

Effects of Perceived Organizational Support and Psychological Empowerment on Creative Performance among Agricultural Personnel

Seyyed Mohammad Kazem Hashemi, Hossein Kazem Nadi and Seyyed Mahmood Hosseini
Faculty of Economics and Agricultural Development, Department of Agricultural
Extension and Education, University of Tehran, Karaj, Iran

Abstract: Innovative organizational behaviors and empowering organizational environments can function reciprocally toward ensuring organizational performance and sustainability in long term. This study aimed at analyzing the relationships between Psychological Empowerment (PE), Perceived Organizational Support (POS), and Creative Performance (CP). Through a literature review, we examined causal relationships among these variables. The subjects of the study were agricultural personnel (n = 80) of Karaj city, Iran. Data were analyzed through descriptive statistics, confirmatory factor analysis, and the structural equation modeling. Results of this study, showed that agricultural personnel had moderate level of Creative Performance (CP) (Mean = 3.35). Moreover, results of correlation analysis and structural equation modeling procedure showed that Psychological Empowerment (PE) significantly affected Creative Performance (CP) more than that of Perceived Organizational Support (POS) ($\beta = 0.29$, $p < 0.01$). Overall, the present study recommended that the agricultural organization environment should promote agricultural personnel's creative behaviors through improving their perceptions of psychological empowerment. Finally, the research provided managerial implications.

Key words: Agricultural personnel, Creative Performance (CP), Iran, Perceived Organizational Support (POS), Psychological Empowerment (PE)

INTRODUCTION

The changes that are taking place in today's business landscape have exerted unremittingly pressure for different organizations to compete toward organisational development and sustainability by providing high quality and innovative products or services. In order to achieve this, organizations need to emphasize on buttressing and enhancing creative spirit among their personnel to sustain in a longer run. Intrapreneurial and creative behaviors are perceived important, not only because they assist personnel to obtain a better psychological and performance outcomes but also contribute significantly to the productivity of an organization. Even though it has been acknowledged that fostering creative behavior among personnel of an organization is imperative, the research on personnel's creative behavior and its antecedents remains uncharted, particularly in the context of agricultural organizations. Innovative organizational behaviors, typically, are affected by two factors, namely, provision of leadership (Tierney *et al.*, 1999) and cultivation of a supportive organizational climate (Scott and Bruce, 1994). Leadership is perceived as one of the

key stimulators of personnel' effective work behaviors in an organization. Another management approach to promote creativity among personnel of one organization is through the cultivation of a supportive and empowering climate. Recently, Seibert *et al.* (2004) focused on empowerment climate of work environment of an organization, a construct which is different from psychological empowerment, and is also found to be pertained to personnel' creativity. Spreitzer (1997) defined two general perspectives of empowerment within a business context, the relational perspective and the psychological perspective. Relational empowerment has been referred as top-down paradigm (Conger and Kanungo, 1988) as well as mechanistic (Quinn and Spreitzer, 1997; Wilkinson, 1998) processes of empowering the personnel of an organization. On the other hand, the psychological perspective of empowerment focuses on the personnel's perception of empowerment (subjective nature of empowerment) (Thomas and Velthouse, 1990; Spreitzer, 1997). Researchers studying psychological empowerment, also known as organic or bottom-up processing, emphasize that empowerment is achieved only when psychological

states produce a perception of empowerment within the personnel of an organization (Quinn and Spreitzer, 1997; Mishra and Spreitzer, 1998; Wilkinson, 1998). To developing a nomological network for understanding empowerment in the workplace, Spreitzer (1995) underscored the importance of the psychological perspective of empowerment. Basically, psychological empowerment has been conceptualized as a multidimensional construct consisting of four construct, i.e. meaningfulness (personnel perceptions of connection between their job and their own personal standards), (Thomas and Velthouse, 1990), competence (personnel's perceived ability to perform their tasks well), self-determination (personnel perceptions of choice in the tasks that they undertakes), (Deci *et al.*, 1989) and impact (degree to which personnel feel their study affects the effectiveness of their organization), (Kirkman and Rosen, 1997). Overall, the issue of empowerment especially, psychologically aspect of individual empowerment in organizations continues to receive more attention from scholars in the fields of work and organizational psychology. According to Lee and Koh (2001), empowerment involves two main concepts: first, the objective behavior which refer to managerial empowerment. Second, the subjective psychological state perceived by the personnel of an organization toward the empowerment, which refer to psychological empowerment. In fact, psychological empowerment (as motivational factor) is perceived as psychological state of personnel resulting from empowerment practices (Thomas and Velthouse, 1990) and also a process of increasing feelings of employee self-efficacy (Conger and Kanungo, 1988). Based on organizational behavior literature, psychological empowerment has been considered as reflecting personal sense of control in the workplace, as manifested in the four beliefs concerning the person-work environment relationship in the four cognitions: meaning, competence, self-determination and impact. If one of the dimensions is not there, then the experience of empowerment among personnel of one organization will be limited. Therefore, all the cognitions need to be present at the same time in order to maximize the personnel feeling of being empowered. Kanter (1983), in the case studies of entrepreneurial organizations found inextricable link between empowerment and innovative behavior. Thomas and Velthouse (1990), concerning the explanation of innovative behavior, suggested the relationship between psychological empowerment and personal flexibility. In addition to psychological empowerment, personnel's perceived organizational support may facilitate or impede their creative behaviors. According to Eisenberger *et al.* (1986), when personnel feel the organization emphasizes their personal

contribution and welfare, they tend to develop a sense of obligation toward the organization. The personnel's level of Perceived Organizational Support (POS) reflects their innermost feelings about the organization's care and emphasis. Personnel with a sense of POS feel that in circumstances where they need work or life support, the organization is willing to lend a helping hand; personnel personally feel respected, cared for, and recognized, and in turn display increased cooperation, identification, diligent performance, appreciation, and reciprocity among personnel. Based on the principle of reciprocity, personnel with POS not only help coworkers, but also increase their own job satisfaction and organizational commitment, while reducing resignations and absenteeism, thus stimulating personnel job performance (Rhoades and Eisenberger, 2002). Therefore, it can be said that personnel's POS can affect their psychological empowerment and consequently their creative behavior. For example, Eisenberger *et al.* (1990), in the study of perceived organizational support and employee diligence, commitment, and innovation, found positive relationships of perceived support with employee's job attendance, performance outcome expectations and innovation on behalf of the organization in the absence of anticipated direct reward or personal recognition. Relationship of perceived organization support and personnel's psychological empowerment has not been investigated accurately and sufficiently in management literature. For example, Walton (1985) argued that organizational support facilitates mutual trust between organization and personnel which enhance their sense of confidence and increases their impact at work place. Vogt and Murrell (1990) suggested that reciprocity of personnel and organization creates collaborative and supportive environment for both parties that, in turn, empowers personnel through developing their sense of self-efficacy. According to Spreitzer *et al.* (1997), empowered personnel see the meaning of their jobs and meaning serves as the "engine" of empowerment (i.e., the mechanism through which personnel get-energized about work). They are further energized if they see their works will make an impact and contribute to the achievement of collective goals of their organization. Also, personnel who feel competent develop strong confidence in self and they would actively develop their work competence and eagerly seek ways to improve their work and work conditions (Spreitzer, 1995). Those who feel efficacious (competence component) are more cognitively flexible and likely to find many alternative ways of solving problems (creative behavior). This renewed sense of work meaning, awareness of one's impact on collective goals, and work competence can be translated into creative performance among personnel of an organization. All

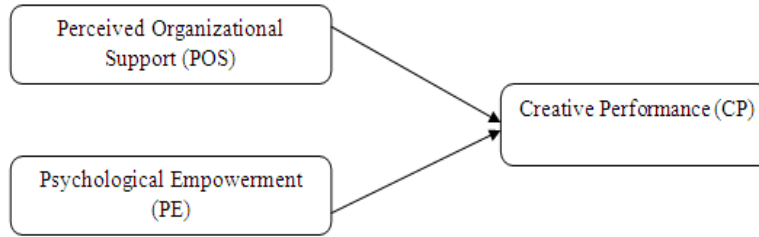


Fig. 1: Conceptual framework of study

these are further reinforced by personnel’s perceptions of self-determination and inclination to make an impact on their works and organization. Based on Jung and Sosik (2002), self-determination is an overarching antecedent of organizational creativity because personnel produce more creative work when they perceive more personal control over how to accomplish given tasks. Prior research has confirmed a positive relationship between psychological empowerment and creativity. For instance, Amabile (1983) found that people perform more creatively if they are motivated by interest in the activity itself, rather than the promise of rewards or threat of punishments. Creative performance, Amabile (1983) discovered, is facilitated by giving personnel of an organization high levels of discretion, especially in the use of time. In other words, conditions that allow personnel to work commensurate with their own creative process to encourage and nurture their creative performance. Bandura (1982) study indicates an individual’s self-evaluation of their capacity to succeed (self-efficacy) is closely related to intrinsic motivation, and thus creative performance. For example Spreitzer *et al.* (1999), observed that supervisors who felt more empowered were seen as being more innovative (creative) by their subordinates. Quinn and Spreitzer (1997) concluded that empowered personnel tended to experiment, find new solutions to challengeable situations and produce creative/innovative outcomes. Based on work and organizational psychology literature, numerous studies investigated the factors affecting personnel behavior and performance in the terms of both individual and organizational antecedents, but examine how perceptions of Psychological Empowerment (PE), Perceived Organizational Support (POS), and Creative Performance (CP) among personnel interact, merits further investigation, especially in the context of agricultural organizations from Iran country (Fig. 1).

MATERIALS AND METHODS

Personnel’s perceptions are rooted into their attitudes and behaviors. The study of personnel’s attitude and perception is, therefore, has paramount importance to determine their possible outcome expectations at study

place to ensure organizational development and sustainability in the long term. This study aimed at analyzing the relationships between Psychological Empowerment (PE), Perceived Organizational Support (POS), and Creative Performance (CP) among agricultural personnel. Correlation analysis (covariance matrix analysis type) and casual relationships methods were used as analytical strategies. Model formulation was based on a random survey of agricultural personnel. Model parameter estimation was supported by structural equation modeling. Analysis unit of this study consisted of all personnel of Karaj city agricultural Jihad organization from Iran country, which were surveyed from late June to August 2011. Statistical sample based on the Morgan table (Krejcie and Morgan, 1970) included 80 agricultural personnel from the statistical population of 100. In this study, structured questionnaire was used to gather the required data. For analyzing data, descriptive statistics and zero-order Pearson correlation analysis were used. Moreover, a two-step Structural Equation Modeling (SEM) procedure was employed to establish construct validity and test the relationships of Perceived Organizational Support (POS), Psychological Empowerment (PE), and Creative Performance (CP) among agricultural personnel. SEM is a priori technique, meaning that the researcher must specify a model (conceptual framework), in order to conduct the analysis (Kline, 2005). In SEM, parameters are estimated by minimizing the difference between the observed covariances and those implied by the model. In the present study, Lisrel 8.50 package was used to test the relationships of specified constructs in the study framework. The estimation method employed was Maximum Likelihood (ML). Items of Perceived Organizational Support (POS) and Psychological Empowerment (PE) were measured on the Five-Point Likert type scale (From 1, strongly disagree to 5, strongly agree). The 5-item scale for measuring POS adapted from Rhoades *et al.* (2001). These items were: POS₁: My organization cares about my opinions, POS₂: My organization really cares about my well-being, POS₃: My organization strongly considers my goals and values, POS₄: Help is available from my organization when I

have a problem, and POS₅: My organization would forgive an honest mistake on my part. The 12-item scale for measuring psychological empowerment (PE₁: Competence, PE₂: Meaning, PE₃: Self-Determination and PE₄: Impact) was adopted from Spreitzer (1995). For measuring Creative Performance (CP), we used the 8 items adapted from the measure of George and Zhou (2001). All items of creative performance were measured on a 5-point scale ranging from 1 (never) to 5(always). These items were as follow: CP₁: He/she suggests new ways to achieve goals, CP₂: He/she comes up with new and practical ideas to improve performance, CP₃: He/she searches out new technologies, processes, techniques, and product ideas, CP₄: He/she suggests new ways to increase quality, CP₅: He/she is a good source of creative ideas, CP₆: He/she promotes and champions ideas to others, CP₇: He/she comes up with creative solutions to problems, and CP₈: He/she suggests new ways of performing work tasks. All items were averaged in order to become an index of creative performance of agricultural personnel.

RESULTS

According to descriptive statistics results, most agricultural personnel of study had university education and were with 11-15 years tenure in the organization. Zero-order Pearson correlation analysis used to analyze the relationships between Perceived Organizational Support (POS), Psychological Empowerment (PE), and Creative Performance (CP) among agricultural personnel. Based on the results of Table 1, CP was significantly correlated with both two antecedents of POS and PE (p<0.01). However, the correlation coefficient between PE and CP (r = 0.570, p<0.01) was more than the correlation coefficient between POS and CP. Based on results of Table 1, agricultural personnel perceived their Creative Performance (CP) as moderate level (Mean = 3.35), suggesting that personnel felt somewhat good about their performance as creative. However, few studies investigated the relationship between perceived organization support and psychological empowerment among personnel of an organization, but positive and significance relationship of POS with PE (r = 0.445, p<0.01) in this study is congruent with the results of Walton (1985) and Vogt and Murrell (1990). Moreover, based on the results of Table 1, agricultural personnel had fair agreement with their psychological empowerment (Mean = 3.12), suggesting that personnel felt somewhat good about being empowered. Positive and significant relationship between Psychological Empowerment (PE) and Creative Performance (CP) found in this study, is consistent with the results of Bandura (1982), Kanter (1983), Thomas and Velthouse (1990), Quinn and Spreitzer (1997), and Spreitzer *et al.* (1999). According to Eisenberger *et al.* (1986), when personnel feel the

Table 1: Mean, standard deviation and inter-correlation of POS, PE and CP constructs among agricultural personnel

Variables	Mean	SD	1	2	3
1.POS	2.86	1.09	1		
2.PE	3.12	0.82	0.445**	1	
3.CP	3.35	0.71	0.514**	0.570**	1

** : significant at p<0.01

Table 2: Results of CFA for measurement model.

Construct	Item	Standardized factor loading	AVE*
POS	POS ₁	0.87	0.75
	POS ₂	0.90	
	POS ₃	0.92	
	POS ₄	0.83	
	POS ₅	0.69	
PE	PE ₁	0.94	0.82
	PE ₂	0.92	
	PE ₃	0.86	
	PE ₄	0.87	
CP	CP ₁	0.85	0.93
	CP ₂	0.78	
	CP ₃	0.77	
	CP ₄	0.84	
	CP ₅	0.85	
	CP ₆	0.86	
	CP ₇	0.89	
	CP ₈	0.88	

*: Average variance extracted.

organization emphasizes their personal contribution and welfare, they tend to develop a sense of obligation toward the organization. Results of this study indicated that agricultural personnel’s perceptions about organizational care for their welfare and emphasis on their contributions was below the average (mean = 2.86), implying that personnel perceived level of support from their organization was not high. For testing model and specified relationships of constructs, the two-step procedure of structural equation modeling proposed by Gerbing and Anderson (1988) was used. Also, for testing construct validity and the dimensionality of the independent and dependent variables, Confirmatory Factor Analysis (CFA) was used. Results of CFA summarized in Table 2.

As showed in Table 2, the Average Variance Extracted (AVE) value derived for all constructs were all above the recommended value (0.5), signifying the discriminant validity of the study constructs. The CFA results for overall model Fit were: $\chi^2 = 199.64$, p = 0.00, $\chi^2/df = 1.26$; CFI = 0.991; NFI = 0.939, IFI = 0.990; RMSEA = 0.021. These indices were acceptable (Bollen, 1989). Substantial and significant factor loadings provide evidence of convergent validity (Steenkamp and Trijp, 1991), with the threshold value of >0.30. Because all of the items loadings are significant and well above the acceptable cut-off-point, signifying the convergent validity of the study variables. After confirmatory factor analysis, the model was tested using the Structural Equation Modeling (SEM) procedure. The central point in analyzing structural models is the extent to which the

hypothesized model “fits” or adequately describes the sample data (Byrne, 2001). The results for the structural model were $\chi^2 = 275.4$, $\chi^2/df = 2.31$, NFI = 0.939, CFI = 0.987, IFI = 0.986, RMSEA = 0.029. The overall model Fit was good. An analysis of the data using the structural equation modeling procedure, showed significant effects of Perceived Organizational Support (POS) ($\beta = 0.14$, $p < 0.01$), and Psychological Empowerment (PE) ($\beta = 0.29$, $p < 0.01$) on increasing levels of agricultural personnel's Creative Performance (CP).

The two independent variables accounted for 22% of the creative performance variance among agricultural personnel. Overall, results of the structural equation modeling procedure showed significant effects of antecedents of perceived organizational support and psychological empowerment on agricultural personnel's creative performance. However, Psychological Empowerment (PE) had more contribution on explaining Creative Performance (CP), than Perceived Organizational Support (POS) ($\beta = 0.29$, $p < 0.01$).

DISCUSSION

Personnel's perception of their organizational support has the potential to change motivations, attitudes and facilitate not only their capabilities but also their psychological empowerment. In this study the relationship between psychological empowerment and agricultural personnel's creative performance was correlated significantly more than that of POS, but it can be recommended that agricultural organizations should provide an internal organizational ecosystem in order to their personnel perceive intrapreneurial and creative behaviors more desirable and feasible. Also, because of norm of reciprocity (Gouldner, 1960), organizational support obligates both personnel and organization to fulfill each other requirement and obligation for strengthening of the relation (Gouldner, 1960; Eisenberger *et al.*, 2001), the reciprocal relationship between a supportive organizational environment and psychologically empowered personnel should be buttressed to ensure agricultural personnel's creative behaviors in long run. According to Katz (1964) and Smith *et al.* (1983) to achieve effective and sustainable organizational operation, the following three kinds of behaviors are needed: personnel's willingness to remain with the organization (organizational commitment), personnel's actions that surpass their job description (challengeable activities), and personnel's proactive behaviors beyond job responsibilities (such as, creative behaviors). The first two kinds of behaviors are within personnel roles, whereas the third goes beyond, to include cooperation among colleagues, self-improvement, and creating a positive organizational image. For an organization to function effectively, innovative and

creative behaviors are essential. These behaviors, though mainly not considered for job development and performance, but they can greatly contribute to the operation and performance of an organization in long run. This study verified Psychological Empowerment (PE), Perceived Organizational Support (POS), and Creative Performance (CP) as the research framework. Through a literature review, we examined causal relationships among these variables. The subjects of the study were agricultural personnel. Results indicated that, there is moderate level of creative behavior among agricultural personnel. Also, according to the results of correlation analysis and structural equation modeling procedure, Psychological Empowerment (PE) significantly affected agricultural personnel's Creative Performance (CP) more than that of Perceived Organizational Support (POS). Moreover, results of Confirmatory Factor Analysis (CFA, Table 2), showed that items of "POS₅- My organization would forgive an honest mistake on my part", and "POS₄ "Help is available from my organization when I have a problem", respectively had lowest standardized factor loading among five variables of measuring agricultural personnel's perceptions of their organizational support. Therefore it can be recommended that, because organizational support perceptions have significant effects on personnel's psychological empowerment and their creative behaviors, as in this study results showed, agricultural organizations should provide a window of opportunity for their personnel to perceive their organizational climate as supportive through establishing empowering structures for institutionalizing intrapreneurial and creative behaviors in organizational goals and mission. According to the results of Confirmatory Factor Analysis (CFA), indicators of "PE₃: Self-Determination" and "PE₄: Impact", respectively gained lowest standardized factor loading among four dimension of measuring agricultural personnel's psychological empowerment. But, variable of "PE₁: Competence" gained most standardized factor loading among four dimension of measuring psychological empowerment. Therefore it can be recommended that because of two component of meaning and competence can be further reinforced by personnel' perceptions of self-determination and inclination to make an impact on their works and organization and also based on Jung and Sosik (2002), self-determination is an overarching antecedent of organizational creativity, agricultural personnel's perceptions of self determination and impact needs to be strengthened through increasing their participation in the creative planning and implementation processes to buttressing simultaneously both their perceptions of self efficacy and empowerment. In addition, according to the results of CFA, among eight indicators of measuring creative performance, indicator of "CP₃: He/she searches out new technologies, processes,

techniques, and product ideas", gained lowest standardized factor loading, while indicator of "CP₇: He/she comes up with creative solutions to problems", gained highest standardized factor loading. Therefore it can be recommended that agricultural managers should integrate participatory creative processes and empowering organizational environments in organizational structures and goals to ensure the conditions of creating new processes, techniques and products within their personnel.

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