

## **The Role of Informal Learning and Organizational Learning Capacity in Learning Motivation and Professional Ethics of Faculty Members in the Eastern Azerbaijan Universities**

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Informal learning, organizational learning capacity, learning motivation, professional ethics.

### **Abstract**

**Purpose:** This study aimed to examine the role of informal learning and the organizational learning capacity in learning motivation and professional ethics of faculty members in the Eastern Azerbaijan 's Universities.

**Methodology:** It used survey approach. Statistical population included 2500 individuals of faculty members in Eastern Azerbaijan from which 400 people were selected using random sampling. Data was collected using four standard questionnaires. To analyze data and examine the relationships of the variables, correlation method and stepwise regression were used.

**Findings:** Results showed a positive and significant correlation between informal learning variables and learning motivation and professional ethics. Also, a positive and significant correlation was found between organizational learning capacity, learning motivation, and professional ethics. Maximum correlation coefficient belonged to informal learning and learning motivation ( $r=0.73$ ). Based on the findings, the regression model for predicting learning motivation and professional ethics through informal learning and learning capacity is significant.

**Conclusion:** Regarding the findings, it can be concluded that any increase in informal learning and organizational learning capacity is associated with increased academic motivation and professional ethics; hence, attention to informal learning and learning capacity in East Azarbaijan universities It can be of great importance in increasing the learning motivation and professional ethics of the faculty members of the universities of East Azarbaijan.

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## Introduction

Motivation is the main concern of most employees and managers. Motivation's issue is not limited to the education department; but, it is important in psychology, management, health, and other social-economic sections. In fact, the role of education systems in training interested, responsible, researcher, and efficient human forces for social organizations and training good citizens for the society has highlighted the role of motivation in those systems. Thus, for the effective and successful learning, organizations need motivated, interested, and active employers. One of pioneer and effective organizations in all countries with a dynamic economy is university. Undoubtedly, faculty members make the main body of every university and educational and research centers. They are certainly more important than the programs, activities, equipment, and materials in the system.

Universities need motivated teachers as an educational component to be effective in educating students and promoting community development. Existence of tension and the lack of job satisfaction among faculty members can threaten physical and mental health and quality of life, impeding the achievement of individual and social development goals. The lack of learning motivation has an impact on the quantity and quality of work, raising professional ethical problems in this vital job for the promotion of human societies. Investigating the factors influencing the learning motivation and studying the professional ethics of faculty members is one of the necessities that can be helpful in increasing job productivity and successful planning in creating a dynamic environment at university. According to the studies, learning has an effect on motivation (Seif, 2015). Meanwhile, awareness of the needs of faculty members is useful in predicting and interpreting their behaviors, one imperative that should not be ignored. The proper understanding and analysis of the learning motivation has a significant effect on the learning outcomes of the learning activities (Torrence, 1993). Motivation empowers the learner to achieve the goals, providing the ability to do the necessary jobs under the specific conditions (Akbash and Kan, 2007). Learning motivation is defined as the particular desire of a learner to learn the content of a defined plan (Noe and Schmitt, 1986). It's about how much the learner learns during learning events (Noe and Wilk, 1993). The learning motivation of most human beings is cognitively generated and their self-efficacy ideas determine which challenging goals individuals should select, how much effort they should spend, and how much endurance they should show in facing the problem (Bandura, 1991).

Ethics in the organization has emerged as a scientific concept in the West since the second half of the twentieth century (Svensson and Wood, 2004). At the individual and organizational levels, the attention of various researchers has been attracted to it over the past four decades and it is considered as a major challenge for various organizations around the world (Cardy and Selvarajan, 2006). Different definitions of ethics have been suggested. The English Encyclopedia of Chambers considers ethics to be "a collection of spirituality" and "behavioral rules." Researchers believe that issues such as fairness, decision making on what is right or wrong, the identification of operations and regulations that affirm responsible behavior between individuals and groups are all in the morality domain (Orme and Ashton, 2003). Richard Daft considers ethics to be the guiding moral principle and values that govern individual or collective behavior as true or false (Mirkamali, 2004). According to the ethical researchers, it means the use and evaluation of the values and ethical positions defined inside and outside the organization (Ismaili and Abbasi, 2013). Everything done at workplace is based on some kind of ethical beliefs. In fact, organizational decisions are interwoven with morality (Karamdokht, 2012). Therefore, the elaboration and development of a common set of ethics in the organization puts individuals together and helps creating an organizational culture that embraces ethics and reinforces positive organizational behaviors in the organization (Karamdokht, 2012). Specifically, considering professional ethics at universities has become a necessity (Ghasemzadeh et al., 2017). Universities are among public organizations which act as a scientific and cultural institution. Therefore, their staffs are expected to act morally; since university is a good context to develop human behaviors and express moral values and principals, faculty members can play effective roles in suggesting proper professional behaviors. In the past two decades, systematic studies have been growingly conducted on the subjects of professional ethics

(Ghasemzadeh et al., 2017). So that professional ethics can be investigated by the researchers and scholars from different aspects (Karimi et al., 2011). On the other hand, nowadays, the vital path of cognition and adoption is increasingly changing (Najafi et al., 2013). Broad organizational environments have made organizations look for the best strategies and job trends in order to adapt to changes in the environment; in this regard, one of the most important measures to deal with such changes is to pay attention to a set of factors known as continuous and informal learning in the workplace, thereby enhancing competitive abilities and rapid action for the staff and organization (Slater, 2004; cited in Zeraatkar, 2016). Informal learning which is relatively new refers to the continuous learning process across the lifetime of the man, simultaneously occurring in various places and times (Nadi et al., 2014). Lohman (2006) identified the factors influencing informal learning in the form of environmental factors such as physical loss and access to others, undesirable organizational culture, and etc. and individual factors such as initiative, love of learning, interest in the profession, curiosity, and etc. The role of learning is evident in every area of human life (Atkinson et al., translation by Baraheni, 2007). Perhaps, it can be said that one of the most important aspects of human life is learning.

Human being is made of habits, habits are the results of learning, and learning is a basic necessity in human life. In other words, a human being is the product of his own learnings (Karimi, 2011).

Marquardt (2007) believes that learning ability, discovering changes, and implementing them is an important feature that is crucial for the excellence in today's changing world. According to many scholars, learning occurs in both formal and informal ways. For example, Hager (1998) views the distinctions between informal learning from formal learning based on unplanned, unorganized, and non-structured concepts. Informal learning is a collection of employees' conscious activities at work as a result of which their knowledge and professional skills grow (Cofer, 2000; Lohman, 2000) and the freedom to create changes is obtained (Mariotti, 1999; Cseh, 1998). This type of learning is a personal and interpersonal process that can be used to help team-making in education. It can be improved by recognizing and using informal learning strategies (Marsick and Watkins, 1999, cited in Karshki, 2010). On the other hand, organizational learning capacity goes beyond organizational learning, suggesting the organization's capacity to develop its abilities to acquire new information and transform that information into knowledge (Skerlavaj et al., 2007). Organizational learning capacity implies the capacity for creating and generalizing ideas to effectively address different organizational boundaries through special management initiatives and practices (Schales, 2000). Kreitner describes organizational learning capacity as a set of qualities that distinguishes the organization from its competitors as a specific knowledge of using technological skills and processes, making it suitable for adapting to its environment. In his view, learning capacity for the organization is its fuel; as the gasoline drives the car, the learning capacity equips the organization to predict internal and external changes and respond them (Kreitner and Angel, 2001; cited in Haghani, 2016). Organizational learning capacity develops the ability and capacity of individuals to access new information and transform this information into knowledge; this is vital for organizational activities by which organizations can maintain their competitive advantages. As universities increase their learning capacity, they create better organizational strategies and equip themselves to anticipate internal and external changes, respond them, and preserve their competitive advantages. Mirheidari et al. (2012) found a positive and significant relationship between learning and work enthusiasm; the higher the level of learning, the higher the motivation and satisfaction of the job (Hasani, 2015). Also, Landry et al. (2001) argue that learning is a fundamental factor for innovation and creativity and consequently motivation. Studies have shown that among various (personal and environmental) factors that affect formal and informal learning the role of motivation is significant and more important (Torrence, 1993; Tella, 2007; Akbas and Kan, 2007). Also, according to prior studies, learning has an effect on motivation (Seif, 2015). On the other hand, based on Newman's general model, there is a positive and significant relationship between ethical indicators and sharing knowledge and learning. In his research, Barzgar (2006) reported a positive and significant relationship between different types of formal and informal learning with ethics in the workplace.

Petermouri (2004) showed a close relationship between organizational learning capacity and learning in the organization (cited in Haghani, 2016). Ghasemzadeh et al. (1395) showed that professional ethics plays a mediating role between intellectual capital, organizational learning, and knowledge sharing. Jalalian (2014) showed that organizational learning is the predictor of the employee's job (cited in Kateb, 2017). But in general, according to the literature review in the study, no internal or foreign research has been conducted on the role of informal learning and organizational learning capacity in learning motivation and professional ethics among faculty members. Therefore, for filling this gap, the aim of this study is to investigate the relationship between informal learning and organizational learning capacity in learning motivation and professional ethics of faculty members of East Azerbaijan universities to predict their learning motivation and professional ethics through informal learning and organizational learning capacity. Thus, the main question of the research is whether there is a relationship between informal learning and organizational learning capacity with learning motivation and professional ethics.

## Methodology

Since the purpose of this study was examining the role of informal learning and organizational learning capacity in learning motivation and professional ethics of faculty members in East Azerbaijan universities, this study describes their correlation. In the analytical model of the study, informal learning and organizational learning capacity were independent variables; while, learning motivation and professional ethics were dependent variables. The statistical population included all faculty members of universities of East Azerbaijan Province in the academic year of 2017-2018 ( $n=2500$ ). According to the population and the existence of different universities in the province, the sample size was considered to be 400 people. About Tabriz, Sahand, and Shahid Madani universities, simple random sampling method and for Payam-e-Nour, Azad, and Comprehensive Academic Universities, one-step cluster sampling was used due to their widespread population of the study. From 53 centers, 16 centers were randomly selected in which the questionnaires were distributed. In the second step, cluster sampling was used. To gather data, the following standard questionnaires were implemented:

*Informal Learning Questionnaire:* To measure informal learning, the standard questionnaire of Lohman (2005) with 8 questions was used with a 5-point Likert scale (never = 1, rarely = 2, sometimes = 3, often = 4, and always = 5). The validity of the questionnaire was confirmed by two panels of experts including educational and training researchers and a field survey (Choi, 2009) and with a Cronbach's Alpha of 0.63, its consistency was confirmed in previous studies of Lohman (2005) (Choi, 2009). In this research, the opinions of the supervisor and assistant professors were used to ensure its content validity. The construction validity of it was also verified by the CFA method.

*Learning Motivation Questionnaire:* To measure learning motivation, the standard questionnaire of Tharenou (2001) with 7 questions was used based on a 5-point Likert scale (capacity disagree = 1, disagree = 2, no idea = 3, agree = 4 and capacity agree = 5). This scale was originally developed by Noe and Schmitt (1986) which included 17 items with a Cronbach Alpha of 0.81. Then, Tharenou (2001) identified the main components of this variable in 7 items by performing a factor analysis with a Cronbach Alpha of 0.81. Used scales in this questionnaire tended to evaluate people's willingness to learn educational and optimization programs. Its content validity and consistency with the Cronbach Alpha of 0.82 in Tharenou (2001), 0.81 in Noe and Schmitt (1986) and 0.81 in Choi (2009) was confirmed. In this research, to ensure content validity, the measurement tool was approved by the expert university professors. The construct validity of the questionnaire was also measured by CFA method.

*Organizational Learning Capacity Questionnaire:* Organizational Learning Capacity Questionnaire consisted of 12 questions that were prepared by Nikolova et al. (2014) on the basis of a 5-point Likert scale (totally disagreed = 1, totally agreed = 5) (Nikolova et al., 2014). The validity and consistency of the present questionnaire were already confirmed by Ghasemzadeh et al. (2016) with Cronbach Alpha of 0.83.

*Professional Ethics Questionnaire:* To measure professional ethics, the questionnaire of Moghimi and Ramazan (2012) including 26 questions was used with a 5-point Likert scale (totally disagreed= 1, totally disagreed = 5). According to previous studies, Cronbach Alpha of Professional Ethics Questionnaire was calculated to be 0.80 (Ghasemzadeh et al. 2014). Cronbach Alpha for this questionnaire was 0.88 in this study.

Cronbach Alpha was the used measure for consistency evaluation. Consistency scores for all the scales were high: The consistency of the Informal Learning Questionnaire was 0.77; it was 0.87 for Learning Motivation Questionnaire, 0.82 for Organizational Learning Capacity, and 0.89 for Professional Ethics Questionnaire.

## Findings

Table 1 shows descriptive data of the variables. According to this table, the values of mean statistics and standard deviation indicate a good frequency of the data.

**Table 1.** Mean and standard deviations of the studied variables

Professional ethics	Learning motivation	Organizational learning capacity	Informal learning	Indicators
115.35	26.84	36.18	30.71	Mean
20.42	5.50	10.73	5.66	Standard deviation

**Table 2.** Correlation matrix between research variables

4	3	2	1	Variable	Number
			1	Informal learning	1
		1	**0.52	Organizational learning capacity	2
	1	**0.29	**0.73	Learning motivation	3
1	**0.38	**0.52	**0.45	Professional ethics	4

Correlation between research variables is presented in Table (2). As seen in the table, there is a positive and significant relationship between informal learning variables with learning motivation and professional ethics. Meanwhile, there is a positive and significant relationship between organizational learning capacity with learning motivation and professional ethics. The maximum correlation coefficient between informal learning with learning motivation is  $r = 0.73$ . Before analyzing the regression, normality, linearity, equal variance and residue independence were tested and verified.

**Table 3.** Results of stepwise regression analysis for the prediction of learning motivation from informal learning

Sig	t	R	R2	F	B	Variable
0.000	19.85	0.73	0.53	394.17	0.71	Informal learning

The analyses showed that the F-value was 394.17 and statistically significant ( $P \leq 0.01$ ). Therefore, the regression model for predicting learning motivation based on informal learning was statistically significant. Also, the analysis of this hypothesis showed that regression coefficients were statistically significant for explaining the role of informal learning in predicting learning motivation ( $P \leq 0.01$ ).

**Table 4.** The results of stepwise regression analysis for predicting professional ethics from organizational learning capacity and informal learning

Sig	t	R	R2	F	B	Variable
0.001	8.40	0.52	0.27	86.89	0.77	Organizational learning capacity
0.001	5.80	0.58	0.34		1.01	Informal learning

Based on the analyses in the first stage, with the entry of organizational learning capacity variable into the equation, its correlation coefficient ( $R^2$ ) is 0.27. That is, the organizational learning capacity variable explained 27 percent of the variance of professional ethics. In the second stage, after the informal learning variable entered,  $R^2$  increased to 34.4. In other words, in the second stage, the variables of learning capacity and informal learning were able to explain 34% of the variance of professional ethics. According to the results, the second model was selected as the final model with higher explanatory power ( $R^2 = 0.34$ ). Based on the results, the F-value was 86.89 and statistically significant ( $P \leq 0.01$ ). Therefore, the second regression model for predicting professional ethics based on informal learning and learning capacity was statistically significant. Finally, the results showed that regression coefficients were statistically significant ( $P \leq 0.01$ ) for explaining the contribution of each of the variables of organizational learning capacity and informal learning in predicting professional ethics. Also, according to the standard regression coefficients, the organizational learning capacity variable with the standard beta of 0.41 is more effective in the prediction of professional ethics.

### Conclusion

The results showed that there is a positive and significant relationship between informal learning and learning motivation among faculty members of East Azerbaijan universities. Results of this research are consistent with Zeidi et al. (2018), Kateb (2017), Hasani (2015) and Sadat Marashian and Safarzadeh (2014). Learning can also enhance the quality of organizational decision-makings. Landry et al. (2001) also argue that learning for creativity and consequently motivation is a fundamental factor. According to the findings of this research, in the first place of recruiting manpower, universities in East Azerbaijan should survey the needs and ideas of faculty members to learn about their skills and expertise and their job needs and obstacles. By this, developing necessary plans for meeting job needs and improving job performance of the faculty members becomes possible. In this case, it is possible to expand the faculty members' informal learning to improve their learning motivation at the university. According to the results, there was a positive and significant relationship between informal learning and professional ethics among faculty members of East Azerbaijan universities. There was no similar study on this issue; however, this result is indirectly consistent with Ghasemzadeh et al. (2017), Mokhtari and Shafizadeh (2016), and Barzegar (2005).

Results showed a positive and significant relationship between organizational learning capacity and learning motivation in the faculty members of East Azerbaijan universities. It means that the development and improvement of organizational learning capacity in East Azerbaijan universities has an impact on the development and realization of learning motivation. This finding is consistent with Habibi Badr Abadi (2013), Seyed Naghavi et al. (2013), and Ghasemzadeh (2013) shows a significant correlation. Petermouri (2004) showed a close relationship between organizational learning and learning in the organization (cited in Haghani, 2016). Organizational learning capacity or interorganizational processes to maintain or improve the organization's performance are based on experiences. In other words, organizational learning is the collective process of acquisition and the creation of merits which will change the way of managing variables and transform the conditions (Akab, 2003). Based on the above-mentioned points, it can be said that the ability to learn is the ability of the organization to utilize managerial initiatives structure and processes properly for which learning process and motivation is facilitating.

According to the analyses, there was a positive and significant relationship between organizational learning capacity and professional ethics among faculty members of East Azerbaijan universities. This result is indirectly consistent with the results of Ghasemzadeh et al. (2017). They showed that professional ethics is the mediator between intellectual capital, organizational learning and knowledge sharing.

Analyses showed that the prediction of learning motivation based on informal learning and learning capacity is statistically significant. The results of this study are in line with Haghani (1394), Jalalian (2014), Foroozeshnia (2013), Kaveh (2011), Gardner and Lambert (1972), Warschauer (1996) and Seyed Javadin (2003). Reviewing cognitive theories also confirms this result. They show that motivational strategies are related to the learning process and these strategies contribute to the learning enhancement (Ashouri et al., 2012). On the other hand, Seyed Javadin (2003) stated that increasing the efficiency of education and learning depends on the degree to which learning motivation develops in them; as many organizations become wider and more diverse, the problems and the importance of motivating learning in the workforce are added.

The analyses showed that the prediction of professional ethics based on informal learning and learning capacity is statistically significant. This result agrees with the results of Barzegar (2005) and Ghasemzadeh et al. (2017). This is true since the increasing complexity of the organizations and the increase in the number of unethical and illegal work in work environments has made it necessary for managers to create and maintain ethical professionalism in all organizations, especially attention to the professional ethics in the academic circles has become a requirement of the educational system. The universities are among the governmental organizations that act as a cultural and scientific environment. Therefore, it is expected that their employees would be away from misdeeds. Therefore, the university can take effective steps by creating a suitable context and developing a proper learning capacity for the formation of human behaviors and expressing ethics and moral values.

This research had some limitations that can be mentioned. The statistical population of this research includes the faculty members of East Azerbaijan universities. Therefore, it is necessary to be cautious in generalizing the results to other faculty members of other universities. In this research, other factors such as social, cultural, and financial indicators were not controlled. The lack of control over all unwanted variables and the lack of access to broad theoretical bases were other limitations. Also, one of the research constraints was the large number of available information collection and the time shortage of the faculty members and their professional spread which can affect research results. Despite these limitations, the study has opened up a new and excellent field of study. In this regard, some suggestions can be identified in the context of this article for future research. The following suggestions can add to the richness of further research in this field.

In order to provide a comprehensive study, it is suggested to obtain more empirical evidences and future researchers in the field and in the follow-up of the present study should compare the achieved results. More research should be done on the relationship between informal learning and organizational learning capacity with these variables using other research tools. Also, examining the role of informal learning and instructions in organizational learning and its impact on the creation and improvement of faculty members' job performance, the ways to foster the learning motivation of academic members for informal learning in the workplace, the strategies for increasing organizational learning capacity of the faculty members and their role in their participation and interaction in informal learning, bilateral and interactive study of each research variable, especially informal learning, and the influencing factors in reducing the learning motivation of faculty members should be considered. In addition, it is suggested that different types of moderating and mediating variables in the relationship of informal learning and organizational learning capacity with learning motivation and professional ethics are considered.

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