



The Effects of Leadership Styles on Job Performance of Experts through the Mediating Role of Psychological Empowerment (The Case of Agricultural Jihad Organization of Kerman Province)

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Received: 19 May 2019,
Accepted: 02 February 2020

Abstract

Job performance is considered one of the most important criteria for developing and measuring the performance of organizations such as the Agricultural Jihad Organization (AJO). The main purpose of the present study was to study the effects of leadership styles on job performance through the mediating role of psychological empowerment. The statistical population was composed of the experts of AJO in Kerman province (N=1418). The sample size was estimated to be 306 experts according to Krejcie and Morgan's sampling table. The stratified random sampling method was used to select the samples. The research instrument was a questionnaire whose validity was confirmed by a panel of experts in the field of agricultural extension, education, and management. Cronbach's alpha coefficient was employed to examine the reliability of the constructs ($0.76 \leq \alpha \leq 0.93$). The results revealed that the psychological empowerment and the transformational, transactional, and laissez-faire leadership styles had significant effects on job performance. The transformational and transactional leadership styles also had positive and significant effects on psychological empowerment. On the other hand, the laissez-faire leadership style had a negative and significant effect on psychological empowerment. In the end, it should be noted that the independent variables could account for 63 percent of the variance in job performance.

Keywords:
Agricultural Jihad Organization; job performance; leadership styles; psychological empowerment

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INTRODUCTION

Agriculture is a dominant part of the economy in many developing countries (Mehnat-Far et al., 2015). This sector also plays an important role in the national economy of Iran (Badri et al., 2011) so that the agricultural sector accounts for as high as 13 percent of GDP, 25 percent of non-oil exports, 20 percent of employment, and 93 percent of the food needs of community and production of raw materials for industries (Aghanasiri, 2012). In this regard, attending the factors affecting agricultural development can increase the share and power of this sector in the national economy. Many factors including investment in infrastructures, technologies, and credits (Abah & Petja, 2015; Ravallion & Datt, 2002), education (Burton, 2013), marketing, land ownership, communication with change agents, research centers, and policymakers (Ajani & Onwubuya, 2013; Rivera, 2011), human resources, and development of their efficiency (Baylis, 2008) contribute to agricultural development. Meanwhile, the human-related factor is of particular importance (Bozovic & Đuraskovic, 2014; Bushra et al., 2011; Canto et al., 2011).

Human resources are considered the engine of development (Canto et al., 2011). Similarly, they are major factors in agricultural development as well (Bozovic & Đuraskovic, 2014). Meanwhile, agricultural specialists play a significant role in the development of this sector (Gabre-Madhin & Haggblade, 2004). Agricultural development requires the participation of experts and the use of scientific principles in production processes (Alahyari et al., 2016). Using knowledge and technical information of experts can play a key role in improving the efficiency and proper utilization of other factors of production.

Since the agricultural sector is a production structure and proper utilization of its potentials requires the empowerment of individuals (Roknoddin-Eftekhari et al., 2009), this sector needs skillful and capable employees to achieve its goals (Bushra et al., 2011). In

order to realize human resource development, empowering employees is an effective tool to increase productivity and optimal use of their individual and group capabilities (Mirhoseini et al., 2015).

Increasing global competition and the urgent need for improving organizational performance have led organizations to make changes in their current management practices and to increase their competitive advantage (Schyns et al., 2007). Accordingly, empowering employees in such a competitive environment increases the organization's survival capability and facilitates the compatibility of the organization with a constantly changing external environment (Khalifeh-Soltani et al., 2017). In this regard, psychological empowerment is vital to boost organizational performance (Zhang & Bartol, 2010).

Leadership is one of the factors dictating empowerment so that many researchers (Alameh et al., 2012; Gill et al., 2010; Hoseinpour et al., 2011; Mirhoseini et al., 2015; Pourjafar & Rastgar, 2015; Sun et al., 2012) have focused on its paramount contribution to employees' empowerment. Good leaders motivate employees in a variety of ways. For example, they may motivate their followers with respect to their needs and create a sense of ability in them (Shamsaei et al., 2015). Knowing the exact factors influencing human resource performance is essential for proper management in organizations. Therefore, applying appropriate leadership styles by managers and employees will definitely improve organizational performance (Khodabakhshzadeh et al., 2015). In other words, leadership style has an impact on employees' performance and it leads to increased effectiveness and performance of the organization (Mosaddeghrad, 2005).

Studies (e.g. Liu et al., 2007; Quiñones et al., 2013; Zhang & Bartol, 2010) show that empowerment has some benefits such as increasing productivity, efficiency, and job satisfaction. On the other hand, an effective leadership style is an integral part of creating

a suitable environment for training capable employees (Hayat et al., 2011). Therefore, it seems that leadership styles provide a basis to improve employees' performance through the mediation of psychological empowerment (Gill et al., 2010). With respect to this approach and what was previously mentioned about the role of leadership styles and psychological empowerment in predicting job performance of agricultural experts, the main purpose of this study was to analyze the effects of leadership styles on job performance through the mediating role of psychological empowerment in the Agricultural Jihad Organization of Kerman Province, Iran.

Since the present research addresses the relationships among leadership styles, psychological empowerment, and job performance of agricultural experts, each of the variables is theoretically described in this section.

Empowerment and psychological empowerment: It means empowering people to improve their ability to display a behavior (Roknoddin-Eftekhari et al., 2009). Empowerment is the process of strengthening self-determination in employees and increasing their interactions and participation which leads to increased decision-making power and organizational interests (Nauman et al., 2010). Psychosocial empowerment means creating the necessary conditions for the activation of motivation in individuals to perform their duties (by developing a sense of competence or reducing a sense of disability among them) (Wagner et al., 2010). Researchers (see Quiñones et al., 2013; Spreitzer, 1995; Thomas & Velthouse, 1990) have identified psychological empowerment as a motivational construct that includes five dimensions of meaningfulness, competence, self-determination or autonomy, effectiveness, and trust.

Spreitzer (1995) suggests that meaningfulness refers to the value of goals or purposes of work, which is judged by one's (employee) own standards and ideals. In other words,

meaningfulness concerns a sense of feeling that one's work is personally important (De-gago, 2014). Competency refers to the criteria by which individuals can successfully measure their job duties (Li et al., 2012). Spreitzer (1995) stated that self-determination is a person's feeling of starting and adjusting his occupational activity and indicates independence in behavior, implementation, and continuation of occupational processes (Avey et al., 2008). Effectiveness shows the feeling of being able to influence the organization's outcomes and strategies (Tetik, 2016). Finally, a sense of trust reflects a state in which people are confident that they will be treated fairly and are sure that authorities or power holders will not harm them. Thus, they will be treated with impartiality (Hasani et al., 2016).

Job performance: It is typically defined as the behaviors under the control of an individual that contributes to achieving organizational goals (Johnson et al., 2009). In other words, job performance is a set of behaviors that people point to in their job environments (Yu et al., 2009). There are two distinct dimensions in behaviors associated with job performance including task performance and contextual performance (Kahya, 2009). Task performance refers to the direct role that an employee must perform to achieve organizational goals. This role consists of those behaviors that are individually controlled and can be observed and measured (Díaz-Vilela et al., 2015). In contrast, the contextual performance includes behaviors that are not directly related to job tasks, but they have a significant impact on the organizational, social and psychological aspects of an individual. These behaviors are considered the catalysts for the efficient execution of tasks entrusted to the employee (Díaz-Vilela et al., 2015).

As was previously mentioned, good leaders are of great importance in organizations (Gill et al., 2010; Mirhoseini et al., 2015; Pourjafar & Rastgar, 2015). Good leaders enjoy the characteristics including self-confidence, trans-

parency, inspiration, eagerness, innovativeness, patience, perseverance, credibility, openness, and decisiveness that enable them to have positive effects on their organizations (Mirhoseini et al., 2015). But, it should be kept in mind that no leader can have these characteristics at a high level (Shamsaei et al., 2015). The most significant reason for this claim is that different leaders apply different leadership styles, which may have different effects on an organization's performance (Khodabakhshzadeh et al., 2015). In this regard, the nature and effects of three well-known leadership styles and their organizational effects are analyzed in this section.

Transformational leadership: They pay great attention to the growth and success of their followers (Alarifi, 2014; Enaiati-Kukandeh & Azdeh-Del, 2015). A transformational leader uses optimism, intelligence, and many of his or her personal abilities to promote the aspirations of the followers and leads individuals and organizations to a higher level of performance (Skakon et al., 2010; Ghafoor et al., 2011). Researchers (e.g. Bushra et al., 2011; Gregory-Stone et al., 2004; Sun et al., 2012) have identified four factors of inspirational motivation, idealized influence (charisma), individualized consideration, and intellectual stimulation as the most important behavioral components of transformative leadership. Through inspirational motivation, transformational leaders pass on a common and long-term vision to followers that is motivating, inspiring, and challenging (Wang et al., 2011). The leader encourages employees to reach the desired goal and creates an incentive for them to achieve it (Yaghoubi et al., 2010). In the idealized influence situation, one has the character of a charismatic leader which leads to recognition and imitation of the followers (Avey et al., 2008). In other words, employees know him or her as a role model and act so in a way that enables them to become like him or her. Through individualized consideration behavior, the transformational leaders pay atten-

tion to the needs of their followers and consider each follower as a unique individual, thereby they strengthen the sense of trust and satisfaction of the followers. In addition, transformational leaders persuade their followers mentally to challenge existing hypotheses and get ideas and suggestions from other followers (Wang et al., 2011).

Transactional leadership: Transactional leadership is based on the Leader-Member Exchange Theory (Hayat et al., 2011). This leadership style puts emphasis on the relationship between a leader and his or her followers and focuses on bilateral and contractual benefits (Gardner & Stough, 2002). In some cases, the leader gives rewards to his or her followers for their commitment and loyalty (Yaghoubi et al., 2010). Therefore, in this leadership style, both the leader and followers benefit from the exchange process (Gregory-Stone et al., 2004; Hayat et al., 2011). Accordingly, in interruptions the parties are reluctant to continue the cooperation (Humphreys & Einstein, 2003). The dimensions of exchange leadership include contingent reward and management by exception/active-passive (Higgs, 2003). In the context of contingent reward, leadership is applied through rewards that are proportional to performance. That is, different types of rewards are given for predetermined goals. In management by exception/active-passive, the active leader seeks to deviate from the goals and standards and, in turn, the passive leader is waiting for things to happen and will not respond to the environment as long as something happens (Jafari-Harandi & Najafi, 2017).

Laissez-faire leadership: In Laissez-faire leadership style, leaders are absent when they are needed and refuse to accept responsibility (Gardner & Stough, 2002; Jones & Rudd, 2008). These leaders will not interfere until a serious problem occurs and they usually give decision-making responsibility to their followers (Jones & Rudd, 2008). Hayat

et al. (2011) state that there is no exchange of leaders with followers in this type of leadership and it can be considered an inactive form of leadership.

Table 1 shows a summary of the literature review regarding studies on the relationships among psychological empowerment, leadership styles, and job performance (see Eagly et al., 2003). Based on this literature review and theoretical background, psychological empowerment was considered a mediator of the relationship between leadership styles (transformational, transactional, and Laissez-faire) and job performance (Figure 1). Thus, the main hypotheses of the present study are articulated as below:

H₁: Job performance will positively and significantly be affected by psychological empowerment;

H₂: Job performance will positively and significantly be affected by transformational leadership style;

H₁: Job performance will positively and significantly be affected by transactional leadership style;

H₂: Job performance will negatively and significantly be affected by Laissez-faire leadership style;

H₁: Psychological empowerment will positively and significantly be affected by transformational leadership style;

H₂: Psychological empowerment will positively and significantly be affected by transactional leadership style;

Psychological empowerment will positively and significantly be affected by Laissez-faire leadership style.

Table 1

A Summary of the Literature Review on the Relationships of the Variables and Type of the Association

The relationship between the variables	Researcher	Type of association
Psychological empowerment and transactional leadership	Hayat et al. (2011); Mirhoseini et al. (2015)	Positive and significant
Psychological empowerment and transformational leadership	Avey et al. (2008); Gumusluoglu and Ilsev (2009); Hayat et al. (2011); Sun et al. (2012); Allameh et al. (2012); Mirhoseini et al. (2015); Pourjafar and Rastgar (2015)	Positive and significant
Psychological empowerment and Laissez-faire leadership	Hayat et al. (2011)	Non-significant
Transformational leadership and job performance	Ghorbanian et al. (2010); Ghafoor et al. (2011); Wang et al. (2011); Sundi (2013); Enaiati-Kukandeh and Azdeh-Del (2015); Alarifi (2014); Khalifeh-Soltani et al. (2017)	Positive and significant
Transactional leadership and job performance	Ilies et al. (2007); Harris et al. (2009); Ghorbanian et al. (2010); Sundi (2013); Hill et al. (2014); Khalifeh-Soltani et al. (2017)	Positive and significant
Laissez-faire leadership and job performance	Ghorbanian et al. (2010)	Non-significant
Psychological empowerment and job performance	Gumusluoglu and Ilsev (2009); Seibert et al. (2011)	Positive and significant
The relationships between leadership styles	Bass (1990); Eagly et al. (2003); Jones and Rudd (2008)	Transformational leadership has the highest association

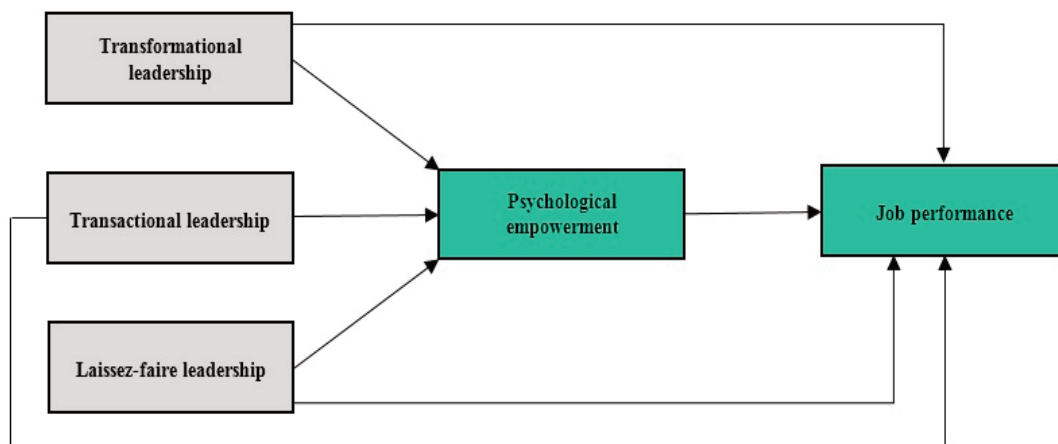


Figure 1. The conceptual framework of the study

METHODOLOGY

The present research is an applied study that was carried out using the survey technique. The research site was Kerman Province. The statistical population was composed of the experts of Agricultural Jihad Organization in Kerman Province (N=1418). The sample size was estimated to be 306 experts according to the Krejcie and Morgan sampling table (Krejcie & Morgan, 1970). The stratified random sampling method was used to select the samples. For this purpose, the target group was divided into strata according to the population of Agricultural Jihad Organization and Agricultural Jihad departments. In the next step, the samples were proportionally selected from each stratum.

The research instrument was a questionnaire consisting of four sections. The first section was related to the demographics of the participants. The second and third sections measured psychological empowerment (including 20 questions and five dimensions of meaningfulness, competence, self-determination or autonomy, effectiveness, and trust) and leadership styles (including 36 questions and three styles), respectively. Spreitzer's (1995) psychosocial empowerment tool and leadership scale of Bass and Avolio (1997) were employed to measure psychological empowerment and leadership styles. A five-point Likert type scale was used to measure the individual items of psychological empow-

erment (5=totally agree, 4=agree, 3= no idea, 2=disagree, 1=totally disagree) and leadership styles (1=never, 2=rarely, 3=sometimes, 4=often, 5=always).

In the fourth section of the questionnaire, Griffin et al. (2000)'s scale was employed as a basis to assess the task and contextual performance of the agricultural experts. Task performance operationalized using 18 questions. Moreover, the contextual performance was measured by nine items. A five-point Likert type scale (1=never, 2=rarely, 3=sometimes, 4=often, 5=always) was used to measure task performance and contextual performances. Cronbach's alpha coefficients were applied to confirm the reliability of the research instrument. Cronbach's alpha coefficients for different sections of the questionnaire are presented in Table 2. SPSS₂₂ used to analyze data. The statistics including mean, standard deviation, and percent were employed in the descriptive analysis of the data. Pearson correlation coefficients and path analysis were also used in the inferential analysis of data. Considering that the path analysis was carried out using SPSS, the path model (Figure 2; Table 4) was divided into two sub-models and then the enter-regression analysis was employed to calculate standardized direct effects. Later on, the total and indirect effects of the independent variables on the dependent variable were manually calculated.

Table 2
The Main Variables, Numbers of Items, and Alpha Values

Variable	Number of items (questions)	Alpha coefficient
Psychological empowerment	20	0.89
Transformational leadership	20	0.76
Transactional leadership	12	0.83
Laissez-faire leadership	4	0.79
Job performance	27	0.93

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The results of the descriptive statistics showed that the average age of respondents was 42.17 years. Most participants had long work experience ($X \geq 20$). Analyzing experts in terms of their fields of study demonstrated that most of them had expertise in agricultural majors including Agronomy and Plant Breeding (18.5%), Horticulture (14.4%), Animal Science (9.6%), Agricultural Extension and Education (1%), Plant Pathology (10.3%), Fishery (5.5%), Agricultural Economics (3.1%), Agricultural Mechanization (4.1%), Irrigation and Drainage (12.3%), Rangelands and Watersheds (5.1%), and Natural resources and Environment (4.5%). Furthermore, 11.6% of the participants had expertise in non-agricultural fields. Descriptive statistics regarding the level of education revealed that most respondents (187 experts) had a bachelor's degree.

The results of Pearson correlation coefficients among the variables within the conceptual framework are presented in Table 3. The results showed a positive and significant correlation ($r=0.683, p<0.01$) between transformational leadership and psychological empowerment of experts in Agricultural Jihad Organization of Kerman Province. This finding suggests that, from the experts' point of view, employing transformational leadership style by the managers of this organization will lead to their increased psychological empowerment. These findings are in line with the findings of Allameh et al. (2012), Avey et al. (2008), Hoseinpour et al. (2011), Mirhoseini et al. (2015), Pourjafar and Rast-

gar (2015), and Sun et al. (2012). The findings of the correlation between transactional leadership style and psychological empowerment also showed a positive and significant relationship ($r=0.353, p<0.01$). This finding is supported by the studies of Hayat et al. (2011) and Mirhoseini et al. (2015). Moreover, the findings indicated that there was a negative and significant correlation between Laissez-faire leadership and psychological empowerment ($r=-0.298, p<0.01$). This suggests that employing Laissez-faire leadership by the managers of Agricultural Jihad Organization of Kerman Province can weaken the psychological capabilities of the experts. This result is inconsistent with the findings of Hayat et al. (2011). In general, it can be mentioned that among three transformational, transactional and Laissez-faire leadership styles, transformational style had the highest correlation with the psychological empowerment, which is supported by Eagly et al. (2003), Jones and Rudd (2008), and Mirhoseini et al. (2015).

The results showed that there was a positive and significant relationship between job performance and transformational leadership ($r=0.639, p<0.01$). This result is consistent with the results of other studies (e.g. Alarifi, 2014; Enaiati-Kukandeh & Azdeh-Del, 2015; Ghafoor et al., 2011; Wang et al., 2011). Also, there was a positive and significant relationship between job performance and transactional leadership ($r=0.423, p<0.01$). Similar findings can be found in the reports of Ghorbanian et al. (2010), Hill et al. (2014), Khalifeh-Soltani et al. (2017), and Sundi

(2013). Nevertheless, there was a negative and significant relationship between job performance and Laissez-faire leadership ($r=-0.341$ and $p<0.01$). This result was supported by Ghorbanian et al. (2010). Finally, the results demonstrated that there was a positive and significant relationship between psychological empowerment and job performance ($r=0.667$, $p<0.01$).

The results of analyzing the effects of independent variables on dependent variables (Table 4) showed that transformational ($\beta=0.668$, $p<0.01$) and transactional ($\beta=0.401$, $p<0.01$) leadership styles had positive and significant effects on psychological empowerment. On the other hand, Laissez-faire leadership style ($\beta=-0.274$, $p<0.01$) had a negative and significant effect on psycho-

logical empowerment. As the findings of this section show, the standardized effect (β) of transformational leadership is greater than the other variables indicating the significant role of this variable in explaining psychological empowerment. Psychological empowerment was a mediating variable in the conceptual framework of the present study (Figure 1). Therefore, in the next step, the effects of three leadership styles and psychological empowerment were examined on job performance. The results revealed that psychological empowerment ($\beta=0.426$, $p<0.01$), transformational ($\beta=0.521$, $p<0.01$), transactional ($\beta=0.327$, $p<0.01$), and Laissez-faire leadership ($p<0.01$, $\beta=-0.291$) styles had significant effects on job performance.

Table 3
Correlations among the Study Variables

	Psychological empowerment	Transformational leadership	Transactional leadership	Laissez-faire leadership	Job performance
Psychological empowerment	1				
Transformational leadership	0.683**	1			
Transactional leadership	0.533**	0.368**	1		
Laissez-faire leadership	-0.218**	-0.486**	-0.417**	1	
Job performance	0.567	0.639	0.423**	-0.341**	1

Table 4
Direct Effects on Psychological Empowerment and Job Performance

	Independent variables	B	Beta (β)	t	p-value
Direct effects on psychological empowerment	Constant	17.23	---	6.57	0.001
	Transformational leadership	0.593	0.668	15.59	0.001
	Transactional leadership	0.491	0.401	9.73	0.001
	Laissez-faire leadership	-0.517	-0.274	-6.25	0.001
	p-value= 0.001	F= 151.69	R²Adj = 0.606	R² = 0.610	R= 0.781
Direct effects on job performance	Constant	6.50	---	5.63	0.001
	Transformational leadership	0.456	0.521	11.14	0.001
	Transactional leadership	0.393	0.327	6.17	0.001
	Laissez-faire leadership	-0.536	-0.291	-6.58	0.001
	Psychological empowerment	0.613	0.426	10.18	0.001
p-value= 0.001	F= 139.87	R²Adj = 0.627	R² = 0.63	R= 0.711	

In the present research and the proposed framework, some variables indirectly influenced the main dependent variable (job performance). Therefore, a path analysis was used to calculate these indirect and total effects (Table 5; Figure 2). Comparing these effects showed that the indirect effect of transformational leadership was more than the other variables. Also, analyzing the total

effects of the independent variables on the main dependent variable (job performance) indicates that transformational leadership has the highest total effect. Eventually, it should be mentioned that the independent variables could account for 63 percent of the variance in the variable of job performance (Figure 2).

Table 5
Analysis of Direct, Indirect, and Total Effects of the Variables on Job Performance

No.	Variables	Direct effects	Indirect effects	Total effects
1	Transformational leadership	0.521	0.284	0.805
2	Transformational leadership	0.327	0.170	0.497
3	Laissez-faire leadership	-0.291	-0.116	0.407
4	Psychological empowerment	0.426	---	0.426

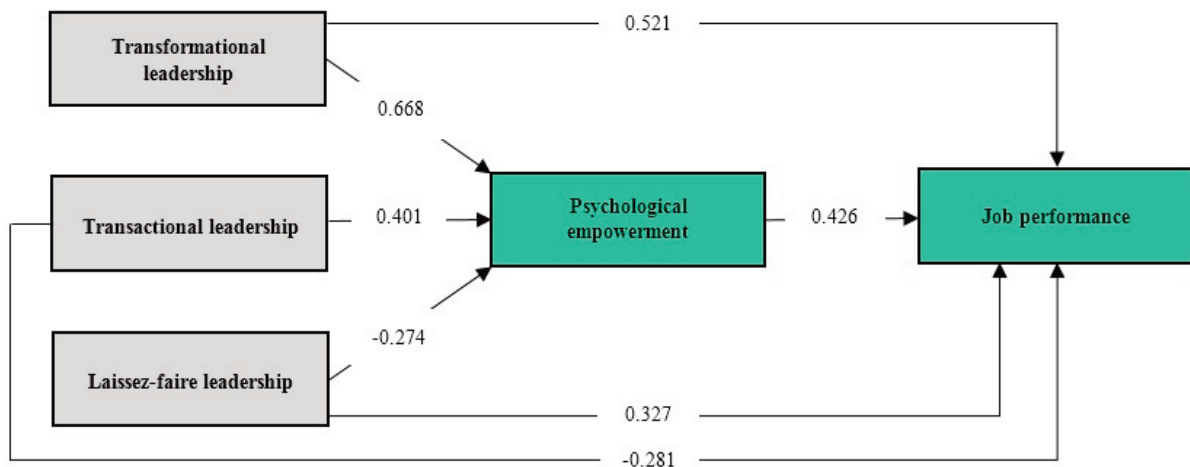


Figure 2. The Path Model of the Study

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Job performance is considered one of the most important criteria for developing and measuring the performance of organizations such as Agricultural Jihad Organization. In this regard, it is important to identify the factors affecting the job performance of the organization’s staff. Psychological empowerment is one of the most important

determinants of job performance. Leadership styles used by the managers of organizations are the other important factors affecting job performance. Therefore, the main purpose of the present study was to study the effects of leadership styles on job performance through the mediating role of psychological empowerment. The results revealed that transformational, transactional, and laissez-faire

leadership styles had significant effects on job performance. Considering that transformational leadership style has a stronger effect on job performance and puts emphasis on the growth and success of employees and organizations, it is recommended that the managers of Agricultural Jihad Organization of Kerman Province use this style to advance objectives and programs. In addition, it should be noted that the increased use of laissez-faire leadership style will be led to backwardness in the job performance of experts. So, it should be used to a lesser extent than the other leadership styles.

The results showed that psychological empowerment also had a significant and positive effect on the job performance of experts in Agricultural Jihad Organization of Kerman Province. In other words, psychologically empowering the experts and employees will lead to an increase in their job performance. In this regard, the leaders of Agricultural Jihad Organization should try to inspire the feeling to experts that they are effective and highly qualified individuals in the organization. Furthermore, the managers should strive to create trust and self-determination in the organization. For this purpose, holding some workshops for managers on effective communications and strategies for strengthening psychological empowerment can be very useful. In addition, the results showed that from the experts' point of view, transformational leadership is the most powerful predictor of psychological empowerment. This result suggests that the managers and leaders of Agricultural Jihad Organization should employ this style to increase the psychological empowerment of experts. In this regard, program planners of this organization are suggested to design plans for the development of transformational leadership styles among managers. By doing so, they will become more familiar with the application and process of implementing transformational leadership. This will create an environment in which managers and leaders can benefit from potential capacities of employees and

they can also empower the employees psychologically.

The effects of different leadership styles on job performance and psychological empowerment of experts depend on "the characteristics of leader and follower" and "environment in which they operate" whereas the variety of leadership styles can be seen in different organizations. Accordingly, it is suggested that the leaders use different leadership styles depending on the context (environment) and target group and never follow "one-size-fits-all" leadership approach. Because such a leadership approach does not take into account the differences between individuals and contexts. The program planners of Agricultural Jihad Organization should take this point into account that the empowerment of agricultural experts in this organization is a milestone point for improving performance. Therefore, they have to try to organize empowerment training courses for experts. In these courses, they can get acquainted with the interests and expectations of their followers and practice collaborative work in an experimental environment. Experiences and lessons learned from these training courses can then be applied in the real work environment by managers (as the leaders) and employees (as the followers).

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

We would like to acknowledge the cordial and effective participation and support of the research participants in data collection and information dissemination process.

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How to cite this article:

Haji, L., Karimi, H., & Valizadeh, N. (2020). The effects of leadership styles on job performance of experts through the mediating role of psychological empowerment (The case of Agricultural Jihad Organization of Kerman Province). *International Journal of Agricultural Management and Development, 10*(3), 243-256.

URL: http://ijamad.iaurasht.ac.ir/article_674766_06aebc2cbc52ac59e7397b3a2244cd5e.pdf

