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Human resource development: Faculty members’ psychological empowerment in Iran’s colleges

Ehsan Gholifar*, Seyyed Yousef Hedjazi, Seyyed Mahmoud Hoseini and Abdolmotalleb Rezaei

Department of Agricultural Extension and Education, College of Agricultural Economics and Development, University of Tehran-Karaj-Iran.

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The purpose of the paper is to investigate the factors affecting faculty members’ psychological empowerment towards access to human resource development in colleges in Iran with application of structural equation modeling. Data were collected using a structured questionnaire. Five dimensions of psychological empowerment (that is, meaning, self determination, impact, competence and trust) were used as dependent variable in evaluating faculty members’ psychological empowerment, and their interrelationships were suggested and empirically tested. The results provide an expanded understanding of factors that influence on faculty members’ psychological empowerment and implications of this work are discussed. Research findings showed that professional skills and organizational culture had a significantly positive effect on psychological empowerment of faculty members, but management-organizational factors had hardly any effect on psychological empowerment of faculty members.

Key words: Human resource development, faculty members, Iran, psychological empowerment, structural equation modeling.

INTRODUCTION

Since higher education has a determining role in economic, social and cultural development of the countries, and with regard to the fact that the required labor force of diverse sections are trained through higher education, consolidation and expansion of this sector serves as the infrastructure of the other parts. At the same time, faculty members are considered as the major assets to the educational system of any country whose competency has a direct effect on the function of educational systems (Gharoon, 2000). Quality of scientific attempts, such as research and teaching experiences, hinges more than any other thing on the activity of faculty members. On the other hand, the totality of the anticipated activities done by universities such as science exploration and production (investigation and development of major and basic sciences), science combination (integration of thoughts), and application of science (employment of it in real world), teaching and training is accomplished by the faculty members. Therefore, it is mentionable that efficiency and productivity of higher education organizations depends, to a large extent, on the quality of their faculty members (Birenbaum, 1998).

Empowerment of labor forces in educational organizations is of extraordinary importance, due to its significant role in the development and expansion of society in multifarious dimensions. Thus, universities are required to provide the qualification and circumstances necessary to empower the faculty members, who serve as the main assets and gravity center of universities and foundation of activities in scientific centers as well (Abdollahi and Heydari, 2008).

These days the specialist advocate, that the faculty members with high potentials, are considered as one of the most important social groups in every society. This is due to the ability of potent and powerful faculty members to shape the attitude, skills and behaviour of the students,

*Corresponding author. E-mail: ehsan.gholifar@gmail.com. Tel: (+98)261-2238293. Fax: (+98)261-2818709.

Abbreviations: IVs, Independent variables; DV, dependent variable; SEM, structural equation modeling.
resulting to the empowerment of the knowledge seekers (Sanders and Rivers, 1996). Therefore, one of the important ways of achieving an ideal result in terms of learning and reduction of educational costs, particularly in universities; involves creation of opportunities for the faculty members to constantly develop their professional skills, which will, in effect, lead to their empowerment. In another way, the governments must create a suitable environment, with enough opportunities to enhance the empowerment of the faculty members; so they can in turn, create empowered students for their society in general (Erizen et al., 2009).

Despite the importance of the issue and progressive inclination of the universities and educational institutes in developed countries towards empowerment of the faculty members, this issue in general and in agricultural faculties/universities/colleges in particular, has not been addressed in Iran. Hitherto, no specific objective programs have been adhered to towards tackling this issue, which can have negative effect on the quality of the education and complicate the issue further in long term. One of the primary reasons, contributing to the existence of present dilemma, is the lack of fundamental knowledge or recognition surrounding the process of empowerment. Its extent, intellectual principles and other related demands have also effectively rendered the implementation of empowerment somewhat impractical. As a result, one of the basic questions that this study concentrates on relates the constitutional elements of empowerments of faculty members within the agricultural colleges. It also looks at the principles that affect the process of empowerment of the faculty members with reference to enquires of the study. This investigation has focused on empowerment of faculty members of Iranian agricultural colleges, identify and investigate the effective factors on empowerment of faculty that are vital components of a cohesive planning and programming in relation to psychological empowerment of the faculty members of Iranian agricultural colleges.

LITERATURE REVIEW

The extent of psychological empowerment

The concept of psychological empowerment was first introduced in 1980s (Blanchard et al., 1996; Whetten and Cameron, 1998; Sagie and Koslow, 2000). However, in 1990s substantial interest towards this concept among researches, university lectures, and management specialists has been generated (Conger and Kannungo, 1988; Bowen and Lawler, 1995; Thomas and Velthouse, 1990; Spreitzer, 1995; Shelton, 2002). The intellectuals and researchers until 1990s have considered issues such as allocations of duties, decision making of the lower level employees and access to information, as the empowerment of the human resources (Blanchard et al., 1996; Bowen and Lawler, 1995; Foy, 1997). For instance, Foy (1997) has described empowerment as "the allocation of decision making power to those who lacked it previously". Bowen and Lawler (1995) have opted for "the empowerment of the front line employees of an organization, to share vital elements of information, knowledge, bonus, and power.

Blanchard et al. (1996) consider empowerment as "sharing information, group establishment and planning of the organizational structure as the vital components. Quinn and Spreitzer (1997) consider this kind of viewing the empowerment as "mechanical approach". However, since 1990s, the theorists and organizational psychologists look upon empowerment of the human resources as a complex multi-dimensional issue. They have advocated that, there is a difference between specific occasional management actions and the conception of the employees related to these actions (Thomas and Velthouse, 1990). Quinn and spreitzer (1997), Thomas and Velthouse (1990), Ford and Fotler (1995) and Whetten and Cameron (1998) accept the multi dimension concept of empowerment and that it has different meaning to every individual. Quinn and Spreitzer (1997) consider this kind of viewing the issue as the Organic Approach. According to this approach, the issue of empowerment is not something that the managers must do for the employees, but the conception of the employees in regards to their own role within the organization. Nevertheless, the managers could prepare the ground and give the employees enough opportunities, leading to empowerment. According to Conger and Conneng (1988), the empowerment has its roots in the level of the enthusiasm among the employees. Thomas and Velthous (1990) believe that this concept could not be defined as "one dimensional issue" they consider "psychological empowerment" as the process of inner motivation increase among the employees that recognize four areas of impact, competency, meaning and choice (self-determination). For the first time they have inserted the conception of psychological empowerment into the management literature. Spreitzer (1996) by considering the definition of Thomas and Velthous (1990), go on to describe the psychological empowerment as a motivational concept, consisting of four dimensions of competence, self-determination, meaning and impact. These dimensions are the indicative of the direction of the employee’s role in an organization. They have subjected these four issues to credibility research. Whetten and Cameron (1998) think that, empowerment is the notion of giving the decision making power to the employees, who could mean helping the employees to strengthen their trust by overcoming their inadequacy, we would be able to direct and channelize their inner motivation to act. The following authors, apart from confirming the four dimensional aspects of empowerment, that is, Thomas and Velthous (1990) and Spreitzer (1995, 1996), have further added the factor of
“trust” to this issue. Therefore, to the psychological empowerment dimensions of impact, competency, meaning, self-determination and, the factor of trust could be added in this research. For the purpose of measuring the extent of empowerment of the faculty members, different dimensions of psychological empowerment has been utilized;

**Meaning:** The meaning of a value of a task goal or purpose judged in relation to individual own ideals of standards (Thomas and Velthouse, 1990). Meaning involves a fit between the requirements of a work role and beliefs, values and behaviors (Spreitzer, 1995).

**Competence:** competence is an individual’s belief in his or her capability to perform task activities skillfully (Bandura, 1997). Competence is analogous to agency beliefs, personal mastery, or effort-performances expectancy (Thomas and Velthouse, 1990).

**Impact:** is the degree to which an individual can influence strategic, administrative, or operating outcomes at work (Thomas and Velthouse, 1990). Impact is the converse of learned helplessness. Further, Impact is different from locus of control; whereas impact is influenced by the work context, internal locus of control is a global personality characteristic that endures a cross situations (Spreitzer, 1995).

**Self-determination:** where competence is a mastery of behavior, Self-determination is an individual’s sense of having choice in initiating and regulating actions. Self-determination is an issue of psychological need (Ryan and Deci, 2000). Self-determination reflects autonomy in the initiation and continuation of work behaviors and processes (Thomas and Velthouse, 1990). Self-determination includes an activity that comes with the freedom of action and the experience of having the right of choice (Gagne and Deci, 2005).

**Trust:** aims at the relationship between high level managers and employee at lower level. The issue of reliability relates to the level of interest, competence, amiability and trusting others (Mishra and Spreitzer, 1997).

**Organizational culture**

At university levels, culture is described as a values, beliefs and common objectives between the faculty members, managers, student and the university employees. These values and believes affect the process of the decision making at the universities to a large extent and shape personal and organizational behaviour (Bartell, 2003). The following researches (Sigler and Pierson, 2000; Liden and Tewksbury, 1995; Mallak and Kustedt, 1996; Shabani, 2006; Sagie, 2002) have confirmed the effect of organizational culture on the empowerment.

**Professional skills**

Professional skills are those variables and instances that relate to the academic and professional life of a faculty member, which includes all the required capabilities of teaching skills, evaluation, communication, application skills of novel technology in teaching, educational planning, information and communication technology skills, technical skills, etc. (Shams, 2008). Researches such as Hobbs (2009), Shahpasand (2006), Soltani (2004), Bogler and Somech (2004), Adakatsap (2003) Luanne et al. (2006) and Ravid et al. (2008) studied relationship between professional skills and empowerment.

**Management- organizational factor**

One other factor that affect the empowerment of the faculty members are, organizational and management factor; the collection of causes and effects that either leads to the implementation of an act or by hindering it, inhabits the actions of the faculty members (Shams, 2008). The result of the researches Robbins et al. (2002), Conger and Kannungo (1988), Bowen and Lawler (1992), Casteilano et al. (1998), Blanchard and zigarmi (1985), Thomas and Velthouse (1990), Nielsen and Pedersen (2003), Foy (1997), Stainer (2000), Erstad (1997), Ongori (2009), Spreitzer (1996) and Bandura (2000) pointed out that the most important organizational and management factor that affect the empowerment, include; the allocation of responsibility, job enrichment, sharing of information, access to resources, education, organizational obligation, cooperation, communications, management actions, objective classification, organizational vision, analyzing and reviewing the action and the reward system.

**Research Framework and Hypotheses**

A proposed research model, based on the literature review, is shown in Figure 1. The model is implemented and validated in the course of the work. This model gives rise to a series on hypotheses: The study was designed to examine “effect size” (that is, regression coefficient), between the independent variables (IVs) and the Dependent Variable (DV).

**H1:** Organizational culture factor has a positive effect on the faculty members’ empowerment.

**H2:** Professional skills factor has a positive effect on the faculty members’ empowerment.

**H3:** Management-organizational factor has a positive effect on the faculty members’ empowerment.
METHODS

Data collection

Data for the study were collected using a questionnaire survey administrated during 2009. Data were collected using a structured questionnaire addressed to Agricultural faculties. The statistical population of the study consisted of 1837 agricultural faculties who were working in 31 agricultural colleges in Iran. The sample size was determined by using Morgan’s formula. However, the sample included 404 faculties were proportional stratified random sampling from 31 colleges. Earlier, a pilot study was conducted in University College of Agriculture and Natural Resources, University of Tehran using thirty faculties. The aim was to test and improve the questionnaire. Revisions were made based on the pilot study. Responses from the pilot test were not included in the final sample. The questionnaire included two parts. The first asked those demographic variables of faculties and the second asked questions about the faculties’ empowerment, organizational culture, professional skills and management-organizational factors.

Measures

Except for the demographic c, all of characteristics, all of the variables in this study were assessed on a Five point Likert scale (where 1 = strongly disagree/very low and 5 = strongly agree/very high).

Psychological empowerment

The study measured faculty psychological empowerment using Whetten and Cameron (1998) 15-item scale, which is commonly used to measure employee psychological empowerment (Ryan and Deci, 2000; Gagne and Deci, 2005). Using the following scale, they indicated the extent to which they agree or disagree that each one describes their self-orientation. The validation of the instrument is described in Spreitzer (1995, 1996). The validity of the instrument is proven. Cronbach’s alpha coefficient for reliability has been shown to be strong and reliability estimates for the psychological empowerment dimensions are typically around 0.84.

Organizational culture

Organizational culture was measured with Denison and Adkins (2007) 60 item scale, which is commonly used to measure organizational culture. Example items include “Decisions are usually made at the level where the best information is available”, “There is a clear and consistent set of values that governs the way we do business”, “Innovation and risk taking are encouraged and rewarded”. Cronbach’s alpha coefficient for reliability has been shown to be strong and reliability estimates for the organizational culture is typically around 0.78.

Professional skills

Professional skills was measured with self-structured 30 item scale based on prior studies such as Librera et al. (2004), Ross, and Bruse, (2007), Sandra et al. (2006) and Roberts et al. (2006). Example items include teaching skills, evaluation, communication, application skills of novel technology in teaching, educational planning, information and communication technology skills, technical skills. Cronbach’s alpha coefficient for reliability has been shown to be strong and reliability estimates for the empowerment dimensions are typically around 0.82.

Management-organizational factors

Management-organizational factors measured with elf structured 27 item scale based on prior studies such as Robbins et al. (2002), Thomas and Velthouse (1990), Ongori (2009), Nielsen and Pedersen (2003) and Spreitzer (1996). Example items include “Attention towards in service training by college”, “Progenitor behaviour modeling in college”, and “Easy access to required information for faculties’ member in college” Cronbach’s alpha coefficient for reliability has been shown to be strong and reliability.
estimates for the management-organizational factor typically around 0.92.

Data analysis

In this research, descriptive and inferential statistics were used to analyze collected data. Descriptive statistics included frequency values (mean, standard deviation) and inferential statistics included: multiple regression procedures, and correlation analysis. All data were analyzed using the LISREL 8.5.

RESULTS

LISREL model analysis

Structural equation modelling (SEM) was used for the testing of hypotheses. The LISREL map presented in Figure 1 (Research Framework) was developed on the basis of the results in the literature review. Table 1 presents the results of LISREL model analysis. Figure 2 presents the results of the model map. They suggest that the structure in the model is suitable.

These figures suggest that the internal and overall suitability of the model is very good. Moreover, based on the suitability criteria in the model, in general the variables satisfy the standard value.

As expected, H1 was supported. This implied that increased organizational culture would be associated with increased psychological empowerment of faculty members. For professional skills, H2 was also supported. The professional skills had a significantly positive effect on psychological empowerment of faculty members. It was discovered that professional skills was a greater determinant of psychological empowerment of faculty members ($\beta = 0.721$) than was organizational culture ($\beta = 0.259$). Professional skills and organizational culture accounted for 58.2% of the variance contained in Psychological empowerment.

Management-organizational factors had not a significantly effect on psychological empowerment of faculty members. This is a surprising finding because it does not support the original hypothesis.

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Considering the attention to the research findings, the organizational culture is identified as one of factors affecting the empowerment of the faculty members. We can conclude that, from faculty members point of view, organizational culture is one of the major factors affecting their empowerment: thus, the following suggestion is presented in order to improve the condition of the organizational culture in agricultural colleges: Specific attention must be paid to team orientation in university and administrative programming, prepared in relation to team work among faculty members in order to achieve faster results. Improve and develop organizational culture to help administer shared thesis by the help of various faculty members in agricultural colleges. Implementation of planning, scientific articles, group and multi group research, establishment of team work within groups to centralize the decision making process; presentation of new thoughts and ideas in regards to improvement of the activities of the agricultural groups should be looked at further. On-going investment is required in order to ensure the development of the work skills among the faculty members. Furthermore, practical programmes must be prepared in order to oversee the continued development of potentials of faculty members. Supply necessary information to the faculty members to facilitate
these decision making process in a convenient accessible way. In addition, special attention must be paid to ensure adequate independence in regarding the professional services.

The result of the study exhibited that attention a positive meaningful relationship between professional skills and ability of the faculty members. As a result, we can conclude that, professional skill development faculty members will lead to the increased advancement in empowerment of faculty members. The professional skills of the faculty members which include teaching skills, evaluation, communication, updating information and the technical handling of the information; should be further focused on; to increase necessary skill, particularly the one which is related to the technical handling of the information and communication that constantly changes in this regard, training, seminars for teaching information technology and communication, by the expert instructors within a suitable teaching atmosphere, for fulfilling the needs of faculty members, are suggested.

Research findings show that, Management-organizational factors have no a positive effect on the faculty members’ empowerment. Therefore, researchers concluded that based on faculty member’s conditions of management-organizational factors in Iranian Agricultural colleges, it is inappropriate for their empowerment. Also Iranian Agricultural colleges cannot prepare essential conditions and contexts for increasing of faculty members’ empowerment. However according to key role of management in organizations, forward recommendations offered: Increase in entrusting of faculties for the decision making process and practical implication of them is necessary. Also, the provision of suitable motivational approach in terms of sharing the decision making process with the faculty members and increasing the sharing level/cooperative role of the faculty members in the educational planning must be considered.

Evaluating faculty members’ performance on the basis of clear and already determined objectives and the review of the current process of evaluation is very important. Making university objectives clear and facilitating necessary opportunities for an uninterrupted development and learning process of the faculty members to achieve these objectives are two interrelated factors that should happen by university administrators.

Caution of suitable operational program for in-service training of faculty members and review of the result of these programs to fulfill the professional needs of them is strongly recommended. Laying down a suitable information channel, to keep the faculty members informed about the result of the decision that have already been made, effort by the manager to establish feelings of fraternity among them is impotent to be done by managers.

REFERENCES


Table 1. Results of evaluation indicators.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Evaluation indicator</th>
<th>Parameter/criteria</th>
<th>Reference coefficient</th>
<th>t-value</th>
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<tr>
<td>Internal suitability</td>
<td>B</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Organizational culture- psychological empowerment (H&lt;sub&gt;1&lt;/sub&gt;)</td>
<td>0.258</td>
<td>3.124**</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Professional skills- psychological empowerment (H&lt;sub&gt;2&lt;/sub&gt;)</td>
<td>0.721</td>
<td>8.000**</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Management- organizational factors - Psychological empowerment (H&lt;sub&gt;3&lt;/sub&gt;)</td>
<td>0.620</td>
<td>0.823</td>
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<td>Overall suitability</td>
<td>&lt;sup&gt;x&lt;/sup&gt;2-value</td>
<td>447.03</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>GFI</td>
<td>0.88</td>
<td>&gt;.85</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>RMR</td>
<td>0.03</td>
<td>&lt;.05</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>AGFI</td>
<td>0.84</td>
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<td></td>
<td>NFI</td>
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<td>RMSEA</td>
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Note: **” represents p<0.05 (level of significance); ***” represents p<0.1 (level of significance); all reference coefficients are standard coefficients.
Education.