Research Article
Enhancing Employees Performance via Empowerment: A Field Survey

Nail AHK Awamleh

Department of Management, Applied Science University (Bahrain)

Abstract: This study aims to show the importance of empowerment in improving employee's performance in many ways. Major objectives of the study are: (1) Give concise review on empowerment from different aspects, (2) Show practical experience with empowerment practices through a field survey of these practices in a sample of respondents working in business and government organizations in Bahrain, (3) Draw some conclusions on "empowerment" of importance for researchers and practitioners in management and organizations, (4) Provide some recommendations in the light of the conclusions of the study. Empowerment is the process of enabling employees in many forms and ways including delegating, training and development, job rotation and fair promotion opportunities. A concise review of literature on empowerment, its types and forms, obstacles and ways of improving empowerment have been given in this study. The study employs descriptive-analytic approach in achieving its goals. It utilizes ready and primary sources of information and data. The study relies on related literature review along with primary data collected by means of questionnaire especially designed for this study. Major findings of the study include wide differences among researchers and practitioners regarding the meaning, nature, tools and applications of empowerment. Findings also shows that empowerment faces serious practical obstacles such as insufficient top management support, lack of awareness, absence of clear regulations on ways and tools of empowerment and insufficient funds. The study recommended carrying out more academic and practical activities regarding empowerment, updating laws and regulations to reinforcing empowerment practices and restructuring organizational culture and structure to create empowerment friendly environment.

Keywords: Authorization, empowerment, delegation of power performance

INTRODUCTION

Organizations are mere tools for the achievement of predetermined goals. They are contrived social systems designed and managed by people for the interest of people. It is apparent that "people" are the core of any organization regardless of its goal, nature or affiliation. Therefore, goal achievement is dependent on the nature and quality of human assets in organizations. Employee's performance is the yardstick for organizational success or failure. Performance is a function of multiple factors among which is empowerment. That is, empowerment is a crucial factor in the enhancement of employee's performance.

There is no commonly agreeable definition of empowerment as a concept or an application. Empowerment can be understood and applied in many ways, forms and methods. It refers to enabling of employees to make their performance easier and more effective. There are so many forms and ways of empowerment including delegating, training and development, job rotation and fair promotion opportunities.

Contemporary realities including globalization, democratization, liberalization, technologization and mobilization support empowerment of people in organizations. Empowerment is a significant tool in the satisfaction and motivation of employees and effective performance.

Importance and objectives of the study: This study aims to shed some light on one of the most influential elements in the life of employees, organizations and society in general. Empowerment is essential for employees since it gives them more power, knowledge, experience, meaning, opportunities and status. It is beneficial for organizations since it enhances individual performance thus improving overall organizational performance. For society, empowerment is positive since it ends with better service and life for people (employees and customers).

Major objectives of the study are:

- Give concise review on empowerment from different aspects especially answering the following questions:
  What is meant by "empowerment"?
  Why "empowerment" deserves study, analysis and application?

How to apply "empowerment" in the real organizational life?

Who are concerned with "empowerment"?

What are major problems associated with "empowerment"?

How to overcome "empowerment" problems?

- Show practical experience with empowerment practices through a field survey of these practices in a sample of respondents working in business and government organizations in Bahrain.
- Draw some conclusions on the subject matter "empowerment" of importance for researchers and practitioners in management and organizations.
- Provide some recommendations in the light of the conclusions of the study.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This study employs descriptive-analytic approach in achieving its goals. It utilizes ready and primary sources of information and data. The study relies on related literature review along with primary data collected by means of questionnaire especially designed for this study. The questionnaire has been reviewed by some colleagues and a sample of respondents to assure its validity and suitability before formulating its final draft and distribution to the sample. Chronbach Alpha has been calculated to assure internal consistency and validity of the questionnaire. It scored (87.3) on Chronbach Alpha measure (Appendix). A snowball sampling technique has been used to distribute the questionnaire for the sake of easiness and availability of respondents.

The context of the study: The idea of this study stems from the changing work requirements and environment. Under open and global business environment, employees need to be given more freedom and independence to face challenging job requirements. That is, employees should be given the chance to be more creative and responsible at the same time. There is significant correlation between the dimensions of empowerment and employee performance. Chen (2011) found that employee's performance will improve significantly when they are empowered with autonomy, freedom and opportunities to influence decision making in their jobs or organization. Ke and Zhang (2010) have shown positive relationship between psychological empowerment including autonomy, competence, meaningfulness and impact on one hand and employee's performance on the other one. Tuuli and Rowlinson (2009) have shown that psychological empowerment has direct and positive performance consequences as well as indirect impact by intrinsic motivation and opportunity and ability to perform. Holden (2001) has emphasized the role of employee's involvement and empowerment in improving performance. In conclusion, management literature is very rich on employee's empowerment and strong evidence is found on the positive relationship between employee's empowerment and performance.

The concept and meaning of empowerment: What is meant by "empowerment"? There is no commonly agreeable definition of empowerment. However, it includes so many ways, forms, sources, tools and levels of granting power and enabling employees to best perform their jobs at workplace. According to The Free Dictionary (2000) empowerment includes authorization (delegation of power), enabling or permission and providing opportunities. Business Dictionary provides detailed and comprehensive definition of the term "empowerment" to include all management practices related to sharing information, rewards and power with employees so they can take initiative and make decisions to solve problems and improve service and performance. Empowerment, according to Business Dictionary, involves giving employees skills, resources, authority, opportunity, motivation, as well as holding them responsible and accountable for their actions thus contributing to employee's competence and satisfaction. Empowerment may also be defined as "a multi-dimensional social process that helps people gain control over their own lives" (Page and Czuba, 1999)

Kilton described empowerment as a "paradigm" or "thinking outside the box" and it is often overused or misused. However, he maintained, empowerment is very significant to the success of organizations. Empowerment means granting power and authority to make decisions (Kilton, 2003).

Empowerment is also defined as the process of enabling and authorizing individuals to think, behave, take action and decision and control work autonomously. It is the feeling of self control of one's own destiny (Heathfield, 2012).

According to Whatley, empowerment refers to increasing the spiritual, political, social or economic strength of individuals and communities. It includes autonomous decision-making power, information access, opportunities and choices, assertiveness, positive thinking and change, learning skills, influencing others by democratic means, continuous development and positive self-image (Whatley, 2012).

Chamberlin defined empowerment as multidimensional concept including decision power, information and resource access, availability of choices, assertiveness, ability to make a difference, think critically, positive self-image and ability to change and develop the self and others (Chamberlin, 1997).

Oladipo claims that empowerment is culture-bound expression that may vary in meaning across the different cultures. In its broadest sense, empowerment is the expansion of freedom of choice, ability to act autonomously, control of resources and ability to make decisions. Oladipo emphasized what he called " Psychological Empowerment " that is defined as an individual's cognitive state characterized by a sense of perceived control, competence and goal internalization. Psychological Empowerment (PE) includes developing

the ability to access and control resources, influence and decision making, awareness of freedom of choice and act with individual confidence (Oladipo, 2009).

From the above selected definitions, we may conclude that empowerment is very controversial yet including so many dimensions related to individual involvement, ability, decision power and influence and control over his job and environment. It is a total socio-psychological state that creates positive individual influence and control over his work related activities. For the purpose of this study, empowerment simply means all ways and sources of power that enabling employees to successfully perform their jobs including information accessibility, knowledge and skills, development opportunities, discretionary decision power and freedom of choice at workplace.

Rationale for Studying Empowerment: Why "empowerment" deserves study, analysis and application? This study was stimulated by the numerous benefits and advantages of empowerment and its crucial role in employee's satisfaction and effective performance.

Empowerment is an essential tool for the enrichment of human resources abilities and capabilities of mastering their jobs. It is needed to foster employee's commitment, creativity and independence at workplace. Major benefits of employee's empowerment include prompt, easy and effective customer service, less need for close supervision and increased sense of self-confidence among employees. Kilton (2003) Furthermore, empowerment enables organizational change through fostering power in people. It is a multi-dimensional process that helps people to gain more power and thus control over their destiny and community. It improves employee's knowledge, skills and contribution to positive change in organization culture (Page and Czuba, 1999).

Empowerment promotes employees autonomy and control of their own jobs and improves their skills and abilities to benefit both their organization and themselves. It also increases happiness among employees at workplace. Organizations should create a work environment which promotes employees ability and desire to act in empowered ways and remove barriers that limit their ability in this regard (Heathfield 2012).

Zeithaml *et al.* (1988) has shown that empowerment increases job satisfaction and reduces role stress. Singh (1993) found that empowerment reduces role ambiguity among customer-contact employees. According to Rafiq and Ahmad (1998), empowered employees make faster resolution of customer problems since they can act directly regarding customer complaints without referring problems to upper level managers.

Forms and tools of applying empowerment: How to apply "empowerment" in the real organizational life? Empowerment has been described as a tool to enable decision making skills, power and experience among employees. Successful application of empowerment depends on both managers and subordinates. Three types of empowerment can be identified namely routine, creative and deviant empowerment. Routine empowerment refers to employee selection an alternative from a list of possible actions under certain conditions. Creative empowerment enables employee to develop alternative solution and select method of performing a task. Deviant empowerment involves actions outside the scope of employee's formal job description and authority (Ravichandran and Shirley, 2006).

Some people may consider employee involvement and participation as a kind of empowerment while others refuse to use them as interchangeable concepts. There are no commonly agreeable forms or unified tools for empowerment. Empowerment stems from individual desire and interest as well as management strategic thinking and practice. Empowerment is partly an individual initiation to enabling himself to take action and control work and decision making in autonomous ways. It is also partly the organization responsibility to create a work environment which helps foster the ability and desire of employees to act in empowered ways and to remove barriers that handicap empowerment (Heathfield, 2012).

Participation in debates regarding organization is considered as an influential tool for employee's empowerment since it gives access to information. Debate over organizational matters promotes critical thinking among individuals at workplace. It also broadens the knowledge and intellectual skills of employees (Warner and Jon, 2001).

Delegation of power is a traditional principle of management which involves granting employees some degree of power (empowerment) to carry out certain tasks under certain conditions without avoiding responsibility regarding their actions. Empowering through delegation of power requires democratic style of management, employee's ability and readiness for increased responsibility and positive organizational climate. Delegation of power fosters superior-subordinate relations and facilitates work flow easily and quickly thus promoting customer satisfaction. (Awamleh, 1994).

People involved in empowerment: Who are concerned with "empowerment"? All human resources in any organization are concerned and should be involved in many forms of empowerment. Different levels of managers in the various areas of organizational activity should take part in empowerment since it is in the general interest of the whole organization. Empowerment is an effective tool to distribute power among people sharing common goal

and interest. Everybody needs to be empowered for effective performance of tasks assigned to him or her. Empowerment should be at the core of any successful organizational strategy. Therefore, all people working in any organization should be empowered to get jobs and tasks done. Furthermore, in some cases, all stakeholders related to any organization should be empowered in order to assume effective role and contribution to organizational welfare. This includes customers, investors, suppliers, taxpayers and citizenry at large.

Empowerment hindrances: What are major problems associated with "empowerment"? There are many legal, organizational, behavioral, structural, financial and environmental problems decreasing the scope and degree of empowerment policies and practices in business and government organizations. This includes the lack of clear and sufficient regulations on empowerment, lack of top management support, lack of trust among superiors and subordinates, insufficient funds and lack of awareness and readiness for empowerment.

Facing empowerment problems: how to overcome "empowerment" problems? Based on the above mentioned examples on empowerment problems, there are some measures that may promote the awareness and practices of empowerment. These measures include updating laws and regulations, organizational restructure, leadership support, positive organizational culture and climate encouraging mutual trust among all levels of management and availability of necessary funds.

FIELD SURVEY: DATA ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION

In this section, the study provides the results of the field study and detailed analysis and discussion of collected data by means of questionnaire from a sample of respondents. As shown in Table 1. The researcher sample is characterized by the following demographic distribution:

- (70%) are males and (30%) are females
- Largest portion of respondents (60%) are middle managers level while (30%) are lower level employees and (10%) are top managers level
- Vast majority of respondents are university degree holders (95%) and the remaining (5%) are none-university degree
- Majority of respondents (55%) are with experience longer than twenty years while (20%) of respondents are with experience less than ten years and (25%) of them are with experience more than thirty years

As shown in Table 2 below, there are significant differences between respondent's attitudes regarding

Table 1: Demographic characteristics distribution of respondents

Characteristics		Number	Percentage
Sector	Government	48	60
	Business	32	40
	Total	80	100
Gender	Male	56	70
	Female	24	30
	Total	80	100
Job level	Top management	8	10
	Middle management	48	60
	Lower management	24	30
	Total	80	100
Degree	Less than bachelor	4	5
	Bachelor	36	45
	Masters	28	35
	PhD	12	15
	Total	80	100
Experience	Ten years or less	16	20
	11-20 years	20	25
	21-30 years	24	30
	31 years or above	20	25
	Total	80	100

Table 2: Institutional dimensions of empowerment

		Mean	
Dimensions		Govt.	Buss
1	Empowerment is part of our organization policy	2.5	3.2
2	My Superior always tries to empower me in many ways	2.3	2.8
3	Top management encourage empowerment of employees	2.2	2.5
4	Laws and regulations allow employees empowerment	1.8	2.1
5	Empowerment is part of training and development activities	2.2	2.3
6	Empowerment is an integral part of motivation and promotion	1.7	2.3
7	Employees seek and accept empowerment and its challenges	3.1	3.9

Table 3: Empowerment mechanisms

		Mean	
Empowerment mechanisms		Govt.	Buss
1	Empowerment level, means and forms are sufficient	1.2	2.3
2	Empowerment includes job enlargement (work quantity)	1.5	2.7
3	Empowerment includes job enrichment (work quality)	1.4	2.5
4	Empowerment includes delegation of authority	2.3	3.4
5	Empowerment includes employees participation and involvement	2.5	3.5
6	Empowerment includes enough and easy access to information	2.7	3.7
7	Empowerment includes sufficient funds for carrying out jobs	3.1	4.2

institutional dimensions of empowerment according to sector affiliation. It indicates that respondents in business sector have higher positive attitudes (means range between 2.1-3.9) compared with government sector respondents (means range between 1.7-3.1) towards the specified dimensions.

Table 3 shows that empowerment mechanisms tend to be better in the business sector (means ranging between 2.3-4.2) as compared with those available in government sector (means ranging between 1.2-3.1), according to respondents.

Table 4: Advantages of empowerment

Advantages of empowerment	Mean	
	Govt.	Buss
1 Empowerment encourages employees creativity and innovation	3.3	4.2
2 Empowerment promotes employees loyalty and commitment	3.8	4.5
3 Empowerment makes my job easier , faster and effective	4.2	4.6
4 Empowerment makes my job more efficient and economical	4.1	4.3
5 Empowerment makes my job more convenient for clients	4.3	4.5
6 Empowerment reduces work related stress	3.5	4.1
7 Empowerment increases responsibility and accountability	4.3	4.3

Table 5: Empowerment hindrances

Empowerment hindrances	Mean	
	Govt.	Buss
1 Lack of confidence(in self and others) handicap empowerment	4.2	4.5
2 Concentration of authority and power handicap empowerment	4.5	4.3
3 Lack of experience handicap empowerment	3.7	3.5
4 Lack of training and development handicap empowerment	3.9	3.2
5 Outdated laws and regulations handicap empowerment	4.6	3.1
6 Red-tape and bureaucratic procedures handicap empowerment	4.4	3.2
7 Lack of top management support handicap empowerment	4.2	3.3

Table 6: Factors improving empowerment

Factors improving empowerment	Mean	
	Govt.	Buss
1 Top management support enhance empowerment	4.3	4.4
2 The use of the state-of-the art technology enhance empowerment	4.2	4.5
3 Training & development activities enhance empowerment	4.3	4.4
4 Adoption of merit system and competition enhance empowerment	4.5	4.1
5 Mutual trust among employees enhance empowerment	4.5	4.6
6 Linking empowerment into motivation enhance empowerment	4.7	4.6
7 Updating structures and laws enhance empowerment	4.5	4.4

Table 4 shows insignificant differences in respondent's attitudes (government versus business sectors) towards the specified advantages of empowerment. It indicates positive attitudes towards the advantages of empowerment in both sectors (means ranging between 3.3-4.6).

Table 5 reflects serious difficulties and problems facing empowerment in both business and government sectors, according to respondent's attitudes as measured by response means ranging between (3.1-4.6).

Table 6 shows evidence consistence with that of Table 5 regarding empowerment problems and means of overcoming them. It reflects respondent's strong agreement on factors promoting empowerment regardless of sector affiliation (response means ranging between 4.1-4.7).

Major findings and conclusions of the study: This study revealed that empowerment is a very significant tool in promoting individual performance thus improving overall organizational performance. It reflected wide attention among both researchers and practitioners of management. A great deal of literature on empowerment has been found. Major findings and conclusions of this study are:

- Despite general agreement on the importance of empowerment principle, there are wide differences among researchers and practitioners regarding the meaning, nature, tools and applications of empowerment.
- Empowerment plays significant role in employee's satisfaction thus promoting their performance in organizations.
- Employee's participation in decision making, delegation of power, access to information and resources and job enrichment are common forms and tools of empowerments.
- Employee's empowerment faces serious practical obstacles such as insufficient top management support, lack of awareness, absence of clear regulations on ways and tools of empowerment and insufficient funds.
- Effective application and practice of empowerment require top management support, mandatory legal measures, positive organizational culture regarding empowerment and rewarding empowerment activities and practices.

Recommendations of the study: Based on literature review and field survey and in the light of the above mentioned findings and conclusions, this study proposes the following recommendations that may help in promoting effective application of empowerment in organizations:

- Organize and carry out more academic and practical activities regarding empowerment to promote awareness of empowerment concept, importance and tools and mechanisms of effective application in real life organizations. This includes more research, training and changes that promote employees empowerment.
- Updating laws and regulations with special and direct attention for reinforcing empowerment practices.
- Linking empowerment to leadership success and motivation to encourage empowerment practices in daily and real life organizations.
- Restructuring organizational culture and structure to create empowerment friendly environment.
- Re-allocate organizational resources and power (access and utilization) to make fair and balanced empowerment throughout organizational hierarchy.

APPENDIX

Research questionnaire:

Dear ladies and gentlemen: Kindly fill the attached questionnaire the aim of which is to collect some data related to my study entitled "Enhancing Employees Performance via Empowerment". Please be confident that collected data will be strictly confidential and utilized for research purposes only. I do appreciate your kind cooperation and patience.

The Researcher: Should you have any comment, suggestion or questions please do not hesitate to contact me on my address below. Alternatively, you may write down your comments below.

Mobile: 00973 39016320
Place your comments or notes here (if any):
General Information:

1.Sector:
( ) Government ( ) Business

2. Gender:
( ) Male ( ) Female

3. Job Level and Title:
( ) Low management , name your position:
( ) Middle Management , name your position:
( ) Top Management , name your position:

4. Degree:
( ) Less than (Bachelor) degree   ( ) Bachelor Degree
( ) Masters Degree   ( ) PhD

5. Years of Experience:
( ) Ten Years or Less   ( ) Eleven to Twenty Years
( ) Twenty One to Thirty Years   ( ) Thirty One Years or Above

Kindly put an (X) in the appropriate box against each of the following statements which you think best fit your view. For the purpose of this study, empowerment simply means all ways and sources of power that enabling employees to successfully perform their jobs including information accessibility, discretionary decision power and freedom of choice at workplace. Select one answer on Likert five degree scale where ONE means least agreeable and FIVE most agreeable regarding each statement.

No	Statements	1	2	3	4	5
1	Empowerment is part of our organization policy					
2	My Superior always tries to empower me in many ways					
3	Top management encourage empowerment of employees					
4	Laws and regulations allow employees empowerment					
5	Empowerment is part of training& development activities					
6	Empowerment is an integral part of motivation and promotion					
7	Employees seek and accept empowerment and its challenges					
8	Empowerment level, means and forms are sufficient					
9	Empowerment includes job enlargement(work quantity)					
10	Empowerment includes job enrichment(work quality)					
11	Empowerment includes delegation of authority					
12	Empowerment includes employees participation and involvement					
13	Empowerment includes enough and easy access to information					
14	Empowerment includes sufficient funds for carrying out jobs					
15	Empowerment encourages employees creativity and innovation					
16	Empowerment promotes employees loyalty and commitment					
17	Empowerment makes my job easier , faster and effective					
18	Empowerment makes my job more efficient and economical					
19	Empowerment makes my job more convenient for clients					
20	Empowerment reduces work related stress					
21	Empowerment increases responsibility and accountability					
22	Lack of confidence(in self & others) handicap empowerment					
23	Concentration of authority and power handicap empowerment					
24	Lack of experience handicap empowerment					
25	Lack of training and development handicap empowerment					
26	Outdated laws and regulations handicap empowerment					
27	Red-tape and bureaucratic procedures handicap empowerment					
28	Lack of top management support handicap empowerment					
29	Top management support enhance empowerment					
30	The use of the state-of-the art technology enhance empowerment					
31	Training and development activities enhance empowerment					
32	Adoption of merit system and competition enhance empowerment					
33	Mutual trust among employees enhance empowerment					
34	Linking empowerment into motivation enhance empowerment					
35	Updating structures and laws enhance empowerment					

REFERENCES

Awamleh, N., 1994. Delegation of power in jordanian public and private Institutions: A field study. Econ. Admin. J., 7(1), ISSN: 1319-0997.

Chamberlin, J., 1997. A Working Definition of Empowerment. Psychiatr. Rehabil. J., 20(4).

Chen, K.P., 2011. A Study on the Impact of Empowerment on Employee Performance in the Automotive Industry in Malaysia. MA Thesis, Submitted to the Centre for Graduate Studies, Open University Malaysia, 2011), Retrieved from: http://eprints.oum.edu.my/671/1/study_kok.pdf.

Heathfield, S.M., 2012. Empowerment Definition and Examples of Empowerment. Retrieved from: http://humanresources.about.com/od/glossarye/a/empowerment_def.htm.

Holden, L., 2001. Employee Involvement and Empowerment. Retrieved from: https://ulib.derby.ac.uk/ecdu/CourseRes/dbs/manpeopl/hold.pdf.

Ke, W. and P. Zhang, 2010. Effects of empowerment on performance in open-source software projects. IEEE T. Eng. Manage., 58(2): 334-346.

Kilton, R., 2003. Empowerment: It's About What You Do, Not What You Say. Retrieved from: http://www.rwkenterprises.com/empowerment.htm.

Oladipo, S.E., 2009. Psychological empowerment and development. Edo J. Counseling, 2(1).

Page, N. and C.E. Czuba, 1999. Empowerment: What is it? J. Extension, 37(5).

Rafiq, M. and P.K. Ahmed, 1998. A contingency model for empowering customer-contact services employees. Manage. Decis., 36(10): 686-694.

Ravichandran, S. and G. Shirley, 2006. To empower or not to empower: The case of students employed in one Midwestern university's dining services. J. Foodservice Manage. Educ., 2: 1-14.

Singh, J., 1993. Boundary role ambiguity: Facets, determinants and impacts. J. Marketing, 57(2): 11-31.

The Free Dictionary, 2000. Retrieved from: http://www.thefreedictionary.com/empowerment.

Tuuli, M.M. and S. Rowlinson, 2009. Performance consequences of psychological empowerment. J. Constr. Eng. Manage., 135(12): 1334-1347.

Warner, E. and B. Jon, 2001. Gone on Debating: Competitive Academic Debate as a Tool of Empowerment for Urban America. Retrieved from: http://commfaculty.fullerton.edu/jbruschke/Papers/Debate%20as%20a%20Tool%20of%20empowerment.htm.

Whatley, L., 2012. Women Empowerment. Wikepedia.org, Retrieved from: http://www.selfgrowth.com/articles/Articles_Women_Empowerment.html.

Zeithaml, V.A., L.L. Berry and A. Parasuraman, 1988. Communication and control processes in the delivery of service quality. J. Marketing, 52(2): 35-48.