

## **EMPOWERED EMPLOYEES' KNOWLEDGE SHARING BEHAVIOR**

**Ayşegül ÖZBEBEK**

Istanbul University

Istanbul Üniversitesi Siyasal Bilgiler Fakültesi İşletme Bölümü 34116 Beyazıt-

Istanbul-Türkiye

E-mail: aozbebek@istanbul.edu.tr

**Esra KILIÇARSLAN TOPLU**

Istanbul University

Ortaklar Cad. Akıncı Bayırı Sk. No:38/15 Mecidiyeköy-Istanbul-Türkiye

E-mail: 2502090296@ogr.iu.edu.tr

### **—Abstract —**

*Knowledge is a critical organizational resource and in order to gain a sustainable competitive advantage, organizations must in some ways rely on their employees because knowledge sharing is the main activity through which employees can contribute to knowledge application, innovation, and consequently the competitive advantage of the organization.*

*There are many studies that research on the relationship between empowerment and performance, creativity, innovation. In this study, the relationship between psychological empowerment and knowledge sharing behavior is researched. The main purpose of this research is to examine the relationship between empowerment and knowledge sharing. The research sample is selected from the fast moving consumer goods (fmcg) sector where knowledge sharing is thought to be very important because of the fast changing environment. When measuring empowerment Spreitzer's (1995) scale is used and when measuring knowledge sharing behavior Yi's (2009) scale is used.*

*The results of the research are important in today's fast changing environment because knowledge sharing is crucial to future success.*

**Key Words:** *psychological empowerment, knowledge sharing behavior, fast moving consumer goods, fmcg.*

**JEL Classification: M10**

## **1. INTRODUCTION**

Empowerment has been studied in two ways. In the first approach, empowerment is described as actions taken by organizations to share power and decision-making, in the second approach empowerment is studied from a psychological perspective. Structural empowerment and psychological empowerment can be distinguished, although research suggests that structural empowerment leads to psychological.

In the psychological approach, empowerment is viewed as the perception or attitudes of individuals towards their work and their role in the organization (Conger & Kanungo, 1988:473-474). According to Thomas and Velthouse (1990) psychological empowerment involves workers' beliefs about the meaning of their work (meaning), their capability to do their job well (competence), their sense of self-determination (self-determination) and their autonomy in influencing work outcomes (impact). Based on psychological empowerment hypothesized by Thomas and Velthouse (1990), Spreitzer (1995) developed a theory-based measure of empowerment which is used by many researchers.

Knowledge sharing behavior is a set of individual behaviors involving sharing one's work-related knowledge and expertise with other members within one's organization, which can contribute to the ultimate effectiveness of the organization (Yi, 2009:68). Due to the rapidly changing global economy, organizations need to consider a serious change in strategy and begin to focus more on knowledge management (Switzer, 2008:18). Because of the potential benefits that can be realized from knowledge sharing, in order to facilitate the collection, storage, and distribution of knowledge, many organizations have invested money into knowledge management initiatives including the development of knowledge management systems (Wang & Noe, 2010:115). In the time of knowledge, this study focuses on the analysis of knowledge sharing behavior at the individual level and tries to find out the relationship between psychological empowerment and knowledge sharing behavior of the employees.

## **2. THEORETICAL BACKGROUND**

### **2.1. Psychological Empowerment**

Empowerment is defined as the "process of enhancing feelings of self-efficacy among organizational members through the identification of conditions that foster powerlessness and through their removal by both formal organizational practices and informal techniques of providing efficacy information" by Conger and Kanungo (1988). In other words, Conger and Kanungo (1988) defined

empowerment as the motivation concept of self-efficacy. Thomas and Velthouse (1990), building on Conger and Kanungo's (1988) motivational approach, stated that empowerment is multi-faceted and defined empowerment as increased intrinsic task motivation manifested in a set of cognitions reflecting an individual's orientation to his/her own work. They determined four dimensions of empowerment: meaning, competence, self-determination and impact.

- Meaning: The value of a work goal compared with individual's own values, ideals and standards (Spreitzer, 1995:1443; Thomas&Velthouse, 1990:672-673)
- Competence: An individual's belief in his or her capacity to perform the activities which is necessary for his or her work role (Spreitzer, 1995:1443; Thomas&Velthouse, 1990:672)
- Self-determination: A perception that one has autonomy in performing job tasks and can choose how to behave in various job-related situations (Spreitzer, 1995:1443)
- Impact: A sense that one can influence events in an organization (Spreitzer, 1995:1444). Whereas self-determination refers to perceived control over one's own behavior, impact refers to perceived control over one's environment (Thomas&Velthouse, 1990:672)

## **2.2. Knowledge Sharing**

Yi (2009), defined knowledge sharing behavior as "a set of individual behaviors involving sharing one's work-related knowledge and expertise with other members within one's organization, which can contribute to the ultimate effectiveness of the organization".

In today's knowledge-based economy where an organization's most valuable asset has shifted from physical capital to knowledge capital, organizations develop systematic processes to create and leverage knowledge but employees do not share their knowledge under all circumstances. They may think that knowledge becomes less valuable when they share it and they lose their intellectual property which gives them a personal advantage (Switzer, 2008:18; Cho&Li&Su, 2007:2).

In order to measure knowledge sharing behavior Yi (2009) developed a valid and reliable scale which is called "Knowledge Sharing Behavior Scale" (KSBS). In her study, she determined four dimensions of knowledge sharing behavior: written contributions, organizational communications, personal interactions and communities of practice.

- Written contributions include behaviors of employees' contributing their ideas, information, and expertise through written documentation rather than dialogs, such as by posting ideas to organizational database and submitting reports which can benefit other employees and the organization. In this dimension, knowledge is shared through a person-to-document channel (Yi, 2009:69).
- Organizational communications include behaviors of sharing knowledge in formal interactions within or across teams or work units. For example, working teams or project groups may have regular meetings for brainstorming or problem solving by seeking ideas from employees. Knowledge is shared through formal social interactions of a person-to-group channel (Yi, 2009:69).
- Personal interactions include behaviors of sharing knowledge in informal interactions among individuals, such as chatting over lunch and helping other employees who approach them. Knowledge is shared through the informal social interactions of a person-to-person channel (Yi, 2009:69).
- Communities of practice include behaviors of sharing knowledge within communities of practice, which are voluntary groups of employees communicating around a topic with common interests in a non-routine and personal way. Knowledge is shared through informal social interactions of a person-to-group channel (Yi, 2009:69-70).

### **3. THE RESEARCH METHOD**

#### **3.1. Sample and Procedure**

The research sample is selected from the fast moving consumer goods (fmcg) sector where knowledge sharing behavior and accordingly solving problems, generating ideas and creating new products is thought to be very important because of the fast changing environment. The research is made with three fmcg companies' employees. The selected companies are in the list of "Turkey's Top 500 Industrial Enterprises 2009" published by Istanbul Chamber of Industry. Some of the questionnaires were distributed by authors and some were distributed by key persons who had easy access to the employees. Questionnaires were answered and returned directly to the authors via e-mail or by hand. The questionnaire was totally sent to 350 employees, 136 responses were received and out of these 119 of them were usable (response rate is 34%).

### **3.2. Measures**

The main purpose of this research is to examine the relationship between empowerment and knowledge sharing. Empowerment was measured by a 12 item scale developed and validated by Spreitzer (1995) and knowledge sharing behavior was measured by a 28 item scale developed and validated by Yi (2009).

Psychological empowerment has four dimensions, the scale consists of 12 items and a five-point Likert scale ranging from “strongly disagree” (1) to “strongly agree” (5) was used. Although 7-point Likert scale is used in the original psychological empowerment scale, 5-point Likert scale is used in this research in order to adapt the two scales. Sample items include “The work I do is meaningful” for meaning dimension, “I am confident about my ability to do my job” for competence dimension, “I have significant autonomy in determining how I do my job” for self-determination dimension and “My impact on what happens in my department is large” for impact dimension.

Knowledge sharing behavior has four dimensions, the scale consists of 28 items and a five-point Likert scale ranging from “never” (1) to “always” (5) was used. Sample items include “Submit documents and reports” for written contributions dimension, “Express ideas and thoughts in organizational meetings” for organizational communications dimension, “Support less-experienced colleagues with time from personal schedule” for personal interactions dimension and “Meet with community members to create innovative solutions for problems that occur in work” for communities of practice dimension.

## **4. RESULTS**

Statistical analyses are performed using SPSS 17.0 Statistical Package. Correlation analysis is used to test the relationship between empowerment and knowledge sharing behavior.

In this study, the alpha coefficient of reliability of psychological empowerment scale is 0,739 and reliability of knowledge sharing behavior scale is 0,760. The alpha values are more than 0.7 and fall into the acceptable range suggested in the literature.

For psychological empowerment scale, possible total scores range between 12 and 60, with a higher score indicating greater empowerment and for knowledge sharing behavior scale possible total scores range between 28 and 140, with a higher score indicating more knowledge sharing behavior.

From 119 participants; 53 are females (45%) and 66 are males (55%). Most of them are aged between 30-34 (39%) and the majority had at least university education (66%). The number of years on the job ranged from more than a year and 10 years but the 48% of the participants are working more than 5 years.

<b>Characteristics</b>	<b>Category</b>	<b>n=119</b>
<b>Gender</b>	Male	55%
	Female	45%
<b>Age (Year)</b>	20 - 24	1%
	25 - 29	12%
	30 - 34	39%
	35 - 39	34%
	40 - 49	13%
	50 - 59	1%
<b>Education</b>	High School	5%
	College	9%
	University	66%
	Graduate school	20%
<b>Experience</b>	more than 1 - 3	27%
	more than 3 - 5	25%
	more than 5 - 10	48%

**Table 1: General characteristics of the sample**

As a result of the correlation analysis; the correlation between empowerment and knowledge sharing behavior is statistically significant and show that empowerment is positively associated with knowledge sharing behavior ( $r = .635$ ,  $p = < .003$ ).

## **5. DISCUSSIONS AND CONCLUSION**

In today's knowledge-based economy in order to achieve sustainable competitive advantage organizations are trying to facilitate the collection, storage, and distribution of knowledge. Because the new essential asset of the company now resides in the minds of the employees, organizations have to convince or motivate the employees to create and share their knowledge with the organization.

That's why the main purpose of this research was to examine the relationship between empowerment and knowledge sharing behavior.

The results demonstrate that empowerment is positively correlated with employees' knowledge sharing behavior. It can be said that empowered employees are more willing to share their knowledge.

There are limitations of the research. First of all, individual characteristics are not considered in the research but personality and motivation is also important both in empowerment and in knowledge sharing. Second, organizational culture can also have a direct effect on employees' empowerment and knowledge sharing behavior and it is also not included in the research. Third, culture is an important factor to be considered in knowledge sharing. Also because of the limited scope of this study, the results cannot be generalized.

In this study empowerment is researched from a psychological perspective of employees. Organizations have different mechanisms for empowering their employees. Identifying the various empowerment mechanisms and evaluating what works best for knowledge sharing behavior would be worth investigating in the future.

## **BIBLIOGRAPHY**

Carless Sally A. (2004), "Does Psychological Empowerment Mediate the Relationship Between Psychological Climate and Job Satisfaction", *Journal of Business and Psychology*, 2004, Vol.18, No:4, pp.405-425.

Cho Namjae, Li Guo zheng and Su Chen-Jen (2007), "An Empirical Study on the Effect of Individual Factors on Knowledge Sharing by Knowledge Type", *Journal of Global Business and Technology*, 2007, Vol.3, No:2, pp.1-15.

Conger J.A. and Kanungo R.N. (1988), "The Empowerment Process: Integrating Theory and Practice", *The Academy of Management Review*, Vol.13, No: 3, pp.471-482.

Spreitzer Gretchen M. (1995), "Psychological Empowerment in the Workplace: Dimensions, Measurement and Validation", *Academy of Management Journal*, 1995, Vol.38, No.5, pp.1442-1465

Spreitzer Gretchen M. (1996), "Social Structural Characteristics of Psychological Empowerment", *Academy of Management Journal*, 1996, Vol.19, No.2, pp.483-504.

Spreitzer Gretchen M., Kizilos Mark A. and Nason Stephen W. (1997), "A Dimensional Analysis of the Relationship between Psychological Empowerment

and Effectiveness Satisfaction and Strain”, *Journal of Management*, 1997, Vol.23, No: 5, pp.679-704

Srivastava Abhishek, Bartol Kathryn M. and Locke Edwin A. (2006), “Empowering Leadership in Management Teams: Effects on Knowledge Sharing, Efficacy, and Performance”, *Academy of Management Journal*, 2006, Vol. 49, No. 6, pp.1239-1251.

Switzer Cameron (2008), “Time For Change: Empowering Organizations to Succeed in the Knowledge Economy”, *Journal of Knowledge Management*, Vol.12, No: 2, 2008, pp. 18-28.

Thomas K.W. and Velthouse B.A. (1990), “Cognitive Elements of Empowerment: An Interpretive Model of Intrinsic Task Motivation”, *Academy of Management Review*, 1990, Vol: 15, No:4, pp.666-681

Wang Sheng and Noe Raymond A. (2010), “Knowledge sharing: A review and directions for future research”, *Human Resource Management Review*, 2010, Vol.20, pp.115-131.

Yi Jialin (2009), “A measure of knowledge sharing behavior: scale development and validation”, *Knowledge Management Research & Practice*, 2009, Vol.7, pp.65-81.