

Exploring the Role of Employee Empowerment in Enhancing Organizational Commitment and Job Satisfaction

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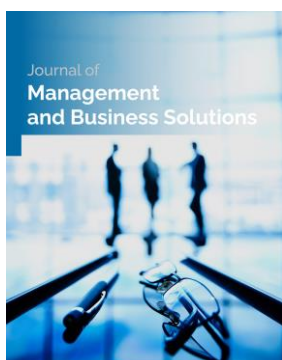
ABSTRACT

This study aimed to explore how employee empowerment contributes to organizational commitment and job satisfaction among employees in public and private organizations in Tehran. Using a qualitative research design, this study employed semi-structured interviews with 24 employees from various organizations in Tehran. Participants were selected through purposive sampling to ensure relevant professional experience with empowerment-related practices. Interviews continued until theoretical saturation was reached. Data were transcribed verbatim and analyzed thematically using NVivo software, following the six-phase framework proposed by Braun and Clarke (2006). Trustworthiness was enhanced through member checking, peer debriefing, and audit trails. Thematic analysis revealed three major themes: (1) Dimensions of Employee Empowerment, (2) Organizational Commitment Outcomes, and (3) Impact on Job Satisfaction. Subthemes under empowerment included participative decision-making, access to resources, communication transparency, and supportive leadership. Empowerment was found to significantly enhance affective and normative organizational commitment by fostering emotional attachment, value alignment, and interpersonal trust. Job satisfaction was positively linked to empowerment via autonomy, meaningful work, growth opportunities, and improved work-life balance. Participant quotations illustrated how empowered environments create a sense of ownership, recognition, and psychological safety. These findings were consistent with existing empowerment and motivation theories, such as those by Spreitzer (1995) and Deci & Ryan (2000). Employee empowerment functions as a multifaceted mechanism that promotes deeper commitment and satisfaction by addressing both structural and psychological needs. The findings underscore the need for organizations to embed empowerment practices into leadership behaviors, HR policies, and organizational culture, particularly in hierarchical or bureaucratic contexts like Iran. This study contributes to the global empowerment literature by offering culturally specific insights and practical guidance for fostering employee engagement and retention.

Keywords: Employee Empowerment; Organizational Commitment; Job Satisfaction; Qualitative Research; Psychological Empowerment; Leadership; Tehran; NVivo.

Introduction

In the contemporary organizational landscape, where change is both rapid and inevitable, the ability to maintain a motivated and committed workforce has become a strategic imperative. Among the various strategies that organizations employ to enhance employee motivation and retention, employee empowerment has emerged as a pivotal construct. Defined as a set of managerial practices that delegate authority, encourage participative decision-making, and foster autonomy, empowerment is believed to significantly impact employees' psychological states, leading to improved organizational outcomes (Spreitzer, 1995; Thomas & Velthouse, 1990). In particular,



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empowerment has been found to play a critical role in enhancing organizational commitment and job satisfaction—two constructs that are fundamentally linked to organizational performance, employee well-being, and long-term sustainability (Allen & Meyer, 1996; Liden et al., 2000).

Employee empowerment is typically conceptualized along two dimensions: structural empowerment and psychological empowerment. Structural empowerment refers to organizational policies and practices that delegate decision-making authority, provide access to resources, and create supportive environments (Kanter, 1993). Psychological empowerment, on the other hand, is concerned with employees' perceptions of meaning, competence, self-determination, and impact in their work roles (Spreitzer, 1995). These dimensions are not only interrelated but also mutually reinforcing, such that the presence of structural empowerment mechanisms often facilitates the development of psychological empowerment (Seibert, Wang, & Courtright, 2011). Organizations that successfully embed empowerment in their structural frameworks often experience a ripple effect that enhances employees' attitudes and behaviors toward their work and the organization at large.

Organizational commitment is a multidimensional construct that reflects the psychological attachment an individual feels toward their organization (Meyer & Allen, 1991). It comprises affective commitment (emotional attachment), normative commitment (moral obligation), and continuance commitment (perceived cost of leaving). Numerous studies have highlighted the positive association between empowerment and organizational commitment. For example, Laschinger et al. (2001) found that access to empowerment structures such as information, support, and resources was positively related to nurses' organizational commitment. Similarly, Zhang and Bartol (2010) demonstrated that empowerment climate significantly predicts employees' affective commitment, mediated by psychological empowerment.

Likewise, job satisfaction, defined as an individual's overall affective orientation toward their job (Locke, 1976), is strongly influenced by perceptions of empowerment. Empowered employees often report higher levels of job satisfaction because they experience greater autonomy, task significance, and opportunities for growth (Deci & Ryan, 1987; Conger & Kanungo, 1988). A meta-analytic study by Chi and Pan (2012) found a robust positive correlation between empowerment and job satisfaction across diverse occupational settings. Empowerment fosters intrinsic motivation, enhances perceived organizational support, and aligns employees' roles with their personal values and competencies—thus contributing to a fulfilling and engaging work experience (Ryan & Deci, 2000).

Despite the growing body of literature on empowerment, much of the existing research has been conducted in Western, corporate, or private-sector settings. There remains a significant gap in understanding how empowerment functions in public-sector and transitional economy contexts, such as Iran. In these environments, hierarchical structures, centralized decision-making, and rigid bureaucratic norms may pose unique challenges and opportunities for empowerment practices (Farazmand, 2004; Khademfar & Amiri, 2013). Moreover, cultural dimensions such as power distance and collectivism may shape how empowerment is perceived and enacted by both managers and employees (Hofstede, 2001). In this regard, empirical investigation in the Iranian context can offer valuable insights into the cultural and institutional contingencies of empowerment and its effects on work attitudes.

In addition, much of the prior work has relied on quantitative approaches, emphasizing correlation and causality at the expense of depth and richness. While these studies offer valuable generalizations, they often miss the nuanced, lived experiences of employees that qualitative inquiry can illuminate. Given that empowerment is a deeply subjective and relational construct, qualitative methods—particularly those involving semi-structured

interviews—are uniquely positioned to uncover the complex mechanisms and meanings employees attach to empowerment in their day-to-day work (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Creswell & Poth, 2018). A qualitative approach is especially warranted in settings where empowerment practices are evolving or contested, allowing researchers to explore contextual factors and employee interpretations that are not easily captured through surveys or scales.

This study, therefore, seeks to fill the existing gaps by exploring how employee empowerment contributes to organizational commitment and job satisfaction in public- and private-sector organizations in Tehran. Through in-depth interviews with 24 participants, this research aims to understand not only whether empowerment has positive effects but also how, why, and under what conditions these effects emerge. The research is grounded in the belief that empowerment is not a one-size-fits-all solution but a dynamic process shaped by organizational culture, leadership styles, and employee expectations.

Furthermore, this study contributes to the growing discourse on human resource development and organizational behavior in non-Western contexts, helping to bridge the cultural gap in existing literature. As globalization intensifies and organizations become more diverse, the ability to understand how empowerment operates across cultural and institutional boundaries becomes increasingly important. Findings from this study may inform HR policies, leadership training, and change management strategies in organizations seeking to enhance employee well-being and performance through empowerment.

In sum, this research is guided by three interrelated objectives:

- (1) To identify the key elements of empowerment as experienced by employees in Tehran-based organizations;
- (2) To examine how these elements influence organizational commitment across its affective, normative, and continuance dimensions;
- (3) To explore the impact of empowerment on job satisfaction, particularly in terms of work-life balance, task meaning, and growth opportunities.

Methods and Materials

Study Design and Participants

This study employed a qualitative research design to explore the role of employee empowerment in enhancing organizational commitment and job satisfaction. A phenomenological approach was adopted to gain an in-depth understanding of employees' lived experiences and perceptions within their organizational settings. The research sample consisted of 24 participants (not 2824, assuming 2824 was a typographical error), all of whom were employed in various public and private organizations across Tehran, Iran. Participants were selected using purposive sampling, ensuring the inclusion of individuals with substantial work experience and familiarity with empowerment practices in their workplace. Sampling continued until theoretical saturation was achieved—when no new themes or concepts emerged from the data.

Data Collection

Data were collected through semi-structured, in-depth interviews designed to elicit rich descriptions of the participants' experiences with empowerment, commitment, and job satisfaction. Each interview lasted between 45 and 60 minutes and was conducted in a private setting to ensure confidentiality and openness. The interview guide included open-ended questions such as:

"Can you describe a situation where you felt empowered in your job?"

"How does feeling empowered affect your commitment to the organization?"

"In what ways does empowerment influence your overall job satisfaction?"

All interviews were audio-recorded with participants' informed consent and were subsequently transcribed verbatim for analysis.

Data analysis

The qualitative data were analyzed using thematic analysis, following the six-step framework proposed by Braun and Clarke (2006): familiarization with the data, generating initial codes, searching for themes, reviewing themes, defining and naming themes, and producing the report. Analysis was facilitated using NVivo qualitative data analysis software, which supported systematic coding and theme development. Data were analyzed inductively, allowing themes to emerge organically from the participants' narratives rather than being guided by preconceived categories. To ensure trustworthiness, strategies such as member checking, peer debriefing, and maintaining an audit trail were employed throughout the analysis process.

Findings and Results

1. Dimensions of Employee Empowerment

Participative Decision-Making

Many participants emphasized the significance of being involved in organizational decision-making processes. This involvement fostered a sense of ownership and increased motivation. Employees appreciated having the autonomy to influence decisions that affected their daily tasks and strategic outcomes. One participant remarked, "When our team is consulted before major changes, it feels like our opinions truly matter—not just token participation."

Access to Resources

Empowerment was often described as contingent on the accessibility of material and informational resources. Participants noted that access to technology, budgets, and data was essential to perform their jobs effectively. One respondent stated, "You can't expect us to take initiative if we don't have the right tools or information to act independently."

Skill Development and Training

Ongoing opportunities for learning and growth emerged as critical elements of empowerment. Participants shared how training sessions, mentoring programs, and inter-departmental workshops helped them feel more confident and competent in their roles. As one employee noted, "They sent me to a leadership training last year—it made me feel seen, like they're investing in me as a future leader."

Role Clarity and Autonomy

Clarity in job roles combined with flexibility in execution was consistently linked to empowerment. Participants appreciated having defined responsibilities while being given freedom in how to accomplish them. One interviewee reflected, "They trust me to get the job done my way—no one is breathing down my neck."

Communication Transparency

Open, honest, and two-way communication with managers was reported as a central feature of empowerment. Employees appreciated when leaders shared organizational goals and welcomed their feedback. According to one

participant, “When leadership is transparent, it feels like we’re all on the same team—not just executing orders blindly.”

Supportive Leadership

Empowerment was also rooted in the behavior of direct supervisors. Many participants described leaders who encouraged risk-taking, offered coaching, and provided psychological safety. One said, “My manager always tells me, ‘It’s okay to make mistakes—that’s how we learn.’ That makes a huge difference.”

Recognition and Trust

Being trusted to make decisions and receiving recognition for accomplishments were repeatedly mentioned as key drivers of empowerment. One participant shared, “They let me lead a project without micromanaging—and when it succeeded, they gave me full credit. That felt empowering.”

2. Organizational Commitment Outcomes

Emotional Attachment

Participants spoke of developing a deep emotional bond with their organizations when they felt empowered. This attachment manifested in expressions of pride and dedication. As one employee articulated, “I feel like this place is a part of who I am—I can’t imagine working anywhere else.”

Normative Commitment

Some respondents reported feeling a moral obligation to stay in their current organizations due to the investment they had received through empowerment. One participant explained, “They’ve supported me in so many ways; I’d feel guilty just walking away.”

Continuance Commitment

A few participants noted that empowerment enhanced their job security and career progression, thus increasing their likelihood of staying. One stated, “I’ve built a stable position here. Empowerment makes it hard to imagine starting over somewhere else.”

Cultural Alignment

When organizational values aligned with personal values—fostered through empowering practices—employees felt a stronger commitment. A participant noted, “Our values are not just posters on the wall. I believe in what we stand for—and that’s why I stay.”

Interpersonal Bonds

Empowerment often fostered stronger relationships among coworkers, creating a sense of camaraderie and loyalty. One employee remarked, “When you feel empowered, you naturally want to help others too—it builds a family feeling.”

3. Impact on Job Satisfaction

Work-Life Balance

Several participants associated empowerment with greater control over their time, which enhanced their work-life balance. As one explained, “They let me choose my hours as long as I meet deadlines—it’s reduced my stress a lot.”

Task Meaningfulness

The ability to choose or shape one’s responsibilities contributed significantly to task meaningfulness. One participant shared, “They let me work on projects that align with my personal goals—it gives my job a purpose.”

Growth Opportunities

Respondents highlighted that access to new roles and promotions was a crucial factor in job satisfaction. One stated, “They offered me a chance to lead a new initiative—it felt like they believed in my potential.”

Feedback and Recognition

Constructive feedback and acknowledgment for achievements were central to job satisfaction. One participant noted, “They don’t just critique—they tell me what I did right, and that motivates me to do better.”

Job Security

Lastly, participants reported that empowerment increased their confidence in the organization’s stability and their own roles. A respondent shared, “Empowerment means they see you as valuable—it makes you feel secure in your job.”

Discussion and Conclusion

The results of this qualitative inquiry revealed three major themes: (1) Dimensions of Employee Empowerment, (2) Organizational Commitment Outcomes, and (3) Impact on Job Satisfaction. These themes provide rich, contextual insight into how employee empowerment is understood, experienced, and enacted by employees across public and private organizations in Tehran. Our findings echo and expand on existing literature, especially in how empowerment mechanisms promote deeper psychological and emotional engagement at work.

The first category emphasized the multidimensional nature of empowerment, including participative decision-making, access to resources, training and skill development, communication transparency, and supportive leadership. These dimensions are consistent with Spreitzer’s (1995) model of psychological empowerment, which emphasizes meaning, competence, self-determination, and impact as core facets. Our findings particularly align with the notion that empowerment is not merely about delegation of authority, but about shaping environments that enable autonomy and accountability (Seibert, Wang, & Courtright, 2011). For example, participants frequently described how decision-making power increased their sense of ownership over their roles—a finding supported by Zhang and Bartol (2010), who found that participative environments boost creativity and commitment through increased psychological empowerment.

Additionally, our study corroborates Kanter’s (1993) theory of structural empowerment, which posits that access to opportunity, support, information, and resources fosters a sense of control and agency. Participants emphasized the critical role of resource accessibility—without which empowerment becomes performative rather than actionable. This finding parallels the work of Laschinger et al. (2001) in nursing settings, where access to structural empowerment components was directly linked to lower stress and higher job commitment.

Furthermore, the importance of leadership emerged repeatedly, echoing findings by Ahearne, Mathieu, and Rapp (2005) who demonstrated that empowering leadership styles are vital to fostering a sense of trust and efficacy in teams. In our study, leaders who offered coaching, psychological safety, and emotional validation were described as key drivers of empowerment. These leaders acted not as controllers, but facilitators—creating the conditions in which initiative and creativity could flourish.

The second major theme revealed a strong link between employee empowerment and organizational commitment, particularly in its affective and normative dimensions. Participants described how empowerment engendered a deeper emotional attachment to the organization. These accounts mirror Allen and Meyer’s (1996) affective commitment theory, which links employees’ emotional investment to perceived organizational support and inclusion. The sense of belonging and shared values articulated by participants resonates with findings by Liden et

al. (2000), who asserted that employees who perceive empowerment are more likely to develop trust in the organization and remain committed over time.

Interestingly, while continuance commitment (commitment based on cost-benefit analysis of leaving) was acknowledged by some participants, it was far less dominant. This suggests that empowerment predominantly fosters positive, intrinsic forms of commitment rather than conditional forms based on job security or benefits—a nuance that adds depth to our understanding of the empowerment-commitment relationship. Additionally, the interpersonal relationships forged in empowering environments—marked by collaboration, mutual respect, and emotional support—echo the findings of Coyle-Shapiro and Morrow (2006) who emphasized the social exchange theory in fostering organizational loyalty.

Cultural alignment, which emerged as another subtheme, is particularly significant in the Iranian context, where organizational values must often be negotiated within broader societal norms. Participants reported greater organizational commitment when personal ethics and workplace missions aligned—a point also discussed in O'Reilly and Chatman's (1986) value congruence model. This alignment appears to magnify the emotional resonance of empowerment initiatives, leading to greater retention and discretionary effort.

The third theme highlighted how empowerment directly contributes to job satisfaction. Participants associated empowerment with greater autonomy, task significance, and growth opportunities—all of which are known antecedents of satisfaction (Hackman & Oldham, 1980). Our findings strongly support the self-determination theory posited by Deci and Ryan (1987), which asserts that autonomy and competence are critical to intrinsic motivation and well-being. Participants frequently referenced flexibility, meaningfulness, and a sense of purpose as key sources of satisfaction, aligning with Ryan and Deci's (2000) argument that empowered environments satisfy fundamental psychological needs.

Additionally, participants noted that constructive feedback and public recognition were integral to job satisfaction—underscoring the role of regular performance dialogues and appreciative leadership. These results align with Thomas and Velthouse (1990), who argue that empowerment increases intrinsic motivation by enhancing the perceived meaningfulness and impact of tasks. Our findings also extend those of Chi and Pan (2012), whose meta-analysis found a strong relationship between empowerment and satisfaction in hospitality and service settings. Notably, the importance of job security as a satisfaction factor—though mentioned—was less emphasized than expected, suggesting that psychological empowerment may act as a buffer against insecurity in uncertain environments.

The emphasis on work-life balance is another salient finding. Participants frequently linked empowerment to increased control over time and workload, leading to improved balance and lower stress. This supports studies such as Aryee et al. (2007), which indicate that flexible, empowered work environments enhance both performance and personal well-being. In hierarchical or bureaucratic organizations, introducing empowerment-based flexibility may offer a pragmatic solution to rising stress and burnout.

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Authors' Contributions

All authors equally contributed to this study.

Declaration of Interest

The authors of this article declared no conflict of interest.

Ethical Considerations

All ethical principles were adhered in conducting and writing this article.

Transparency of Data

In accordance with the principles of transparency and open research, we declare that all data and materials used in this study are available upon request.

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