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THE IMPACT OF QUALITY MANAGEMENT ACTIVITIES ON THE PROCESS OF KNOWLEDGE CREATION

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ABSTRACT

Today competition between organizations is intensified and this competition has reduced human resources in order to reduce costs, and the reduction of human resources has led organizations to explicit the tacit knowledge held by employees. The purpose of this study was to investigate the effect of quality management activities on the process of knowledge creation. This research in terms of purpose is an applied research and in terms of data collection method, it is a descriptive and field study. The statistical population of the study was consisted of directors, experts and specialists of Amir Kabir Steel Company in Rasht Industrial City and based on the census method; the sample size was 341 people. Statistical analysis was performed on collected data by Kolmogorov-Smirnov test by means of Spss22 software and path analysis and structural equations were done by Amos18. Based on the results of the research, it was determined that quality management activities were: top management support, employee training, customer (focus) orientation, supplier quality management, employee involvement, product design, benchmarking, quality information, vision document and recognition and reward and they have been influential in the knowledge creating process. Top management support had the highest impact with the path coefficient of 0.898 and recognition and reward had the lowest effect with a path coefficient of 0.731 on the process of knowledge creating.

Keywords: Quality Management Activities, Knowledge Creation Process, Steel Complex Employees, Industrial City of Rasht

INTRODUCTION

What, in a competitive environment forces organizations to identify strategies with global content, is important competitive factors of quality management. One of the primary goals of improving the quality of an organization is the creation and acquisition of knowledge in that organization. The fundamental distinction between factories on a universal and non-universal class is the ability of factories worldwide due to the process improvement in terms of quality and service provision for customers. Many empirical studies have attempted to take action to improve understanding of quality management and factors that lead to its success or failure. Today, improvements due to quality management systems have spread from manufacturing to all parts of the community (Ansari et al., 2012). Manufacturing organizations, hospitals and service organizations, educational institutes and defense industries are among the organizations that have been successful in implementing a quality management system (Anupam et al., 2008). Creating knowledge and acquiring knowledge is also two independent processes in the form of

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a sensitive competitive experience in today's globally competitive market, which will be doomed to obsolescence without creating a continuous knowledge and business. Knowledge development includes all management efforts that an organization deliberately strives to capture capabilities that it lacks or to create capabilities that are not yet within and outside the company (Chen et al., 2013). In this research, the researcher will examine the impact of quality management components on the process of creating knowledge. In this chapter, the overviews related to the present research have been examined, so that at the outset, a description of the research problem has been made, in order to provide the necessary bases to justify the reason for the present research, then the objectives of the research are stated and, consequently, the goals and research hypotheses are presented. Then, the definitions of the research variables have been made so that the present study can be easily understood and, finally, the scope of the research has been introduced (Cholip, 2008).

The presence of breakdowns and roughness at the surface of the pavement at airports can lead to loss of comfort and vibration of the control panel of the devices and endanger the safety of passengers and aircraft (Floyde et al., 2013). Repairing concrete pavement in our country is very important in the airports pavement. One of the most reliable methods for determining the structural condition of the considered pavement is using non-destructive testing methods. Asphalting is performed on a layer of broken stone material, the so-called foundation, which may be prepared and graded from a mountain or river mines or a mixture of them. If the foundation is properly designed and implemented and appropriate drainage conditions are provided, it is expected that the crashes that appear on the pavement surface are not due to the weakness of the foundation (Farooq et al., 2014).

Lack of sufficient density of pavement layers also causes some asphalt pavement malfunctions, including fatigue cracks, localized subsidence, and holes in the path of the wheels; when checking and evaluating the pavement position, this should be taken into account, so if necessary, by digging the place (to achieve a rigid and healthy layer) and, if necessary, by means of a drainage layer we can be properly repaired with a deep patch. The basic approach to properly repair any failure is to identify and recognize the cause or reason of the failure. Anyway, before deciding what kind of restoration is needed to fix a broken pavement, if the cause of the failure is insufficient pavement bearing, the pavement patching is not a principled solution, and in such cases after the patching, by covering the damaged area, its bearing load capacity should be increased. On the other hand, if the cause of the pavement damage is the presence of weakly localized parts, then these parts should be restored and usually, there is no need to reinforce the entire pavement (Judge, 2008).

Statement of The Problem and Necessity of Research

Among the factors of quality management, one can mention top management support, customer focus (customer orientation), employees involvement, employees training, product design, supplier quality management, quality information, vision document, recognition and reward and benchmarking. Top management acts as a driving force for quality management that builds values, goals, and systems to meet customer expectations and organizational performance, and top management support not only gives high priority to quality but also provides sufficient resources to implement quality management practices. The focus on costumer (focus) orientation of an organization is usually assessed by the frequency and accuracy of customer



satisfaction surveys. Customer orientation is the ultimate criterion for quality and the maintenance of a competitive advantage (Kotlyar et al., 2011).

Employee involvement includes a range of policies that allow employees to propose improvements and give them the ability, motivation, and power to continuously improve the organization performance. Training in quality related concepts and tools is a prerequisite for the effectiveness of quality improvement activities and can only better understand quality-related issues when staffs receive formal and systematic education in the field of quality management (Kristal et al., 2010).

Product design is another important dimension of quality management. This is a complete cleaning process and includes all the groups involved in the design review. Suppliers' quality management is the basis of providing high-quality parts and materials. This is an effective approach for an organization seeking to ensure quality at all stages of production (Mills et al., 2011). Maintaining and improving the quality requires a continuous flow of accurate information about the processes that produce the products of the organization. The availability of accurate information and the statue of vision with regard to quality is an effective prerequisite for quality management practices. Benchmarking can also be defined as a search for an analysis of industry best practices that lead to superior performance. Benchmarking enables the organization to improve its internal systems by learning from external sources (Muethel et al., 2013).

According to the abovementioned content, it can be concluded that most of the quality improvement activities require the creation of new knowledge for the organization. Hence, it is inferred that an effective organization must not only effectively manage the quality of the products/services and practices, but also apply the knowledge management components and control it (Podgorski, 2010).

Skill, knowledge, and productivity of employees are some of the important factors that play a key role in the success of companies, and quality management as a kind of management system pays special attention to these factors. On the other hand, the creation of knowledge as a resource for the survival of companies is necessary and for the implementation of knowledge management, a relatively long interval, the provision of intellectual and cultural areas, skills and education, knowledge and technology centers are needed (Sassenburg et al., 2010). Employees as first people involved with knowledge and as knowledge generators play a key role in this context; therefore, the statistical population of the present study consists of employees of Amir Kabir Khazar Steel Company. This unit has experienced people with a high level of knowledge and experience, which is a competitive advantage, and if the knowledge of these people is not properly used, they will be attracted by other organizations, and these employees will share their knowledge capital somewhere else. In order to create a suitable context, identification of effective quality management indicators on knowledge creation and sharing is a strategy for changing the behavior of individuals and reducing identified barriers. In the meantime, the managers of this unit can, by creating an appropriate working environment, strengthen the morale of the employees and create, accumulate, share and use knowledge in the organization to generate more add value, and with knowledge management reduces costs, improve performance, improve customer service delivery, reduce latency in delivering services to them, and ultimately reduce the cost of finding and accessing valuable knowledge within the organization (Soderlund, 2010).



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Based on the conceptual model of research, the basic question is: How are quality management activities influential in the process of creating knowledge?

RESEARCH BACKGROUND

- Juan Jose Tari et al. (2014) in his article "The Relationship between total quality management (TQM) practices and their Impact on Output Quality" examine TQM procedures and the direct and indirect effects of these methods on the organization's output quality. The community of 106 TQM companies in Spain. The findings showed that TQM has a positive effect on the organization's output quality. Matching these results with other research in this field has shown that a variety of organizational methods consistent with the principles of TQM are able to transfer to other countries with a similar culture. But in this transfer and implementation, managers must pay special attention to the cultural differences in line with their procedure implement.
- Krenz et al. (2014) in their article entitled " *Knowledge Management in Value Creation Networks: Establishing a New Business Model through the Role of a Knowledge Intermediary*," explored this issue. The spatial distribution and the growth of knowledge networks in the manufacturing networks increase the complexity of the process of creating inter-organizational knowledge and present new challenges in their participation and the creation of a common innovation. Knowledge is the key to addressing this complexity. However, in an inter-organizational position, conflicts exist between the objectives of knowledge management and the objectives of public management that must be compensated. In this paper, the role of knowledge mediator, which has a supporting role in the creation of knowledge networks, has been addressed.
- Shan et al. (2013) in a study entitled "Impact of Quality Management on the Process of Creating Knowledge: The Perspective of Chinese Aviation firm" examined the impact of quality management practices on the process of creating knowledge. The proposed model for examining the hypothesis in this study was tested based on survey data collected from aviation firm in China. The results of this study manifest that employee training, employee involvement; product design, benchmarking, and the vision document have significant direct impacts on the process of creating knowledge. It can also be seen that some other quality management practices such as senior management support, customer service, supplier quality management, information quality, and appreciation and reward do not directly affect the creation of knowledge. There are suggestions for improving the quality management in aviation firms in China.

METHOD

The present study in terms of research method is applied; it is descriptive in line with the research objective and in terms of research type it is a field study. The statistical population of the present study consists of managers and staff (experts and field experts) of Amir Kabir Steel Complex in Rasht. Sampling in this study was done by census method. In this study, due to the limited statistical population, by means of census method, only managers and employees (experts in the field of knowledge management and quality management) were used. Accordingly, 341 people were assigned to answer the questions. The library research method (Persian and English books,



dissertations, organizational documents, Internet, etc.) was used to collect information about research literature and theoretical issues related to the subject. The questionnaire was used as one of the most common tools for collecting information in survey research. Accordingly, Shan's et al. (2013) 23-item questionnaire was used with five-point Likert scale.

No	Variable	Number of items
1	Top management support	1~4
2	Employee training	5~7
3	Costumer focus	8~9
4	Suppliers Quality Management	10~11
5	Employee involvement	12~13
6	Product design	14~17
7	Benchmarking	18~21
8	Quality information	22~25
9	Vision document	26~28
10	Recognition and reward	29.32

Table 1: Separation of questionnaire questions (Shan et al., 2013)





Figure 1: Conceptual Model of Research (Shan et al., 2013)

In this study, the content validity method was used to measure the validity of the questionnaire. To this end, a first questionnaire was provided to the abovementioned subjects and unclear and unrelated questions were identified and those questions that were editable were re-edited and included in the final questionnaire. Questionnaires that were completely incompatible were removed from the questionnaire. The questionnaire of the present study is the standard questionnaire of Shan et al. (2013). Cronbach's alphas for each of the variables, as well as the

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whole questionnaire, are calculated and presented in the table. Accordingly, the total reliability of the questionnaire is 0.958, which indicates a very good reliability of the questionnaire.

No.	Variable	Cronbach's alpha
1	Top management support	0.847
2	Employee training	0.87
3	Costumer focus	0.792
4	Suppliers Quality Management	0.817
5	Employee involvement	0.818
6	Product design	0.819
7	Benchmarking	0.931
8	Quality information	0.924
9	Vision document	0.894
10	Recognition and reward	0.904
	Total	0.957

Table 2: Research variables Cronbach's alpha

RESEARCH FINDINGS

The Kolmogorov-Smirnov test was used to check the normality of variables. The test results for each variable are as follows:



Table 3: Results of the Kolmogorov-Smirnov test

0	
Dimension	Sig. level
Top management support	0.608
Employee training	0.642
Costumer focus	0.277
Suppliers Quality Management	0.378
Employee involvement	0.263
Product design	0.634
Benchmarking	0.268
Quality information	0.270
Vision document	0.172
Recognition and reward	0.568

As can be seen in the table, at the error level of 0.05 (significance level) of the research variables are higher than 0.05, this indicates that it follows the normal distribution (Significant level> 0.05); therefore, parametric tests can be used for inferential statistics.

Path analysis

For analyzing the hypotheses, the method of factor analysis and path analysis were used. Structural Equation Modeling is a highly effective multivariate analysis of linear regression family that allows the researcher to test a set of regression equations in a concurrent manner. Structural Equation Modeling is a comprehensive statistical approach for testing hypotheses about the relationships between observable and hidden variables, sometimes the covariance structure analysis is called causal modeling. In general, the structural equations have three basic models:

- 1. Measurement Model (Confirmatory Factor Analysis)
- 2. Structural model (confirmatory path analysis)

3. A general model of structural equations

In the model, measuring the relationship between the hidden variables and the observed variables is important, which is categorized into two X and Y models of measurement. In the structural model, the researcher seeks to determine whether the relationships between hidden variables extracted on the basis of the theory are confirmed by the data collected from the sample. But the general model is a combination of two measurement and structural models, in which the relationships between hidden and observed variables (measurement model) and the relationships between hidden variables (structural model) are considered.

CONCLUSION

When the research variables are too much, the structural equations modeling is used simultaneously to examine the effect of each of the variables on each other. The results and general model of this research are summarized below in terms of the effect of variables on each other simultaneously after implementation in AMOS18 software.

The figure represents the research model in the standard state. The standard state is the standardization of the regression path coefficients, which in the standard state; the variable errors will be eliminated. The path coefficients in the standard state will be based on the deviation from the variables criterion.



Figure 2: Structural Model in Standard state

The path coefficients of the variables in the standard state and the error level of 0.05 are shown in Table 4:

Dependent variable	Independent variable	Path coefficient	Sig. level	Result
Knowledge Creation Process	Recognition and reward	.731	0.000	Confirmation of hypothesis
Knowledge Creation Process	Vision document	.778	0.000	Confirmation of hypothesis
Knowledge Creation Process	Quality information	.892	0.000	Confirmation of hypothesis
Knowledge Creation Process	Benchmarking	.835	0.000	Confirmation of hypothesis

Table 4: Path Coefficients in Standard state



Knowledge Creation Process	Product design	.834	0.000	Confirmation of hypothesis
Knowledge Creation Process	Employee involvement	.744	0.000	Confirmation of hypothesis
Knowledge Creation Process	Supplier QM	.791	0.000	Confirmation of hypothesis
Knowledge Creation Process	Costumer focus	.830	0.000	Confirmation of hypothesis
Knowledge Creation Process	Employee training	.871	0.000	Confirmation of hypothesis
Knowledge Creation Process	Top management support	.898	0.000	Confirmation of hypothesis

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• The first hypothesis of the research indicated that top management support has a positive impact on the process of creating knowledge. The results of path analysis and structural equations indicate that the path coefficient between the top management support and the knowledge creation process is significant (significance level is 0.05) and is equal to 0.889. Therefore, it can be said that top management support will be effective in the process of creating knowledge. In Shan's et al. (2013) research, the effect of top management support on the knowledge creation process is not supported and the path coefficient of 1.148 is at a significant level of 0.251 (significance level of 0.05). Of the studies consistent with this hypothesis on can mention study by Bahreini and Hooshangi (2011), which explores the approach of human resources to quality management in three dimensions of top management support, employee competency upgrade plans and customer focus and the impact of human quality management dimensions on the creation of the value chain of knowledge management in the organization. Another consistent research was carried out by Miri and Eshkevar (2013).



- The second hypothesis of the research was that employee training has a positive impact on the process of creating knowledge. The results of path analysis and structural equations indicate that the path coefficient between employee training and knowledge creation process is significant (significance level is 0.05) and is equal to 0.871. Therefore, it can be said that employee training will be effective in the process of creating knowledge. In Shan's et al. (2013) study, employee training with a path coefficient of 3.480 at the significance level of 0.000 (significance level>0.05) significantly affects the process of knowledge creating. Of the similar studies, one can mention the study by Vivora et al. (2013).
- The third hypothesis of research was that customer focus (customer orientation) has a positive impact on the process of creating knowledge. The results of path analysis and structural equations indicate that the path coefficient between customer orientation and knowledge creation process is significant (significance level is> 0.05) and is equal to 0.830. Therefore, it can be said that customer focus will affect the process of creating knowledge. In Shan's et al. (2013) research, the effect of customer orientation with a path coefficient of 0.249 at the significance level of 0.769 (meaningful level>0.05) is not supported on the process of creating knowledge. Of the similar studies, one can mention researches by Yarmohammadian et al. (2012) and Bahrain and Houshangi (2011) and Hashemi and Farzanegan (2015).
- The fourth hypothesis of the research was that the supplier quality management has a positive impact on the process of creating knowledge. The results of path analysis and structural equations indicate that the path coefficient between the supplier quality management and the knowledge creation process is significant (significance level is>

0.05) and is equal to 0.791. Therefore, it can be said that supplier management system will be effective in the process of creating knowledge. In Shan's et al. (2013) research, the effect of supplier quality management with a path coefficient of 0.354 at the significance level of 0.723 (significance level>0.05) on the process of creating knowledge is not supported. Of the similar studies, one can mention researches by Yi and Chang (2010).

- The fifth hypothesis of the research was that employee involvement has a positive impact on the process of creating knowledge. The results of path analysis and structural equations indicate that the path coefficient between employee involvement and knowledge creation process is significant (significance level is> 0.05) and is equal to 0.744. Therefore, it can be said that employee involvement will affect the process of creating knowledge. In Shan's et al. (2013) research, employee involvement with a path coefficient of 0.015 at the significance level of 2.431 (significance level>0.05) significantly affect the process of creating knowledge. Of the similar studies, one can mention researches by Gazmeh and Beheshtifar (2015).
- The sixth hypothesis of the research was that product design has a positive impact on the process of creating knowledge. The results of path analysis and structural equations indicate that the path coefficient between product design and knowledge creation process is significant (P < 0.05) and is equal to 0.834. Therefore, it can be said that product design will affect the process of creating knowledge. In Shan's (2013) research, product design with a path coefficient of 0.033 at the significance level of 2.131 (significance level>0.05) significantly affect the process of creating knowledge. Of the similar studies, one can mention researches by Bakhsha et al. (2013).
- The seventh hypothesis of research was that benchmarking has a positive effect on the process of creating knowledge. The results of path analysis and structural equations indicate that the path coefficient between optimization and knowledge creation process is significant (significance level is> 0.05) and is equal to 0.835. Therefore, it can be said that benchmarking will affect the process of creating knowledge. In Shan's (2013) research, benchmarking with a path coefficient of 0.350 at a significant level of 0.251 (significance level>0.05) significantly affect the process of knowledge creating.
- The eighth hypothesis of the study was that quality information has a positive impact on the process of knowledge creating. The results of path analysis and structural equations indicate that the path coefficient between knowledge information and knowledge creation process is significant (significance level is> 0.05) and is equal to 0.892. Therefore, it can be said that quality information will be effective on the process of knowledge creating. In Shan's et al. (2013) study, the effect of quality information with a path coefficient of 1.075 at a significant level of 0.282 (significance level) was not supported on the process of knowledge creating.
- The ninth hypothesis of the research was that the vision document has a positive impact on the process of knowledge creating. The results of path analysis and structural equations indicate that the path coefficient between the vision document and the knowledge creation process is significant (significance level is> 0.05) and is equal to 0.778. Therefore, it can be said that the vision document will be effective on the process of creating knowledge. In Shan's (2013) research, the vision document with a path coefficient of 4.091 at a



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significance level of 0.000 (significance level>0.05) significantly affects the process of knowledge creating. Of the similar researches one can mention researches by Bakhsha et al. (2013).

• The tenth hypothesis of the research was that recognition and reward had a positive effect on the process of knowledge creating. The results of path analysis and structural equations indicate that the path coefficient between recognition and reward and the knowledge creation process is significant (significance level > 0.05) and is equal to 0.731. Therefore, it can be said that recognition and reward will affect the process of creating knowledge. In Shan's et al. (2013) research, the effect of recognition and reward with path coefficient of 0.144 at the significance level of 0.885 (significance level>0.05) is not supported on the process of knowledge creation.

SUGGESTIONS



Customer orientation is a key factor in the product development process. In order to fully meet the needs of the customers, a growing number of companies collect employees from different sectors, including production, marketing, purchasing, and quality management, as well as various experts to discuss product design details and product quality assurance. Investigating the design of the new product enables employees to capture and convey hidden knowledge of experts, adopt and understand the best practices from other fields and projects, share ideas in the light of their experiences. Quality management practices affect extravagance (hidden to obvious), internalization (reveal to covertness), and socialization (hidden to hidden). All of these factors can enhance the sharing of knowledge and its production.

The impact of top management's support on the process of creating knowledge is directly determined by direct impacts on other methods of quality management. For example, the prospecting and optimization practices reflect the characteristics of the senior management's support policies and objectives. Educational attributes are reflected by the staff training method. Employee involvement and product design methods reflect other top management support features. Some employees believe that top management support for quality is often spent on empty slogans and advertising. They also believe that specific quality management methods and tools improve company performance.

The customer orientation key is to keep in touch with customers and to get hidden information about customer needs for product quality that can be used in product design and quality improvement process. In accordance with the quality management system requirements, each company must have a list of eligible vendors. Many companies may regularly review the quality management system and select eligible partners. However, most companies should pay more attention to the delivery schedule when faced with difficult orders. At the same time, these companies often impose many needs instead of negotiating with their employees. In such cases, the process of creating knowledge cannot be effectively promoted.

So far, more quality information has been delivered about preservation products and in written form, which is relatively unpleasant to use and search. This prevents the sharing and analysis of quality information among employees. In addition, the company is faced with a serious shortage of professional employees who are skilled in the use of basic quantitative analysis tools. At the moment, Quality information is not effectively used in day-to-day production decision-making processes. Quality information influenced by the process of creating knowledge is not fully reflected in the industry.

Quality management is very important in increasing the authority and encouraging employees to propose possible ways to improve the quality of their tasks. Quality management when is supported through top management, employee involvement, continuous improvement and customer orientation, not only is it a management tool for improving and enhancing quality, can also enhance organizational knowledge; Therefore, it is recommended that the concerned company be aware of this factor.

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