



An examination of the relationship between empowerment and organizational commitment

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Abstract

This research based on “Whetten” (1990) and “Spreitzer” (1992) is carried out according to the matter that empowerment is multilateral and 4 dimensions that are competence, meaning, self-determination (choice), impact and also trust are emphasized. “Meyer & Allen” commitment model consist of 3 dimensions: affective, continuance and normative commitment. Because of, both empowerment and organizational commitment are important and issues in modern societies, the research address their relations.

Regarding the purpose, present research is an applied study and regarding data collection, it is descriptive and survey. It is also called correlation research. The sample for this study includes experts of Qom Industries & Mines Organization and Qom Standard & Industrial Research Organization who have bachelor degree or higher and be used sampling method for this homogenous statistical community. After distributing and gathering relevant questionnaires, the results are analyzed by Spss software. According to the research’s findings the correlation of trust and organizational commitment is not rather than other dimensions and this assumption is rejected but they indicates a relationship between empowerment and organizational commitment. There are relationships between 4 dimensions of empowerment and trust and organizational commitment. Finally, the dimensions of empowerment and commitment are ranked by Freedman test of which competence, normative and continuance commitment obtain the highest rank.

Key words: Empowerment; Competence; Impact; Self-determination (choice); Organizational Commitment.

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Introduction

A rapidly changing environment threatens the survival of many organizations. The global economy propelled by booming regional economies, new media and information technology, universal consumer cultures, emerging global standards, and opportunities for corporate cost-sharing, has dramatically changed the environment in which organizations exist today (Ohema,1998,p.17). The survival of many organizations is threatened, in part, by reluctance to adapt to the changing environment. "Ecology-evolutionary theory suggests that uncertain, volatile environments will support diverse organizational forms and that the apparent winners will fluctuate from time to time as conditions change" (Hannan and Freeman, 1989, p.27).

Changes in business environment have forced organizations to review management systems in order to remain competitive in today's turbulent economy."Empowering" employees has become a central theme of related management and leadership practices that have been endorsed to allow organizations to become more competitive. Where yesterday`s organizations were typically rigid, bureaucratic, and rule-bound, today`s successful competitors are flexible, fast and dependent on their front-line employees to act independently in the best interest of the organization (Baker, 2000, p.2). Success in the global marketplace will come to the organization built on synergy, collaboration, flexibility and partnership; an organization that expects individual accountability in return for individual freedom (Lynch, 1997, p.18).

Problem Statement

Despite its widely recognized role, there has been no consensus on the definition of empowerment. Scholars have considered it mainly in connection with organizational practices or managerial techniques; they have neglected to investigate its underlying process. In addition, the word has been used with a variety of meanings such as delegation of power (Tannenbaum, 1968), autonomy (Kanter,1983), leadership skills (Burke,1986), team-building experiences (Nielsen, 1986), intrinsic motivation or self-determination (Deci,1980), effectance motivation or competency (White,1959), sense of control (Lawler,1992), need for power (McClelland,1975), and self-efficacy(Bandura,1986)(Yoon,2001,p.195).

Implicit in the empowerment literature is the reliance on employee commitment as a form of employee control (Baker, 2000, p.4). This research asks the question "Is there a

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relationship between empowerment and organizational commitment?" To aid in the examination of the relationship between empowerment and organizational commitment, conceptual clarity is necessary.

A glance at research literature

Empowerment

Empowerment is the delegation of decision-making prerogatives to employees, along with the discretion to act on one's own (Samad, 2007, p.71).

Empowerment is the process through which enables others to gain power, authority and influence over others, institutions or society. Empowerment is probably the totality of the following or similar capabilities:

- Having decision- making power of their own
- Having access to information and resources for taking proper decision
- Having a range of options from which you can make choices (not just yes/no, either/or)
- Ability to exercise assertiveness in collective decision-making
- Having positive thinking on the ability to make change
- Ability to learn skills for empowering one's personal or group power
- Ability to change other's perceptions by democratic means
- Involving in the growth process and changes that is never ending and self-initiated
- Increasing one's positive self-image and overcoming stigma (Wikipedia, 2008).

Thomas and Velthouse (1988) and Spreitzer (1992) have developed a model that identifies four task assessments as a basis for worker empowerment. These four dimensions of empowerment are competence, meaning, self-determination (choice), and impact.

Competence: Competence is the degree to which a person can perform task activities skillfully when he or she tries. This dimension reflects a mastery of behavior.

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Meaning: Meaning is the value of the task goal or purpose, judged in relation to the individual's own ideals or standards. It is the fit between the needs of one's work role and one's beliefs, values, and behaviors.

Self-determination (choice): To be self-determining means to experience a sense of choice in initiating and regulating one's own actions. This dimension reflects a choice of behavior.

Impact: Sense of impact represents the extent to which one can causally influence a desired environmental outcome. This dimension reflects a control over ends and outcomes (Baker, 2000, pp.14-16).

Trust: Whetten & Cameron added trust to Spreitzer's model according to "Mishra" studies (1992) (Mishra & Spreitzer, 2006, p.55). Trust refers to positive expectations individuals have about the intent and behaviors of multiple organizational members based on organizational roles, relationships, experiences, and interdependencies (Huff & Kelley, 2005, p.97). This dimension reflects the relationship between supervisor/manager and subordinate/employee (Mishra & Spreitzer, 2006, p.55).

Dimensions of Empowerment

Empowerment as Relational Construct

The literature on empowerment from a relational perspective focuses on the dynamics of transferring power from the leader/manager to the subordinate/employee. Empowerment studies often advocate that employees should be permitted, or even encouraged to influence their working environment (Hollander & Offerman, 1990, p.183).

Empowerment as Psychological Construct

The psychological perspective views empowerment as a subjective phenomenon. Empowerment in this view is a motivational construct where power and control are seen as motivational states internal to individuals. As a psychological construct empowerment raises subordinates' convictions about their own effectiveness. Studies that view empowerment as a psychological construct shift the responsibility for motivation from the employee to the organization (Conger and Kanungo, 1988, p.473).

Notable Factors in Consideration of Empowerment

Level: Empowerment is a phenomenon that can occur at all levels of an organization from the board of directors to front line workers. One must determine the level of analysis to be analyzed by considering employee position in the organizational hierarchy. Several, rather than one, stratum in the hierarchy may be analyzed; however, employee position in the organizational hierarchy is an element to consider.

Content: Is collective or individual empowerment the focus of inquiry? Collective empowerment represents the enabling of a group. Empowerment of a collectivity focuses on the empowerment of people through group membership. Individual empowerment does not require group membership. Individuals may feel empowered, yet they may be a member of a powerless group. Similarly, a collectivity may be empowered, yet the individual empowerment emphasizes the competence and right of people to take charge of their own destinies.

Context: Another factor to consider in a conceptual framework for empowerment is the context within which empowerment will be examined. Individuals may feel empowered in a family setting, work setting, and/or a community setting. It is acknowledged that individual growth is profoundly affected by the larger social environment.

State: The state of empowerment, whether empowerment is a process or product, is another factor that needs to be considered when developing a conceptual framework. Empowerment includes both process and product dimensions, and the relationship between them is complex. Empowerment as a process refers to the means, thought, and action that allow individuals or group to act on their own behalf to achieve a greater measure of control over their lives and destinies. Empowerment is viewed as the processes that allow a transfer of power. This view of empowerment fits with the relational perspective of empowerment. As a product, empowerment is viewed as a motivational state internal to individuals. Empowerment as a product fits with the psychological perspective of empowerment where empowerment is viewed as raising subordinates in their own effectiveness. Common to both states of empowerment, process and product, is the notion that empowerment is dynamic and constantly evolving. There is no final state (Staples, 1990, pp.30-34).

Underlying Assumptions about Empowerment

Human nature: The empowerment conceptual framework assumes people are basically good and have an internal need for self-determination. Employees are capable people trying to do a good job. In addition, every one has an internal need for self-determination and a need to control and cope with environmental demands. Employees not only want to control factors in the work setting but have an internal need to do so (Baker, 2000, p.20).

Environment: Individuals may feel empowered in a family setting, work setting, and/or community setting. Individuals empowered in one of these setting do not necessarily feel empowered in another setting. "Empowerment is not a global construct generalizable across different life situation and roles, but rather specific to the work domain" (Spreitzer, 1995, p.1444).

Power: A third assumption is that employees with power are more likely to obtain what they desire. Conger and Kanungo (1988) stated "Actors who have power are more likely to achieve desired outcomes and actors who lack power are more likely to have their desired outcomes redirected by those with power" (Conger and Kanungo, 1988, p.472).

Variable characteristics: The last assumption is based on characteristics of empowerment as a variable. Empowerment is defined as a dynamic, continuous variable. There is no "final" state of empowerment. Empowerment is a continuum with employees feeling various degrees of intrinsic task motivation (Staples, 1990).

Related Literatures with Empowerment

A theory has yet to be developed that examines the construct of empowerment. There are, however, related literatures that discuss the empowering of employees in organizations as an ancillary factor. This related literature consist of; Management Techniques, Organizational Leadership, Culture.

Management Techniques

Two formalized management systems prevalent in the management systems literature are Total Quality Management (TQM) and Employee Involvement (EI).

Total Quality Management (TQM)

TQM is a management philosophy that focuses on quality, customer satisfaction, and the use of statistical process control to aid in continuous improvement. It is based primarily on

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the work of four individuals: Deming, Juran, Crosby and Ishikawa. Deming (1986) stated "Total Quality Management emphasizes the empowering of employees to make changes that will enhance quality"(Lawler, 1994, p.68).

Employee Involvement (EI)

EI is a management system that focuses on locating decisions at the lowest level in the organization. EI is designed to yield better decisions and to increase employee commitment. EI evolved from research on democratic leadership in the 1930s and includes such topics as job design, organization design, and organizational change (Lawler, 1994, p.70).

Both TQM and EI systems endorse a change in management behaviors so that employees have increased responsibilities in the workplace. Manager in these systems allow employees to make decisions and facilitate the decision making process. This involves communicating information to employees and providing them with necessary tools to optimize employee decision-making. Both management systems empower employees to make improvements in the workplace (Deming, 1986; Lawler, 1994).

Organizational Leadership

Traits and behaviors of leaders are divided into two categories. One category is universal traits and behaviors where certain traits and behaviors are considered effective for all situations and individuals. Energy, intelligence, communication skills, and physical stature are common traits that are considered to be essential for effective leaders. The second category in leadership research asserts that different traits and behaviors are required for different situations. Certain leadership traits and behaviors are considered effective for a particular group of subordinates and situations, but those same traits and behaviors are ineffective for another group of subordinates and situations. There are two kind of leadership style that consist of; Transformational Leadership and Transactional Leadership.

Traits of Transformational Leader

- Charisma: Provides vision and sense of mission, instills pride, gains respect and trust.
- Inspiration: Communicates high expectation, uses symbols to focus efforts, and expresses important purposes in simple ways.
- Intellectual Stimulation: Promotes intelligence, rationality, and careful problem solving.

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- Individualized Consideration: Gives personal attention, treats each employee individually, coaches, and advises.

Traits of Transactional Leader

- Contingent Reward: Contracts exchange of rewards for effort, promises rewards for good performance, recognizes accomplishments.
- Management by Exception (active): Watches and searches for deviations from rules and standards, takes corrective action.
- Management by Exception (passive): Intervenes only if standards are not met.
- Laissez-Faire: Abdicates responsibilities, avoids making decisions (Bass, 1990, p18).

Culture

An organization's shared beliefs, ideology, values, language, ritual and myth defines its culture. The culture of an organization is comprised of a set of shared beliefs and assumptions that are actualized through artifacts, rites, rituals, and symbols. An organization's culture emphasizes the unique or distinctive character of the organization that provides meaning to members. Culture is deeply embedded, enduring, and slow to change. The culture of an organization exerts control over its member's behavior (Tierney, 1990).

The theory of cultural consequence states there are shared beliefs, values, norms, etc. that are culture specific, and their differential cultural endorsement is predictive of a wide range of behaviors and practices deemed acceptable and effective. Hence, selected values and beliefs (acceptable) are predictive of practices and leader traits and behaviors that are considered acceptable to members of that culture (and effective in that culture)(Hofstader,1984,p.1991).

Culture and Learning Organization

There are five elements of the learning organization:

Systems thinking: Systems thinking challenges the illusion that the world is created of separate, unrelated forces. It is a conceptual framework that rests on the underlying assumption that actions and events are interconnected.

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Personal mastery: Personal mastery is a philosophical element whereby individuals establish personal aspirations and live to serve these aspirations.

Mental models: These are the deeply ingrained assumptions, generalization, or even pictures or images that influence how we understand the world and how we take action. This is the foundation for which an organization`s culture is built.

Building shared vision: This represents creating a shared picture of the future the organization wishes to create. Creating a shared vision instills genuine commitment of employees and is a form of control that negates the use of compliance mechanisms.

Team learning: Teams learn when the intelligence of the team exceeds the intelligences of the individuals making up the teams and the individual members are growing more rapidly than could have occurred otherwise (Senge, 1990, pp.7-10).

Organizational Commitment

"While there is agreement among scholars that the concept of organizational commitment indicates the link of an employee to an organization, there has been a controversy over the nature of organizational commitment" (Ko, 1996, p.7). Organizational commitment refers to an employee`s attachment to an organization as a whole. It is different from other forms of commitment such as work ethic endorsement, career commitment, job involvement, and union commitment which focused on value, career, job, and union, respectively (Baker,2000,p.42).

Meyer and Allen Approach

Meyer and Allen (1987) divide organizational commitment into three dimensions: affective, continuance, and normative commitment.

Affective Commitment: Affective commitment is an emotional attachment to an organization. Employees of an organization with a strong sense of affective commitment to the employing organization will remain a member of that organization because they want to. It is characterized by the degree to which an individual identifies with, is involved in, and enjoys membership in an organization. Meyer and Allen (1991) suggest that affective commitment will mostly result from work experiences that satisfy employees' need to feel comfortable in the organization and contribute to their feelings of competence in the work role (Mowday, Steers, and Porter, 1982).

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Continuance Commitment: Continuance commitment is an attachment to an organization based on an employee's awareness of the costs associated with discontinuing membership. Employees of an organization with a strong sense of continuance commitment to the employing organization will remain a member of that organization because they need to. Remaining an employee of an organization is a result of an employee calculating the benefits and weighing those against the costs of membership in the organization. Remaining with an organization tends to result from the accumulation of side bets (investments) an individual has made in the organization which would be lost if the individual discontinued membership in the organization (Ko, 1996, p.13).

Normative Commitment: Normative commitment is an attachment to an organization based on an ethical imperative that an employee feels it is the right thing to do. Employees of an organization with a strong sense of normative commitment to the employing organization will remain a member of that organization because they ought to. Employees with a strong sense of normative commitment feel obligated to be an employee of an organization. Normative commitment is viewed as the totality of internalized normative pressures to act in a way which meets organizational goals and interests (Wiener, 1982).

Research Goals

Main Goal:

An examination of the relationship between empowerment and organizational commitment.

Secondary Goals:

- Determination of the relationship between a sense of competence and organizational commitment.
- Determination of the relationship between a sense of meaning and organizational commitment.
- Determination of the relationship between a sense of self-determination and organizational commitment.
- Determination of the relationship between a sense of impact and organizational commitment.
- Determination of the relationship between trust and organizational commitment.

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- Determination of the trust and organizational commitment's correlation in regard to other dimensions and organizational commitment's correlation.

Research Hypothesis

Main Hypothesis:

There is significant association between empowerment and organizational commitment.

Secondary Hypothesis:

- There is significant association between a sense of competence and organizational commitment.
- There is significant association between a sense of meaning and organizational commitment.
- There is significant association between a sense of self-determination and organizational commitment.
- There is significant association between a sense of impact and organizational commitment.
- There is significant association between trust and organizational commitment.
- Correlation of trust and organizational commitment is rather than the Correlation of other dimensions and organizational commitment.

Methodology, community and statistical sample

This research is categorized in survey-type studies and is an applied form in terms of its goals and is descriptive in terms of the method of data collection.

In this research, statistical community is the experts of Qom Industries and Mines organization and Qom Standard and Industrial Research organization who have bachelor degree or higher. Statistical sample is the part of this community. It is specified by limited community formula and based on this formula ($n = 100$).

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Data collection method and statistical analysis

Library and field study methods were utilized to gather information about theoretical basics, literature devising, index identification and their related definitions.

The tool of data gathering is questionnaire. By using of "Spreitzer" questionnaire about empowerment and "Meyer & Allen" and "OCQ" questionnaires about organizational commitment and other information, two questionnaires with Likert's continuum were devised that their validity were calculated based on the viewpoints of management professors and connoisseurs and their reliability were computed based on Cronbach's Alpha. The results consist of respectively, ($r = 0.903$) and ($r = 0.832$). In this research, information were gathered in August 2008 and experts answered to the questions by current conditions.

Various inductive statistical methods were used to analyze the gathered data. The applied statistical tests include Kolmogrov-Smirnov Test, One-Sample T Test, Spearman's correlation Test, Differences of the Correlation Coefficients Test and Friedman's Test.

Findings analysis

1) Kolmogrov- Smirnov Test

Kolmogrov-Smirnov Test is applied to review the normal/abnormal situation of the research variables. Based on the results, self-determination is in the abnormal situation but other dimensions are in the normal situations. The results are shown in table 1.

Table 1: the results of Kolmogrov-Smirnov Test

Sig	Dimensions	K- S
0.159	Competence	1.124
0.082	Meaning	1.264
0.098	Impact	1.228
0.036	Self-determination	1.418
0.322	Trust	0.955
0.975	Empowerment	0.480
0.059	Affective Commitment	1.328
0.292	Continuance Commitment	0.980
0.072	Normative Commitment	1.289
0.609	Organizational Commitment	0.609

Significant = 0.05

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2) One - Sample T Test

One-Sample T Test is applied to review the suitable/unsuitable situation of the research variables. Based on the results, continuance commitment is in an average position but other dimensions are in the suitable situations.

3) Spearman's Correlation test

This test is applied to review the existence/non-existence of a meaningful relationship among research variables. Based on the results of this test, there are direct meaningful relationships between four dimensions of empowerment and trust and organizational commitment. The result shows that, there is direct meaningful relationship between empowerment and organizational commitment and the correlation ratio is 0.672, too. The results are shown in table 2.

Table 2: Nonparametric Correlation

Rank	Correlation Coefficient	
1	Competence & Organizational Commitment	0.424
2	Impact & Organizational Commitment	0.571
3	Meaning & Organizational Commitment	0.567
4	Trust & Organizational Commitment	0.547
5	Self-determination & Organizational Commitment	0.535

Correlations are significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

4) Differences of the Correlation Coefficients Test

This test is applied to review the Differences of the Correlation Coefficients among research variables. This test is used for considering the last hypothesis. It is necessary to examine four states in this hypothesis. In the first state, Correlation of trust and organizational commitment is against of the Correlation of Competence and organizational commitment. In the second state, Correlation of trust and organizational commitment is against of the Correlation of meaning and organizational commitment. In the third state, Correlation of trust and organizational commitment is against of the Correlation of impact

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and organizational commitment. In the fourth state, Correlation of trust and organizational commitment is against of the Correlation of self-determination and organizational commitment. The results are shown in table 3.

Table 3: Results of the Test

1	In the first state	$Z = 1.12 < Z_{0/05} = 1.64$
2	In the second state	$Z = - 0.2 < Z_{0/05} = 1.64$
3	In the third state	$Z = 0.12 < Z_{0/05} = 1.64$
4	In the fourth state	$Z = - 0.24 < Z_{0/05} = 1.64$

Therefore, based on the results of this test, Correlation of trust and organizational commitment is not rather than the Correlation of other dimension and organizational commitment.

5) Freedman's test

This test is applied to rank dimensions of the research. These dimensions are shown in tables 4 and 5.

Table 4: Dimensions of empowerment

Variable	Rank	Dimensions	Mean Rank
Empowerment	1	Sense of Competence	3.78
	2	Sense of Self-determination	2.98
		Sense of Meaning	2.96
		Sense of Impact	2.72
		Trust	2.54

Table 5: Dimensions of organizational commitment

Variable	Rank	Dimensions	Mean Rank
Organizational Commitment	1	Normative Commitment	2.42
		Affective Commitment	2.28
	2	Continuance Commitment	1.30

Conclusion and recommendations:

In this research, empowerment, organizational commitment and the relationship between them are examined. After studying such variables and their dimensions in target organizations, it was observed that continuance commitment is in the average situation and it is necessary to pay more attention to this dimension.

Because of, the correlation of competence and organizational commitment is the lower than correlations of other dimensions but the mean rank of competence is higher than others, can conclude that, they employees have ability, skill and talent for doing their job activities but they have not any commitment and loyalty to their organizations. In order to remove this problem it is recommended that, organization improves its commitment and appreciation toward employees, because that it enforces employees' commitment and appreciation toward organization and increases organizational belonging and loyalty culture. In order to improve employees' commitment and increase integration, it is recommended that, organization allows to employees for performing new works, creativity and innovation and makes situation to enhance employees' rank.

Because of, the meaning dimension is in the second rank, can conclude that, work and job activities are not very important for employees and do not make target for them. Thus, it is recommended that, organizations defines mission, vision, ends and job values for employees and changes their view points about work and job activities and enforces systems thinking.

Because of, the impact dimension is in the second rank; too, it is recommended that, organization makes conditions to be relevant employees' job and their educations or academic paper, because it is positive and effective factor to increase a sense of empowerment, particularly, in competence and self-determination dimensions.

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Because of, the self-determination dimension is in the second rank, suggestions to the organization are consist of:

- Encouraging employees for solving their problems by mental models.
- Training and delivering information for increasing employees' ability in order to control of results and outcomes.
- Improving a sense of autonomy and self-efficacy for doing job activities and controlling responsibilities.
- Changing person' view toward own and job.

Because of, the rank of trust is the lowest, it is recommended that managers entrust their subordinates and respect them in order to breed their best capabilities and cause their trust through supporting employees' decisions and initiatives and respecting and encouraging their capabilities and talents.

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