

Studying the Factors Affecting Human Resource's Empowerment: Case Study on the Employees of Customs in West Azarbaijan

Hamed Hemmati*¹, Mahboub Sheikhalizadeh Heris², Behrooz Pirizadeh³

¹Department of Management, Ahar Branch, Islamic Azad University, Ahar, Iran

²Department of Physical Education and Sport Sciences, Ahar Branch, Islamic Azad University, Ahar, Iran

³Department of Management, Ahar Branch, Islamic Azad University, Ahar, Iran

ABSTRACT

Empowerment is a concept that can provide benefits to organizations and make sense of belonging and pride in the staff. The objective of the present article is to study the factors affecting the empowerment of human resources of the customs in West Azarbaijan. For this purpose, 120 persons of the employees of West Azarbaijan's customs filled out the questionnaire containing personal specifications and the researcher-made questionnaire of the factors effecting the empowerment of the human resources. The data were analyzed after being gathered and the one sample t test results showed that according to the employees of West Azarbaijan's customs the components of: authority assignment ($t=3.172$; $p< 0.05$), job enrichment ($t=2.497$; $p< 0.05$), education ($t=2.443$; $p< 0.05$) and participatory management ($t=3.446$; $p< 0.05$) are considered as the factors affecting human resources' empowerment; whereas, three components of formation of work teams, job motivation and job satisfaction at the significant level of $\alpha=0.05$ were not approved as the factors affecting the empowerment. In conclusion, it can be stated that empowerment of the employees is a new method for increasing the organizational productivity.

KEY WORDS: Empowerment, Human Resources, Customs in West Azarbaijan

INTRODUCTION

One of the major challenges of managers in this age is that they do not sufficiently take advantage of the intellectual resources, mental capacity and the potential capacities of the human resources. The capabilities of the staff are not optimally used in most organizations and the managers are unable to apply their potentials. In other words, despite the fact that the individuals are more capable of developing capability, initiative and performing more tasks, these capabilities are not appropriately utilized at the organizational settings due to some reasons. The idea of empowering human resources for today's organizations is crucially significant because of a growing number of responsibilities undertaken by the employees. The staff's empowerment have been exposed to discussion for the purposes of increasing power inside the organization, involving the subordinates in the leadership, improving the efficacy through increasing power and ultimately enhancing the internal motivation for working. The scholars of the management of change and organizational optimization have introduced human resources' empowerment as an effective strategy affecting both performance and optimization of the human resources and believe that the empowerment of the human resources is one of the perspectives of this modern age which is applied by the organization these days and in fact, it is considered as a response to the vital demand of the contemporary management [2]. Empowerment is a concept that can provide benefits to organizations and make sense of belonging and pride in the staff. Indeed, it creates Win -Win relationship between organizations and employees; something that is ideal to many organizations and their employees [16]. According to Foy, empowerment consists of distributing the decision-making ability among the employees who lack it in the organization [3]. Bowen and Lawler's (1992) discussion of empowerment relates the concept to practice that includes sharing information, rewards, knowledge and power with front line employees [1]. An empowered organization is the organization where the managers supervise over more people in comparison with the traditional organizational chart and assign more decision-makings to the subordinates [10]. The managers act like coaches and help the employees to solve the problems. Thus, they accept more responsibilities. The top managers assign more responsibility to the subordinates and enable them which results in the employees' satisfaction and meeting the expectations of managers [9]. Empowering the employee increases the sense of ownership toward his/her job so that employee will be proud of his/her job and undertakes the task with desire and enthusiasm. The employees that are more competent are more committed and enjoy further job satisfaction; they also undergo less job-related stresses and are more likely to cooperate. It is possible to achieve the organizational goals and benefit from advantages like job conditions improvement, job satisfaction enhancement, reduction of employees' stress levels and reduction of conflicts among the employees and so on by implementing human resources' empowerment. The empowerment prepares the individuals for taking appropriate and logical decisions to improve the product or production process and the commitments are better fulfilled through empowerment. In the present age, the empowerment is like a tool by which the managers will be able to operate the contemporary organizations through the characteristics such as variety of growth and influential networks, reliance upon the horizontal and networking structures, minimizing the isolation of the staff from the managers, reduced organizational sense of belonging and using the information technology in an efficient manner. Empowerment through improve of some motivated and able employees provides this

*Corresponding Author: Hamed Hemmati, Department of Management, Ahar Branch, Islamic Azad University, Ahar, Iran,
E-mail: h-hemmati@iau-ahar.ac.ir, Tel: +989143260096

opportunity for the managers to act quickly and appropriately against dynamics of the competitive environments and provide the grounds for competitive advantage of their organization [8]. According to Lietgo, motivation, job satisfaction, job enrichment, participatory management, training and job satisfaction all include the factors affecting empowerment of the individuals. Although many managers accept that empowerment generates competitive advantage for an organization, many organizations have been faced with problems when implementing it. One of the problematic elements during implementation of empowerment in the organization that one can count is the lack of identification of the managers and authorities on the factors affecting it. The results of studies of Tom Hill (2002) demonstrate that the empowered staffs have few ambiguities toward their own role in the organization [5]. The leaders have an expansive control in the empowered organizations that will result in their own self-autonomy. Considering his research results, Kim (2005) defined the effective factors on empowerment as encouraging the staff to take part in decision-making, apprenticeship and training programs for the success of the employees [7]. Michael (1998) in his own study studied the factories which had experienced TQM and concluded that having a combination of highly capable personnel and higher goals were amongst the success factors of the studied organizations [11]. Jazinie (2006) studying the factors affecting empowerment of Naja staff's officers concluded that having motivation for jobs, training, job satisfaction and leadership style are all effective in empowering the officers [6]. Tehrani (2004) in his research aimed at identifying the most important factors influencing empowerment achieved this conclusion that five factors of: participation of employees in decision makings, lucidity of the organizational goals, omission of severe supervision and control over the staff, assignment of suitable authority have significant relationship with increasing the empowerment in the staff [14]. Yahya Molhem et al. (2004) in his own study concluded that increasing communications, motivation, knowledge and skill have a direct and strong impact on empowering the employees [15]. The results of Guzel et al (2008) research demonstrated that from the point of view of managers the most important aspects concerning empowerment is providing necessary training to employees [4]. Clear goals, the staff's moral, honesty in the organizational behavior, lucidity and appreciation, group work, participation in management of communications and possession of a sound environment are all considered as the indices of empowerment of the employees in every organization that all the existing resources have emphasized on them [12]. Spreitzer et al. (1997) in their own study concluded that high levels of being important and the sense of confidence (self-esteem) will increase job satisfaction by making the individuals interested in their duties [13]. Taking the results of the mentioned studies into account, it can be concluded that having job motivation, job satisfaction, training, employees' participations in decision-making and assignment of authorities are considered as the factors affecting empowerment of the employees. In the present study, all attempts have been made to study and review more factors effecting empowerment in the employees using the designed questionnaire; thus, the research's question is whether the components of assignment of authority, work teams, motivation, job satisfaction, job enrichment, training and participatory management are considered as the factors affecting the empowerment of the West Azarbaijan's customs' human resources or not?

METHODS

The method of the current research is of descriptive type and data gathering is field type and has been done using questionnaires. The statistical population of the current research consists of 400 persons amongst the staff of West Azarbaijan's customs. For a population with the capacity of 400 persons, number of statistical sample equivalent to 144 cases was obtained using the Cochran's sampling formula and 144 questionnaires were distributed using random sampling method.

Measures

Demographic characteristics

The Demographic characteristics questionnaire has been provided aiming at identifying the members of the research population by the researcher. Through this questionnaire, the data related to age, gender, educational degree and the work experiences history of the participants were gathered.

The factors affecting empowerment of human resources' questionnaire

The researcher-made questionnaire was used for determining the factors affecting human resources empowerment and its components. The questionnaire included 37 items in forms of components of authority assignment (5 item), work teams (6 item), motivation (5 item), job satisfaction (5 item), job enrichment (5 item), training (6 item) and participatory management (5 item) and the participators answered the items within 5 options Likert Scale (Strongly disagree = 1, disagree= 2, Neutral= 3, agree= 4, strongly agree= 5). The questionnaire's validity was approved by 10 university professors and experts of administrative management and governmental management courses. In the pilot study conducted on 30 persons, The Cronbach's Alpha was estimated equal to 0.83 for the authority assignment's component, work teams (0.87), motivation (0.93), job satisfaction (0.90), job enrichment (0.89), training (0.85) and participatory management (0.86).

Data gathering method

For gathering data, the data were given to the participants by their attendance at the site and then, the questionnaires were gathered after one week. In total, out of 144 distributed questionnaires, 120 questionnaires (83.33 %) were completely filled out and returned. In this study, descriptive statistics was used in order to summarize and classify the data and to calculate the mean, frequency, standard deviation and to draw diagrams and tables, and the one sample t-test was used for assessing the effective factors.

RESULTS

The descriptive results of the data demonstrate that the male participants with 77.8 percents formed the highest frequency percentage. The highest age range of the participants was between 31 to 40 years equal to 48.6 percent. 63.2 percent of the participants held bachelor's degrees (Table1).

Table 1 the description of the demographic characteristics of participants

	Gender		Age (Year)				Educational Degree			Work Experiences(Year)						
	Male	Female	30 ≥	31-40	41-50	50 ≤	Diploma	Two-year university	B.A.	M.A. or higher	5 ≥	6-10	11-15	16-20	21-25	26 ≤
Frequency percentage	77.8	22.2	6.9	48.6	36.8	7.6	16	15.3	63.2	5.6	35.4	23	45	16	8	1

Considering table 2, the significant level values for variables of authority assignment, job enrichment, training and participatory management is less than 0.05; therefore, the null hypotheses are rejected and the alternative hypotheses are approved. It can be stated that according to the employees of customs of West Azarbaijan, the components of authority assignment, job enrichment, training and participatory management are all considered as factors affecting empowerment of the human resources and components of job satisfaction, motivation and work teams in view of the participants of the research are not considered as the factors affecting empowerment of customs' human resources in West Azarbaijan.

Table 2 One-Sample Test for indices of empowerment

	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Difference	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference	
					Lower	Upper
					Test Value = 3	
Authority Assignment	3.172	143	0.002	0.18194	0.2953	0.686
Job Enrichment	2.497	143	0.014	0.16667	0.2986	0.0347
Participatory Management	3.446	143	0.001	0.2222	0.3497	0.0948
Training	2.443	143	0.016	0.17245	0.3120	0.0329
Job Satisfaction	0.497	143	0.620	0.3194	-0.1589	0.0950
Motivation	0.977	143	0.330	0.05440	-0.1644	-0.0556
Work Teams	1.412	143	0.160	0.10764	-0.0430	-0.2583

DISCUSSION

The results of the present study showed that according to the employees of West Azarbaijan's customs, the component of authority assignment is considered as one of the factors affecting personnel's empowerment. This finding is consistent with the result of the researches conducted by Yazdani et al (2011) and Tehrani (2004). According to the researchers, assignment of authorities to others has been considered as one of the principles of management and one of the components of a successful management and leadership. The managements' researchers and experts believe that assigning some authorities and responsibilities to the subordinates provides a more opportunity for planning and other essential activities by managers and more efficient use can be made of the expert personals human resources. Besides, if the subordinates participate in the decision-making issue, they will have better self-confidence, will professionally promote and they will be innovative and initiative while fulfilling their own tasks.

The result of the present research showed that job enrichment is considered as one of the factors affecting empowerment of the employees. This finding is consistent with the result of the research conducted by Yazdani et al (2011). The occupational enlargement and reinforcement enable the employees to have more autonomy during decision makings and during undertaking tasks and to have more self-control and this, in itself, will result in sense of contentment, reduced fatigue, absence or quit of job, more participation and increased motivation and ultimately, increase organizational productivity [4]. The research results showed that according to employees of customs in West Azarbaijan, the participatory management's component is considered as one of the factors affecting employees' empowerment. This finding is consistent with the results of studies of Kim (2005) and Tehrani (2004). The organizational culture one of the features of which is high level of employees' involvement at doing jobs strongly encourages the participation of staff in various activities of the organization and develops sense of ownership and sense of responsibility in them. Sense of ownership results in developing more commitment toward the organization and increases the potentials of autonomy in the staff. In this type of culture, the employees put more emphasis on the implied and voluntary control systems than the formal, clear and bureaucratic systems; the organization continuously empowers its employees and promotes their capabilities across all the organizational levels. As a result, all the people of the organization will have the required skill and ability for taking decisions in their own occupational fields and also the quality of decisions and implementing them will be high as the result of obtaining information from the organization's members.

The research's results demonstrated that according to the employees of West Azarbaijan's customs, the training component is considered as one of the factors affecting empowerment of the employees. This finding is consistent with the result of researches conducted by Guzel *et al* (2008), Jozinie (2006) and Kim (2005). Benefiting from both general and specialized trainings results in employees obtaining all the required information and skills in various occupational aspects (increased level of expertise, knowledge and experience) and consequently, it leads to empowering the employees of that organization.

Conclusion

To conclude, it can be stated that empowerment of the employees is a new method for increasing the organizational productivity. The empowerment is a different approach for the people who cooperate with each other. Hence, the managers of the organizations should attempt to provide all the grounds for empowering their employees by appropriate assignment of authorities, contributing the staff in the decision-makings, formal trainings and on-the-job trainings and job enrichment.

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