

Investigation of the Influence of Spiritual Leadership on Employees' Empowerment in Karaj Payam-e-Nour University

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ABSTRACT

Organizations should provide working conditions which help attract, retain, promote and motivate skillful employees in order to be able to confront with external environment variations and challenges. Provision of a working environment which inspires meaningfulness and competition in employees is a strategic must in the third millennium. Considering the novelty of spiritual leadership concept and the role of employees' empowerment in organizations, the present research aims to investigate the impact of spiritual leadership on employees' empowerment in Karaj PNU, Iran. In terms of objective, the present study is an applied one and in terms of relationship between research variables, it is a correlation research. A standard questionnaire was used for data collection. Cronbach's alpha was used for testing its reliability. Statistical population of the research included all employees of Karaj PN University. Sampling was conducted by means of simple random sampling method. Path analysis test was used for testing research hypothesis. To this end, PLS software was used. Results showed that spiritual leadership has a significant impact on employees' empowerment in Karaj PN University. Further, vision, altruistic love, faith in work, meaning, and performance feedback dimensions have influence on employees' empowerment but organizational commitment and membership do not influence employees' empowerment.

KEYWORDS: spiritual leadership, empowerment, employees

INTRODUCTION

The word "spirituality" has received a lot of attention in leadership within the past decade. Many scientists have studied the concept of spirituality in leadership area and spirituality is becoming a common field of study in organizational behavior (Robbins, 2003). In fact, introduction of concepts like ethics, belief in God or Supreme Power, meaningfulness at work, altruism and ... are indicative of emergence of a new paradigm. Many researchers believe that this paradigm in work environment-which is an opponent of the modern mechanistic paradigm-, is spirituality paradigm. Presence of spiritual leadership (SL) concept in institutes like universities requires transformation, continuous learning and employees' empowerment (Geijsel, 2003). If we look deeply at the evolution trend of leadership studies, we will notice that many studies have been conducted on physical, mental and emotional characteristics of leaders but spiritual leaders and the fact that how can we reach individual and organizational health and employees' empowerment through resorting to spirituality have received a lot of attention in the recent years (Fry, 2006).

Spiritual leadership (SL)

Within the recent years, many studies have been conducted on SL and its benefits for individuals, groups and organizations (Al Arkoubi, 2008). SL can be regarded as an emerging construct in work environment spirituality (Fry et al., 2011). Up to now, Fry's definition provides the connection between spirituality and leadership in work environment (Dent et al, 2005). Fry defines SL as values, attitudes and behaviors which are necessary for internal motivation of one and others such that a sense of spiritual conservation is produced through membership and meaningfulness (Reave, 2005). This involves two things: 1. Creation of an insight in which the leader and subordinates feel purposeful, important and meaningful, 2. Establishment of an organizational culture based upon altruistic values through which leader and subordinates feel appreciated, loved, cared and acknowledged (Fry, 2003). SL is related to learning and growth and therefore it is necessary for organizations which seek advancement and achievement. SL improves operations and quality of services and products and finally results in higher levels of customer satisfaction and financial performance (Fry et al., 2010). SL movement involves servant leadership and participative leadership models and empowerment. SL has been based upon servant leadership philosophy and emphasizes on serving others, individual development and joint decision-making (Korac and Kouzmin, 2002). In fact, a spiritual leader is a person who produces spiritual conservation of organization members using values,

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attitudes and behaviors which are necessary for him or her and others. He or she makes this in two steps: 1. A spiritual leader creates a shared vision while organizational members feel they have important and meaningful jobs. 2. A spiritual leader establishes organizational/social culture based on human values and therefore employees feel interested in themselves and their colleagues. They feel other people are also important and deserve appreciation and recognition (Fry, 2003). Lwiss Fry conducted one of the most important studies on leadership and spirituality in 2003. His research is regarded as one of the main clear and objective studies on SL and its impact on employees' motivation. He believes that SL is one the main forgotten factors in motivation theories (Fry, 2003).

Spiritual leadership dimensions:

Fry mentioned 7 dimensions for SL:

1. vision: it reflects organizational units shared destination and ambition. It adds value to tasks and encourages hope and faith. Vision refers to a picture of future along with a clear interpretation of individuals' attempts (Fry et al., 2011). Studies reveal that spiritual leaders must have vision. SL creates a vision of future and leads employees to believe in fulfillment of organizational vision and hope for future (Fry, 2003).

2. Altruistic love: altruistic love or altruism is a collection of values, assumptions and morally right methods which are shared by group members and is taught to new members (Fry et al., 2011). Prevalence of altruism culture within an organizations leads individuals to pay deep attention to their past and establish desirable relationships with others and this results in formation of relational networks among people. This also leads leaders to consider their employees' interests and needs and delegation of power and responsibility to employees.

3. hope and faith: In general, it can be said that faith and hope are the origins of the belief that organizational vision and mission will be fulfilled (Fry et al., 2011). SL in an organization increases spiritual beliefs and faith in work in employees and this in part, acts as an internal motivator in employees. An increase in motivation leads to responsiveness and dutifulness.

4. Membership: it includes cultural and social structures by which we are surrounded. It is an understanding and appreciation feeling which originates from communications and mutual relationships and membership in groups (Fry et al., 2011). Furthermore, employees feel their jobs are important and meaningful when SL is present in an organization. When an employee feels his or her job is important from organization and other members' viewpoints, they develop sense of trust and friendship in the organization (Fry, 2003).

5. Meaningfulness: it refers to an excellent experience or serving others in order to add meaning and purposefulness to life. People look for meaning and social value in their jobs in addition to competency and skills (Pfeffer, 2003).

This kind of leadership helps employees with understanding their jobs meanings and care about their jobs. Therefore, employees will have better understanding and recognition of their works (Fry, 2003).

Organizational commitment: it is a spiritual attitude and state which is indicative of tendency and necessity for continuing one's activity in an organization (Bagheri and Tavallayee, 2010). SL inspires organizational commitment, loyalty, And sense of identity in employees and employees become willing to stay with the organization. Therefore, employees view organizational problems as their own problems and this makes them try to solve organizational problems. Finally, if managers trust in employees, employees' participation in organizational affairs will increase (Fry, 2003).

7. Giving performance feedback to employees: SL provides informal feedback for employees and allows for periodical formal performance feedback visits. Therefore, feedback makes employees aware of their performances and allows them to improve their performances (Fry, 2003).

Employees' empowerment:

The current business environment needs employees who are able to make decisions, present solutions, have creativity and be responsive towards their works. Employees also have more demands and want meaningful works. Therefore, managers should satisfy employees' expectations and fulfill organizational targets. This is done by employees' empowerment. Empowerment not only increases employees' commitment to their organizations, but also it results in behaviors like fairness and compatibility with group members (Jahaniyan, 2007). The most important productivity factor in organizations and societies is human resources. Employees' empowerment is a concept which aims to improve human resources productivity (Ziyae and Nargesian, 2008). Organizations in the 21st century are more different from traditional ones. In contemporary organizations, employees' thinking powers and creativity are managed in addition to energy. In such conditions, imperative hierarchical methods are not appropriate and employees should express initiative and take actions for solving their problems and join committees. (Maccoby, 1999). This involves a new outlook to human resources and authorities. Necessity for educating employees which have self-management ability has led human resources empowerment to attract a lot of attention

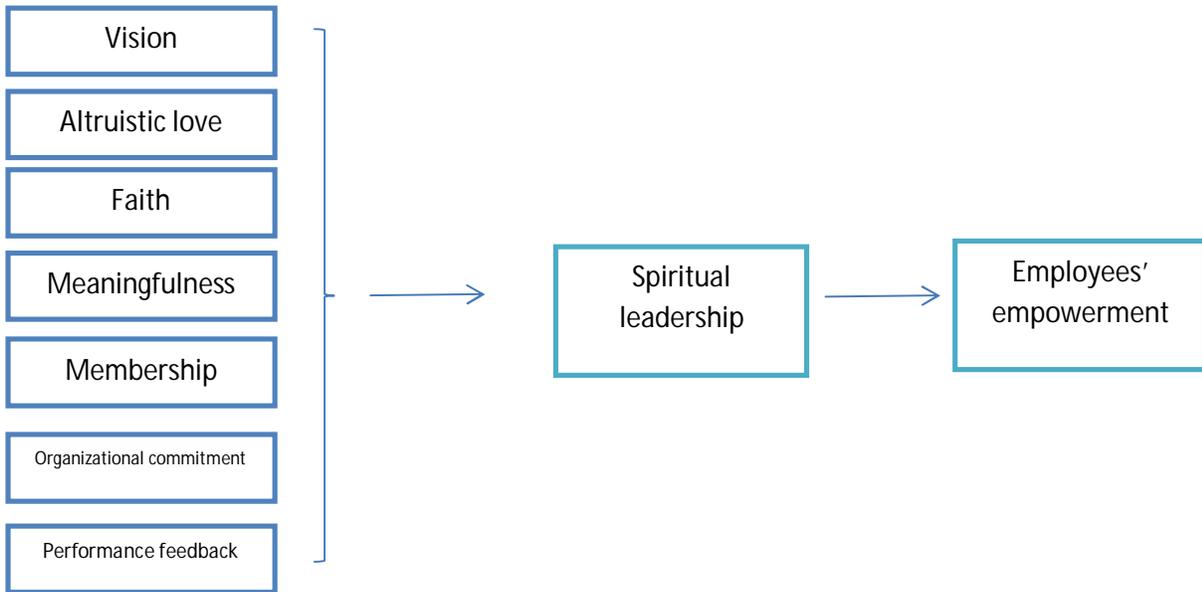
by management researchers as a new paradigm. The first definition of empowerment was provided in 1788. This definition states that empowerment means delegation of power. This delegation should be given to employees or become embedded in their roles. Empowerment concept with this definition referred to an individual's interest in his working responsibility which was first interpreted formally as responsiveness. Grove (1971) referred to common definitions of empowerment in dictionary which include legal power delegation, delegation of authority, and delegation of mission and distribution of power. Gandes (1990) conceptualized empowerment as delegation of decision-making power to employees but Zimmerman believes that empowerment definition will be easy only when we don't consider some words like helplessness, powerlessness and estrangement. Many studies have been conducted on empowerment and its literature is very rich. Finally, Lee (2001) views empowerment as a platform for increasing dialogues, critical thinking and activity in small groups and contends that the main elements of empowerment are facilitating activities for transaction, sharing experiences, thinking, seeing and conversing. (Naderi and Rajaepour, 2007).

SL and employees' empowerment:

SL theory is in fact a causal theory for organizational transformation which is aimed to produce a learning and internally-motivated organization. SL theory is based upon internal motivation model which is a combination of vision, faith in target fulfillment, altruistic love, meaningfulness in work, membership, organizational commitment and performance feedback (Fry, 2003). SL results in raising motivated and committed human resources (Ibid, 2003). SL improves spiritual welfare and has positive impacts on organizational responsiveness, commitment, productivity and financial performance (Fry, 2010). Considering the novelty of SL concept and the role of empowerment in organizations, the present research is aimed to determine the influence of SL on employees' empowerment in Karaj PN University. Furthermore, SL (vision, altruistic love, faith, meaningfulness, membership, organizational commitment and performance feedback) serves as independent variable and employees' empowerment serves as dependent variable in this research.

Research conceptual model

Considering previous studies and research subject, research conceptual model is as follows:



Research conceptual model: extracted from Fry (2003)

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

In terms of objective, the present research is an applied study and in terms of data collection, it is a descriptive research and in terms of relationship between research variables it is a correlation study. A standard questionnaire was used for collecting primary data. SL questions were extracted from Fry et al spiritual leadership scale (2005) and employees' empowerment questions were extracted from Spritzer's scale (1992). Totally, 45 questions were

included in the questionnaire based on 5-point Likertscale from 1 (completely agree) to 5 (completely disagree). Statistical population of the research included all employees (female or male) of Karaj Payam-e-Nour University. Sample size was calculated by means of Krejcie and Morgan table to be 260 people. Sample members were selected by means of simple random sampling. SPSS software and Chronbach's alpha coefficient were used for evaluation of reliability. To this end, a primary sample including 60 questionnaires was pretested and then, Chronbach's alpha was calculated. Chronbach's alpha coefficients for SL (29 questions), empowerment (16 questions), vision (4 questions), faith (5 questions), altruistic love (6 questions), meaningfulness (3 questions), membership (4 questions), organizational commitment (4 questions) and performance feedback (3 questions) were equal to 0.87, 0.80, 0.78, 0.75, 0.88, 0.78, 0.88, 0.89, and 0.89, respectively. Therefore, reliability of the questionnaire is verified. Data were analyzed by means of path analysis test. Kolmogrov-Smearnov test was used first for testing normality of data and selection of appropriate software and analysis method.

Kolmogrov-Smearnov test:

Test hypotheses:

H₀: distribution of observations is normal.

H₁: distribution of data is not normal.

Table 1.Kolmogrov-Smearnov test for both variables (empowerment and SL)

		Empowerment	SL
number		260	260
Normal parameters	mean	2.6593	2.6956
	SD	.65251	.67791
Maximum absolute difference		.060	.083
	positive	.049	.083
	negative	-.060	-.065
Kolmogorov-Smirnov Z		.970	1.336
Significance number		.004	.006

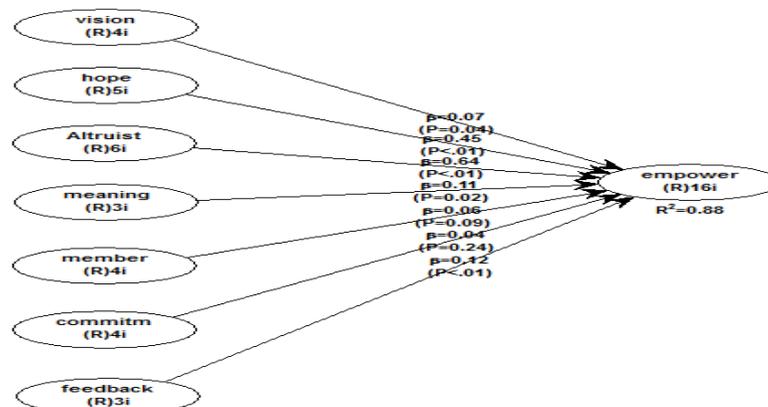
Since the significance numbers of the variables (empowerment and SL) are smaller than the assumed significance number (5%), H₀ is rejected and H₁ is supported. In other words, data distribution is not normal. Consequently, Warp PLS software which is not distribution-sensitive software was used for data analysis.

Research hypotheses test using PLS software

Subsidiary hypotheses tests:

This software was used because it is not distribution-sensitive and is not also dependent on sample size. However, other software like LISREL are distribution-sensitive and do not provide exact results. Therefore, PLS software was used for analysis. Paths coefficients and research hypotheses are analyzed in the following sentences based upon PLS output and research model.

Model of investigation of the impact of SL dimensions on empowerment



The figure above indicates the research tested model in path format. This model has been drawn by PLS and variables are clear (7 independent variables and one dependent variable).

Table 2. path coefficients and p values

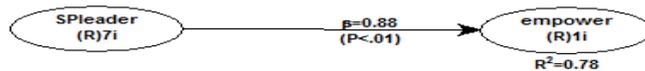
Path coefficients								
	vision	hope	Altruist	meaning	member	commitm	feedback	empower
vision								
hope								
Altruist								
meaning								
member								
commitm								
feedback								
empower	0.066	0.453	0.640	0.106	0.061	0.035	0.119	

P values								
	vision	hope	Altruist	meaning	member	commitm	feedback	empower
vision								
hope								
Altruist								
meaning								
member								
commitm								
feedback								
empower	0.041	<0.001	<0.001	0.023	0.091	0.242	<0.001	

Considering the numbers obtained for p values in the table above, all constructs have significance numbers smaller than 0.05 and are meaningful except for membership and commitment.

Main hypothesis test

The figure below indicates schematically the tested model of research hypothesis in path format. This model has been calculated by means of PLs software and variables (one independent and one dependent variable) have been designated.



Considering the above model and determination coefficient (R-squared, which is below the dependent variable), it can be said that 78% of variations in dependent variable is predicted by SL and the remaining percentage belongs to other variables which have not been considered in the present research.

Table 3. Path coefficients and p values for the main hypothesis

Path coefficients		
	SPleader	empower
SPleader		
empower	0.883	

P values		
	SPleader	empower
SPleader		
empower	<0.001	

Main hypothesis: SL influences empowerment.

Considering the p value in the above model and table, it can be said that the impact of SL on empowerment is meaningful because p value is smaller than 0.05. Therefore, the main hypothesis of the research is supported and SL does have a significant influence on empowerment.

Results analysis:

Path coefficient and p values have been demonstrated in the following tables. Considering the table and the calculated numbers for p values, significance numbers for all constructs are smaller than 0.05 except for membership and commitment constructs. The following results are obtained considering the p values and positive

path coefficients. Vision, altruistic love, faith, meaningfulness and performance feedback have positive impacts on empowerment. Furthermore, the influence of organizational commitment and membership on empowerment is not significant because their p values are greater than 0.05. In other words, commitment and membership do not influence empowerment.

membership	commitment	feedback	meaningfulness	faith	Altruistic love	vision	P value
0.091	0.242	0.001	0.023	0.001	0.001	0.041	empowerment
membership	commitment	feedback	meaningfulness	faith	Altruistic love	vision	Path coefficient
0.061	0.035	0.119	0.106	0.640	0.435	0.066	empowerment

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

SL results in employees’ empowerment. In other words, universities which have a SL atmosphere can motivate their employees and delegate power to them and involve them in decision-making process and therefore make them empowered. In other words, SL provides support for employees in order to try to fulfill organizational targets and satisfy their own needs and express their potential abilities. Further, Fry and Slosem (2008) showed that influences positively and considerably on spiritual welfare and organizational performance and employees’ empowerment through drawing an excellent vision and culture. Results of the present research also support their results. Organizational vision results in employees’ empowerment; organizational vision is an image of organizational long-term objectives which can direct individuals’ expectations and guide them through success. A belief in organizational vision inspires endeavor among employees and results in empowerment. Altruistic love also results in empowerment; it produces some kind of unity and empathy among employees and this in part promotes job motivation and finally results in empowerment and productivity improvement.

Faith in work also results in empowerment; it leads employees to ignore job difficulties and helps them solve working problems such that organizational challenges are dissolved by faithful employees meaningfulness in work also results in empowerment; in fact, it involves compatibility of role requirements with job features and values. Regardless of organizational compulsory tasks, individuals tend to work on goals which have meaning for them. In fact, employees prefer to work with those who have values similar to their own values. When subordinates confront with meaningless goals, they defend their short-sighted benefits. Therefore, meaningfulness brings empowerment.

Results of the present research shows that membership does not have a significant influence on empowerment. It must be mentioned that this is a relative result. Furthermore, organizational commitment does not have any significant impact on empowerment. In other words, a person who feels loyal to a university does not necessarily get empowered because managers and leaders of the university may not trust in him or her and may not delegate power to him or her and prevent him from accessing information due to lack of skill and expertise. Performance feedback makes employees aware of their performance regularly and conscious about their weaknesses and helps them with improving their strengths. Employees feel satisfied when they see their contribution to organizational performance. This, in part, increases quality level of employees and this empowers employees.

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