

## **Prerequisites of Employee Empowerment: The Case of Jordanian Mobile Phone Companies**

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### **ABSTRACT**

Data from 191 service employees in Jordanian mobile companies have shown a positive and significant association among four empowerment prerequisites or antecedents (including trust, incentives, communication and flow of information, and knowledge and skill) and empowerment of mobile companies' sales representatives. The results in this study suggest that the independent variables, trust, incentives, communication and flow of information, and knowledge and skill have a direct and strong impact on the dependent variable; employee empowerment. As such, the empowerment prerequisites in this study accounted for the significant variation in the level of empowerment among service employees in the mobile industry. Implications for future research and for managerial practices are also discussed.

**Keywords:** Trust, Incentives, Communication and flow of information, Knowledge and Skill, Empowerment, Mobile Companies, Services, Jordan.

### **1. INTRODUCTION**

Bowen and Lawler (1992; 1995) underline the importance of empowerment, and that empowerment of service employees requires very important prerequisites including knowledge, information, rewards and trust. It is suggested that the ability of an employee to make the proper response during the service delivery process is largely a function of the employee's knowledge and control (Bitner et al., 1990; Randolph, 1995). For example, Bitner et al. (1990) stress that knowledge of the service concept, the service delivery system and its operation, and the system standards enables employees to inform customers about what happened, what can be done, and why their needs can or cannot be accommodated. Yip (2000) argued that power, information, knowledge and rewards are very significant measures to have an effective workforce. They further

assert that empowerment also leads to greater levels of satisfaction among staff, whereas empowered employees can provide faster and friendlier service to customers as well.

Nevertheless, many organizations are still suspicious and reluctant to adopt empowerment as a change program (Eccels, 1993). Some scholars like Chris Argyris in his 1998 article throws some criticisms at the practicality of the empowerment initiative, stressing that managers and people like it, and praise it in public and in theory, but they hate it and undermine it in reality (Argyris, 1998).

Many appear to operate on the premise that employees must be protected, controlled and observed all the time. However, many scholars (Pfeffer, 1994, 1999; Kanter, 2000; Bennis et al., 2001; Ouchi, 1981) encourage companies to trust employees in making their own decisions and working out their own conflicts. William Ouchi (1981), the author of *Theory Z*, argued that a company that engaged employees as thinkers as well as doers and managed people based on values, trust and intimacy could turn things around and restore health

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and productivity to the organization (Daft, 2004).

As such, this article suggests that for empowerment to be applied effectively, academics as well as managers must consider some antecedents and prerequisites for empowerment in order to make it succeed (Bowen and Lawler, 1992; 1995). This study will investigate such prerequisites including knowledge, communication, incentives and trust in order to fill the gap that has been overlooked in the literature and to test the impact of such prerequisites on the empowerment of customer contact employees in the service industry; represented here by the case of the mobile telecommunication companies in Jordan. While such relationships have been investigated separately based on anecdotal studies, and limited to Western environment, this is an empirical attempt to study the prerequisites of the empowerment of service employees in an environment that has been under shortages of such investigation in the Jordanian telecommunication industry. The following section presents a brief history of the mobile companies in Jordan.

### **Empowerment Defined**

Empowerment according to Randolph and Sashkin (2002) is recognizing and releasing into the organization the power that people already have in their wealth of useful knowledge, experience and internal motivation (Randolph, 1995; 2000).

Empowerment is further defined as management strategies for sharing decision-making power (Bowen and Lawler, 1992). Barbee and Bott (1991) also define empowerment as being the act of vesting substantial responsibility in the people who are the nearest to the problem. Many people however, confuse empowerment with delegation of authority. The reality is that in delegation of authority, authority can be given and withdrawn by the will of the higher authority whereas empowerment is a state of mind and an engagement of the mind and the soul of the individual (Bowen and Lawler, 1995). In delegation, the manager is the thinker and the holder of initiative and responsibility; whereas in empowerment, the empowered is the thinker, proactive and initiator. He owns the task at hand, owns the

problem, the job and the customer. He does not wait for any script to be followed. He rather initiates his own script for his own task or problem at hand. Such people need to find the right organizational climate enhanced by good relationships between managers and employees where trust and openness are the prevailing atmosphere (Grievess, 2000).

Knowledge and skill and continuous learning are the dominating language, communication and flow of information is effectively applied in the era of information and information technology. And incentives and support is to its fullest to encourage people to hold more responsibility, discretion and autonomy (Grievess, 2000).

Briefly, this study advocates the establishment of positive conditions that foster empowerment and feelings of self efficacy like trust, communication, knowledge, and incentives.

### **The Mobile Industry in Jordan Background**

Currently, there are four different mobile companies operating in Jordan. Jordan Mobile Telephone Services Company (Fastlink) was established in 1994 as a joint venture between Motorola and Jordanian investors. Fastlink started its commercial operations in September 1995 and was the first operator to introduce mobile phone services into Jordan. In 2003, Fastlink became a subsidiary of Mobile Telecommunications Company K.S.C. ("MTC"). Since its inception, Fastlink has increased its subscribers' base at an exponential growth rate, with the number of users currently approaching 1 million and representing 75% of the total market in Jordan.

The second company, Fastlink's first competitor was Mobilecome, which is a subsidiary of the Jordanian Telecommunication Company in Jordan which started operating in September 2000. Both companies were given a license and the right to be the only service providers in Jordan evading any type of competition until 2003. However, MOBILECOM marketing strategy is to build bonds and contracts with some public and government institutions by providing special rates to their employees.

The competition between both companies has a key role in increasing the number of customers for both. Hence the number of mobile owners climbed from 389 thousand in the end of 2000 to 866 thousand in the end of 2001, a growth rate of 123%. Recently, two new mobile companies have entered the competition with some modified services and different target customers. Express and Umnia are struggling to attract customers and to compete against the big players in the mobile industry in Jordan. All these companies have something in their mission statements regarding their employees in terms of training and development, trust and good relationships between employees, supervisors and customers; they try to hire fresh graduates with high grade point averages (GBAs), and with extra curricular activities including computer skills. They all compete for talent and view their employees as their most important assets. Most Managers and employees are aware of the modern management principles and ideas like the empowerment concept. The author has tried to get data from the first three companies, while the last one was under establishment during the process of this research<sup>(1)</sup>.

## 2. THE RESEARCH MODEL

### The Empowerment Debate

Empowerment as a contemporary concept has encountered so much debate that perhaps exceeds most controversial concepts in organization behavior or human resources in contemporary issues and topics. Argyris (1998) for example has argued that despite all the talk about empowerment as a significant change program and a modern intervention approach, it is still mostly an illusion:

*The change programs and practices we employ are full of inner contradictions that cripple innovation, motivation, and drive. At the same time, CEOs subtly undermine empowerment. Managers love empowerment in theory, but the command and control model is what they trust and know best. For their part,*

*employees are often ambivalent about empowerment- it is great as long as they are not held personally accountable (Argyris, 1998:89).*

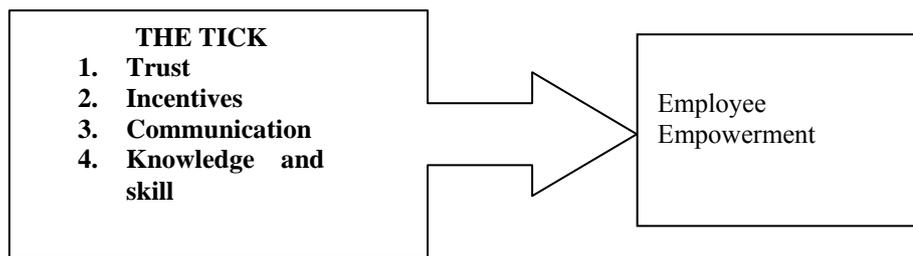
Such unsettled debate creates a need for more systematic and empirical efforts, specifically in different contexts to explore those neglected prerequisites to empower employees and resolve the inner contradictions that undermine empowerment as described in the language of Argyris (1998). Hence, this study came to examine the relationship between trust, incentives, communication and flow of information, knowledge and skill on one hand and employee empowerment on the other hand, and whether such conditions work in the Jordanian telecommunication mobile industry to sustain and develop employees' responsiveness and capabilities in serving their customers.

Contrary to the illusion view of empowerment expressed by scholars like Argyris (1998) and Eccels (1993), the author along with popular research presented by Bowen and Lawler in their articles of 1992 and 1995 believe that the problem is not with the empowerment itself, but rather with the way people implement it. Therefore, the real challenge occurs in the difficulty of implementing the empowerment initiative. Managers find it difficult to implement because it requires that they give up some of their power and authority to those people in the front line or the lower echelons of the hierarchy (Melhem, 2004), and without the appropriate organization climate, empowerment would still be an unrealistic concept.

Therefore, if an appropriate organization climate is created with incentives, rewards and recognition maintained; effective communication and flow of information are established, and knowledge, learning and skills enhanced; when such conditions are sincerely infused and embraced by managers and employees, empowerment then could be well worked on and subtly developed. Nevertheless, this does not guarantee the automatic application of empowerment but it establishes the necessary prerequisites for management initiative to the effective implementation of empowering the frontline employees.

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(1) See for example: <http://www.intaj.net/news/readnews.cfm?id=794>

**Figure 1.: Proposed Study Model of Employee Empowerment.**

As such, the main purpose of this study is to examine the TICK<sup>(2)</sup> prerequisites (Trust, Incentives, Communication, and Knowledge) assuming through the literature (Bowen and Lawler, 1992; 1995; Spreitzer, 1995; 1997; Melhem, 2003; 2004; 2005) that such conditions have a direct impact and effect on the degree of empowerment among service employees in the service sector, specifically, the mobile telecommunications industry in Jordan. The following figure demonstrates such relationship.

### **Empowerment Prerequisites**

#### **Knowledge and Empowerment**

Knowledge and skill in this research are viewed as interchangeable terms where knowledge or skill are considered as key factors to the empowerment of frontline employees or to a lower level employees in any organization. Hence, knowledge and empowerment are expected to be associated constructs and the rise of knowledge work has been foreseen for many years (Cortada, 1998). The term "knowledge worker", described by Peter F. Drucker (1989) signals to the great shift from the industrial worker, manual worker or the routine work into the knowledge worker and knowledge work (Davenport, 2001). Hence, knowledge, skill and expertise are very important conditions and antecedents of empowered staff to act and deal with tasks, job activities

and customers, based on that skill or knowledge (See Drucker, 1989; Davenport, 2001; Nonaka and Takeuchi, 1995; Poell and Der Krog, 2000). Researchers like Thomas and Velthouse (1990), Spreitzer, (1995), Al-Qarioti (2004), Melhem (2004) have empirically investigated the relationship between knowledge, skill and expertise on one hand and self-efficacy on the other (i.e., the perception of confidence in one's ability to perform well) and found strong relationship between such factors. Thus, knowledge increases the employees' confidence in their decisions and more importantly in serving their customers. However, while knowledge and expertise have been heavily researched and many articles and books have tackled the issue, still there is a lack in empirically exploring the relationship between these constructs and the empowerment of service employees. Specifically, taking this investigation in a new environment with no previous research in this area. This leads to the development of the first Hypothesis:

***H1: Empowerment levels are higher among employees with more knowledge and skills.***

#### **Communication and Empowerment**

Communication refers to the extent of information sharing between organizational members in order to achieve the organization goals and objectives. Any relationship would include at least two parties, often more in a network of relationships, and in order for the relationship to develop successfully, the parties involved have to share information about needs that have to be fulfilled and solutions that can be offered (Grönroos,

(2) TICK stands for the four study prerequisites; Trust, Incentives, Communication and flow of information, and Knowledge and skill as independent variables for the empowerment of service employees.

2000; Lawler III, 2001). Sharing information according to Pfeffer (1994) is:

*A necessary precondition to another important feature found in many successful work systems: encouraging the decentralization of decision making and broader worker participation and empowerment in controlling their own work process (Pfeffer, 1994:41).*

Indeed, information sharing is an essential part of high performance systems (Pfeffer and Veiga, 1999; Bowen and Lawler, 1992; 1995). The sharing of information according to Pfeffer and Veiga (1999) on such things as financial performance, strategy, and operational measures conveys to the organization's people that they are trusted. Even motivated and trained people cannot contribute to enhancing organizational performance if they don't have information of important dimensions of performance or training on how to use and interpret that information. Randolph and Sashkin (2002) provide a compelling rationale arguing that open sharing of information is crucial to empowerment, since without information people cannot act responsibly, even if they want to. These authors further recognize that the problem in most organizations is that top managers are often reluctant to share financial and strategic information with people throughout the organization. Perhaps managers feel that such information is too complex and too sensitive for such sharing.

Kanter (1989:5) suggested that in order to be empowering, organizations must "make more information more available to more people at more levels through more devices". Simply, communication and flow of information are very significant for employees' empowerment by enabling them to be more responsive and more able to answer the customer's questions correctly, quickly and effectively. Based on that, the second hypothesis is:

***H2: The levels of empowerment will be higher for frontline employees when communication and flow of information are effective in the organization.***

### **Trust and Empowerment**

**Trust** is an individual's willingness to be vulnerable to another, based on the belief that another party is competent, honest, reliable, and concerned about the individual's own interest (Hart and Saunders, 1997; Mayer et al., 1995). Vulnerability is the potential for significant risk of loss (Granovetter, 1985; Mayer et al., 1995; Moorman et al., 1992). Considering the proposed association between empowerment and trust, Rothstein et al. (1995) argue that without trust, no empowerment scheme could work. Closely related, Hart and Saunders (1997) and Mayers et al. (1995) emphasize that without trust people assume self-protective, defensive postures that inhibit learning. As such, leaders need to trust followers by redistributing power, exhibiting confidence in employees, providing necessary resources and accepting new ideas. Kotter (1995) observed that in transforming an organization, management is needed to encourage risk taking and non-traditional ideas, activities and actions and that risk taking will prevail only in a culture of trust. The main argument regarding trust in this study is that: employees close to the customer are the first to know about problems and are in the best position to determine what can be done to satisfy the customer (Hart et al., 1990). They can be more responsive and proactive than their supervisors in dealing with customer problems or complaints due to their constant interaction with their customers more than any one else in the organization. Spreitzer and Mishra (1999) empirically demonstrated that managerial trust in customer-contact employees will increase the likelihood that managers will involve first line employees in decision making and give them more empowerment.

All this, supports the following hypothesis:

***H3: Empowerment will be higher among frontline employees when more trust is being exercised between them and their supervisors.***

### **Incentives and Empowerment**

**Incentives** is another mechanism for reducing the risks associated with trusting actions. In traditional organizations, a major determinant of an individual's pay

is the type of work they do (Miles and Creed, 1995). With the right combination of reward system practices, people will be motivated to excel, and those who do excel will be motivated to stay because they will be highly rewarded. This is the foundation of the so called "virtuous spiral" by Lawler III (2003), in which both sides (the organization and the employee) win and create success for each other (Lawler III, 2003).

A high involvement system requires a different reward system: one that rewards performance rather than the job *per se* (Lawler III, 1992). Such rewards are termed incentives based on the outcomes of the employee's behavior rather than for specific behaviors (Eisenhardt, 1989). Incentives work to co-align employee preferences with those of the organization which reduces the risk of self-interested behavior. A company's rewards and incentive structure are expected to give employees positive reinforcement for solving problems and pleasing customers (Hart et al., 1990). Pleasing customers or solving customers' problems can be publicized and held up as examples to inspire others (Hart et al., 1990).

Spreitzer (1995), Hesterly et al. (1990), Lawler (1990) and Miles and Creed (1995) argue that the role of incentives will help make managers more willing to involve lower level employees in decision making, and enhance employees' concern for the success of their organization. However, much of the literature on the issue of incentives and empowerment is either very broad or lacks empirical evidence. While it is important to study the general association between empowerment and incentives, it is rather more significant to look at such relationships, specifically in service encounter situations in which customers' needs and problems are being handled. Nevertheless, Heskett et al. (1997) explain the association between incentives and taking "ownership" of customer problems, but this conceptual assertion requires an empirical investigation to explore such an association (Heskett, 1990). Therefore, the following hypothesis will look at rewards and incentives as a precondition for empowerment of service employees in order to take more responsibility in solving problems and pleasing customers.

**H4: Empowerment levels will be higher for service employees who are being rewarded and recognized for their capabilities and levels of autonomy.**

### 3. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

#### Data Collection

The study population was estimated to be 1000 service employees. The sample taken was 20% of the population which is considered as a sound statistical representation of the population. As such, the questionnaire was distributed randomly to 200 sales persons (the study unit of analysis). 191 questionnaires out of 200 were usable. In advance, the questionnaire was pre-tested with 20 employees as a pilot study. The results of pilot testing were not incorporated in the survey data. The questionnaire was then adjusted, corrected and reworded, according to the results of the pilot testing then it was collected using *drop off and collect method* from sales reps in three mobile companies in the Jordanian Mobile Telecommunication sector<sup>(3)</sup>. It was made sure that managers and employees understand the term "empowerment". Then, surveys were sent to the managers for distribution to their employees. Three mobile companies were covered and these were the only companies operating in Jordan during the study.

The questionnaire included questions about the 4 prerequisites hypothesized in this research including **Trust, Incentives, Communication and Knowledge** (TICK) in addition to the empowerment statement and the demographic characteristics of the sample. Statistical techniques were conducted to analyze the data using descriptive statistics, correlation analysis, and multiple regression technique. A 5% level of confidence was applied to the significance testing of the research hypothesis. Factor analysis was implemented by some previous studies (Hayes, 1995) to indicate strong consistency between the questions and their respected dimensions.

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(3) Research Assistants were hired and trained to distribute the questionnaire and collect it, in their vacation, during summer of 2005 and came with 191 questionnaires ready for analysis.

**Table (1): Results of Cronbach’s Alpha Reliability Test Applied to the Empowerment of Mobile Company's Service Employees (N= 191).**

Dimensions and Sub-dimensions	Number of Items	Cronbach’s Alpha Coefficient
Empowerment	12	0.68
Trust	4	0.71
Incentives	4	0.73
Communication and information	10	0.72
Knowledge and skill	5	0.68

**Table (2): Results of the Mean and Standard Deviation of the Study Dimensions (N=191).**

Dimension	Mean	Standard Deviation
Empowerment	3.50	0.65
Trust	4.00	0.68
Incentives	4.00	0.74
Communication and flow of information	3.80	0.67
Knowledge and skill	3.98	0.62

**Measures**

All scales in this study were measured on five-point Likert scale ranging from 1 for strongly disagree to 5 representing strongly agree. A review of the literature yielded a number of measurement instruments that were employed to test the hypothesized model. Empowerment was measured using a 12-item scale originally developed by Hayes (1994) and modified for service contexts.

Some Questions were reversed in order to improve the accuracy of filling out the questionnaire by respondents. For example question 4, 6, 8, 10, 11, and 12 were reversed to test for the respondents’ accuracy of completing the questionnaire as recommended by researchers. Hence, Q11 is reversed and modified: instead of “I am encouraged to handle customer problems by myself”, it became “current instructions don’t give me freedom in meeting customers’ needs”. This question was modified because some employees expressed such concern at the pilot questionnaire that rules are

preventing them from meeting customer needs. Q12, the last question (“Workload reduces the level of service provided to my customers”) in this group, is being added by the researcher because workload in Jordanian mobile organizations is a point of concern.

Four measures of empowerment prerequisites were used as independent variables in this study. These measures were selected because of their accepted construct validity and reliability in previous studies (Hayes, 1994; Spreitzer, 1995; Lawler, 1992; Schlesinger and Zornitzky, 1991; and recently Melhem, 2004).

**Trust:** Four items were used for this scale with two items from a scale developed by the QUEST solution, Quality Survey Teams (Smialek, 1998). However, one item was modified to fit individuals rather than team relationships. Cronbach's Alpha was 0.73 for this measure, suggesting a high level of scale reliability.

**Incentives, Communication and Knowledge:** Four items were used for the **incentive** scale and ten items for

**Table (3): The Mean Average of the Empowerment Statements.**

Empowerment Statements	Mean	Std. Deviation
1. I am allowed to do anything to do a high quality job.	3.99	1.1
2. I have the authority to correct problems when they occur.	3.62	1.01
3. I am allowed to be creative when I deal with problems at work.	3.93	0.99
4. I go through a lot of red tape and rigid rules to change things.	2.70	1.12
5. I have a lot of control over how I do my job.	4.11	0.82
6. I don't need to get mgt. approval before I handle problems.	2.97	1.21
7. I have a lot of responsibility in my job.	4.33	0.72
8. I am not encouraged to handle job-related problems by myself.	3.42	1.16
9. I can make changes on my job whenever I want.	3.30	1.11
10. I cannot take charge of problems that require immediate attention.	3.24	1.11
11. I cannot feel free to meet my customers' needs under the bank's regulations	3.27	1.13
12. The work load reduces the service I provide to my customers	2.80	1.37

**Table (4): Regression of Empowerment and its Prerequisites.**

Model	Std. Error	Beta	t	Sig.
Trust	0.069	0.21	2.88	0.004
Incentives and rewards	0.067	-0.10	-1.33	0.184
Communication and information flow	0.080	0.50	6.11	0.000
Knowledge and skill	0.073	0.16	2.31	0.022

Dependent variable: Empowerment. R = 0.70, Adjusted R Square = 0.49, P < 0.01

*communication* developed by the QUEST Solution (Smialek, 1998). The QUEST included questions about these constructs but considering team empowerment not individual empowerment. Hence, the questions taken from the QUEST were modified to fit individual respondents rather than teams. Finally five items from Smialek's (1998) scale were used for the *knowledge and skill* dimension. Face validation including referees and pilot testing was conducted along with content reliability to validate the research instrument. The results of Cronbach Alpha test was applied and strongly confirm the reliability of the instrument as shown in Table (1).

#### 4. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Key demographic characteristics of service staff at telecommunication mobile companies in Jordan

demonstrated that 77.5% of the sample were males;. 44% of the sample were less than 25 years old and 47% of the sample were between 26-35; 6.8% of the sample were between 36-45 and only 1.6% of the sample were between 46-55 of age. This indicates that the majority of the sample of service employees is youth with less than 35 years old. 73.2% of the sample have up to six years of experience and 26.2% have from 7-11 years of experience. 64.4% hold diploma or bachelor degree from college or university and even about 10% hold post graduate degrees. About 50% of the sample hold management degrees and about 40% hold other social science qualifications.

Table (2) illustrates the perceptions of the mobile telecommunications' employees in relation to the four understudy dimensions indicating high mean average of

3.5 out of 5.00 for empowerment, 4.0 for trust and good relationships between managers and employees, 4.0 for incentives and rewards, and 3.8 for communication and flow of information and finally 3.98 for skill and knowledge. Such perceptions may suggest that employees give high weight and importance to such dimensions, especially, when talking about trust, incentives and knowledge and skills.

### **The Empowerment Dimensions**

#### **Empowerment and its Prerequisites**

The basic hypotheses are concerned with the impact of four independent variables; namely, Trust (T), Incentives (I), Communication (C) and Skill and Knowledge (K) on the empowerment of service workers at the mobile telecommunications in Jordan.

As such, the model was estimated as follows, using multiple regression to estimate such effect.

**Empowerment = f(T, I, C, K)..... Model one.**

This regression suggests that empowerment should be seen as a function of (T, I, C, and K) as shown in Table (4).

The overall regression is significant  $P < 0.01$  and the estimated prerequisites; Trust, Incentives, Communication and Knowledge, (T, I, C, and K) explain 70 percent of the variation in employee empowerment. However, the coefficients in Table (4) illustrate the individualized significance of the four prerequisites (T, I, C, and K). It appeared that trust is significant with  $P = 0.031$ . Communication is significant with  $P < 0.01$  and knowledge is also significant with  $P = 0.022$ . Recently, similar results were obtained by Melhem (2004).

The result regarding knowledge and skill was consistent with previous research (Spreitzer, 1995; Davenport 2001; Poell and Der Krogt, 2000). The result related to communication and flow of information was also consistent with previous research cited in the literature review. For example, Jeffery Pfeffer has provided a long history of research and conceptual views asserting the relationship between empowerment and communication and flow of information and the

importance of openness, transparency and candor (Pfeffer, 1994). Kanter (1989), Grönroos (2000), and Randolph and Sashkin (2002) all provided similar findings empirically and conceptually suggesting that information and communication are very important tools to create an empowered workforce. The literature review has also revealed supporting and consistent findings on the relationship between trust and empowerment, where Hart and Saunders (1997); Spreitzer and Mishra (1999); Melhem (2004; 2006) have all provided such similar findings. Accordingly, Kotter (1995) presented a strong conceptual agreement to such association between empowerment and good climate of trust and good relationships between managers and employees in the organization for employees to act in more responsiveness and discretion.

However, incentives was not significant with a negative association where  $P = 0.184$ . This might suggest that incentives have nothing to do with empowering employees at the mobile telecommunication companies in Jordan. This finding was consistent with previous study applied on the banking sector in Jordan by Melhem (2004). However, it was inconsistent with other conceptual research like that of Bowen and Lawler (1992; 1995) and Lawler III, (2003). This might suggest that employees at service organization including banking and telecommunication in Jordan would not perceive incentives as an empowering factor. They might view empowerment as something that has got to do with intrinsic motivation and non-monetary rewards (Argyris, 1998).

Overall, three hypotheses including trust, communication and knowledge and skill are all strongly accepted and demonstrate significant and positive association with empowering service employees in the mobile industry in Jordan.

Moreover, a correlation analysis (Table 5) has been also conducted to indicate some strong and significant associations among the study variables.

The correlation analysis here (Pearson Correlation individually associates dependent variables to their

**Table (5): Pearson Correlation for the Dimensions of Empowerment; Trust, Incentives Communication and Knowledge.**

Pearson Correlation	Empowerment	Trust	Incentives	Communication	Knowledge
Empowerment	1	0.55**	0.46**	0.67**	0.55**
Trust	0.55**	1	0.62**	0.64**	0.53**
Incentives	0.46**	0.62**	1	0.68**	0.56**
Communication	0.67**	0.64**	0.68**	1	0.64**
Knowledge	0.54**	0.53**	0.56**	0.64**	1

**\*\*Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).**

relevant independent variables) demonstrates that all associations are significant between empowerment and its dependent variables (TICK) as illustrated in Table (5). For example, there was a significant (55%) association between empowerment as a dependent variable and trust. The correlation between incentives and empowerment was significant at (46%). Communication and flow of information are also associated with empowerment at (67%). This correlation was significantly higher when compared with other independent variables and this might be the case because frontline people in a telecommunication sector rely on information and communication more than most sectors where its core business relies on information and communication. As such, this correlation indicates the importance of communication and information to the telecommunication and mobile organizations. Finally, the correlation was (55%) for knowledge and skill. It appears from the analysis that trust and knowledge scored the same correlation level in their association with empowerment. This seems to suggest that trust and knowledge are equally significant factors with empowerment of service employees at telecommunication companies like the cellular phone or mobile industry.

Albeit all correlations were significant, the analysis suggested that the degree of correlation between incentives and empowerment was lower at 46% whereas communication, trust and knowledge were much higher at 67%, 55%, and 55%, respectively. This might explain the insignificant relationship in incentives, where the incentive

dimension was insignificant in the coefficients as illustrated in Table (4). Again, this might indicate that employees who are more involved, autonomous, and empowered care more about the flow of information and skill and knowledge development, and might be less aware of the incentive aspect and rewards. This result was, however, inconsistent with results shown in previous studies like Bowen and Lawler (1992; 1995) and Melhem (2003). This contradiction suggests further research in this area to come up with solid and rigorous findings.

The correlation analysis also signals to certain degrees of variance in the level of association among the independent variables themselves. Although this was not the subject of this study, further research is warranted to investigate the relationship among these independent variables like trust, incentive, communication, and skill.

Overall, the field study and the data analysis have indicated that the hypotheses in this study are accepted in aggregate, demonstrating a positive relationship between trust, incentives, communication, knowledge as independent variables on one hand and empowerment as a dependent variable on the other hand Al-Qarioti (2004) and Melhem (2004) have arrived at similar results in the Jordanian environment, specifically between empowerment on one hand and incentives, knowledge, support and information on the other hand. As such, the hypotheses in this study have been all accepted with various degrees of association and relationship, specifically weak association for incentives.

## 5. RECOMMENDATIONS

1. It is advisable for service companies like the mobile companies to build more skillful and knowledgeable employees, particularly those at the frontline where they come in direct contact with the customer. Therefore, training and skill development programs are the tools for learning and acquiring skill and knowledge.
2. It is very important at what so called knowledge and information era to keep the service employee well informed in order to be independent in responding to the customer, in solving his/her problems and meeting his requisites.
3. Empowerment can never work well in organizations, specifically in service organizations like the telecommunication industry, without trust and confidence. Managers can improve self control, self reliance, and autonomy by trusting their employees and believing in their skill and capabilities to perform the right job.
4. Managers in service organizations and specifically in the mobile industry need to provide their employees with more intrinsic and extrinsic incentives as a reward for being responsible and empowered. They need such recognition and rewards because responsibility means more effort and accountability.
5. Empowerment does not call for absolute and unlimited freedom. Boundaries and limits are necessary sometimes to avoid any misuse of the above prerequisites, especially when talking about trust because some people might misuse trust and misuse their autonomy. Accordingly, Randolph (2000) calls for accountability along with the empowerment approach to scrutinize people's responsibility, commitment and willingness to perform well.

The following section provides the limitations and some avenues for future research in the area of empowerment.

## Limitations and Future Research Avenues

While this study has provided valuable insight, there are some limitations, which may limit generalisability:

- (1) This study, based on data from different mobile companies in Jordan, permits the researcher to make limited inference to other telecommunication companies in such a growing industry in Jordan.
- (2) All the constructs are measures of employee perceptions that may magnify the relationship between dependent and independent variables in this study. However, there is no better source for the perception of workers than the workers themselves. Areas of further research could also include measuring the impact of employee empowerment on the satisfaction of employees and customers. Additionally, recognizing the importance of creating boundaries to empowerment is an important future investigation to the area of employee empowerment.
- (3) This study could not possibly cover all potential aspects and prerequisites that might influence employee empowerment. For example, organizational culture and value system, organizational structure, leadership style, employee personality, team work, and a host of other potential factors might influence the degrees of empowerment along with the underlined research prerequisites. Hence, such factors are really beyond the scope of this research, further research could find a good avenue in navigating such areas.
- (4) The methodology could be enhanced adding the qualitative side by conducting interviews, focus groups, observations and perhaps critical incident techniques to bring about more rigor and reliability to future research.

Furthermore, some authors, like Randolph and Sashkin (2002), argue that empowerment cannot work without setting boundaries and limits for the empowered to follow. Clear boundaries must be constructed by defining goals, roles, and values, and by designing organizational structures and systems consistent with them. Further empirical efforts might be required to examine the impact of empowerment boundaries on

customer satisfaction and to define the domains within which people have autonomy and responsibility.

This research and other similar studies should encourage other researchers to engage in more studies regarding the empowerment of employees in the hope that such efforts will improve the relationship between the organization, its employees on one hand, and unleashing the human talent capabilities and creativity in providing creative ideas, products, services and better serve and satisfy their customers on the other hand.

## 6. CONCLUSIONS

Overall, the evaluation of this study suggests that prerequisites of empowerment are significant in aggregate. Specifically, it demonstrates the importance of employee empowerment enhanced and positively influenced by employees' knowledge and skill, trust,

incentives, communication and flow of information. Moreover, supportive management (Pfeffer, 1994) is likely to lead to positive attitudinal and behavioral responses by employees. Supportive management, according to Yoon et al. (2001), refers to managers' concern and support for staff work and represents the degree to which they create a facilitative climate of support, trust, and helpfulness. It also involves giving them greater control over their work efforts and how they achieve their job goals (Brown and Leigh, 1996). Yoon et al. (2001) used SEM to find a strong and direct relationship between a supportive management and staff work effort and capability. Consistently, this research found that as the staff perceives greater skill and knowledge, trust, communication and information flow, incentives, and support, from the management, their empowerment may increase substantially (Singh, 2000; Thoits, 1995).

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## متطلبات تمكين العاملين: شركات الاتصال (الخلوي) الأردنية

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### ملخص

شملت هذه الدراسة عينة مكونة من 191 موظف خدمات مباشرة من شركات الهاتف الخليوي (الموبايل) الأردنية، وقد دلت هذه الدراسة على وجود علاقات ذات دلالة إحصائية بين أربعة متطلبات للتمكين. وتتضمن هذه المتطلبات الأساسية كلاً من: الثقة، والحوافز، والاتصال وتدفق المعلومات، والمعرفة والمهارة، وعلاقتها مع تمكين موظفي الخدمات في الشركات المبحوثة.

وقد بينت نتائج الدراسة تأثيراً قوياً ومباشراً لهذه المتغيرات الأربعة المستقلة على المتغير التابع، وهو تمكين الموظفين. من هنا، فإن متطلبات التمكين وشروطه التي تمت دراستها في هذا البحث كانت تدل على أهمية إحصائية واضحة مع مستوى التمكين بين العاملين في شركات الموبايل. وقد شملت الدراسة عدداً من التوصيات التي تتعلق بأبحاث مستقبلية ذات علاقة إضافة إلى توصيات ربما تهتم الباحثين والمديرين على حد سواء.

**الكلمات الدالة:** الثقة، الحوافز، الاتصال وتدفق المعلومات، المعرفة والمهارة، التمكين، شركات الموبايل، الخدمات، الأردن.

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