

Providing a Model for Implementing Knowledge Sharing in Educational Organizations (Case Study: School Principals of Ahvaz City)

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Article Info

Article type:

Original Research

How to cite this article:

Ahmadi Babadi, O., Mehralizadeh, Y., Nasiri, M., & Hosseinpour, M. (2024). Providing a Model for Implementing Knowledge Sharing in Educational Organizations (Case Study: School Principals of Ahvaz City). *International Journal of Innovation Management and Organizational Behavior*, 4(2), 64-73. <https://doi.org/10.61838/kman.ijimob.4.2.8>



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ABSTRACT

Objective: The primary objective of this research is to develop a model for implementing knowledge sharing in educational organizations, specifically focusing on school principals in Ahvaz city.

Methodology: This study employs a qualitative research approach. The participants included 15 knowledgeable and informed individuals, such as employees from the Ministry of Education, faculty members of educational sciences and management, staff from the Education and Research Department of Khuzestan, and experienced school principals and researchers. Data was collected through in-depth interviews until theoretical saturation was achieved. The data was then analyzed using qualitative content analysis with open, axial, and selective coding.

Findings: The research identified five main factors influencing knowledge sharing: individual, organizational, cultural, infrastructural, and managerial. Each main factor includes several sub-factors, with individual factors comprising the most significant influence. The study found that attitudes, interests, professional abilities, and personal relationships significantly impact knowledge sharing. It also highlighted the importance of intellectual property, trust, and confidence in fostering a conducive environment for knowledge sharing.

Conclusion: Knowledge sharing in educational organizations, particularly schools, is crucial for improving performance and educational quality. The developed model emphasizes the importance of individual factors, such as receptiveness to criticism, knowledge and awareness, time, intellectual property, trust, abilities, experience, and attitudes towards knowledge sharing. The findings suggest that a supportive organizational culture and infrastructure, alongside effective management, are essential for successful knowledge sharing among school principals.

Keywords: Knowledge, Knowledge Sharing, Knowledge Management, School Principals.

1 Introduction

Knowledge management is essentially the planning for creating and making available the necessary knowledge for the organization so that it is accessible to employees when needed, enabling them to achieve greater efficiency in their daily activities (Nazari Ardabili et al., 2024; Ng, 2024; Shariati et al., 2024). Knowledge management involves collecting successful experiences within the organization, recording them, and making them available, effectively ensuring that the organization pays attention to its knowledge assets and plans in such a way that these assets are available to the right person at the right time (Karyatun et al., 2023; Othman & ElKady, 2023; Zuochun, 2023). Knowledge management entails developing steps through which an institution manages its knowledge resources, including creating, collecting, storing, transferring, and applying knowledge (Deng et al., 2023; Edelmann, 2023; Frozza et al., 2022; Hidayat & Sensuse, 2022; Kavalić et al., 2022; Odugbesan et al., 2022; Rahman et al., 2022; Soloki et al., 2020).

Generally, perceptions of knowledge vary among individuals; some consider the facts and information around them as knowledge, while others refer to the know-how and awareness required to perform tasks as knowledge. A general definition of knowledge is the ideas or awareness that an individual possesses and utilizes for effective action and achieving a goal (An, 2017; Cohen & Olsen, 2015; Paudel, 2020). Karl Popper (1994) in his analysis of knowledge, divides the world into three distinct domains: the first world, which has existed since ancient times, includes all the material and physical objects around humans (Chang & Taylor, 2016; Ehsanfar, 2016; Ha et al., 2016). The second world is the one experienced by individuals, either consciously or unconsciously. The third world consists of human mental products that are manifested as social and cultural products, such as theories, scientific achievements, artistic works, and other content created by humans (Brewer & Brewer, 2010; Coakes et al., 2010). Alvin Toffler, in his studies, has discussed the emergence of a knowledge-based economy. Toffler believes that knowledge impacts new societies in two ways: firstly, knowledge is currently considered a key to wealth creation, and secondly, the fundamental fusion of consumption and production will lead to an explosion of the non-monetary economy (Kulkarni et al., 2006; Lee & Choi, 2003; Miresmaielie, 2005). Traditional economics discusses scarcity, but knowledge is fundamentally inexhaustible and sustainable. A linear

relationship in knowledge does not exist, and a small amount of knowledge can lead to the production of significant products, especially since knowledge is intangible. Intangible factors are always intertwined with tangible assets (Akroush & Al-Mohammad, 2010; Ghasemi et al., 2021; Soleimani & Geshani, 2023). In this regard, Peter Drucker (1999) refers to two terms: the knowledge society and the knowledge-based economy. What managers experience and perceive in organizations is due to broader transformations influenced by factors such as global competition, quality movements, downsizing, the current limitations of information technologies in fostering behavior, beliefs, creative synergy, and the novel processes required for managing value-added information and creating, disseminating, and applying knowledge (Abbas & Kumari, 2023; Kannisto, 2023; Kumburu, 2023; van Zyl et al., 2022; Zhao et al., 2022). Therefore, the main objective of this research is to provide a model for implementing knowledge sharing in educational organizations (case study: school principals of Ahvaz city).

2 Methods and Materials

2.1 Study Design

In this research, the interview method will be used at the qualitative research stage. This research is developmental in nature. The qualitative research method will be based on the meta-synthesis method and the inductive grounded theory method with a systematic approach. One of the most important strategies for this research is grounded theory, which is used when there is a lack of theory or theoretical framework to present a model. We intend to use the experience and perspectives of experts active in this field to develop a theory and present a model using grounded theory.

2.2 Participants

The qualitative sample consists of 15 employees from the Ministry of Education, who are active in the strategic and educational sectors with at least five years of work experience; faculty members of the Educational Sciences and Educational Management Departments; employees of the Education and Research Department of the Khuzestan Education Department with at least five years of experience in their positions; and managers who have managed schools for over ten years. Additionally, researchers and individuals educated in this field were selected through snowball

sampling. The number of samples was determined based on theoretical saturation during the interviews and analysis.

Given that the present study aims to provide a model for implementing knowledge sharing in educational organizations, the expert community was selected using the snowball method. Sampling continued until the point of saturation, meaning it was conducted until no new data or concepts were added to the categories obtained.

Considering the present study's subject, which is providing a model for knowledge sharing among school principals in Ahvaz, in the first stage (qualitative part), semi-structured interviews were used for data collection due to the use of grounded theory. Interviews are an appropriate tool for gathering the participants' insights and viewpoints.

Semi-structured interviews are designed based on a paradigmatic model, and during the interviews, depending on the respondents' answers, research questions may be asked differently or adjusted according to ethical and technical principles.

2.3 Data Analysis

To address the first research question, Corbin and Strauss's (2001) coding method was used. Open, axial, and selective coding approaches were utilized for coding. Data analysis for this research employed grounded theory, one of the prominent methods in qualitative research (Corbin & Strauss, 2014).

3 Findings and Results

In this section, the general characteristics of the interview participants (gender, age, education, field of study, organizational position, related work experience) are described.

The characteristics of the knowledgeable and informed participants in the interviews consisted of 15 individuals:

Employees of the Ministry of Education who are active in strategic and educational sectors with at least five years of work experience;

Faculty members of the Faculty of Educational Sciences and Educational Management;

Employees of the Education and Research Department of the Khuzestan Education Department with at least five years of experience in their positions;

Managers with over 10 years of school management experience;

Researchers and individuals educated in this field.

To identify the factors and components influencing knowledge sharing, qualitative research methods and qualitative content analysis models were used to collect information. Therefore, in-depth interviews were conducted with informed and knowledgeable individuals. After achieving theoretical saturation, the qualitative data from the in-depth and exploratory interviews were analyzed from the perspective of the participants, and the results were compared with theoretical and research-based information.

To discover the relationships between words and concepts in the interview texts, the researcher considered the frequency of words and concepts used and their alignment with the factors and components of knowledge sharing, examining the links and relationships between them. During the coding phase, the researcher used communication codes to indicate positive relationships with the factors and components of knowledge sharing, and the text was coded accordingly. The interview texts were reviewed multiple times to gain an overall sense and understanding of the content. Subsequently, the interview content was converted into text, divided into meaningful units, and summarized. The next stage involved coding and comparing specific codes based on differences and similarities to reveal the main factors and their components. Finally, by combining categories, the main themes were identified, and open coding, axial coding, and selective coding were performed in three separate stages to classify the data into similar groups. This way, the content analysis of the interviews and the coding of the interview content resulted in three coding groups: open coding, axial coding, and selective coding. These groups identified the categories, main factors, and sub-factors influencing knowledge sharing among school principals into five main factors or categories and 31 sub-factors: individual (8 components), organizational (8 components), cultural (5 components), infrastructural (5 components), and managerial (5 components). These factors have the highest frequency and are more important in knowledge sharing compared to other factors. The names of the five extracted factors were determined through three methods: 1) based on the nature and scope of the variables that the extracted factors had the highest share from, 2) examining the range of words and terms in the field of knowledge management and utilizing the perspectives of informed and knowledgeable individuals, and 3) based on theoretical foundations and research background.

Table 1*Results of Content Analysis of Interviews: Open Coding (Concepts)*

| ID | Initial Interview Text | Concepts |
|-----|---|--|
| A1 | We strive to plan by equipping schools with appropriate tools and spaces for interactive learning, and providing courses in knowledge management and interpersonal communication to help principals share their experiences and knowledge effectively. | Planning for providing necessary training in knowledge sharing |
| A2 | I have always wanted to share the experiences and knowledge I have gained over the years of managing schools with my colleagues. This is very valuable to me because I know that by sharing knowledge, we can all benefit from each other's experiences and make significant improvements in school management. In fact, this sharing is very effective in strengthening internal school communications and creating a fruitful and positive collaborative environment. | Willingness to share knowledge and information with others |
| A3 | At the school I am active in, we collaborate with a team of managers and board members to implement systematic and reliable processes for collecting, evaluating, and transferring knowledge and experiences to others. These processes include identifying key knowledge, developing and presenting content, providing appropriate spaces for sharing, and assessing the impact of this sharing on organizational improvements. Recognizing these processes allows us to better and more efficiently utilize the knowledge and experiences of school principals. | Recognizing knowledge sharing processes |
| A4 | In schools, understanding and awareness of the importance of privacy in knowledge sharing is critical. This means ensuring that personal or sensitive information of managers and colleagues is shared appropriately and securely, adhering to privacy regulations. This process requires setting clear boundaries and regulations for the use and access to sensitive information to prevent privacy violations and strengthen trust among organization members. | Understanding the importance of privacy in knowledge sharing |
| A5 | Familiarity with knowledge management methods is one of the key components for improving knowledge sharing in schools. This includes identifying, collecting, storing, sharing, and using knowledge to enhance organizational performance and increase individual and group efficiency. Knowledge management methods include techniques and tools such as knowledge bases, internal social networks, relevant training, and strategic processes to encourage continuous sharing and learning. | Familiarity with knowledge management methods |
| A6 | The ability to analyze and evaluate knowledge is highly important in the school environment. This means that managers must be able to analyze and assess existing knowledge to utilize the best practices and solutions for sharing and leveraging it. Knowledge evaluation includes identifying strengths and weaknesses, assessing the impact of knowledge sharing on organizational performance, and improving knowledge sharing and learning processes, ultimately leading to increased productivity and quality of educational services. | Ability to analyze and evaluate knowledge |
| A7 | We use resources such as databases, digital libraries, educational management systems, and collaboration software, which help us effectively share knowledge and experiences at the organizational level. Access to these resources allows us to design appropriate programs and strategies to expand this knowledge-sharing process and ultimately improve performance and enhance the quality of educational services. | Awareness of knowledge resources in the organization |
| A8 | We continuously focus on creating an environment where all colleagues feel they can freely share their knowledge and experiences. By encouraging collaboration and promoting a team spirit, we can benefit from diverse perspectives and experiences and improve the educational and managerial processes of our school. This spirit of collaboration strengthens relationships among colleagues and creates a dynamic and energetic work environment that leads to better and more sustainable results. | Having a spirit of collaboration and teamwork |
| A9 | I have always been interested in attending training courses and spending my free time learning and updating my knowledge. For me, training courses are an opportunity to gain new experiences and discover the best practices and new approaches to improve my performance in the school. | Interest in attending training courses |
| A10 | I believe that any problem we encounter in school can be solved through knowledge sharing and the experiences of colleagues. In my opinion, we are all in this learning process and can find the best solutions for complex issues through cooperation and knowledge exchange. | Belief in solving problems through knowledge sharing |
| A11 | I have always tried to avoid academic arrogance. I believe that everyone can learn something, and there is always something new to learn. In my view, valuing collaboration and expanding knowledge is more important than showcasing one's knowledge, and with this motivation, I adhere to experience and revision. | Avoiding academic arrogance |
| A12 | For me, being aware of the benefits and opportunities of knowledge sharing in school is very important. These benefits include increased ability to learn from others' experiences, improved work relationships, increased personal motivation for knowledge sharing, and improved organizational performance. With sufficient awareness of these benefits, I can choose the best strategies and approaches to strengthen knowledge sharing processes in our school. | Awareness of the benefits and opportunities of knowledge sharing |

After identifying the concepts in the open coding, the next step was axial coding of the interview texts regarding the implementation of knowledge sharing in Ahvaz city schools. At this stage, based on the internal relationships between

concepts, the central category was identified, and other concepts were placed under the central category. The following table shows the central categories.

Table 2*Results of Content Analysis of Interviews: Axial Coding (Subcategories)*

| Subcategories | Concepts |
|---|---|
| Intellectual Property | Preventing misuse and theft of creative ideas and thoughts + copyright and related rights + protection of inventions and innovations + registration of organizational plans + knowledge protection policies |
| Organizational Strategies | Efforts to nurture elites by the Ministry of Education + utilizing the opinions and experiences of successful school principals + using the knowledge and experiences of managers and employees who have had study opportunities abroad + leveraging the experiences and opinions of experts outside the organization + forming special knowledge sharing committees and workgroups + emphasizing the importance and necessity of knowledge sharing and promoting it in the organization + focusing on creating innovation and creativity by the Ministry of Education + providing facilities and human resources for knowledge sharing + holding empowerment and retraining courses and workshops + determining effective ways for knowledge sharing + allocating appropriate time and place for knowledge sharing |
| Individual Ability and Efficiency | Ability to present information in an understandable way + skill in establishing effective communication + skill in appropriately rejecting requests |
| Trust and Confidence | Ensuring security in expressing opinions and viewpoints in the organization + honesty in interactions + reliability of information sources + mutual respect + positive cooperation history |
| Receptiveness to Criticism | Accepting logical opinions of others and avoiding resistance to criticism + ability to hear negative feedback + acceptance of weaknesses and mistakes + motivation for personal improvement and progress + active and non-judgmental listening + non-defensive reaction to criticism |
| Individual Attitude Towards Sharing | Willingness to share knowledge and information with others + having a spirit of collaboration and teamwork + interest in attending training courses + belief in solving problems through knowledge sharing + avoiding academic arrogance |
| Individual Awareness and Knowledge | Awareness of the benefits and opportunities of knowledge sharing + individual's scientific background and expertise + awareness of the advantages of knowledge sharing + understanding the benefits of knowledge circulation in the organization |
| Organizational Structures | Clear communication flow in the organization (upward and downward) + delegation and decentralization in decision-making + flexibility in the organizational structure of the Ministry of Education + senior managers' willingness to share knowledge + defining the duties of each group and organization members in knowledge sharing |
| Experience | Prior readiness for knowledge sharing + utilizing the experiences of individuals outside the organization + individual's research background and experience |
| Time | Allocating sufficient time for knowledge sharing + appropriate scheduling for knowledge sharing sessions and workshops + suitable opportunities for holding knowledge sharing meetings and gatherings + setting specific times for reviewing knowledge positions and experiences |
| Meritocracy | Differentiating individuals based on ability and effort + providing equal and fair opportunities for the participation of school principals |
| Valuing Knowledge Sharing | Encouraging and providing positive feedback to individuals sharing knowledge + fostering a culture of knowledge sharing in the community and the Ministry of Education |
| Goals | Including knowledge sharing in the goals and mission of the Ministry of Education + having appropriate work goals to compel individuals to share knowledge + allocating sufficient time for knowledge sharing in the goals of the Ministry of Education |
| Communication | Strengthening friendly behavior among employees + developing effective communication skills |
| Encouragement and Discipline | Appropriate encouragement of individuals for knowledge sharing + providing legal and financial support for knowledge sharing + reviewing incentive regulations |
| Trust and Confidence | Creating a secure environment for knowledge dissemination and sharing and protecting the rights of the knowledge publisher + maintaining privacy and confidentiality of information + creating a safe space for discussion and exchange of ideas + evaluating and ensuring the quality of disseminated knowledge + encouraging interaction and cooperation among managers + strengthening the sense of responsibility and motivation for knowledge sharing |
| Evaluation and Monitoring | Defining and specifying expectations from school principals + determining minimum competencies of school principals in knowledge sharing + continuous evaluation of the knowledge sharing system |
| Macro Policies of the Organization | Developing and reviewing policies and regulations for the promotion of managers and employees in the Ministry of Education + developing policies and regulations |
| Planning | Coherent and organized planning for knowledge sharing + planning for providing necessary training in the field of knowledge sharing |
| Knowledge Understanding | Understanding the importance and necessity of knowledge sharing + recognizing knowledge sharing processes + understanding the importance of privacy in knowledge sharing + familiarity with knowledge management methods + ability to analyze and evaluate knowledge + awareness of knowledge resources in the organization |
| Trust | Promoting a culture of trust as social capital + increasing the participation of managers in organizational discussions |
| Familiarity with Educational Technologies | Enhancing IT literacy and modern technologies + IT and communication technology skills |
| Progressivism | Fostering a culture of organizational progress + the role of motivation in the organization |

| | |
|---------------------------------------|--|
| Access to Modern Technologies | Easy and quick access of school principals to educational technologies + IT facilities in schools |
| Support | Mutual respect among employees + cultural support for knowledge sharers + fostering a spirit of knowledge sharing in the organization |
| Availability of Hardware and Software | Providing necessary technological and technological facilities + school management systems and software + access to infrastructure and virtual networks + communication tools and equipment |
| Direction | Determining the direction and path of the organization in knowledge sharing + aligning individuals in the organization in knowledge sharing |
| Commitment | Creating a culture of commitment to sharing and disseminating knowledge + improving organizational commitment of school principals |
| Organizational Transformation | Organizational transformation through technological advances + transformational leadership + innovative organizational culture + continuous professional development + senior management support + employee empowerment |
| Empowerment | Attracting and retaining competent and interested managers and employees in knowledge sharing + having competent managers in facilitating knowledge sharing |
| Communication | Ability to establish effective communication among educational groups and managers and employees within the Ministry of Education + ability to establish effective communication with key individuals outside the organization |
| Facilitation | Determining knowledge sharing strategies + providing grounds for knowledge sharing + providing necessary facilities and tools + allocating budget for training managers and employees |
| Change Management | Planning for change in knowledge sharing and managing it + operationalizing change plans in knowledge sharing |
| Influence | Instilling organizational values in individuals + influencing knowledge sharing by limiting the scope of managers' responsibilities + increasing motivation among school principals |
| Meritocracy | Promoting meritocracy in the Ministry of Education + selection and appointment based on competence + rewards and motivation based on performance |
| Virtual Space | School principals' use of the internet and knowledge sharing networks + familiarity with knowledge sharing in virtual networks + access to virtual networks |

As the findings of Table 2 show, 36 subcategories were identified in the second coding phase from the review of interview texts regarding the implementation of knowledge sharing in Ahvaz city schools.

In the selective coding phase of this research, based on the previous stages, the organized data were categorized into

various components and in more limited dimensions. The common aspects of the components identified in the previous stage were recognized and organized into broader and more limited categories. The number of these dimensions reached four. The following table presents a diagram of the selective coding phase.

Table 3

Results of Content Analysis of Interviews: Selective Coding (Main Categories)

| Main Categories | Subcategories |
|-------------------------|---|
| Individual Factors | Receptiveness to criticism, Individual knowledge and awareness, Time, Intellectual property, Trust and confidence, Individual ability and skills, Experience, Individual attitude towards knowledge sharing |
| Organizational Factors | Macro policies of the organization, Organizational structures, Goals, Planning, Encouragement and discipline, Meritocracy, Organizational strategies, Evaluation and monitoring |
| Cultural Factors | Commitment, Support, Progressivism, Communication, Valuing knowledge sharing |
| Infrastructural Factors | Organizational transformation, Access to modern technologies, Familiarity with educational technologies, Availability of hardware and software, Virtual space |
| Managerial Factors | Meritocracy, Empowerment, Direction, Change management, Influence |

As the findings of Table 3 show, the conditions for implementing knowledge sharing in Ahvaz city schools were identified in five categories (individual factors, organizational factors, cultural factors, infrastructural factors, and managerial factors). Each of these concepts is further explained below.

Ultimately, after determining the components of the research model for implementing knowledge sharing among school principals in Ahvaz city, the initial model derived from the qualitative section is presented as follows:

Figure 1

Qualitative section model for implementing knowledge sharing among school principals in Ahvaz city



4 Discussion and Conclusion

The present study aimed to provide a model for implementing knowledge sharing in educational organizations (case study: school principals of Ahvaz city). The qualitative section of the research aimed to identify and explain the components and factors influencing the knowledge sharing behavior of school principals through qualitative content analysis. In this regard, in-depth and exploratory interviews were conducted with expert members of the statistical population who had managerial, assistant, and research experiences in knowledge sharing, and the interview content was analyzed. According to the research findings, the main and sub-factors important in knowledge sharing among school principals were identified and categorized into five main factors and 31 sub-factors. The main factors include individual (with 8 components), organizational (with 8 components), cultural (with 5 components), infrastructural (with 5 components), and managerial (with 5 components).

According to the research findings, individual factors include components such as receptiveness to criticism, individual knowledge and awareness, time, intellectual property, trust and confidence, individual ability and skills, experience, and individual attitude towards knowledge sharing. All participants considered individual factors as the most influential factor in knowledge sharing.

The findings of this research suggest that knowledge sharing in educational organizations, including schools, is recognized as a fundamental tool for improving performance and enhancing educational quality. Various individual factors can play a role in this process, including receptiveness to criticism, individual knowledge and awareness, time, intellectual property, trust and confidence, individual ability and skills, experience, and individual attitude towards knowledge sharing.

Authors' Contributions

All authors have contributed significantly to the research process and the development of the manuscript.

Declaration

In order to correct and improve the academic writing of our paper, we have used the language model ChatGPT.

Transparency Statement

Data are available for research purposes upon reasonable request to the corresponding author.

Acknowledgments

We would like to express our gratitude to all individuals helped us to do the project.

Declaration of Interest

The authors report no conflict of interest.

Funding

According to the authors, this article has no financial support.

Ethical Considerations

In this research, ethical standards including obtaining informed consent, ensuring privacy and confidentiality were observed.

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