

## **An Assessment on Effectiveness of Human Resources Management Measures on Engagement at Work and Obtaining Competitive Advantage in Social Security Organization (Case Study, Social Security Branches in the Cities Nikshahr, Chabahar, Kenarak and Iranshahr)**

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**Abstract:** The organizations aim to improve their organizational performance and reach the competitive levers in order to achieve their missions and visions. In doing so such intangible capitals as human resources can be of high importance. Engagement at work and lack of indifference in the workplace will provide the conditions for organizational performance improvement. The present study aims to assess effectiveness of human resources management measures on engagement at work and obtaining competitive advantage. In terms of objective and nature, present work is an applied and descriptive-survey research, respectively. The statistical universe includes employees and managers of Social Security Organization in the cities Nikshahr, Kenarak, Chabahar and Iranshahr with a size of 100 persons all of whom were participated into the research using Census method. Also, a questionnaire was used to collect data whose reliability and validity were approved. The collected data was analyzed through the software Smart PLS. The results indicated effectiveness of human resources management measures on human resources' engagement in the workplace. Besides, human resources management measures provides the conditions for obtaining competitive advantage in the organization. Ultimately, the results demonstrated that human resources' engagement at work allows for obtaining competitive advantage in the organizations.

**Key words:** Human resources management measures, competitive advantage, engagement at work, organizational performance, social security organization

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### **INTRODUCTION**

Nowadays, human capital is known as a key and valuable capital which brings up the base for sustainable growth and lasting competitive advantage preservation for an organization. The organizations in complicated environments are involved with several effective factors on human and organizational resources performance. This has caused plenty of rises and falls for organizational performance (Chen and Huang, 2009; Jackson *et al.*, 2014). With increased such factors and environmental variations, the organizations have taken some distance from their traditional resources and try to employ the intangible organizational resources such as knowledge and the capitals associated with human resources (Hsiao *et al.*, 2011; Lopez-Nicolas and Merono-Cerdan, 2011; Rasula *et al.*, 2012). These new resources have led to major changes in organizational structures (Sanchez *et al.*, 2015). Such an issue that the

organizations need to pay increasing attention for their human resources and care about management of this kind of capital has been discussed considerably and all scholars believe in case of unsuitable status for human capitals, other capital will face with loss of performance, as well (Liao, 2011; Chuang *et al.*, 2016). Therefore, the organizations have reached such a perception that use of intangible assets leads to make a kind of stability in performance for an environment with high variations (Choei and Lee, 2012). Current organizations often look for the ways through which the employees are forced to pay more efforts and endeavors and actually they intend to make their employees more engaged at work (Welbourne, 2007). Engagement at work is a concept which has recently been addressed in organizational debates and its evolution does not last for more than two decades. The employees engaged at work are usually energetic and active, make a positive relation with their work and try to carry out the work effectively (Koyuncu *et al.*, 2006). The

studies show that employees' engagement at work has a considerable impact on profitability and productivity of the organizations (Harter *et al.*, 2002). One of the most important organizational factors which may affect engagement at work is the employees' perception about measures of human resources managers in improvement of occupational indicators in organizational environment. For instance, employees of social security organizations have no favorable attitude toward human resources and organizational managers' measures and have missed their trust in the organization and thereby an atmosphere of doubt and pessimism will be dominated in the organization, due to weakness in evaluation and meritocracy system. In this case, for the colleagues and organizational improvement, such an employee is not expected to try for sharing information and using organizational knowledge but he/she will remain silent as much as possible. In such cases where the organizations are not able to manage their intangible assets accurately, they will suffer from considerable performance loss. Therefore, in case of lack of specific strategies in human resources sector, the organizations will not be able acting in suitable way and they will face failure in achievement of the objectives and missions. This is the main issue in present study. Improper measures of human resources managers, failure to implement high performance work system and inability to make suitable organizational atmosphere provide the potentials for loss of human resources' engagement at work and their indifference at workplace that will result in decreased performance and weakness of social security organization to reach strategic objectives and competitive advantage. The main question here is that how much human resources management measures are effective on employees' engagement at work and achievement of competitive advantage?

### **Theoretical basics**

**Engagement at work:** The word "engagement" is translated in dictionaries as getting engaged for marriage, commitment, obligation, employment, recruitment and involvement. In social sciences literature, the root of this concept refers to the role theory and in particular works of Erving Goffman in this regard. He believes that the people in a society accept diverse roles and defines engagement at a role as a spontaneous attachment with the role and attention to considerable attempts for the role implementation (Mello *et al.*, 2008). One of the roles which is played in the society is that accepted in the organization and workplace. Kahn (1990) is the first person who used this concept in the workplaces. In his opinion, employees of an organization may be either engaged or not-engaged at a work role. He defines

engagement at work as a psychological status where the employee makes him/herself an obedient or subordinate under his work role in the organization (Kahn, 1990). In an engagement, the person physically, cognitively and emotionally employs his/her work role in the organization and introduces him/herself along with his/her role functioning. In Kahn's opinion, the person and the role have mutual interactions in such a way that the person employs his/her energy for the behaviors in the role (self-employment) and then expresses him/herself into the role (self-expression) (Langelaan *et al.*, 2006).

While the engagement makes the employees having spirit and audacity at work, non-engagement makes the employees to get separated from their role, show withdrawal and disruptive behaviors and resist against their work role (May *et al.*, 2004). Non-engaged employees withdraw to conduct their work role and retreat emotionally and cognitively. They do their works imperfectly and their behavior is free of necessary efforts and endeavors and thereby they will become lifeless human-like persons with hourly and involuntary movements (Luthans, F., Peterson, 2002).

Schaufeli *et al.* (2002) concluded that engagement has three fundamental aspects including: vigor (a high level of energy and mental tolerance while working and willingness for efforts and endeavors at work), dedication (deep attachment to a work and sense of importance, seriousness and challenges at work) and finally absorption (intense focus and employment along with satisfaction and happiness while working in such a way passing of time is quick and leaving the work is hard) (Fong and Ng, 2012; Schaufeli *et al.*, 2002).

**Management of human resources:** As mentioned above, human resources are strategically important due to providing the tools for organizational competitive status improvement as well as efficiency and effectiveness improvement through recruitment of unique human resources (Arthur, 1994). The way of preparation, formulation and selection of human resources measures is always a challenging issue (MacDuffie, 1995). The first ideas on human resources management have been based on contingency approach. According to this approach in human resources management, the organization must provide the best coordination between the general actions from one hand and human resources plans and strategies from another hand in order to reach higher level performance (Miles and Snow, 1984).

In human resources studies, there is a different classification for human resources measures. In present study, four main measures including recruitment, development training, services compensation and

performance appraisal are emphasized. Recruitment means attraction and selection of proper employees. Development Training refers to the planned organizational endeavors to accelerate learning knowledge, skills and the behaviors associated with the job for employees. Services compensation includes cash and non-cash rights and benefits influenced by the job specifications and also workplace conditions and considered for employees' work. Performance Appraisal also means identification, observation, measurement and improvement of human resources performance in and organization (Seyed *et al.*, 2011).

Most recently, some human resources measures are proposed to enhance organizational effectiveness but they are often limited with no theoretical base. Two theoretical bases are paid into attention in most of scientific books and papers: the first is Lauer's Model which recognizes four processes (i.e., empowering, competency development, information sharing, and procedural justice) effective on occupational attitudes and behaviors. Empowering addresses increased authority or decision making power for employees. Competency development refers to such plans as occupational flow, teacher-student relationship and training which makes the employees to feel they are considered as a competitive advantage and the organization tries to have a long-term relationship to them. Information sharing means awareness of employees from the environment and areas they are working in and procedural justice refers to fairness of current procedures in decision making for services compensation (Chew and Chan, 2008).

Second, High Performance Work System (HPWS) proposed by Billy who argues that the employees apply for a reaction only when they have the opportunity for contribution. Kahrir believes that a perfect HR strategy with the objective to enhance positive behaviors and attitudes for employees should follow three conditions (Bailey, 2013; Chen and Huang, 2009) as follows:

- The employees should be provided by incentives (rewards and recognition) to be motivated conducting satisfactory behavior and attitudes
- The employees should gain necessary skills to make their efforts meaningful
- The employees should find necessary opportunities to contribute in diverse levels (Chen and Huang, 2009)

Obviously, if the measures lead to improve organizational justice, enhance meritocracy and increase organizational atmosphere, they can prepare the human resources for work and business process and thereby

increase engagement at work. This issue definitely results in enhance efficiency and productivity of human resources in the organization. According to what mentioned above, the first hypothesis is concluded:

- Hypothesis 1: Human Resources measures are effective on employees' engagement at work

**Competitive advantage:** For an industrial company, the success key is not only relying on one resource to gain competitive advantage, but the best and the most successful companies are aware that they should see the competitive advantage from additional angles and utilize all kinds of resources for competitive advantage creation (Stalk, 1998). In doing so, according to the resource-oriented and Barney's model, the resources should have at least four specifications including valuable, rare, non-imitable and irreplaceable as well as organizational capability and operability (Dobni and Luffman, 2000). One of the most important ways of gaining sustainable competitive advantage is to employ key resources. The key resources are also classified into two groups including assets (tangible and intangible) and capabilities with the features valuable, rare, non-imitable and irreplaceable as well as organizational capability and operability. It is noteworthy to mention that tangible assets are in financial services industries including land, building, equipment and employees (Clulow *et al.*, 2003). Although, these assets are of competitive advantages, they cannot be considered as sustainable competitive advantages because although very skillful employees provide a high potential for gaining competitive advantage in service-oriented organizations, these employees may be hired by the competitors. As a result, they are merely known as competitive advantage in short-term not long-term and as sustainable competitive advantage, land, building and equipment, despite being valuable can be duplicated and imitated by the competitors and hence they are not of sustainable competitive advantage. Therefore, our conceptual model focuses on intangible assets and the capabilities which follow the Barney's desired conditions in resource-oriented model. Intangible assets may include human resources' commitment, human resources' loyalty, customer's trust, reputation and credit, intellectual creations, databases and complicated and valuable networks (Clulow *et al.*, 2003). Accordingly, these resources may serve as barriers to copy and imitate other assets and thereby they are non-imitable, irreplaceable, valuable and rare with the capabilities team knowledge, organizational culture, organizational history, learning, managerial skills and so on. In addition, competitive

advantage is one of the presentable values of a company in such a way that such values are higher than customer's costs (Lopez *et al.*, 2010). The competitive advantage is actually the increasing attractiveness of the company's offers compared to competitors in customers' opinion. The competitive advantage includes factors or abilities which permanently enable the company to show a performance better than that of competitors (Baker and Sinkula, 2002). Therefore, in order to achieve competitive advantage, an organization should pay attention to its both external positions and internal abilities (Arias *et al.*, 2001; Faraj *et al.*, 2015).

Ultimately, it can be argued that engagement at work means improvement of loyalty and commitment level of human resources towards the organization and work processes. The more endeavors of human resources to reach higher performance level, the higher potentials for gaining competitive advantage in the organization. Besides, increased employees' engagement requires increased attention to the issue HR managers' measures. As a result, HR managers' measures can have the necessary potentials to gain competitive advantage, as well. According to above mentioned details, the hypotheses 2 and 3 are stated as follows:

- Hypothesis 2: Human Resources Management measures are effective on gaining competitive advantage
- Hypothesis 3: Engagement at work is effective on gaining competitive advantage

**MATERIALS AND METHODS**

In terms of orientation and research strategy, the present study is recognized as evaluation and survey research, respectively which tries to test hypotheses and the questionnaire is used for this purpose (Sarmad, 2012).

According to the theoretical framework and addressed hypotheses, the conceptual model is drawn as Fig. 1.

In present study, structural equations model was used with partial least squares to test the hypothesis and the software packages SPSS and Smart PLS were used for this purpose. This research was conducted among employees of Social Security Organization in three cities including Chabahar, Kenarak and Iranshahr. Given the statistical universe size of 100 individuals in present study and accessibility of the members of this society, all participants in this study were invited to have contribution that indicates use of census sampling

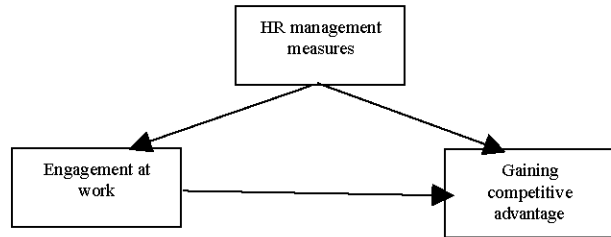


Fig. 1: Conceptual Model

Table 1: Structure of the questionnaire

Variables	Number of items	Cronbach's alpha coefficient
Engagement at work	8 items (1-8)	0.762
HR management measures	11 items (9-19)	0.813
Gaining competitive advantage	8 items (20-27)	0.804

method here. A standard questionnaire was used for required data collection that is approved by HR and organizational behavior experts in terms of validity. Besides, prior to final distribution, a number of 20 questionnaires were distributed among the members of statistical universe and then reliability of the questionnaire was approved following collection and use of K-S test. The questionnaire structure and its resources are presented in Table 1.

**RESULTS AND DISCUSSION**

**Descriptive statistics:** Present section tries to take a glance on demographic characteristics of the study. Regarding participants' age, the highest size was belonged to the people in the range 36-45 years old with a frequency of 76 individuals (76%), then range of 25-35 years old with a frequency of 20 individuals (20%) and age of over 45 years old with a frequency of 4 participants (4%), while no participant was found with an age under 25. Regarding the second demographic question which questions on gender, the highest number of employees was found for males while the universe size was composed of 67 men and 33 women, indicating higher contribution of males in present study. The third demographic characteristic is about educational status of participants. In this research, among a total number of 100 individuals, 69 ones held BS (Bachelor of Science) degree, 28 ones held master degree and 3 ones held degrees lower than associate degree, indicating BS degree as the major degree among participants. The last demographic characteristic is associated with work experience. In this regard, the highest frequency was composed by those having a work experience of 8-15 years (49 individuals, namely 49%) and those with 16-21 years of work experience (37 individuals, namely 37%) and participants

Table 2: Reliability and validity of the measurement model

Variables	Factor loading	t-value statistics	Convergent validity	Composite reliability	Cronbach's alpha
Competitive advantage	0.527-0.866	6.501-36.207	0.539	0.900	0.871
Engagement at work	0.770-0.895	13.934-41.227	0.640	0.934	0.919
HR management measures	0.692-0.870	30.546-62.364	0.718	0.965	0.960

Table 3: Fitness of the structural model

Variables	Coefficient of determination	c.v Red	c.v Com
Competitive advantage	0.615	0.229	0.634
Engagement at work	0.579	0.152	0.563
HR management measures	-	0.717	0.717

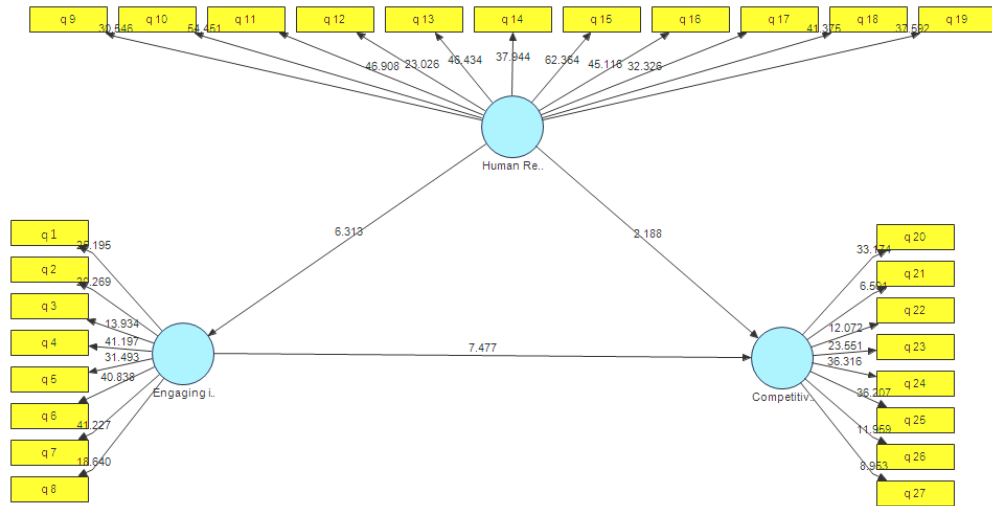


Fig. 2: Partial least squares model in significance factors mode

with under 7 years of work experience (11 individuals, 11%) were in second and third ranks of work experience. Ultimately, 3 individuals had a work experience of over 21 years.

**Inferential statistics:** The structural equation modeling was used along with partial least squares approach to test hypotheses. However, before interpretation of the model, suitability of the model should be approved in three sections including measurement model, structural model and general model to have reliable results, proving reliability and validity of the model. For this purpose, the indices Cronbach' alpha, composite reliability and convergent validity were used for measurement model which is presented in Table 2.

The results of Table 2 indicate that reliability and validity of the measurement model are in a suitable level because the factor loading of each question was not lower than 0.4 and the lowest value was 0.527 in the aspect competitive advantage. Besides, the t-value statistics were not lower than 1.96 while the lowest value was obtained for one of the questions of employees' engagement at work as many as 13.934. Furthermore,

regarding Cronbach's alpha, every aspect was >0.7 while composite reliability and convergent validity were reported >0.6 and >0.5, respectively, indicating validity and reliability of the measurement model.

Following approval of the measurement model suitability, reliability of the structural model should be pointed out for which two indicators including "c.v Red" and "c.v Com" were used and shown in Table 3.

Finally, fitness of the general model is pointed out, as well. In the models based on partial least squares, Goodness of Fit (GOF) indicator is used which should be >0.3. This indicator is calculated for present model as follows, indicating suitability of the general model:

$$GOF = \sqrt{\text{Communalities} \times R^2} = 0.522$$

Now, following approval of the model fitness in three levels, the structural equations model made by the software Smart PLS is presented and the research hypotheses are investigated (Fig. 2).

As it can be seen in Fig. 2 and 3, in significance factors mode the reported statistics is t-value which in

Table 4: Summary of the research results in partial least squares model

Hypothesis	Variables		Path coefficient (β)	t-values	Results
	Independent	Dependent			
1	HR management measures	Engagement at work	0.387	6.313	Confirmed
2	HR management measures	Competitive advantage	0.152	2.188	Confirmed
3	Engagement at work	Competitive advantage	0.452	7.477	Confirmed

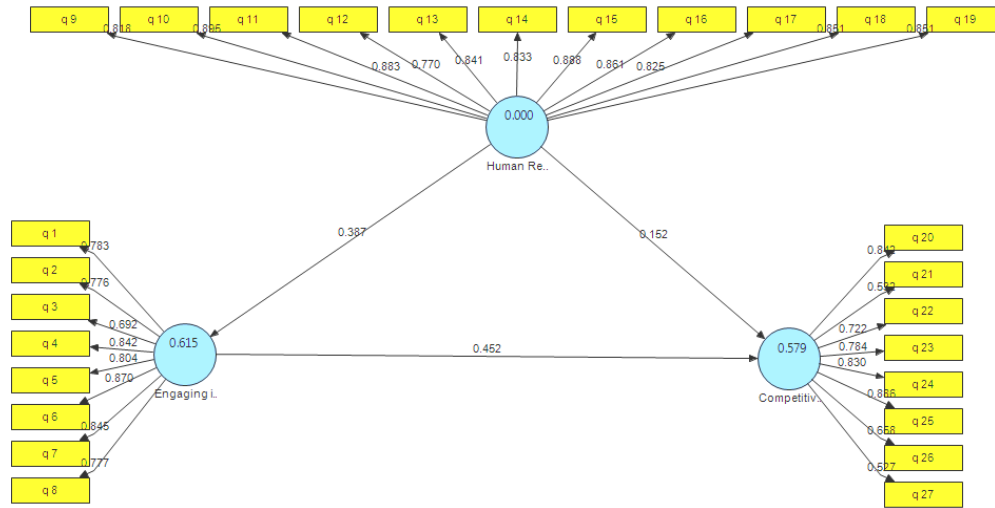


Fig. 3: Partial least squares model in standard mode

case of being >1.96, the hypothesis is approved. Also, in the partial least squares model, the reported values indicate the path coefficient which shows impact of variables on each other. The main hypotheses are briefly studied in Table 4.

According to outputs of the partial least squares model, the three hypotheses are argued to be confirmed. This means that HR management measures are effective on employees' engagement at work and gaining competitive advantage. Besides, employees' engagement at work is effective on gaining competitive advantage.

**CONCLUSION**

Increased complexity surrounding the organizations leads to occur some changes in business environment, indicating organizations' need to look for new ways in order to survive and enhance their performance. Suitable functioning is important due to reach competitive advantage level. In organizational areas where diverse factors are effective on the performance and functioning, those organizations can guarantee their survival which provide a suitable level of performance for activities in diverse areas and also allow for their positive improvement in competitive markets through gaining competitive advantage. Lots of taken actions to improve performance and gain competitive advantage can be

quickly imitated by the competitors and the competitive advantage may be missed in a short time. Tangible organizational capitals which provide the conditions for the competitive advantage are of those factors which are quickly imitated by the competitors, therefore the companies which are looking for the competitive advantage will employ intangible assets and capitals. The most important intangible capital in an organization is human resources. Human resources are known as a wheel drive for the organizations since they can provide a suitable level of performance and competitive advantage for the companies by organizational measures and innovations. Suitable measures of human resources management in this regard can have positive effects on increased employees' engagement at work in the organizations. Unfair measures and inattention to the decisions made in this section occasionally lead to increase indifference and lack of commitment of human capital and thereby they will provide the conditions for decreased performance level from one hand and inability of Social Security Organization to reach its organizational objectives and visions. The results of present study indicate effectiveness of HR management measures on employees' engagement at work because the value of t-statistics in this hypothesis is 6.313 which is greater than absolute value of 1.96 therefore this hypothesis is argued to be confirmed. Besides, effectiveness in this

hypothesis is 0.387 which indicates direct and positive effectiveness. HR management measures should be along increased transparency in organizational decisions from one hand and improvement of workplace atmosphere in the organization so that indifference to work processes can be prevented and thereby people could do their organizational activities with higher willingness. Besides, the results indicate that HR management measures are also an effective factor on gaining competitive advantage because the t-statistics in this hypothesis is 2.188 with an effectiveness of 0.152, indicating confirmation of above hypothesis. In fact, as mentioned in theoretical basics, attention to HR management measures (as a strategic part to incite human resources) can provide the conditions for employees' performance and productivity improvement and allow to enhance competitive advantage for managers of Social Security Organization. Finally, the last hypothesis deals with effectiveness of engagement at work on gaining competitive advantage. The results indicated that the t-statistics is 7.477 with a path intensity of 0.452, indicating confirmation of above hypothesis. This proves the important role of intangible capital (e.g., human capitals) due to its non-imitability on performance distinction inside the organization and gaining long-term competitive advantages. Therefore, managers of Social Security Organization managers are proposed to employ High Performance Work Systems from one hand and systems of meritocracy from another hand to improve engagement and increase human resources' commitment.

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