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# Research and Development on Social Sciences

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# The Effects of Knowledge Management Practices on Organizational Performance: Mediating Role of Organizational Social Capital

Durdu Mehmet Biçkes, Celal Yılmaz, Mustafa Karaca

## 1. Introduction

Nowadays, transformation and change have gained a rapid attribute which cannot be compared with the previous periods. Organizations need some priorities to sustain their presence and achieve their performance goals in the environment where change is the key determinant. These priorities can be classified as employing qualified human resource, effective human resource practices, knowledge management, organizational learning, core competence, environmental adaptation, innovation, organizational social capital and so on. In the process of internalizing environmental changes, it can be said that knowledge management has vital importance, however in the process of transferring the outputs emerged from the knowledge management practices into organizational activities, social capital plays an important role for enterprises.

Knowledge management, focusing on the management of complexity, uncertainty and change, is defined as “the process of collecting, interpreting, and using of the various knowledge needed to achieve organizational goal”. It is, on the other hand, defined that organizational social capital is emerging from networks of social relations in the internal and external environment and it is a critical intangible asset that has the potential to maximize organizational competitive advantage. This intangible asset, by means of its potential, has a significant role in transforming information and knowledge produced by knowledge management practices into outputs - commercial values. Thus, it can be argued that organizational social capital plays a bridge role between knowledge management practices and organizational performance.

This study aims to determine the mediating role of organizational social capital on the relationship between knowledge management and organizational performance and it has three parts: conceptual framework, research methodology and findings. So at first, the variables and the relationship between the variables are theoretically discussed. Then, research model and hypotheses, sampling, data collection method are given in the second part of the study. Finally the research findings and the implications are expressed.

## 2. Conceptual Framework

### 2.1. Knowledge Management

Knowledge management focuses on the complexity, uncertainty and change management (Singh, 2008: p. 24) and it is defined as “the identification and usage of collective knowledge in an organization to increase the competitiveness of an organization” by Andreeva and Kianto (2012). Rastogy (2000) defines it as “a systematic and integrative process that coordinates activities to capture, create, share and disseminate knowledge through individuals and groups who are trying to achieve organizational goals”. Knowledge management is also defined as “a process of creating, collecting, interpreting and usage of knowledge that contributes to the enhancement of organizational performance and the achievement of objectives” (Rasula, Vuksic & Stemberger, 2012: p. 147). It is possible to infer from these definitions that the enhancement of the organizational performance is the common ground. Corresponding with this common ground, Jaitly and Kumar (2012: p. 77) claim that knowledge management is a new management discipline which leads to the achievement of synergy, creating a revolutionary transformation in employees, processes, technologies and organizational performance. The knowledge management process is categorized in various ways in literature. For example, Darroch and McNaughton (2003: p. 575) handle the knowledge management process in three steps: acquiring knowledge, sharing knowledge and response to knowledge. According to Rasula et al. (2012: p. 149) the

stages of the knowledge management process are capturing, usage, sharing and storing of knowledge. Saini (2013: p. 578) categorizes these stages into the creation of knowledge, the coding of knowledge, the sharing of knowledge, and the use of knowledge. In this study, Gold, Malhotra and Segars's (2001: p. 190) classification has been adopted. In their classification, the knowledge management process has four steps, acquisition, transformation, usage and store of knowledge.

Knowledge management practices help to overcome problems such as resource shortage, management problems, and high staff turnover rates. Knowledge management offers practical facilities to gear complex and adverse business environments to a manageable context. Knowledge management leads to gain competitive advantages by reducing production costs and innovative applications (Saini, 2013: p. 577). Knowledge management is a strategic weapon for today's organizations. It is likely that organizations that cannot constantly create knowledge will disappear (Lee & Choi, 2003: p. 189).

## **2.2. Organizational Performance**

The performance of a system is the result of its output or operation in a period. This result is regarded as the level showing how much an enterprise has achieved its tasks and goals. In this case, performance can also be explained as an evaluation of all the work carried out in order to realize business goals (Sahin, 2014: p. 46). From this point of view, Pitt and Tucker (2008) have defined the concept of performance as how and what level the activity is achieved in a process or the specific level of effectiveness of the outputs, succeeded as a result of the achievement process.

In general terms, performance is categorized into two groups, financial and non-financial performance. Financial indicators include sales volume, profitability, return on investment, sales income, equity productivity, earnings per share, etc. Non-financial indicators include, for example, market share, product quality, marketing effectiveness, production efficiency, technological efficiency, number of staff, staff turnover rate, etc. (Chairungruang, 2016: p. 41). In the definition of financial and non-financial performance indicators, it is seen that performance is the improvement which has directly or indirectly positive financial effects, qualitative enhancement (quality, management mentality, environmental awareness, corporate reputation, etc.) and quantitative enhancement (sales amount, profitability level, number of staff, product range, etc.) on planned organizational activities (Biçkes & Özdevecioğlu, 2016: p. 12). It is possible to infer from this definition that the value of any organizational behaviour is directly proportional to the improvements made by organizational performance (Lee & Choi, 2003: p. 190).

## **2.3. Organizational Social Capital**

Social capital theory is based on the assumption that a network of relationships between individuals and groups constitutes a valuable resource. This resource, regarded as capital, is embedded in mutual acquaintance networks (Ofori & Sackey, 2010: p. 72). Social capital, an embedded asset in relation, can develop to the extent that it can facilitate instrumental relationships among people (Shaw et al., 2005: p. 595). Social capital is defined as marginal utility of social relations between individuals and organizations in economic activities. Social capital is held in two types in the literature: organizational social capital and social capital in society because the effects of social capital arise at different levels such as individual, group and society (Tantardini & Kroll, 2015). Defining organizational social capital makes it necessary to interpret social capital "beyond the individual relationships" (Erbil & Ögüt, 2016: p. 195).

Organizational social capital arises from the relationships within an organization (Li et al., 2016: p. 132) and it may also result from associations with other organizations (Erbil & Ögüt, 2016: p. 196). From this point of view, organizational social capital is seen as a critical asset that has the potential to maximize the organizational competitive advantage resulting from social relations in and out of an organization (Shorunke et al., 2014: p. 60).

Organizational social capital consists of structural, relational, and cognitive components (Nahapiet & Ghoshal, 1998: p. 243, Andrews, 2005: p. 584). There are two basic schools of thought regarding the structural component. The first one led by Sandefur and Laumann (2000), focus on the link among individual actors and it is referred to egocentric perspective on social networks. The

second one sociocentrism, is based on the views of Ronald Burt and built on a relative position within a network rather than individual direct relationships. The relational component reflects positive interactions among individuals and concepts such as trust and reciprocity, which are the basics of social capital formation. The cognitive component, including abstractions, particulars and basic assumptions in daily communication, goes beyond the common language (Ruiz et al., 2010: p. 50) and also includes the shared goals and values by organizational members (Li et al., 2016: p. 134). This component also reflects a shared vision that facilitates individual and group activities (Merlo et al., 2016: p. 1215).

#### 2.4. Relations between Variables and Research Hypotheses

The knowledge-based view claims that performance difference among organizations lies in the fact that they have different levels of knowledge and capacity to create and use knowledge (Andreeva & Kianto, 2012: p. 620). In this sense, in many studies, it has been suggested that the way to improve performance is to capture knowledge, share knowledge and integrate it to process of creating value and core competency-based strategies and then use it (Gholami et. al., 2013: p. 209; Omotayo, 2015: p. 11; Schiliro, 2007: p. 20). In this context, many practitioners particularly prefer to use knowledge management practices and a variety of strategic variables to improve performance, which is one of the most critical areas of business management.

This relationship, theoretically expressed in the literature, has also been analysed in a number of case studies. Inkinen, Kianto and Vanhala (2015) have found that knowledge management practices have positive effect on organizations' innovation performance; Darroch (2005) suggests that firms with knowledge management skills use resources more effectively and have a more innovative and higher performance level than others; Tan and Wong (2015) have found that knowledge sources, knowledge management factors and knowledge management process have a direct and significant influence on the production performance; Palacios Marques and Garrigos Simon (2006) express that there is a positive and significant relationship between knowledge development, knowledge sharing and knowledge preservation and firm performance.

In the light of these explanations, the first hypothesis has been formed as follows:

**Hypothesis 1:** There is a significant and positive relationship between knowledge management practices and (a) operational performance and (b) financial performance.

The knowledge-based view argues that there should be positive relationships between members for the creation and transfer of knowledge. At this point, organizational social capital built on mutual relations within the organization is regarded as a vital asset to maximize organizational gains (Khodabakhshi & Abbasi, 2015: p. 56). In terms of organizations, social capital is seen as a prerequisite to transfer and share the significant knowledge (Daud & Wan Yusoff, 2010: p. 142). Social capital in an organization makes easier to capture, encode and transfer it. It also supports the knowledge management process because it makes collective activities more efficient by facilitating the change and transformation of sources into different combinations, contributing to organizational ability to create innovations and superseding formal contracts, incentives, and monitoring mechanisms among the members of the organization (Hoffman et al., 2005: p. 98). In this sense, Daud and Wan Yusoff (2010: p. 142) assert that organizations can produce new knowledge by encouraging applications of new ideas and knowledge sharing through social capital. They also suggest that, new knowledge leads to an increase in the value of organizations when it is combined with the tacit knowledge and used to create new products and services.

Nazem and Korpi (2014: p. 2363) indicate that the creation and development of a knowledge management system will strengthen and stabilize organizational social capital. A number of applied studies have revealed that there is a positive relationship between knowledge management practices and organizational social capital (Yli-Renko et al., 2001: p. 607, Daud & Wan Yusoff, 2010: p. 146, Damirchi et al., 2012: p. 51; Nazem & Korpi, 2014: p. 2363).

Based on the theoretical knowledge and applied research findings in the literature, the second hypothesis of the research is as follows:

**Hypothesis 2:** There is a significant and positive relationship between knowledge management practices and organizational social capital.

Organizational social capital supports teamwork among employees and enhances operating effectiveness. It facilitates access to resources through communication networks and the development of human capital (Hoffman, 2005: p. 98). Organizational social capital opens up ways to create and nurture a social relationship that shapes values, goals, and expectations of members in an organization. Thus, it contributes to mutual understanding and high level of cooperation among organization members, innovation process, organizational growth, competitive advantage and an increase in performance (Li et al., 2016: p. 132). Social capital embedded in the network of relationships with employees, customers, suppliers, partners and other stakeholders helps to reach organizational performance goals (Daud & Wan Yusoff, 2010: p. 143). Lee and others (2016) have found that there is a positive relationship between board members' external organizational social capital and growth; Steiner and Wang (2016) infer from their study that social capital has a positive and significant effect on firm performance; Javakhadze and others (2016) have found that organizational social capital positively affects organizations' future operating performance, equity return ratios, stock-based performance and risk-adjusted returns.

By means of these explanations, the third hypothesis of the research is as follows:

**Hypothesis 3:** There is a significant and positive relationship between organizational social capital and (a) operational performance and (b) financial performance.

Considering the information above and relationship between the variables, the last hypothesis is as follows:

**Hypothesis 4:** Organizational social capital mediates the relationship between knowledge management practices and (a) operational performance and (b) financial performance.

### 3. Methodology

#### 3.1. Population and Sample

The population of the research constitutes a total of 104 accommodation facilities with the certificate of tourism operation and tourism investment from the Ministry of Culture and Tourism in Nevsehir/Turkey. The data were collected by questionnaire technique. A full count method was used for the implementation of the questionnaire. A total of 208 questionnaires were delivered to accommodation facilities, two for each. Analyses were conducted on 160 questionnaires, completed and returned by the respondents; thereby, yielding a response rate of 76.9%.

#### 3.2. Measurement Variables

**Knowledge Management Practices:** Knowledge management practices were measured by Darroch's (2003) the knowledge management scale. This instrument with 16 items measures three dimensions of knowledge management practices; knowledge acquisition (6 items), knowledge dissemination (5 items) and responsiveness to knowledge (5 items).

**Organizational Social Capital:** Andrews's (2010) 6-item scale was used to determine the level of organizational social capital. The instrument measures three dimensions, structural, relational and cognitive dimension, two items for each.

**Organizational Performance:** Organizational performance has two dimensions, operational performance and financial performance. Operational performance was measured by the scale developed by Bowersox et al. (2000) and adapted by Wang and Wang (2012). For the measurement of financial performance, the scale developed by Inman et al. (2011) was used.

### 4. Results

#### 4.1. Findings Related to Participants and Business

Table 1 demonstrates demographic data of the participants.

**Table 1.** Demographic data of participants

Data	f	%	Data	f	%
<b>Gender</b>			<b>Marital Status</b>		
Male	137	85,6	Single	53	33,1
Female	23	14,4	Married	107	69,9
<b>Age</b>			<b>Job tenure</b>		
25 and below	9	5,6	5 and below	15	9,4
26-35	70	43,8	6-10	54	33,8
36-45	52	32,5	11-15	36	22,5
46-55	25	15,6	16-20	29	18,1
56 and over	4	2,5	21 and over	26	16,3
<b>Education</b>			<b>Employee number</b>		
Primary-High school	41	25,6	1-9	70	43,8
Associate	92	57,5	10-49	32	20,0
undergraduate	27	16,9	50-199	36	22,5
Master degree			200	22	13,4

#### 4.2. Descriptive Statistics and the Results of Correlations Analysis

Descriptive statistics, Cronbach's Alpha reliabilities and correlations for all of the study variables are presented in Table 2. Alpha reliability of all measure instruments is higher than (0.70). This reveals that the reliabilities of the scales are over the acceptable reliability limit of (0.60) in exploratory research (Hair et al., 1998: p. 118).

**Table 2.** Scale means, standard deviations, reliabilities, and correlations

Variable	Mean	SD.	1	2	3	4
1. KMP	3,84	0,48	(0,86)			
2. OSC	3,90	0,60	,679**	(0,82)		
3. OP	3,92	0,57	,576**	,615**	(0,80)	
4. FP	3,53	0,70	,459**	,406**	,435**	(0,82)

**Notes:** N=160. Correlation is significant at \*\* $p < 0.01$ , (two-tailed). Cronbach's Alpha reliabilities for observed variables are in parenthesis in the diagonal; KMP=Knowledge management practices, OSC=Organizational social capital, OP=Operational performance, FP=Financial Performance.

The results in Table 2 reveal that there are significant and positive correlations between variables. KMP and OSC ( $r=0,679$ ,  $p < 0,01$ ); KMP and OP ( $r=0,576$ ,  $p < 0,01$ ); KMP and FP ( $r=0,459$ ,  $p < 0,01$ ). Similarly, OSC is significantly and positively correlated with OP and FP, respectively, ( $r=0,615$ ,  $p < 0,01$ ); ( $r=0,406$   $p < 0,01$ ). So these results substantiate H1 (a) and (b), H2 and H3 (a) and (b).

#### 4.3. Regression Analysis Results

H4a and H4b posit that OSC will mediate the relationship between KMP and two outcome variables, OP and FP. To test these hypotheses, a four-step procedure is followed to test mediation proposed by Baron and Kenny (1986). They state that the following conditions should be satisfied to imply mediation. Firstly, the independent variable(s) must be significantly correlated with the mediator variable(s). The results presented in Table 2 show that KMP (independent variable) is significantly correlated with OSC (mediator variable). Thus, the first condition for mediation is satisfied. Secondly, the independent variable(s) must be significantly related to dependent variable(s). The regression analysis reveals that KMP is significantly related to the dependent variables, OP and FP (model 1 provided in Table 3 and Table 4). Hence, the second condition is met. The third condition postulates that the mediator variable(s) must be significantly correlated with dependent variable(s). OSC is significantly correlated with both outcome results, OP and FP. Thus the third condition for mediation is also met. The final condition for mediation specifies that when both the independent variable and mediator are incorporated in the regression model, the direct effect of the independent variable on the dependent variable should substantially reduce; indicating partial mediation or it should be eliminated,

demonstrating full mediation. To test this last condition, hierarchical multiple regression analysis is performed for both outcome variables.

The results of hierarchical multiple regression analysis, performed to show the mediating role of OSC on the relationship between KMP and OP, are provided in Table 3.

**Table 3.** Hierarchical regression equation testing hypothesis 4a

Model	Variables	R	R <sup>2</sup>	Adjusted R <sup>2</sup>	Beta	F	t	p
1	KMP	0,576	0,332	0,328	0,576	78,517	8,861	0,000
2	KMP				0,295		3,573	0,000
	OSC				0,414		5,022	0,000
		0,651	0,424	0,417		25,219		

**Dependent variable:** Operational performance (OP).

It is seen that the effect of KMP on OP is positive and significant ( $\beta=0,579$ ;  $p<0.001$ ) in Model 1. When OSC is added to the equation, it is found to be significant ( $\beta=0,414$ ;  $p<0.001$ ) but KMP also remains significant although the value of its regression coefficient decreases from ( $\beta=0,579$ ;  $p<0.001$ ) in Model 1 to ( $\beta=0,295$ ;  $p<0.001$ ) in Model 2. These results signify that OSC partially mediates the relationship between KMP and OP. Sobel test is performed to test these results. The results of Sobel test also signify the mediation ( $z=7.49$ ,  $p<.001$ ). Therefore, H4a is partially supported.

The results of hierarchical multiple regression analysis, performed to show the mediating role of OSC on the relationship between KMP and FP, are depicted in Table 4.

**Table 4.** Hierarchical regression equation testing hypothesis 4b

Model	Variables	R	R <sup>2</sup>	Adjusted R <sup>2</sup>	Beta	F	t	p
1	KMP	0,459	0,211	0,206	0,459	42,257	6,501	0,000
2	KMP				0,341		3,566	0,000
	OSC				0,175		1,826	<b>0,070</b>
		0,477	0,227	0,218		3,334		

**Dependent variable:** Financial performance (FP).

It is found that KMP significantly relates to FP ( $\beta=0,459$ ;  $p<0.001$ ) in Model 1. When OSC is added to the equation, KMP remains significant although the value of its regression coefficient reduces from ( $\beta=0,459$ ;  $p<0.001$ ) in Model 1 to ( $\beta=0,341$ ;  $p<0.001$ ) in Model 2. However, OSC is found to be insignificant ( $\beta=0,175$ ;  $p<0.07$ ). These results show that OSC does not significantly mediate the relationship between KMP and FP. So, H4b is rejected.

## 5. Discussion

Organizations are established and structured to accomplish various goals. There is a direct relationship between the level of goal achievement and organizational performance. A number of antecedents are required to realize organizational performance at the desired level. Knowledge management, internalization of environmental changes, creation of new knowledge and organizational social capital are seen among those antecedents. Organizational social capital plays an important role in the transfer of knowledge to organizational activities and operation. This study is conducted to test the mediating role of organizational social capital in the relationship between knowledge management practices and organizational performance. The sample of the study constitutes 160 employees from 104 accommodation facilities with the certificate of tourism operation and tourism investment from the Ministry of Culture and Tourism, in Nevsehir/Turkey.

As a result of the analyses, it has been determined that knowledge management practices have significant and positive effects on organizational social capital, operational performance and financial performance. This finding is in parallel with similar research findings in the literature (Andreeva & Kianto, 2012; Damirchi et al., 2012, Alegre et al., 2013, Ahmed et al., 2015). Similarly, they have found that organizational social capital significantly and positively effects operational performance and financial performance. There are many studies in the literature that reveal parallel findings with these results (Leana & Pil, 2006, Andrews, 2010). In addition, research findings have shown that

organizational social capital has a partial mediating effect between knowledge management practices and operational performance. The findings of the studies by Lee and Sukoco (2007) and Ladib (2015) coincide with these results. On the other hand, as a result of the analyses, it has been determined that the relationship between knowledge management practices and financial performance is not mediated by organizational social capital.

The knowledge-based view claims that level of acquisition, creation and usage of knowledge capacity lie at the basis of performance differences among organizations (Andreeva & Kianto, 2012: p. 620). The way to improve performance in this sense is to acquire, share and use the knowledge by integrating the gained knowledge into the value creation process and core competence strategies (Gholami et. al., 2013: p. 209; Omotayo, 2015: p. 11; Schilirò, 2007: p. 20). Thus, it can be stated that the findings are the expected results, considering the studies in the literature.

The findings of the study and the expressed theoretical knowledge are guiding to shape some strategies and practices for researchers. Within the scope of the study, it is required that some antecedents like knowledge management and organizational social capital are necessary to realize the organizational performance at the desired level, in other words to achieve organizational goals. In this sense, organizations should produce new knowledge and internalize environmental changes in a short period of time by means of effective knowledge management practices. In addition, organizational social capital should be invested in order to increase organizational synergies and work capacity and to expand customer portfolio.

In the following studies: a) Relationships between variables can be tested on different samples, b) relationships between variables can be tested in longitudinal studies, c) knowledge management, organizational social capital and organizational performance variables can be dealt with different predictors and outcomes, and d) what can be done to improve organizational social capital could be studied.

## 6. References

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