Confirmed
5	sense of trust on knowledge sharing	.78	10.12	Confirmed

The general pattern of relationships between variables in the structural equation model has been consistent with expressed hypotheses; every five reviewed relationships were significant

and important. Based on these obtained results, empowering employees has a significant and important impact on knowledge sharing capacity. Based on these results, "sense of trust" has had the highest determining impact on knowledge sharing (0.78) and in the follow, sense of having impact, sense of self-determination, sense of competency and sense of job meaningfulness in influencing knowledge sharing value was on next places.

These findings are consistent with the results of previous research. For example, Gecas concluded that sense of competency leads to the initiative, effort and perseverance in the face of challenging situations. The freedom of action of employees in their jobs results in having rapid response in the face of obstacles and problems. From motivational aspect, Thomas and Taiwun found that empowerment can bring necessary motive to improve performance in employees by providing freedom of action for employees. Also, Ashforth believes that sense of having impact resulted from empowerment make people realize that their voices would be heard in the organization (Spreitzer, 1992).

## **CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

Knowledge sharing is one of the key measures of knowledge management that has a high impact on the competitiveness and innovation of organization. The role of the human factor in knowledge sharing is highly determining and crucial. Therefore, increasing the abilities of employees would improve their ability to share knowledge to such an impressive way. Increasing the sense of competency, job meaningfulness, having authority to choose and make decision and also sense of having impact and sense of rust in others can improve the capacity of knowledge sharing by employees.

The sense of competency strengthens self-confidence to get involved in job issues and try to improve and change. Having such sense makes an individual realize his tacit knowledge and experiences to be valuable and tries to use them to improve his performance.. This is considered creation as a kind of combination where new tacit knowledge would be shared from the existing tacit knowledge. Also having a sense of competency in person makes him believe that he has the valuable knowledge and experience to teach the others, and doing this means sharing new knowledge through socialization.

A sense of job meaningfulness leads to create a kind of intrinsic motivation among employees. One of those important factors of intrinsic motivation is a sense of having important and valuable job and having personal values in line with job values. This motivation leads knowledge workers try to share knowledge in order to improve the job performance of the person that he considers it as an identity.

Having an authority to choose and make decision (self-determination) make knowledge workers can identify their weaknesses and strengths, and resolve those weaknesses and strengthen their strengths. In this case, their ability to create and deliver new ideas will rise. Also the important result of self-determination is the permission to make mistakes and not knowing evil the wrong doing in business affairs. Fear of failure and blame caused by it, often prevents the tendency to search and test new methods; and then they will tend to provide their own successful or failed experiences to others.

The belief of employees in having impact would boost a sense of having enough ability to make changes desirably and also having impact on available situation and those results that would be generated. This belief makes an individual have a feeling of attachment and ownership towards his work and is always concerned about improving his own performance. In this case, the possibility of his efforts for sharing knowledge with colleagues and his colleagues will increase.

Knowledge sharing, especially through socialization, requires high level of collaboration among employees and his will happen when there is a high trust among employees. Friendly relations, encouraging employees to help solving the problem together, encouraging honest behaviors, the emphasis on meeting the promises and commitments, more attention to democracy in the organization, dealing with the destructive political behaviors in the organization, managing effective organizational conflicts , can strengthen required trust for cooperation among members of the organization.

In general it can be said, that he more capabilities and competencies have the employees then the capacity of knowledge sharing will be developed in the organization. Those employees who have more knowledge, skills, experience and expertise, will have more ability to share and apply knowledge and have more valuable work experiences that can share them with others and increase knowledge sharing and application in the organization increasingly. The more abilities and competences employees have, they can more facilitate implementing knowledge sharing in the organization. Knowledge is shared in the minds of employees; so those having more abilities and competences will have richer resources of tacit knowledge and with their own analysis power they can better help new knowledge sharing.

As a result, efforts of organization to increase the capabilities and intrinsic motivation of employees can be considered as a main facilitating factor to develop capacity of knowledge sharing and consequently, increasing the power of innovation and competitiveness of the organization.

Given the results of this research, following recommendations can be provided in order to improve the capacity of knowledge sharing through empowering employees in leading and innovative organizations:

- Efforts of organization management to reduce regulations and formal and written procedures about how to perform tasks and activities of the organization, to involve employees in problem-solving processes, encouraging innovative behaviors, giving more power to employees, can strengthen sense of having impact and self-determination of employees. Such spirit among managers encourages knowledge integration among employees. It also can help to create a sense of job meaningfulness among employees.
- Following efforts will be effective such as increasing informal interaction in the organization, increasing the delegation of authority to employees on how to do their tasks, increasing the freedom of action and decision-making power of employees about their job, facilitating communication between different units of the organization, giving the authority of the decision-making in each level that has access to the best information, holding regular meetings to exchange information between authorities and employees and increasing employee access to information and documents, and all these can lead employees to this belief that they have abilities to do their job and there will be no barrier to prevent them from doing their tasks. These beliefs form the essence of sense of competency and they can help to create a sense of self-determination, having impact and job meaningfulness among employees.
- Knowledge workers have the professional expertise. This type of expertise creates commitment. Control tools of these people should be based on internal control. Admittedly, the high ability with a close control is inconsistent. Using these internal controls about knowledge workers, we can strengthen their professional commitment and lead to improve their sense of self-determination among them.
- Managers must also provide the context where employees offer their knowledge and experience to the others and at the same time ensure that doing this, never put their job in danger. Managers must have cultural modeling that "sharing knowledge is power, not hoarding it". In this regard, the following measures can be useful: encouraging employees to exchange knowledge and experience of their own with each other, holding group meetings in order to exchange ideas and information, creating a friendly and reliable atmosphere of employees, preparation of bulletins, group discussions for decision-making in certain cases, increasing the interaction between officials and employees, facilitating employees' access to information about their job, increasing interaction among employees

who work in connection with each other. Doing things that can strengthen a sense of having impact and trust among employees

- Provision of conditions for the sufficient and acceptable recognition of members of the organization of each other, the emphasis on transparency, mutual understanding, openness and acceptance in the interaction between members of the organization, creating an atmosphere of cooperation and solidarity between the members of the organization, adhering to honesty, exchanging of views and value in the organization, fairness among employees, making the claim and action the same, facilitating and encouraging the exchange of information and the use of religious lessons to create the environment suitable for trust between members of the organization , can strengthen the sense of trust among the members of the organization strengthen .

## RESEARCH LIMITATIONS

There might be unwanted factors in any research that make limitations to the research; hence, some of the unwanted variables are not under researcher`s control. These factors must be determined and the researcher must show his knowledge about the influence of these factors on the research results. In the present study, there were some limitations such as:

- To study the variables the survey (questionnaire tools) has been used; while it was better to use observation and/or interview for some factors. The questionnaire is a tool by which the understandings and attitude of any person is investigated; whereas, the reality might be different with respondent`s answers.
- There are two issues must be considered regarding the nature and generalization of the research: firstly, there might be some practical behaviors like other survey researches that are mostly dependent on environmental conditions. Furthermore, intervening variables might affect the supposed relations among variables that are considered in this study.
- Some other important limitations to this research include: reluctance of some of the respondents to answer the questionnaires, not enough carefulness of some of the respondents in answering the questions, the possibility of bias in answering the questions by some of the respondents.

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