

The Relationship between Psychological Capital and Job Performance: The Mediating Role of Psychological Empowerment

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Abstract

Introduction: This study investigated the relationship between psychological capital and job performance by focusing on the mediating role of psychological empowerment.

Method: The present study used a correlational method through Structural Equation Modeling (SEM). In order to do so, 204 employees were selected through the stratified sampling method. To collect data, the study drew on such instruments as Luthans and Colleagues' Psychological Capital Questionnaire, Paterson's Job Performance Questionnaire, and Spreitzer and Mishra's Psychological Empowerment Questionnaire. The data were analyzed with reference to correlational statistics and inferential statistics processed in SPSS-23 and Lisrel-8.5 software. Analyses of the SEM confirmed that the proposed model fit the data.

Results: The findings revealed that psychological capital had a significant effect on both job performance (%35) and on psychological empowerment (%69). Furthermore, the effect of psychological empowerment on job performance (%54) was significant. The effect of psychological capital on job performance through the mediation of psychological empowerment was also significant (%37).

Conclusion: As the results showed, it can be argued that organizations could reinforce their competitive status by investing on and paying attention to the positive psychological features of their Human Resources (HR), and by taking the necessary measures to enhance these characteristics, as they could contribute to organizational performance and productivity.

Keywords: Psychological Capital, Psychological Empowerment, Job Performance, Structural Equation Modeling (SEM)

Introduction

In today's competitive business environment, employees' job performance represents an important factor that can have a pivotal function in achieving organizational performance. Performance is the most important dependent variable in the context of organizational research and the most important concept in industrial-organizational psychology [1]. From an organizational perspective, performance is often regarded as the operation of the members of an organization in achieving goals [2]. The role of employees' job performance is extremely important because if this factor is ignored it could disturb the organization's success [3]. Meanwhile job performance is significantly associated with the development and advancement of organizational goals and the achievement of competitive advantage [4].

The importance of employees' job performance, which normally represents the whole the

performance of an organization, requires managers to always identify and determine elements affecting this factor. As the literature suggests, psychological capital and psychological empowerment of Human Resources (HR) are among the most important factors that improve individual performance, organizational performance, and competitive advantage. Therefore, focusing on these two concepts and arranging plans to develop them could considerably improve performance. Psychological capital is a positivist psychology indicator and involves features such as: (a) confidence and effort to succeed in challenging tasks (efficacy); (b) a positive attribution about success in the present and future (optimism); (c) persistence in reaching goals and redirecting them in order to succeed when needed (hope); and (d) sustainability in the face of difficulties and problems and the ability to bounce back (resilience) [5].

Psychological capital is an emerging concept that rests on a large number of theories and studies, and has been the topic of various positive individual and organizational findings [6]. This new approach addresses the capacities and psychological forces of human-centered resources, with the purpose of improving organizational and individual performance and of achieving organizational success [7]. Psychological capital is, in fact, beyond human and social capital and can help individuals gain benefits from competitive advantages. This positive psychological source can lead to positive organizational behaviors and encourage people to work more accurately, while bringing about efficiency and job satisfaction [8]. One of the practical purposes of psychological capital is to enhance employee performance [9].

People with a higher rate of psychological capital tend to be more hopeful about achieving their goals, are optimistic about the occurrence of positive outcomes, and believe that they are able to create positive changes in their workplace with a high degree of efficacy [10]. More specifically, psychological capital encompasses certain attributes and capabilities which can affect both employees and the entire organization. At an individual level, it can promote individual performance, and from an organizational viewpoint, it can help to increase the assets and earnings of the organization and improve the general performance [11].

Many studies have concentrated on the impacts of psychological capital on organizations. Luthans et al. [5] observed that enhancing employees' psychological capital could increase their job performance. Kappagoda et al. [1], in a survey conducted in Sri Lanka, found a significant and positive relationship between psychological capital and job performance; they explained that attitudes toward work had a mediating role in the relationship between psychological capital and job performance. Avey et al. [10] stated that psychological capital brought about positive effects in the organization such as increased job performance, job satisfaction, and reduced absenteeism.

Another variable affecting employees' job performance is psychological empowerment [12]. The empowerment of HR, as a novel approach to intrinsic motivation, involves a liberation of inner powers of employees while providing

opportunities for the development of their talents, abilities and competencies. Empowerment, then, addresses individuals' perceptions about their roles in their jobs and organization [13]. Thomas and Velthouse [14], introducing the notion of psychological empowerment in the management literature, viewed psychological empowerment as a multi-dimensional concept and defined it as the process of increasing intrinsic task motivation.

With reference to Conger and Kanungo's motivational model, Thomas and Velthouse [14] considered empowerment to be a motivation process by emphasizing that empowerment rests on an internal motivating factor which reflects an employee's active role in the organization. "Intrinsic task motivation" refers to the positive experiences that individuals directly derive from their tasks; such experiences would foster their sense of direct responsibility, motivation, and satisfaction [14]. "Competence" refers to the individual's belief in his/her capabilities needed to skillfully perform occupational activities.

"Self-determination" is the individual's feeling and perception of the independence needed to initiate, regulate, and plan occupational activities. "Meaning" is the individual's perception of the value of goals or occupational purposes; this value is judged in the light of personal norms and ideals. "Impact" denotes the individual's perception of whether he/she is able to affect work strategies and to enforce the results in his/her practice [15]. Whetten and Cameron [16] believe that the factor of "trust" should be included in the list of the factors as well. According to Fernandez and Moldogaziev [17], empowering employees leaves direct impacts on job outcomes (e.g. quality, productivity, and job satisfaction) and indirect impacts on employees' recognition (e.g. efficacy, motivation). Thomas and Volthouse [14] also contend that empowerment enhances employees' concentration, innovation, and resilience, while enhancing management effectiveness.

Environmental changes and increased global competition have added to the prominence of the notion of empowerment [17, 18]. Empowerment is one of the effective ways of increasing employee effectiveness and productivity in organizations [19]. In order to attain better performance, most organizations include employee empowerment plans in their business and individual goals. Empowering employees creates opportunities for them to work effectively and consequently improve performance. Empowerment, accompanied with expanded individual awareness, encourages employees to act more considerately, focus more specifically on their jobs, and be more willing to try new methods of job performance and participation in teamwork.

Employee empowerment accelerates the decision-making process. Research has shown that empowerment can be one of the most effective tools for increasing productivity and profit [20]. Generally speaking, it can be concluded that empowerment has a significant effect on the performance of the organization's staff and on a large number of organizational and individual interests such as

organizational commitment, effectiveness, productivity, motivation, innovation [21], high quality in job performance, and job satisfaction [16]. Considering the role of employees in organizational performance and in the achievement of organizational goals, employees' job performance can serve as the criterion for assessing and comparing the performance of organizations.

Given the fact that psychological capital and psychological empowerment can be effective in improving employees' job performance, this study seeks to investigate the relationship between these variables. As the literature suggests, numerous studies have addressed the relationship between psychological capital and job performance, and between psychological empowerment and job performance, in various organizations and

institutions; as this background reveals, there is definitely a relationship between these variables. However, what appears to be missing in the literature is an investigation that explores the mediating role of psychological empowerment in the relationship between psychological capital and job performance. Therefore, this study proposes a model in which psychological capital has a direct and positive effect on psychological empowerment and job performance (hypotheses 1 & 2). Furthermore, the model suggests that psychological empowerment has a direct and positive effect on job performance (hypothesis 3). Moreover, psychological empowerment mediates the relationship between psychological capital and job performance. Figure 1 illustrates the conceptual model configured in this study.

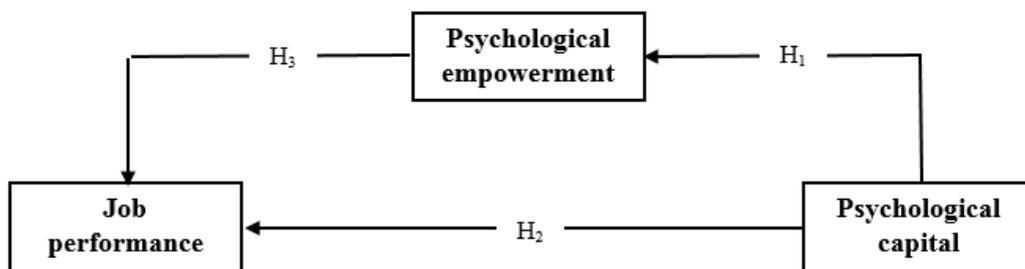


Figure 1. The conceptual model proposed in this study

Method

This study was an applied research which relied on the correlational survey method. The statistical population included all employees (400 individuals) in the Petrochemical Company in Asalouye, Iran. Among them, 196 individuals were selected with reference to the Morgan table. The employees were first classified according to the units in which they worked. The stratified random sampling was used to select employees in the sample. Moreover, the simple random sampling was employed for selecting respondents in each group.

After the samples were finally decided, 220 questionnaires were distributed among the employees selected; however ultimately 204 questionnaires were returned. The questionnaires were as follows:

Job Performance Questionnaire

This questionnaire was designed by Paterson (1990) [22]. It contains 15 items and the responses are scored on a 4-point Likert scale ranging from 0 (Rarely) to 3 (Always). In this study, the reliability coefficient of this questionnaire was 0.868 using Cronbach's alpha method.

Psychological Capital Questionnaire

To measure the employees' psychological capital, Luthans and colleagues' [5] 24-item questionnaire was used. The questionnaire is made up of standard values which have been widely used for constructs that measure hope, resilience, optimism, and efficacy; the validity and reliability of these subscales have been confirmed. The questionnaire contains 6 items for each component of psychological capital and the participants respond to each item on a 6-point Likert scale (1 = Strongly Disagree; 3 = Strongly Agree). In his investigation, Jacqueline has measured the validity of Luthans's questionnaire through the relationship of this questionnaire to job satisfaction

and self-rated performance questionnaires. He states that this questionnaire involves a stable construct and a sound measuring tool for evaluating psychological capital [23]. In this study, the reliability coefficient of this questionnaire was 0.822 using Cronbach's alpha method.

Psychological Empowerment Questionnaire

This 15-item questionnaire was introduced by Spreitzer and Mishra [24]. For each dimension of psychological empowerment (competence, self-determination, meaning, impact, and trust), 3 items are considered and the responses are scored on a 5-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (Completely Disagree) to 5 (Completely Agree) [24]. In this study, Cronbach's alpha for the psychological empowerment questionnaire was 0.862, which was a measure above the minimum acceptable level.

Results

In the descriptive statistics section, including the identification of demographic variables, the results showed that among the 204 respondents, 73% were married and 27% were single individuals; as a result the majority of them were aged 31-40 (67.6%). Furthermore, more than half of the respondents had a bachelor's degree and a work experience of 6-15 years. Table 1 lists more detailed information.

Table 2 shows the mean and standard deviation of psychological capital, psychological empowerment, and job performance of the employees in the Petrochemical Company, as well as their total scores and comparisons with the theoretical measure. For this purpose, the single-sample t-test was conducted to determine the dimensions of psychological capital, psychological empowerment, and job performance among all the respondents.

Table 1. Statistical information of the sample

age	Percentage	Education level	Percentage	Work shifts	Percentage	Years of Experience	Percentage
20-30	21.6	Diploma	7.8	A	17.2	1-5	25
31-40	67.6	Undergraduate	14.2	B	18.1	6-10	38.7
41-50	8.8	Bachelor	53.4	C	18.6	11-15	29.9
Above 50	2	MA	24.5	D	20.1	16-20	4.4
				Others	26	21-25	1.5
						26-30	0.5

Table 2. Comparing the means of psychological capital, job performance, and psychological empowerment of Petrochemical Company employees with acceptable levels (Q2)

Variable	Cronbach's alpha coefficients	Mean (μ)	Standard deviation(SD)	t value	Degrees of freedom (d.f)	Significance level (Sig)	Difference from hypothetical mean
Efficacy	0.770	4.946	0.594	22.730	203	0.0001	0.946
Hope	0.792	5.062	0.572	26.514	203	0.0001	1.062
Optimism	0.714	4.539	0.568	13.556	203	0.0001	0.539
Resiliency	0.732	4.661	0.553	17.088	203	0.0001	0.661
Psychological Capital	0.822	4.802	0.410	27.952	203	0.0001	0.802
Job Performance	0.868	2.594	0.355	23.924	203	0.0001	0.594
Meaning	0.813	4.116	0.858	18.569	203	0.0001	1.116
Competence	0.814	4.526	0.583	37.366	203	0.0001	1.526
Self-determination	0.802	3.620	0.848	10.457	203	0.0001	0.620
Impact	0.835	3.714	0.772	13.211	203	0.0001	0.714
Trust	0.919	3.547	0.997	7.840	203	0.0001	0.547
Psychological Empowerment	0.862	3.904	0.549	23.502	203	0.0001	0.904

Before calculating the overall structural model fitting and the significance levels of the path coefficients, the correlation coefficients between the variables of the model were computed (Table 3). The values specified in Table 3 show that there was a high and significant degree of correlation between the latent variables under investigation.

To fit the model, the fitting criteria used in modeling structural equations were used. The fitting criteria would indicate whether or not the model represented by the data would confirm the research measurement model or not. The model fitting indicators are presented in Table 4.

After examining how the model was fitted with the data collected and confirming the model fit the data, in the second stage, factor loadings and path coefficients in the structural model were examined. The factor loadings of each variable should be greater than 0.3 to be acceptable. The observations in Figure 2 shows that the factor loadings of all the observed variables were higher than 0.3; therefore, they could well measure the latent variables (psychological capital, job performance, and psychological empowerment). The standard pattern defined the impacts and magnitudes in the model. Figure 2 illustrates the structural model in the standard mode.

Table 3. The correlation matrix of the intrinsic and extrinsic constructs in the study

R	Variable	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
1	Efficacy	1									
2	Hope	0.914	1								
3	Optimism	0.846	0.932	1							
4	Resiliency	0.809	0.894	0.924	1						
5	Meaning	0.751	0.782	0.845	0.901	1					
6	Competence	0.782	0.793	0.859	0.768	0.894	1				
7	Self determination	0.694	0.708	0.867	0.715	0.704	0.917	1			
8	Impact	0.705	0.694	0.610	0.814	0.637	0.846	0.909	1		
9	Trust	0.801	0.807	0.784	0.602	0.742	0.751	0.892	0.891	1	
10	Job Performance	0.793	0.767	0.647	0.729	0.697	0.803	0.756	0.510	0.634	1

Table 4. Model enhancement indicators

Parameter Name	Observed Value	Acceptable Value
Chi-square Ratio to Degree of Freedom	2.96	Less than 3
Root Mean Square Error Approximation (RMSEA)	0.077	Less than 0.08
Normative Fitness Index (NNFI)	0.92	More than 0.9
Adaptive Fit Index (CFI)	0.93	More than 0.9
Incremental Fitting Index (IFI)	0.94	More than 0.9
Fitness Index (GFI)	0.92	More than 0.9
Adjustable Adjustment Index (AGFI)	0.91	More than 0.9

Table 5 shows the positive and significant impact of psychological capital on job performance, the positive and significant effect of psychological capital on psychological empowerment, and the positive and significant effect of psychological empowerment on job performance. Therefore, the first, second, and third hypotheses of the research were confirmed.

As the three hypotheses were confirmed, the indirect and possibly significant impact of psychological capital on job performance could be investigated. The indirect impact was calculated through relation 1, where *a* is the effect of the independent variable on the mediator variable and *b* is the effect of the mediator variable on the dependent variable.

Relation 1:

$$B_{indirect} = a \times b$$

Along with the calculation of the indirect effect, the Sobel test must be used to measure the significance of the mediating role. As a result, indirect significance had to be manually computed based on relation 2 in line with the Sobel method:

Relation 2:

$$t - value = \frac{a \times b}{\sqrt{b^2 \times sa^2 + a^2 \times sb^2}}$$

where *a* is the effect of the independent variable on the mediator; *sa* is the standard error of the effect of the independent variable on the mediator; *b* is the effect of the mediator on the dependent variable; and *sb* is the

standard error of the mediator on the dependent variable. As Figure 2 illustrates, the path coefficient value of the relationship between psychological capital and psychological empowerment is 0.69 (the standard error value processed by the software was 0.087). The same value for the relationship between psychological empowerment and job performance was 0.54 (the standard error value processed by the software was 0.107). Therefore, based on relation 3, the indirect effect of psychological capital on job performance was 0.372:

Relation 3:

$$B_{indirect} = a \times b \rightarrow 0.69 \times 0.54 = 0.372$$

Given the observed results, the significance of the indirect effect was investigated. As the t-value was greater than ± 1.96, it could be concluded that the indirect effect of psychological capital on job performance was significant and that the main hypothesis of this study was confirmed:

Relation 4:

$$t - value = \frac{0.69 \times 0.54}{\sqrt{0.54^2 \times 0.087^2 + 0.69^2 \times 0.107^2}} = 4.257$$

Therefore, it can be concluded that psychological empowerment had a mediating effect on the relationship between psychological capital and employee job performance. As a result, the main hypothesis postulated in this study was confirmed.

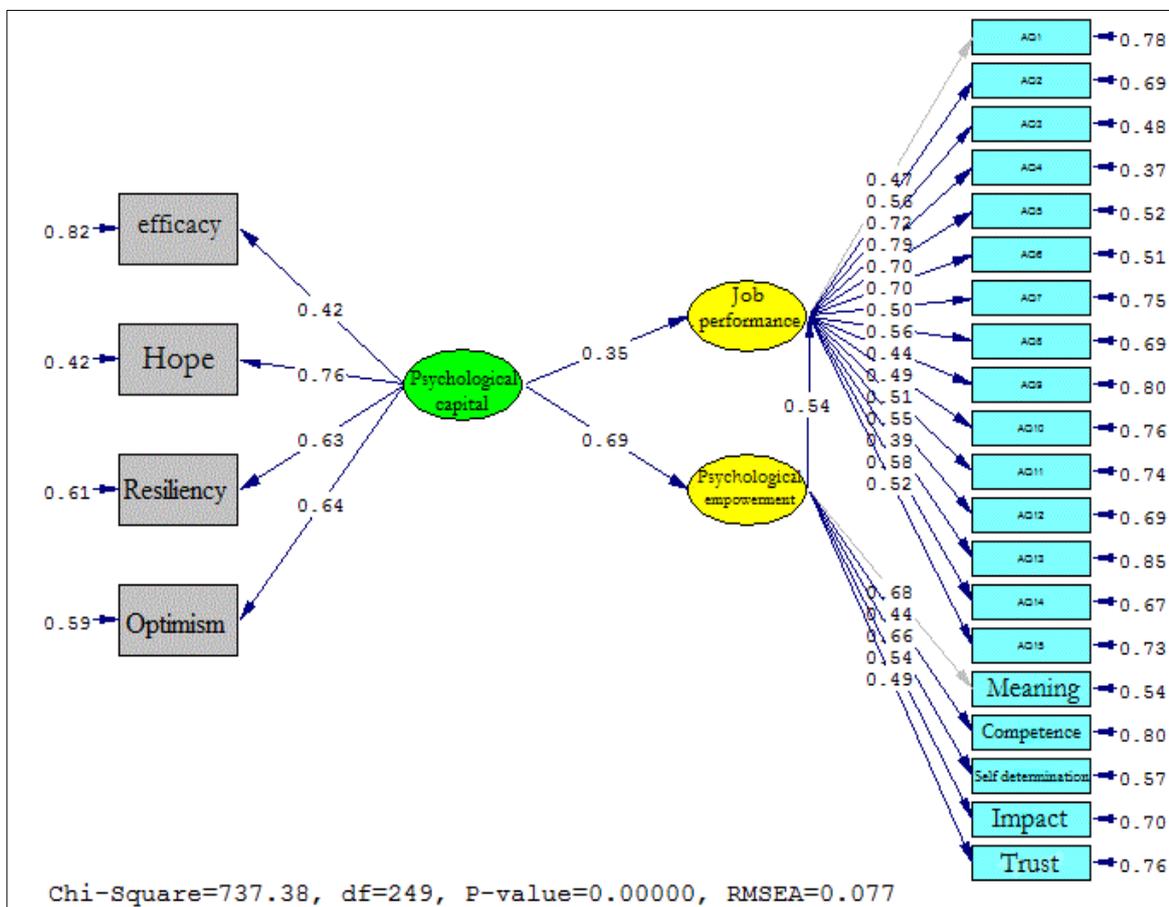


Figure 2. Structural relations between the research variables in the standard estimation mode

Table 5. Research hypotheses

Hypothesis	T value	Impact Factor	Result
Psychological capital will have positive impact on job performance	5.71	0.35	Confirmed
Psychological empowerment will have positive impact on job performance	2.38	0.54	Confirmed
Psychological capital will have positive impact on psychological empowerment	6.76	0.69	Confirmed
Psychological empowerment will have positive moderating impact on the relationship between psychological capital and job performance		0.37	Confirmed

Discussion

This study explored the mediating role of psychological empowerment in the relationship between psychological capital and job performance. After determining the instruments and evaluating their validity and reliability, the study elaborated on the data collection procedure, model fitting, factor estimation, and the structural relationships between the variables. The research hypotheses were confirmed as a result of the analysis. According to the obtained results, psychological capital had a positive and significant effect on the employees' job performance in the Petrochemical Company (H2) under investigation. The effect of psychological capital on job performance in this research was 35%. The results of this study were in line with the findings of Iroegbu [25], Kappagoda et al. [1], Wang et al. [26], Peterson et al. [27], Luthans et al. [5] and Randhawa [28]. Furthermore, the results revealed that psychological capital had a positive and significant effect of 0.69 on employees' psychological empowerment in the Petrochemical Company (H1). This finding was compatible with the observations of other studies including those of Kaya and Altinkurt [29], Kyoo Joo et al. [30], Fernandez and Muldogaziev [17], Avey et al. [10] and Thomas and Velthouse [14].

The relationship between psychological empowerment and job performance in the employees of the Petrochemical Company was also positive and significant (H3). According to the results, this relationship was estimated 0.54, which pointed to a unit of change in employees' capabilities as their performance was increased by 0.54. The results were in line with those of Sun [31], Degago [13], Iqbal et al. [12], and Chiang and Hsieh [33].

]. Path analysis indicated that psychological capital, in addition to the direct impact on job performance, indirectly and through psychological empowerment affected the employees' job performance, which left an effect of 0.37. This impact was comparatively more than the direct effect of psychological capital on job performance (0.35).

Naturally, every study faces barriers, limitations, and problems, although these issues do not necessarily invalidate the research findings. Similarly there were some limitations in this study: As some of the employees at the company worked according to rotational shifts and were not present at the workplace when the study was conducted, there were not available at all times; and as a result the process of completing the questionnaires took a relatively longer time. Moreover, the research was conducted based on the assumption that most of the employees working at the Petrochemical Company were males. Therefore, caution should be exercised in

generalizing the findings. Gender-related characteristics might have influenced the results, as all the respondents were male employees.

As the findings of this study were based on self-reports, the reports in the questionnaires might have been subconsciously biased, future researchers are advised to use interviews and empirical observations to collect data and compare the results to those of the present study. Future researchers can examine psychological capital and psychological empowerment at group and organizational levels, evaluating their impacts on organizational performance.

Conclusion

Employers have to enhance their performance both in terms of effectiveness and efficiency, contributing to the achievement of organizational goals. Job performance is, in fact, one of the fundamental ingredients in achieving performance-related organizational goals [1]. Given the importance of this factor in organizations, the dimensions improving organizational performance must be identified and reinforced in employees. Given these issues, this study probed into the relationship between psychological capital and psychological empowerment, following an exploration of the literature and identification of the two variables in terms of job performance.

As the results showed, it can be argued that organizations can sustain their competitive status by investing in and paying attention to the positive psychological characteristics of their HR, and by taking the necessary measures to develop these characteristics. As a result of such measures, organizational performance and productivity can be enhanced. Organizations can hold workshops for their HR managers/leaders to introduce the notion of psychological capital to them. Actually, HR managers should consider psychological capital as a basis for the recruitment and selection of potential employees, as the role of this variable definitely leaves an impact on improving job performance and on advancing organizational goals. Managers are advised to increase employees' psychological capital through a series of changes in their management practices (for instance by implementing positive and transformational leadership styles).

Managers can arrange the workplace in such a way that it can stimulate psychological capital by creating a positive and supportive organizational environment, providing positive feedback, establishing positive and constructive human relationships, using cooperative styles, and delegating authority to employees. Managers should strive to empower employees by accurately describing their tasks within the framework of technical and operational activities, while supporting and

appreciating employees. In order to maintain and enhance the level of employee empowerment, the recruitment department of an organization must consider the compatibility of a job with the personality and characteristics of a given employee; as such an individual's values, beliefs and behaviors would be in line with the job he/she performs. Managers can also enhance employees' sense of efficacy by practicing reward systems based on innovative/unusual performance and higher motivational values.

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