

Relationship between managers' self-knowledge and their tricks in managing conflicts in Khuzestan Gas Company

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Abstract: This research aims to study the relationship between self-knowledge and employing tricks to manage probable conflicts. The research population includes all 150 managers working in Khuzestan Gas Company and its affiliated units in 2014. The procedure of census was used to determine the research sample. The required data were gathered by two questionnaires: the Self-Compassion Scale (SCS) and questionnaire of conflict management styles (Putnam and Wilson). Data were then analyzed by confirmatory factor analysis, Pearson correlation coefficient, and regression analysis. Results show that the current state of self-knowledge and its different dimensions (personal self-knowledge, public self-knowledge and social self-knowledge) are in an average level. Additionally, tricks to manage conflicts in general and two strategies of not contrasting and not controlling are in relatively good situation. Solution-oriented strategies used by managers in Khuzestan Gas Company are also in an average state. Results revealed that there was no significant correlation between managers' self-knowledge and the strategy of not contrasting and not controlling. However, a significant correlation was observed between self-knowledge and solution-oriented strategies. In general, although there is a direct correlation between managers' self-knowledge and tricks to manage conflicts, this is not a significant correlation.

Key words: Managers' self-knowledge; Tricks to manage conflicts

1. Introduction

Organizations constitute the main pillar of society and management is a key factor for the growth, development and unproductivity of organizations. Managers have the task of directing their organizations toward the desired state. Accordingly, as a precious resource, human force can help managers fulfill their goals. In addition to knowing their own attributes, managers, thus, have to have a correct understanding of their employees and have good relationship with them. As such, the first step can be taken to form an effective relation with others is self-awareness and understanding our own capabilities. Self-knowledge is the prerequisite of effective social and interpersonal relations and plays an important role in empathy with other people. In management literature, "Self-Knowledge" is referred to as a prerequisite of mental health and the ability to know other people. Managers' understanding, perception and awareness help them improve and specialize in their public relations and be more productive. In order to identify their personal attitudes and weaknesses and strengths, they need help (Taremi et al., 1999). According to Maslow, in today's organizations, employees' self-knowledge needs are not sufficiently considered and this acts as an obstacle in the way of growing personality and self-knowledge. As a result, conflict

and inconsistency appear between individuals' mental need to self-knowledge in one hand and organizations' need to build up their efficiency on the other hand. Put it differently, one important issue in organizational management is facing organizational differences and conflicts that any managers have to allocate a substantial part of their time to solve them. Note, also, that unsolved conflicts progressively increase people's resistance and it will become much more difficult to solve them in subsequent phases. And if they are totally suppressed, they bring about aggressive reactions (Ahmadi, 2004). As subject of conflict management refers to facing distinctions and different tastes and the importance of self-knowledge in how to manage such confrontation has been considered in the subject literature, considering the importance of self-knowledge and its relation with strategies used to solve such conflicts (Keramati and Roshan, 2005; Neyestani and MonfarediRaz, 2009), the major issue is to study the correlation between managers' self-knowledge and their strategies in managing probable conflicts in Khuzestan Gas Company.

2. Research literature

2.1. Self-knowledge

Some pundits refer to self-knowledge as self-awareness. They define it as this fact that what perception a person has of him/her and based on

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such perception how he/she feels. Our self-awareness predicts our satisfaction from ourselves and our lives. Satisfaction seems to be a need that affects all our activities. Dissatisfaction warns people that they need a change. The most important and major part of this change is formed based on this self-knowledge (Ashrafi et al., 2014).

Self-knowledge is an ability to know ourselves, our weaknesses and strengths, our wants, our fears and disgusts. People with self-knowledge try to identify their feelings, know them, control them, recognize their weaknesses and strengths and reduce their weaknesses relying on their strengths (Brad et al., 2009).

According to Yung, with mutual relation with environment and others, human being reaches a perception of him/her which is called by psychologists as a self-knowledge. In other words, self-knowledge means self-awareness, understanding and identifying outside world and knowing ourselves in relation to outside world (Yung, 2001).

2.2. Self-knowledge dimensions

Self-knowledge or self-awareness consists of three components:

A. Public Self-Awareness: a general awareness of self as a social person and the same as others know him/her.

B. Personal Self-Awareness: incline to think over and consider thoughts, feelings and internal and personal insights.

C. Social Anxiety: describes an individual's concern and distress because of being among other people and tending to be alone (Scheier and Buss, 1975).

According to Keramati and Roshan (2005), self-knowledge dimensions include personal values, stylistics, aptitude to change and human relations. Personal values affect other aspects of behavior and have a major functional role in the formation of personality. Stylistics refers to the method of gathering and processing information. Aptitude to human relations connects to interaction with others.

2.3. Self-knowledge stages

In his research studies, Morin describes the stages of self-knowledge as follows:

-Unconsciousness: in this stage, the person is neutralized toward him/her and environment and does not have any response.

-Consciousness: in this stage, the person attends to the environment and process external stimuli.

-Self-awareness: in this stage, the person attends to his/her ego and processes his/her personal and public information.

-Meta-Self-Awareness: in this stage, self-awareness is maximized and the person can extend his/her prosperity in other personal and public skills (Murin, 2005).

2.4. Conflict management

Conflict is not necessarily a negative matter. If it is applied to personal intentions, it turns harmful and inefficient. However, it would be functional, if it is used in direction to organizational intentions and creating aptitudes. In other words, conflict management allows organizational conflicts to serve organizational objectives, reduce its non-functionality and increase its functional aspects (Jones et al., 2000). Conflict management is to fairly, logically and efficiently identify and manage conflicts (USDA, 2002). Generally, there are five methods to respond to conflicts which are called as conflict management styles and any person dominates over one of these styles (Hornang, 2002). These five styles can be determined over one diagram. The horizontal axis shows objectives, interests, and personal needs, and the vertical axis indicates others' objectives, interests and needs. By combining these two axes in different ways, different styles of managing conflicts would be created (Eckstein, 1998). These five styles have been included by management experts into three general tricks of contrasting, solution-orientation, and control including the following five styles:

1. Competition style: a style in which people look for their goals and interests regardless of others. It is a non-participatory and power-oriented style. This means that people impose any power seems to be appropriate for a particular situation.

2. Reconciliation style: this is the opposite point of competition. People overlook their interests and goals to help others fulfill their purposes and to meet their needs. The most important feature of this style is self-devotion and participatory.

3. Prevention style: when people neither follow their interests and goals nor others'. They mostly try to evade from conflicts, and delay or retreat them.

3. Cooperation Style: this is the opposing point of prevention style. Cooperation includes trying to work with other people to find a solution for fulfilling both sides' objectives. In other words, both sides firmly stand to achieve their interest. They want to cooperate with each other and also consider other side's interests. The main attitude of this style is that it is participatory.

4. Reconciliation style: reconciliation aims to find some acceptable solutions and approaches for both sides and relatively help them achieve their interests and goals. This style is placed between competition and reconciliation and it is relatively participatory. Here, both sides agree to overlook a part of their positions and offer a privilege to their rival and receive privilege in contrast (Hornang, 2002). An interesting point is that none of these styles are rejected and can be used in different situations. The delicate point of conflict management is the art of applying the appropriate style in an appropriate situation. On the other hand, as mentioned before, one of these styles is dominant in any person. According to Mazlo, if a hammer is the only tool you have, you tend to see any problem as a pin (Eckstein,

1998). If one style of conflict management is dominated, there would be many limitations. Therefore, they have to develop other styles as well. In fact, none of these styles is rejected and they can be used in any situation.

2.5. Triple tricks of conflict management

As said before, five styles have been included by experts in three general tricks:

A. Not contrasting: it is created by combining reconciliation and prevention styles. It is a state in which people try to avoid conflict.

B. Solution orientation: it is created by combining reconciliation and cooperation styles. It is a state in which both sides insist on profit and at the same

time want to cooperate and consider the other sides' utility.

C. Control: it only contains competition style. It is a state in which people try to reach more profit regardless of this fact that this may cause them to confront others (Keramati and Roshan, 2005).

3. Research hypotheses

3.1. Leading hypothesis

There is a positive and significant correlation between managers' self-knowledge and their conflict management tricks (in Khuzestan Gas Company).

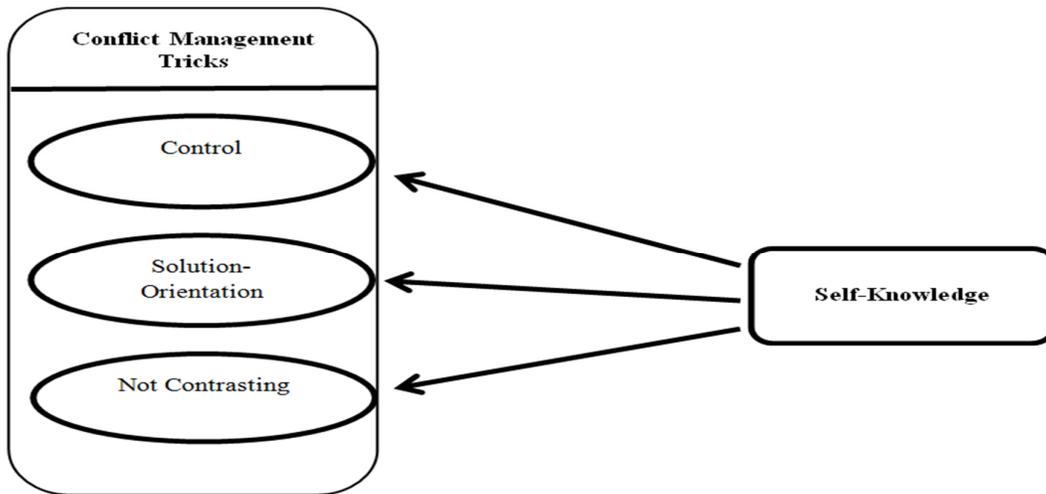


Fig. 1: Research Conceptual Model

3.2. Secondary hypotheses

1. There is a negative significant correlation between managers' self-knowledge and not contrasting trick (in Khuzestan Gas Company).

2. There is a positive significant correlation between managers' self-knowledge and solution-orientation trick (in Khuzestan Gas Company).

3. There is a negative significant correlation between managers' self-knowledge and controlling trick (in Khuzestan Gas Company).

4. Materials and methods

This is a practical and descriptive correlational research study with statistical population including all 150 managers working for Khuzestan Gas Company in 2014. All members of the statistical population were considered as the sample volume.

Here, to measure variables, the questionnaire of SCS by Scheier and Carver and the questionnaire of conflict management styles by Putnam and Wilson were used.

Self-knowledge scale consists of three sub-scales:

1. Personal self-awareness: focuses on internal and personal aspects.

2. Public self-awareness: aptitude to be informed of some aspects of self which others can understand it.

3. Social anxiety: tending to be easily anxious and uncomfortable in social situations.

The validity and reliability of research tool were verified by confirmatory factor analysis and Cronbach's alpha coefficient respectively. The reliability of self-knowledge questionnaire and conflict management tricks questions were calculated at 0.84 and 0.78. One sample Kolmogorov-Smirnov test was used to identify the research variables, confirmatory factor analysis was employed to study the validity of questionnaires and Pearson correlation coefficient was practiced to investigate the correlations of variables.

5. Data analysis

5.1. Leading hypothesis

H₀: There is no significant correlation between managers' self-knowledge and their conflict management tricks (in Khuzestan Gas Company).

H_a: There is a significant correlation between managers' self-knowledge and their conflict management tricks (in Khuzestan Gas Company).

Table 1: Correlation test results

Dependent Variable	Independent Variable	Correlation Coefficient	R	P
Conflict management tricks	Self-knowledge	Pearson	0.03	0.71

*Significance Level at 0.05

As table 1 shows, although there is a direct correlation between managers' self-knowledge and their conflict management tricks, this correlation is not significant ($p > 0.05$). Therefore, H_0 (i.e. there is no significant correlation between managers' self-knowledge and their conflict management tricks (in Khuzestan Gas Company) is confirmed.

5.2. First secondary hypothesis

H_0 : There is no significant correlation between managers' self-knowledge and not contrasting trick (in Khuzestan Gas Company).

H_a : There is a significant correlation between managers' self-knowledge and not contrasting trick (in Khuzestan Gas Company).

Before statistical analyses, the normality of the research variables was checked by One-Sample Kolmogorov-Smirnov Test (See table 2). Kolmogorov-Smirnov Test is exercised to measure the normality of the dependent variable distribution and model errors.

Table 2: Kolmogorov-Smirnov Test results

	Self-Knowledge	Not Contrasting	Solution-Orientation	Control	Conflict Management Strategy
Kolmogorov-Smirnov Test	0.76	0.76	0.88	0.83	1.66
sig	0.60	0.60	0.41	0.48	0.13

According to Table 2, the research variables are normal ($p > 0.05$). Thus, it is possible to examine the linear correlation between research variables using

Pearson correlation coefficient and multiple regressions.

Table 3: Correlation test results

Dependent Variable	Independent Variable	Correlation Coefficient	R	P
Not contrasting	Self-knowledge	Pearson	0.07	0.42

*Significance Level at 0.05

As Table 3 shows, there is no significant correlation between managers' self-knowledge and not contrasting trick ($p > 0.05$). Therefore, H_0 (i.e. there is no significant correlation between managers' self-knowledge and not contrasting trick (in Khuzestan Gas Company) is confirmed.

5.3. Second secondary hypothesis

H_0 : There is no significant correlation between managers' self-knowledge and solution-orientation trick (in Khuzestan Gas Company).

H_a : There is a significant correlation between managers' self-knowledge and solution-orientation trick (in Khuzestan Gas Company).

To see if a variable can predict the criterion variable, the regression analysis was used. In regression, subjects' scores in on or more predictive variables are applied to anticipate subjects' behavior in the criterion variable. Table 4 presents the correlation coefficient results.

Table 4: Correlation test results

Dependent Variable	Independent Variable	Correlation Coefficient	R	P
Solution-orientation	Self-knowledge	Pearson	0.23*	0.01

*Significance Level at 0.05

As Table 4 shows, there is a significant correlation between managers' self-knowledge and solution-orientation trick ($p < 0.05$). To study the

correlation of two variables more, two-variable regression analysis was used. Tables 5 and 6 present regression analysis results.

Table 5: two-variable regression analysis results

Model	Sum of Squares	Df	Ms	F	P	R	R ²	DW
Regression	3.82	4	3.82	6.63	0.01	0.23	0.05	1.81
Remnant	69.73	121	0.58					
Total	73.55	122						

Given Table 5, 0.05 from the variance of changes in solution-orientation variable is identifiable by self-knowledge variable ($R^2 = 0.05$). Findings of multiple regression analysis show that F is significant and the level of 0.05 ($F = 6.63, p < 0.05$). The significance of F test indicates that the predictor variable can anticipate the variance changes in solution-orientation strategy. Finally, Durbin-

Watson statistic results show that error independencies, difference between real values and values predicted by regression equation. If this statistic is placed between 1.5 and 2.5, the non-correlation of errors is accepted. This shows the independency of error phrases.

Table 6: Multiple regression coefficients

Model	B	SEB	Beta	t	P	VIF
Constants	2.32	0.35		6.61	0.000	
Self-knowledge	0.29	0.11	0.03	2.57	0.01	1

To analyze regression table results, we use Beta coefficient. Beta coefficient is a number between 0 and 1. The closer the Beta to one, the stronger the correlation between independent and dependent variables would be. If the coefficient is positive, the direction of the relation is straight. The opposite is also true. As observed in the above table, beta has been estimated for self-knowledge at 0.29. On the whole, considering correlation coefficient test results and regression analysis, H_0 (i.e. there is no significant correlation between managers' self-knowledge and

solution-orientation trick (in Khuzestan Gas Company) is rejected.

5.4. Third secondary hypothesis

H_0 : There is no significant correlation between managers' self-knowledge and controlling trick (in Khuzestan Gas Company).

H_a : There is a significant correlation between managers' self-knowledge and controlling trick (in Khuzestan Gas Company).

Table 7: Correlation test results

Dependent Variable	Independent Variable	Correlation Coefficient	r	P
Solution-orientation	Self-knowledge	Pearson	0.03*	0.71

*Significance Level at 0.05

As table 7 shows, there is no significant correlation between managers' self-knowledge and controlling trick ($p < 0.05$). Thus, H_0 (i.e. there is no significant correlation between managers' self-knowledge and controlling trick (in Khuzestan Gas Company) is accepted.

6. Results and discussion

6.1. Leading hypothesis

The leading hypothesis, i.e. there is a significant correlation between self-knowledge and conflict management tricks, was rejected, while previous research studies have confirmed a significant correlation between these two variables. Such contrasts seem to be as a result of the dependency of the research variables on time, cultural conditions and environmental factors. In other words, the leading hypothesis is rejected because it may be affected by the conditions and attributes of the society and the studied sample.

6.2. First secondary hypothesis

The analysis results of the first secondary hypothesis show that there is no significant correlation between managers' self-knowledge and non-contrasting trick.

6.3. Second secondary hypothesis

The analysis results of the second secondary hypothesis show that there is no significant correlation between managers' self-knowledge and solution-orientation trick. In other words, the higher the managers' self-knowledge is, the more they use the solution oriented strategy. Considering the theoretical and empirical evidences on this, using solution orientation trick improves personal and organizational performances. As self-knowledge is one the most important factors of facilitating personal, organizational and social life, trying to build it up can improve personal efficiency and organizational performance. In this regard, personal efforts and organizational supports can help managers to raise their self-knowledge. On the other hand, solution orientation is a chance for both sides to insist on their interests and at the same time consider other side's interest and tend to cooperate. Therefore, regarding the correlation between self-knowledge and solution-orientation, we can improve this strategy and affect organizational and personal performance. This finding agrees with a part of research done by Neyestani and MonfarediRaz (2009) and a part of research carried out by Keramati and Roshan (2005).

6.4. Third secondary hypothesis

The analysis results of the second secondary hypothesis show that there is no significant correlation between managers' self-knowledge and controlling trick. The main question, that was

referred to before, investigate the correlation between managers' self-knowledge and their conflict management tricks. Results disclose that this correlation is not significant. This finding somehow does not agree with results found by Neyestani and MonfarediRaz (2009) in a research study titled "an investigation on the correlation between principals' self-knowledge and their conflict management tricks in Bojnurd high schools". Results revealed that there was a significant correlation between principals' self-knowledge and their conflict management tricks at the significance level of 0.99. Such correlation was also observed between principals' self-knowledge and each of their cooperation, reconciliation, competition, and prevention styles at the significance level of 0.95. They stated that those principals using cooperation, reconciliation and settlement styles have higher self-knowledge. Our research results do not agree with results found by Keramati and Roshan (2005) in a research study titled "correlation between managers' self-knowledge and their conflict management tricks". According to their findings, there is a significant correlation between managers' self-knowledge and their solution-orientation trick, while such correlation does not exist between managers' self-knowledge and not contrasting and controlling tricks. Such inconsistency exists also with findings reached by Neyestani and MonfarediRaz (2009) and Keramati and Roshan (2005).

7. Suggestions

1. According to this research results, organizations and managers are recommended to specifically consider solution orientation. As said before, this trick is more effective than others in improving individual and organizational performance.

2. Research results confirm the significant correlation between self-knowledge and solution-orientation strategy. Focusing on this trick can increase individuals' engagement and develop some aspects of self-knowledge. This means that solution-orientation can affect more than other tricks on the growth of self-knowledge.

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