



Ways to activate and improve job empowerment among academic leader's in Iraqi universities

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Abstract

The study aimed to explore strategies for enhancing and augmenting job empowerment levels among academic leaders in Jordanian universities. The research followed a qualitative approach, wherein the researcher conducted interviews with 15 academic career leaders from this group. These strategies encompassed several aspects:

1. Facilitating administrative communication to bridge the gap between university administration and academic leadership while accommodating individual desires, needs, and preferences.
2. Leveraging modern tools and methods for job empowerment.
3. Empowering self-management through the formation of a dedicated team to make informed decisions.
4. Fostering a positive work environment to enhance personal and professional equilibrium.
5. Actively seeking and implementing feedback mechanisms, a critical requirement for Jordanian universities.

The interview results produced seven recommendations to activate and enhance empowerment among academic leaders:

1. Introducing university academic leaders to pertinent laws and regulations while providing training for their effective implementation.
2. Conducting regular assessments of the empowerment experience to identify shortcomings and communicate them to staff.
3. Acknowledging and celebrating the successes of employees.

Keywords:

job empowerment, academic leaders, Iraqi universities, strategies, qualitative approach, administrative communication, modern tools, self-management, positive work environment, feedback mechanisms, recommendations, laws and regulations, training, assessments, employee successes.



Introduction

The new millennium has witnessed numerous cognitive challenges and rapid changes. Achieving a competitive edge for institutions in the era of globalization and openness has become a highly valued goal. This has led to the emergence of various modern management approaches aimed at achieving functional excellence and competitiveness in educational institutions. These institutions must be capable of addressing challenges effectively by strategically investing in human capital, empowering employees by leveraging their skills and capabilities, and granting them the necessary authority to manage tasks efficiently and cost-effectively. This approach helps achieve educational objectives in light of contemporary developments.

Universities have consistently played a vital role in the field of education across different eras. They work on enhancing and developing leadership and management methodologies, introducing suitable and innovative changes, and engaging employees in effecting collective change. This ensures ongoing improvement and adaptation to the ever-evolving challenges and developments, facilitating the growth of employees on all fronts, including mental, physical, psychological, and social aspects. It also fosters a collaborative spirit within universities, allowing them to meet societal requirements and address the needs of the labor market.

In the present day, organizations worldwide manage various institutions, achieving goals across different economic, educational, and social domains. This is accomplished by relying on the knowledge capital's distinctive advantages, which are essential for achieving optimal results, maintaining competitive excellence, and ensuring an institution's sustainability and progress. Institutions benefit from scientific progress and technological advancements. Educational institutions strive to introduce functional empowerment within their administrative structures and prepare their individuals adequately to attain the desired outcomes.

Functional empowerment is one of the key factors contributing to the effectiveness of universities, along with other factors like morale and strengthening personal relationships among employees, and enhancing productivity. Therefore, leaders must learn how to connect with their employees. This is achieved by working on the development of their communication skills to establish an effective and positive connection with those working with them, ultimately leading to the empowerment of educators.

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Functional empowerment in universities plays a significant role in supporting the necessary administrative development processes to enhance employees' performance. However, this can be affected by a decline in the improvement rates or fluctuations due to leaders not giving adequate attention to functional empowerment within their institutions. Consequently, focusing on leaders and empowering them has an impact on the prevailing skills in their work environment. Experienced leaders should participate in solving issues related to the educational process, contributing to decision-making, providing them with a sense of status, and influencing others. Furthermore, focusing on leaders' professional growth helps enhance communication and productivity.

In the context of Jordanian universities, modern trends have been observed, and educational concepts have been adopted in the field of management. It's no doubt that functional empowerment is one of the essential management concepts that can solve most of the administrative dilemmas faced by

academic leaders in universities. Therefore, this current study aims to shed light on the availability of functional empowerment among academic leaders in Jordanian universities from their perspective.

Empowerment is defined by Hamoud (2010) as the environment where employees have the capacity and ability to assume responsibility for developing and improving essential functions to satisfy consumer needs. This is achieved through clear relationships and results in order to benefit the organization's objectives.

Al-Harashseh and Al-Hetie (2006) define functional empowerment as a way to increase employees' internal work motivation by engaging them in their work. It's a process practiced by management, involving taking initiatives that positively affect individuals' work nature and motivation.

The researcher concludes that functional empowerment involves giving employees the authority to make work-related decisions directly connected to their tasks. This reflects on the quality and effectiveness of decisions, enhances employees' confidence, their commitment to the organization, and contributes to improving the relationship between employees and the organization. Employees are granted the authority to solve problems and execute solutions they decide on without referring to higher authorities.

The modern administrative empowerment methods include leadership style, individual empowerment, team empowerment, and total quality management. Leadership style focuses on delegating authority from top to bottom, individual empowerment emphasizes self-empowerment, team empowerment focuses on group work, and total quality management revolves around continuous improvement in all aspects of the organization.

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Multidimensional Empowerment Approach: This approach combines the previous methods.

Past (2009) identified types of empowerment, including participation empowerment, integration empowerment, commitment empowerment, empowerment through reducing managerial levels. These types are achieved through multiple steps, which can be summarized as follows:

1. Assessing others' capabilities to ensure their tasks align with their abilities for success.
2. Providing a practical model that demonstrates how to perform the responsibilities. A practical example helps employees quickly and effectively empowers them in their work.
3. Expecting success and fostering hope by fully believing in the capabilities of others. Disclosing expectations and assisting in achieving goals will increase the effectiveness of employee empowerment and improve their skills and abilities.
4. Delegating authorities with tasks and using feedback if one of the leader's assistants can effectively carry out their responsibilities. This is the path to developing leaders' independence, with the ultimate goal of autonomy in decision-making.

Aldwani (2008) emphasizes the importance of functional empowerment in improving service quality, ensuring the organization's efficiency, direct communication, and trust among employees, utilizing their guidance and opinions on the level of service quality provided. It also includes enhancing communication effectiveness and establishing a strong, sustainable relationship between the

organization and other institutions, expediting task completion and answering questions due to the absence of bureaucracy. Furthermore, it improves employees' motivation and commitment to work, fosters community participation in functional empowerment development activities, supports development and improvement activities, contributes to the institution's annual report writing, and continually participates in the institution's self-evaluation activities, including making critical decisions.

Gibson (2006) has identified several goals for functional empowerment, including:

1. Providing academic leaders with information and skills related to their job tasks to enhance their performance and accomplish their tasks in less time and with less effort and cost.
2. Changing behaviors, concepts, attitudes, and skills to efficiently and effectively accomplish administrative tasks and improve academic leader's administrative and functional performance.
3. Enhancing the quality of educational outcomes by developing the academic leader's administrative performance and functional empowerment.

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4. Developing administrative performance skills for academic leaders to enable them to achieve the institution's educational vision and mission fairly and honestly.
5. Ensuring good organizational relationships among human elements within institutions and supervising the implementation of current and future educational projects.
6. Enhancing the performance levels of leaders by identifying weaknesses, acquiring skills, and participating in activities while continuously working to improve through feedback processes.

Aldwani (2008) identifies the foundations of successful functional empowerment in higher education institutions as follows:

- **Clarity of the institution's goals:** Defining and explaining objectives within higher education institutions is a priority for leaders to prepare their plans, outline execution methods, and suggest appropriate solutions or alternatives.
- **Scientific approach:** This involves collecting data and information, conducting research and studies on functional empowerment within higher education institutions. This ensures the safety of the functional empowerment process.
- **Previous experiences:** This means making use of others' experiences and previous successful outcomes in similar projects, relying on the results of previous successful functional empowerment within higher education institutions.
- **Collaboration:** This is achieved by providing opportunities for each person within the work environment to contribute according to their abilities and potentials. This extends to evaluation and monitoring, and this basis ensures the pooling of efforts and constructive cooperation in achieving goals.
- **Prediction:** The rapid changes in the world necessitate thinking about the future in light of prevailing indicators so that leaders can form a mental picture of tomorrow's society.
- **Continuation:** Functional empowerment is an ongoing process. An individual rarely completes their job tasks and achieves their goals before starting a new plan.

- **Evolution:** During execution, one may notice that some of the current methods fall short, or that other more suitable methods are emerging. As long as these lead to successful functional empowerment, it is crucial to reconsider and opt for the best.
- **Feasibility of implementation:** In setting educational plans within higher education institutions, it is essential to consider the feasibility of implementation based on the available resources and the society's limited capabilities. Overly ambitious plans within a resource-constrained community may not achieve anything and might have adverse effects.

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Bogner (2006) points out that the most important obstacles to functional empowerment are:

1. **Personal Obstacles:** These are related to the individual themselves, whether they are the sender or receiver of empowerment, and they have a reverse effect due to individual differences that make people differ in their judgments about things. Some of the main personal obstacles include:
 - Variability in perception: Differences among individuals in their perception of different situations stem from their individual and environmental differences, leading to varying interpretations of things.
 - Negative attitudes: Negative attitudes of the sender towards themselves, the subject, or the future can include negative opinions towards empowerment.
2. **Organizational Obstacles:** The organizational structure of an institution illustrates the relationships between different functions, the flow of authority and responsibility, and the lines of communication among employees. A weak or nonexistent organizational structure poses a significant obstacle to functional empowerment. Key organizational obstacles include:
 - Lack of organizational structure, leading to unclear delineation of authorities and responsibilities.
 - Inefficiency of the organizational structure in terms of the management levels involved in communication, leading to information distortion or withholding and thus impairing the effectiveness of functional empowerment.
 - Shortcomings in the communication system's policy due to a lack of a clear policy expressing the management's intentions.
 - Overlapping of execution and consultation, which is a major cause of the longstanding animosity between them.
3. **Environmental Obstacles:** These obstacles result from the society in which the individual lives, whether inside or outside of work. Some of these environmental obstacles include:
 - Language and the problem of words and their connotations.
 - Geographic location, where the distance between decision-making centers and execution centers can make timely communication difficult.

The researcher concludes that educational leaders have a close connection with everything in the surrounding environment. Educational leaders need to have the ability to provide information, make decisions in various forms, and practice them correctly in educational institutions. Furthermore, they need to be capable of guiding efforts, interpreting goals, and achieving desired objectives. Therefore, leaders require effective tools to guide the work of the institutions they manage. One of these tools is functional empowerment.

After objectives are defined, policies formulated, and duties assigned, it is necessary to transfer and interpret these objectives and policies, issue orders, and provide guidance to subordinates in various positions. By maintaining a good democratic-based communication system, leaders can understand all activities taking place within educational institutions. This enables them to intervene in a timely manner to make the appropriate decisions to solve problems and remove obstacles to educational work.

For functional empowerment to yield the desired results, specific performance criteria must exist, which can be achieved. These criteria should be set clearly for all those involved in educational institutions. Practice of empowerment should be linked to predefined goals and associated with them. Through this, measuring progress or delay in achieving the goals and the necessity of compliance with standards as a tool to assist academic leaders in performance monitoring is achieved. Standards determine the extent of progress or delay in achieving the objectives that the leader seeks to achieve.

"Many studies have explored the topic of functional empowerment and have been organized in chronological order, from the oldest to the most recent. For example, Hung (2005) aimed to determine the impact of elementary school teachers' empowerment on job satisfaction in Taoyuan and the influence of demographic variables (age, educational qualification, school size). The study included a sample of 450 teachers in government schools in Taoyuan. The study found a statistically significant relationship between administrative empowerment and job satisfaction. However, it indicated no statistically significant relationship between dimensions of job satisfaction and administrative empowerment. The study also revealed that demographic variables had no effect on administrative empowerment.

Al-Otaibi (2007) conducted a study to identify the prevalent leadership style in public institutions, understand the perception of managers regarding the concept of administrative empowerment, and recognize the obstacles preventing the application of administrative empowerment from the viewpoint of administrative leaders. The study included all working directors, their deputies, assistants, department heads, totaling 491 directors. The study found a statistically significant relationship between leadership styles and administrative empowerment.

Al-Jamili (2008) conducted a study to identify leadership styles and their relationship with levels of empowerment from the perspective of employees of the Shura Council. The study had a sample of 173 participants from the study's population. The study found a statistically significant relationship between administrative leadership styles and levels of empowerment. Some of the main obstacles to empowerment in the organization were found to be the limited effectiveness of monetary incentive systems, limited delegation of authorities to managers, a lack of contribution from the work environment in solving employees' problems, and failure to provide employees with opportunities to participate in decision-making.

Al-Bashabsheh (2008) conducted a study to explore the impact of administrative empowerment in enhancing organizational creativity among employees in the Aqaba Special Economic Zone. The study included 385 participants out of a population of 1022. The study revealed a significant and statistically meaningful impact of administrative empowerment on organizational creativity, emphasizing the importance of nurturing and encouraging creative individuals and their contributions to fostering creativity. Employees were encouraged to take ownership of their work and act as if the

organization belongs to them. Furthermore, the study indicated that enabling employees to take responsibility for the results and empowering them to act in crisis situations were vital.

Al-Qadi (2009) conducted a study to assess the perceptions of academic leaders in Iraqi universities regarding the levels and dimensions of administrative empowerment and the relationship between training and the dimensions of administrative empowerment. The sample included 340 academic leaders from six universities in the northern region. The study found that the administrative empowerment levels for the study sample were moderate in all areas of administrative empowerment, and the results indicated centralization in administrative work.

Al-Matruch (2010) conducted a study to determine the impact of organizational justice on administrative empowerment from the perspective of employees of the General Secretariat of the Supreme Council for Planning and Development in Kuwait. The study also aimed to identify the impact of demographic and job-related variables on employees' perceptions of organizational justice and administrative empowerment. The sample consisted of 350 participants from a population of 540 employees. The study found that the application of administrative empowerment in Kuwait was moderate in terms of all dimensions of administrative empowerment. There were statistically significant differences attributed to demographic variables such as gender, years of experience, educational qualification, and job title.

Arigaat (2010) aimed to highlight the role of empowerment in crisis management in organizations and compare the differences between organizations that implement empowerment and those that do not in managing crises. The study included employees from Al-Iskan Bank for Commerce and Finance, Iraqi Commercial Bank, and Al-Sunabel International Company. The study found that organizations that enable their employees through training and development increase employees' contributions to the extent that they become fundamental and essential. Employees become capable of bearing the results of decisions and have the ability to take action as if the organization is owned by them. In times of crisis, they are capable of preparing emergency plans before the crisis occurs.

Sarafidof and Chatziioanidis (2013) aimed to determine the level of involvement of educational faculty members in making school decisions, its impact on student academic performance, and its relation to administrative performance. The study included 143 educational faculty members from Greek primary schools. The study revealed that active participation of teachers in making school decisions related to students was positively and significantly related to academic performance, with a high degree of influence but with less impact on administrative aspects.

The previous studies mentioned share some similarities with the current research, albeit indirectly, as they touch on the main variable of this study (administrative empowerment). However, each of these studies had its own objectives, sample, context, and countries in which the study was conducted. The current research stands out as it directly investigates the administrative empowerment of academic leaders in Iraqi universities. The research problem: In general, institutions, and specifically educational and pedagogical institutions, have strived to improve the performance of their staff through administrative reform programs, organizational development programs, and human relations programs. These programs all focus on creating a flexible empowerment culture that encourages creativity and innovation by relying on the principles of human relations, activating the principles of consultation and participation, and providing the opportunity for experimentation as a source of

learning. The goal is to build an organizational culture characterized by flexibility, support, and the integration of values that help activate new ideas to improve performance (Al-Adwan, 2008).

Through the researcher's observations of the reality of educational institutions, significant obstacles and challenges have become apparent within Iraqi universities. These challenges include decision-making inertia, insufficient budgets, a lack of modern educational resources, and resistance to acceptable development for introducing changes in work processes. Additionally, numerous studies that have explored functional empowerment in Iraqi universities, including Al-Qadi (2009) and Arigaat (2010), have found variations in the availability of functional empowerment for academic leaders in universities. Therefore, this study aims to reveal the availability of functional empowerment among academic leaders in Iraqi universities from their perspective.

Research Questions: The study seeks to answer the following question: Question 1: What are the ways to activate and improve the degree of availability of functional empowerment for academic leaders in Iraqi universities from their perspective?

Significance of the Study: The results of this study are expected to be beneficial for the following groups:

- **University presidents:** The study will provide them with feedback on the availability of functional empowerment, helping them improve its level and implementation within their universities.
- **Academic and educational leaders:** They will have access to recent studies from which they can benefit in terms of results and recommendations for achieving functional empowerment to meet the desired goals.
- **Educational researchers:** The study will serve as a valuable reference for conducting similar studies on the same topic, making it easily accessible for enriching their research.

Study Objectives: This study aims to achieve the following objectives:

- To identify ways to activate and improve the degree of availability of functional empowerment in Iraqi universities.
- To positively influence the enhancement of functional empowerment, ultimately contributing to the advancement of education in Iraqi universities. Furthermore, it aligns with global attention to functional empowerment.r the academic year (2022/2021)."

Boundaries and Delimitations of the Study:

1. **Objective Limitation:** This study is focused on identifying ways to activate and improve the degree of functional empowerment availability among academic leaders in Iraqi universities from their perspective.
2. **Human Limitation:** The study has been conducted on a sample of academic leaders in Jordanian universities within the province of Irbid. The specific universities included are Yarmouk University, the University of Science and Technology, Al-Ahliyya University, Jadara University, and Al-Balqa Applied University.
3. **Geographical Limitation:** The study is confined to universities located within the borders of Irbid province.
4. **Time Limitation:** The study was conducted during the academic year 2021-2022.

Study Delimitations:

The potential for generalizing the results of this study depends on the psychometric properties of its tools, including validity and reliability.

Methodology and Procedures:

Study Approach: This study utilizes a qualitative approach to identify ways to activate and improve the degree of functional empowerment availability among academic leaders in Iraqi universities from their perspective.

Study Population: The study population consists of all academic leaders in both government and private Iraqi universities. These leaders include college deans, vice deans, assistant deans, and department heads in Irbid province for the academic year 2021-2022. The total number of academic leaders is 435, according to the statistics of higher education for the 2021 academic year.

Study Sample: The researcher selected a random sample of 15 academic leaders from universities located in Irbid province. Interviews were conducted with these leaders to answer the study's research question.

Study Tool: The study employed interview questions designed to elicit responses from a sample of 15 academic leaders in Iraqi universities located in Irbid province. The questions were aimed at identifying ways to activate and improve the degree of functional empowerment availability in Iraqi universities from the perspective of these academic leaders.

Study Variables the study included the following variables:

1. Ways to activate and enhance the availability of functional empowerment among academic leaders in Iraqi universities.
2. Statistical methods and procedures.

To answer the research question, a series of interviews were conducted with academic leaders, and then the content of these interviews was analyzed to extract frequencies and percentages.

Study Results and Discussion To answer the research question, which focused on "how to activate and improve the availability of functional empowerment among academic leaders in Iraqi universities from their perspective," the content of interviews conducted with 15 academic leaders from universities in the Irbid governorate was analyzed. They were purposefully selected, with three from each university to ensure representation of all universities.

The analysis unit was based on the interview paragraph. After coding and gathering the answers, the researcher generated proposals for ways to activate and improve the availability of functional empowerment as follows:

1. **First Proposal:** Activate functional empowerment as a link between university management and educational administration. Improve the relationships and skills between academic leaders and students. This proposal was expressed by 14 participants, representing 93% of the sample. The

researcher attributes the prominence of this proposal to academic leaders' feelings of weak functional empowerment skills and a lack of continuity in sharing visions or perceptions about the university's goals, expected outcomes, and limited motivation due to the centralized decision-making authority.

2. **Second Proposal:** Familiarize academic leaders with the laws and regulations of the university and provide them with training on their application. This proposal was expressed by 13 participants, representing 87% of the sample. They believe that the lack of functional empowerment and its compliance can be attributed to a lack of understanding of the laws and regulations, variations in interpretations, and sometimes reluctance to accept instructions. It is often thought that these instructions contradict the employees' needs and capabilities, and, at times, they perceive the instructions as strict and unjust, serving the interests of those in power and authority by exploiting their positions and monopolizing decision-making.
3. **The Third Proposal:** Provide information in a way that aligns with individuals' preferences, understanding their needs and desires. This proposal ranked third, with 11 of the interviewees (73%) endorsing it. The emergence of this proposal can be attributed to a lack of attention in building work skills, communication, and empowerment among employees, a non-conducive and ambiguous work environment, a shortage of problem-solving tools, a lack of qualified work teams led by effective leadership, transparency, and non-compliance with regulations and instructions from higher education authorities.
4. **The Fourth Proposal:** Activate modern means of functional empowerment and make use of them. This proposal was supported by 10 of the interviewees (67%). It can be attributed to resistance to change, fear among employees of taking responsibility, maintaining the current status quo and work routine. Additionally, strict systems and procedures that do not encourage initiative and innovation, a weak motivation system, secrecy in information exchange, and bias were factors contributing to this proposal.
5. **The Fifth Proposal:** Activate self-management practices through a self-managing team in decision-making. This proposal was suggested by 8 interviewees, representing 53% of the sample. The emergence of this proposal can be attributed to academic leaders not seeing the importance of self-discipline. Employees cannot be forced to comply with self-discipline since it is related to their work in human relations, such as fairness, honesty, and other individual practices for each employee. Therefore, leadership, when it implements self-discipline, has a positive impact on those around them and significantly contributes to reaching the pinnacle of development, progress, prosperity, and the consolidation of democratic values.
6. **The Sixth Proposal:** Promote positive feelings among employees to increase a sense of personal and professional balance. Seven of the interviewees (47%) suggested this proposal. The emergence of this proposal can be attributed to universities favoring traditional administrative leadership styles, leading to administrative mistrust, extreme centralization in decision-making authority, fear among those in power regarding their job positions, which in turn shapes negative and counterproductive attitudes towards self and work.
7. **The Seventh Proposal:** Activate feedback, which requires evaluating the empowerment experience, transferring shortcomings to employees, and praising their successes. Six of the interviewees (40%) suggested this proposal. They mentioned the lack of consultation with them in many decisions. This proposal can be attributed to not consulting with employees about new decisions, ignoring their opinions to identify strengths and weaknesses, evaluating them, and making responsible and realistic decisions. Chaos, corruption, and administrative laxity are widespread. The results of the current study align with the findings of Al-Qadi (2009) and the study conducted by Areeqat (2010), which examined the reality of functional empowerment in its various dimensions.

The researcher concludes that the importance of functional empowerment among academic leaders in Iraqi universities plays a significant and vital role. It helps employees understand the goals, duties, and policies of educational institutions, fosters collaboration among them, and keeps them informed about what is happening within the organization. Effective leadership contributes to making informed decisions that depend on the quantity and integrity of information and data, thus aiding in achieving the success, growth, and development of the institution. It informs educational management about what has been done and the problems that have arisen in implementing educational plans, along with proposals for solving these problems.

It appears that measuring the availability of functional empowerment is essential for discovering weaknesses and strengths, improving the educational process, and achieving the goals of higher education. Measuring functional empowerment is especially effective for decision-makers when there are obstacles or challenges that could impact the overall performance of leaders. Measurement serves as an evaluation that guides the right direction, corrects administrative and functional deviations, and helps achieve the highest interest in the expected educational process of higher education institutions.

Recommendations:

1. Consider the proposals of the interviewees to enhance and activate functional empowerment for all university staff.
2. Conduct further studies related to functional empowerment in Iraqi universities and link them to other variables.

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