

EMPOWERMENT, JOB INSECURITY AND QUALITY OF JOB PERFORMANCE OF FACULTY MEMBERS: AN EMPIRICAL ANALYSIS

Georges Yahchouchi, Ph. D

Associate professor, Deputy President for Quality Assurance and Teaching
& Learning, Holy Spirit University of Kaslik (USEK), Lebanon

Nathalie Bouldoukian

Vice-Director of the Quality Assurance and Institutional Effectiveness
Office, Holy Spirit University of Kaslik (USEK), Lebanon

Abstract

People are the most valuable assets of educational institutions. Exploring best practices for managing human resources in universities has become a challenge for university quality enhancement and competitiveness in order to attract and retain students. Enhancing students' experience became a priority by providing them the best education and learning experience and by redirecting ways of managing their Human Resources toward more empowerment and efficiency. The objective of this paper is to shed the light on the impact of Human resources practices on student's experience and to assess the results of common managerial practices in the Lebanese Private Higher education Sector. This article examines the relationship between quality of job performances in a university and academic human resources management (HRM) practices mainly: Faculty empowerment and job insecurity. The study has been conducted using secondary data from the database of one of the largest private universities in Lebanon from a sample of 136 faculty members. Data gathered are related to academic and administrative responsibilities, assessment and feedback results from students and senior peers (deans). While the cross section results of the t-test show that empowerment of Faculty members and job security can play a positive in promoting quality in job performance and teaching and learning.

Keywords: Academic Human Resources, Faculty empowerment, Job insecurity

Introduction

As a response to competition, a business model of organizing universities has become more common in recent years in Lebanon. The business model includes “greater managerial power, structural reorganization, marketing and business generation, moves towards performance-related pay and a rationalization and computerizing of administrative structures” (Parker and Jary, 1995:320). Many academic institutions have adopted organizational forms, technologies, management instruments, and values that are commonly found in the private business sector (Deem, 1988). This wave of reforms, which has swept through universities and other public organizations in Europe, has been known as *managerialism* (Trow, 1994; Hood, 1995; Pollit and Bouckaert, 2004). As *managerialism* is thought to result in higher efficiency, transparency, and effectiveness, it is thought to positively affect the quality of job performances. Others, however, argue that “managerial” characteristics in universities impede employees, especially academic human resources, from achieving a higher quality of job performance (e.g., Trow, 1994, Henkel and Kogan, 1996; Ylijoki, 2003; Bryson, 2004). In addition, human resources adapt their activities to “the simplifying tendencies of the quantification of outputs” (Trow, 1994, 41), which may lead to lower-level of organizational commitment and performance. Thus, the university becomes for some scholars a less attractive employer for academic human resources (Smeenk, Telken, Eisinga and Doorewaard, 2008).

The impact of these new managerial practices in academic human resources management on job performance has not been sufficiently evaluated. With the recent focus on accreditation, Lebanese private universities changed their managerial practices toward *managerialism*. The impact of this change has not been studied in Lebanon, where the main experts and academic debates are concerned with the development of a national legal framework for quality assurance. For these two reasons, this article examines two aspects of *managerialism* empowerment and job insecurity and investigates the empirical relationship with quality of job performance.

Academic Human Resources Empowerment

This concept of empowerment in management has been developed and advanced by several researchers (Chebat & Kollias, 2000; Conger, 1989; Conger & Kanungo, 1988; Hartline & Ferrel, 1996; Hui, 1994; Spreitzer, 1995; Spreitzer, 1996; Thomas & Velthouse, 1990). It was shown that empowered employees have greater authority and responsibility for their work than they would in more traditionally designed organizations (Conger & Kanungo, 1988). Empowerment is thought to unleash employee potential,

enhance their motivation, allow them to be more adaptive and receptive to their environment, and minimize bureaucratic hurdles that slow responsiveness (Forrester, 2000; Spreitzer, 1995; Spreitzer, 1996).

Previous research demonstrated that empowerment drives organizational effectiveness, and practitioners and researchers alike believe it warrants further inquiry (Kanter, 1989; Spreitzer, 1995; Spreitzer, 1996; Thomas & Velthouse, 1990). One approach roots empowerment in the organizational context and defines it as “a practice, or set of practices involving the delegation of responsibility down the hierarchy so as to give employees increased decision-making authority in respect to the execution of their primary work tasks” (Leach, Wall, & Jackson, 2003, p. 28).

In the recent context of Lebanese private universities, empowerment is related to an increase in managerial responsibilities. With limited financial and human resources, Faculty members in Lebanese private universities are asked to take part of committees' activities and share some managerial responsibilities related to events management, communication, international affairs, etc. These additional responsibilities are rewarded through an additional compensation offered to the Faculty member. The impact of Faculty empowerment on quality of job performance will be examined in the empirical part of this study.

Based on the above literature review we address the following hypothesis:

Hypothesis 1: Empowering university academic human resources positively affects the quality of job performance.

Job insecurity

In a highly competitive environment with more than 50 private higher education institutions in Lebanon, universities tend to retain efficient academic human resources able to handle academic and managerial responsibilities. In the absence of legal framework for Faculty members operating in private institutions and a law for quality assurance, universities are counting a lot on part-timers who experience more job insecurity. According to scholars, job insecurity is an employee's perception that his or her job is uncertain and may come to an end sooner than expected. From what has been theorized and inferred, it is understandable that job insecurity is highly threatening to employees given the prospect of losing the positive material, social, and psychological benefits associated with employment (De Witte, 1999). The notion that job insecurity may produce negative effects among individuals is well established. Research in job insecurity across firms, industries, and countries has provided consistent evidence that job insecurity is associated with negative employee attitudes, behaviours, and

health (see meta-analytic evidence, Sverke, Hellgren, & Naswall, 2002). For example, performance effects include reduced effort (Brockner, Grover, Reed, & DeWitt, 1992), poor safety compliance by employees (Probst & Brubaker, 2001), reduced organizational citizenship behaviour (Feather & Rauter, 2004; King, 2000; Wong, Wong, Ngo, & Lui, 2005), and increased deviant behaviour (Lim, 1996). Despite this growth of evidence in literature, no research has linked individual-level effects to organizational-level effects even though it is intuitive that employee outcomes should be associated with organizational performance.

This logical connection is not surprising considering that it goes back to an earlier proposition of job insecurity theory (Greenhalgh, 1983, p. 433). This theory predicts that employee behaviour and attitude will decline as job insecurity increases. Specifically, employees will be less productive, resist change, and leave. These intermediate outcomes are hypothesized to affect organizational performance. Importantly, this nexus of effects also predicts a reciprocal effect. Employees who stay infer, on the basis of on-going organizational decline, that their own jobs are less secure. Research shows that non tenured employees behave less effectively than their tenured counterparts, but it is still unclear whether this behaviour is detrimental to institutional performance (Reisel, Chia, Maloles and Slocum, 2007). There is no evidence whether job insecurity has a positive or negative impact on job performance in Higher education institution in Lebanon.

Based on the above literature review we address the following hypothesis:

Hypothesis 2: Job insecurity negatively affects the quality of job performance.

Quality of Job Performance

The Quality of faculty job performance concerning academic resources is usually obtained through two sources of feedback: students and peers. Student feedback is mainly used to measure the quality of teaching whereas peers' feedback is used to measure overall job performance mainly academic and managerial.

Feedback from students was acknowledged by Chism (1999) as being an integral aspect of effective teacher evaluations. The extent to which student feedback is used in the assessment of job performance was acknowledged by Cashin (1999) when he made reference to a US Department of Education survey (1991) of over 40,000 department chairs. The analysis revealed that 97% of the chairs used "student evaluations" to assess job performance. He adroitly acknowledged, however, that "there is almost universal agreement that data from a variety of sources, not just

student ratings, are required to accurately evaluate teaching”. Centra (1993) underscores further this point. He contends that “student evaluations represent only one source of information: student opinion”. Feedback from deans mainly from peers or chairpersons who are the direct supervisors of instructors within the faculties is also a necessary instrument in evaluations. It assesses the quality of the educational skills, research achievements, administrative activities, punctuality, availability and attitude of faculty members. Accordingly, we can realize that the assessment by students cannot cover all these points deeply observed by the deans all over the year.

Methodology and measurement

In order to assess the relationship between the empowerment of the Academic Human Resources and the quality of job performance, we used secondary data from the HR database of one of the largest private universities in Lebanon. The selected sample consists of data from 136 faculty members. Only one university is considered in the sample since it is difficult to access these types of confidential informations from other universities.

Quality of job performance is measured through the feedback questionnaire collected from students at the end of every semester. The questionnaire consists of 15 questions, on a 1 to 4 scale, to assess four concepts in each course (see appendix 1):

- organization of teaching
- educational skills
- learning evaluation
- general assessment

Cronbach alpha was conducted on the four dimensions of the questionnaire to see whether these dimensions can be considered a measurement of a one concept Job Performance. As per the below Table 1, the Cronbach alpha result is superior to 0.95 which indicates a strong internal validity for the measurement of job performance.

Table 1 - Reliability analysis for student’s feedback questionnaire

Case Processing Summary

		N	%
	Valid	113	41.2
Cases	Excluded ^a	161	58.8
	Total	274	100.0

Reliability Statistics

Cronbach's Alpha	N of Items
.957	4

The second level of measurement of quality of job performance is the assessment done by deans based on a peer review process. The faculty deans were asked to complete questionnaires for each instructor in their faculties. The questionnaire consists of 22 items that evaluate four areas on a 1 to 4 scale (see appendix 2):

- quality of educational skills
- research achievements
- administrative activities
- punctuality, availability and attitude

We excluded research from the job performance measurement since our main focus is teaching and learning and service provided to the university community. And this validated with a weak alpha de Cronbach obtained for the four dimensions when research is included. As per table 2, the results of Cronbach alpha for the three remaining dimensions of the questionnaire is encouraging equal to 0.79. This supposes that the three dimensions can be considered as a measurement of one concept in our case job performance as perceived by senior peers.

Table 2 - Reliability analysis for peers' evaluation

Case Processing Summary

		N	%
Cases	Valid	105	99.1
	Excluded ^a	1	.9
	Total	106	100.0

Reliability Statistics

Cronbach's Alpha	N of Items
.790	3

The degree of academic human resources empowerment is measured indirectly by the additional academic or managerial responsibilities such as dean; head of department; course coordinator; director of a unit, etc. According to this criterion academic human resources in the sample were divided into two categories with or without additional managerial mission and responsibilities. The degree of job insecurity is measured by two

variables: full time or part time status through contract duration that can be one year for newly appointed faculty, or three years and above for tenured faculty. T-test is than conducted to check whether there is a significant difference in job performance related to empowerment and job insecurity.

Results: Empowerment vs. Job performance

We used the T-test to assess the relationship between empowerment and job performance, comparing the job performance of faculty with and without managerial mission and responsibilities. Results in below tables 3 and 4 show that there is no significant difference in student perception of quality of job performance between faculty with managerial responsibilities and faculty without managerial mission and responsibilities.

Table 3 - Group statistics for the peers and students evaluation with and without managerial mission

Group Statistics					
	mission	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
Deans	With	58	92.8093	8.41686	1.10519
	Without	45	88.3721	9.63378	1.43612
Students	With	77	89.7662	8.06963	.91962
	Without	52	88.4635	9.36487	1.29867

Table 4 – Independent Samples Test of the peers and students evaluation with and without managerial mission

Independent Samples Test										
	Levene's Test for Equality of Variances		t-test for Equality of Means							
	F	Sig.	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Difference	Std. Error Difference	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference		
								Lower	Upper	
Deans	Equal variances assumed	1.754	.188	2.491	101	.014	4.43712	1.78140	.90330	7.97093
	Equal variances not assumed			2.449	87.782	.016	4.43712	1.81215	.83573	8.03850

students	Equal variances assumed	1.012	.316	.843	127	.401	1.30277	1.54601	-1.75650	4.36205
	Equal variances not assumed			.819	98.372	.415	1.30277	1.59131	-1.85497	4.46052

This suggests that additional responsibilities have no negative impact on the quality of teaching and learning as perceived by students. As for the deans perception of faculty performance it shows a significant difference with a positive relationship between added responsibilities and job performance. It can be assumed that empowerment is positively linked to quality of job performance as perceived by peers only. This can be explained by the potential higher commitment that empowered faculty members may have compared to less empowered ones with additional managerial responsibilities. Our results give a partial support to the Hypothesis 1 assuming a positive relationship between empowerment and quality of job performance. The results are compatible with the conclusions of Trow 1994a, Henkel and Kogan, 1996, Ylijoki, 2003 and Bryson, 2004). The positive attributes of empowerment as supported by management theories (Forrester, 2000; Spreitzer, 1995; Spreitzer, 1996) seems to be supported by evidence on academic human resources. Higher education institutions can benefit from the advantages of empowerment without negative effect on teaching and learning quality.

Results: Job insecurity vs. Job performance

Job insecurity is assumed according to hypothesis 2 to be negatively linked to quality of job performance. The T-test results obtained from students' feedback support this argument. The quality of job performance for full time faculty is higher according to students' perception (see below tables 5 and 6). On the other side no significant differences in job performance can be observed from senior peers (deans) feedback. Results support hypothesis 2 especially when it comes to the students' perception of the quality of job performance. The students' perception of the quality of job performance is significantly higher for faculty with long term contracts. This is a significant support for the managerial theory that job insecurity is associated with negative employees' attitudes and behaviours. Job insecurity may limit the faculty investment in teaching and learning quality since his or her focus can be invested in his or her main professional activities.

Table 5 - Group statistics for the peers and students evaluation according to their contract type

Group Statistics					
Contract		N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
Deans	Part-Time	24	90.7242	10.08039	2.05765
	Full-Time	79	90.9152	8.97490	1.00975
students	Part-Time	33	80.8030	23.25922	4.04891
	Full-Time	99	89.3495	11.82520	1.18848

Table 6 - Independent Samples Test of the peers and students evaluation according to their contract type

		Levene's Test for Equality of Variances		t-test for Equality of Means						
		F	Sig.	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Difference	Std. Error Difference	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference	
								Lower	Upper	
Deans	Equal variances assumed	.001	.979	-.089	101	.929	-.19100	2.15323	-4.46244	4.08043
	Equal variances not assumed			-.083	34.816	.934	-.19100	2.29206	-4.84501	4.46300
students	Equal variances assumed	9.613	.002	-2.753	130	.007	-8.54646	3.10478	14.68890	-2.40403
	Equal variances not assumed			-2.025	37.661	.050	-8.54646	4.21973	17.09140	-.00153

Conclusion

Perhaps the most striking insight that can be drawn from this research concerns shedding the light on the impact of some aspects of *managerialism*, that is combined with new orientation of managerial practices in Higher Education Institutions, and quality of job performance of academic human resources. According to the obtained findings, theories supporting the

positive relationship between employees' empowerment and quality of job performance seem to be also suitable for academic human resources management. We can easily confirm from results obtained in this study, that giving managerial responsibilities to academic human resources does not influence negatively the quality of teaching and learning as perceived by students on the opposite side it suggest a positive impact as observed by senior peers. This will also mean that additional compensation may influence academic human resources motivation and the quality of job performance. HEI can therefore be encouraged to take advantage of empowering academic human resources opposing to some traditional thoughts that faculty members should be only dedicated to teaching and research.

The results also show that Job security influences positively the quality of job performance (teaching and learning) as perceived by students. Higher Education Institutions are recommended to promote job security for their Faculty to promote more organisational commitment to teaching and learning. Faculty empowerment combined with job security may have positive impact on job performance.

In the future, further research can provide additional contribution to the understanding of the determinants of quality of job performance of academic human resources and support of teaching and learning quality through managerial actions. This area of research provides additional understanding of the managerial theory and the managerial practices in Higher Education Institutions. We invite also researchers that could have access to universities internal human resources data to combine their efforts in multiplying results that can explain better the relationship between Human Resources practices and Job performance.

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Appendix 1: Criteria for Evaluation of Teaching by Students

1. Organization of teaching
 - In general, the course plan has been respected
 - The teacher is available to answer any questions
 - The time scheduled for this course has been respected
 - The educational methods are well adapted
2. Educational skills
 - The course is well structured
 - The course is clear
 - The teacher knows how to maintain a favourable environment for the course
 - The teacher shows interest in his course
 - The teacher masters his course
 - The teaching of this course is stimulating
3. Learning evaluation
 - The exam questions are clear
 - The correction criteria are clear
 - The comments made help students progress
4. General assessment
 - I am satisfied with this course
 - I recommend this teacher to others

Rating scale:

- 5=Total agreement;
- 4=More or less agreement;
- 2= More or less disagreement;
- 1= Total disagreement;
- N/A=Not applicable.

Appendix 2: Criteria for Evaluation of Teaching by Peers

1. Quality of educational skills
 - Awareness of discipline and academic rules
 - Awareness of pedagogical methods
 - Relevant student's evaluation methods
 - Teaching language skills
 - Respect of syllabus
 - Achievement of the course objectives
 - Students satisfaction
2. Research achievements
 - Number of publications
 - Participation to research activities
 - Quality of conducted researches
3. Administrative activities
 - Awareness of university rules and procedures
 - Respect of university rules and procedures
 - Participation to activities
 - Office attendance
 - Meetings attendance
4. Punctuality, availability and attitude
 - Punctuality
 - Availability
 - Attitude towards students
 - Attitude towards administrative staff
 - Attitude towards colleagues
 - Team spirit
 - University belonging spirit

Rating scale:

4=Very satisfactory;

3=Satisfactory;

2=Unsatisfactory;

1= Very unsatisfactory; /A=Not applicable.