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## CONTENTS

Sr. No.	TITLE & NAME OF THE AUTHOR (S)	Page No.
1.	THE DEVELOPMENT OF THAI HERBAL TRADITIONAL RECIPES FOR TREATMENT IN COMMUNITIES <i>DR. PATTHIRA PHON-NGAM</i>	1
2.	DO FINANCIAL VARIABLES INFLUENCE MARKET PRICE OF BANK SHARES IN BANGLADESH: A CASE STUDY ON NATIONAL BANK LTD. AND ISLAMI BANK BANGLADESH LTD. <i>MOHAMMAD ARIFUL ISLAM &amp; M. MUZAHIDUL ISLAM</i>	5
3.	MEASURING STUDENTS' PERCEPTION TOWARDS UNIVERSITY SELECTION: AN EMPIRICAL INVESTIGATION ON MALAYSIAN POSTGRADUATE STUDENTS <i>ABDULLAH AL MAMUN SARWAR, AHASANUL HAQUE &amp; AHMAD ZAKI HJ ISMAIL</i>	13
4.	USAGE OF RUBRICS FOR EFFECTIVE CLASSROOM EVALUATION <i>DR. MD. ABBAS ALI &amp; DR. T. VENKAT RAM RAJ</i>	21
5.	THE IMPACT OF WORK RELATED ATTITUDES ON TASK AND CONTEXTUAL PERFORMANCE: A COMPARATIVE STUDY IN PUBLIC AND PRIVATE BANKS IN SRI LANKA <i>U.W.M.R. SAMPATH KAPPAGODA</i>	23
6.	CALL CENTRE OUTSOURCING PRACTICES ADOPTED BY MOBILE PHONE COMPANIES IN KENYA <i>LEWIS KINYUA KATHUNI &amp; NEBAT GALO MUGENDA</i>	27
7.	EXERCISE OF CADRE COORDINATION BY WORKMEN BY VIRTUE OF PROPER TRAINING AT OPEN CAST MINES AT NORTHERN COALFIELDS LIMITED, SINGRAULI (MADHYA PRADESH) <i>ABHINAV KUMAR SHRIVASTAVA &amp; DR. N. C. PAHARIYA</i>	35
8.	RURAL HEALTH- AN ENGINE FOR ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT <i>SHEETAL SHARMA &amp; DR. PAVNESH KUMAR</i>	40
9.	ORGANIZATIONAL CITIZENSHIP BEHAVIOR OF MEMBERS OF SELF HELP GROUPS AND ITS IMPACT ON GROUP PERFORMANCE <i>C.MURALIDHARAN, R.VENKATRAM &amp; K.MANI</i>	45
10.	A COMPARATIVE STUDY TO ANALYSE THE REQUIREMENT OF AN EFFECTIVE AND VALUE-BASED HIGHER EDUCATION SYSTEM WITH REFERENCE TO INDIA <i>DR. RAMESH KUMAR</i>	49
11.	INEQUALITY AMONG STATES OF INDIA: HUMAN DEVELOPMENT ASPECT <i>SUNEEL KUMAR</i>	54
12.	A CRITICAL ANALYSIS OF HOUSING SHORTAGE IN INDIA <i>DR. MOOL CHAND &amp; DR. RAJ PAL SINGH</i>	61
13.	BANK'S EMPLOYEES PERCEPTION ON QUALITY OF WORK LIFE AND ITS RELATION WITH JOB SATISFACTION IN MALWA REGION OF PUNJAB <i>DR. GIRISH TANEJA &amp; LALITA KUMARI</i>	70
14.	STUDY OF CONSUMPTION PATTERN OF COSMETIC PRODUCTS AMONG YOUNG MALES IN DELHI <i>ABDULLAH BIN JUNAID &amp; DR. RESHMA NASREEN</i>	77
15.	SELF HELP GROUP IN SOCIO ECONOMIC TRANSFORMATION WITH SPECIAL REGERENCE TO COIMBATORE <i>DR. SARAVANAKUMAR &amp; S. MAMTA</i>	87
16.	INDUSTRIAL EXPANSION AND GLOBAL WARMING <i>DR. MANZOOR A SHAH</i>	94
17.	GLOBAL FINANCIAL CRISIS II: IMPLICATION ON INDIA (BOON OR BANE??) <i>DR. ANUPRIYA PANDEY</i>	97
18.	FACTORS THAT ENCOURAGE IMPULSE PURCHASE & IMPACT OF VISUAL MERCHANDISING ON THE PURCHASE DECISION OF WOMEN FOR BEAUTY PRODUCTS IN GUJARAT <i>MITAL THAKOR &amp; SANDIP G PRAJAPATI</i>	101
19.	STUDY GROUPS, GROUPING CRITERIA AND THE SYNERGY IN EDUCATIONAL SYSTEM: A QUALITATIVE RESEARCH AMONG FDP PARTICIPANTS <i>SIMON JACOB C</i>	105
20.	INCOME GENERATION AND EMPOWERMENT OF DALIT WOMEN IN LUCKNOW DISTRICT <i>DR. KAUSHIKI SINGH</i>	109
21.	TESTING THE WEAK FORM EFFICIENCY IN WORLD STOCK MARKET: A CASE STUDY IN AUSTRALIA <i>DR. REKHA GUPTA</i>	118
22.	A COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS ON HOME LOANS OF PUBLIC & PRIVATE SECTOR BANKS IN INDIA <i>PUSHPA SANGWAN &amp; KANWAR BHAN</i>	121
23.	IMPLICATIONS OF THE SHIFT IN GLOBAL ECONOMIC POWER: AN ANALYSIS <i>DR. JAYA PALIWAL</i>	126
24.	CONSUMERS' COMPLIANCE TO ADOPT ECO-FRIENDLY PRODUCTS FOR ENVIRONMENTAL SUSTAINABILITY <i>JYOTI GOGIA &amp; NANDINI SHARMA</i>	130
25.	AN INNOVATIVE MODEL OF SOCIALWORK EDUCATION AND PRACTICE <i>M.YALADRI, DR. R. SUDHAKAR GOUD &amp; K.NARSAIAH</i>	136
26.	EMPLOYEE EMPOWERMENT: A NEED FOR COPORATE SURVIVAL <i>DR. V. TULASI DAS, DR. P. HANUMANTHA RAO &amp; DR. B. VENKATA RAO</i>	139
27.	HUMAN RIGHTS: AN OVERVIEW IN INDIAN FRAMEWORK <i>ZAINAB FATIMA &amp; MOHD YASIN WANI</i>	143
28.	TERM STRUCTURE OF INTEREST RATES AND FISHER EFFECT IN INDIA: AN EMPIRICAL ANALYSIS <i>RANJAN KUMAR MOHANTY &amp; BRAJABANDHU NAYAK</i>	149
29.	EMPLOYEE RETENTION <i>SWATI GUPTA, DR. PUNEET JAIN &amp; DR. BHAVNA AGARWAL</i>	159
30.	SOCIO-ECONOMIC UPLIFTMENT OF GUJJAR TRIBE IN JAMMU & KASHMIR <i>SWATI GUPTA &amp; FARHAT BANO BEG</i>	162
	REQUEST FOR FEEDBACK	167

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**EMPLOYEE EMPOWERMENT: A NEED FOR CORPORATE SURVIVAL**

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**ABSTRACT**

*The current meltdown of the Global economy has claimed many organizations as casualties. Employees who are well paid and well off today found their jobs gone overnight. This nightmare is across all sectors of the economy and older business like manufacturing and new business like IT are equally affected. Researchers and leaders worldwide have called for the empowerment of employees to help their organization compete successfully in the highly competitive marketplace. Having an employee empowerment programme enables companies to keep up with a competitor or gain a competitive advantage.*

**KEYWORDS**

employee empowerment, HRM.

**INTRODUCTION**

The current meltdown of the Global economy has claimed many organizations as casualties. Employees who are well paid and well off today found their jobs gone overnight. This nightmare is across all sectors of the economy and older business like manufacturing and new business like IT are equally affected. In a recession scenario, the challenge to the HR professional is that he has to survive himself first from the approach of job cut and bundling up of responsibility and then move in for playing a key role to make the organization survive during trying times. In this situation the managers and the organizations should empower and enable employees to accomplish their work in meaningful ways. Empowerment has been described as a means to enable employees to make decisions and as a personal phenomenon where individuals take responsibility for their own actions. The aim of the present study was to present employee empowerment which constitutes for the organization a source of competitive advantage.

Nowadays organizations and enterprises function in a globalized economic, social and technological environment. Every organization can function efficiently only if it has at its disposal the required resources. These resources are grouped into material resources in the form of capital, facilities and equipment, and human resources that include employees and their managers. The managers and the organizations should consider three elements which are vital for their development. These elements are: (1) precise goals to be achieved (2) limited resources and (3) people. Of these three, it is the entity of «people» that is most challenging to the managerial attention. Many authors retain that for a manager to be effective, he or she must be a good manager of people because it is they who make up an organization and make everything work (Tosi, Rizzo and Carroll, 1986). Because of that, management and more specifically empowerment of human resources in the particular working and social environment of each organization has greater importance than the management of other resources and requires a meticulous attention. As a matter of fact, human resources represent an important capital, which should be managed effectively in order to constitute for the organization a source of competitive advantage (Bowen and Lawler, 1992).

Dynamic business environment has been forcing most organizations to change their traditional approach of management. This is due to the traditional management techniques used in business organization has become obsolete. Further, rapid technological changes has created the new millennium competitive landscape that demanding customers with individual needs that are required in the changing environment. Therefore, adapting new approach of management to boost up organization performance and high quality of services as well as maintaining high level of motivation is priority to managers. One of the techniques used by organization and that has attracted great interest from scholars and practitioners is employee empowerment. Because of that, management and more specifically empowerment of human resources in the particular working and social environment of each organization have greater importance than the management of other resources and require a meticulous attention. As a matter of fact, human resources represent an important capital, which should be managed effectively in order to constitute for the organization a source of competitive advantage.

**REVIEW OF LITERATURE**

Researchers and leaders worldwide have called for the empowerment of employees to help their organization compete successfully in the highly competitive marketplace (Kirkman & Rosen, 1999). Empowerment has been the focus of relatively few empirical studies (Kirkman & Rosen, 1996; Konczak, Stelly and Trusty, 1996; Zimmerman, Israeli, Schulz & Checkoway, 1992). Empowerment has been defined as helping employees take personal ownership of their jobs (Byham & Cox, 1989), as well as the transfer of decision making and responsibility from managers to employees. Basically, it is the process of encouraging and rewarding employee initiative and imagination. Basic prerequisite is the fact that the members of the organization are willing and capable of assuming more power, make good decisions and perform them effectively. Until recently, most discussions of empowerment aimed at empowering management behaviours, particularly delegation and shared decision making (Conger & Kanungo, 1988; Spreitzer, 1995). Empowerment was mainly conceptualized as a matter of power (Mainiero, 1986). Many authors (Ashness and Lashley 1995; Dickmeyer and Williams 1995; Goodale et al. 1997; Maxwell, 1997; Ugboro and Obeng, 2000; Ling, 2000; Savery et al. 2001; Patterson et al. 2004; McKenna, 1998) supported that human resource management and more specifically the empowerment of human resource for enterprises practice.

Empowerment is a concept that links individual strengths and competencies, natural helping systems and proactive behaviour to organizational change. Empowerment means engaging employees in the thinking processes of an organization. Empowerment requires a change in an organization culture, but does not mean that top management abdicates their responsibility or authority. An employee empowerment is necessary for the effective functioning of the skill of employee. Each employee in a team should be given a chance to act mentally to achieve their goal or targets. Empowerment is about putting employees in the driver's seat. Having an employee empowerment program enables companies to keep up with a competitor or gain a competitive advantage.

#### EMPOWERMENT IN THE BUSINESS SECTOR

Empowerment is most often considered to be a viable means to increase the effectiveness of an organization, as well as to improve the quality of working life for employees (Manz, 1992; Wellins, Byham, & Wilson; 1991). Furthermore, Mathis and Jackson (1991) proposed three kinds of individual performance criteria that organizations need to cultivate in order to flourish: productivity, innovation and loyalty. All three can be succeeded through effective enforcement of the empowerment principles, because responsibility and accountability encourage not only job satisfaction but also satisfaction in the achievement of better standards of performance. Bernstein (1992) claimed that companies in which employee empowerment has actually been put into force frequently found that such an approach bore fruits in such key aspects as morale, productivity and quality which leads competitive advantage.

Ashness and Lashley (1995) examined employee empowerment (focused on the managerial dimensions of empowerment). The results pointed out that overall organizational performance had improved. There had been a sale increase of 7 per cent, team member turnover had fallen by 19 per cent, wages costs were marginally reduced, from 24 per cent to 23.2 per cent and administration costs had fallen by 41 per cent and labour turnover was particularly low at about 10 per cent. An increase in understanding and commitment to the business objectives throughout the organization was also noticed. Unit management also reported a low level of complaints, and problems were sorted out more quickly. Moreover the empowerment of employees in service organizations has been shown to produce positive outcomes in the form of increased job satisfaction and self-efficacy. Maxwell's (1997) case study of empowerment at the Glasgow Marriott, indicated higher levels of job satisfaction, better customer service, more rapid decision making, and personal development.

Previous research has also found that employee understanding of empowerment has had an influence on employee loyalty, concern for others (including customers), and satisfaction. The implication of this finding is that boosting employee service capability through empowerment contributes to employee job satisfaction, job commitment, pride of workmanship, and what Anderson, Rungtusanatham, and Schroeder (1994) called employee fulfillment or the degree to which employees feel that the organization continually satisfies their needs (Fulford & Enz, 1995).

Similarly Heskett's (1987) Quality Wheel and Schlesinger & Heskett's (1991) Cycles of Success and Failure show the link between employee satisfaction through empowerment, customer satisfaction and enhanced business performance. From this theoretical basis it is proposed that customer satisfaction, employee empowerment, morale and service quality are directly linked because the more-motivated employee will provide better service. Furthermore, if employees understand that their manager values them and provides them with appropriate control and authority over their work, they will feel more confident about their jobs (Yoon et al., 2001; Babin and Boles, 1996). On the other hand, the researchers suggested that employee empowerment and job facet satisfaction influenced dimensions of perceived fairness (responsiveness and empathy/courtesy, respectively) of the service recovery attempt which, in turn, affected consumer satisfaction. It was disclosed from the results that empowerment via training and autonomy led to higher service employee satisfaction.

Moreover, Nelson (1994) stressed that, efficiency and productivity can be increased through empowerment, giving the organization the chance to respond to strategic changes in the marketplace more rapidly. As Cordery (1995) expressed in his study of self-managing teams, empowerment techniques provide work experiences that are fundamentally motivating to employees whilst at the same time useful to organizational performance. Many organizations (such as Wilson, Eastman Chemical and Rhone-Poulenc) reported that through the use of empowerment they have managed to establish new and better ways of working as well as increasing profits (Wright, 1993, Industry leaders try new approaches, 1993). Blitzer et al. (1993) argued that empowerment can positively influence employee self esteem of competence and security giving employees a clear sense of the contributions they can make to the company directly leading to increases in productivity. More specifically, employee turnover declined with empowerment, and increases in sales per employee, a higher profit margin, lower material cost as percentage of sales, lower labour cost as a percentage of sales, and higher net profit were observed (Dickmeyer and Williams, 1995). Furthermore, Lewis and Lytton (1995) underscored that the key to successful organizational change and profitability within a small British engineering company is empowerment.

Human resource development through empowering employees and establishing appropriate compensation and recognition systems have affected positively a firm's financial performance, and has appeared to be the most critical competency in business environment in China (Ling, 2000). Furthermore, Robert, Probst, Martocchio, Drasgow, and Lawler (2000), in their cross-cultural study on employees of a single firm (specializing in light manufacturing) with operations in the United States, Mexico, Poland, and India found that continuous improvement practices (defined as encouragement of employees for learning and development, rewarding employees for attaining competence, and pay for knowledge) and empowerment were found to be positively related to job satisfaction in the United States, Mexico, and Poland but not in India. Robert et al. (2000) attributed the inverse relationship between empowerment and job satisfaction in India to the unusually high power distance that exists in this culture.

#### METHODS AND TECHNIQUES OF EMPOWERMENT

The human resource empowerment process has proved beneficial and essential. Empowerment is composed of processes, methods, tools and techniques which have been developed in the framework of human resource development, motivation, job design, responsibility devolve and delegation of authority.

- **Creation of vision and formulation of Organizational Values:** Senior management needs to develop a vision and a mission statement for the organization which focuses on the customer and recognizes the significant role of human resource. Many organizations poured a great deal of effort into creating a vision of the company as a collaborative of empowered people – a vision of respect, responsibility, and cooperation, focusing on better service to the customer.
- **Teamwork:** Teamwork is an important element in assisting employees to take on new responsibilities as it creates a supportive and open environment and enables empowerment to take place. Empowered teams are very different from participative teams, quality circles, or semiautonomous teams. They make decisions, implement them, and they are held accountable, they do not just recommend ideas.
- **The Role of the Manager:** A fundamental change in the culture of the organization as a result of empowerment is the role the manager needs to adopt to facilitate the process. The empowered managers adopted a more facilitative approach to the problem and encouraged a different relationship with their subordinates so that they in turn feel empowered to act.
- **Training support:** Constant training contributes to the improvement of unit and team efficiency, increases the competitiveness of the organization and contributes to the achievement of organizational goals. The management usually plays the part of the trainer, defines the training needs of the employees and through appropriate educational programs provides skills which concern the job (technical skills knowledge), empowerment and teamwork and evaluates the effectiveness of educational programs.
- **Reward system and recognition:** The reward system based on organizational and individual performance constitutes an essential practice of motivation independently of the kind of rewards (financial, not financial).
- **Organizational culture:** constructive organizations focus on: (a) determination of important goals at all levels, (b) development of full capabilities of human resource (innovation, creativity), (c) promotion of a uniform atmosphere within the organization and (d) promotion of effective cross-divisional cooperation. Furthermore, they promote the organizational climate where they reinforce mutual trust and trust to the human resources capabilities which align with the achievement of goals and affect the performance of the organization.
- **Devolve responsibility and delegation of authority:** Devolving responsibility and delegation of authority are important aspects of the empowerment process which give the employees the feeling of «ownership» and motivate them to use the maximum of their capabilities and the talent they have so that to perform their duties effectively.



**EMPLOYEE EMPOWERMENT TO GAIN COMPETITIVE ADVANTAGE:**

Empowerment is about putting employees in the driver's seat. Employee empowerment went from being a buzzword among managers during the 1990s to a sought-after part of quality management among industries by the early 21st century. Employee empowerment as one of the "critical drivers of business success in the global marketplace. Having an employee empowerment program enables companies to keep up with a competitor or gain a competitive advantage. Employees who are empowered make decisions that save companies money, time and, in some cases, prevent potential disputes. Decentralizing the decision-making process can improve the performance of support and service departments by giving customers more confidence in the process of being helped, especially since the empowered employee does not have to check with her supervisor to make minor decisions.

- **Better Job Satisfaction, Retention and Motivation:** Human resource professionals, describes employee empowerment as one of the factors behind increased employee education and training; lower absenteeism, and less conflict with administration and managers related to change because employees are able to participate in decision making.
- **Increased Productivity, Efficiency and Effectiveness:** When managers are freed up to be coaches, mentors and advisers instead of management firemen who have to put out mini-situational fires, the company or organization benefits.
- **Reduce Costs:** Empowered employees are able to improve service delivery within their sphere of operations, thus enabling cost savings. Empowering employees can also decrease the need for middle management positions, which conserves labor costs. Employees who take ownership of their work can also yield major savings in the form of workplace safety.

**CONCLUSION**

As the number of organizations and businesses is increasing there is immediate need to perceive what will make them more effective and competitive. The above mention benefits reinforced the belief that human resource empowerment is a major factor for business activity, because it may contribute to the viability and profit increase of organizations. So, empowerment must not be considered as a simple technique or process which makes employees feel good about their job but an organizational need which takes extensive planning, requires time and requires capable and trained managers to empower human resource so that the latter constitutes an advantageous competitive resource for the organization.

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