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Iranian Agricultural Academic Staff's Organizational Culture and their Psychological Empowerment

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Abstract

Faculties' empowerment is one of the effective tools for increasing productivity and optimum use of their individual and group abilities and capacities to reach organizational goals. Organizational culture is the main component of decision making in universities and one of the requirements of psychological empowerment (i.e. meaning, competence, self-determination, trust, impact). Given the importance of these two variables and their possible relations; and as the main purpose of this study, the supposed correlation between Iran agricultural colleges' faculties' psychological empowerment and their organizational culture was investigated. So this descriptive correlation study surveyed agricultural faculties to measure their psychological empowerment and also organizational culture in their colleges. A multi-stage random Sampling approach was implemented. The national sample consisted of 404 faculty members. Factor analysis determined three components of organizational culture (i.e. team-orientations, empowerment and capability development). All components of psychological empowerment were significantly and positively correlated with team-orientations and empowerment while the capability development was only significantly correlated with trust.

Keywords:

Organizational culture, Psychological empowerment, Iran agricultural college faculties

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INTRODUCTION

Human resource (HR) empowerment is one of the most effective factors influencing employee's productivity -i.e. Optimum benefit from collective and individual capacities toward achieving organizational goals (Erisen *et al.*, 2009). Organizations today are affected by a variety of issues such as increasing global competition, sudden transformations, need for efficient staff, and resource limitations. In such circumstances, pioneer organizations seeking competitive advantage, must possess creative and motivated human resources (Thomas and Velthouse, 1990). Therefore, manpower empowerment as the most important property of every organization is considered necessary. In other words, HR must be able to develop their skills comprehensively, leading to improved productivity (Sajedi and Omidvari, 2005). Nowadays, strategy of empowerment is regarded as a very important step in the process of organizational development which enables organization staff to cope with the external threats. Of course, it is regarded as one of the main shortcomings of modern organizations as well. A successful organization is a complex of humans with a dynamic organizational culture, common thoughts and goals which in the flexible system of their organization are willing to share their experience and knowledge with the management in order to help advance the organization. So all have a sense of ownership toward their organization and the job that they do. Being able to take advantage of the potential abilities of human resources is a great advantage for any organization (Blanchard, 2003).

Because of the vital role of higher education in the process of economic, social and cultural development in every nation by providing much-needed human capital, its reinforcement and development is basic in developing the other sectors. In this respect, the academic staffs are one of the main players of higher education system of any country and their empowerment has a direct impact on the performance of higher education (Gharoon, 2000). Academics' job quality, namely research and teaching, is dependent on their dynamics more than any other factor. Those are the academics that crystallize

the expected university functions including scholarships of discovery (research and development of new knowledge), scholarship of integration (linking ideas), scholarship of application (using of knowledge in real word) and scholarship of teaching. Hence, efficiency and effectiveness of higher education institutions are related to the quality of their faculty (Birnbau, 1998). That's why, it is so crucial for the universities to identify appropriate mechanisms towards the empowerment of their faculties, and so utilization of their capabilities (Abdollahi and Heydari, 2008).

The Empowerment process provides the faculty with the possibility to gain the capability and authority which could eventually facilitate their impact on the organization, society and learner. Generally, empowerment process enable the faculty to acquire the following capabilities: positive attitude toward change, better decision making, improved access to up-to-date information, diverged range of choices, enhanced ability of self-expression and the like (Whetten and Cameron, 1998).

So far, the importance of organizational culture (Liden and Tewksbury, 1995., Mallak and Kustedt, 1996; Sagie, 2002; Sigler and Pearson, 2000) as one of the most important factors affecting human resource empowerment is clarified especially in higher education institutions.

Although there is not a general agreement on elements of organizational culture amongst different scientific disciplines, there are a set of core values which have widely been accepted by members of any organization (Tsui *et al.*, 2006). In fact, the basic of organizational culture is comprised of values considered common by members, which later form the inter-organizational behaviors (HajiKarimi, 2002). Particularly in an educational setting, an appropriate organizational culture is one the most important foundation of the organizational development and empowerment of human resource empowerment. Effective organizational culture in a university can persuade and motivate the academics into appropriate behavior. Furthermore, it can lead to success in administration and monitoring through trust building between man-

agers and faculties of the university (Fralinger, 2007). In the universities, culture is defined as a set of common values, beliefs and goals shared by faculties, managers, students and staffs. These values and beliefs form individual and organizational behaviors, and are largely effective on the decision making mechanisms (Bartell, 2003). Evidence shows that organizational culture is a complex phenomenon with a critical role in the organizational development. So when organizations don't have enough detailed information on their organizational culture, they will face problems, some of which are: organizational conflict, lack of organizational coherence, and decreased productivity. On the contrary, organizational culture awareness could help the managers to exploit its strengths and overcoming on its weaknesses (Rahimnia and Alizadeh, 2006).

Mohammadi (2002) evaluated staffs' empowerment mechanisms of Birjand University. Beside explaining empowerment approaches, dimensions, and intervening factors, its different methods were also investigated. He reported that various components of organizational culture such as performance based salary, participatory management, suggestion system, responsibility, team working, and participation in goal setting were the most important empowerment methods. Sajedi (2006) while investigating the relationship between organizational culture and person/organization fit revealed that all four dimensions of Denison organizational culture (including: participation, adaptability, consistency and mission) can be seen at various extents in the western universities of Iran. Furthermore, the mission and participation dimensions showed the strongest and weakest relationships with the individual criteria of person - organization fit; respectively. Rahimnia and Alizadeh (2006) concluded that faculties believed the consistency dimension of organizational culture had the highest priority, while participation dimension remained the lowest.

Mallak and Kustedt (1996) investigated the relationship between psychological empowerment (meaning, competency, self determination and impact) and organizational culture components.

Their findings showed that there was a positive significant relationship between empowerment components and components of organizational culture such as team orientation, self determination, access to information, and the others. Wilkinson (1998) showed that consistency dimension was the most and adaptability the least important dimension.

Given the importance of agricultural academics' empowerment, the first step for moving toward empowerment of agricultural colleges in Iran would be conducting a study in search of identifying the process, components and intervening factors from the view point of organizational culture theory. Hence, this study was mainly designed aimed at identification and analysis of organizational culture factors affecting psychological empowerment of the academic staff working in Iran's agricultural colleges. To achieve this, the following specific objectives were pursued:

- Demographics and professional characteristics of agricultural colleges.
- Most important factors of organizational culture affecting agricultural academics' empowerment.
- Most important components of agricultural colleges' psychological empowerment
- The relationship between organizational culture and psychological empowerment components.
- Analysis of each component's proportion in explaining academics' empowerment.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

Data for this survey study were collected using a structured questionnaire during 2009, which addressed Iran's agricultural academic staff. A pilot study was conducted with thirty faculties participating from agricultural college of University of Tehran. The aim was to test and improve the questionnaire. Revisions were made based on the pilot study. Responses from the pilot test were not included in the final sample. The questionnaire included two parts. The first asked those demographic characteristics of Faculty members and the second asked questions about components of the Faculty members'

Psychology Empowerment.

The statistical population of the study consisted of 1,837 academics, working in 31 Agricultural colleges. The sample size was determined based on the Krejcie and Morgan's formula (1970), which consisted of 404 participants selected via a proportional stratified random sampling approach with 31 colleges as the categories.

Faculty Psychological empowerment were measured using Whetten and Cameron's 15-item scale (1998), which is commonly used to measure employees' Psychological empowerment. The survey instrument contained a series of questions to which participants responded by indicating their level of agreement/ disagreement on a five-point scale ranging from strongly agree (score = 5) to strongly disagree (score = 1).

At university levels, culture is described as values, beliefs and common objectives shared by the faculty members, managers, students and the staff. These values and beliefs affect the process of decision making at the universities to a large extent, and shape personal and organizational behavior, here conceptualized as the organizational culture.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Demographic Characteristics

The demographic characteristics of the faculty members have been presented in table 1. As shown, men comprised most of the faculty

Table 1: Frequency distribution of respondents according to their demographic characteristics (n= 404)

	F	%	M	SD
Age	-	-	44.92	8.92
teaching experience	-	-	14.78	8.98
Gender	404	100	-	-
Male	374	92.6	-	-
Female	30	7.4	-	-
Level of Education	404	100	-	-
M.Sc. Degree.	56	13.9	-	-
Ph.D. Degree	348	86.1	-	-
Academic degree	404	100	-	-
Mentor	55	13.06	-	-
Assistant professor	250	61.9	-	-
Associate Professor	62	15.3	-	-
Professor	31	7.7	-	-
Missing data	6	1.5	-	-

members (92.6%). In terms of the educational level, most of them showed a Ph.D. Degree (86.1%), from which most ranked as assistant professor (61.9%). The academics were relatively middle-aged with the average age of 45 years old. On average, they had almost 15 years of teaching experience.

Faculty members' Psychological Empowerment

The 15 psychological empowerment items were listed according to their ranking in Table 2. It shows that "The work that I do is important to me" had the highest mean score (4.58), and was ranked as the most important item. All

Table 2: Rankings of faculty members' Psychological Empowerment Dimensions (n= 404)

Ranking	Psychology Empowerment Dimensions	M	SD	CV
1	The work that I do is important to me	4.58	0.560	0.122
2	My job activities are personally meaningful to me.	4.55	0.585	0.129
3	The work I do is meaningful to me.	4.54	0.590	0.130
4	I am confident about my ability to do my job.	4.38	0.584	0.133
5	My job is well within the scope of my abilities.	4.38	0.632	0.144
6	I have mastered the skills necessary for my job.	4.32	0.638	0.148
7	I can decide on my own how to go about doing my own work.	3.77	0.686	0.182
8	I have a great deal of control over what happens in my department.	3.33	0.638	0.191
9	My impact on what happens in my department is large.	3.52	0.703	0.199
10	I have a chance to use personal initiative in carrying out my work.	3.73	0.750	0.201
11	I have considerable opportunity for independence and freedom in how I do my job.	3.35	0.701	0.209
12	My opinion counts in departmental decision-making.	3.43	0.788	0.229
13	I am confident that my colleagues are completely honest.	2.97	0.912	0.307
14	I am confident that my colleagues sharing important information with me.	2.97	0.945	0.318
15	I believe that my colleagues attention to my Treasure and success	2.81	0.933	0.333

Table 3: Ranking of the organizational culture as perceived by the faculty members (n= 404)

Ranking	Organizational Culture	M	SD	CV
1	Most faculty members are highly involved in their work	4.13	0.736	0.178
2	Problems often arise because we do not have the skills necessary to do the job.	3.85	0.782	0.203
3	Information is widely shared so that everyone can get the information he or she needs when it's needed.	3.34	0.770	0.230
4	Work is organized so that each person can see the relationship between his or her job and the goals of the organization.	3.56	0.837	0.235
5	Decisions are usually made at the level where the best information is available.	3.35	0.801	0.239
6	Authority is delegated so that faculty members can act on their own.	2.76	0.667	0.242
7	University planning is ongoing and involves everyone in the process to some degree.	2.86	0.725	0.253
8	The "bench strength" (capability of faculty members) is constantly improving.	3.04	0.910	0.299
9	The capabilities of faculty members are viewed as an important source of competitive advantage.	3.06	0.996	0.325
10	Faculty members work like they are part of a team.	2.75	0.919	0.334
11	Teams are our primary building blocks.	2.62	0.931	0.356
12	Teamwork is used to get work done, rather than hierarchy.	2.50	0.911	0.365
13	Cooperation across different parts of the organization is actively encouraged.	2.21	0.841	0.381
14	There is continuous investment in the skills of faculty members.	2.59	1.036	0.401

items except three had a mean score greater than three which implies that the respondents agreed moderately with empowerment.

Rankings of organizational culture as perceived by the faculty members

The fourteen organizational culture items have been listed according to their rankings (Table 3). "Most faculty members are highly engaged in their work" had the highest mean score (4.13). This implies that most of the faculties agreed that this item was in a good condition in studied colleges.

Factor analysis of organizational culture items affecting psychological empowerment

Table 4: Extracted factors, with their eigenvalue, its variance percent and cumulative percent of variance

Factors	Eigen value	Eigen value variance	Cumulative percent of variance
First	2.799	23.32	23.3
second	2.437	20.30	43.62
third	2.112	17.73	61.35

To categorize organizational culture factors affecting academics' psychological empowerment, and to determine the variance explained by each factor, an exploratory factor analysis approach was followed. Data revealed that internal coherence of the data was appropriate (KMO = 0.834), while and the Bartlett's statistic was

Table 5: Factors of organizational culture explored and labeled as perceived by respondents (n= 404)

Ranking	Organizational Culture	
Team	Cooperation across different parts of the organization is actively encouraged.	0.792
Orientation	Faculty members work like they are part of a team.	0.761
	Teams are our primary building blocks.	0.633
	Teamwork is used to get work done, rather than hierarchy.	0.613
Capability	Problems often arise because we do not have the skills necessary to do the job.	0.688
Development	There is continuous investment in the skills of faculty members	0.615
	The "bench strength" (capability of faculty members) is constantly improving.	0.591
	Work is organized so that each person can see the relationship between his or her job and the goals of the organization.	0.569
Empowerment	Information is widely shared so that everyone can get the information he or she needs when it's needed.	0.741
Culture	Decisions are usually made at the level where the best information is available.	0.609
	Authority is delegated so that faculty members can act on their own.	0.590
	Most faculty members are highly involved in their work	0.543

Table 6: Relationship between dimensions of psychological empowerment and organizational factors.

Psychological empowerment dimensions	Team-orientation	Organizational culture factors Developing abilities	Empowerment culture
Meaning	0.372**	0.049	0.109*
worthiness	0.230**	0.010	0.100**
Impact	0.168*	0.027	0.166**
Self determination	0.162**	0.079	0.132**
Trust	0.329**	0.294**	0.268**

* P < 0.05 ** P < 0.01

significant at the 0.01 level. According to Kaiser Criteria, there were three factors that their extracted Eigenvalues were greater than one. Later, the items were categorized into three factors by using Varimax Rotation Method (Table 4).

It is worth noting that after Varimax rotation and due to low factor loading (less than 0.5) of some variables therefore insignificance of their correlation with other variables, two variables were omitted from analysis and finally 12 variables were analyzed. Table 5 has summarized the findings.

The correlation between dimensions of psychological empowerment and explored organizational culture factors affecting them

To determine the possible relationship between dimensions of psychological empowerment with the factors affecting organizational culture, the Pearson correlation coefficient approach was utilized (Table 6).

CONCLUSIONS

The most important property of every organization is its human resources, which are critical for very survival of the organization. Empowered human resources form an empowered organization, as well. In brief, empowerment of people is one of the most effective tools for increasing the productivity of staff both at individual and group levels toward realizing the organizational goals. Instructors are one of the basics of any educational systems which are responsible for conveying knowledge to learners, building their attitudes and increasing their skills. So, given the critical role of educators in agricultural higher education institutions,

an identification of factors affecting academics' empowerment aimed at designing plans to actually empower them was envisaged. Achieving this purpose, the perspective of organizational culture theory as one of the most important factors affecting faculties empowerment was followed (Liden and Tewksbury, 1995; Mallak and Kustedt, 1996; Sagie, 2002; Sigler and Pearson, 2000) Results showed that from participants' viewpoints, organizational culture was not that desirable. Faculties' viewpoints revealed that some items as: "Teamwork is used to get work done, rather than hierarchy", "Cooperation across different parts of the organization is actively encouraged", and "There is continuous investment in the skills of faculty members" suffered the most. Factor analysis explored three factors, which later were named: team orientation, developing abilities and empowerment culture. They explained 61.35 percents of the total variance.

Finally, correlation coefficients revealed that the relationship between team-orientation and empowerment culture factors, with all dimensions of psychological empowerment were significantly positive. The following suggestions seem to be useful to increase faculties' empowerment. It seems to us that all dimensions of psychological empowerment especially these three items should be taken into consideration, namely: "I am confident that my colleagues are completely honest", "I am confident that my colleagues sharing important information with me", and "I believe that my colleagues attention to my Treasure and success".

Given the factor analysis results that categorized items in three factors, and the con-

siderable variance each one explained, i.e. team orientation, developing capabilities and empowerment culture, it is necessary to consider them more towards improving organizational culture and so agricultural faculties' empowerment. Especial attention should be given to the team orientation in universities by designing practical programs in order to benefit from faculties' team work through faster achievement of university goals.

Furthermore, improving the organizational culture in universities is also very important. In this regard, collaborative supervision of thesis and dissertations by advisors from various agricultural departments as well as that of research work proves to be crucial.

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