

Investigating the Effect of Prosocial Voice on Psychological Empowerment of Employees

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Abstract

The purpose of the present study is to identify the components of employee prosocial voice and the effect of staff empowerment on it in the municipality of Mashhad, the second largest city in the northeast of Iran. The research method used in this research is a mixed method. The design of the research is the exploratory mixed because firstly the qualitative method is performed and then, based on the obtained results, a quantitative method is performed. The statistical population of this research in the qualitative section is all employees of Mashhad municipality who have at least three years work experience in Mashhad municipality and have officially expressed at least 20 times their prosocial voice which according to the adequacy of sampling, people were interviewed. The Colaizzi method was used to analyze the interviews, and as a result, the components of the prosocial voice were extracted from the staff. Then, in a quantitative section, for measuring and fitting the model, and to examine the effect of staff empowerment on it, a questionnaire was distributed among the employees who had officially experience of indicating prosocial voice. The data analysis of the quantitative part was done for answering the question and the main hypothesis of the study by confirmatory factor analysis and Amos software. The results of the confirmatory factor analysis indicated that all components of the prosocial voice were confirmed. The comparative fit index (CFI) of the model also was estimated 0.881 using the Amos software, which indicates the fitness presented of the model. The results showed that employees' empowerment affects prosocial voice of employees.

Keywords: Employee Voice, Employee Prosocial Voice, Psychological Empowerment

1. Introduction

In today's organizations, emphasizing on employees feedback and suggestions to improve organizational performance is vital. Employees' voices or employee suggestions are a communication action in which employees talk about their workplace problems [15]. In the current era, effective management of staff voice can increase the organization's popularity and organizations that can manage and conduct their employees' voices, can use it as an effective competitive advantage [11]. Clearly, the success of any organization depends on its employees, and the staff are the foundation of each organization. Without employees, the organization is not able to turn its strategies into the reality. In order to achieve the goals of the organization, the organization must create a good internal culture based on unity and pride among the employees of the organization, which will become a competitive advantage for it [3]. Employees' voices is

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a result of a recognition process, and employees compare the costs and benefits of talking and expressing ideas and opinions and then decide how to react [2]. Employees' voices are an intact resource that can lead to an overall positive public image of the organization or may act as a malicious bomb for the reputation of the organization [11]. Also, in various studies, identification of the components of the employee's voice has been neglected, and few studies have identified its components; many studies have been devoted to identifying the concept of the employee's voice, but the studies in this area are very scattered [13]. Also, in recent years, due to the reduced membership of workers in trade unions, the importance of this issue has increased, because it leads to power concentration on a limited number of organizations and results in employee dissatisfaction [6]. If employees do not pay attention to the organization, there will be many problems for the organization, such as inflexibility in the organization, and failure of the worker-employer general policies. The ability of employees to express their opinions in the organization is very important. Employees voices can challenge the organization, or the employee can express their discomfort from the status quo in the organization or can express their views in the organization in this way [12]. Employees voices can also be used to make constructive changes in the existing situation. Researchers in this area have agreed that identifying staff voices is one of the key issues that organizations face with it [4]. Some studies also indicate that empowerment has direct effects on employee behavior and psychological empowerment affects the relationships between managers and employee [8]. However, few studies have investigated the impact of empowerment on employees voices. Some researchers, such as Liu et al. [10], have identified empowerment as one of the most important variables affecting the staff voice, which also in a quantitative section of the study, the effect of employee empowerment on employees prosocial voices is measured. In short, this research attempts to fill the two research gaps that one of them is identifying the elements of employees voices and another one, is examining the impact of employees' empowerment on employees voices. So the main question of the present research is what are the components of the employee prosocial voice? And does the psychological empowerment of the staff affects their employee prosocial voice?

2. Literature review

Employee voice

The employee voice in the field of citizenship behavior, has its unique perspective and is a very broad concept [26]. Employees' voices are in fact the opposite point versus employees silent and in silence, employees refrain from expressing their ideas, opinions, and information about the organization. While by voice perspective, employees tend to provide ideas, information, and constructive ideas to improve their work in the organization and talk about the organization's issues and challenge the [26]. Employee voice is regarded as a positive behavior, which is an attempt to analyze problems to find opportunities for improvement [9]. Two valuable frameworks have been proposed to explain and predict the behavior of employees' voices. The first framework is the active/passive and constructive / destructive two-spectrum model presented by Gordon (1988). According to this model, employees' voices are categorized in four dimensions

based on two criteria of active or passive and constructive or destructive. These four dimensions are productive active voices, productive passive voices, destructive active voices, and destructive passive voices [7]. The second model is presented by Van Dyne et al. [25] and provides employees' motivations as a basis for classifying the types of employee voices. They focused on three main motives and introduced three voices. Acquiescent voice: This kind of voiced voice is created by impartiality motive and employees with this idea cannot change the status quo, will only express ideas and opinions to confirm the current situation. Defensive Voice: In this type of behavior, the person commented on that subject with this fear that expressing his ideas and opinions by providing specific information about a subject could lead to bad results, such as punishment and insult. The motive of this type of voice is self-protection. Prosocial voice: The motive of this kind of voice is kindness and friendship that is versus of personal self-interest. In this type of voice behavior, a person makes comments with this assumption that the expression of his ideas could be beneficial for the organization or his colleagues [25].

The second model of employee voice is more popular among researchers. In this paper, the second model is chosen as the basis. Also, given that the data are collected from people who have expressed their ideas, opinions or suggestions, and according to the definitions of all three types of voices, this concept is consistent with the prosocial voice, because individuals express their ideas and opinions based on the motivation of friendship, goodwill and the benefits of themselves and organization. Therefore, this study only explores the employee prosocial voice, whose purpose is providing employees with solutions for organizational problems or gaining benefit for themselves and organization.

Psychological Empowerment

Human resource management is a process that involves four tasks of attracting, developing, motivating and retaining human resources [5]. Pari & Trambley (2007) have introduced human resource practices as identifying staff, developing competency and empowerment. In fact, empowerment is a tool that aligns individual goals with organizational goals and creates this belief that organizational progress will bring benefits for employees. In addition to the positive effect of the organization's performance, employees' empowerment has positive effects on employees [1]. Empowerment studies have divided it into the two sections: "structural approach" and "psychological approach" [17]. Psychological empowerment is the process of creating inner motivation through the preparing the environment, creating the basis for transferring the feeling of more self-efficacy and, ultimately, more ability (energy) [16]. This approach focuses on perceptions and how employees perceive empowerment. In structural empowerment approach, empowerment is the result and outcome of a studied process. Structural approach studies focus more on what tools and equipment managers can provide to empower employees through creating the necessary context in the physical environment. The structural approach was considered by the scientists in the 1980s, but after the studies of Thomas and Velthouse and Spreitzer's research, the tendency towards psychological empowerment was changed, and it was justified that until the person is not mentally capable prepared, physical upgrading and empowering employees will not be

successful [18]. Given the importance of Spreitzer's research (based on more than hundreds of researches in the last 20 years), in particular, the universality of his model among other models of psychological empowerment, this model is the basis for measuring the psychological empowerment variable in this research. Spreitzer's studies [22] introduced four dimensions for psychological empowerment. Competence: The ability to conducting work successfully. The feeling of confidence in doing the job efficiently refers to this feature. Self-determination: The person feeling about the right to choose and take steps to regulate the activities, independence and continuity in the processes. Having the right to choose means to experience the feeling of choice in implementing and personalizing self-activities. Impact: the extent to which one has the ability to influence and influence the strategic, administrative, or operational implications of work activities. Meaning: involves matching between the requirements of the role and occupation or beliefs, values and individual behaviors [22].

3. Research method

In this research, the phenomenology method was used to identify the components of the employee prosocial voice. The goal of the researcher in this strategy is understanding the meaning of experience as experienced by the person. Hence, it clarifies the structure or essence of the living experience of a phenomenon, in order to find the integrity of its meaning and its explicit description [24]. Phenomenology is the most appropriate method for deep understanding of the experience and meaning of a concept, such as the employee prosocial voice. In this research, the staff of the municipality of Mashhad, which has at least three years of work in the municipality and have expressed at least 20 times their prosocial voice officially, were considered as the statistical population. The samples were selected in the qualitative section of the study through purposeful sampling. In a purposeful sampling method, the researcher is looking for people who have rich experience in the subject and can express and desire to participate in the research [19]. The sample size is not predictable in qualitative studies. In this study, based on the data saturation and the diversity of samples, the data of 23 participants were chosen as a base for coding. The research tool were questions which were raised during the interview. Interviews were semi-structured deep ones. Ethical considerations such as obtaining permission to conduct research, explaining the research goals and used methods were observed. Before the interview, satisfaction was obtained from the interviewees, and they were provided with the necessary confidentiality of the information and specifications received from them. The first common question among interviewees was an open question: "What does prosocial voice mean in your view?" Also in this research during the interview, it was tried to use exploratory questions, such as "can you give me an example and ...". The interviewer's answer was a guide for the next question. The interviewee was told that he could name any item related to the employee prosocial voice that came to his mind and was not included in the scope of the questions, because the goal was to achieve the depth of their experiences. The data collection continued until data saturation, meaning that no new material was added to the collected data. All interviews were written word-by-word. Data were analyzed using

Colaizzi's approach. The data analysis method, based on the Colaizzi's model [20], consists of seven steps:

1. Reviewing all data: At this step, the written interview data was read several times in order to understand its overall content.
2. Extracting important sentences: Phrases, sentences or paragraphs relating to the questions asked in the interview were separated and kept in separate files. This is because of not losing the data which are less important as they may be important in the next steps.
3. Creating formulated meanings: For each important sentence, a short description of its hidden meaning was written that formed the components.
4. Sorting the formulated meanings within the categories and shaping the contents: The components obtained in the previous step were placed in different categories as dimension. Repeating themes is one of the validity indices. To determine the validity of the data, the obtained themes were matched with the data.
5. Creating a brief narrative description: key data concepts were written in a narrative summary.
6. Returning to determine validity: The results were explained for some of the participants, and they were asked to provide feedback about results.
7. Determining follow-up capability: For this purpose, daily activities of the research process were written as a report, and personal experience in dealing with participants was recorded.

Reliability and Validity

In this study, for reliability and confidence building about data, according to Guba and Lincoln (1994), four criteria of reliability, transferability, dependability, and conformability capabilities were used to judge the scientific accuracy of the research. The reliability means to what extent the structure and meaning of the phenomenon are represented desirably [21]. To respect the validity of research, it was tried to enter people into the research who have rich experience about prosocial voice. Also, for the reliability, the long-term involvement of the researcher with the subject of research and confirmation of the findings by the participants were done so that the findings show their true and correct experiences. Transferability contains this message that to what extent the research findings could be generalized to other environments. In this study, we tried to make this important point by expressing research conditions as well as the characteristics of the participants. The reliability of the coherence of the internal processes and the way of investigating the variable conditions of the phenomenon are examined by the researcher [14].

For validity, excerpts from the text of the interview, along with the emerging codes and classes, were given to the three professors who were informed and aware of the qualitative research and they reviewed the research process and confirmed the results. The confirm ability means to what extent the other people who examine the research or its results, confirm the researcher's findings [23]. Confirmability was obtained through detailed reviews and overviews of data, interpretations, and findings of this study by looking at previous studies.

Findings of the research qualitative section

In this study, among 23 participants, 21 were male, and 2 were women. Their average working experience was 15 years and range from 30 to 50 years old. In the final research findings, four dimensions of "promoter," "freely," "preventive" and "ethical" appeared with 10 components. Based on the analyzing method of Colaizzi, a sample of the inductive process of obtaining components the semantic units is shown in Table 1. Participants in the qualitative research section of this study were 23 employees of Mashhad municipality who were 2 women and 21 men, and in terms of age distribution was in the range of 30 to 50 years old, and the average age of their work was 15 years. After analyzing the interviews, the model of employees prosocial voice was extracted at three levels. The first level consists of four components of employees prosocial voice that includes upgrading, freely, preventive and ethical. The second level consists of 10 sub-components that include expressing opinions to address the problems, expressing opinions to improve the organization, expressing opinions for organizing changes, expressing opinions in order to benefit the organization, participation, risk-taking, expressing opinions in in order to reduce losses, expressing opinions to reduce undesirable behaviors, expressing opinions because of commitment, expressing opinions on ethical reasons, and finally the third level of the model consists of 40 semantic units of the employees prosocial voice, as listed in Table 1.

Table 1: Components, sub-components and compressed semantic units extracted from employees prosocial voice

Compressed semantic unit	Sub-component	component
Expressing problems and challenges of the organization, providing solutions for solving organizational problems, concerning about the organization, expressing opinions in order to reduce waste costs.	Expressing opinions to address the problems of organization	promoter
Expressing opinions for improving work practices, expressing opinions on issues affecting the organization, expressing opinions for increasing productivity, expressing opinions for the development of organization activities, expressing opinions to improve work life of mine and my colleagues.	Expressing opinions to improve the organization	
Making suggestions for creating new projects and activities that are good for the organization, expressing ideas for change, expressing criticisms in a constructive way to create positive change	Expressing opinions to make constructive changes	
Expressing opinions for increasing organization's earnings, expressing opinions on how the organization achieved its goals, expressing opinions about serving the organization, expressing opinions to help colleagues	Expressing opinions in order to benefit the organization	
Willingness to participate, encouraging colleagues to	Participation	
		freely

participate and express opinions, expressing opinions to enhance interactions and collaboration, expressing opinions and information about important issues with managers or colleagues, expressing opinions because of good relationships with colleagues		
Expressing constructive opinions in spite of the others oppositions (managers or co-workers), expressing constructive opinions with possible controversies, accepting the risk of expressing opinions, having dare to express opinions, expressing thoughts freely, expressing actual feelings about work, expressing the facts of the organization	Risk taking	
Expressing opinions for preventing potential damages and crises, expressing issues that may reduce the efficiency and damage work units, expressing issues that cause waste of resources	Expressing opinions to reduce damages	Preventive
Expressing opinions to reduce dissatisfaction, preventing undesirable behaviors, pointing out wrong procedures	Expressing opinions to reduce undesirable behaviors	
Expressing opinions due to religious admission, expressing opinions due to religious beliefs, expressing opinions for after life rewards	Religious oriented	Ethical
Expressing opinions because of feeling of belonging to the organization, expressing opinions because of liking the organization, expressing opinions because of conscientiousness, expressing opinions because of sense of responsibility, expressing opinions because of compassion for the organization	Expressing opinions because of taking commitment	

4. Method of work in the quantitative section

A small part of this research is based on the analysis of covariance matrix using structural equation modeling (SEM), which during its implementation stages, seeks to investigate the effect of psychological empowerment and employees prosocial voice. The statistical population of this research are all employees of the Mashhad municipality, who have officially experienced showing prosocial voice, which is 2,780, so the research population was considered as given. To determine the sample size, the Cochran formula was used for the given population. In this method, an initial sample consisting of 30 questionnaires from the representatives was firstly pre-tested and with a standard

deviation of 5% in the Cochran formula with the confidence level of 95 %, and the error rate of 0.05, the sample size was estimated as 338 people. Two questionnaires were used to collect the data. The first questionnaire was the employee prosocial voice extracted from the qualitative section of the research which was a researcher-made questionnaire consisted of 40 items based on the components and sub-components of the statistics. The second was Spreitzer's [22] psychological empowerment questionnaire (1995) includes 15 items. Regarding the prediction of non-return of some of the questionnaires, 500 questionnaires were distributed randomly, and 346 questionnaires were returned. Finally, 346 qualified questionnaires were used in the analysis process. The validity of the questionnaire constructs was also confirmed by a number of management professors using a content-based method. Confirmatory factor analysis method was used to assess the validity of the construct. To assess the reliability of the questionnaire, Cronbach's alpha coefficient was used. Cronbach's alpha had a total of 969 questionnaires, which was 0.996 for the prosocial voice questionnaire, and 0.900 for the psychological empowerment questionnaire which is the high reliability of the questionnaire. It should be noted that all items were measured using the Lickert scale of 5-number and in the range of "1 = completely opposite" to "5 = fully agree". Structural equation modeling was used to investigate the fitting of structural equation model with gathered data. The analyzes were performed using AMOS v.20 software and statistical package for social sciences (SPSS v.19).

5. Quantitative Findings

Out of 500 distributed questionnaires, 346 questionnaires were collected from 165 women and 185 men, at the age of 22 and at the age of 62, with an average age of 13 years. Confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) was used to analyze the data. In the present study, it was found that the collected data are normal. In order to verify the reliability of the measurement tools through CFA, the originality of the data collected by each sentence, which was measured by the two indicators of kurtosis and Skewness in the software Amos – was approved (these values should be between + -7 for kurtosis and + -3 for Skewness). Then, in the second step, the construct validity of the model was investigated. To evaluate the convergence validity of each factor load, the factor weight of all items was significant, and with more than 0.5 and in differential validity, in order to checking non-overlap between the questionnaires sentences, the correlation between the two structures was not more than 0.9. Therefore, the non-overlap in the form of differential validity is also confirmed, which results in the validation of the model's structure.

6. Structural Equation Modeling

In order to test the main hypothesis of the research, structural equation modeling was used in Amos software by the maximum likelihood method that during all steps of the work, covariance matrices was considered as a base. Figure 1 shows the structural relationships of the research model. In order to fit the first model of the study,

the structural equation fitting indices were used. Accordingly, the indices are given as follows:

$\chi^2 = 357.795$; $df = 184$; $\chi^2/df = 1.945$, GFI = 0.829, CFI = 0.881; TLI = 0.792; IFI = 0.852; NFI = 0.843, RMR = 0.056; RMSEA = 0.021

In a desirable structural equation model, it is necessary to have an insignificant Q-square, a Q-ratio to a degree of freedom of less than 3, normed fit index, comparative fit index and goodness of fit index greater than %85, the Root Mean Squared Residual less than 0.09 and the Root Mean Squared Error of Approximation less than 0.05. For the model of the fitted structural equation, the Chi-square is equal to 357 795, the Chi-square ratio to the degree of freedom is equal to 945/1, the indices fit of normed, comparative and goodness of fit are respectively 706, 828 and 822, the Root Mean Squared Residual is 0.0904 and the Root Mean Squared Error of Approximation is 0.076. According to the obtained indices, the research model has good fitness.

7. Discussion and Conclusion

The purpose of this study was to investigate the effect of psychological empowerment on the content of employee prosocial voice with mixed approach. In the first stage, using the qualitative approach, the content of the employee prosocial voice was identified and analyzed by interviewing the staff of the municipality of Mashhad who had more than 20 experiences of prosocial voice, which resulted in this stage of the study as components and sub-components of employee prosocial voice. So, after fitting the extracted model, the effect of psychological empowerment on it as the second goal of the present study was investigated using quantitative approach. Therefore, in order to answer the research question that its purpose was discovering the components and subcomponents of the employees prosocial voice in the municipality of Mashhad, a model emerged which was identified in four components with 10 subcomponents and 40 semantic units. In this research, one of the emerging components is promoter that occurs when the suggestions and opinions of employees are aimed at promoting the organization. In this regard, the employees express their comments to improve the organization, make constructive changes, and benefit the organization. Also He poses problems for the organization and proposes solutions to solve it. Employees in the interviews acknowledged that no one knew better than employees about the organization's problems and, given that they are at the heart of the organization, better than anyone else knows the organization's issues and can provide solutions for them. The freely component expresses the expressions of opinions voluntarily and freely, and the individual expresses his views with the aim of contributing. Also, the expression of comments and suggestions may have risks to the proposer and the person accepts the risk of expressing his or her opinions. A number of interviewees stated that they expressed their views and suggestions in the organization due to their willingness to participate in the organization and also tried to make it clear to a number of interviewees that sometimes comments may be expressed, especially if they point out bad practices to managers They may have a lot of risk for them, but if they know that continuing improper practices may be harmful to the organization, they will express their

suggestions with evidence, even if they are not in favor of managers and officials of the organization. In the preventive component, the interviewees expressed their comments and suggestions to prevent problems for the organization. A number of staff members expressed their views on reducing potential damages. Some interviewees also sometimes express their dissatisfaction with the organization. If the organization does not allow them to express such dissatisfaction, it may appear as unfavorable behaviors such as lack of work, violence, and the desire to leave the organization. The ethical component also suggests that staffs express their views and suggestions according to their ethical standards. In this regard, religious beliefs and the sense of commitment of individuals to the organization are very important. A number of interviewees expressed that because of their religious beliefs and beliefs that their opinions could be useful to the organization and their colleagues, they would express it to obtain rewards of afterlife. Also, a person's commitment to the organization makes him sensitive to organizational issues and expresses opinions and suggestions that he thinks can be useful to the organization. The independent variable of research was empowerment. Empowerment is delegation of authority to the employees and causes increasing employees' power. Oxford dictionary defines empowerment as giving power or authority to someone to do something and creating a feeling in someone who can do more. In the psychological empowerment, the organization seeks to create qualified employees. Qualified employees need less direct supervision and more extra-role behaviors. And since the voice of employees is also a part of the staff's extra-role behaviors, in this research in a quantitative part of the research, the impact of employees' empowerment on the employee prosocial voice is discussed. Given that the impact of psychological empowerment on the employee prosocial voice is confirmed, it is suggested that the managers of the organizations give more power to the employees so that they also dare to express their opinions. Given that the content of the prosocial voice in this research has been shown in the behavior of the staff of the municipality of Mashhad, so other similar organizations can use the results of this research.

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