

## Explaining the Relationship between Empowerment and Work Life Quality: A Case Study on the Staff of Social Security Hospital of Zahedan city

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### ABSTRACT

**Introduction:** The quality of work life has an important role in increasing labor productivity and consequently the efficiency and effectiveness of large organizations. This study was conducted to investigate the relationship between empowerment (as the independent variables) and the quality of work life of employees (as the dependent variable).

**Method:** This study was conducted in a descriptive correlated manner; the population consisted of the Zahedan city hospital's nursing staff (n=132) selected using accessible sampling methods. They filled out the empowerment and quality of work life questionnaire. The reliability of the questionnaires was confirmed through Cronbach's alpha; furthermore, the questionnaires were prepared with a high content validity and construct validity. The obtained data were analyzed using SPSS statistical software and Pearson's correlation and multiple regression test.

**Results:** The results showed that empowerment and its factors (sense of independence, sense of effectiveness, feeling of being meaningful and trusted among colleagues) at 99% confidence level and feeling of competence at 95% confidence level had a significant positive correlation with the quality of their working life. Second, empowerment factors predicted 29% of the variance in employees' quality of work life.

**Conclusion:** Considering the obtained results, it is recommended that to empower their employees more than ever, the managers try more to promote them, have more skillful staff, and help employees experience working life quality.

**Keywords:** Empowerment, Psychological empowerment, Quality of work life

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### Introduction

Suitable and competent human resources, who are also referred to as organization soldiers, are the difference between effective and non-effective organizations because they think of the organization as their home and hence work without expectations towards organization success and struggle to this end (1), so it can be said that human is among the most important resources of an organization, and they are the ones who form organizational decisions and provide solutions, solve the problems, improve the quality, and bring about efficiency and effectiveness (2).

One of the important issues in human resources, which has attracted the attention of researchers and writers, is the quality of work life. According to Walton (1973), in recent years the quality of work life programs has played an important role in increasing labor productivity and as a result, the efficiency and effectiveness of large

organizations. Quality of work life is a comprehensive program designed to achieve staff satisfaction, helping them to manage change and retention of staff. Dissatisfaction with the quality of work life is a fundamental problem that regardless of position affects all employees (3).

While in the past, the focus was only on personal life (outside of work), today quality of work life is discussed as a major social issue in the management world (4).

A review of the literature shows that there is not a commonly accepted definition for quality of work life and several variables such as organizational policy, leadership styles, methods and operations affect the employees' attitudes of the quality of working life (5).

According to Kheradmand et al. (2010), Robbins defined quality of working life as follows: "A process that the organizations use to respond to the needs of employees. Then allow them to participate in all decisions that are involved in determining their work lives quality." (4)

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Or according to Saraji (2006), quality of work life is a complete and comprehensive program that leads to increased employee satisfaction, enhances the learning environment, and helps them to manage change (4). Newsstram and Davis believe that the quality of work life in employees' perspective means the desirability or undesirability of working environment (6). Kasykv believes (1992) quality of work life can be defined in two concepts: 1. the objective definition, equivalent to a set of objective conditions and organizations procedures, including promotion policy, collaborative stewardship, involving employees in decision-making, secure working conditions and so on.

2. The subjective definition, the perceptions of physical (physical) and psychological (mental) health in the workplace. In this sense, it means the mental image of work life quality and the workers' perception of the physical and psychological environment and working conditions desirability (7).

According Sergey et al. (2001), quality of work life is defined as employees satisfaction with the diverse needs of the resource, activities and outcomes that result from participation in the work environment (8).

Studies show that employees with high work life quality report higher levels of determining identity with the organization, job satisfaction, job performance and a lower level of job desertion and self-alienation.

Employee satisfaction with the quality of work life is difficult that damage all organization employees, regardless of position or rank (4).

Many models have been proposed for quality of work life that shows it has many factors; however, the use of Walton's model is more common (9, 10). Walton defined the quality of work life in 8 factors, including a fair and adequate payment, secure and healthy working environment, extended human capabilities, integration and social cohesion in the work organization, provision of opportunities for continued growth and security, social involvement of work life, overall living space and law orientation in the work (4). In this study, we used this model (Walton model) here.

Components of work life quality

\* Fair and adequate payment means equal pay for equal work, and the balance of payments in terms of staff and their compatibility with any other job.

\* Secure and healthy working environment: to create secure working conditions for determining the physical and logical work hours.

\* Development of human capacities: the availability of opportunities for independence and self-control of in the work environment, learning different skills, access to work related information and plan for the employee.

\* Integration and social cohesion in the work organization: creating a good working environment to establish the sense of belonging to the organization and that they are needed by the organization.

\* Provide opportunities for continued growth and security: provide means to improve individual abilities, opportunities for advancement and opportunities to apply acquired skills and securing employment income and

professionalism.

\* Work life and social ties: the staff's perception (perception) of social responsibility of organization.

\* Overall living space: this component refers to the balance between work life and the rest of the life of the staff including leisure, education and family life.

\* Law orientation in the work order, providing more freedom of expression to have no fear of higher rank people's revenge and the rule of law against the domination of the individuals (4).

Most of the studies concerning the quality of work life investigated the effect of other variables such as quality of work life and productivity of human resources (10), employee performance (2), and organizational commitment (3). However, there are some factors that can affect the quality of working life and make researchers, authors and corporate managers pay attention to these factors, one of the important of which can be HR empowerment.

In management, the term empowerment refers to the establishment of democracy and the involvement of employees in decision-making, under different names, team building and participation and overall quality management. The latest change made is named employee self-empowering, and therefore it can be said that empowerment is not a new concept (4).

Based on the existing literature, empowerment can be viewed from two perspectives, I: psychological perspectives, stresses on how employees perceive empowerment (11). This view sees empowerment as a psychological attitude, namely empowering employees and individuals viewed as perception or attitude toward their work and their role in the organization (12). This view reflects whether the employees see themselves capable or not (13). The focus of psychological empowerment is on the psychological empowerment state of employees (14). II: a multidimensional perspective (communications or mechanical) which analyzes the role of managers and leaders exactly. In this perspective, empowerment is seen as organizational activities aimed to distribute power and decision making (12) or a set of managerial activities, which gives employees the right to use and control the resources evenly (13).

According to hardy and Sullivan (1998), the second or multi-dimensional approach focuses on the transfer of power, while the first or the psychological approach focuses more on open communication, emotional support to reduce stress and anxiety, inspiring goals to increase loyalty and partnerships to emphasize the transfer of power. The aim of this approach is to increase employees' feelings of self-efficacy (13).

Many studies have been done on the concept of empowerment and various concepts defined in the existing literature. But there is no consensus on this concept (13); this issue was first introduced in 1980s, but the management and organization scholars and writers have expressed it in the 1990s (15).

In this research, we have tried to present the definitions of empowerment in the two mentioned approaches (psychological approach and a multi-dimensional approach).

**Definitions related to psychological approaches:** psychological empowerment is defined as a set of psychological states and focused on how employees feel about their work and gain experience and believe that their role and influence in the organization make the employees feel more confident and have a desire to be successful (16). Empowering is a personal belief in the individual's skills and knowledge by which people improve and act accordingly (17). Also, empowerment is to create and strengthen the people's confidence in themselves and make efforts to improve the organization's activities (18), allowing the staff to think, encourage partnership, act and do the right thing in accordance with their obligations. It is empowerment that creates a sense of pride and dignity for employees. But it does not mean that employees do whatever they want to do; this means they should be involved in deciding and defining their duties accordingly, thereby increasing their performance. When an organization is successful in achieving this matter, its effectiveness increases (19). Empowering isn't some of the things that managers do for the personnel, but it is employee's thoughts about their role in the organization, a kind of intrinsic motivation called psychological empowerment (20).

Some definitions are associated with multi-dimensional approach; it is empowering individuals to perform work and give them decision-making authority (21). Empowering employees is a modern technique used by managers to increase productivity through increased employee commitment to the organization and vice versa. (15). Vegt (1997) defines empowerment as giving the opportunity to establish business decisions through increased freedom in decision-making (14); also, Blanchard (1997) defined empowerment as the traditional hierarchy (14).

In this study, we considered the psychological approach to empowerment.

#### *Empowerment factors*

Spritz (1995), according to the Thomas and Vithvs's model, defined psychological empowerment as a concept that has four factors of merits, choice, significance and impact (12). Mishra (1992) proposed another division for the empowerment factors and confidence that added trust to the Vithvs and Thomas's factors; based on his views, empowerment factors are: sense of competence, feeling of having a choice, feeling effective, a sense of significance and a sense of trust for others (22). On this basis, the empowerment concept is multidimensional and the following factors can be considered in it:

Feelings of self-efficacy (competence): this refers to a sense of competence and expertise that people need to do their jobs successfully (23). They have a sense of personal superiority and believe they can learn and evolve to meet new challenges (24). According to daft and Wieck (1984), competence is a key aspect that shows how much people try to remove the obstacles and barriers and how much resistance they show in the face of new challenges (25).

Sense of autonomy (independence): the feeling of autonomy suggests that individuals are capable of performing the duties independently, can decide on job activities, and have the authority necessary to determine the timing and

speed of performing their duties. In fact, autonomy has a direct linkage with freedom of choice (26). Independence indicates choice in the way of doing tasks, work volume and work duration. People show further commitment to what they feel is meaningful, so they have more time for these purposes and will be more diligent about their desired goals. This means that they feel important and worthy for what they are doing (26).

Feeling of influence (accept personal results): It's the individual's ability to influence applied outcomes, administrative or professional lives, and operational activities (23). The sense of effectiveness on the job is connected to the sense of self-control. In order for people to feel empowered, not only they must feel what they do has effect, they should feel that they can create the same effect; namely, the produced results are in their control and so on, having a sense of personal control is essential for health and empowerment (24).

Feel meaningful: Being meaningful includes matching of beliefs, role requirements, values and individual behavior. Regardless of institutional requirements, people tend to strive for goals that they perceive as meaningful. In fact, employees prefer to work with those that have the same values as them (27). Being meaningful is defined as a balance between job requirements and individual values, beliefs and behaviors (23).

Feeling trust: Empowered individuals are capable of sensing trust; they are confident that they will be treated fairly and equally; in other words, they are confident that the holders of power and influence don't damage or harm them and that they will be treated in an impartial manner (22). According to Daft and Wieck (1984), capable people are equipped with a sense of confidence. They are assured that they will be treated fairly and equally. They usually feel that their power protects them from harm (25).

Both the sense of competence and sense of significance will result in employee's satisfaction. Despite the fact that significance affects job satisfaction, the competence level affects employee satisfaction through understanding of the hard work during their encounter (23). Some authors claim that this feature (competency) is the most important element of competence, as having competency determines if these people will make an attempt to try hard in work or not (25).

So based on what was missing in the literature, mentioned in this study, researchers tried to examine the relationship between psychological empowerment and quality of work life and human resource; thus, on this basis, the following research questions raised:

- 1) Is there a significant relationship between employee's empowerment and quality of life?
  - 1.1 Is there a significant relationship between the feelings of competence and quality of work life?
  - 1.2 Is there a significant relationship between the feeling of independence and quality of work life?
  - 1.3 Is there a significant relationship between the feeling of effectiveness and quality of work life?
  - 1.4 Is there a significant relationship between the feeling of significance and quality of work life?
  - 1.5 Is there a significant relationship between trust

between colleagues and the quality of work life?

2) Do the empowerment factors have the ability to predict the work life quality?

## Methods

In terms of objectives, this research was an applied one, in terms of data collection methods, it was descriptive and non-experimental, and in terms of the relationship between variables, it was a correlational research. Also, the research method was a survey.

The sample consisted of nurses of Zahedan social security hospital. Nursing staff included nurses, patient carriers, operating room technicians, anesthesia technicians and midwives. The number of employees, i.e. our sample size, was 190 individuals. Random sampling was used to select the samples. To determine the sample size, the Cohen (1969) and Morgan and Cressi's (1970) table was used (28). According to the table, and the number of population (190), the desired sample size was determined to be 127. Because it is likely that a number of questionnaires are invalid, 150 questionnaires were distributed and finally 132 valid questionnaires were collected and evaluated to be valid.

In order to determine the relationship between empowerment and quality of work life, the required information gathered through the use of questionnaires consisted of three sections: public section including gender, age, occupational history, education and marital status, and the other parts consisting of two questionnaires to assess the capacity and quality of work life variables that were used as the main instrument for data collection  
A) Empowerment questionnaire: A model based on Thomas and Haas (1992 & 1990) that includes different components, such as feelings of competence, a sense of independence, feeling effective, feeling significant and feel of trust between colleagues. To develop the questionnaire, the previous research and related literature were used, based on an empowering questionnaire containing 20 closed questions.

B) quality of work life questionnaire: It was designed based on the Walton's (1973) questionnaire and includes such components as fair and adequate pay, secure and healthy work environment, provision of continued opportunities for growth and security, rule of law within the organization, dependence of social life and work life, overall living space, integration and social cohesion in the organization of work and development of human capabilities; on this basis the quality of work life questionnaire, it consisted of 29 questions.

**Table 1.** Relationship between empowerment and quality of working life

Factors	Empowerment	Competency	Independence	Effectiveness	Significance	Trust
Work life quality	0.516**	0.181*	0.378**	.0380**	0.359**	0.465**
	<0.001	0.038	<0.001	<0.001	<0.001	<0.001

(\*\*) correlations is significant at 0.99 level.

(\*) correlations is significant at 0.95 level.

This questionnaire focuses on a five-point Likert-type questions ranging from totally disagree to strongly agree.

The method used in this study for reliability of the questionnaires was the Cronbach's alpha. To determine Cronbach's alpha, a total of 30 questionnaires were distributed among the nursing staff and the alpha level was calculated using SPSS software. The alpha for the quality of working life, empowerment and questionnaires overall was determined to be 0.862, 0.893 and 0.946, respectively, and considering the generally favorable reputation it is beyond 70 percent, so we can say that these questionnaires have desirable validity.

To check the validity, content validity was used. To examine the validity, the questionnaire was presented to a number of management specialists and finally considering their suggestions a questionnaire with high content validity was prepared and distributed among the target population. In the first step, to examine the demographic characteristics of the samples, SPSS software was used, and finally to assess sub-hypothesis IBM SPSS Statistics v19 software, and specifically the Pearson's correlation and multiple regression tests at the 99% confidence level were used.

## Results

The findings show that the number of men exceeded that of the women (59.1 of the respondents). Most respondents were between 31 and 35 years old, which included 34.1 of the respondents screw. 82.6 were married, 62.1 of the respondents had an experience of between one and ten years of service and most of them (60.6) had bachelor degrees.

Reviewing the research questions

The aim of this study was to explain the relationship between empowerment and quality of working life. In this context, we sought to answer the question, "Is there a significant relationship between empowerment factors (feelings of competence, a sense of independence, feeling effective, feeling significant and meaningful sense), and the quality of working life?"

Pearson correlations were used to examine the question and the results are given in Table 1

As Table 1 shows, the relationship between empowerment factors (feelings of competence, a sense of independence, feel effective, a sense of meaning and trust between colleagues) and quality of working life was positive and significant . So we achieved this goal, too.

The second research question was: “Can intellectual capital factors predict the quality of working life of employees?” To find the answer to this question and to achieve some other objective of this study, multiple regression analysis were used. The results shown in Table 2 in the next section:

**Table 2.** Effect of intellectual capital factors on quality of working life of employees

Independent variables	Dependent variable	F	P	R	R <sup>2</sup>	B	T	P
Competency	Quality of work life	10.662	<0.001	0.545	0.297	0.27	0.636	0.526
Independence						0.62	1.159	0.248
Feel effective						0.75	1.823	0.71
Feeling meaningful						0.117	1.589	0.115
Trust						0.192	2.898	0.004

According to Table 2, f value was obtained 10.662, which is significant at the 99% confidence level. The relationship between variables was linear and an appropriate model was selected.

The R (multiple correlation coefficient) obtained was 0.545; thus, the relationship between empowerment and quality of work life was significant. Also, the R2 value showed that 29% of the variance in the quality of working life was determined by the empowerment factors and the remaining 71 percent can be attributed to other factors. It should be noted that among the five empowerment factors, only the sense of trust between colleagues was able to predict the quality of working life. According to the regression equation, to predict the quality of work life by empowerment factors, we used the following formula

(Feelings of trust between colleagues)  $275/0 + 2.93 =$  quality of work life.

Therefore, this study also had the ability to predict the quality of work life empowerment.

**Conclusion**

The main objective and the hypotheses of each research measure the general state of sub- hypotheses. As mentioned, the main objective of this study was to explain the relationship between empowerment and quality of working life. The results for the main hypothesis showed that at the 99% confidence level, there was a significant relationship between the quality of work life and empowerment; the correlation between the two variables was positive and high. It means that with the increase (decrease) of empowerment, quality of work life also increases (decreases). Accordingly, if the conditions establish enhancing the confidence and trust about themselves and try to improve the organization’s activities’ effectiveness, or if necessary increases the capacities to enable the staff to create added value for the organization and play the roles created, the ability of organization members to fulfill

important individual needs through their experiences in the organization will increase; in other words, the quality of their work life will be good. Certainly, the root of the positive impact of empowerment on the quality of work life is in empowering components and their positive impact on the quality of working life.

The next objective was to clarify the relationship between feelings of competence and quality of work life. The results of the analysis showed that for this hypothesis at the 95 percent confidence level, the feeling of competence and quality of work life had a significant relationship and

the correlation coefficient between these two variables was positive but weak. So if hr feel higher (lower) competency, they will experience a better quality of work life (lesser quality), i.e. if the person feels he/she can perform his/her tasks successfully and has expertise and ability to do the job successfully, he/she will have more quality of working life.

Another objective was to clarify the relationship between feeling of independence and quality of working life.

The results of the hypothesis analysis showed that the at a 99% confidence level, there was a significant relationship between the sense of independence and quality of work life, and the correlation coefficient between these two variables was positive. So by increasing (reducing) the sense of independence, the quality of work life increases (decreases); hence, it can be assumed that if a person has autonomy or choice of methods used to accomplish a task, the amount of effort that must be done, speed and the time frame in which the work must be done, he will have a sense of ownership for the work and this will rise the quality of work life.

Another objective was to explain the relationship between a sense of significance and the quality of work life. The results of the hypothesis analysis showed that at the 99% confidence level, between the quality of work life and a sense of meaningful, a significant relationship exists. The correlation coefficient between these two variables was positive, so a higher (lower) sense of meaning will lead to higher (lower) quality of working life, i.e. if the requirements of the job and individual beliefs, values and behavior are consistent and the staff consider their purposes and internal desire of more value or, in other words, that the person has a sense of meaning in work, the quality of working life will be good.

The next objective was to clarify the relationship between the sense of efficiency and quality. The results of the hypothesis analysis showed that at the 99% confidence level, between the quality of work life and a sense of

effectiveness a significant relationship exists. And the correlation coefficient between the variables was positive. So if a person feels that what he/she is doing has an effect and he/she can create the effect, he/she has control over the result and the work life quality is desirable.

The next goal is to explain the relationship between feelings of trust between colleagues and the quality of working life. The results of the hypothesis analysis showed that at the 99% confidence level, the quality of work life and a sense of trust between colleagues had a significant relationship and the correlation coefficient between the two variables was positive. This means that if employees are treated fairly and equally, they have confidence that those in power and influence will not damage or harm them and that they feel trust towards colleagues, they will experience better quality of working life.

For the final objective, it was observed that empowering factors at the 99% confidence level were able to predict 29% of the variance for quality of working life. Among all of the aspects of empowerment, only trust between colleagues could predict the quality of working life significantly and this shows the importance of trust. Thus, the health system in place should consider this variable further.

### Suggestions

Since this research indicated a significant positive impact of empowerment on the quality of working life, based on the main objective of this study, it is recommended that managers should empower the employees to pay more effort in raising them.

It seems that if employees feel more competent, they should feel a higher level of quality of work life. And given that in this study the correlation between quality of work life and a sense of competence is low, it is recommended that employee should be more undergo those aspects of experience and expertise and less focus on relationships criteria to posts; a proper relationship should be maintained between the rights and benefits. Also, there should be meritocracy at work and organizational promotions be based on clear criteria so that employees feel they deserve more and have higher quality of working life.

Employees who feel they have no impact on the work, will not experience a quality work life based on the results of this study. Thus, the importance of employees as part of their organization should be understood.

In general, given that all dimensions of empowerment have a significantly positive effect on the quality of working life, there should be an attempt to provide the underlying employees with a sense of independence and freedom, in order to feel significant and make an effort to enrich the job.

Providing more information about the organization and the job can create an atmosphere of trust in the organization and be helpful among the staff, so if a manager wants employees feel empowered and do have work life quality, he/she should ensure to provide all necessary information to employees.

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