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A case study on the relationship between psychological empowerment and organizational learning

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ABSTRACT

In this study, with regard to the importance of the subject, the relationship between psychological empowerment and organizational learning in the supervision committee of Guilan customs is examined. This research is "functional" in terms of purpose and "descriptive" in terms of implementation technique. The questionnaire is used for collecting the information and testing the hypothesis. A standardized questionnaire based-on Thomas and Velthouse models containing 12 questions and Likret's 5-item scales is used to examine the psychological empowerment. A standardized questionnaire based-on Jerez-Gomez model containing 15 questions and Likret's 5-item scales is used to examine the organizational learning. The study population of this research is the supervision committee of Guilan customs containing 275 people. A stratified random sampling is used in this study. By testing the research hypothesis using the collected data, it has been cleared that there is a positive and meaningful relationship between psychological empowerment and organizational learning in supervision committee of Guilan customs. The statistical method used in this research is Pearson correlation coefficient and the evaluation and estimation of variables is performed by SPSS software.

1. Introduction

The learning process is realized when some changes in people's behavior and performance can be observed. These behaviors is often seen directly and sometimes be felt indirectly. Hence, the change in perception, thinking, remembering and recognizing people is also placed in the learning effects circle. The only source of strength and survival of organizations is learning in a better and faster manner than rivals, as learning is the main and key factor which an organization will need to remain in the modern economic world and competitive environment. According to Song, The head of American training and development society, learning is today the vital road of recognition and adaptation by exceeding changing speed (Marquardt, 2011).

Therefore, learning has an impact on human behavior in organizations clearly. It seems that three categories of employee empowerment, organizational learning, and knowledge management are tools that facilitate organizational change. Organizational learning is a process in which the organization learns over time, changes, and improves its operations and progress continually by improving its abilities by means of creating change. Organizational learning is the most important way for improving the long-term performance and in the near future, the only organization can claim superiority that have the ability to exploit effectively from capabilities, commitment, and people's learning capacity at all levels of the organization. In organizational learning, organizational members recognize the mistakes and their causes and correct their mistakes and by these means, learn for future and prepare to deal with changes and possible events. In the complex arena of competitive and changing environment that all organizations are faced with, achieving to success in today's business environment depends entirely on individual and organizational learning (Puan Rafidah binti Aziz, 2015). Revans (1998) said "The organizational learning must be equal to or greater than the change in the environment; otherwise, the organization is destroyed" (Marquardt, 2011). Organizational learning is a process and a set of actions that leads to employee learning and involves significant organizational behaviors that apply in a learning organization. All of the learning conditions are prepared for members in such organizations and people are always trying to use what they have

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learned. Simon has also defined the organizational learning as vision growth and building renewing and successful review of the organizational problems by individuals that its' results reflect in structural factors and organization results. An important factor in the survival of the organizations is having qualified and empowered manpower. In other words, manpower is more important than new technology and financial resources. The main different between organizations should be conceived in their knowledge and ignorance. The role of efficient, competent and knowledgeable human resources in accomplishing organizational goals is an undeniable issue. Learning is the beginning of a need to evolve and improve and as the human knowledge developed, the need to change and learning increases. Alvin Toffler says: "In the third millennium an illiterate person is not someone who cannot read or write, but is someone who cannot learn or forgot and re-learn. Learning is necessary for organizations success and development. In the absence of learning, organizations incur the cost of ignorance or duplication and in efficiency and a waste of resources and skills. In today's variable and complex world, the organizations survival key is their ability to attain required knowledge and information. On the other hand, the increasing complexity and dynamics of the environment have been leads to create an atmosphere of uncertainty and instability for organizations and groups and in these conditions; organizations need to improve their awareness about the environment and increase their knowledge to preserve their survival. In this competitive and changing environment, the organizations which have the ability to learn and acquire the organizational knowledge from environmental changes and organizational experiences and become learning organizations can be able to survive and develop. Peter Senge believes that the organizations will be learning in the future and otherwise will demise gradually. Over the past years, it has become clear that as the organization staff's knowledge improves and individuals work together and become more aware of their organization's perspective, the organization will be more successful. So, learning organization thinking has led to a transformation in the organizations and has led to align the organization with the changing environment. Organizational learning is a competitive advantage for organizations. So the insurance industry should also not ignore the competitive advantage in order to reach its goals. The increasing changes of knowledge, technology and the environment changes and its complexity which affect the organization life are the factors that specify the need to paying more attention to organizational learning and improving the techniques and skills of employees and explain the using of past organizational experiences in the light of looking to the future. If organizational learning is not institutionalized in organizations and institutions, the survival of organizations and companies in the face of hard waves of rapid changes

in science and technology will be treated and will go into decline. Organizations can be survive and continue their work if have the ability to synchronize with extensive changes in the environment and needs of the environment and community. Therefore, organizations should learn the required knowledge, skills and strategies for achieving to success from internal and external experiences in various fields and use them in practice (Marquardt, 2011).

According to the above sentences, the need to learn science, new knowledge and skills among the insurance industry of Guilan's staff that has the mission to serve honestly and trying to meet society's economic and social problems are also felt and this is a necessity that will be achieved through organizational learning. Therefore this research examines the relationship between psychological empowerment and organizational learning in the insurance industry of Guilan, which is a step towards greater emphasis on the necessity of organizations revision to this important issue in order to achieve the objectives. Now the posed question is: "Is there any significant and meaningful relationship between psychological empowerment and organizational learning in supervision committee of Guilan customs?"

This study is done in order to achieve the following objectives:

1. Assessment of psychological empowerment in supervision committee of Guilan customs.

2. Assessment of organizational learning in supervision committee of Guilan customs.

3. Assessment of the relationship between psychological empowerment and organizational learning in supervision committee of Guilan customs.

4. Assessment of the relationship between the feeling of competence (self-efficacy) and organizational learning in supervision committee of Guilan customs.

5. Assessment of the relationship between the feeling of having choice (self-organizing) and organizational learning in supervision committee of Guilan customs.

6. Assessment of the relationship between the feeling of being effective (personal acceptance the result) and organizational learning in supervision committee of Guilan customs.

7. Assessment of the relationship between the feeling of being important or meaningful (being valuable) and organizational learning in supervision committee of Guilan customs.

8. Assessment of the relationship between the feeling of having trust to others and organizational learning in supervision committee of Guilan customs.

2. Model and theoretical framework of study

The theoretical framework is a basis that all parts of the research are based on it. This framework is a logical, descriptive and nurtured network which includes relationships between variables that has been identified following the implementation

processes such as interview, observation and literature review. The theoretical framework makes clear the relationship between the variables; nurtures the theories that are the foundations of these relationships and also describes the nature and direction of these relationships. As literature review will form the basis of the theoretical framework, a good theoretical framework can also provide a reasonable basis for formulating testable hypotheses.
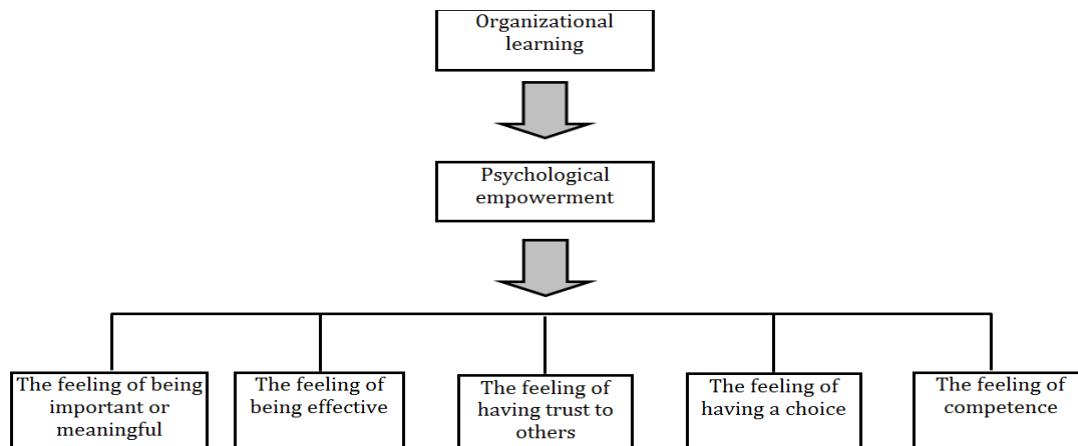

Fig. 1: The research's conceptual model

In this study, only the relationship between psychological empowerment and its dimensions with organizational learning and its components is studied.

3. The research questions

1. Is there any meaningful relationship between psychological empowerment and organizational learning in supervision committee of Guilan customs?

2. Is there any meaningful relationship between the feeling of competence and organizational learning?

3. Is there any meaningful relationship between the feeling of having choice and organizational learning?

4. Is there any meaningful relationship between the feeling of being effective and organizational learning?

5. Is there any meaningful relationship between the feelings of being important or meaningful and organizational learning?

6. Is there any meaningful relationship between the feeling of having trust to others and organizational learning?

4. The research hypotheses

1. There is a meaningful relationship between psychological empowerment and organizational learning in supervision committee of Guilan customs.

2. There is a meaningful relationship between the feeling of competence and organizational learning in supervision committee of Guilan customs.

3. There is a meaningful relationship between the feeling of having choice and organizational learning in supervision committee of Guilan customs.

4. There is a meaningful relationship between the feeling of being effective and organizational learning in supervision committee of Guilan customs.

5. There is a meaningful relationship between the feeling of being important and meaningful and organizational learning in supervision committee of Guilan customs.

5. Psychological empowerment

The psychological empowerment dimension moved away from the examination of traditional management activities and instead emphasized on the perceptions of employees; which means the employees how experience their work; and implied on the employees' personal beliefs about their role in relation to the organization. Empowerment is a model of decentralization, which requires appropriate decision-making authority to lower-level employees. In empowerment, in addition to having authority, people must have adequate training and enough information in order to meet their own decisions (Tubbs and Moss, 2000).

In this study, the psychological empowerment is measured by the indexes of feeling of competence, feeling of having choice, feeling of being effective, feeling of being meaningful, and feeling of having trust to others and Likert's[†] 5-item scales questionnaire.

5.1. Feeling of competence

According to Bandora's[‡] idea, three following key factors are necessary for feeling of competence:
a. Belief in the having the authority to do the work.

[†] A Likert-type scale assumes that the strength/intensity of experience is linear, i.e. on a continuum from strongly agree to strongly disagree, and makes the assumption psychological empowerment can be measured. Respondents may be offered a choice of five to seven or even nine pre-coded responses with the neutral point being neither agree nor disagree.
[‡] Albert Bandura OC is a psychologist who is the David Starr Jordan Professor Emeritus of Social Science in Psychology at Stanford University.

b. Belief in the having enough capacity to endeavor.

c. Belief in the nothing cannot prevent them from doing works.

When people develop the feeling of competence with a minimum of skill and ability, willingness to endeavor for doing the works, and lack of being any obstacle to the success; they will feel opulence (Whetten and Cameron, 2005). This item is measured by Likert's 5-item scales questionnaire.

5.2. Feeling of having choice

Managers who are not sure about their role in the area of expectations have high uncertainty and will not have initiative due to this uncertainty and therefore will have lower levels of self-regulating (Hall, 2008). This item is measured by Likert's 5-item scales questionnaire.

5.3. The feeling of being effective

Whetten and Cameron (2005) believed that the changes can be created by impressing the work environment or produced results. Therefore, the feeling of being effective in work is completely related to the feeling of self-control. This item is measured by Likert's 5-item scales questionnaire.

5.4. The feeling of meaningfulness of job

The meaningfulness of job means the career goals being valuable and the person is interested in to the job (Thomas and Velthouse, 2005). The meaningfulness refers to adjustment between the requirements of working with beliefs, values and behaviors (Spreitzer, 2005). Empowered people feel meaningfulness and prized for career goals; and their standards and thoughts are compatible with what they are doing (Whetten and Cameron, 2005). This item is measured by Likert's 5-item scales questionnaire.

5.5. The feeling of having trust to others

Trust is a softener element that facilitates activities in organizational behavior. McAlister (1995) was the first person who presents empirical evidence based on that the trust has two components, namely trust based on effect and trust based on cognition in organizational environment (Ergeneli et al., 2007). This item is measured by Likert's 5-item scales questionnaire.

6. Organizational Learning

Jerez-Gomez et al. (2005) have defined the organizational learning consist of these three main processes: Creation or acquisition, transfer or integration of knowledge. They have introduced the organizational learning capability as the ability to create, acquire, transfer, and integration of knowledge of organization behavior modification to reflect the new situation with a view to improving the performance of the organization. Organizational learning is a dynamic process that enables organizations to quickly adapt with changes. This process consists of production of new knowledge, skills and behaviors and is reinforced by cross-functional sharing and collaborative learning. The results of these two principles are creating a learning culture and a common culture among all employees (De Weerd-Nederhof et al., 2002).

Dimensions of organizational learning: management commitment for organizational learning, systemic perspective, open and experimentation space, transfer and integration of knowledge. Measuring tool for organizational learning is questionnaire and the organizational learning is measured by Likert's 5-item scales questionnaire.

Organizational learning is the process of finding the errors and reforming them. Organizational learning is obtained based on shared vision and mental, mental models, and knowledge and is based on the past experiences and past events. Organizational learning is a process that occurs with knowledge acquisition and performance improvement over the time.

Simon has also defined the organizational learning as vision growth and renewing the building and successful reviewing the organizational problems by individuals that its results is reflected in structural factors and organization results.

Organizational learning is a reflective process that implements by members of the organization at all levels and includes a set of data obtained from internal and external environments. This information is refined through a process of group understanding and its outcome is common interpretations that could be used in future organizational measures in the face of environmental changes on the organizational behaviors and theories (Kreitner and Kinicki, 2013).

At American dictionary the learning is defined as: "acquisition of knowledge, understanding or being dominated through experience or study". In 1990 decade the issue of organizational learning was just one of the topics of management orientations and from that dates onwards, the organizational learning was affected by new management topics.

Some proposed definitions of organizational learning are as follows:

Organizational learning is a dynamic process that enables organizations to quickly adapt with the changes. This process consists of production of new knowledge, skills and behaviors and is reinforced by cross-functional sharing and collaborative learning. The results of these two principles are creating a learning culture and a common culture among all employees (De Weerd-Nederhof et al., 2002). Individual learning is done by experience, interviews, research, and development of effective mental models in the mind. But organizational learning happens when the group learns to interact, share the knowledge, and work collectively in total;

which will improves the group's performance and cause the group members obtain the ability for doing the works in a better way.

Garvin (1993) also offers a similar definition. Learning is defined as a process which unfolds over the time and accompanies by knowledge acquisition, deeper understanding and improvement in performance. Organizational learning is defined as a collective capacity based on experimental and cognitive processes and includes the acquisition, sharing, and optimization of knowledge (Gilbert et al., 2007).

Organizational learning is a function that takes place in the informal organization. This function should be used to create a new perspective, learning, and offering new paradigms. Organizational learning is defined as a series of organizational measures such as knowledge acquisition, information distribution, information and memory interpretation which affects consciously or unconsciously on the positive organizational changes. In recent years the importance of the study and analysis of organizational learning has increased and different

researchers have different approaches to the analysis, including psychology approach, community approach, and organizational theory perspective. Recently, in terms of strategy, organizational learning is considered as a source of distinction between organizations and also in considered as a basis for creating competitive advantage; and the learning organization concept is derived from this view that has caused to change in the traditional practices of business management. Morales et al. (2006) defined the organizational learning as the capacity of the company to maintain and improve its performance based on past experiences; and consider this capacity as the ability of the acquisition and exploiting from tacit and explicit knowledge, knowledge sharing and use of knowledge in the organization. Today, with increasing emphasis on knowledge-based organizations rather than production-oriented organizations; knowledge is considered as an important factor in organizations; and enjoying a level of knowledge and updated information for the survival of organizations has become an undeniable necessity.

Table 1: A summary of scientists' comments about the organizational teaching (O'Brien, 2010).

Expert's name	1st level	2nd level	3rd level	4th level
Valsenn	Organization actions	Environment reaction	Individual actions	Perception of the environment
Huber	Information identification and knowledge creating	Knowledge exchanging and dissemination	Adding new knowledge to the current knowledge system	Turning theoretical knowledge into practical knowledge
Senge	Doing authority	Collective interpretation	Compilation and dissemination	Producing information

7. Research methodology

The research methodology is a set of rules, tools, systematic and reliable ways for checking the facts, discovering the unknowns, and achieving to solution for problems. The methodology of this research is "Descriptive and correlational". Descriptive study is done for describing and determining the variables in a position. The aim of any descriptive study is also the description of some aspects of researcher's beloved phenomenon with an individual, institutional, industrial perspective and so on. In other words, descriptive research includes a set of methods whose purpose is to describe the studied conditions or phenomena. In this way, the researcher can, if necessary, examine and analyze relationships between studied variables. In these studies, the researcher has no intervention in the situation or status of variables and only reads what is present and describes it. Descriptive researches leads less to the discovery of the laws and theories presentation because it follows certain things. Also the type of work in this research is "functional". Scientific researchers are divided into three categories according to their purpose: fundamental researches, applicable researches, and developmental researches; and the researcher has putted his work based on "descriptive -survey" methodology. "Descriptive" because the researcher

wanted to investigate in order to identify and provide a picture of the status quo relationships between psychological empowerment and organizational learning in supervision committee of Guilan customs. And "survey" because the data are obtained from sampling and are used and are analyzed finally.

The research methodology is that a Thomas-Velthouse questionnaire is distributed for the measurement of psychological empowerment of supervision committee of Guilan customs; which the questionnaire is consist of some questions. Then the Jerez-Gomez standard questionnaire is distributed for measuring the scale of organizational learning. Respondents must choose the right option in the likert's 5-scales and so express their comments to each of the questions about the relationship between psychological empowerment and organizational learning. Likert's 5-scales are one of the most common measuring attitudes. This scale is made from a reasonable set of items that have been written a specific order. These items provide certain sates of the measured phenomenon as items that have appropriate distances in terms of value measurements. The respondent show his degree of agreement with each of these statement on a scale graded from one to five. After completing the questionnaire, researchers will be able to examine the relationship between psychological

empowerment and organizational learning and analyze data. The study population of this research is the supervision committee of Guilan customs containing 275 people. The Cochran formula is used in this study to estimate the sample size.

$$n = \frac{N(1.96)^2 pq}{N(0.05)^2 + (1.96)^2 (pq)} \qquad (1)$$

$$n = \frac{275(1.96)^2 (0.5)(0.5)}{275(0.05)^2 + (1.96)^2 (0.5)(0.5)} = 160 \qquad (2)$$

Which based on the obtained results, the sample size are 160 people. It should be mentioned that the random sampling method is used in this study. Cronbach's Alpha is used for the questionnaire reliability with an emphasis on internal consistency and using SPSS software to set questions for each variable, the following results are obtained:

Table 2: Cronbach's Alpha estimation

Variable	rejected	Final result	Estimated Cronbach's Alpha
The feeling of competence	-	Accepted	0.89
The feeling of having a choice	-	Accepted	0.71
The feeling of being effective	-	Accepted	0.957
The feeling of being important or meaningful	-	Accepted	0.918
The feeling of having trust to others	-	Accepted	0.872
Organizational learning	-	Accepted	0.869

In this study, parametric methods are used. To test the hypotheses, Pearson correlation coefficient is used. The research's instrument is distributed in supervision committee of Guilan customs after reliability test using Pearson correlation coefficient technique. Then the results are analyzed by SPSS 19 software.

8. The results of inferential statistics

8.1. The first test results

After collecting and analyzing data and using regression analysis it was observed that intensity of the relationship between psychological empowerment and organizational learning is equal to77.9%; which according to the amount of Sig which is less than0.05thiseffectis significant. For this reason the H0 hypothesis is rejected and H1 hypothesis is confirmed with a certainty of 95% and this relationship is significant. Also it can be said according to Table 2 that intensity of the relationship between psychological empowerment and organizational learning is equal to77.9 %which this means there is a direct relationship between these two variables. It can be seen that this is a direct and positive impact. This means that the psychological empowerment has an influence on the organizational learning. These results suggest that organizational learning is increased by increasing the psychological empowerment and staff pay more attention to organizational learning and striving hard towards their goals. According to the theoretical foundations of research, achieving to capability is not just a single individual or group endeavor, but macro factors such as management commitment to organizational learning, structure, policies, values, reward system and having a systematic perspective all together should reinforce the individual and group behaviors in this direction.

8.2. The results of the second hypothesis

After collecting and analyzing data and using regression analysis it was observed that the amount

of Sig is equal to 0.25<0.05. For this reason the H0 hypothesis is rejected and H1 hypothesis is confirmed with a certainty of 95%and this relationship is meaningful. Also the correlation between the two variables of feeling of competency and organizational learning is equal to 48.6% which this means there is a direct relationship between the two variables. This means that the feeling of competence influence on the organizational learning. Empowered people feel that they have the ability for the successful accomplishment of a task. They have a feel of superiority and believe that can find a way to meet the challenges and grow.

8.3. The results of the third hypothesis

After collecting and analyzing data and using regression analysis it was observed that the amount of Sig is equal to 0.003<0.05. For this reason the H0 hypothesis is rejected and H1 hypothesis is confirmed with a certainty of 95% and this relationship is meaningful. Also the intensity of correlation between the two variables of feeling of having a choice and organizational learning is equal to 65.4% which this means there is a direct relationship between the two variables. This means that the feeling of having a choice influence on the organizational learning. The feeling of having a choice is attributed to the feeling of being independent. Empowered people are able to do initiative activities, make independent decisions, and try new ideas.

8.4. The results of the forth hypothesis

After collecting and analyzing data and using regression analysis it was observed that the amount of Sig is equal to 0.000<0.05. For this reason the H0 hypothesis is rejected and H1 hypothesis is confirmed with a certainty of 95%and this relationship is meaningful. Also the intensity of correlation between the two variables of feeling of being effective and organizational learning is equal to 78.6% which this means there is a direct relationship between the two variables. This means

that the feeling of being effective influence on the organizational learning. Empowered people believe that they can create change by means of impressing the environment or work's results. The feeling of being effective is a person's beliefs at some section of time about his ability to make a difference in the desired direction.

8.5. The results of the fifth hypothesis

After collecting and analyzing data and using regression analysis it was observed that the amount of Sig is equal to 0.059>0.05. For this reason the H1 hypothesis is rejected and H0 hypothesis is confirmed with a certainty of 95%and so the relationship between two variables of the feeling of being meaningful and organizational learning is not meaningful.

8.6. The results of the sixth hypothesis

After collecting and analyzing data and using regression analysis it was observed that the amount of Sig is equal to 0.000<0.05. For this reason the H0 hypothesis is rejected and H1 hypothesis is confirmed with a certainty of 95%and this relationship is meaningful. Also the intensity of correlation between the two variables of feeling of having trust to others and organizational learning is equal to 74.5% which this means there is a direct relationship between the two variables. This means that the feeling of having trust to others influence on the organizational learning. Empowered people have a feeling named trust and are confident that they will be treated fairly and equally. They are confident that the final outcome of their work, even in a subordinate position, will not be harm or damage but will be righteousness and sincerity.

9. Conclusion and recommendations

Empowerment is a process that proceeds to giving greater autonomy to employees and sharing them in the information about factors which affect the job performance. Empowerment leads to being away from conditions which weakens the organization and staff and leads to an enhancement in the staff's self-efficacy. Empowerment also caused to staff's creativity and volition invigoration and provides conditions to overcome the difficulties that may be encountered. Managers trust to their staff's abilities for performing their duties at a higher level through empowerment. This is the issue that was examined in this study. The existence of a positive and significant correlation between the dependent variable and independent variable dimensions was also examined and confirmed. Also in the current study, the existence of a significant and positive relationship between the dependent variable and independent variable dimensions (feeling of competence, feeling of a choice, feeling of being

effective, and feeling of having trust to others) was confirmed.

It is suggested that:

Executive managers and experts must improve staff's empowerment in the organization with giving freedom to employees in the framework of job duties, having trust to them, providing opportunities for them to expressing the suggestions, and increasing the range of career awareness. Whatever the people within the organization have higher empowerment; this issue will increase the organizational learning in work processes.

Managers should present incentive programs (financial-spiritual) for increasing staff's initiative and should give necessary resources to their employees for gaining brainstorm and new ideas.

Managers and directions can help to learning and improving the employees' skills and empowerment by holding suitable training courses and using of initiatives such as job trip and making employees as multi-skilled staff.

In order to create a platform for freedom of employees, the employees authorities increases.

More employee participation in organizational decision making, enhancing the sense of responsibility among employees, accountability of employees for any responsibility, and encouraging the accountable employees through organizational reward system is suggested in this study.

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