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## ORIGINAL RESEARCH ARTICLE

### The study Strategic Unlearning Model of Sharing Knowledge in Iran

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## ABSTRACT

The main purpose of this study is to develop a model of strategic unlearning of sharing knowledge in Iranian state-owned banks. This qualitative study is developmental in terms of purpose. In the first part of this research, the content related to the concepts of unlearning and strategy were extracted from library sources. The second part refers to the interview process with 21 managers, executives, and experts conducted in the winter of 2021. The statistical population of the research includes experts from the university department who have published at least two articles in the field of unlearning and related research plans. Furthermore, the executive team comprises individuals with a university degree and a minimum of 4 years of work experience in the field of banking education. Judgmental sampling was implemented based on the opinions of professors and experts in this field and continued until theoretical saturation was achieved. The interviews were then analyzed using Atlas.ti 8 software. Findings led to identifying of 11 components, 18 indicators, and 76 selected codes. The results also indicated that some components, such as employee development, management, economics, knowledge management, education, organizational structure, legal aspects, marketing strategies, cultural factors, consolidation, rigidity, and unlearning, are essential in the strategic unlearning process of Iranian state-owned banks.

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## 1. Introduction

Technological advances have changed the competitive environment in organizations, imposed challenges, and created new opportunities; hence, companies and organizations require to develop new strategies (Dana et al., 2021). As a crucial strategy, organizations are expected to focus on the intellectual capital and employees' knowledge (Hosseini & Sabokro, 2021). Given that knowledge is an essential factor for success, organizations must attain new pieces of knowledge (organizational learning) and also control their existing knowledge (Salamzadeh et al., 2022). Organizations are dealing with potential developments in the future; however, they may fail to implement any fundamental changes within the organization due to the heavy burden of such unique competencies and efforts to develop and maintain their capabilities (Mohiuddin et al., 2022). It is really difficult for any organization to pursue a strategically significant unlearning process to change its pivotal strength; it may also act as a major stabilizing force for many pioneering organizations. Currently, the main organizational competitions may expand gradually (Nasim, 2014). A shared understanding of the pressure from intense competition enables employees to engage more effectively and actively in their individual knowledge integration work (Werr & Runsten, 2013). Internal knowledge integration is mainly based on frequent encounters, knowledge transfer, and knowledge sharing among employees (Salunke et al., 2019). As a result, employees enhance communication with each other, strengthen their mutual understanding, and help them develop a shared vision to facilitate internal knowledge integration (Rauniar et al., 2019). Therefore, knowledge owners' reluctance to share their knowledge is considered a major obstacle to integrating the internal knowledge (Ramsey et al., 2019). In this case, the intensity of competition can successfully stimulate internal knowledge integration by creating a tense atmosphere. Competitive intensity can promote the integration of external knowledge. Therefore,

it can be argued that a high degree of competition in a market generally indicates more competitors in the market (Eldor, 2020). As a result, organizations have more opportunities to acquire specialized and complementary knowledge from others (Wang et al., 2018). Access to diverse foreign knowledge increases the possibility of foreign knowledge integration for organizations (Eslami et al., 2018). In addition, competitors in the same market tend to have more compatible knowledge than non-competitors (Chiambaretto et al., 2020), which may reduce and accelerate barriers to acquiring external knowledge (such as difficult access to a compatible knowledge base). Knowledge Integration In a highly competitive environment, competitors contact and communicate with each other, whether they want to or not. These actions are often associated with knowledge transfer, unconscious knowledge sharing, and interaction (Enberg, 2012). These activities may create favorable conditions for organizations to integrate external knowledge. Intense market competition places heavy demands on managerial capabilities to integrate external information and knowledge to adapt to the changing environment (Wang et al., 2018). Organizations must change or remove their traditional beliefs, routines, and knowledge to deal with threats from the external competitive environment. In particular, organizations regularly face rapidly changing competition in a highly competitive environment. Therefore, knowledge quickly becomes obsolete (Lyu et al., 2020). Competitive intensity can neutralize the previous competitive advantages of organizations or make them obsolete (Chen et al., 2015). Hence, in a competitive environment, organizations are more likely to find that their traditional knowledge, processes, and practices are no longer sufficient. Old methods may not yield the desired results, thus prompting organizations to adapt. Given the extent of pressure and competition in the world, such learnings may cause resistance in organizations and their

perspectives. Besides, organizations often need a strong trigger to promote learning, and learning must occur before any crisis or failure for a resilient organization (Salamzadeh et al., 2022). Therefore, removing barriers created by misleading knowledge and obsolete routines is regarded as the most important role of learning leading to strategic flexibility and further learning. Consequently, leaders and managers must prepare the ground for everyone to unlearn outdated knowledge and learn new knowledge to promote a learning-oriented organization. Therefore, by sharing knowledge and information with their employees, managers lead to acceptance of changes in the ways of doing work and thus strengthen their communication with employees (Bolaji & Taiwo-Ogunnesan, 2022). Managers should also evaluate the learning power of their fellow employees and inspire them to express new ideas and actions, irrespective of any institutional constraints. They can encourage people to establish and implement their learning capabilities (Morais-Storz & Nguyen, 2017).

If organizations do not have an effective strategy to manage outdated knowledge, there will be inadequate inclination and agility to accept new technology, technology will be transferred at a slower pace, and the organization will have limited ability to adapt to the new technology (Kheirandish & Keramti, 2015). Organizations are recommended to pursue effective strategies since they believe that any strategic performance can affect the success of the organization considerably (Wang et al., 2018). Therefore, organizational delearning is one of the most effective mechanisms in dynamic environments (Liu et al., 2020; Zhang and Zhou, 2021). Organizations should be more flexible and responsive in the face of intense competitive pressure (Chahal et al., 2018). Therefore, the implementation of knowledge sharing requires a certain amount of employees, time, and other resources (Islami et al., 2018). Therefore, knowledge integration enables organizations to use newly acquired knowledge to bring new product concepts to the market earlier. Internal knowledge sharing also enables

employees to develop a joint base of experience and language, improve the efficiency of intra-organizational communication, and exchange information directly. As a result, employees can clarify the requirements and specifications of new products under development (Morgan et al., 2019). On the other hand, the banking industry setting is based on innovation and competition. Banks can improve their competitiveness and remain competitive by implementing creativity and strategic management, respecting customers' value, as well as providing innovative services. Given that developing countries often focus on a bank-oriented financial system, it will be required to pursue influential market-orientation economy because of the highly competitive process of internationalization of service providing organizations, such as banks. Besides, these organizations are considered the only provider of funds and budget; hence, it is critical to maintain stability within the country's financial system. Managers in the banking system should be prepared to deal with the young generation of employees, and these managers must find an association between their individual values and organizational values. Another challenge would highlight the gap between the skills of human resources and the skills needed for the job, i.e. the employees' abilities against what they need to have. This is a growing concern within the financial services industry, including banks. As a result, the majority of the employees' skills may not be used in the future and people should change their capabilities or develop new skills consistent with the developmental nature of the businesses.

Ordinary jobs, such as cashier, will probably be replaced with new occupations in the future. Hence, it is necessary to train required human resources accordingly. Besides, unlearning is the main issue against organizational learning that needs to be addressed strategically. In addition, some of the respective employees, in state-owned bank system, have been recruited from other departments during the past two decades, whose non-banking attitude affects their interactions with other people. The present

research is the very first study focusing on the development of a strategic unlearning model in the banking industry (among state-owned banks) in Iran. On the other hand, there is only limited instances of research in this area. Despite the significance of monetary and financial institutions in the micro and macro economy, the improvement of production, and job creation, no study has developed a similar model so far. Therefore, it is recommended to design and promote a new unlearning model in state-owned banks in order to reduce the gap between the status quo and the banks' prospective, highlight individual and organizational development of human resources, and institutionalize learning. Consequently, this research aims the study strategic unlearning model of sharing knowledge in Iran.

## 2. Literature Review

### 2.1 Unlearning

Instant technological developments and the emergent competition have caused several challenges that require the implementation of different strategic learning approaches to generate knowledge. Strategic thinking within an organization is regarded as a crucial factor preparing the ground for the establishment of creativity and innovation. Given the inclusiveness and prudence of strategic thinking, employees can have a better understanding of the organization and its environment that leads to recurrent creativity. Besides, it paves the way for frequent interaction between managers and employees, resulting in employees' innovation in the organization (Dianat Nejad & Irajpour, 2017).

Unlearning in an organization is regarded as the change and adaptation to the environment. So, it requires the desertion of old and ineffective beliefs and regulations. Unlearning refers to conscious and decisive organizational overlooking (Yildiz & Fey, 2010). Unlearning helps the management team comprehend that outdated assumptions will not work anymore. Thus, these ideas can restrain their skills to attract customers, limit the efficiency of prior knowledge, and diminish their productivity. If managers realize that some well-served approaches will

no longer be influential in the future, they may support "unlearning" procedures (Burt & Nair, 2020). Unlearning changes organizational values, norms, and/or behaviors by changing cognitive structures, mental models, dominant logics, and main assumptions that guide behavior in order to achieve competitive advantage (Tajpour & Razavi, 2023). Unlearning may reveal management problems that employees may not be willing to articulate, such as overly authoritarian management styles, lack of trust, or other dysfunctional organizational aspects. Therefore, the context of unlearning increases the ability and willingness of managers to reduce the adverse effects of inappropriate knowledge and combine previous knowledge with new knowledge. From this point of view, an unlearning context increases the appropriate balance between knowledge acquisition and absorption (Manning et al., 2023). Hence, both internal and external knowledge in an organization need to be examined critically because this knowledge may be related.

### 2.2 Strategies Unlearning and Sharing Knowledge

The purpose of unlearning is to create an agile organization and undertake a sustainable competitive advantage to achieve the optimal performance in the organization. It will also help employees continue and enhance their productivity in accordance with organizational and environmental changes (Sepahvand et al., 2018). Nonetheless, outdated knowledge in an organization can hinder the development of employees' potential and competencies. Consequently, practitioners have always attempted to find a way to forget the old knowledge actively or intentionally. Therefore, it can be argued that unlearning might result in the improvement of employee competency and organizational performance (Rajabipour et al., 2018). The organizational attitude can change through the "unlearning" process, which highlights the role of errors in motivating learning and knowledge sharing. Knowledge sharing is a set of behaviors that include exchanging knowledge and information and helping others in this regard (Deng et al., 2023).

Knowledge sharing is similar to the behaviors of organizational citizens that are done voluntarily and voluntarily in organizations. In other words, the lack of knowledge sharing in the organization leads to inefficiency in organizational knowledge management, without sharing and synergy, knowledge loses its original value. In other words, knowledge sharing is the most common way to increase the value of knowledge (Fait et al., 2023). The importance of sharing knowledge is that it causes learning and the role of learning is an important factor for the growth of human societies and an undeniable necessity in today's organizations (Mehrabi et al., 2022). Organizational unlearning is as essential as acquiring new knowledge, it would be considered a major weakness if an organization is incapable of implementing unlearning.

On the other hand, strategic unlearning and logic-dominated learning are inseparably intertwined (Ronaghi, 2021). In addition, learning and unlearning concerning a strategic change include the necessity for that change. More importantly, the statement of purpose should determine the strategic objective; therefore, the strategic problem refers to the situation where there is a deviation from this objective, leading to a single sign or a set of signs considered essential (Baer et al., 2013). Consequently, the extent of reliance on outdated knowledge at different organizational levels is regarded as a critical factor that causes difficulty in the process of acquiring new knowledge or failure in the implementation of the change project in the organization (Hosseini & Sabokro, 2021). There is the need to provide strategic unlearning for individuals as a part of a cognitive learning system. The tendency toward unlearning can explain why new competitors attempt to replace experienced employees when organizations plan for major structural changes (e.g., the personal computer revolution).

According to the extant statistics, the government-owned organizations and companies demonstrate fairly weak performance in Iran. Besides, these organizations loss their resources as much as 5-12% of the total GDP of the country. Given

the role of banks in the economy, their competitiveness can indicate if these banks can influence the economy. Therefore, it is crucial to identify the overall status and competitive position of the country's banking market to help the banking system policy makers plan in accordance with more competitive and efficient conditions. The growing competition, in turn, leads to a decrease in the banks' income through financial services; hence, banks should engage actively within this specialized and innovative market to increase financing for new technologies (Románova et al., 2016).

The national banks indicate poor flexibility against environmental demands and requirements, which has led to a growing gap between market needs and the potential of commercial banks to meet these needs. Several surveys concluded that Iran's banking industry is on the verge of major shifts to accomplish its strategic objectives. Nevertheless, the existing gap between Iran's banking industry and the global banking system shows a significant break between Iranian banks and international standards (Sakhaei et al., 2014). Consequently, it is necessary to attempt to understand competitive objectives and strategies. On the other hand, banking system is required to focus on modeling strategic changes within the industry. If a particular bank in Iran aims to improve its profitability, it should make the necessary changes in all the dimensions (Osman et al, 2011). According to the researcher, banks will not be able to promote their profitability if they lack the essential capabilities to change their business model. Besides, bank employees can have the ultimate impact on the profitability of a bank (Beidokhti & Ghaderi., 2011). Learning and innovative culture can facilitate the improvement of the performance and the attainment of the competitive advantage (Oskooii et al., 2017).

In the meantime, the quality of state-owned banking services is rather low compared to private banks. Therefore, state-owned banking system needs to pursue the following measures in order to improve the quality of its services: improving the quality of working environments, promoting their employees'

communication and technical skills, highlighting their satisfaction, providing diverse services according to the customers' different needs, providing timely information about new services and encouraging customers to use such services, reducing mistakes, and assuring customers about the efficiency of banking affairs (Sakhaei et al.,2014). Based on the statistics of 24 banks between 2007 and 2015, the productivity of state-owned banks has been -2.6% during the period under review. Government-owned banks have an average technical efficiency growth of -0.4%, an efficiency margin gap growth of 1.1%, and a technical gap ratio growth of -2.6%. Moreover, they have an average technical efficiency growth of -1.1%, the efficiency margin gap growth of -12.2%, and the technical gap ratio growth of around -1.4%. Accordingly, there is a substantial

difference between private and state-owned banks in terms of technical changes. The difference in management can be regarded as the major cause of technical inefficiency among state-owned banks. It is apparent that government-owned banks have failed to propose a model for strategic unlearning due to high formality and low complexity, unvarying technology in the bank environments and economic enterprises, and excessive focus on resource-oriented capabilities, especially human resources, as a valuable asset. Therefore, it is mandatory to develop such a model in the banking industry in Iran.

**2.1 Research background**

According to the existing literature, the local and international background is as follows:

**Table 1.** *The comparative analysis of previous studies*

Author(s) / year of publication	Title	Method	Research findings
<b>background of local studies</b>			
Ronaghi (2021)	Towards a Model for Assessing Organizational Unlearning	Fuzzy analytical hierarchy process	The development of an organizational unlearning assessment model. Highlighting the significant role of adjusted and factor unlearning.
Gheitarani (2020)	The effect of organization's human resources on turning dynamic strategies and capabilities into competitive advantage.	Qualitative-review	Objectives should be determined according to available resources (money, time, material/human, environment, information, technology ...), and external environment (social, technologic, economic, environmental, and policy making conditions / evaluating executives and industry experts' opinions, customers, reliance on resources, unclear information, and competition).
Rezaei Manesh et al. (2019)	Developing a model to assess strategic managers' maturity in state-owned organizations	Qualitative, theme analysis, interview, interpretive structural equation modeling	It is required to conduct or follow-up some measures in state sector and managers' replacement rate id s dependent on political elections. Hence, it is necessary to engage employees in determining strategies and investments in order to adapt them with strategic objectives through education. Besides, individual performance assessment system should be linked to strategic objectives to facilitate proper implementation of such strategies.
Shah Siah et al. (2019)	Determining the concept, causes, and outcomes of strategic learning	Qualitative grounded theory approach	Unstable environmental changes has caused various challenges for digital startups, which is a risk factor for strategic learning.
<b>Background of international studies</b>			
... (2021)	Evaluating an alternative: ...-... unlearning framework	Focused group discussion, which highlights the	Empirical findings indicated that conventional approaches in management education might become a barrier to

	in management education	dynamic nature of the group to extract information regarding a particular issue.	responsible and sustainable management. Hence, learning difficulties might be resolved using communication. So, it is unlikely that a single learning strategy can reduce the effect of such issues.
Gabriel Segarra-Navaro et al. (2021)	Minimizing the impacts of defensive routines on hiding knowledge through unlearning	Structural equation modelling	There is a negative relationship between unlearning and defensive routines (habits), while hiding knowledge has a direct relationship with such habits. The results showed improvement of service quality at airports and is also recommended for organizations that seek to implement innovations.
Zhang and Zhou (2021)	Social media strategic capabilities, organizational unlearning, and detrimental innovations in SMEs	Structural equation modeling	There is a significant relationship between SMSC and intervening innovation, which is associated with organizational unlearning. In addition, if SMEs have heterogeneous TMT, SMSC's impact on unlearning will increase. Besides, unlearning will have a more significant effect on detrimental innovation in dynamic and controlled environments; however, dynamism will lower in technologic environments.
Becker (2018)	Organizational unlearning: it is recommended to extend the horizon.	Theme analysis	Organizations are required to identify internal factors as well as external pressure on employees to facilitate unlearning. Particularly, industries with strong identity may demonstrate significant resources and power to facilitate or even hinder learning and unlearning processes in organizations.

### 3. Methodology

This study is a developmental research and it is of thematic analysis type; in other words, it intends to develop and expand a more comprehensive model to evaluate and explain the inputs of a particular phenomenon. The study's qualitative research method is inductive, which is based on the interpretive paradigm. Accordingly, researchers are attempting to find a response to this question: how is the pattern strategic unlearning model of sharing knowledge in Iran? Initially, the library sources were examined to extract the content that is related to the concepts of unlearning and strategy. For this purpose, the written text including the terms "unlearning", "strategy", and its derivatives were taken into account. In the second part of the study, 21 managers and experts in the field of education within Iran's state-owned banks were interviewed in the fall of 2021. The statistical population of the research contains experts in the academic and executive sectors. The former includes those who have published at least two articles and a research project in unlearning, while the later includes people

with a university degree and at least four years of related work experience in education and management. Judgmental sampling was performed according to the professors and experts' opinions and continued until the theoretical saturation was reached. Besides, the semi-structured interviews were conducted. The interview process started with posing open-ended questions about the "strategic unlearning model in Iran's state-owned banks"; then, open and axial coding procedures were used. The interview sub-questions include: "What are the components of the strategic unlearning model in Iran's state banks?", "What are the indicators of the strategic unlearning model in Iran's state banks?", and "What are the obstacles to strategic unlearning in Iran's state banks?". In this section, 21 people were interviewed using a theoretical interview procedure. Given that it is necessary to focus on the ease of data analysis, interview results were analyzed in tabular form. The overall concept was extracted by listening to the interviews and evaluating the respective notes. Then, a specific code was assigned to each person

(from A1 to A21). The extracted codes reached the desired saturation from the 21st interview onwards and no new codes were explored anymore. Moreover, this sample size was proved sufficient for the interview section. In order to analyze the data, coding was done using Atlas ti8 software. In terms of validity, two instruments were used to develop the questions, experts proposed modifications for the questions, and the questions were revised by conducting two preliminary interviews. Furthermore, the reliability of this research was examined by reaching the theoretical saturation stage through 21 samples. The reliability coefficient was considered at 78% based on the agreement between the two experts in charge of coding, which is calculated using this formula:

$$C.R. = (2M) / (N1+N2)$$

Where CR is the confidence coefficient, M refers to the number of codes that is supported by two separate codes, and N1 and N2 demonstrate to the initial and secondary decisions.

**Table 2.** Reliability coefficient

Items	Reliability coefficient	Variable weight	Reliability coefficient × variable weight	Average reliability coefficient
Employee development	0.855	0.814	0.696	0.78
Management	0.917	0.756	0.693	
Economy	0.78	1.2	0.936	
Knowledge management	0.819	0.835	0.684	
Education	0.887	0.791	0.702	
Regulation	0.941	0.787	0.740	
Marketing	0.753	1.3	0.979	
Culture	0.906	0.761	0.689	
Organization	0.940	0.748	0.703	
Consolidation and rigidity	0.970	0.947	0.918	

Unlearning	0.92	0.90	0.828	
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This research also employed theme analysis to provide a better solution for the proposed question and illustrate that the expected measures occur throughout the time using a process-based theory.

#### 4. Findings

##### The clarification of the model development process for a strategic unlearning model of sharing knowledge

Three approaches of design, adaptation, and adaptation-design are commonly applied to develop strategic unlearning of sharing knowledge patterns. Nonetheless, the present study used the design approach. As a result, respective model development and model assessment processes among Iran's state-owned banks were performed based on the following stages:

##### (1) Preliminary planning

This stage includes determining values and paradigms, philosophical grounds, strategies, and objectives for strategic unlearning of sharing knowledge and components, as well as the implementation of the model and approaches. It also contains participants, extraction criteria, and procedures.

##### (2) Preparing a preliminary list of strategic unlearning of sharing knowledge using individual interviews:

This stage refers to implementing interviews to determine underlying factors in strategic unlearning of sharing knowledge. Then, these components will be extracted based on the analysis of experts' opinions, and the initial list will be developed accordingly. Theoretical saturation was reached after performing 21 interviews in this study, and the demographic characteristics of participants (e.g., age, education, and gender) are provided. Demographic characteristics indicated that 79% of the participants were male and 21% were female. In terms of age, 5% of the participants were between 30 and 40 years old, 53% were between 40 and 50, and 42% were over 50 years old. Finally, 26% of the respondents held a PhD degree, 58% had a Master's degree, and 16% held a Bachelor's degree.



(3) Comparing the obtained list with the lists and the pattern of strategic unlearning of sharing knowledge

Open and selected coding processes were used for the analysis of qualitative data. It is also noteworthy that these two steps are interconnected and may occur together (Tajpour et al., 2020). At first, appropriate titles were assigned to primary themes, and respective categories were developed accordingly. Eventually, the principal category was extracted based on the relationships between the primary categories, which could lead to developing a theory to illuminate the issue.

Irrespective of the potential relationships, several codes will be extracted in the open coding stage (Cresswell, 1998). A line-by-line approach was used to conduct open coding because the data were collected internally and analyzed externally. At this stage, the ultimate code was extracted following integrating open codes with the researcher's notes. In the next step (axial coding), the codes were integrated based on categorization. Then, relationships between the codes were explained using selective coding (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005).

Ultimately, the researchers would compare primary codes with the outcomes of previous studies in order to extract new components. These components were then added to the original list of strategic unlearning of sharing knowledge. The ultimate list (No. 2) was formed after reviewing the content and analyzing the sources.

(4) Providing a definition for strategic unlearning of sharing knowledge concepts: This step includes researchers' evaluation of the strategic unlearning of sharing knowledge

assigned to lists No. 1 and 2. After integrating the results of the interviews with other resources, the final draft was formed based on the strategic unlearning of knowledge sharing index. The extracted codes were categorized using conceptual correspondence, respectively (see Table 3).

(5) Evaluating and refining the list of strategic unlearning of sharing knowledge

The narrative approach was implemented to collect the data from the individual interviews. For this purpose, the Delphi method was applied for model development as follows: At first, a Delphi panel was developed to identify samples after providing a comprehensive explanation of the objectives and problem of the present research. Selected experts would then receive an invitation along with the central components and practical factors in order to comment on the need to add to or reduce the proposed components. The second stage included the development of a questionnaire for strategic unlearning of sharing knowledge components; this instrument was designed according to the results of previous studies in the literature as well as in-depth exploratory interviews. The questionnaire was sent to the panel of experts for their constructive feedback. Eventually, the ultimate model of strategic unlearning of sharing knowledge for Iran's state-owned banks was developed when the experts assessed the items. The interviews were stopped after reaching saturation; then, the data were categorized into different groups (see Table 4).

After performing analysis and applying necessary revisions, all concepts were classified into 11 components, 18 indexes, and 76 codes.

**Table 3.** *Samples of open coding*

	Open codes	The meaning of the initial code
1	Organizational strong incompetents. People who have adapted to their stupidity and resist new knowledge.	Accepting stupidity
		Resistance against new knowledge
2	It is based on technology and needs to be constantly updated to survive in the competitive environment. I will develop an effective platform to direct employees toward new technology. Learnability is crucial. It is also essential to encourage employees appropriately.	Bank competitiveness
		New technology
3	Unlearning is a procedure that highlights the need to remove outdated information and encourages new and modern attitudes in employees'	Encouraging employees
		Removing employees' negative attitudes

	minds. It is crucial for state-owned organizations, particularly banks, because systems have been upgraded but employees still insist on implementing old approaches. In fact, resisting changes is shared among all human beings.	Insisting on outdated solutions
		Resisting change

Initially, open coding was conducted; then, repetitive statements were omitted. axial coding was used to classify the codes. In Eventually, 11 components, 18 indexes, and Table (4), the items extracted from Table (3) 76 codes were obtained based on the were summarized and simplified, and then the academic and empirical experts' opinions.

**Table 4.** Coding procedure results (source: researcher's findings)

Component	Index	Selected code	Code number
Employee development	Individual development	Individual motivation	AU6
		Individual expertise	AU2
		New experiences	AU1
	Group development	Highlighting group thinking	CU3
		Interpersonal support	CU6
		Establishing special committee	CU39
Management		Holding regular meetings between management and employees	AU16
		Asking employees' opinions to hold meeting	AU14
		Management's perception of employees	BU40
		Managers' attempt to update services and systems	BU15
		Avoiding financial fraud among managers	AU37
		Raising managers' awareness	BU27
Economy	Financial	Limited budget	CU11
		Estimating the expenses of the previous process	CU23
		Bank's profitability	AU54
	Promotion and reward	Appropriate benefit and promotion in the organization	CU2
		Focusing on employees	AU18
		Fame and occupational credit	BU34
Knowledge management	Refining	Stopping using old knowledge	CU22
		Implementation of new knowledge	BU38
		Updating knowledge and information	AU48
	Sharing	Revising old knowledge through new approaches	AU22
		Introducing new approaches	BU24
		Encouraging employees to share knowledge	BU52
Education	Raising awareness	Constant integration in conducting educational affairs	BU21
		Changing employee's attitudes through education	CU21
		Removing old and outdated knowledge	CU24
	Educational planning	Educational needs analysis	AU17
		Employees' passion for learning	CU13
		Holding online educational courses	BU10
		Holding appropriate theoretical and applied courses	BU44
		Hiring experienced instructors	BU7
		Competitive educational environment	AU27
		Developing and implementing related educational courses	CU28
Legal	Intra-organizational regulations	Limiting organizational laws	CU32
		Organizational regulations	BU2
		Implementing systemic recommendation approach	BU3
		Government and regulatory issues	AU23
	Enacting new regulations	Flexibility in new principles and laws	BU13
		Proposing new legal solutions	BU1
		Abandoning old systems	CU31
		Updating to new regulations	AU49
Marketing	Customer service	Facilitating international regulations	AU49
		Highlighting customers' needs and satisfaction	CU16
		Competing other banks in providing the latest services	CU50

	Marketing process	Balanced reward cards	AU46
		Sustainable competitive advantage	CU15
		Familiarity with new products and marketing science	BU16
		Sustaining the business through marketing	BU54
		Resorting to new marketing approaches	BU50
Cultural	Inter-organizational culture	Following non-governmental organizations	AU51
		Establishing friendly communications	CU5
		Following successful banks	BU8
	Intra-organizational culture	Modifying employees' attitudes	CU35
		Changing values and criteria	CU17
		People's participation in decision making processes	CU43
Organizational	Structural	Implementing updated technology	CU54
		Omitting inefficient procedures	AU8
		Undetermined mechanical structures	AU15
		Unnecessary bureaucracy	BU9
	Content	Standardization of processes within the organization	BU39
		Re-engineering of the organization	BU5
		Adapting employees to the new environment	CU7
		Achieving organizational objectives	BU51
Consolidation and rigidity	Individual barriers	Localization and organizational fit	AU25
		Employees' feeling of insecurity	AU39
		Resisting change	AU12
	Organizational barriers	Accepting stupidity	AU3
		Highlighting the benefits of abandoning old methods	AU11
		Improper introduction of the new approach	AU21
		Lack of education for change	CU51
		Lack of accurate evaluator	AU29
Unlearning		Lack of a new educational method	BU23
		Resisting new knowledge	AU5
		Self-opposition	CU34
		Fear of the future	CU48
11	18	76	

Accordingly, primary themes were categorized using Atlas-T 8 software, which is depicted in the following figure.

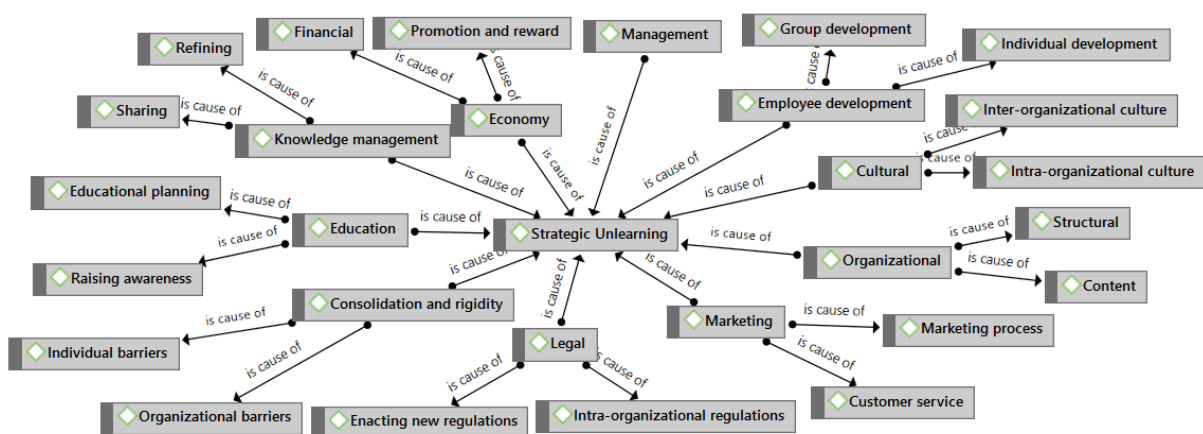


Figure 1. The outcomes of Atlas-ti8 software (source: researcher's findings)

## 5. Discussion

The purpose of this research is the study strategic unlearning model of sharing knowledge in Iran. The statistical population of the study consists of managers, executives, and experts in government-owned banks in

Iran. Besides, judgmental sampling was conducted and continued until the theoretical saturation was reached. Then, the collected data were analyzed using Atlas ti8 software. Eventually, the research model was presented. According to the results, 11

components, 18 indexes, and 76 codes were extracted. The findings also revealed that some components, such as employee development, economic management, knowledge management, education, organizational, legal, marketing, and cultural variables, consolidation, rigidity, as well as unlearning are substantial in developing the strategic unlearning among state-owned banks in Iran.

Related literature suggests that learning is regarded as a source of competitive advantage and a key to organizational success. If learning is not directed in the appropriate direction, it is unlikely that any increase in learning will lead to an increase in the organization's performance. Therefore, organizations will succeed if they can engage in learning and unlearning processes simultaneously. The establishment of this relationship has financial and social implications for employees and organizations as knowledge sharing is often volitional and requires little, or no, organizational resources (Prentice et al., 2023). So, Knowledge sharing is an altruistically connotated behavior. Researchers believe that if the old knowledge is not revised, it will result in the loss of competitiveness, particularly in this unsettled and changing environment. However, it will be absolutely unpleasant for the managers to abandon their old beliefs and ideas that have been practices in the organization for many years. Hence, unlearning is as crucial as acquiring new knowledge, and the lack of unlearning capability has been regarded as a critical weaknesses in organizations. Moreover, unlearning can reduce the occurrence of situations that hinder learning or create challenges for the organization's adaptation to the environment. Therefore, in the subject of knowledge sharing to realize the learning cycle, the organization must properly manage the organization's knowledge, including the creation, identification, acquisition and transfer of knowledge necessary for development (Tajpour et al., 2023). Therefore, agile organizations develop the learning process and knowledge sharing capabilities in order to respond to environmental events (Zhu et al., 2023). In knowledge sharing, a successful

organization must learn new knowledge and also control its existing knowledge, that is, while preventing the destruction of useful knowledge, in appropriate cases, it has the ability to remove and ignore some of its knowledge reserves, then knowledge Replace your old knowledge with the new (Manning et al., 2023). Therefore, in the implementation of unlearning, managers should pay attention to what level of the organization the old and obsolete knowledge has happened from an individual or organizational point of view and take appropriate measures for that environment (Hosseini & Sabokro, 2022). Since people's general attitudes and tendencies originate from their individual motivations, it is better to pay attention to the individual level in the early stages of unlearning and managers use different measures to motivate and encourage employees to unlearn and acquire new knowledge. They should try to provide the ground for unlearning at the group and organizational level. In addition, if there is no proper foundation, the use of measures at the organizational level may lead to excessive costs and failure in the field of change. Therefore, strategic unlearning is one of the most promising concepts in the field of knowledge management, which allows managers to use the effective knowledge, skills and experiences of employees and move towards the desired situation. Therefore, in knowledge sharing, the presence of resistance to change can make change plans in the organization fail; so, first of all, it is necessary that the employees are ready to make the change so that the employees accept the changes (Hosseini et al., 2022). The effect of knowledge management in the implementation of strategic unlearning in order to empower employees to create change and synergy is evident. Therefore, strategic unlearning can strengthen the effect of targeted knowledge management for the acceptance of new sciences. Therefore, the ultimate goal of strategic un-learning is to improve and optimize long-term growth and revenue generation and to make a serious effort to reveal useful information in the minds of employees and turn it into a valuable asset so that the organization's employees

have access to this asset jointly and purposefully. Eliminate useless sciences. According to the interview results, the organizing concept of employee empowerment includes two basic themes of individual and group empowerment, which is achieved by improving the employees' attitude. As an expert in education and empowerment, McLagan (1997) argued that previous theories about the organization must change to have significant impacts in education. This transformation includes the shift from rigid logical systems (focusing on structures) to dynamic patterns that are influenced by innovative views and understanding of the world (focusing on process and participation). Accordingly, education should primarily facilitate the development of individuals' abilities in the workplace and society by implementing available tools and facilities. In this regard, Rezaei et al. (2019) concluded that failing to adhere to meritocracy and professional commitment, neglecting the value of employees' knowledge, and failing to support organizational learning can contribute to lack of motivation and reduced productivity among employees.

As an organizing theme, management, includes the basic concept of participatory management, which can highlight the significance of organizational unlearning by overcoming organizational inactivity. Organizational unlearning can be regarded as a facilitator of innovation. In a seminal research, Leo et al. (2019) concluded that executive managers can contribute to the development of innovative behaviors by raising awareness of an "unlearning environment" or creating internal mechanisms to support employees' unlearning potential. It can also lead to the communication of novel ideas or actions regardless of any institutional constraints. Managers can facilitate interactions among employees and encourage them to agree on

unlearning procedures and beliefs that conflict with the changing environment.

The concept of economic organizer comprises the two basic themes of finance and promotion. Hence, economically efficient productivity, higher income, and improved living standards can prepare the ground for strategic unlearning. According to Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs, self-fulfillment can be attained after meeting low-level needs. It will also result in innovation and the establishment of an unlearning environment, which increases the quality of products and services. In addition, employees might be reluctant to create a strategic unlearning environment without financial incentives. The inspiring stimuli for strategic unlearning should include distinctive benefits and rewards for sustainability and self-control. Allocating budget and financial resources for strategic unlearning is considered a long-term investment in properties. According to Morley (1995), if managers allow employees to demonstrate their competences and learn new skills, their performance will improve (Rezaei et al.,2021). Consequently, if employees embrace a new task quickly and work harder during the transition period to adapt, they deserve to receive promotion and better benefits.

The organizing concept of knowledge management comprises the two basic themes of knowledge improvement and knowledge sharing. The learning cycle in knowledge management can be perceived if the organization properly manages the generation, identification, acquisition, and transfer of organizational knowledge. Thus, agile organizations tend to promote the learning process and knowledge management capabilities in order to respond to environmental events (Mårtensson, 2000). This is consistent with the findings of another research by Lyu et al(2020) and Leo et al(2019) highlighting that a successful

organization must acquire new knowledge and also control the existing knowledge.

Regarding knowledge improvement and the implementation of unlearning, managers should determine the individual and organizational level of the old and outdated knowledge and take appropriate measures accordingly. Since individuals' general attitudes originate from their intrinsic motivations, it is recommended to focus on the individual level in the early stages of unlearning process. Besides, the implementation of such measures at the organizational level may lead to excessive costs and failure to change if there is improper preparation. Similarly, Ličen (2023) concluded that the appropriateness of unlearning approaches and measures are determined based on the implicit/explicit or individual/collective nature of the knowledge. On the other hand, resistance to change can lead to the failure of modification plans in the organization concerning knowledge sharing. Therefore, it is essential that employees are ready to make the change so that they would accept these changes. Similarly, Rezaei et al. (2021) concluded that there is a significant correlation between employees' inclination for change and constant learning, research and discussion, collaboration and group learning, employees' participation in the learning process, employee empowerment, context-orientation, and strategic leadership. Agrawal and Muthulingam (2015) asserted that job satisfaction can act as a mediator between change leadership and individuals' readiness for change and commitment to change. Strategic unlearning can enhance the effect of purposeful knowledge management on the adoption of new sciences. Besides, the ultimate goal of strategic unlearning is to improve and optimize long-term growth and revenue generation, disclose beneficial information in the minds of employees, and turn it into a valuable asset.

The organizing concept of training includes the two primary themes of employee awareness and educational planning. Accordingly, training refers to the awareness raising that comprises identifying and recognizing outdated or detrimental knowledge (Tsang & Zahra, 2008). If managers adjust to the environmental changes, the employees will definitely get along with these changes. Consequently, Rajabipour et al. (2018) concluded that unlearning and its dimensions can have a substantially positive influence on employee development. Regarding the educational planning, organizations should focus on the unique capacities of each employee and plan to transform each talent into a sustainable performance in order to succeed. In contrast, if organizations fully focus on organizational processes and disregard such unique capabilities, it will cause irreparable damage to the organization. According to Bordbar et al. (2021), unlearning is regarded as an effective instrument for managers to improve the organizational performance and accomplish functional objectives.

The organizing concept of law and regulations is made up of the two fundamental themes of intra-organizational regulations and the enforcement of new laws. The lack of organizational knowledge imposes massive expenses on companies because it denotes the loss of capabilities, which destroys the competitive advantage of the organization. De Tajpour et al. (2023) asserted that due to rapid technological changes over time, the present working technologies in an organization might become impractical knowledge in the future. Therefore, it is necessary to manage the unlearning process so that the previous knowledge that prevents useful changes can be removed from the organizational memory and new knowledge can be acquired. Nonetheless, the organizational knowledge is often deeply embedded in the organizational memory that makes it difficult to forget and

remove without separating it from constant and fundamental activities.

The organizing concept of internal marketing includes the two basic themes of customer-orientation and the marketing process. With regards to the marketing process theme, organizations ultimately seek to maximize the profit and increase the revenue. The customer satisfaction can contribute to this condition because it can result in a long-term relationship with the organization and a better performance within the organization. Besides, organizations are required to monitor the market constantly in order to create new opportunities for customer satisfaction. Hence, the awareness of market preferences (customer needs and demands) reduces the extent of incompatibility of new products with customers' needs. Unlearning can result in the stronger customer-respect system, the provision of necessary training for marketing banking services, and the optimal use of new processes. Moreover, it is suggested to hire people with highly intellectual abilities to improve the level of unlearning and investment in this sector and maintain the quality of high-order services by state banks. The organizing concept of culture encompasses the two primary themes of inter-organizational culture and intra-organizational culture. Accordingly, organizational learning refers to dynamic and balanced relationships between the acquisition of external knowledge from the environment and intra-organizational activities (Senge, 1990). Organizational learning highlights the process of integrating norms and knowledge into the organization's culture. Managers must constantly focus on continuous and growing changes in the organization's knowledge (Chen & Pang, 2010). Similarly, Ronaghi (2021) argued that engineering, management of organizational processes, awareness of momentary changes in the external environment, and especially paying attention

to scientific and technological advances are considered the primary bases for maintaining the organization's knowledge advantage. Organizational culture can have an indirect impact on the improvement of strategic unlearning features in association with magnificent components of systemic learning, knowledge sharing, systemic thinking, collaborative management, competence development, comprehensive creativity, compliance with professional ethics, fair distribution of opportunities, friendly interactions, flexibility in resolving banking problems.

The organizing concept of organizational-orientation comprises the two basic themes of structure and content. Managers should design and organize the knowledge management process so that implicit knowledge, skills, and occupational procedures pertaining to structural issues can be transferred to procedures, standardization, and analysis of documentation content (Nadkarni & Chen, 2014). If organizations intend to improve, they should always try to identify their present situation so that they can develop a comprehensive plan for the future (Mahmoodi et al., 2014). Structural dimensions demonstrate the internal characteristics of an organization, which provide a basis to measure and compare organizations. Besides, state banks are recommended to illustrate a clear reaction to environmental changes, customers' expectations, and new technologies.

On the other hand, the content to be unlearned within the organization should be institutionalized in the context of organizational culture. Alike organizational learning that is recorded in the organizational memory, unlearning behaviors are also required to be institutionalized into the organization's culture. Consequently, the repetition of previous behaviors and habits is considered as the counter-value of the

organization's culture, leading to the promotion of learning new content.

The organizing concept of stabilization is associated with the two fundamental themes of individual and organizational obstacles. Organizational knowledge, if perceived properly, can be considered a key asset to generate influence and value. On the other hand, knowledge might quickly become an obstacle and threaten the survival of the organization if it is not supported. If knowledge management is not implemented appropriately, it might lead to unpredictable results (Martin de Holan, 2011). Reem et al. (2014) concluded that unlearning may not happen unless the potential gap is filled with new knowledge. Moreover, Becker (2008) also argued that employees' understanding of unlearning can accelerate the implementation of unlearning process. Meanwhile, managers should consider their fellow employees' feelings and emotions in the implementation of changes and eliminate their fears that changing their position will endanger their position in the company. Furthermore, such changes will result in an increase in the quality of services, employees' and customers' satisfaction, competitiveness as well as a reduction in costs, service delivery time, and resistance to change.

## 6. Conclusion

Not only does unlearning prevent from resistance and inflexibility in the organization, but it also facilitates the adaptation process and the development of methods to improve competitiveness and succeed. For this reason, organizations are recommended to resort to new methods by allocating financial and non-financial benefits. It will act as a motivational factor that encourages employees to abandon old knowledge and accept new knowledge because employees will attempt to perform optimally if encouraged by the company. Finally, many employees believe that financial incentives will work most efficiently.

It is crucial to note that despite the apparent value of new knowledge as a result of cognitive unlearning, some employees may find it difficult to free themselves from all the repetitive rules and practices they have been practicing for a long time. In addition to the commitment that people have old organizational regulations, the process of abandoning previous knowledge is overwhelming because they have become habits and are followed unconsciously. Consequently, the behavioral dimension of organizational unlearning contains the conscious and deliberate abandonment of past actions as well as the development of unconscious behavior patterns. Therefore, it is suggested to create an experimental environment where one group of employees is trained with new methods and knowledge, while the other group is trained based on the old methods and knowledge. These two groups should be working in separate units and the result need to be compared at the end. Moreover, it is recommended to use job rotation technique so that the workplace environment does not become tedious for the members of the organization and it does not lead to low productivity. Eventually, if the new method is proved more advantageous, it will be accepted by other employees more easily. It is suggested not to perform the job rotation in a short period of time because the majority of the expenses for education will be wasted. It is also necessary to plan for both theoretical and practical education because these two types of training can lead to positive results if put together. In this regard, it is recommended to initiate the training process for managers who have worked with the old method and have outdated knowledge. Accordingly, if the managers can deal with these changes, the fellow employees will also cope with this issue more easily and efficiently. In addition, it is better to upgrade all the banks' equipment in accordance with the new method and get rid of all the services related to the old method. The new method and its benefits should be highlighted more often so that we can create a positive image of the new method. It is also essential to modify the procedures, policies, and other organizational frameworks in line with the



new executive elements in the organization; otherwise, there will be many limitations in the organization. Lastly, employees and customers should be informed of the changes in the organization in order to be encouraged to use the new method. State banks, because they are among the most important centers and economic bases of the country, should do all their efforts to implement the knowledge management system in the best way. For this, they must remove the integral obstacles to knowledge sharing and knowledge management. First, the organization should try to select a person as a manager who is familiar with all aspects of knowledge and can manage the people of the organization well. The organization should try to make employees feel job security. The people of the organization should be made to feel that they are the crucial factor for knowledge sharing and knowledge management in the best way, and technology alone is not the answer to such a need, and employees should reduce their unrealistic expectations of technology. This culture should be created in the organization where people share their knowledge and have a good relationship with the organization's manager and are eager to work in a group. These are the factors that previous researches have shown the weakness of these cultural factors in the organization.

## 7. Suggestions

According to the finding, policy makers and managers are recommended to plan to:

- Hold training courses based on these new methods,
- Prepare employees for the shift by publishing brochures about the new method and holding face-to-face meeting,
- Make those who have faith in the old method and are dissatisfied with the implementation of the new method because they find it difficult to learn experience the negative outcomes of using the outdated method,
- Discuss the consequences and disadvantages of failing to accept new knowledge and insisting on implementing old knowledge through speeches and newsletters,

- Prepare instructions on the potential violations after the implementation of the new method to avoid repeating old habits and experiences, and
- Distribute survey questionnaire among the bank members to understand their opinion on the change and prepare the ground promote the employees' understanding and expectations of the changes.

## 8. Limitations and Future Research

Researchers have faced a number of limitations in making suggestions for the future. Due to the use of qualitative research method in the present study, the data required for analysis and model extraction have been collected through interviews with managers of Iran's state-owned banks. The lack of information of managers and experts in the field of state banks regarding the subject of the research faced problems in the research process. Examining the obstacles and problems of implementing strategic unlearning in the environment of government organizations, especially state banks, can be done with special attention to the general upstream strategies. Therefore, the analysis of this study was based on data collected from different perceptions of experts and not from objective sources that may in some cases be influenced by the personal tastes of the findings. In any case, efforts have been made to take the necessary measures to reduce these shortcomings as much as possible, with the concurrence of managers. The present study was conducted in Iran's state-owned banks. Therefore, extending it to other organizations in the country may have different results that are not very reliable. Therefore, the suggestions of this research for the future are as follows:

- This research should be done in other industrial, educational, and economic environments and the results should be presented to generalize the results of the comparison and model.
- Comparative research and comparison of each of the components of strategic unlearning should be done in public and private organizations.

- Due to the novelty of the concept of strategic unlearning, there is a vast research field in this field for the exploitation of the management field.

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The authors declare no conflicts of interest.

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