Original Article

An employee empowerment model in healthcare organizations: a case study of the Iranian social security organization

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Abstract

Background: Employee empowerment in healthcare organizations, which refers to providing staff with the autonomy, authority, and confidence to make decisions and take initiative in their roles, plays a crucial role in enhancing both productivity and the quality of health services. This study aims to design an employee empowerment model for the Iranian Social Security Organization to improve organizational performance.

Methods: This applied research uses a mixed-methods approach. In the qualitative phase, meta-synthesis of 25 purposively selected studies and thematic coding led to an initial model of employee empowerment. In the quantitative phase, data from 210 healthcare employees were collected via a structured questionnaire. ISM was used to determine component relationships, and the model was validated using PLS-SEM in SmartPLS.

Results: The results revealed that the employee empowerment model in healthcare organizations consists of 10 dimensions and 57 components. Additionally, findings indicated that "employee empowerment for organizational productivity" had the most significant impact on other variables, suggesting that improving this factor could enhance overall organizational performance. Key factors identified for employee empowerment included leadership development, organizational support, reward management, feedback and evaluation, decision-making autonomy, and effective communication. Finally, recommendations were provided to enhance employee capabilities and improve the productivity of healthcare organizations.

Conclusion: Employee empowerment, driven by factors such as organizational culture, leadership, and training, plays a crucial role in increasing productivity and organizational commitment. Organizations that invest in human resource development not only achieve better performance but also foster innovation, sustainability, and growth.

Keywords: Delivery of Health Care; Efficiency, Organizational; Empowerment; Latent Class Analysis; Occupational Groups; Social Security.

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Introduction

Employee empowerment, as a key strategy in human resource management, plays an important role in enhancing performance and service quality in healthcare organizations (1). This process, by improving employees' knowledge, skills, and authority, lays the foundation for more effective decision-making and higher-quality service delivery. In organizations such as the Social Security Organization of Iran, which bears responsibility for providing extensive

services to society, employee empowerment can lead to improved health outcomes and increased organizational productivity (2).

Employee empowerment involves providing employees with the necessary opportunities, resources, and responsibilities that enable them to perform independently and effectively in the workplace. Employee empowerment entails building self-confidence, expanding skills and knowledge, and building a sense of ownership and responsibility for employees. Research has shown that employee empowerment leads to improved service quality, increased job satisfaction, and lower costs (3).

Within the healthcare setting, epidemiological approaches—traditionally used to identify risk factors and health trends—can be effectively applied to investigate determinants of employee empowerment (4). For instance, cross-sectional studies can be employed to assess associations between work environment variables (such as workload, leadership style, and access to resources) and levels of empowerment among healthcare staff. Longitudinal data may further reveal how changes in occupational stress or organisational support impact empowerment over time. By analysing patterns in job stress, burnout, and job satisfaction across large employee populations, these methods provide empirical evidence to inform strategies aimed at strengthening empowerment frameworks (5).

Implementing empowerment programs in healthcare organizations is essential from various perspectives, as this initiative can lead to improved service quality, increased productivity, enhanced job satisfaction, and reduced turnover rates. Empowered employees can provide higher-quality services and better respond to patient needs. Increasing their knowledge and skills leads to process optimization and a reduction in resource waste, thereby enhancing organizational productivity (6). Furthermore, employee participation in decision-making and attention to their skills increases job satisfaction, which not only strengthens work motivation but also helps reduce turnover rates and retain a skilled workforce (7). However, implementing empowerment in the Social Security Organization of Iran faces challenges, including resistance to change from some employees and managers, lack of educational resources and professional development opportunities, and a non-participatory organizational culture that hinders the successful implementation of these programs. To overcome these challenges, solutions such as developing cohesive educational programs, creating a participatory organizational culture, and reducing resistance to change through awareness and appropriate incentives must be implemented.

This study aims to develop and validate a structured model of employee empowerment tailored to the context of Iran's Social Security Organization, focusing on identifying key empowerment components, analysing their interrelationships, and evaluating the model's impact on job satisfaction and organizational productivity.

Methods

Study Type and Research Method

The study employed a mixed-methods research approach (qualitative-quantitative), conducted descriptively and analytically, with an applied focus. The study was conducted in two separate but complementary phases. In the qualitative phase, a Meta-Synthesis method was employed to extract components of employee empowerment. In the quantitative phase, Interpretive Structural Modeling (ISM) and Partial Least Squares (PLS) methods were used to test the proposed model.

Research Setting and Study Population

The research environment consisted of healthcare centers affiliated with the Social Security Organization of Iran in significant cities, including Tehran, Mashhad, Kerman, Tabriz, and Shiraz. The study population in the qualitative phase consisted of 15 experts in the fields of human resource management and health, including senior managers from the Social Security Organization, academic professors, and healthcare management specialists, who were selected through purposive sampling. In the quantitative phase, the statistical population consisted of employees working in hospitals and medical centers affiliated with the Social Security Organization, from which a final sample of 350 individuals was selected using stratified random sampling.

Data Collection Method

Research data were collected through two methods:

1. In the qualitative phase, data were collected through two complementary methods: (1) a meta-synthesis of scientific articles, and (2) semi-structured interviews with 15 subject-matter experts. The meta-synthesis focused on reviewing and analysing scientific texts related to employee empowerment, published between 2020 and 2024 in reputable databases such as PubMed, Scopus, Web of Science, SID, and Civilica. This analysis identified initial categories and conceptual codes. In parallel, interviews were conducted to explore practical insights and validate or enrich the findings from the literature. Data from both sources were analysed using axial and selective coding methods in MAXQDA software. The results of the meta-synthesis and interviews were integrated through triangulation to develop a unified initial model of employee empowerment.

2. Quantitative phase: Quantitative data were collected through a standardized questionnaire that included dimensions and components extracted in the qualitative phase. These questionnaires were distributed among employees of the Social Security Organization, and confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) and Cronbach's alpha were used to assess their validity and reliability.

Statistical Analysis

Qualitative data were analysed using inductive content analysis in MAXQDA software. In the quantitative phase, different statistical and modelling techniques were applied, each serving a specific analytical purpose:

1. **Confirmatory Factor Analysis (CFA)** was conducted using AMOS software to validate the factorial structure of the empowerment model and confirm construct validity based on the dimensions identified during the qualitative phase.
2. **Interpretive Structural Modeling (ISM)** was applied via MICMAC software to explore and determine the hierarchical and contextual relationships among the identified components of employee empowerment. This method was particularly useful for understanding the interdependencies and driving–dependence power of each component.
3. **Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modeling (PLS-SEM)** was used in SmartPLS software to assess the overall fit of the structural model, especially given the relatively small sample size and the exploratory nature of the model. Key fit indices such as GOF, AVE, SRMR, and RMSEA were examined to ensure model adequacy.

In addition, descriptive and inferential statistics—including mean, standard deviation, independent t-test, and one-way ANOVA—were performed using SPSS 21 to provide a preliminary analysis of demographic and empowerment-related variables.

Results

The most prevalent age group among experts was 41 to 50 years, comprising 47% of the total sample. Regarding gender, 60% of respondents were male, and 40% were female. The highest work experience was in the range of 15 to 20 years, recorded at 40%. Additionally, the majority of experts held doctoral degrees (73%) Table 1.

Table 1. Demographic Characteristics of Expert Sample

Characteristic	Category	Frequency	Percentage
Age	Under 30 years	1	6%
	31-40 years	4	27%
	41-50 years	7	47%
	51-60 years	3	20%
Gender	Male	9	60%
	Female	6	40%
Work Experience	10-15 years	4	27%
	15-20 years	6	40%
	21-25 years	2	13%
	25-30 years	3	20%
Education	Master's Degree	4	27%
	Doctoral Degree	11	73%

Analysis of Selected Studies Regarding Empowerment and Organizational Productivity

Findings from the analysis of selected articles indicate that employee empowerment and organizational productivity are among the key factors in improving organizational performance. A review of these studies showed that human resource development, organizational culture, and organizational leadership play significant roles in enhancing productivity, organizational commitment, and employee motivation. Additionally, factors such as on-the-job training, coaching and mentoring, delegation of authority, and encouragement of innovation have direct impacts on employee empowerment and improved organizational performance.

Furthermore, the findings revealed that career path development, increased autonomy in teamwork, and facilitation in problem identification and resolution are among the influential factors affecting employee commitment and satisfaction. Flexible organizational structures and effective human resource management also play important roles in creating a more dynamic environment for employees. These results emphasize the importance of efficient human resource strategies and effective management practices in improving organizational performance and increasing sustainability Table 2.

Key Factors in Employee Empowerment

The most critical factors in employee empowerment include training, managerial support, organizational culture, resources, and performance feedback, which play crucial roles in designing an optimal model.

This employee empowerment model for healthcare organizations has been designed based on seven key dimensions. Professional development and training play an important role in enhancing employee skills, while organizational structure and processes create a foundation for better decision-making through autonomy and delegation of authority. Organizational and managerial support increases employee motivation through flexible policies and growth opportunities. An organizational culture based on trust and innovation leads to increased positive interactions. Feedback and performance evaluation contribute to continuous improvement, and resources

Table 2. Key Factors Affecting Employee Empowerment in Healthcare Organizations Based on Selected Studies

Factor Category	Key Factors Extracted from Selected Studies	Outcomes and Effects on Employee Empowerment
Organizational Factors	Organizational culture, Leadership style, Organizational structure, Delegation of authority, Human resource policies	Increased motivation, Improved organizational commitment, Facilitation of independent decision-making
Managerial Factors	Coaching and mentoring, Manager support, Continuous feedback, Clarity in goals and expectations	Increased productivity, Improved job performance, Strengthened sense of responsibility
Environmental Factors	Technological infrastructure, Facilitated access to resources, Supportive and safe work environment	Reduced job stress, Improved employee well-being, Increased work motivation
Individual Factors	Specialized skills, Continuous learning, Work experience, Autonomy in teamwork	Improved job satisfaction, Increased self-confidence, Professional growth
Developmental Strategies	On-the-job training, Career development opportunities, Individual empowerment programs	Enhanced knowledge and skills, increased creativity and innovation, improved individual performance.
Motivational Interventions	Reward and incentive systems, Employee recognition, Participation in decision-making	Strengthened spirit of cooperation, Increased organizational commitment, Reduced turnover

Influence-Dependence Power Analysis (MICMAC Diagram)

In the ISM model, the interrelationships and influence between criteria, as well as the connections between criteria at different levels, are well demonstrated, leading to a better understanding of the decision-making environment by managers. To determine the key criteria, the influence power and dependence of each criterion are defined in the final reachability matrix. The power-dependence diagram for the variables under study is shown in the figure below.

and infrastructure enhance productivity through technology and optimal resource distribution. Finally, leadership and change management, with an emphasis on participatory management and ethical leadership, guide the organization toward sustainability and growth Table 3.

Table 3. Employee Empowerment Model in Healthcare Organizations

Main Dimensions	Key Indicators
Professional Development and Training	Workplace training, Coaching, Soft skills, Training needs assessment.
Organizational Structure and Processes	Delegation of authority, Autonomy in teamwork, Decentralized structure
Organizational and Managerial Support	Managerial support, Flexible policies, Advancement opportunities
Organizational Culture and Motivation	Culture of trust, Participation, Innovation, and Attention to individual differences
Feedback and Performance Evaluation	Periodic feedback, Performance assessment, Performance dialogues
Resources and Infrastructure	Access to technology, Resource distribution, Appropriate infrastructure
Leadership and Change Management	Participatory management, Ethical leadership, Continuous leadership improvement

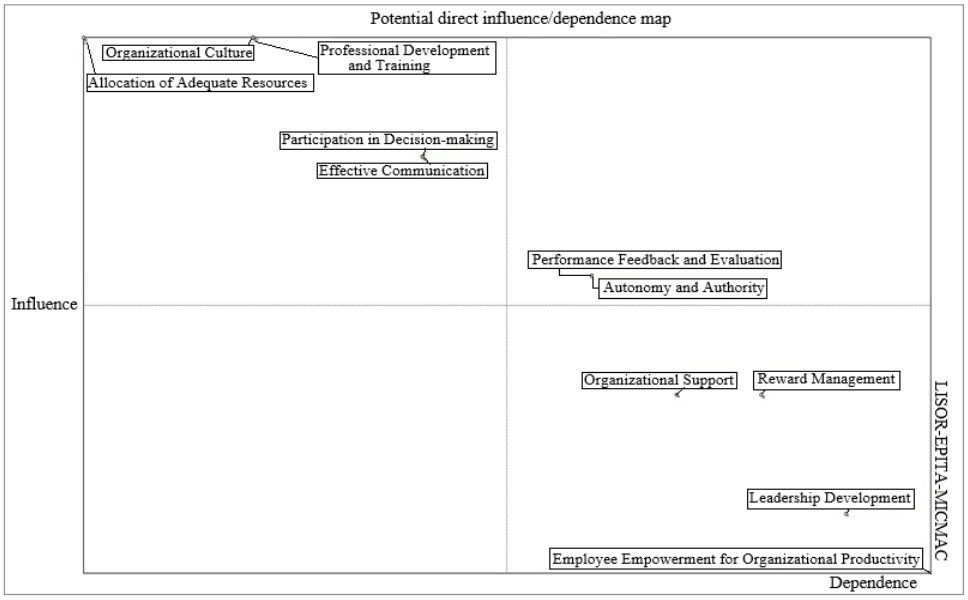

Figure 1. Influence-Dependence Power Diagram (MICMAC Analysis)

Based on the dependency and influence power of variables, a coordinate system can be defined and divided into four equal parts. In this research, a group of variables were classified in the driver subgroup; these variables have high influence power and low dependency. In the next category are dependent variables, which are essentially the results of the model development process and are less likely to contribute to other variables.

In this analysis, variables are divided into four groups: autonomous, dependent, linkage, and independent.

Autonomous variables: Autonomous variables have low dependency and low driving power. These criteria are generally separated from the system because they have weak connections with the system. Changes in these variables do not cause serious changes in the system.

Dependent variables: Dependent variables have strong dependency and weak driving power. These variables essentially have high susceptibility and low influence on the system.

Independent variables: Independent variables have low dependency and high driving power. In other words, high influence and low susceptibility are characteristics of these variables.

Linkage variables: Linkage or connecting variables have high dependency and high driving power. In other words, the influence and susceptibility of these criteria are very high, and any small change in these variables causes fundamental changes in the system.

The results of the multicollinearity test in Table 4 show that the Variance Inflation Factor (VIF) value for all research variables is less than 3. This finding indicates that there is no severe multicollinearity among the independent variables, and the problem of multiple collinearity, which could negatively affect the accuracy of the model, has not been observed. The lowest VIF value belongs to the effective communication variable (1.009), and the highest value belongs to participation in decision-making (2.337), but all values are still within the acceptable range. These results indicate that the research variables independently provide unique information and can be used in structural equation modeling without concerns about multicollinearity. As a result, the proposed model has been validated in terms of non-

collinearity, and the findings derived from it have acceptable statistical validity.

Table 4. Multicollinearity Test (VIF)

Variable	VIF
Professional Development and Training	1.819
Autonomy and Authority	2.224
Performance Feedback and Evaluation	1.966
Participation in Decision-Making	2.337
Organizational Support	2.290
Allocation of Adequate Resources	1.897
Effective Communication	1.009
Reward Management	1.230
Organizational Culture	1.182
Leadership Development	1.303
Employee Empowerment for Organizational Productivity	1.283

Discussion

The present study sought to identify and model the key factors affecting employee empowerment in healthcare organizations by integrating systematic review findings and expert insights through qualitative and quantitative analyses. The results underscore the multidimensional nature of empowerment, encompassing professional development, organizational support, leadership, and structural and motivational components.

The findings are consistent with previous research emphasising the role of training and development as a central driver of empowerment. Some studies highlighted that access to learning opportunities and mentoring directly enhance employees' sense of competence and autonomy. Our results similarly demonstrated that workplace training, coaching, and soft skill development are foundational to empowerment and significantly improve job satisfaction and self-confidence (7, 8).

Numerous studies have demonstrated that a strong and supportive organizational culture plays a pivotal role in enhancing employee commitment and motivation. The findings of the present study indicate that an organizational culture grounded in trust, mutual respect, and innovation contributes to improved employee performance and greater participation in organizational decision-making processes. This finding aligns with Spreitzer research (8), which identified psychological empowerment as a critical factor in boosting both performance and job satisfaction. Similarly, Kirkman & Rosen found that organizations fostering a culture of empowerment experience elevated levels of motivation and organizational commitment (9).

Beyond organizational culture, leadership styles have a significant impact on employee empowerment. Our study revealed that transformational and participative leadership styles enhance employees' sense of value and reinforce their trust in the organization. This corresponds with the findings of Bass & Avolio, who emphasized that transformational leadership fosters intrinsic motivation and enhances employee performance (10). Furthermore, Yukl highlights that effective leaders facilitate empowerment by delegating authority and actively involving employees in decision-making processes (11).

Another crucial factor identified in this research is the positive influence of on-the-job training, coaching, and mentoring on employee empowerment. This outcome is consistent with Salas et al., findings, which demonstrated that effective training enhances employees' knowledge, skills, and attitudes, ultimately leading to increased organizational productivity (12). Additionally, Birdi et al., confirmed that training programs aimed at developing employees' personal and professional competencies directly impact job performance and satisfaction (13).

The results also highlight the significant effects of delegation of authority and increased autonomy on employees' sense of responsibility and productivity. These findings corroborate Thomas & Velthouse, assertion that greater work authority enhances motivation and performance (14). Similarly, Deci and Ryan's self-determination theory posits that employees

with higher autonomy exhibit increased productivity and creativity (15).

Conversely, the role of reward and recognition systems in fostering organizational commitment and reducing turnover was also validated. Our study found that organizations implementing fair and motivational reward systems enjoy more committed and productive employees. This is consistent with Eisenberger et al., findings, which link employee recognition directly to increased motivation and commitment (16). Moreover, Stajkovic & Luthans, emphasized that performance-based rewards can substantially boost productivity (17).

Finally, the influence-dependence power analysis (MICMAC) revealed that factors such as human resource policies and organizational structure serve as key drivers influencing other variables. This aligns with Burke & Litwin, findings, which identified organizational structure as a fundamental element in enhancing organizational productivity (18).

Based on these results, it is recommended that organizations develop comprehensive empowerment strategies, enhance the work environment, and expand learning opportunities to establish a robust foundation for productivity improvement. Furthermore, adopting participatory management practices, delivering constructive feedback, and cultivating an organizational culture grounded in trust and innovation are critical to improving employee performance and ensuring organizational sustainability.

Ultimately, the findings underscore that employee empowerment not only elevates organizational productivity but also fosters a sustainable, innovative, and committed work environment. Given the significance of this issue, organizations should consider implementing intelligent management strategies, investing in training, enhancing organizational culture, and strengthening supportive infrastructures. Such efforts will promote higher motivation, creativity, and responsibility among employees, leading to improved organizational outcomes, increased job satisfaction, and long-term human resource sustainability.

Conclusion

The findings of this study demonstrate that employee empowerment is a key component in improving organizational productivity, reinforced through multiple factors such as organizational culture, leadership, training, managerial support, and effective organizational structures. Organizations that strategically invest in human resource development and create a supportive environment not only perform better in terms of productivity and organizational commitment but will also be able to make their workforce more resilient against the changing challenges of the business world. This study emphasizes that employee empowerment extends beyond a mere management concept and, as a comprehensive strategy, can guide organizations toward innovation, sustainability, and growth. Ultimately, organizations that place empowerment at the heart of their human resource policies will not only benefit from economic and performance advantages but will also play a more prominent role in creating healthier, more dynamic, and more humane work environments.

Authors' contribution

Ali Sadeghinezhad and Hamdollah Manzari Tavakoli developed the study concept and design. Saeed Sayadi and Mahdi Mohammad Bagheri acquired the data. Mohammad Jalal Kamali and Ali Sadeghinezhad analyzed and interpreted the data, and wrote the first draft of the manuscript. All authors contributed to the intellectual content, manuscript editing and read and approved the final manuscript.

Informed consent

Questionnaires were filled with the participants' satisfaction and written

consent was obtained from the participants in this study.

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Conflict of interest

The authors declare that they have no conflict of interests.

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