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Article

EMPLOYEES' decision-making power in universities: Employees' right or taken for granted REALITIES?

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MANAGEMENT | RESEARCH ARTICLE

EMPLOYEES' decision-making power in universities: Employees' right or taken for granted REALITIES?

Iman Tohidian^{1*} and Abbas Abbaspour¹

Abstract: Internationally, state and non-state organizations are often managed based on an organization chart where sections are illustrated based on their management and decision-making power. Employees, as the main administrative body at these organizations, are generally represented as executive work forces—required to do whatever is assigned to them by senior management. Previous studies have investigated employees' job satisfaction within different contexts and from divergent perspectives. However, little attention has been paid to exploring employees' thinking power and their decision-making role within the organizations. This study explored the perspectives of 73 (46 male/27 female) university employees. The anonymized interviewees' responses were submitted to three top-level managers for their consideration. This paper presents the employees' feedback and managers' suggestions and proposes a series of recommendations around effective

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PUBLIC INTEREST STATEMENT

Organizations' success happens if we observe the main reality that organizations are living communities where all members' rights, voices, values, divergences, and characters much be observed and appreciated by all those who have positions in the organization chart. If we consider employees and managers as the main contributing part of the organizations; then it must be kept in mind that success and progress of the organization (universities, in our case) happens if we witness a friendly academic democratic environment at the universities as we need cooperation and commitment to achieve our goals. Employees' thinking power, unfortunately, is a missing ring in our universities as they are just asked to focus on their daily duties. Universities' authorities, also, do not trust employees as counselling wings; rather, they consider them as mere recipients of authorities' orders without any chance to dialogue and argue concerning the challenges, crises, and potentials of the university. We reminded our university authorities that trust among employees-managers is key to the organization's success.

decision-making. The paper argues that it is important to engage top-tier management with the views of employees to improve relationships and productivity within organizations.

Subjects: Middle East Studies; Cultural Studies; Economics and Development; Economics; Finance; Business, Management and Accounting; Human Resource Management

Keywords: employees' thinking power; managers' priorities; university and policies; employees' reflection; top-down level of organization charts

1. Decision-making and thinking power in organization: an introduction

Everyday decision-making is often influenced by the surrounding community. For example, Thøgersen et al. (2012) discuss green product attributes;

Rather than changing the way consumers make decisions when buying this type of product, the availability of a “green” alternative seems to make “green” consumers develop a new, simple choice heuristic that allows them to do their shopping as effortless and time-efficient as consumers buying conventional products. (p. 187)

Each organization's vision and mission is linked to their ideals and goals and concerns around the minimum use of costs, work force, and time. Therefore, where the main core is cooperation and the organization's goals are its members' professional life priorities they often encourage a democratic working environment among employees-managers, managers-managers, and employees-employees. This management style is facilitated if employees are empowered and middle- and top-level managers' engage with them, particularly in the case of challenges and crises. Employees' real-lived professional experiences in different work contexts or job positions can help managers, when they fail to consider minor or major key points due to their exhaustive administrative workload and distance from work on the ground. In this regard, managers' encouragement of employees' thinking power can be advantageous, as committed employees can consider their organization's future prosperity and success as their own success and believe in their contributing role to the success or failure of the organization. Arguably, if top-level managers give priority to the systemic thinking at all decision-making levels and no employee is excluded from decision-making sessions in the organization there can be significant benefits.

The concept of systemic thinking might sound as a clichéd term. However, we need to give it a priority in organizations. Atwater and Pittman (2006) describe systemic thinking as;

Studying the role and purpose of a system and its parts to understand why they behave as they do; Dynamic thinking: examining how the system and its parts behave over time; [and] Closed-Loop thinking: investigating how the parts of a system react and interact with each other and external factors. (p. 278)

For Dixon (2007, p.) systemic thinking is “a loose body of ideas and techniques, organized around the principle that each system is a whole system in its own right and yet also part of a larger system”. Espejo (1994) also offers a detailed definition of systemic thinking as;

a) an understanding of how the parts relate to each other and constitute larger wholes, that is, of self-organizing processes; b) understanding the interactive processes constituting wholes at multiple levels, that is, the recurrent conversations grounding shared constructs in a common reality; c) understanding how the system works, that is, understanding the mechanisms underlying the preceding processes; d) understanding the likely effects in the whole of local behaviors, and vice versa; e) understanding the language and emotions (i.e., conversations) most likely to produce stable, viable wholes; [and] f) grounding purpose through shared distinctions and transforming these distinctions into interactive patterns enhancing people's actions, making their action more effective. In other words, systemic thinking is learning how to manage situational complexity. (p. 210)

Johanessen et al. (1999, p. 26) also elaborate “1) the importance of internal motivation; 2) the emphasis on relations in, and among systems; [and] 3) focus on idea generation from everyone in the organization” as three elements of their proposed model based on systemic thinking. However, all portrayals of systemic thinking emphasize the importance of all members’ interconnectedness in organizations and prevalence of a sharing community in each organization, which might not to be taken into account by the higher order authorities of both state and non-state organizations.

Higher education organizations, such as universities, are not an exception as they are also working within the realm of state or non-state organizations. Accordingly, each change in the surrounding community has its positive or negative effects on higher education organizations. Each organization works based on an organizational chart where all higher order decision-making bodies are at the top and other members are positioned based on their role and power in the organization. Universities train future members of society to successfully look for best solutions with least use of the available sources. For this to be successful, we need an environment enriched with cooperation, commitment, trust, and mutual respect; and the right path towards these ideals is through acknowledgement of diversity among members of communities no matter of their organizational positions and their decision-making power.

Employees or administrative staff are the main body of organizations. However, they often have no decision-making power or authority to challenge top-tier managers if a wrong decision is being made in their organizations. In organizations, employees are advised to focus on their duties and few dialogues happen among employees and managers. Accordingly, we witness employees experience more psychological pressure and suppression. For example, Tohidian & Rahimian, (2019b, p. 2) found that “employees’ total dissatisfaction specifically concerning colleagues’ mutual relationships, biased and unfair managers’ looks towards some employees, and their fear of being kicked out of the organization if their ideas are expressed within the context of the organization”. This suggests of employees’ power, voice, and thinking in organizations, which has led employees to become dissatisfied in the workplace.

There is an extensive body of published research on the concepts of employees, decision-making in organization (Beach, 2014; Chan et al., 2016; Graham et al., 2015; Jordan & Haines, 2017; Kaner, 2014; Shepherd & Maynard Rudd, 2014; Smith, 2014). However, this paper engages with two main groups of people in organizations—employees and managers. This is important as employees and managers are often involved separately but in this study, they participated simultaneously. First, the employees’ concerns and problems were identified. Following these interviews with employees then, managers were asked to provide solutions for a successful leadership in the organization. In this regard, we focus on the employees’ thinking power, their role as at the university, and the prevalent atmosphere among employees and those involved policy-making authorities at the top of organizations.

2. Overview of research practice

As discussed, much previous research negates to ask employees’ views concerning their decision-making power within the organizations. A feature of the present research is the engagement of both employees and managers. This research aimed to examine the denied power of decision-making, and how the prevalent authoritative management in the organizations are structured. To attend to the research aims, 73 employees (Table 1) were purposefully selected from two universities in Tehran and Isfahan.

Interviews were conducted with employee participants and we then used Strauss and Corbin (1998) Constant Comparative method to analyze the data. All employees’ responses were translated from Persian into English, and three steps of open coding, axial coding, and selective coding were administered, respectively. At the initial step of data analysis, all English transcriptions were meticulously analyzed to locate the participants’ main ideas and concerns. Then, we compared all

Table 1. Employees' educational & professional background

Participants (No.)	Age Range	Educational Background & Marital Status	Year(s) of Employment
29	45–63	Male (7) Female (8)/B.A. (15)/S: 0; M: 15 Male (2) Female (3)/B.Sc. (5)/S: 1; M: 4 Male (8) Female (1)/M.Sc. (9)/S*: 3; M: 6	24–30
30	40–45	Male (12) Female (8)/B.A. (20)/S: 3; M: 17 Male (4) Female (0)/B.Sc. (4)/S: 0; M: 4 Male (3) Female (3)/M.A. (6)/S: 0; M: 6	15–24
3	35–40	Male (3) Female (0)/B.Sc. (3)/S: 1; M: 2 Male (0) Female (0)/M.Sc. (0)/S: 0; M: 0 Male (0) Female (0)/M.A. (0)/S: 0; M: 0	10–19
11	30–35	Male (6) Female (2)/M.A. (8)/S: 5; M: 3 Male (1) Female (2)/M.Sc. (3)/S: 0; M: 3	5–10

S: Single; M: Married; S*: Divorced

those obtained major categories to find the similarities. Finally, we identified the main themes which are presented in Table 2.

There were two phases of data gathering and analysis from our research. In the first phase, the employees' responses to the interview questions (**Appendix A.**) are presented as two themes of (a) Decision-makers: Employees' Lost Role in University Organization Charts, and (b) University as a piece of larger puzzle (government). At the second phase of data gathering and analysis, three (2 male/1 female) top-level managers with an age range of 45–57 and more than 10 years of higher order management experience were selected from both universities to propose their solutions based on the main concerns of the data generated with employees. The employees' responses were given to the managers once they had signed the consent form (**Appendix B.**)

Table 2. Emerged categories and final themes based on three research queries

Research QUERIES	Respondents' NO.	Emerg ed CATEGORIES
Employees' thinking power?	39	TOTALLY taken for granted entities; Decision-making sessions as FORBIDDEN zones; RETIREDS are NEVER invited to share their comments; NO chance to practice research oriented activities.
Employees as counselling wings at the university?	18	Employees' preference NOT to challenge the authorities; University Employees' thinking empowerment as Publics' Voice for Government; EMPLOYEES as mere controlled work force.
Employees & authorities relationship?	16	If I want to live I have to ACCEPT work conditions; NO friendly cooperative environment between EMPLOYEES & AUTHORITIES; University is the MIRROR of GOVERNMENT.
	TOTAL	Final THEMES
	73	Employee is just an employee even in a university
		University as a piece of larger puzzle (government)

3. Results

3.1. Phase ONE: analysis of employees' interviews

Categories from data analysis based on three research queries and two main themes are provided in Table 2.

3.1.1. Decision-makers: employees' lost role in university organization charts

Most participants illuminated that they used to the organization community and its practices. However, they raised concerns about the denial of their thinking power within the universities. They stressed that employees' experience is not taken into account by management especially in decision and policy-making sessions. Torrento Estimo and Mandado Aguilar (2017, p. 242) also stress that "the employees have different preferences in terms of core work values, environment, interaction, and work activities". The following accounts from participants portray the prototype of employees among managers and authorities in the universities.

It dates back to more than nine years ago when I was assigned to a position at the university. I was fresh, recently graduated from mechanical engineering, and highly motivated to begin my professional life as an expert in one of the laboratories. Too much ideas for research joint works with affiliated academic staff at our department, and highly committed to my profession as an expert. I was, even, highly motivated to pursue my further studies as it was in alignment with my current position and previous studies. I tried to correspond with the academic staff and students at the laboratories to both put into practice my learned theories in undergraduate levels, and also to ask the instructors for joining them in their research projects. NO! NO! NO! Maybe in future, but for now NO! Just try to stick to what you are supposed to do! It was their immediate feedback! **(Participant #1)**

Everything is the same. If not regarded as satisfaction, rather, it is our commitment to our beliefs and ideologies as we are mere employees who are supposed to put into practice what is decided by those top level managers and authorities of the university. Of course, it is well-embraced by us as employee as we have accepted to work within the community of higher education; however, I also believe there should be a chance for us to participate in board of directors or trustees (here, I mean each section at the university should introduce one administrative staff representative to participate in higher level decision making sessions where critical and long-lasting decisions are to be made). **(Participant #36)**

Unfortunately, the prevalent work atmosphere of organizations is the authorities' *working* mentality, which leads to the denial of employees and low level managers' as decision-makers. Such neglect might be due to the employees being overwhelmed with lots of administrative tasks, which leave no time for them to have dialogue and correspondence with their colleagues on critical issues crises of the university. Employees emphasized that their everyday commitments may create a sense of doubt and uncertainty in authorities' minds about the employees' developed professional identity, which could lead to them not being considered as a reliable entity in decision-making meetings. They felt that managers positioned employees as failing to critically analyze the situation and having the capacity to find the immediate solutions for the problems. This suggests a lack of trust (in terms of power of thinking and critical worldviews) among authorities and employees within the university community. The following excerpt illustrates authorities' lack of trust in employees' capabilities;

She is ranked as a professor! My colleague and I got our masters from management with different courses on knowledge and personnel management. Unfortunately, we explicitly feel an atmosphere of our manager's fear to trust to what we propose. We rarely remember times when she invites us to her office for professional talk or to ask us to propose some ideas when she is supposed to participate in higher order sessions held in the Ministry of Science, Research & Technology. Of course, we report a lot on what we have done in a day. It is not a fair behaviour, at all, towards us. **(Participant #53)**

In line with the above participant's concern, Moorman et al. (1993) found that

The use of fair treatment and fair procedures may be a key antecedent to promoting OCB [Organizational Citizenship Behavior] performance. Employees who demonstrate conscientiousness toward their work, try to prevent problems with other employees, inform others before taking important actions, and refrain from excessively complaining about work, likely do so because the organization has treated them in a fair manner. (p. 223)

Managers and organization authorities are highly advised to respect their employees' rights and provide them with chances to share their ideas or even challenge what might be contrary to their inner thoughts and beliefs. Employees believe that when mutual respect is observed between managers and employees, it motivates them to be more committed and pursue their managers' policies to promote managers in administrative positions, and at the larger scale, to expedite their universities' success pace. Whitener et al. (1998) also

propose that managers and organizations interested in establishing trust must take the first step. By designing organizations in ways that encourage managers to initiate trusting relationships, and by rewarding employees for reciprocating, management can establish a foundation for a trusting organization. ... [as] such designs and management practices stand to enhance organizational effectiveness and viability. (p. 527)

If their character and personality are not considered as mere employees; rather as entities whose voices and ideas are taken into account, employees can potentially form a trusted relationship with their managers, which increase output and provide a cooperation environment where both sides have almost rights in terms of their decision-making power. Tzafrir et al.'s (2004, p. 628) findings confirmed that "a significant and positive influence of empowerment, organisational communication and procedural justice [are] as determinants of employees' trust in their managers". Employees also highlighted that we expect managers not to think that payment by the university is fair enough. They emphasized that there should be no such a feeling that employees are looking for a monthly paid job vacancy to escape the financial crises and nothing more is important for them than waiting to finish the working hours (7:30 a.m. to 15:30 p.m.). The following participant's overview confirms managers' consideration of employees as those who look for financial support:

Decisions are made and we consciously or unconsciously perform our duties with no question to pose. Of course, we raise our concerns every day as soon as we find time concerning how our rights are violated, how our ideas and advices are neglected (if not suppressed), and it is our commitment to do what we are supposed to do (as we are paid based on our position). Unfortunately, employees are dismissed ring in the policy-making procedures at higher levels as we, for sure, are really aware of hidden lines and available true paths towards success. **(Participant #70)**

In line with the above participant's quote, the following quote also concerns interviewee's feedback around their manager's perspective on towards their role:

I remember the session prior to join the office. 23 males/females were shortlisted candidates for the position at the Quality Assurance Office. [Here, just one of this participant's quotes is provided]. The manager said that "You are monthly paid and there would be no delay in your payment, so you have to stick to what you are supposed to do. There is no need to question or challenge what authorities decide or propose. Just, try to be identified as a silent employee who loves his job and not as an interfering object. **(Participant #24)**

Most of employees also believed that managers and authorities do not put much emphasis on employees' experiences in their decision-making sessions.

Experience cannot be denied. It is extensively acknowledged and appreciated worldwide, but here it seems those biased looks and not tolerating colleagues' success and prosperity is

the main building block. However, it will lead employees forget cooperation environment and in some cases unreal and fake accuses might emerge. Of course, it is managers' duty to encourage such a cooperation and friendly work environment at the offices.

(Participant #54)

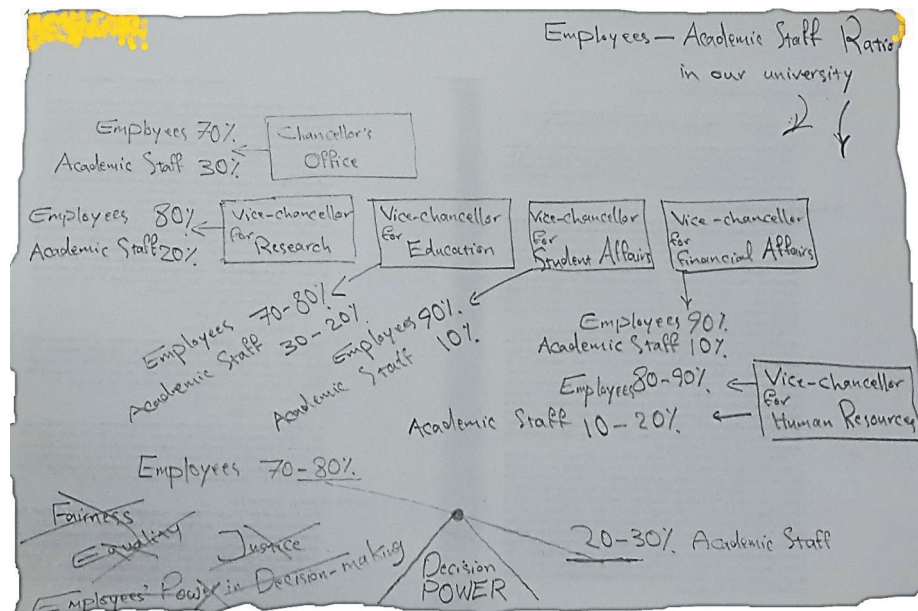
One of the employees as a senior expert in international collaboration office illuminated her beliefs concerning the decision-making power of employees in her affiliated university (Figure 1). She believes that employees' right in terms of thinking power and the chance of participation in decision-making meetings are not observed as most of employees are willing to participate in such sessions.

If employees are invited to participate in such sessions or propose novel ideas, they feel more committed to the university as such an opportunity makes them feel that they are acknowledged and valued, and that their ideas and voices are taken into account in university policies. Twenty-nine participants were experienced employees with near 24–30 years of experience within different sections of university. They discussed how when their views and experience are not valued and acknowledged by the university authorities, a competitive environment emerges where ethical considerations might be violated as employees try to get promotion. In this situation, there is no opportunity for professional development and cohesive relationships with other employees. In line with our participants' overview of their working environment and formation of their personalities; Bakker (2010) stresses that

focusing on work engagement offers organizations a competitive advantage. Moreover, engaged employees create their own great place to work. They are active job crafters looking for possibilities to optimize their work environment ... This has positive consequences for employees and for organizations at large, since engagement leads to creativity, active learning, and optimal performance. (p. 241)

Therefore, the empowerment of employees in organizations should be a priority of managers. Ergeneli et al. (2007, p. 41) also mention that “personnel empowerment is one of the fundamental elements of managerial and organizational effectiveness and that effectiveness increases when power and control are shared”. De Vos and Meganck (2009, p. 58) also stress that “HR managers

Figure 1. Participant's #18 overview concerning decision-making power among employees and academic staff.



should better take into account what their employees value and how they evaluate their organization's efforts towards retention management if they are to contribute in a cost-efficient way to the strategic objectives of the organization". However, employees' empowerment can only happen if top-tier authorities believe in staff professional development and employees' encouragement to be active members of the university than mere robots who perform their jobs. These concerns are also in alignment with [Goetsch and Davis \(2014\)](#) work on employees' empowerment. So, authorities are at the core of the employees' concern who should provide a chance for employees' engagement within the decision- and policy-making meetings. One of the employees provided his feedback as follows:

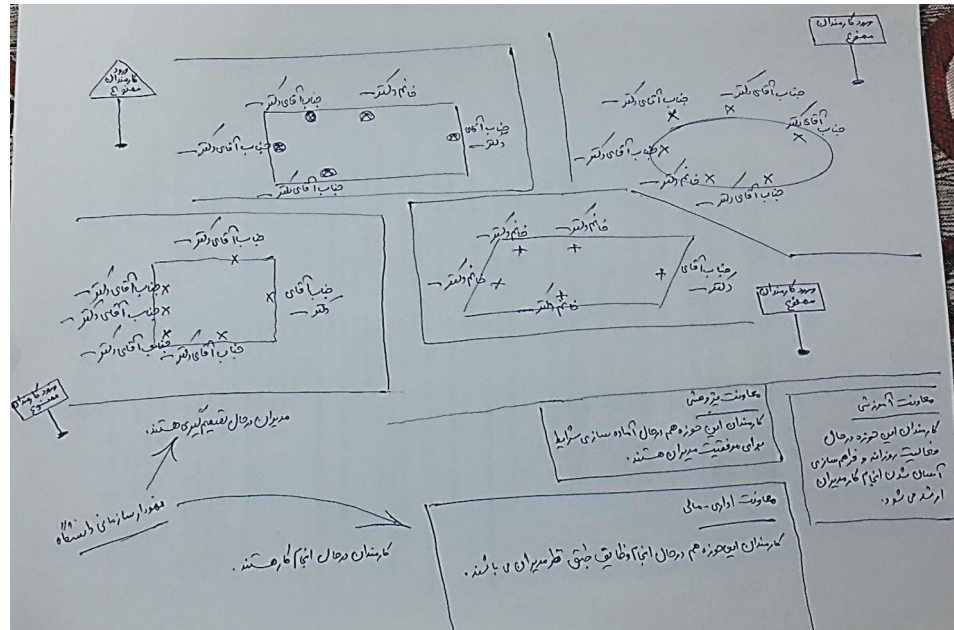
There is no mutual channel between employees and those at the top levels of management at the university. It might happen to see the chancellor, vice-chancellors, and some other higher order authorities on the campus, but in most cases it just takes about few seconds for greetings and nothing else. It is even more interesting that those authorities might even have no background that he/she might be the employee of the university. In such a case, is it possible to participate in decision-making meetings and share the experiences which might be vital to the university success? The answer is NO! Here, the middle level managers' failure to provide such a chance for employees to share their ideas and engage them in each and every domain of the university's policies might be the reason that employees are only bounded to their offices and desks during their eight-hour-daily clichéd life at the university. Or the unwritten policies which higher order authorities and managers adopt to form a forbidden zone which cannot be deviated by their employees at the lower, middle, and top levels of work force. **(Participant #59)**

The importance of available channels between managers and employees cannot be neglected. If employees feel secure in the universities, then, they will show more commitment towards the organization's goals and, in case of different crises; they will be able to share their views and experiences with their managers. In such a friendly cooperative and warm environment, the organizations and employees' performances increase, respectively. In a research practice, [Hauck and Chard \(2009, p. 13\)](#) found that in case of depression in the organization, "Better links are needed between employees and managers to enhance workplace collaborations and achieve optimal work performance". It also needs to be mentioned that the role of personal and emotional characteristics in employees' sense of total commitment to their organizations as well as their empowerment cannot be taken for granted. As [Nikic et al. \(2014, p. 281\)](#) claim, the available research highlights "the main competences related to excellent performance at work are emotional and social qualities: adaptability, self-confidence, persistence, emotion identification and control, empathy, [and] ability to agree with others". One of the other female employees portrayed her beliefs about the decision-making power distribution among employees and middle- and top-level managers ([Figure 2](#)). As she described her ideas in Persian, all her accompanying notes are provided in English.

At the top of [Figure 2](#), she drew four counselling or/and decision-making meetings where all those participants were male and female PhD. holders who were affiliated with different departments at the university. Importantly, she put a NO ENTRY SIGN for EMPLOYEES which portrays how employees are taken for granted in middle and higher order decision-making sessions. She also drew three vice-chancellors' sections where all employees were busy with their clichéd daily administrative tasks without any opportunity for their voices and ideas to be heard or acknowledged through their participation in these decision-making meetings. This suggests that university managers should provide the necessary infrastructures to enable a reform in employees' engagement so that they can participate in decision-making sessions. Almost all participants' feedback on the impact of their participations and engagement within decision-making sessions is in alignment with [Driscoll's \(1978\)](#) view that

Two aspects of decision making predict satisfaction: the individual's participation in decisions (especially the fit between desired and perceived participation) and the individual's trust in organizational decision makers. ... This study [also] supports one of [Ritchie's](#)

Figure 2. Participant's #40 feeling about participants at decision-making sessions and working offices.



conditions on the effectiveness of participation, namely that people must desire participation for it to have major effects. (p. 53)

It appears that organizations and universities' community that managers do not engage with the idea that employees are capable and that they should be permitted to be more active members of their organizations. Wrzesniewski and Dutton (2001) also propose [that]

the employees craft their jobs by changing cognitive, task, and/or relational boundaries to shape interactions and relationships with others at work. These altered task and relational configurations change the design and social environment of the job, which, in turn, alters work meanings and work identity. (p. 179)

3.1.2. University as a piece of larger puzzle (government)

Public and private organizations are (in)directly supervised by governments as they have to follow the higher order policies of states. Long (1962, p. 110 as cited in Pettigrew, 2001, p. 16) mentions that "People will readily admit that governments are organizations. The converse - that organizations are governments - is equally true but rarely considered".

Politics is a game embedded with hidden and unwritten ideologies. I remember no chance to talk about my experience when some problems emerge though I am working at the office of university chancellor. Unfortunately, the denial of employees' overviews and taking into account their thinking power is easily understood both among employees and those authorities of the university. I am not yet invited to participate in one of board of directors' session since I joined the office (2008, I think). The policies of university should be revised in this case and there should be an opportunity for each section at the university to introduce one representative (selected based on experience and levels of administration success) to participate in higher order decision-making sessions to voice the employees' needs and ideas of the corresponding section, to propose some advices which might not be seen by the higher order managers and policy-makers of the university, and also to challenge some of already or newly made decisions by the authorities of the university. (Participant #16)

Governments, ministries, universities, schools, and almost all state and non-state organizations provide different channels (usually virtual through their online pages) for us to

communicate if we prefer to raise any concern, propose suggestions, and criticize what is happening in that specific organization. I also had the experience of corresponding through such channels with different state organizations. My concern was acknowledged, but nothing happened in reality (of course, in my case). Unfortunately, it seems administrative staff are just considered as the executive work force which is supposed to do exactly what he/she is supposed to do with no power to challenge the higher order made decisions. Such a mentality towards employees has no result than their suppression and lowers their motivation to work with total commitment. **(Participant #9)**

Brass and Krackhardt (2012) also emphasize that “organizations are designed to be cooperative systems; however, political activity occurs when conflict arises, and those with power have the advantage”. The interdependence of politics as well as organizational management, control, and employees’ status within the circle of internal and external political relationships is always at the top of researchers’ theme of practice (e.g., Ferris & Kacmar, 1992; Fulop et al., 1999; Kumar & Thibodeaux, 1990; Vigoda, 2000).

I joined the vice-chancellor for development office as a senior expert since 2007 with a treasure of thirteen-year experience of working in a private organization outside the university. It was a reputable industrial manufacturing corporation with its main focus on worldwide export. All duties were based on that top-down hierarchy of authorities’ organization chart, but more focus was put on cooperation engagement of managers and employees almost in all policy-making sessions (of course, these sessions happened monthly in each section based on its duties and contributing role in the corporation). Such sessions are missing here in the vice-chancellor for development office where its name suggests there should be continuous counselling sessions but it was totally different. It leaves no satisfactory feeling as universities are to train future members of our society and work as the counselling wing of other ministries of the government. **(Participant #72)**

I got my B.A. in Political Sciences and left Iran for a five-year period. I also got my M.A. in the same field with on-site living experience in Europe. At the moment, I am working as a senior expert of international relations. I was in almost all sessions where international counselling members were meeting once in a month. The annoying feeling is that I felt no such a friendly environment to voice my own ideas or challenge what might be on the contrary to the university’s higher order policies in international cooperation. The main problem remains with the manoeuvring atmosphere in almost all universities (of course, all organizations) that employees are just employees and their thinking power, their critical looks, and their real lived experiences are taken for granted in most cases as in almost all decision making sessions, we just see the academic staff and no administrative staff. Unfortunately, it is denied in our universities that it is the administrative staffs who handle most of duties to pave the way for academic staffs’ ease of research and practice. **(Participant #69)**

What happens outside organizations (in our case, universities) in society is impacted by the prevalent policies to govern the society and the public. So, such ideologies and ideals of authorities manoeuvre the working and cooperation environment of the organizations. Hence, employees at those low-, middle-, and even top-levels have to accept those policies. In a study in Bangladesh, Rahman et al. (2011, p. 153) found that organizational politics affect garments employees’ commitment as well as their job performance. The same working condition was also prevalent in schools where teachers are just teachers without any power to challenge the teaching methodologies or syllabi which are foisted on teachers and have no channel to voice their ideas. For instance, Safari (2018) discussed her role as an English language teacher stated that;

In this context, I understood my teaching was not mine, I was not the type of teacher I liked to be, and my identity was in the control of an authority named the principal of school. I felt disempowered as I had no power to display my SELF in my work. (p. 11)

Put in linking sentence to the following quote ...

Experience in some cases works much better than years of mere theoretical teaching and learning at the universities, but it is the missing ring in our organizational structure not only in universities but in all sections where experienced staff might work as a facilitative work force to increase the organizations' success with their years of real lived experiences and wrestling with different types of problems and crisis (in all forms). But, unfortunately it is totally different here. **(Participant #19)**

Employee participants were concerned about the denial of their thinking power and universities authorities' preference to keep employees as the executive forces who are committed to their position and duties to foster the universities' pace towards their ideal position in national, regional and global levels. Participants believe as time passes and changes happen in each and every sphere of our life cycle; employees also change and they are just at the organization and their offices due to the financial problems they experience in life. Almost all participants claimed that there is no way to escape from the unwritten hidden policies of the states, accordingly, the data highlighted the negative effects of politics on employees' attitudes and performance. Karatepe et al. (2012, p. 73) stress that "management must take decisive step to devise new policies and/or revise the existing policies to create a work environment where politics is minimized". As a teaching practitioner as well as a life-long learner, Tohidian (2016) also tried to remind students that we really matter and our voice should be heard as future members of society. His endeavour was to remind the students that we should never feel suppressed and it is important to believe that our words count. He also emphasized that as a teacher, we are training future members of our society; so it is our duty to remind educational policy-makers to develop materials and design courses and syllabi in alignment with the ideology of higher education stakeholders' empowerment than their suppression.

3.2. Phase TWO: managers' proposed solutions

Top-level managers are engaged within the proposal cycle of suggestions generated in this study to include the employees in the decision-making procedures. This suggested an acceptance that employees had been taken for granted, aligning with a position where employees are just the work forces who perform the assigned duties from the top (Table 3).

The pivotal role of managers and authorities in promotion of employees' engagement was the emphasized as key for universities' success. It was highlighted that if different ideologies are expressed employees' capability to manage the situation and to provide an environment where ideas can freely be expressed. Furthermore, mutual meetings were emphasised as a key site to generate common perspectives and examine differences. In a study, O'Leary (2010) asks

Table 3. Managers' suggestions and emerged themes

#M NO.	Proposed Suggestions as KEY IDEAS
#M1	Change in managers' mindset; Encouragement as bonus; Priority of experience; Employees as counselling wings; Amendment of policies; Establishment of chancellor's employee counselling office; No equal decision chance based on academic & non-academic staff distribution;
#M2	Not following the organization of state; Finding employees' unwillingness to contribute as an idea creator; Remind the policy-making bodies about nature of cooperation in university; Ph.D. holders need experienced counselling bodies; Learning from developed countries; Amendment of organization chart; Specifically designed in-service programs for training empowered employees;
#M3	Chancellor's (bi)weekly meeting with employees (each section separately); Chancellor's encouragement of top-level managers to have weekly meetings with their employees; Chancellor's encouragement of employees whose ideas, suggestions and proposals are put into practice; Chancellor's change of clichéd employees' university life from mere executive to study, research, and execute;

managers about “the value of dissent in organizations” and further proposes the following suggestions based on the received responses:

1) Create an organization culture that accepts, welcomes, and encourages candid dialogue and debate. Cultivate a questioning attitude by encouraging staff to challenge the assumptions and actions of the organization; 2) Listen; 3) Understand the organization both formally and informally; 4) Separate the people from the problem; [and] 5) Create multiple channels for dissent (pp. 16-17).

Jiao and Zhao (2014, p. 795) also considered the importance of providing a free atmosphere in the work environment for employees. In their research on how do employees interpret the concept of change in their organization, they stressed that “there is no reason to believe that employees should have similar attitudes toward change as their managerial change initiators”. Our managers’ suggestions were in alignment with these research findings as an amendment of already administered rules for employees’ roles and rights are no longer responding to the current changes and reforms of employees’ engagement and acknowledgement of their rights as decision-making entities who might even be considered as counselling wings of higher order authorities of the university.

Each university also has a guild council for non-academic staff which as far as I know it mainly deals with employees’ needs, financial problems, insurance issues, different types of available loans, and etc. They also have annual or bi-annual (still, I’m not sure) representative elections to be in constant contact with higher order authorities of the university; however, as far as I know most of their concerns manoeuvre over financial problems and nothing is raised about employees’ right to introduce their ideas, to participate in policy-making sessions, and to remind authorities that if teaching, learning, and research happens is most due to presence of employees who handle almost all administrative and executive plans of the university. Employees’ unwillingness, then, causes authorities to neglect the employees as the counselling bodies with treasure of experience. **(Participant #M1)**

It also needs to be mentioned that managers are advised to design the working and cooperation environment with an emphasis on total engagement of the staff. Such managers’ proposals again confirm the authorities’ awareness of the employees’ concern as their power of thinking is not taken into account; however, it is concluded from the analysis of managers’ suggestions that authorities fear change and it is hard for them to modify their leadership styles, which leave no space for employees’ engagement within higher order sessions. Accordingly, the management style is very important in managers’ effectiveness and the overall prosperity of organisations. Mosadegh Rad and Yarmohammadian (2006, p. 1) also found that “Employee job satisfaction depends upon the leadership style of managers. Nevertheless, participative management is not always a good management style. Managers should select the best leadership style according to the organizational culture and employees’ organizational maturity”. The following excerpts from participating managers’ illuminate the managers’ concerns:

I had a chance to visit University during my four-day mission for pursuing the progress of signed MOU in 2015. Contrary to what we see in our sessions with international delegates (here, I mean); three employees from the corresponding bodies who were engaged with the MOU ARTICLES were also present at the session. They were also the opportunity (like the academic staff and authorities) to talk and express their ideas and suggestions concerning the MOU. I was surprised as our employees follow all issues based on their managers’ orders and pave the way for our progress, but they are not allowed to participate in such sessions. One more interesting point was that the managers at the session each introduced the employees separately and explained how he/she contributed to the progress of MOU. But, here, I have never seen to ask employees to be at our meetings and even (un)consciously forget to acknowledge employees. **(Participant #M2)**

It is really hard and in some cases it is even impossible to change the university authorities’ mindset concerning what is administered as a cliché for years. Therefore, we need to see both a movement in managers and authorities’ way of thinking to provide further chances

for their employees to hear their ideas (even in less important cases) to motivate the employees and remind them that their words are counted and valued. For sure, it will be like a movement as there is an unreal forbidden zone which unconsciously keeps away the employees from being critical and challenge the clichéd decision-making sessions. At the same time, employees also need to increase their criticality mind to look at the surrounding community through critical lens and try to remind the university authorities that they also have the right to be counted when decisions are to be made. **(Participant #M3)**

As highlighted in Table 3., employees' motivation and encouragement have facilitative and positive effects on their commitment to the work community and their engagement with other employees, and further with the middle – as well as top-level managers which increase the cooperation community in the organizations. Wiley (1997, p. 277) also emphasized that “promotion and growth in the organization and interesting work are longstanding factors that motivate people to do their best work”. Furthermore, employees' training (for example, thought management, critical thinking, and crisis management courses) was a suggestion from managers to increase employees' deep thinking techniques. It was thought with this training employees would be better equipped to participate in decision-making opportunities. Managers advised universities to provide training based on the employees' position needs and the university higher order policies to have more cooperative work environment. In line with these proposals, Georgiadis and Pitelis (2016, p. 409) found that “employees' training had a stronger positive impact on firms' labour productivity and profitability than that of managers”. Ramus (2002, p. 163) also confirmed that “environmental policies are important because they make employees sensitive to the signal (supportive or unsupportive) that they receive from their line manager”. Similarly, Brewer (1996, p. 33) proposed that “managers and supervisors need to look at structures and processes which encourage participation and decentralized authority so that employees become more involved in their organization”.

Therefore, managers' critical analysis of employees' responses to the interview questions illuminate that they are aware of the employees' denial by the authorities from decision-making cycle at the university. This may be due to the prevalent ideologies and policies outside the university as an organization and the employees' unwillingness to challenge the existing policies. Hence, it is important to remind the authorities about the employees' thinking potential, which needs an urgent reform (structural changes) in the organization chart to provide an identical section for employees to provide them with a chance to share their ideas and views. In the long run, this shapes the employees' decision-making power, and convinces the organization's authorities' (chancellor, board of trustees, board of directors, and vice-chancellors) to trust employees' views and proposals. They also emphasized the necessity of infrastructures to change the employees' role as mere receivers of authorities' orders and rules who are asked to meticulously do what is assigned to them with no power to challenge the authorities if a wrong decision is made or if it can be modified according to the universities' priorities. This aligns with Safari's (2017) research which stressed the pivotal role of practices to change the teachers' role as passive recipients of higher order policies to active and empowered entities. Consequently, there should be change in managers and authorities' mindset towards the work community as both (managers and employees) should consider themselves as two interwoven bodies with the same goals who pursue the same road to their success. Tjosvold et al. (1991) also illuminated that

cooperative and powerful managers and employees are effective; cooperative goals supplement power and together contribute to constructive organizational dynamics. Employees described cooperative managers as competent and facilitating their work. Managers who had developed cooperative goals thought their employees had a positive impact on them and were competent. (p. 294)

4. Concluding remarks

The present research explored the views of employees and top-level managers to propose solutions to issues in universities in the context of Iran with its specific cultural, political, economic, and educational heritage. The analysis of employees' interviews illuminated that they are highly

motivated and willing to share their ideas and participate in higher order authoritative decision-making sessions but they find little opportunity to achieve this in their roles. Their main concern was that university authorities pretend to acknowledge and value the employees' thinking power and their counselling role, but in reality, it is totally different when it comes into practice as employees are not yet allowed to participate in the decision- and policy-making sessions.

The engagement of top-level managers to propose their suggestions led to an interesting and vital claim that they believe the employees are not willing to be engaged in the decision-making sessions, which stand in contradiction to what employees believe about their roles in universities. However, their proposals can also provide insightful comments for university authorities to change that long-lasting clichéd organization charts by engagement of all contributing bodies who cooperate in the organizations and universities with the same ideals. The analysis of employees' responses also illuminated that some of them had totally different experiences in state and non-state organizations. They believed that cooperation and encouragement of employees in non-state organizations are much more evident as the corporates' managers believe that two minds work much better than a single mind. The available research, also, confirm the differences between management style within public and private sectors, as well as the employees' behaviour within these two sectors, respectively (see Boyne, 2002; Buelens & Van den Broeck, 2007; Poole et al., 2006; Rainey & Bozeman, 2000; Solomon, 1986).

The findings from this study can be used to develop further research to implement such practices within the same or different contexts to increase the position of organizations and change the debilitating prevalent atmosphere of employees-employees and employees-managers to a facilitative cooperation environment where all ideas are freely expressed and all are engaged within decision as well as policy-making sessions. Morgan (1986) in his book "Images of Organizations" uses metaphorical language to talk about the organizational culture and working environment. The Morgan's metaphors are *Organization as machine*, *Organization as brain*, *Organization as organisms*, *Organization as culture*, *Organization as psychic prisons*, *Organization as a system of politics*, *Organization as flux/transformation*, and *Organization as a tool of domination*. Our research findings are in alignment with these metaphors, for instance, if we consider university as an organism, we need to remember that all its parts must be in total alignment with each other if success is the ultimate goal of the organization. In this regard, all engaged people's voices and ideas must be heard and people's identity must be respected. Or organization as a system of politics portrays our findings where we discuss "University as a piece of larger puzzle (government)". Tohidian & Rahimian (2019b) also confirmed that research in this area is essential if we aim to obtain the organizations' ultimate goal of success.

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APPENDIX A

Dear Mr./Mrs./Ms.

First of all, let me express my sincere gratitude to you. I am sure that you have lots of administrative commitments to handle; however, it would be an honour for me if you could kindly find time to provide me with your feedback concerning the following questions. As I emphasized – through our phone calls – we are going to ask the employees and administrative staffs’ ideas about how much their thinking power is acknowledged at the university and valued by the higher order authorities. Further, it needs to be highlighted that **NO** identifying information will be revealed during the research progress and its results dissemination.

Considering your tough and scheduled executive program; I would be pleased if you could kindly provide your notes and responses to the following questions in any desired form (written, audio-recorded, drawings, and etc.) with total commitment to the future of organizational studies (higher education domain, specifically).

Please feel free, also, to contact me at (Deleted for Anonymity purposes) if you need any further information in this regard.

Sincerely,

- (1) Who decides in a higher education organization (Ministry of Education, MSRT, universities, etc.)?
- (2) What happens in a higher education organization as soon as higher ranking authorities’ decisions are rendered?

- (3) What are the intervening factors or unwritten rules (if any) which might expedite or postpone the higher education organizations move towards their success?
- (4) What are the roles of other state or non-state bodies who impose their power over higher education organizations' decision- and policy-making?
- (5) How do you portray your position within the decision-making cycle of university?

APPENDIX B

Dear Dr./Mr.

First of all, let me express my deep appreciation to you for participating in our research practice. Based on our initial talks in your office, here, you – as a manager – are supposed to present your proposed solutions to employees' concern about denial of their thinking power in organizations in general and in universities (our case) specifically. Below, you are one more time asked to confirm that you will remain unbiased towards employees' community and their responses (Of course, you are provided with analysis of employees' responses).

Your proposed advices will be presented to two our university cases for consideration.

Here, I confirm to provide the responses with total commitment to the nature of research practice and avoid any biased or injustices in my responses due to the employees' responses.

Your name (Anonymity will be observed).

Signature



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