

Original Article (Qualitative)

# Examining the Degree of Penetration and Dependence of Factors Affecting Organizational Forgetfulness

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**Abstract**

The purpose of this research is to investigate the degree of penetration and dependence of factors affecting organizational forgetfulness using the interpretive structural modeling (ISM) approach. The type of research is applied in terms of purpose and descriptive-survey in terms of data collection. The statistical population of this research consisted of 10 experts and specialists in the fields of educational management, human resources, and organizational behavior, who were purposefully selected from among the experts. The research measurement tool was the ISM questionnaire. Data analysis was conducted using interpretive structural modeling, which is part of systems analysis and examines the interactions between system elements. Therefore, to identify the components, a review of past literature was conducted, and the model and findings were drawn using the six stages of interpretive structural modeling. The results led to the compilation of four levels for interpretive structural modeling. The first and most important level is related to the technology component, the second level is dedicated to culture building and human resources management components, the third level refers to the components of competition, stakeholder factors, employee characteristics, and strategy, and the fourth level includes the components of transformational leadership and organizational structure. Additionally, the most influential index in the influence-dependency matrix is the "technology" component, and the most dependent component is "transformational leadership." Therefore, it is suggested that the organization of industry, mining, and trade should act on their long-term plans in the field of organizational forgetfulness based on this perspective.

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## Extended abstract

### Introduction

What distinguishes the present era from other eras is the scientificization of organizations, societies, and individuals. The success of countries depends on their knowledge, and successful organizations are those that have knowledgeable employees (Hislop, Bosua, & Helms, 2018). However, the accumulation of knowledge without modification reduces its value, reminding managers that new knowledge cannot be acquired until old ways are forgotten and previous learning is abandoned (Mariano, Casey, & Olivera, 2018). Organizational forgetting is, in fact, a form of reverse learning where individuals accidentally or intentionally discard their previous learning and replace it with new learning (De Holan & Phillips, 2011). Organizational forgetting is defined as a process where an individual or organization discards knowledge or information that leads to the loss of something in order to make way for new, more effective responses (Alzahrani & Woollard, 2013). Some experts state that forgetting is a common, important, and vital phenomenon that may be accidental or intentional, and in both cases, it affects organizational performance and learning (Adcock, 2012). Forgetting at both organizational and individual levels increases the capabilities of individuals and organizations, enabling them to acquire new knowledge and insights (Aydin & Gormus, 2015). Over time, innovation and the replacement or forgetting of old knowledge is necessary to prevent futile activities at the individual and organizational levels, thus providing an opportunity to learn new knowledge. In fact, old knowledge hinders the learning of new knowledge (Barber, 2002). Forgetting must be accompanied by organizational learning and innovation so that the organization can dominate the market, produce better, and remain competitive (Birmingham, 2015).

Undoubtedly, creating desirable changes and achieving a desirable future in the field of humanities and management requires predicting the future by understanding the factors affecting changes in this field. Identifying value-creating areas in organizational management, estimating knowledge transfer spaces in the future, recognizing the needs of future users of humanities, and adapting in a timely manner to changes are only part of the requirements for understanding the future. Despite the importance of organizational forgetting in modern management, this issue has not been addressed so far, and conducting this research can help with the future management of organizations in this field. Therefore, with structural modeling, it is possible to create specific programs for managers and organizational employees in the future, which, by strengthening relevant factors, will improve organizational purposeful forgetting and reduce unconscious forgetting of useful knowledge, helping the rapid progress of the organization. For example, the organization of industry, mining, and trade is one of the key organizations in the country's economy and future. Improving the performance and progress of this organization can have a significant impact on the country's economy and people's lives. On the other hand, identifying the most influential and effective components in organizational forgetfulness, as well as identifying the components related to other components of organizational forgetfulness in industry, mining, and trade can help in realizing the short-term and long-term plans of this organization. Therefore, the main question of the research can be stated as follows: What is the interpretative structural model of the effective factors in organizational forgetting?

### Theoretical Framework

#### Organizational Forgetting and Its Dimensions

Organizational forgetting, contrary to organizational learning which adds to the storage of organizational knowledge, causes the reduction and loss of organizational knowledge. From the perspective of de Holan and Phillips (2004), organizational forgetting is the voluntary or involuntary loss of organizational knowledge (Mashbaki & Rabia, 2009).

Past research suggests that some relatively distinct conceptualizations of forgetting have already been developed, and they approach forgetting in different ways (Casey & Olivera, 2011; de Holan, 2011). However, these concepts are largely theoretically unrelated and have not been empirically evaluated. These concepts are not related in the sense that there has been no attempt to create a single model or theory that would allow the derivation of hypotheses and propositions about how forgetting occurs or can be avoided. Instead, this field has diversified, with different concepts of forgetting (e.g., accidental, inadvertent, or intentional) existing alongside each other.

So far, research on organizational forgetting processes has focused on ideas of learning, replacement, neglect, rearrangement, or deletion. It is assumed that the concept of not learning or unlearning supports the goal of replacing old routines with new ones (Fiol & O'Connor, 2017; Reese, 2017; Starbuck, 2017; Tsang, 2017; Visser, 2017). Researchers believe that forgetting refers to the removal of routines that no longer serve the organization's goals, allowing the 'installation' of new routines that support organizational objectives (Tsang, 2017).

Selective forgetting, ignorance, and awareness of not knowing (Roberts, 2013) means that individuals and teams within organizations actively decide to stop investing resources in storing a defined set of information. In this context, forgetting means temporarily suppressing irrelevant information. Voluntary forgetting (de Holan, 2011) facilitates change, particularly when current knowledge is perceived as a barrier or competitor to new knowledge. Rearranging information (de Holan, 2011) aims to abstract and generalize existing knowledge, freeing it from unnecessary details. If an organization wishes to reorganize, it must make decisions about future scenarios and contexts, as future contexts must be anticipated. Deletion (Akgün et al, 2006) as an organizational forgetting process means that an organization essentially discards old, useless, or even incorrect/false information. It can also mean the removal of information that has become irrelevant due to environmental changes or incorrect data.

### **Methodology**

The research methodology was qualitative in nature, applied in terms of its goal, and descriptive-survey in terms of data collection. The participants of this study consisted of 10 experts and specialists in the fields of educational management (4 individuals), human resources (4 individuals), and organizational behavior (2 individuals), selected purposefully from among experts. The measurement tool used in the study was the Interpretive Structural Modeling (ISM) questionnaire. The ISM method inherently includes validity and reliability. The MICMAC software was also used for data analysis.

### **Findings**

The results led to the identification of four levels in the interpretive structural modeling. The first and most important level pertains to the technology component. The second level includes the components of culture-building and human resources management. The third level refers to components such as competition, stakeholder factors, employee characteristics, and strategy. The fourth level includes the components of transformational leadership and organizational structure. Furthermore, the most influential component in the influence-dependency matrix was "technology," while the most dependent component was "transformational leadership." Therefore, it is suggested that the organization of industry, mining, and trade incorporate this perspective into their long-term plans regarding organizational forgetfulness.

### **Conclusion**

This study aimed to examine the degree of penetration and dependence of factors affecting organizational forgetfulness using the interpretive structural modeling (ISM) approach. The



findings of this research align with the results of studies by Mohammadpour & Kamalian (2017), Barati et al. (2019), Bahadori et al. (2018), Moqaddaei (2017), Harris et al. (2021), Bongso (2020), Agrawal et al. (2020), Shen et al. (2020), Blagov & Shcherban (2019), and Becker et al. (2010).

Based on the findings, the following suggestions are provided:

- The results showed that the "technology" component is the most crucial and key component in organizational forgetfulness. Therefore, it is recommended that significant attention be given to utilizing "technology" for knowledge management and organizational forgetfulness in the industries of mining and trade. Using modern technologies in this area, as well as forming a strong human resources group to share knowledge using these technologies through organizational websites and specific platforms, is suggested.
- The results also indicated that, after the "technology" component, the "human resources management and culture-building" component holds high importance. Therefore, it is recommended to employ capable and knowledgeable managers in the human resources field and use their expertise. Additionally, by organizing various courses and seminars, employees should be familiarized with the consequences of organizational forgetfulness. By holding these courses and involving different thinkers, a culture of adaptability and change can be institutionalized in the organization.