Validation of a Scale for Assessing University Staff’s Empowerment

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**ABSTRACT**

**Background:** The population of the study consisted of the university staff working in the year 2012 in monetary, research, education, and student sections in Roudehen, Damavand, and Pardis Branches as well as Boumeh Center. **Objective:** The purpose of the study was to validate a scale for assessing the staff’s empowerment in Islamic Azad University. **Results:** Using probability sampling method, 550 subjects were randomly chosen. The research was the Nahapit and Goushal’s (1998) Empowerment questionnaire. **Conclusion:** The results of the study through applying factor analysis showed that the empowerment of the university staff consists of four dimensions of autonomy (items 1-3), merit (items 4-6), meaningfulness (items 7-9), and influence (items 10-12). The first dimension, that is, autonomy had the main role in the empowerment of the university staff.

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**INTRODUCTION**

Manpower is considered as the most important, costly and valuable organizational capital and resource. Human being is the only smart element in an organization whose crucial role is to coordinate other elements. Nowadays, organizations experience continuous change in order to survive in the complicated, competitive conditions of the present time and future. On the other hand, in this new era, the material condition which once was the main reason for success has lost its effectiveness. Now, physical property is less important than intellectual property in order to be better than other competitors. In other words, the changes happen in software forms rather than hardware ones. One of these changes appears to be the application of the empowerment process of the staff. The reasons which justify the application of empowerment process in an organization are as follows:

The customers have raised their expectation regarding the quality, price and services of goods, and if an organization can not satisfy them, it will lose its customers [3].

While the customers’ expectations should be taken into consideration, the profit of the organization should be guaranteed. Because there is always the risk of satisfying customers at the cost of the organization’s loss [3].

The pressure from the global competition and new technologies as well as the change in the customers’ tastes makes organizations do the necessary changes. It implies that what appeared to be incredible last year is a normal event now. In this endless competition, an organization which cannot produce faster, cheaper and better goods compared to its global competitors is doomed to end its enterprise. Hence, in the environments in which there are complexity, turbulence, chaos, high rate of change and on the whole, revolutionary changes, the suggested solution for the efficiency of the organization ought to include flexible, autonomous, and entrepreneurial work power [24].

The managers have also felt the tension due to emphasis on more products while employing less staff and the increase of their responsibility. The traditional management in which the manager was the mere commander and the staffs were obedient does not work anymore. What the managers are looking for is finding a way which makes them able to handle the job faster and consume less resource. At the same time, the staff members want to have job security, possession and self-importance [3].

The modern work power is different from the past. They have incredible capacity and talent in order to develop. They are also eager to have their destiny under their own control. Day by day, the necessity in the increase of trust between the managers and the staff members is felt. It can be a prerequisite for the staff to accept their responsibility and act freely under the managers’ supervision. Therefore, empowerment is an appropriate solution for the abovementioned situation [3].

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Regarding the need for the staff's empowerment, Sintia and Zhafeh (1991) note that an organization is attacked from both inside and outside[10]. Externally, global severe competition, unbelievable rapid change, new demands for quality and services and limited resources put the organizations under pressure to act in response quickly. Internally, the staff members who face frequent changes feel that managers do not interact honestly with them; so, they feel hopeless. From the staff's point of view the managers continually change the rules of the game. On the other hand, the staff members expect meaningfulness, explicitness, and honesty in the workplace. They also expect more self-discovery and self-actualization. Changing a traditional organization to a modern one requires the staff's empowerment. A traditional organization needs the employees who do their given jobs and ask nothing. The current workplace needs the employees who are decision makers, creative, find new solutions for the problems, and take responsibility regarding the results of their activities. In new organizations with better performance, there are less issued orders from the high rank managers to their subordinates and less centralized decision making while they enjoy a democratic leadership style [24].

Blanchard relates making an appropriate condition for presenting the intellectual resource in every field of organizational performance to empowerment. According to him, the purpose of empowerment is to make the most qualified staff members embark the most suitable procedures [7]. Thomas and Wolthoos (1990) consider psychological empowerment as the increase in the job internal motivation which consist of for cognitive areas, that is, the feeling of influence, merit, the feeling of meaningfulness, and the right to choose. They were the first who used the psychological empowerment term. Regarding Thomas and Wolthoos' pattern, Spritiz (1992) defines psychological empowerment as a motivational concept which consists of merit, autonomy (right to choose), the feeling of influence, meaningfulness[22, 9].

Merit: When individual become empowered, they enjoy the feeling of efficiency, or feel that they have the capacity and proficiency to succeed. Empowered individuals also feel confident that they can accomplish the goals. Personally, they feel better and they believe that they can develop and learn new ways to face new challenges[12, 7, 25].

Autonomy: The feeling of autonomy means the feeling of control over one's work. In other words, this one's right includes the feeling of individual's independence for starting and continuity of behaviors and work processes as well as making decision regarding methods, actions, and required attempts for accomplishment at work. The merit feeling refers to the feeling of capacity and independence refers to having the right to choose. When individuals voluntarily control their own work instead of being forced to start and terminate their activities, they feel autonomy. In this situation, their accomplishments are the result of personal freedom and power. The empowered staffs feel responsibility for and ownership of their work [25]. They consider themselves as overactive and initiative. They can act creatively. They can make decisions and tests new ideas[22,5]. Instead of thinking that their activities are preplanned, under others' control, unavoidable and permanent, they feel free and think that whatever they do in under their own command.

The feeling of effectiveness: It means that the individual believes he can considerably influence the operational, official and strategic consequences of the organization. Capable people enjoy the feeling of personal control over the results of the activities. They believe that through influencing the work environment or results, they can cause changes. The feeling of effectiveness includes individual's beliefs in a period of time about his capabilities for making some changes for good [18].

Meaningfulness: Meaningfulness refers to the value of work goal which is judged in relation to one's ideals and standards. It includes the balance between the necessary conditions for a work role and the individual's beliefs, values and behaviors. Capable people have the feeling of meaningfulness. They value their goals and activities and whatever they do are based on their ideals and standards. They care for and believe in what they produce. They involve their spirit in their work and have the feeling of self-importance[4].

Blanchard, et al. (2000) believe that the key point in empowerment is the overall contribution of individuals in accumulation of information[3]. The first main factor of empowerment is share of information and one of the roles of organizational leaders is to give the staff efficient, sufficient and in time information. The staff members who work under the supervision of the leaders who do not share information would not contribute to manage their organization successfully and have a powerful organization. In order to empower an organization, sharing information is a must. On the other hand, trust is a necessary factor for an empowered organization. Sharing information causes trust, intimacy and responsibility. If the staff members are not given the necessary information, it would lead to lack of trust, and they cannot be expected to act responsibly. A distrustful atmosphere leads to chaos in decision making. Without information, individuals cannot manage themselves, or make appropriate decisions. Therefore, informed staff members are apt to act responsibly[8].

According to Blanchard et al., Information in the land of empowerment is like a currency which can buy responsibility and trust. Every organizational leader needs responsible and trustable followers, and this can be accomplished by sharing information. If staffs are given information, even the secret and sensitive ones, their trust to the leader will be doubled. Therefore, People need information in order to be responsible and feel that they are trusted. Cameron and Wetten (2002) emphasize on gathering information in order to increase
empowerment. The results of their study showed that through sharing the information which is needed for the improvement and modification of the organization, eye-catching successes are attainable[11].

In their definition of empowerment, Sintia and Zhafeh (1991) refer to work teams as one of the features of empowerment. They believe that if work teams continually cooperate to improve the performance and attain a higher level of productivity, the organization will change its pyramid style to circle one[10].

The results of the study done by Oakly (1997) showed that when the human-centered leadership style is applied, teachers feel more empowerment. In a study, Step (2000) found that the teachers who follow transformational leadership style feel more empowered. Silver (2000) found out that there is a relationship between pragmatic leadership style and psychological empowerment. The results of Gaily's (2010) study showed that the increase in social capital increases the economical empowerment[15,20,17].

In a study done in Life Environment Protection Organization, Eftekhari (2012) found that the factors which form empowerment are autonomy, merit, meaningfulness, and effectiveness[5]. Other studies[9,5, 8,6,2]. emphasized that the same abovementioned factors form the empowerment dimensions of the staff.

Regarding the given results from other studies done in the same field, the purpose of the present study was to prepare a scale for assessing the staff's empowerment in selected Islamic Azad University.

**MATERIALS AND METHODS**

Regarding the type of the variables in this research, it is classified as a heuristic research.

Research Instrument: In order to gather the research data, the empowerment questionnaire which was designed based on Thomas and Wolthoos' pattern was used. The tool consisted of 4 dimensions of merit (Items, 4-6), autonomy (right to choose) (Items, 1-3), meaningfulness (7-9), influence (Items, 10-12).

Population, Sample, Sampling Method: The population of the study consisted of the university staff working in the year 2012 in monetary, research, education, and student sections in Roudehen, Damavand, and Pardis Branches as well as Boumehen Center. Using probability sampling method, 559 subjects were randomly chosen.

Data Analysis Procedure

**Results:**

There were 367 (63.1 %) male and 215 (36.9 %) female subjects in the research. The work experience range of the subjects was from 1 to 30 years. But, the mode of this distribution was devoted to the subjects with 12 years of experience. The work experience of half of the subjects was 8 years or less. The mean of the distribution showed 9 years of experience. Regarding the educational degree of the research subjects, the gathered data showed that 149 (26.1 %) held Diploma or Associate diploma, 326 (57.1 %) held Bachelor's, and 96 (16.8 %) held Masters' or higher. Among the subjects, 168 (29.8 %) were married and 396 (70.2 %) were single. Regarding the subjects' areas of work, the data showed that 104 (18.8 %) worked under the supervision of vice-chancellor for research; 169 (30.5 %) worked for vice-chancellor for economic; 127 (22.9 %) worked for vice-chancellor for monetary and official affairs; 46 (8.3 %) worked for vice-chancellor for civil; 73 (13.2 %) worked for vice-chancellor for students' affairs; and 35 (6.3 %) worked under for vice-chancellor for research.

**Table 1:** The Indexes of Central Tendency and Dispersion of Empowerment Variable and its Dimensions

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Dimensions</th>
<th>Empowerment</th>
<th>Autonomy</th>
<th>Merit</th>
<th>Meaningfulness</th>
<th>Influence</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Mean</td>
<td>33.83</td>
<td>7.71</td>
<td>8.93</td>
<td>8.86</td>
<td>8.34</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Median</td>
<td>34.00</td>
<td>8.00</td>
<td>9.00</td>
<td>9.00</td>
<td>9.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mode</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Standard Deviation</td>
<td>6.243</td>
<td>2.084</td>
<td>2.058</td>
<td>2.060</td>
<td>2.028</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Range</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Minimum Score</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Maximum Score</td>
<td>48</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total Score</td>
<td>20126</td>
<td>4586</td>
<td>5311</td>
<td>5269</td>
<td>4960</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The indexes of central tendency for the empowerment variable are very close; so, the obtained amount is near to the normal distribution. As the table shows, the minimum score is 12 and the maximum score is 48, and the related total score is 20126. Focusing on the obtained data shown in Table 1, in order to prepare a scale for assessing the empowerment of the staff in the selected branches of Islamic Azad University, the method of factor analysis was applied.

The first step in the process of factor analysis which is the first assumption is confronting missing data. In this part, the subjects whose ID numbers were 252,240,231,71, 38, 681, 628, 664, 606, 555, 478, 438, 885, 758, 895, 927, 1054, 1023, 1705, 1468, 467, 1421, 1132 (25 subjects) were omitted from the factor analysis process in order to observe the assumption which states that the minimum of missing data for each subject is...
0.02. Therefore, 25 subjects were omitted from the research sample, but the items of the questionnaire were kept. In other words, all the items were kept for the factor analysis based on the assumption.

The second assumption of factor analysis refers to sample size. In this study, the amount of KMO appeared to be 0.841; so, the sample size was acceptable.

The third assumption of factor analysis is related to the normality of multivariate distribution which is referred to as sphericity. Since the approximate amount of Chi square is with 66 degrees of freedom equals 7471.134, it can be stated that the approximate amount of Chi square is statistically significant with the level of confidence of 0.999 (α=0.001). Emphasizing on the fact that the Bartlett's test using sphericity, has compared the approximate amount of Chi square with the approximate amount of Chi square mentioned in the related table with 66 degrees of freedom, it can be stated that the obtained amount of Chi square is significant and confirms the sphericity of the empirical data and the normality of multivariate distribution is observable.

The forth assumption of factor analysis refers to the identification of shared amounts. Regarding the fact that all scale loads or the shared coefficients of the items are with the scale of 0.5, it can be stated that there is congruence among the items and the whole instrument; the factor analysis can be performed using all the items.

The fifth assumption of factor analysis states that the explained variance should be higher than 0.50. Regarding the obtained cumulative frequency, it is found out that the first factor explains 36.42 % of the variance, and the second factor explains 15.59 % of the variance. Finally, regarding the share and role of each factor which has been mentioned in the related column of cumulative frequency, the degree that each factor explains the total variance of the questionnaire is found out. The degree of variance explained by the first factor was 36.42%. The first two factors explained 52.01 % of the variance. When the variance of the third factor was added to the previous percent, it appeared to be 62.21 %, and finally, based on the cumulative frequency column, the total percentage of all four factors equaled 69.42 which was more than 50%. In other words, the total variance explained by the factors was around 70 %.

Table 2: Matrix of Rotation

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Component</th>
<th>1</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>3</th>
<th>4</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>X1</td>
<td></td>
<td>0.803</td>
<td>0.768</td>
<td>0.865</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>X2</td>
<td></td>
<td>0.846</td>
<td>0.825</td>
<td>0.838</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>X3</td>
<td></td>
<td>0.811</td>
<td>0.757</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>X4</td>
<td></td>
<td>0.723</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>X5</td>
<td></td>
<td>0.789</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>X6</td>
<td></td>
<td>0.778</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>X7</td>
<td></td>
<td>0.723</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>X8</td>
<td></td>
<td>0.789</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>X9</td>
<td></td>
<td>0.778</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>X10</td>
<td></td>
<td>0.723</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>X11</td>
<td></td>
<td>0.789</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>X12</td>
<td></td>
<td>0.778</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

When the table of components of matrix was carefully investigated, the rotation method is applied to locate the items in the four factors by focusing on the factor load. Regarding the components matrix of rotated items; the place of each item after rotation in the related factors is located referring to load of the factor. Ultimately, the analysis has shown that four factors have been obtained from the rotation of factor analysis. In fact, it shows that empowerment is consisted of four factors as follows: autonomy, merit, meaningfulness, and influence. Focusing on four factors of empowerment, the items related to each index are shown in Table 3.

Table 3: Results of Factor Analysis of Empowerment Constituent

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Factors</th>
<th>Index</th>
<th>Items</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>First Factor</td>
<td>Meaningfulness</td>
<td>7-8-9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Second Factor</td>
<td>Autonomy</td>
<td>1-2-3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Third Factor</td>
<td>Merit</td>
<td>4-5-6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fourth Factor</td>
<td>Influence</td>
<td>1-1-12</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Discussion And Conclusion:

The results of the study emphasize that the staff empowerment consists of autonomy, merit, meaningfulness and influence. The findings of the study are in line with other studies done by[22,5,6,2,8,4,8]. The survival and continuity of organization activities depend on its staff’s performance. The fundamental changes in the organizations have been so rapid that they have made the organization management more complex than before. The role of work power has been considered important in all fields. Therefore, people are the most important component in the work process. Organizations invest lots of money to increase the performance of their staff. Whenever, the organizations intend to survive in today's dynamic and complex world, they have to handle the potential powers and apply them. Empowered staff members are purposeful people, and the organization and they personally benefit from this characteristic. In an empowered organization, staffs apply their innovation and
thought, work responsibly and passionately, and feel ownership and proud. They also prefer the organization’s benefit to their own benefit. New technology is not the merit that the organizations can have in order to compete in today’s condition. The excellence of an organization is the high level of confidence of the staff, their level of commitment, their dependence to the organization’s goals and finally, their hidden empowerment. Accessing to creative and committed staff is considered the most important asset of an organization. In traditional organizations, the staffs were supposed to do physical activities, act in a predetermined framework, do their jobs as fast as possible, and ask nothing. But the modern workplace needs staffs that decide properly, and find suitable solutions for the problems. Therefore, the staffs of an organization should be empowered and take responsibility of their activities. Drucker (1998) believes that in predictable, static and fixed environments, the organizations’ performance is controlled, repetitious, and mechanical[16]. In these organizations, the managers have more control over the staff and issue the orders to manage them. They tell the staff how to do their duties. In this situation, the staffs are supposed to follow the rules and behave according to standards. Each individual has a specific duty and is responsible to it. The rules are issued by high rank managers and heard and followed by subordinates, that is, staff members. But in modern environments, which are described by features like: complexity, chaos, speed, hasty changes, staffs should be flexible, self-controlled, entrepreneurial, responsible, and eager to be creative, and act freely. There should be fundamental changes in management styles and organizational structures in a way that all staffs participate in the process of decision making. Work groups should be formed, and more authority and power should be given to subordinates. The hierarchical structure should be replaced by network organizational structure. In this situation, the organization ought to be more lively, dynamic, and flexible, and managers should pay more attention to the staffs’ interests and ideas. On the other hand, the staffs should feel that they are the owners of the organization and belong to it. Because, higher education is one of the most important concerns of each society, the higher education management has an important role in social and economical growth and renewal. Regarding the important role of higher education management in the politics, cultural, social and economical aspects, it is necessary to improve the quality of these systems and avoid wasting human and fiscal capital. Based on the results of the study, it is suggested that the process of staffs’ empowerment is followed in Islamic Azad University and other similar organization by observing the following principles[9,5]:

1. Individuals are given the opportunity to act freely.
2. Individuals are allowed to make decision about their own activities.
3. Individuals are given the chance to freely and independently decide how to do their duties.
4. Individuals should be confident about their own capabilities.
5. Individuals should have the necessary skills for doing their jobs.
6. The work should be meaningful to individuals.
7. The activities should be considered valuable and important.
8. Individuals should be influential in their workplace.
9. The individuals’ opinions should be regarded as efficient and important. The individuals’ opinions should be effective in decision making process.
10. **REFERENCES**


