Effect of Altruism on Organizational Learning Capability with the Mediating Role of Communication Conflict and Organizational Trust

(Case Study: Staff of Red Crescent Provincial Branches of Gilan and Mazandaran)

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Original Article

Abstract

INTRODUCTION: A critical importance has been attached to altruism and organizational learning capability in the improvement of organizational performance. In light of this significance, the present study investigated the effect of altruism on organizational learning capability with the mediating role of communication conflict and organizational trust in Red Crescent provincial branches of Gilan and Mazandaran.

METHODS: This practical study was conducted based on a descriptive-correlational design. The statistical population included 107 managers, deputies, and heads of departments who were selected by convenience sampling method. Data collection tools included standard altruistic questionnaires developed by Podsakoff, MacKenzie, Moorman, and Fetter (1990) Podskov, McKinsey, Morman and Fetter (1990), conflict scale by Cox(1998), organizational learning ability by Chiva, Alegre, and Lapiedra (2007), and Organizational Trust Inventory (OTI) scale developed by Nyhan and Marlow (1997) consisting of 28 items. Moreover, the reliability coefficient for all variables is above α = 0.7.

FINDINGS: Based on the results, organizational learning is enhanced by an increase in organizational trust, and organizational trust plays a mediating role between learning and organizational altruism. Communication conflict in organizations reduces altruism and organizational learning capability. On the contrary, high altruism and trust among employees will positively affect organizational learning capability and communication conflict. In other words, it increases organizational learning ability and decreases conflict among employees.

CONCLUSION: Today, organizations are facing fundamental issues, including altruism, trust, organizational learning capability, and communication conflict. As evidenced in the current study, it can be concluded that organizational learning capability is enhanced by an increase in altruism and organizational trust. Furthermore, considerable efforts are required to reduce the effects of communication conflict through ongoing training and team building to increase altruistic behaviors and encourage staff.

Keywords: Altruism; Organizational Learning Capability; Communication Conflict; Organizational Trust.

Introduction

Today, fast and better learning is recognized as one of the important sources of power and the key to the survival of organizations relative to other competitors. The increasing complexity and speed of environmental change have elevated environmental uncertainty in organizations. As a result, organizations need extensive knowledge and awareness of

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environmental factors to adapt themselves to environmental changes and developments.

In this regard, increasing environmental changes and developments, such as increasing technological development and competition intensity, have led organizations to adapt to their environment to maintain, survive, and develop (1). In recent years, the concept of organizational learning capability has gained special importance. The need for innovation, current complexities, and rapidly changing environmental competition gave rise to the development of this concept (2, 3).

This competitive environment forces organizations to learn. Learning is the main, key, indispensable requirement of any organization that wants to survive in the new economic world (4). Experts have defined organizational learning in a myriad of ways. However, behavior change has been considered the most fundamental element of learning in all of these definitions. Argyris and Schon (1978) defined organizational learning as the detection and correction of error.

In another definition, organizational learning has been defined as the process of improving organizational tasks and practices through better knowledge and more effective cognition (5). Chiva and Alegre (2008) also defined organizational learning as a key process through which the organizations learn. They added that this learning refers to any change in organizational models that leads to the improvement or maintenance of organizational performance (6). Lahteenmaki et al. (2001) referred to the clarity of purpose and mission, leadership commitment and empowerment, as well as knowledge transfer and integration, as the three main components of organizational learning (7). In another conceptualization, the dimensions of organizational learning include the shared perspective, organizational culture, team learning and teamwork, knowledge sharing, systems thinking, Participative leadership, and employees' competency development.

Organizational learning capability facilitates managerial features and the organizational learning process and allows an organization to learn (8). It is the key element to successful competition in a global market (9). Organizations that are able to learn have a better chance of feeling, acting, adapting, and surviving in this competitive and dynamic environment. Previous studies on organizational learning have demonstrated that some leadership styles, such as transformational, spiritual, or credible leadership positively affect organizational learning (2). All of these leaders share an altruistic behavior, and motivation as an essential feature common to all of these leaderships is indicative of real interest and attention toward people (10). In addition, some studies have indicated that altruistic behaviors in organizations can help generate positive expectations of the other party's intentions and behavior. Conflict is a natural and normal part of life and a reality that human beings have been familiar with throughout history.

Mary Parker Follett was one of the first to address the issue of conflict. She argued that conflict by its very nature is not necessarily a negative issue that could disrupt management. Conflict is inevitable arising from the diversity of opinions and goals, and it must be managed and minimized. The ability to control conflict is undoubtedly one of the most essential skills people should possess. Conflict is provoked by pursuing inconsistent and contradictory goals that lead to the loss of resources and other objectives.

On the other hand, the results of some studies introduce conflict as a communication process since it occurs when people engage in communication practices that become interactive and important for both parties involved. The conflict between individuals or groups will not inherently exist unless some kind of connection is established. Individual conflict is one of the major factors that lead to talent waste, as well as group and organizational conflict (11).

Trust is another important variable and issues in human behavior and relationships and affecting employees' sense of trust in the manager and the organization, organizational life and behavior, as well as the relationship between employees and the organization. The concept of trust is rooted in Aristotle's literature; therefore, there is little agreement on what trust is and how it can be achieved in the workplace.

Milligan (2005) considers trust to be an important concept in organizations. In the aforementioned study, it was found that work environments with high trust lead to increased teamwork, reduced conflicts, and improved performance and effectiveness of organizations (12) (13). According to Huber (2013), the philosophy of staff development is based on the

premise that human resource development fosters organizational culture (14).

In organizations with low systemic trust, information sharing is less accurate and low trust among the members of a working group often leads to ultimate failure. A low level of trust causes employees to divert the flow of information in the organization. Accordingly, suspicion and distrust among employees are aroused, open and honest communication in the organization is lost, and the quality of organizational decisions is lowered (11). Given the importance of organizational trust, studies conducted in Iran point to a breach of trust among government employees (15). Trust is one of the social assets that creates and maintains unity in organizations fostering employee trust in the institutions and organizations where they work. Moreover, trust is a prerequisite for organizational learning and performs a peculiar role in today's global economy. Trust simultaneously facilitates organizational learning and enables organizations to use learning for competitive advantage.

Today, competitive advantage in organizations that promote a culture of learning is recognized by a high level of trust. In this regard, the higher levels of trust result in much greater learning, creativity, innovation, and competitiveness. In a similar vein, in their study, Farhang et al. (2010), pointed to a significant relationship between the dimensions of trust and organizational learning. Milligan also demonstrated that high-trust environments lead to increased teamwork, reduced conflict in the organization, and improved leadership performance and effectiveness (12).

Therefore, distrust is one of the issues that cause unmotivated and indifferent employees and slows down the implementation of programs (16). According to Nadi, Gol Shirazi, and Farah Gol (2015), success in the competitive world of organizations requires the ability to develop relationships based on trust. Organizations and employees need to be both trustworthy and trust each other (17).

In their study (2008), Ayoko and Peckerty found that trust in organizations is effective in increasing productivity. They also defined conflict as a difference in the desires and opinions of both parties and proved that open connection, along with increased trust, has a positive effect on the reduction of conflict. The innovation of their study lied in the fact that they

detached from traditional methods in better recognition of the impact of conflict on employee trust by distinguishing between the types of conflict (e.g., task, relationship, process) and characteristics of conflict (e.g., intensity and duration of conflict) (18).

Dirkes et al. (2002) conducted a study on trust in organizational managers and found a close relationship between managerial trust and organizational commitment. They also concluded that trust in the supervisor brings about job consequences, such as participation in extra-role behaviors. Nevertheless, trust in leaders and senior managers results in organizational consequences, such as organizational commitment (19).

Committed employees work passionately towards achieving organizational goals and are more likely to trust the organization's leaders and senior managers (20). Along the same lines, Farhang et al. (2011) studied the dimensions of organizational learning and its effects on employee development. The results of the mentioned study denoted that staff development is significantly correlated with organizational learning and organizational trust. Moreover, a significant and direct relationship was observed between organizational learning and organizational trust (15).

Biggiero and Sevi (2008) studied the dimensions and aspects of organizational trust and its effects on the conditions of organizations (21). They found that two factors are quite effective in building inter-organizational trust: 1) the reputation of the company, and 2) the experience of previous exchanges and transactions. They added that most organizations determine the level of their inter-organizational trust by reviewing the organization's previous records and experiences with other companies (21).

In a study performed by Kakemam et al. (2015), it was found that organizational learning capability improves employee performance and is positively related to their satisfaction (22). A group of qualified and efficient staff is dispensable to achieve the goals of any organization, whether small or large. Therefore, it is necessary to train employees and update their information to adapt their knowledge to current issues.

Employees without training and with their obsolete and outdated information will not be able to tackle the problems of the organization.

Consequently, they could not perform to their full potential, and the organization will actually face irreparable problems. On the other hand, communication among members and the development of altruistic behavior can elevate the performance of individuals in different levels of organizational learning, as well as the efficiency of members and the organization.

One of the factors that can increase altruism among people is the lack of communication conflict and the existence of trust. The less communication conflict, the more trust exists among people leading to altruistic behaviors, which in turn, improves organizational learning. Therefore, the staff of Red Crescent Society's rescue and relief organization need effective training in order to remove the obstacles, provide assistance with high awareness and ability, and reduce damages and losses.

Methods

This practical study was conducted based on a descriptive-correlational design. The statistical population of this study included all 140 managers, deputies, and heads of branches. Using convenience sampling, a total of 107 personnel, including employees and managers of Red Crescent provincial branches of Gilan and Mazandaran, were selected as the statistical sample of the study.

Data collection tools included standard altruistic questionnaires developed by Podsakoff, MacKenzie, Moorman, and Fetter (1990) Podskov, McKinsey, Morman and Fetter (1990), conflict scale by Cox(1998), organizational learning ability by Chiva, Alegre, and Lapiedra (2007), and Organizational Trust Inventory (OTI) scale development by Nyhan and Marlow (1997) consisting of 28 items.

Staff responses to each questionnaire item were rated on a five-point Likert scale on a continuum from strongly agree to strongly disagree. In addition, Cronbach's alpha coefficient and reliability coefficient for all variables were above $\alpha = 0.6$ and $\alpha = 0.7$, respectively.

The fit of the structural model was assessed using the R Squares, Q2, and GOF criteria. As illustrated in Table 1, the obtained value of R2, according to the three criteria, explains 74% of the organizational learning capability in general. Q determines the predictive power of the model in the dependent variables. The results of the

Table 1. Results of R Squares and Q2 criteria for endogenous variables

Concealed variables	R Squares	Q^2
Perceived organizational learning capability	0.074	1
Communication conflict	0.974	0.172
Organizational Trust	0.098	0.277
Altruism	---	0.335

abovementioned table are indicative of the strong predictive power of the model regarding endogenous variables of the research.

Furthermore, Table 2 presents the results of processing the general model according to the formula, three introduced criteria, and the obtained data. It shows that the value of 0.1385 indicates the overall desirability of the research model. The psychometric properties of scales were measured and analyzed to test scale dimensions. The concepts and structures used in the theoretical model, reliability, content validity, convergent validity, and differential validity (Table 2; standard deviation and correlation factors) are displayed.

Table 2. Results of general model processing

GOF	R^2	Communality
0.1385	0.932	1.784

Findings

The psychometric properties of scales were measured and analyzed to test scale dimensions. The concepts and structures used in the theoretical model, reliability, content validity, convergent validity, and differential validity (Table 2; standard deviation and correlation factors) are displayed. Therefore, we first examined the measurement dimensions for the variables of altruism, conflict, organizational learning capability, and organizational trust structures using confirmatory factor analysis. The factor loads of all variables were examined according to the existing hypotheses, and the results are as follows:

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In Table 4, the variables of conversation, experience, interaction with the environment, risk, and organizational trust are the items of organizational learning capability that are expressed separately in this table. Figure 2 shows the effects of each variable on organizational learning capability. To examine the relationships among the variables, we used Tippins and Sohi (2003) method which involves estimating two structural models.

Table 3. Measurement of factor loadings

Altruism	AL1	0.706	**Organizational learning capability**	DEC	0.439
	AL2	0.853		DIA	0824
	AL3	0.674		EXP	0.743
	AL4	0.842		INT	0.725
	AL5	0.616		RISK	0.580
Trust	TRUST1	0.450	**Communication conflict**	CON1	0.663
	TRUST2	0.839		CON2	0.816
	TRUST3	0.747		CON3	0.703
	TRUST4	0.852		CON4	0.563

Table 4. Relationship factors, mean, and standard deviation

|	Mean	The standard deviation	Altruism	Communication conflict	Participatory decision making	Conversation	Experience	Interaction with the environment	Risk	Organizational Trust
Altruism	17.39	2.67	0.744							
Communication conflict	6.52	2.00	-0.307	0.692						
Participatory decision making	10.72	1.98	0.045	-0.059	0.912					
Conversation	7.88	1.53	0.121	-0.349	0.235	0.824				
Experience	7.66	1.31	0.190	-0.304	0.167	0.552	0.890			
Interaction with the environment	4.89	1.35	0.029	-0.147	0.439	0.480	0.480	0.898		
Risk	10.98	2.40	0.110	-0.129	0.279	0.363	0.477	0.297	0.716	
Organizational Trust	7.23	1.92	0.136	-0.139	0.435	0.954	0.521	0.463	0.402	0.740
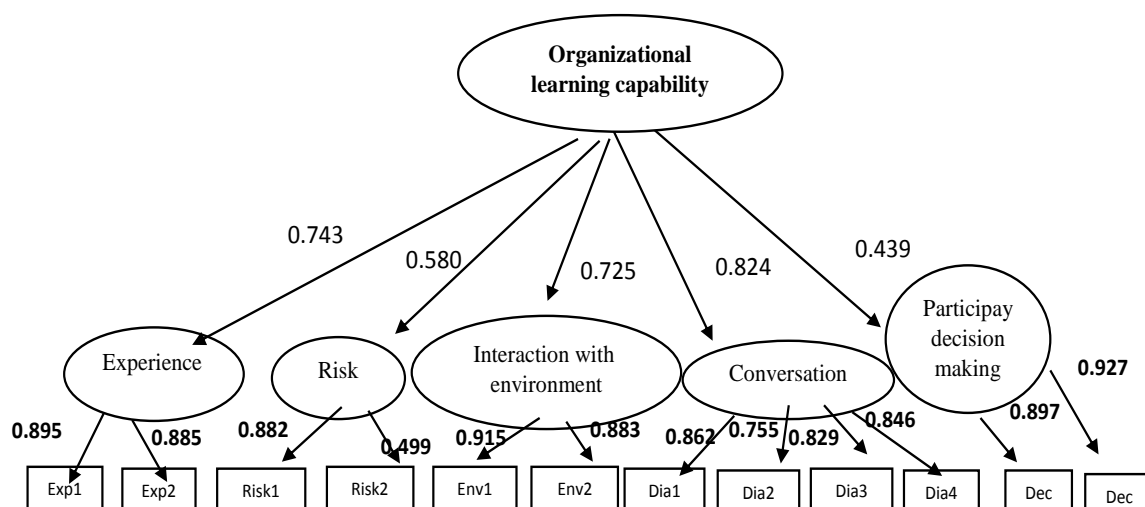
Figure 1. Analysis of organizational learning capability

Firstly, the direct effect of the independent and dependent variable model was tested. Due to mediation, the Impact coefficient in the direct model can be important to continue testing the mediating effects with reference to the effect of altruism on organizational learning capability. In Figure (1), the items related to organizational learning capability were examined so that we can have a deeper understanding of the effects of items.

Here, it can be observed that the items of conversation, experience, interaction with the environment, risk, and collaborative decision-making can affect the development of organizational learning capability. Therefore, it highlights the factors organizations should cover and support in order to increase this capability. As the organizational learning capability increases, we can witness a more efficient environment and make the most of the available resources. The relationship between altruism and organizational learning capability was confirmed in direct effects model (Figure 2).

At this stage, it can be argued that the direct relationship between altruism and organizational learning capability can result from different direct and indirect forces. Assessment of

research hypotheses shows how the independent variable (altruism) affects the dependent variable (organizational learning capability) through mediating variables (organizational conflict and organizational trust).

As demonstrated in Table 5, the criteria for measuring the relevant variables in Cronbach's alpha scale are convergent validity, divergent validity, structural reliability, and variance.

In addition, the second model includes a multifunctional model of mediating variables (communication conflict and organizational trust). Suitable indicators for these models are depicted in figures 2 and 3. The mediator model is available in terms of the effect of altruism on organizational learning capability in the analysis of communication conflict and organizational trust as mediation mechanisms and the direct effect of the model is extended. Figure 3 shows the results of structural equations.

Organizational learning capability is a second factor. For the sake of brevity, it is displayed just for the first time. Items loading on these first-order factors are all significant.

Figure 3. Mediator effect model: altruism, organizational learning capability, communication conflict, and organizational trust. In the interest of

Table 5. Measurement criteria

|	Cronbach's alpha	Composite reliability	Extracted mean-variance
Altruism (5 items)	0.794	0.859	0.554
Communication conflict (5 items)	0.660	0.783	0.479
Organizational trust (4 items)	0.703	0.822	0.548
Experience (2 items)	0.738	0.884	0.792
Risk (2 items)	0.059	0.662	0.513
Interaction with environment(3 items)	0.799	0.908	0.832
Conversation (4 items)	0.842	0.894	0.679
Participatory decision making (3 items)	0.764	0.894	0.809
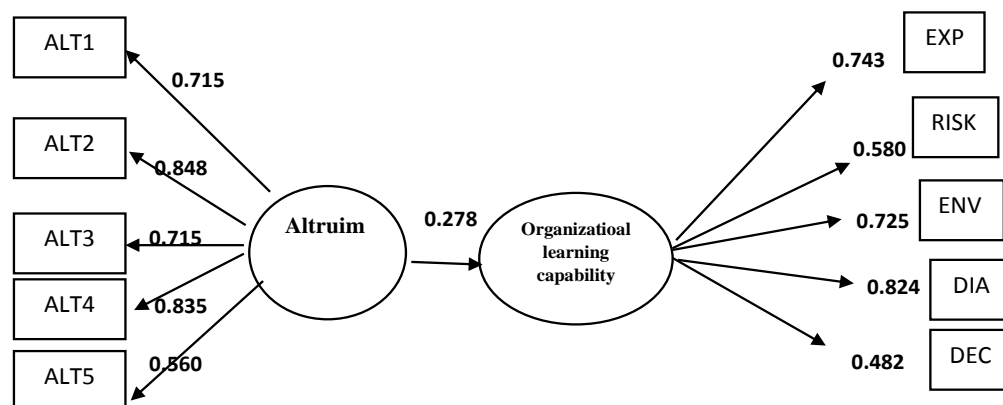
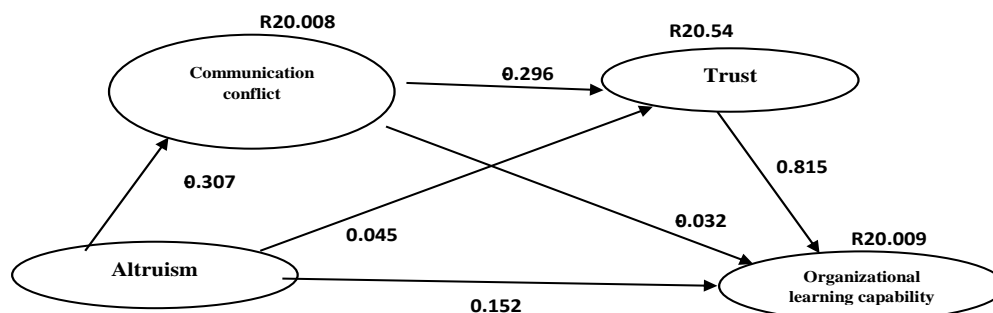**Figure 2.** Direct effect model, altruism, and organizational learning capability

Figure 3. Mediator effect model: altruism, organizational learning capability, communication conflict, and organizational trust. In the interest of brevity, the factor loadings are only shown in the path of the hypotheses.

brevity, the factor loadings are only shown in the path of the hypotheses.

The analysis of the model as presented in Figure 1 is indicative of the rejection of the first hypothesis that examined the mediating role of communication conflict in altruistic variables and organizational learning capability among employees of Red Crescent provincial branches of Gilan and Mazandaran.

According to the study conducted by Tippins and Sohi (2003), if communication conflict acts as a mediating variable between altruism and organizational learning ability, we will witness the relationship between communication conflict and organizational learning ability, which did not occur.

In the second hypothesis, which examined the mediating role of communication conflict in the variables of altruism and organizational trust among the employees of Red Crescent provincial branches of Gilan and Mazandaran, the results obtained are as follows:

Firstly, a negative relationship exists between altruism and communication conflict. Secondly, there is a negative relationship between conflict and trust, and thirdly: altruism has a direct effect on organizational trust. These results confirm and support the second hypothesis and show that communication conflict plays a mediating role between altruism and organizational trust.

In the third hypothesis, the mediating role of organizational trust in the variables of communication conflict and organizational learning capability among the employees of Red Crescent provincial branches of Gilan and Mazandaran is confirmed. It is due to the fact that in the first place, there is a negative relationship between communication conflict and organizational trust. Secondly, there is a positive

relationship between organizational trust and organizational learning capability, and thirdly: the direct effect of altruism on organizational trust is expressed.

These conditions support the third hypothesis, namely the mediating effect of organizational trust between communication conflict and organizational learning capability. Finally, the mediating role of organizational trust between altruistic and organizational learning among the staff of Red Crescent provincial branches of Gilan and Mazandaran, which was examined as the fourth hypothesis, was confirmed.

It is due to the fact that three is a positive relationship between altruism and trust in the first place. Secondly, there is a positive relationship between organizational trust and organizational learning capability. In the third place, there is a direct relationship between altruism and organizational trust indicating the mediating role of organizational trust between altruism and organizational learning ability.

Discussion and Conclusion

Organizational learning capability is recognized as a vital feature in a country with increasingly changing economics. Today, organizations that base their work on learning are striving to improve their job performance to stay ahead in a competitive environment. From their perspective, fast learning is the best way to improve long-term performance and maintain a competitive environment. A learning organization is an organization that cares about gaining knowledge and experience.

Therefore, it is necessary to promote learning among members of the organization and create a work environment with high learning capabilities. At the same time, building trust and increasing

trust is indispensable as an important factor in paving the way for human capital formation, more importantly, the preservation of human heritage in any organization. The present study aimed to determine the effect of altruism on organizational learning capability. To this end, altruism in organizations can be related to five factors of organizational learning capability proposed by Chiva et al. (2007).

Moreover, regarding the relationship between altruism and organizational learning capability, it was found that this association cannot be simply considered a direct relationship; rather it depends on other organizational factors, such as organizational trust. As trust in organizations increases, employees tend to be altruistic, thereby increasing organizational learning.

Furthermore, the current study provided a complete view of the effects of altruism in organizations and several mechanisms for organizational learning capability. It reported the findings of research on the phenomenon of altruism and some organizational conditions that facilitate organizational learning capability. The results according to the new paradigm of management theory focus on the human approach of organizations. Altruism in organizations is directly related to the dimensions of organizational learning capability proposed by Chiva et al. (2007).

In addition, altruism in organizations promotes the healthy growth of strong emotional relationships, in which interpersonal differences may occur less frequently. Therefore, altruism can prevent relationship conflicts in organizations. On the other hand, altruism in organizations may be interpreted as a sign of trustworthiness. As a result, the common presence of altruism in organizations can increase the level of organizational trust. Organizational trust, in turn, fosters some behaviors, such as risk.

trust, and in turn increases organizational learning capability. Finally, the lack of communication conflict in organizations can foster the conditions for the promotion and weakening of relationships, increased interpersonal differences among colleagues, and the development of organizational trust. Organizational trust plays a mediating role between altruism and organizational learning capability. The results demonstrated that trust can improve organizational performance, and organizational learning can perform a role in changing organizational knowledge.

This finding is consistent with the research performed by Guinot et al. (2015) (23). The findings of the present study play a significant role in altruism in organizations, organizational learning literature, as well as the association between altruism and organizational learning capability. These findings are in agreement with the results of the study conducted by Farhang et al. (2011) and Guinot et al. (2015).

We also concluded that according to the existing hypotheses, communication conflict and organizational trust play a mediating role with respect to altruism and organizational learning capability. In line with the results reported by Guinot et al. (2015), communication conflict performs a mediating role in the relationship between altruism and organizational learning capability. The results showed that altruism reduces communication conflict, increases organizational

In addition, consistent with the findings of Guinot et al. the results of the present study indicated that altruism directly enhances organizational learning capability (2015). This study also provides a more thorough review of the effects and records of organizational trust and communication conflict. However, as indicated by the results, organizational trust acts as a mediating variable between altruism and organizational learning capability, but not for communication conflict. These findings suggest that organizational trust plays a more fundamental role in organizational learning capability, compared to communication conflict.

Therefore, fostering a culture of organizational trust can enhance the organizational learning process as an essential factor. Furthermore, the present study pointed out that altruistic behavior in the workplace devoid of communication conflict is a key to encouraging organizational trust. Finally, it was found that altruism reduces communication conflict and increases organizational trust, which in turn, increases organizational learning capability.

In addition, the obtained results indicated that altruism directly enhances learning capability. It also provides a thorough review of the history and effects of organizational trust and communication conflict. Findings also highlighted the importance of trust and communication conflict in organizational learning capability. Nevertheless, based

on the obtained results, although organizational trust acts as a mediating variable between altruism and organizational learning ability, it has no mediating effect on communication conflict. However, the mediating role of communication conflict can be invoked through organizational trust.

These findings indicate that organizational trust has a more dominant role in increasing organizational learning compared to communication conflict. Therefore, fostering a culture of trust in organizations can be considered an essential element to enhance the organizational learning process. Furthermore, the present study showed that creating a friendly work environment devoid of communication conflict is key to the promotion of organizational trust.

Therefore, in the present study, it was proposed that altruism in Red Crescent organization can be implemented as a managerial measure to strengthen organizational learning capability and levels of organizational trust. Altruism is one of the organizational issues neglected by managers; rather it should be promoted due to the importance of trust and organizational learning capability for today's organizations, especially Red Crescent societies.

Therefore, it can be concluded that the promotion of altruistic behaviors in the Red Crescent organizations can be of great help for gaining a competitive advantage in global markets. On the other hand, it can be argued that organizational learning capability is a suitable strategy for achieving organizational success in the long run. Finally, since organizational learning in Red Crescent organizations must be effective, employees should be provided with continuous training opportunities.

Furthermore, it is recommended that the importance of altruism and organizational trust in these organizations should be emphasized with the help of educational videos and brochures. Moreover, organizations should strive to increase the performance of their workforce to reduce such factors as conflict and increase trust. On a final note, before the recruitment of employees, they should be tested for the level of learning, altruistic behaviors, conflict, and their trust in the organization.

Acknowledgments

Conflict of Interests

The authors declare that they have no conflict of interest regarding the publication of the current study.

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