FULL LENGTH ARTICLE

The Structural Model of Performance Based on the Empowerment of University Staff

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of the study is to present a structural model of the performance based on the empowerment of the working staff in Islamic Azad University.Thepopulation included all the staff in the branches of Islamic Azad University. Using cluster random sampling, 1096 subjects were selected. The Instruments were a researcher-made questionnaire which was designed based on the ACHIEVE Model presented byHersey and Goldsmith as well asSpritzer's[19], empowerment questionnaire which was designed based on the model by Thomas and Velthouse[20]. The result of path analysis indicated that the university staff's empowerment can influence their performance and the highest influence is devoted by motivation.

Keywords: Performance, empowerment, Islamic Azad University

INTRODUCTION

Nowadays, organizations are in a continuous change to survive in the complex and unpredictable condition of present and future. Also, the time has passed when the materialistic entities were the preconditions for success. Now, physical capital is less important than the intellectual capital and the purpose of change is mainly upon the softwares rather than the hardwares. One of the significant changes in the field can be sought in the empowering process of human resources. Hence, it is to be underlined due to the following reasons:

1. Customers' demands on quality, price, and services are now on the rise and if an organization cannot make these demands come true, customers are attracted by other competing companies [4].

2. The realization of customers' demands is to be based on the profitability of the organizations since there has always been the risk to drastically reduce the benefits of the organization in the end[4].

3. Lagging behind in the competition to excel thecompetitors may lead to more loss and increased burden.Therefore, the effectiveness of an organization and management requires flexible, self-commanding, and entrepreneuring workforce[24].

4. Managers have also felt the tension for more production with fewer employees. The traditional management style which is based on the hegemony of managers and the full obedience from the employees cannot solve the problem. What managers are looking for is finding the solution to more production with fewer employees and less resources in a shorter time. The members of organizations are looking for job security, ownership, and gaining pride[3].

5. The current labor force is completely different from past. It is capable of excellent talents in growth and development but is rather hasty to establish its goals. Gradually, it is necessary to create confidence among members and managers; as a result, individuals try to do their best responsibly in a free atmosphere and the managers can ask the group members to perform freely. Therefore, a suitable response to the above categories and difficulties is "empowerment" [4].

6. Based on Scott and Jaffe [17], the organization is rushed both externally and internally.The former includes intensive global competition, unbelievable rapid changes, demand for quality and services and limitation of resources; the latter, the staff feels untruthfully on behalf of managers and would become depressed. They seek meaningful work and more self-actualization. In response, the managers should adapt a group to satisfy organization's goals. Changing traditional organizations and using the modern ones require more consideration to the environment. In traditional organizations, the individuals only did

a definite task but the modern ones need the staff capable of decision-making, problem solutions, creativity and responsible for the results.

Blanchard related empowerment to providing condition to supply the best intellectual resources in any field of organizational performance. In his view, the goal of empowerment is that the most capable staff should make the most impact through the most suitable methods [13]. Thomas and Velthouse[20],regarded the psychological empowerment process as increasing of intrinsic job motivation; it includes four cognitive fields as feeling of impact, competence, meaning, and choice (self-determination). For the first time they stated the concept of psychological empowerment in literature. Spritzer [19],expanded on the works of Thomas and Velthouse[20], and Conger and Kanungo (1988) in defining psychological empowerment as a cluster of four psychological characteristics. These include: 1) impact, 2) meaning, 3) choice (self-determination), and 4) competence. Impact is the degree to which an individual feels that he or she is having a positive influence on the outcomes of the work such as care that is provided to nursing home residents. Work is considered to have meaning when the work tasks reflect the worker's individual beliefs, values, and behaviors. Choice (Self-determination) is defined as an individual's sense of having choice in initiating and regulating actions. This reflects autonomy in the initiation and continuation of work behaviors and processes such as making decisions about work methods, pace, and effort. Competence, or self-efficacy, is identified as an individual belief in his or her capability to perform the work activities [19].

One of the roles of organizational leaders is to give effective, sufficient, and on-time information to the employees. Those leaders, who do not like to share information with the individuals, would never have an empowered organization. If they share the information with the staff, confidence, intimacy and responsibility will be formed. An atmosphere with the lack of confidence would disrupt the process of decision-making. The individuals cannot make a suitable decision without enough information. Hence, they have to act responsibly because of the information [3]. Koplman, [15],insisted on gathering information to increase empowerment. According to their individual findings, one can achieve considerable successes through sharing individuals with the information necessary for improving the organization [24].

The continuity of organizations' activities depends on staff performance. The fundamental changes in organization were rapid in recent decades in such a way that made the organization's management more complicated than before. In organizations, the role of labor force is important in all activities. Dessler[7].enumerated the factors affecting staff performance as follows:

1. Individual Behavior: one's performance is affected by conception, personality, ability, and the function of management in line with their performance.
2. Motivation: one should be motivated to do a job effectively.
3. Positive Reinforcement: tangible rewards and promotion would improve performance. Positive reinforcement is the best way to change behaviors.
4. Job Redesign and Job Fulfillment: the issues related to the nature and features of a job, e.g. challenge in work, lead to a successful better performance.
5. Goal-determination, Contribution, and Goal-based management: one should know what others expect him/her.
6. Morale: individuals having a high morale would pay more attention to the task.
7. Leadership and Power in Organization: leader would affect much on staff performance, as he has to determine important goals, resolve the conflicts, reward the staff, make the opportunity for the individuals to have more training and affect directly on individual's morale.
8. Groups: a work group can affect the goals, abilities, rewards, and performance of its members.
9. The Inter-group Relation: the conflict between two groups in organization would restrain the information, make one not to attend and decrease performance level.
10. Structure of Organization: any organization needs a pattern of relations in which one can understand reporting process, task division and individual's responsibility.
11. Organizational Relations and Decision-making: the process of employing, organizing, and handling depends on the leader's decision; a good decision requires a good relation.
12. Inter-individual Relations and Evaluation: most tasks of a manager require face-to-face contacts. The staff performance should be evaluated.
13. Learning and Training: an employee should have necessary skills to do the task and these skills should be refreshed.
14. Organizational Change and Improvement: the low level of performance necessitates the change in some organizational dimensions such as structure and reward system. Organizational improvement causes more trust and collaboration in organization and leads to better problem solving.

Another researcher defined job performance as a function of motivation and ability [15]:

$$ability * motivation = performance$$

Other researchers also referred to the importance of these two factors in labor force performance. Another important factor in staff productivity is support:

$$attempt * support * ability = performance$$

Attempt is when an individual tries in job which is the reflection of his job motivation. DurBin[9]. knew the ability and motivation as the most important factors affecting staff productivity. It is also important that one's talents match with his/her job. The level of productivity would be low in case the adaptation between individual and job would be achieved. If individuals' skills and interest match with the task they do and if they have the opportunity to reform their performance, the productivity would increase. The clarity in goals, performance expectations, and feedback are other important factors in performance. In Vecchio[21], three features are important in performance improvement considering goals specification, challenge and acceptance of these. In goal theory, Locke and Latham [16],focused on the idea that the goal should be defined and informed to be done. Based on this theory, goal determination causes performance improvement in two ways. First, one can use technology toward the specified goal and the individuals can focus their activities and operations on important results. Second, goal determination and directing attempt would create technology. If the staff know what they should consider, they would engage and interest more in task. The other aspect of this theory is to give feedback about the results. Feedback helps individual to determine new goals. The feedback should be in such a way that if the given goal is not achieved, one would not lose interest and try more. It also should create new technology to do the task. Sometimes, an overall feedback is desirable such as the following sentence: "You have done well." However, it is emphasized in Skinner's Learning Theory that the feedback should be specified [2]. The staff should know which behavior is considered to be valued so they can improve their performance better. It is rather impossible to help the individual to compensate the mistakes without specified information. Hersey and Blanchard [4].believed that specified goals would lead to a good performance. One should be sure that the staff know the following two matters. First, what they are asked to do (responsibility domain) and, second, what a good performance is. In view of these theorists, the importance of expectations and organizational responsibilities would stop performance improvement. The staff's reply to the question of "what do you do?" is rather different from the manager's reply to the question of "what do your staff do?" Hersey and Goldsmith defined the acronym of the word "ACHIEVE" as the following factors affecting human resource performance:

a) Ability: it refers to the knowledge and skill in doing a task; its key dimensions are knowledge (formal and informal training), experience (previous job experience), and skill (special features cause success).

b) Clarity (role perception): one should know and accept what, when and how s/he must do. In many cases, the oral agreement on goals is not enough i.e. the manager must become sure that the goals are stated formally and the subordinates should be encouraged to ask for more understanding.

c) Help (organizational support): it refers to the organization support, which one needs to do the task. It may include budget, job facilities, support from other departments, and enough human resources.

d) Incentive (motivation): job motivation means the interest for doing the task successfully. The individuals are not motivated equally. They are motivated in case of tangible and intangible rewards.

e) Evaluation: it is a daily feedback of performance and formal periodical supervisions. An effective feedback process helps the individuals to know how well they have done. It is rather illogical to expect the staff to improve their performance under the circumstances in which they are not informed about their job expectations.

f) Validity: it refers to the valid decisions of manager in relation to human resources. Such decisions should be legal and in the line with individual's occupation, e.g. job analysis, employment, evaluation, training, job progression, and leaving the organization.

g) Environment: it refers to the external factors affecting performance beside other factors such as ability, support, and motivation necessary for the job. The important environmental factors include competition, change, labor market conditions, government rules, and suppliers [14]. In the study by Silver [18], psychological performance is in a strong relation with self-autonomy and team or individual performance. Ahearne[1],proved that empowerment-based managers' behaviors increase the individuals' performance. There is a strong relation between individual engagements in decision-making with

performance. Corrigan [6],stated that the well-empowered individuals would have high job performance. Greenberger[12], found a relation between individual empowerment and performance; the level of individual perception of formal and informal power and environmental power would make 30% of job performance. Congar, [5],showed the effect of empowerment activities on staff performance.

The goal of this research is to provide a structural pattern for performance based on the staff empowerment at Azad Islamic University.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

The present study is applied research and methodologically a correlational one which investigated the relationship between two variables of empowerment and performance among university staff.

Instruments:

To collect data, Spritzer's [19], Empowerment questionnaire was adopted, expanded on the works of Thomas and Velthouse (1992) with four dimensions of Competence (items 4-6), self-determination (items 1-3), meaning (items 7-9), and impact (items 10-12) with Alpha index of 0.84. The staff performance was measured through a questionnaire constructed based on the Hersey's and Goldsmith's ACHIEVE model. This model includes components of ability (items 1-6), clarity (items 7-12), help (items 13-18), incentive (items 19-28), evaluation (items 29-36), validity (items 37-42), and environment (items 43-48) with the Alpha index of 0.87.

Population, sample, and sampling method

The population of the study included all the staff working for all 17 zones in Islamic Azad University in 2011in Iran. Cochran's formula was run to estimate the appropriate sample size. Using cluster random sampling, 1096 participants were selected.

RESULTS

The descriptive statistics showed that 367 (63.1 %) participants were male and 215 (36.9 %) were female. The lowest and highest work experience was 1 and 30 years respectively with the average of 9 years. Regarding their level of education, 149 (26.1 %) got High school or college diplomas, 326 (57.1 %) got BA, 96 (16.8 %) MA and PhD. In Marital status, they were 29.8 percent (N=168) married and 70.2 percent (N= 396) single. Considering their department they work for, 104 (18.8 %) worked under research department, 163 (30.5 %) in educational departments, 127 (22.9 %) in financial and administration department, 46 (8.3 %) in civil department, 73 (13.2 %) in the department of student affairs, and 35 (6.3 %) worked in the other departments.

Table 1

Descriptive statistics for measures of central tendency and dispersion for staff empowerment

indexes / dimension	Mean	Median	Mode	SD	Range	Min.	Max.	Total
Empowerment	33.83	34	36	6.243	36	12	48	2.126
Self-determination	7.71	8	9	2.084	9	3	12	4586
Competency	8.93	9	9	2.058	9	3	12	5311
Meaning	8.86	9	9	2.06	9	3	12	5269
impact	8.34	9	9	2.028	9	3	12	4960

The measures of central tendency (Mode, Mean, and Median) for the variable of empowerment are relatively close which prove the distribution is normal. As in Table 1, the lowest and highest indexes in empowerment are 12 and 48 respectively and the range is 36. The score with the highest frequency is also 36. The average index of the empowerment among the sample was 33. The index of standard deviation (6.24) shows the distribution of the results around the mean.

Table 2

Descriptive statistics for measures of central tendency and dispersion for staff performance

indexes / dimension	Mean	Median	Mode	SD	Skewness	Kurtosis	Range	Min.	Max.	Total
Performance	170.68	171	192	28.618	0.72	9.303	391	48	439	247821
Ability	22.85	23	24	3.806	-0.51	0.402	24	6	30	41327

Clarity	22.52	23	23	3.649	-0.38	0.535	34	6	40	40535
Help	20.75	21	19	4.755	-0.329	0.8	42	6	48	37127
Incentive	33.78	34	40	7.949	-0.355	0.79	57	10	67	58750
Evaluation	29.38	30	32	7.141	16.241	497.53	239	8	247	50909
Validity	20.11	20	24	7.441	16.701	518.46	244	6	250	35305
Environment	20.64	21	22	4.641	-0.159	2.651	53	6	59	36036

As can be clearly observed in the above table, the measures of central tendency (Mode, Mean, and Median) for the variable of staff performance are relatively close which prove the distribution is normal. The lowest and highest indexes in staff performance are 48 and 439 respectively and the range is 391. The performance score with the highest frequency is 192. The average index of their performance in the sample group was 170.68. The index of standard deviation (28.61) shows the distribution of the results around the mean. Therefore, 64 per cent of the participants lie between the total score of 142.07 and 199.29.
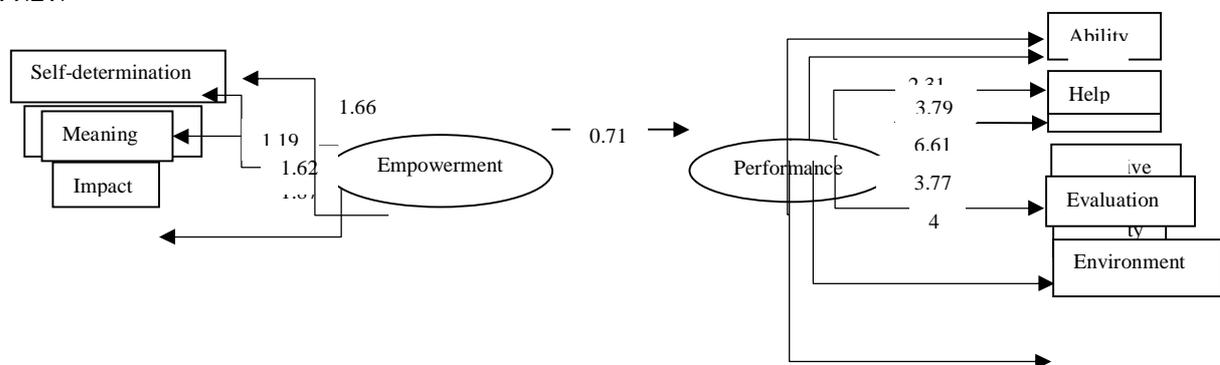

Figure1 Path analysis model of staff performance based on their empowerment

As shown in Figure 1, the Lambda rate of external latent variable of empowerment was 1.63 for self-determination, 1.19 for competency, 1.62 for meaning, and 1.87 for impact which help form the empowerment variable with the effectiveness rate of 0.71. It means that 71 % of the variation in the dependant variable of staff performance is explained by a collection of these indices. The variables of Impact and Competency indicate the highest and lowest amount of internal consistency in the external latent variable. The Lambda rate of internal latent variable of performance were 2.31 for Ability, 2.32 for Clarity, 3.79 for Help, 6.61 for Incentive, 3.77 for Evaluation, 4 for Validity, and 2.97 for Environment, whose accumulation form the performance variable. The variables of Incentive and Ability indicate the highest and lowest amount of internal consistency in the internal latent variable. Since the model's goodness of fit index is 0.90, it can be stated that it has an acceptable fit. The calculated index indicates the direct effect of empowerment on performance among university staff. The following table presents the indices related to the model's fit:

Table 3
Model's Fit Indices

Index	Rate	Interpretation
Lewis-Tucker (Non-normed fit index)	0.90	High fit (equals or more than 0.90)
Bentler-Bonett's (Normed fit index)	0.91	High fit (more than 0.90)
Hoelter	0.70	High fit (more than 0.70)
Root Mean Square Error (RMSE)	0.043	High fit (equal to or less than 0.05)
GFI	0.90	High fit (more than 0.90)

To sum up, the five goodness of fit indices indicate presented model's fit since Lewis-Tucker Non-normed fit index (0.90) and Bentler-Bonett's Normed fit index (0.91) are both above 0.90, Hoelter index (0.70) is acceptable, and Root Mean Square Error (0.043) is below 0.05. Therefore, desirability adaptation is provided for the designed model and can approve it as an appropriate model for the staff performance based on their empowerment.

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

The findings of the present study emphasized that the staff empowerment can affect their performance in Islamic Azad University branches. In a study by Wei, Yuan, and Di[22], they found a relationship between

psychological empowerment and creative performance. The large number of studies carried out by Yang and Choi [25], Silver [18], Ahearne[1], Corrigan [6], Govers[11], and Fiedler [10], also proved the relationship between staff empowerment and their performance.

As a result of diverse changes in the surrounding environment, Figbenum (1994) indicated that universities, these days, are the centers fornational and international debates on the goals of universities in leading the societies. He underlined the quality of higher education as the key factor in the hidden competition among countries. Higher education system is a determining factor in training work forces for the other institutions in the society. The social, economic, cultural, and political dimensions of the higher education institutions require that the quality of these centers is to be considered as in the limelight of the activities in a society to reduce the waste in the human financial resources.

Drucker[8], believed that in the new organizational environments which are described as complex, chaotic, rapidly changing, staff are to be flexible, self-controlled, responsible, initiating. Major changes are to be designed in the organizational structures and management styles so that all the staff are invited in the decision-making process, team works are formed, more authority are given to staff in the middle or lower levels, the hierarchical systems are replacedby self-managing networks. Under such circumstances, organizations are to be more dynamic and flexible and managers are to consider their staff's ideas and interests. Staff are to belong themselves to the organization. As a result of the present study, the following suggestions are presented for all the branches of Islamic Azad University and other organizations and higher education institutions:

1. Staff should be given more freedom of action.
2. Staff should be allowed to make decision on their responsibility.
3. Staff should be allowed to on how they would like to do their responsibilities freely and independently.
4. Staff should be self-confident regarding the work they do.
5. Staff should be proficient enough for their responsibility.
6. Responsibilities are to be meaningful for the staff.
7. The workdone by the staff should be regarded as valuable.
8. Staff should play a major role in the related responsibilities.
9. Staff's ideas are shared in decision making process.

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