
Studying the Link between Organizational Learning and Employees' Empowerment: A Case of Qom Maskan Ban

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ABSTRACT: *Present study aims at investigating the relationship between organizational learning and employees' empowerment. Organizational learning consists of such components as structure, strategy culture, and perspective based on Neefe's theory (2001) while employees' empowerment is considered based on introduced components by Spritz (1992) including effectiveness, significance, meritocracy, independence and trust. Present study is conducted by a descriptive survey and its population consists of management and employees in Qom Maskan Bank selected branches. In this research, 120 questionnaires were distributed by layered random sampling method and finally 100 ones were returned and analyzed. To gather data, the first questionnaire involves 12 items based on Neefe's components while the second one (employees' empowerment) involves Spritz indices that their validity can be supported. Chronbach's alpha value is used to measure reliability as 0.93 and 0.94 for organizational learning and employees' empowerment respectively. To analyze research data in SPSS and Amos software packages, such techniques as Spearman correlation coefficient, regression analysis and structural equations are used. The findings support research conceptual model and show that there is an association between organizational learning and employees' empowerment.*

Keywords: Organizational learning, employees' Empowerment, Banking industry and Maskan Bank

Today organizations are acting in a complicated and changing environment and they are not able to predict future situation as before. Changes are the main characteristics of today age and according to Tom Peters in "In Search of Excellence", the only fixed things can be found today are changes. If in agricultural age, manual power and in industrial age, equipment and tools were seen as the main factors of survival, in today changing age as the result of ITC call as World Village by Mak Lohan or Information Age by Castells, the only resource of power and survival is better and rapider learning than rivals since learning is the main critical factor by those organizations that like to remain in modern economic world and competitive environment. According to Song as the head of US Training and Development Association (20020, learning is a critical road of recognition and adaptability with increasingly velocity of changes (Sharifi, 2008: 2).

Empowerment is a term rapidly and increasingly accepted in recent years and it is still appearing in political discussions on the empowerment of disadvantaged people and it shows a close link to continuous improvement, competency promotion, behavioral changes and improvement in organization elements. In other words, empowerment is considered as a common idea which involves a part of organizational development and can stabilize organizational survival by employees' performance improvement (Rajabi, 2012: 26). Concerning high importance of discussed issues, present paper attempts to study the relationship between learning and their impacts on workforce in Maskan Bank branches as well as to provide guidelines to improve it.

Learning

Apparently, individual learning refers to individual learning in organization while organizational learning is more pointed to collective or organizational level learning. Individual learning happens through study, interview, recognition, experience, exercise and development t of affecting mental models on mindset while organizational learning occurs when the group learns to interact, to share its knowledge and to act collectively so that combined capacity of the group is increased and one can achieve the ability to understand and act effectively (Bennet, 2008).

Today, organizational learning is particularly regarded by interested companies in increasing competitive advantage, innovation and effectiveness and different researchers have analyzed it by different approaches. Among these approaches, one can refer to psychological approach (Daft and Weick, 1984), social studies approach (Nelson and Winter, 1982; Levit and March, 1988) and organizational theory (Cangelosi and Dill,

1965; Nonanka, 1994 and Huber, 1999; Gomez, Lorente an Caprera, 2005). In 1900, when Frederick Taylor introduced learning transfer to other employees in order to improve efficiency and organizational improvement, organizational learning concept was shaped (Yeung, Ulrich, Nason & Glinow, 1999). However, Richard Siret and James March were among the first authors who put learning and organization together and introduced learning as an organizational phenomenon.

Argyris believes that organizational learning is to share knowledge, beliefs and assumption among people and teams (Jamalzadeh, Mohammad, 2009: 64). Likewise, Argyris and Schon (1978) defined organizational learning as exporing and modifying errors. According the Fiol and Lyles (1985: 805), organizational learning is to the process of improving initiatives through between and more effective knowledge. Dodgson defines organizational learning as a method by which organizations are created, supplemented and organized to develop knowledge normal work flows as well as improving the efficiency of the organization through using broad skills of workforce (Lamsa, 2008: 12). Templeton et al. studied over 150 scientific articles to provide a single definition on organizational learning and concluded that three paradigms are used for organizational learning including demography, social action and outcome perspective. Based on their studies, they believe that organizational learning is a set of organizational actions such knowledge acquiring, information distribution, information description and organizational memory that impact on organizational positive changes both intentionally and unintentionally (Jamalzadeh, 2009).

Alegra and Chiva (2008: 321) define organizational learning as a process by which an organization learns and this learning means any changes in organizational models which improve and retain organizational performance. According to Senge, organizational aspects include joint perspective, individual domination, mental paradigms, team learning and systemic thinking. The most recent aspects of organizational learning are introduced by Neefe (2001) including joint perspective, organizational culture, systemic thinking, contributive leadership and developing employees' competencies (Neefe, 2001). Probst and Bashel (1997) believe that there are at least four different approaches adopted by organizations for learning: (1) learning through developing a strategy; (2) learning through developing a structure; (3) learning through developing culture; (4) learning through developing human resources (Rajabi, 2012: 74). In present study structure, culture, strategy and perspective are considered as organizational learning aspects

The Necessity of Learning

Many studies on organizational learning show that organizational learning impacts on innovation in organizations positively (Calanton, Cavusgil & Zhao, 2002). Organizational learning supports creativity and innovation, leads into knowledge and new ideas generation and increases the capability to understand and use them. In fact, incremental learning is a very advanced shape of organizational learning and happens when organization tends to examine its main hypotheses including mission, customers, market orientation, capabilities, operation, strategies and values. This kind of learning is a necessary prerequisite of innovation culture and radical innovation in products and processes (Correa, Morales & Pozo, 2007).

Today, the importance of learning capabilities is revealed for all organizations. In fact, organizational learning is raised an important concept in today organizations which is necessary for integration in resolving organizational problems and active treatments and constructive and effective decision making. Under such circumstances, one can say that organizations become environments for developing learning processes and, as a result, improving their performance level and learning processes will be competitive advantages for organizations.

The aim of present study is to investigate the relationship between employees learning and empowerment in Maskan Bank and answering research main question: is there a significant relationship between employees' learning and empowerment in Qom Maskan Bank branches?

Empowerment

The history of the first definition on empowerment backs to 1788 when it was seen as delegation in organizations role which should assigned to someone based on his organizational role. It meant personal enthusiasm for responsibility interpreted officially as accountability for the first time. In 1971, Grove pointed out common definitions in encyclopedia including assigning power, authority and granting power. In 1990, Gandes conceptualized empowerment as delegating the power of decision making to employees. So far, empowerment literature has faced with many changes. Ultimately, Lee (2001) defined empowerment as a ground to increase dialogues, critical thinking and operation in small groups.

According to Rapilli, empowerment is a set of organizational behaviors and plans. As a concept, it

includes delegating the power of decision making to subordinates, as a set of behaviors, sharing independent groups and people in determining the professional fates and as an organizational plan which provides workforce with more opportunities for freedom, improvement and using skills, knowledge and its potentiality for their and their organizations goodness (Paktinat, 2008: 34).

Empowerment means to pave the ground for employees' freedom so that that they can perform assigned tasks well. Those managers who like to empower their employees should remove controls, constraints and barriers and motivate, conduct and encourage them (Wheteen and Cameron, 1998). In fact, empowerment is to delegate official authorities and legal power to employees (Argyris, 1998: 12). It means to assign authorities and decision making to employees in order to improve their efficiency and to play their fruitful role in organization (Irtstad, 1997: 71). Empowerment means that employees can conceive their functions well before saying them what to do (Savery and Laucks, 2001: 97). Overall, based on theoreticians who consider empowerment in employees' perspective, one can say that empowerment expresses employees' psychological status. If employees do not show the behavior the expected behavior after power transitions or they are not aware that power is transferred to them or they feel powerless, no empowerment is in turn occurred (Greasley & King, 2005).

According to Rapilli, empowerment is a concept and set of organizational behaviors and plans. As a concept, it is to authorize decision making to subordinates and as a set of behaviors it means to share self – regulated groups and people in determining their professional fate while as an organizational plan it means to grant more opportunity to all workforces for freedom, improvement and utilizing skills, knowledge and potential knowledge for organizational wellness. Trelax defines empowerment as the process of changing employees performance from what they are said to what is needed to do. Savij believes that empowerment is not only granting power to employees but also it causes that employees improve their performance by learning knowledge, skills and motivation. Process empowerment is a value from top management to lowest ranks (Rajabi, 2012: 27 – 28).

The Necessity of Empowerment

Concerning rapid changes in information and environmental transformations, today organizations need to be accountable rapidly for their own survival. Since human resources are the driving forces of organizations against such changes, it is particularly important to equip human resources. In this vein, many organizations

believe that the solution of this problem is to execute empowerment plans.

After ten years of experiences, the world has concluded that in an organization plans to be pioneer in economy and business and competition, it should possess specialized, creative and motivated manpower. Human resource is the basis for real wealth of an organization. There is a direct relationship in organizations between human capital and productivity. Of important concerns of successful global economic firms is wise human capital which can transform relevant organizations (Paktinat, 2008: 35). Kooberg (1999: 46) believes that managers and employees will be benefited by empowerment advantages. By self – adequacy and freedom for employees, empowerment would build an opportunity for employees to use their capabilities and skills in order to improve organizational effectiveness. On the other hand, by breeding motivated and capable employees, empowerment would make it possible for managers to react against dynamism of the competitive environment rapidly and more suitably.

Therefore, the importance of human resources is more than other both financial and nonfinancial resources. Capable and efficient human resources are effective in realizing organizational goals since a capable human capital would make organization capable and would create a collaborative environment for employees. Employees' empowerment would make their talents splendor and such feeling of capability would cause independence and job performance improvement.

The Aspects of Empowerment

One of the most important studies on empowerment by Spritz (1992) has defined empowerment by four critical aspects. Studies by Mishra added another aspect and five key aspects of empowerment were shaped. Five key aspects of empowerment include self – effectiveness or the feeling of self – competency, self – authority or the feeling of personal selection, accepting personal outcome or the feeling of influencing potentiality, meaningfulness or the feeling value deed, trust or feeling of confidence and security. Below, all five aspects of empowerment are defined in brief (Ali Ahmadi, 2010: 71 – 73).

Self – effectiveness: when managers are empowered, they feel self – effectiveness or they feel that they have necessary capability and skills to do a successful job. Capable managers not only feel competency but also they are sure that they can perform the jobs sufficiently. They feel personal superiority and believe that they can find and promote a way to combat new challenges.

Self – regulation: self – effectiveness refers to the feeling of capability while self – authority refers to the right of choice. When managers start controlling initiatives voluntarily rather than being engaged or forbidden compulsorily, they feel self – authority. Under such circumstances, the activities of managers are the result of their freedom and personal authority. Empowered managers feel responsibility and ownership. Also, they consider themselves as hyperactive managers. They are able to do initiatives by their own tendency, to take independent decisions and to test new opinions. They believe that they are dominated by their own will rather than feeling that their actions are predetermined, controlled by others, unavoidable and permanent.

Accepting personal outcomes: empowered managers feel self – control on their outcomes. They believe that they can pose changes through influencing over work environment or outcomes. Accepting personal outcomes means managers' beliefs in a fraction of time on their own capabilities to change in desired direction. Such managers do not believe that they are controlled by external barriers; rather, they believe that they are able to control such barriers. Such control feeling allows them to synchronize environment with their own demands.

Meaningfulness: capable managers value their aims and activities for which they work and their initiatives and efforts are kinds of their own ideals and standards. They care what they produce and believe and they invest their spiritual and mental energy in this regard and they enjoy a kind of personal importance feeling when they engaged in their job. Therefore, meaningfulness refers to value attitude. Their meaningful activities create a kind of objectivity feeling, emotion or mission as well as a source of energy and enthusiasm.

Trust: finally, empowered managers feel trust. They believe that they are treated fairly and equally. They are sure that their ultimate outcome even as a subordinate is justice and friendship rather than damage and loss. Those managers who trust are more prepared to replace affectation by authenticity and they are more committed to clarification, honest and compatibility rather than cheating. Likewise, they are research – oriented, self – organized and interested in learning. They have more capacity for mutual relations and show higher degree of cooperation and risk taking in team working. Trusted managers express their interest to others, attempt that to be an effective member of the group, are more self – revealed and are more honest in their communications. They are more capable to listen to other people carefully.

Background

Different and separated researches are conducted to examine the relationship between learning and empowerment. Bohluli (2004) studied the impact of organizational learning on Porter value chain service component in domestic elevator industry. He concluded that high know – how and learning impact on providing by firms' personnel in this industry. Hashemi (2006) studied affecting factors on organizational learning and concluded that 9 main factors are identified on organizational learning. They include systemic thinking, team learning, mental models, vision, joint ideals, personal skills and domination, experiencing by new methods, learning from past experiences, learning from others and knowledge transfer (Moteasb Dyani (2004) and Esmaili (2005, 2006) conducted studies in this regard (Jamalzade, 2009: 67).

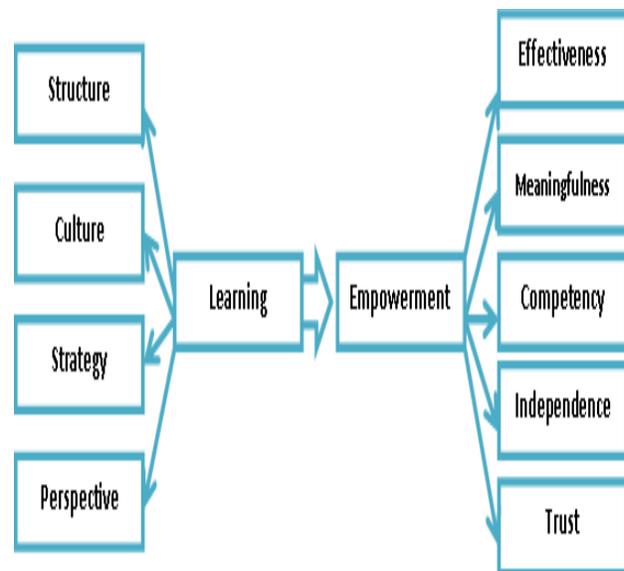
Providing a model to measure organizational learning capability in Iranian Spare Part Making, the barriers of building learning organizations in Iran, the role of quality awards in organizational learning, reorganizing designing engineering sections based on processes by an approach on learning organizations, illustrating the link between learning capability and organizational transformation: case study in Iranian organizations, analyzing HR empowerment in Power Company and providing its development guidelines, analyzing affecting factors on empowerment in the view of Kerman Water Company, studying affecting factors on employees' productivity and empowerment of Qazvin Power Distribution Company and providing guidelines on its development, and evaluating employees' empowerment techniques in Birjand University (Khanalizadeh, 2010: 29).

Jarvinen (2004) concluded that one can use learning principles and mechanisms to improve and develop organization. Lamsa, Lee and Choi (2003), Goh Guan Gan (2006), Migdadi (2005), Kenny (2006) and Thomas (2006) achieve similar conclusions. Positive and significant outcomes are also reported on knowledge transfer and application (Dibella, Nevis and Gold, 1996), concerning team learning, it is said that people's negotiation, working teams and their meeting can be ideal forums to share ideas and transfer knowledge (Lee, Slowcum and Pits, 1999; Barton, 1992; Cohen, Nevis and Gold, 1990). In his study, Bhatnagar (2007) investigated the link between HR strategic roles, psychological empowerment, organizational learning capacity and organizational commitment based on HR functions in India. The findings indicated that there was a positive link between HR strategic roles and organizational commitment. Likewise, it was found how

psychological empowerment facilitates learning capacity and, as a result, improves organizational commitment.

Conceptual Model

The challenge in today age that has attracted authors to subjects raised in this paper is to explore and study the role of learning organization on employees' empowerment in an organization to conceive the relations between these structures fully. According to abovementioned points, learning organization is endogenous and employees' empowerment is exogenous factor. Therefore, by providing proposed model in figure and in accordance with research hypotheses, research conceptual model and framework in banking industry are analyzed.



Hypotheses

Studying business environment and conducted studies on learning and empowerment persuaded authors to provide below hypotheses:

Major hypothesis

- Organizational learning impacts on employees' empowerment.

Sub-hypotheses

- Organizational structure impacts on employees' empowerment (effectiveness, meaningfulness, competency, independence, trust).
- Organizational culture impacts on employees' empowerment (effectiveness, meaningfulness, competency, independence, trust).

- Strategy impacts on employees' empowerment (effectiveness, meaningfulness, competency, independence, trust).
- Perspective impacts on employees' empowerment (effectiveness, meaningfulness, competency, independence, trust).

Methodology

In terms of purpose this is an applied study while it is a descriptive one in terms of data collection method as a field study. Research methodology is a survey and one of its most important attributes is the extendibility of its findings. After studying relevant texts and reviewing research literature, the conceptual model was drawn by authors and its assessment indicators were devised. Used variables in this research include organizational learning (organizational structure, organizational culture, strategy and organizational perspective as endogenous variable and empowerment (effectiveness, meaningfulness, competency, independence and trust) as exogenous variable. To assess the relationship between research paradigm aspects, hypotheses were devised. The, a questionnaire was designed to measure research variables and distributed among population. Based on testing the hypotheses, final paradigm was shaped in which the relationship between organizational learning and empowerment was analyzed.

Research population consists of managers and employees of Qom Maskan Bank who communicate customers to provide their services. In present study, the population is selected by layered random sampling method. Based on computation in Morgan table (1970), 120 questionnaires were distributed among managers and employees and 100 ones were returned and analyzed.

Research tool includes two questionnaires devised through advices by a group of research scholars and previous studies. One questionnaire was to assess organizational learning while another one was to assess the empowerment of employees and managers in Qom Maskan Bank branches in accordance with research variables. The first and second questionnaires had 12 and 15 items respectively in Likert five – point closed scale.

Concerning theoretical basics and studied investigations, the questionnaire devised by Neefe et al, (1990) is used for organizational learning while the questionnaire devised by Spritz (1995) is utilized for empowerment. Both questionnaires are supported in terms of reliability and validity. Chronbach's alpha value in SPSS software package is used to determine the reliability of

questionnaires. Chronbach's alpha values are 0.94 and 0.93 for organizational learning and empowerment questionnaires respectively which are admirable. Table 1 renders Chronbach's alpha values for organizational learning and empowerment components. By using descriptive statistics, all demographic questions were investigated and then data analysis was done by using statistical tests including Spearman correlation test in SPSS and AMOS software packages.

Components	Alpha Value
Structure	0.86
Culture	0.87
Strategy	0.89
Perspective	0.88
Empowerment	0.93

Research Findings

Demographic attributes of the sample indicate that 4.4% of respondents are female while the remained 95.6% are male. Therefore males and females constitute highest and lowest numbers respectively. In terms of education, 49% of respondents have bachelors (highest level) and 1.4% have masters (the lowest level). In terms of job experience, people with 5 – 15 and over 25 years of service constitute the highest and lowest levels respectively.

Sample's Demographic Attributes

Gender	Male	Female			
Frequency (%)	95.6	4.4			
Marital status	Married	Single			
Frequency (%)	99.26	0.74			
Employment	Contractual	Official			
Frequency (%)	20.7	79.3			
Education	Associate of arts	Under diploma	Diploma	Bachelor	Masters
Frequency	7.4	3	39.2	49	1.4

The results of Spearman correlation test
Spearman correlation test is utilized to test the relationship among research variables. Since variables are qualitative, SPSS software package is used to analyze data. Spearman correlation test results are shown in table 3.

Table 3: organizational learning and empowerment correlation, averages and standard deviation

variables	1	2	3	4	5	6	Average	SD	Sig
Structure	1						2.0333	0.92296	0.001
Culture	.477	1					2.0233	1.06916	0.001
Strategy	.541	0.456	1				2.6533	0.82867	0.001
Perspective	.6	-0.350	0.696	1			3.2667	0.94874	0.001
Empowerment	.486	0.633	0.688	0.606	1		2.5360	0.74037	0.001
Organizational learning	.754	0.634	0.845	0.882	0.748	1	2.4942	0.83604	0.001

Based on software report, correlation is reported positively between variables which show their relations. Since significance level between organizational learning and empowerment is lower than 0.05, one can conclude that there is a link between organizational learning and empowerment. Thus, main hypothesis is supported. Likewise, significance level is lower than 0.05 among organizational structure variables and empowerment (impact, meaning, competency, independence, trust), organizational culture and empowerment (impact, meaning, competency, independence, trust), strategy and empowerment (impact, meaning, competency, independence, trust), perspective and empowerment (impact, meaning, competency, independence, trust). So, one can conclude that there are relations among these variables and research sub – hypotheses are also supported.

Structural Equation Modeling Results

In present study, structural equation modeling (SEM) is used to examine the impacts by organizational learning (independent variables) and empowerment (dependent variable) by Amos21 software package (figure 2). As figure 2 show, X1 is organizational structure, X2 is organizational culture, X3 is the meaning variable and X4 is perspective. In the meantime, OL us organizational learning, Y1 is impact, Y2 is the meaning, Y3 is competency, Y5 is trust and OE is empowerment. Y4 was eliminated due to low factor load.

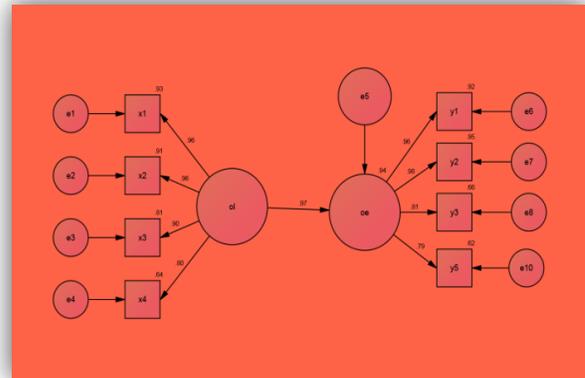


Figure 2: SEM (significance level and confirmatory factor loads for initial model)

To study the appropriateness SEM, six indicators were investigated. The first indicator is X2/df. If it is between 1 and 3, it shows higher confirmation of the model. It is reported 11.957 in present research. RMSEA is the second indicator by which the model is more efficient when it is closer to 0.05. It is reported 0.333 in present paper. Other four indicators including GFI, IFI, NFI and CFI are between 0 and 1. The model is more efficient when they are closer to 1. In this model, they are reported 0.693, 0.787, 0.772 and 0.786 respectively. The measures for SEM are shown in table 4.

Table 4: SEM measures

RMSEA	CFI	NFI	IFI	GFI	X2/df
0.333	0.786	0.772	0.787	0.693	11.957

According to information, most indicators do not show desired fitness. To the same reason, it is necessary to modify initial measurement. These modifications are due to the fact that internal relations among variables are not seen in initial conceptual model.

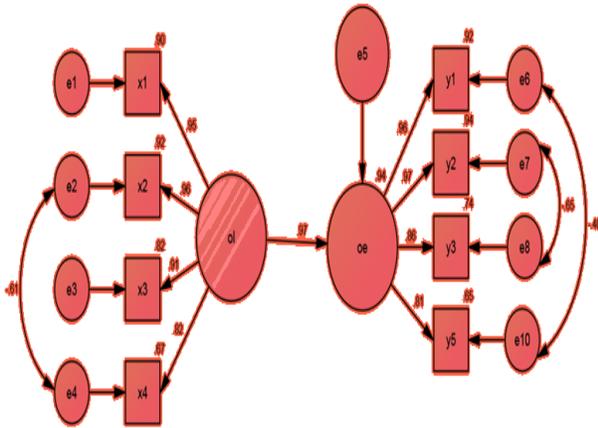


Table 5 shows the status of measurement model fitness after remedies. As seen in the table, X2/df is 10.688 which is a proper fitness. RMSEA is another measure which is improper if it is greater than 10%. Since it is 0.3 in modified model, its fitness is proper. Other model fitness measures show proper situation.

Table 5: SEM measures

RMSEA	CFI	NFI	IFI	GFI	X2/df
0.3	0.839	0.828	0.841	0.768	10.688

Table 6: Results of SEM factor analysis

Hypothesis	Impact ratio	P	CR	Result
Major hypothesis				
Organizational learning impacts on employees' empowerment	0.969	***	15.126	Supported
Sub-hypothesis 1				
Organizational structure impacts on employees' empowerment (effectiveness, meaningfulness, competency, independence, trust).	0.944	***	15.885	Supported
Sub-hypothesis 2				
Organizational culture impacts on employees' empowerment (effectiveness, meaningfulness, competency, independence, trust).	0.961	***	16.776	Supported
Sub-hypothesis 3				
Strategy impacts on employees' empowerment (effectiveness, meaningfulness, competency, independence, trust).	0.834	***	11.760	Supported
Sub-hypothesis 4				
Perspective impacts on employees' empowerment (effectiveness, meaningfulness, competency, independence, trust).	0.5	***	5.452	Supported

Concerning SEM, the impact by organizational learning and empowerment is significant as the main hypothesis; the impact by organizational structure on empowerment (impact, meaning, competency, independence, trust) is significant as the second sub-hypothesis, the impact by organizational strategy on empowerment (impact, meaning, competency, independence, trust) is significant as the third sub-hypothesis, the impact by perspective on empowerment (impact, meaning, competency, independence, trust) is significant as the fourth sub-

hypothesis and, in other words, research findings support a causal positive relations among the variables of the main hypothesis and sub-hypotheses 1, 2, 3 and 4. Therefore, all hypotheses were supported. Table 6 outlines the findings of causal analysis by using SEM to test research hypotheses. Amos software package shows that hypotheses are supported or not by CR and P. if CR is greater than 1.96 and P is lower than 0.05, it shows a causal link between variables and the hypothesis is supported. Research findings are shown in table 6.

Conclusion

Today, organizations should increase their employees' learning capabilities for successful performance. Such organizations are more capable than their rivals. The results of present paper indicate that all organizational learning components impact on employees' empowerment and as mentioned, the results of structural model by software suggest that organizational learning significantly impacts on employees' empowerment in Qom Maskan Bank. Based on the same findings, organizational culture and organizational perspective have the highest and lowest impacts on employees' empowerment respectively. The impact of learning components on empowerment means that one can measure employees' empowerment by changing organizational learning components. In their study in Tarbiat Modares University, Khanalizadeh et al (2010) found that there is a relationship between organizational learning and employees' empowerment and such significant association is supported by research main hypothesis. Concerning above points, one can say that organizational learning is highly important today for all organizations since it fosters employees' empowerment and aids to create a proper competitive environment for organization as well as organizational dynamism and performance improvement through suitable organizational perspective, culture, structure and strategy.

Research Recommendations

One can below items as research recommendation for future study:

- Studying the impact of organizational learning on organizational loyalty
- Studying the impact of organizational learning on conflict management
- Studying the impact of organizational learning on leadership

Applied Recommendations

By more attention to organizational learning components, managers should help to expand meaningful jobs for people. They should build trust and foster the feeling of independence among their employees by providing a clear organizational perspective and determining organizational aims.

By formulating strategies and strategic plans, managers should pave the ground for developing employees' training so that competent individuals are employed. By increasing employees' training grounds, managers prepare their employees for environmental changes. Synchronization between employees' skills and their job positions would create a feeling of objectivity and meaning.

Concerning research limitations, one can point out below ones:

- Lack of proper responsiveness to questionnaire by some employees.
- Lack of cooperation by some managers and employees.

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