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Evaluation and Measurement of Managers' Relationship Skills based on Employee's Listening Styles

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ABSTRACT

Background: Since managers spend most of their time interacting with humans, on the one hand, the most important factor for them is workforce organization and on the other hand, their most important commitment is to customers and clients of organization, both of which are humans with all of the other peoples' constraints. Therefore, adapting style and content of their message with recipients' listening style, Managers can get their thoughts and suggestions accepted more. **Objective:** The present study is executed to assess the managers' communication skills based on employees' Listening Styles. **Method:** The method of this study in terms of purpose is applied and in terms of method is descriptive survey research, a kind of field method. The data are collected through two questionnaires, one of them is made by researcher and the other is standard. The study sample consists of all employees and managers of Economic Affairs and Finance Organization in Esfahan province of Iran whom are estimated to be 136. Collected data are analyzed using statistical software of SPSS and LISREL and statistical tests such as regression, ANOVA test, tests of normality for data distribution (Kolmogorov- Smirnov tests), Friedman test and Covariance Structures Analysis. A questionnaire was developed to collect required data and we received feedback from teachers and scholars for its validity and its validity was confirmed after requisite reforms. Its reliability also is tested and approved using Cronbach's alpha coefficient of 82%. **Results:** The results indicate that listening styles variables, including results style, reasons style and process style according to Bennett and Wood, is effective on managers' communication skills. **Conclusion:** the findings provide a framework for improving managers' communication skills.

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INTRODUCTION

Communication a vital artery of the management plays a key role in the success of organization (Moghimi, 1997: 42). Because of the fundamental goals beyond everyday communication, the organization as a social institution establishes organizational communication among peoples. It is evident that one of the essential points of the managers' interest is communication and how they are oriented towards the organizational goals. The organization actually is a sample of communication network, because there is correlation and link between its different and dispersed components and in case there is not a communication system, it is considered a single set which there is not any correlation among its different and dispersed components to achieve goals (Raeesi *et al.*, 2009 :57-62). Communication motivates a sense of sociability and a person establishing such a relation achieves new skills and new attitudes, to the extent that organizations get wider (Poczwadowski, 2002 :116-140). Communication is transmission of information from the sender to the recipient in a way that is mutually clear to interpreted. If one of these elements (sender, recipient, and message) does not exist, there is no communication (Sullivan, 2004: 1231). In other words, a communication skill refers to behaviors by which a person is able to communicate with others so that can lead to positive responses and avoiding negative responses (Ghobadi, 2002: 18).

Since a manager spends most of his/her time communicating with others and all the activities that is carried out by him/her including leadership, planning, decision making and other activities need establishing a communication and knowing communication skills. The importance of assessing communication skills of this group becomes evident (Robbins, 2010: 449).

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One of the strengths of a good manager is influencing employees to change their behavior and attitude so that maintaining relationship with them; he/she will prevent harm to their character. Manager to do this can take advantage of effective listening skills, confirming employee's feeling after listening to his words and speech or behavior reflections which demonstrate manager's understanding of these feelings is considered effective listening (Kashani, 1994: 69). Effective communication relies on a set of skills that most of them can be listed in the form of verbal skills, listening skills, feedback skills.

Among communicative skills, Listening is one of the most important skills in the early stages of growth. For having an effective conversation, it is necessary to put personal thoughts aside and to listen carefully to the other person's words to understand the content and meaning of speaker's words. Organizations, that listening and speaking skills are the cornerstone of their business culture, gain numerous advantages. Obviously listening will generate positive effects for managers and other laborers. Because accurate listening encourages speaker to provide more information (Ghadirian Abarghoi, 2010: 30-31).

Listening in interpersonal communication is a meaning finding process for others' speech in the mind. More precisely speaking, listening is as follows: learned and complicated process of sensing, interpreting, evaluating, storing and responding to verbal messages. Effective listening is one of the fundamental issues in effective communications. Effective listening makes a communication and conversation fruitful (Ghadirian Abarghoi, 2010: 2). Listening style is an effective way of listening which enhances the ability to communicate among peoples (Lu, 2005: 2).

Bennett and Wood (1989) have identified three different styles for listening skills. Their research shows that people prefer to hear the information in proportion to their listening style. They also tend to speak in accordance with their listening style. Incompatibility of Styles prevents effective communication, therefore managers with regard to this issue identifying various listening styles have to also show good reaction in communication (Moghimi, 2009: 340). These three listening styles are as follows:

1. Results style, 2. Reasons style and 3. Process style (Bennett and Wood, 1989:45-48).

The main subject of this study is to evaluate the effect of staff's listening style (from the perspective of "Bent" and "Wood") on the communicative skills of managers in Economic Affairs and Finance Organization of Esfahan province. The importance of effective communicative skills of managers and its effectiveness on decision-making makes assessing its impact on the organization so important. Adapting the style and content of messages to the listening style, managers also can provide additional acceptability for their ideas.

Verbal Skills:

Verbal skills is defined the conscious use of verbal symbols to encourage others to do the work (Robbins, 2000: 449). Verbal skills are a practical communication for expressing opinion, idea, feeling or state, and one of the best means to get the greatest reward in life environment and to minimize punishment (Miller, 2007 :7-19).

Discussing communication, presented definitions of verbal communications are divided into two categories:

- First, definitions assuming that verbal communication is equivalent to speech and writing (Helrigel and Slocum, 1996: 485).
- Second, definitions only regarding oral (spoken) aspects and attributing verbal communication to oral aspects (Thompson, 1996: 81).

Psychologists agree that human beings evolve fundamentally by language. Some scholars, logicians and epistemologists go beyond this and say human child transforms from animal state to human traits through the medium of language and words or They say that the language is a home of self and if there was not any language, there would be no history. Verbal communication is important because it is one of the most effective tools used by human beings to control understanding of his environment and influencing it. Moreover, it must be said that, at least for most people, proficiency in the use of the language is one of the best means to achieve highest rewards in life and to minimize punishment (Miller, 2007: 7-19).

Among all the things that a manager does during the day, speaking is of first order. He speaks with teachers, parents, educational council and other groups. The speech of a manager can be considered by phone calls, participation in conferences, teachers meetings, meeting students, face to face contacts with citizens, expressing feelings to friends and etc. Training manager actually is situated in a verbal environment. The manager works with utilizing words. In fact, when a manager is doing his/her duty in organization, the most important aspect of his/her job is to take advantage of his/her verbal environment properly. When a manager sends a message, he/she should try to use language (where possible) carefully and with consideration of all the pros and cons to reduce misunderstanding and not to involve in meaning disorder (Berko and Velvin, 2010: 109). Thus, proficiency in oral communication skills are essential for the manager and he/she must try to make his/her speech clear but easy to be understood and away from ambiguity and distortion.

Listening Skill:

Several definitions have been proposed for effective listening. Susman and Dip (1989) has defined effective listening in their book, *communications experience in human relations*: “effective listening is active participation in a dialogue” (p. 129). Verderber (1998) believes active listening is an active process including attention, perception, evaluation, recall, and the response (reaction). Effective listening is the base of communication components (p. 234).

Some communication experts believe that the cornerstone of managers’ communication skill is effective listening (Siebert, 1990: 27-119). Several studies indicate that managers spend 45 to 63 percent of their time listening to the people (Keif, 1971: 10). Effective listening is the key to understanding, perceiving and reasoning; it also has direct and decisive effects in the processes of perception, training and human learning. Besides this effect, it is one of the basic means for human development and acquisition of spiritual values. In fact, one of the firm boundaries separating humans from animals is speech which itself needs to Listening (Mortazavi and Mehraban, 2004: 129).

Listening skills has an important and direct relation to our daily life and work life. In fact, every day from waking moment until the last moment to go to sleep we continuously transfer into our mind information and messages through listening and then respond to them. Especially in working life, the art of effective listening enhances the quality of our communications with colleagues and organizational staff and enables managers to stimulate employees’ compassion, cooperation, empathy and they create warmth and empathy among fellow employees and tensions and misunderstandings of their communications will be reduced and it eventually get managers to influence employees’ hearts and they increase their sense of responsibility and commitment to achieve better and more effectively organizational and personal goals. Therefore, effective listening can serve as an important means for improving the quality of work life in the organization (Allen and Blackburn, 1989: 239-240). Listening skills include observation, attention and understanding of listeners which promote a sense of responsibility and commitment through rapport and cooperation among peoples. A successful manager is one who, in addition to what he/she hears, through effective listening collects more accurate information necessary for decision-making and problem-solving or achieving ideas and new concepts that never could have imagined by himself/herself.

Feedback skill:

Feedback skill is a control over the communication process (Mortazavi and Mehraban, 2004: 44-124). In other words, the return of the result of message to the sender so that the sender of a message get aware of how the message is sent, received and perceived (Alvani, 2006: 177). Feedback is a process through which the message recipient announce communication start and respond how is feeling the original message. (Shremer Horn, 1993: 476).

Shirazi (1994) believes feedback has two following advantages:

1. Guide or criterion for determining the success of the communication process
2. It is the base of correction or change of messages or communications in the future (P. 213). Furthermore, feedback makes communication process bilateral and maintains its continuity and this facilitates greater understanding between the sender and the recipient.

In management, the concept of feedback has an important role, particularly in establishing effective communication between managers and employees. In organizational situations, feedback implies a kind of verbal or non-verbal communication between managers and others (colleagues, subordinates, or superiors) during which firstly, manager through others’ reactions and behaviors comes to know how much they are affected, and secondly others get aware their actions and behaviors how effect managers by managers’ reactions and behaviors (Alaqheband, 1999: 7).

Tracy *et al.* (1998) about the importance of feedback skill say: “skill in providing feedback to employees causes strengthening and enhancing communication and it is effective on improving organizational interactions, motivation and commitment (P. 293). Robbins (1999) believes that providing effective feedback causes the effectiveness of the communication network and the phenomenon of uncertainty and ambiguity are weakened, and as a result the performance of organization’s members and their job satisfaction increases (P. 617).

One of the most important factors in effective listening is responding to the speaker through the appropriate feedback. Some feedback motivate speaker to discuss more about the issue and expand it into other related fields while others result in limiting the issue and the termination of the conversation. Iranians used to say: “The listener encourages speaker” which is expressing such issues that motivates speaker to talk more about the issue. Rumi says: “when there is no listener, it is better to be silent”. Also expressing a negative feedback that is received by speaker and the speaker have taken silent position. Appropriate responses largely depends on the purpose of the communication and interaction goal. If the goal is to evaluate the performance, the re-evaluating and re-interpreting feedback is generally the best answer.

Research Hypotheses:

The main hypothesis: It seems that employees' listening styles affects managers' communication skills.

Subordinate hypotheses:

It seems that employees' results style affects managers' verbal skill.

It seems that employees' results style affects managers' listening skill.

It seems that employees' results style affects managers' feedback skill.

It seems that employees' reasons style affects managers' verbal skill.

It seems that employees' reasons style affects managers' listening skill.

It seems that employees' reasons style affects managers' feedback skill.

It seems that employees' process style affects managers' verbal skill.

It seems that employees' process style affects managers' listening skill.

It seems that employees' process style affects managers' feedback skill.

Methodology:

The method of this study descriptive survey. Data collection method in this research is in the field and library. Books, magazines, various periodicals along electronic journals and websites have been used in this research and statistical analyses of the results of the questionnaire, which are designed and distributed based on hypotheses, are carried out by SPSS and LISREL and they finally lead to hypothesis confirmation or refutation. Statistical analyses consist of two parts: descriptive statistics including frequency and statistic, mean percentage calculation, standard deviation, etc.; deductive statistics including regression test, covariance structures analysis, tests of normality for data distribution (Kolmogorov- Smirnov tests), Friedman test.

Results:

In this test statistic hypothesis is expressed as follows:

The main hypothesis: It seems that employees' listening styles affects managers' communication skills.

The Main hypothesis values of coefficient of determination and normalized coefficient of determination

Model	Coefficient	coefficient of determination	Normalized coefficient of determination	Standard error
1	(a)0.793	0.629	0.627	0.22695

Regression test of the main hypothesis

Model		Non-standard coefficient		standard coefficient	T	Significance level
		B	Error	Beta	B	
1	(fixed)	1.055	0.172		6.115	0.000
	Styles	0.704	0.047	0.793	15.083	0.000

Results of regression analysis between independent variable (listening styles) and dependent variable (communication skills) show that there is a significant positive correlation between these two variables. Significance level is less than .05 and obtained Beta value is equal to 0.79. Thus, H_1 assuming that listening styles is effective on communication skills is approved.

First hypothesis:

It seems that employees' results style affects managers' communication skills.

The First hypothesis values of coefficient of determination and normalized coefficient of determination

Model	Coefficient	coefficient of determination	Normalized coefficient of determination	Standard error
1	(a)0.950	0.902	0.902	0.13073

Regression test of the first hypothesis

Model		Non-standard coefficient		standard coefficient	T	Significance level
		B	Error	Beta	B	
1	(fixed)	0.143	0.101		1.413	0.160
	Results	0.767	0.027	0.750	35.215	0.000

Results of regression analysis between independent variable (results style) and dependent variable (verbal skill) show that there is a significant positive correlation between these two variables. Significance level is less than .05 and obtained Beta value is equal to 0.75. Thus, H_1 assuming that results style is effective on verbal skill is approved.

Second hypothesis:

It seems that employees' results style affects managers' listening skill.

The second hypothesis values of coefficient of determination and normalized coefficient of determination

Model	Coefficient	coefficient of determination	Normalized coefficient of determination	Standard error
1	(a)0.869	0.756	0.754	0.21256

Regression test of the second hypothesis

Model		Non-standard coefficient		standard coefficient	T	Significance level
		B	Error	Beta	B	
1	(fixed)	0.313	0.164		1.909	0.058
	Results	0.909	0.045	0.869	20.363	0.000

Results of regression analysis between independent variable (results style) and dependent variable (listening skill) show that there is a significant positive correlation between these two variables. Significance level is less than .05 and obtained Beta value is equal to 0.86. Thus, H_1 assuming that results style is effective on listening skill is approved.

Third hypothesis:

It seems that employees' results style affects managers' feedback skill.

The third hypothesis values of coefficient of determination and normalized coefficient of determination

Model	Coefficient	coefficient of determination	Normalized coefficient of determination	Standard error
1	(a)0.235	0.055	0.048	0.47319

Regression test of the third hypothesis

Model		Non-standard coefficient		standard coefficient	T	Significance level
		B	Error	Beta	B	
1	(fixed)	2.599	0.365		7.121	0.000
	Results	0.278	0.099	0.235	2.799	0.006

Results of regression analysis between independent variable (results style) and dependent variable (feedback skill) show that there is a significant positive correlation between these two variables. Significance level is less than .05 and obtained Beta value is equal to 0.23. Thus, H_1 assuming that results style is effective on feedback skill is approved.

Fourth hypothesis: It seems that employees' reasons style affects managers' verbal skill.

The Fourth hypothesis values of coefficient of determination and normalized coefficient of determination

Model	Coefficient	coefficient of determination	Normalized coefficient of determination	Standard error
1	(a)0.946	0.894	0.894	0.13599

Regression test of the fourth hypothesis

Model		Non-standard coefficient		standard coefficient	T	Significance level
		B	Error	Beta	B	
1	(fixed)	0.198	0.104		1.907	0.059
	Reasons	0.849	0.028	0.846	33.703	0.000

Results of regression analysis between independent variable (reasons style) and dependent variable (verbal skill) show that there is a significant positive correlation between these two variables. Significance level is less than .05 and obtained Beta value is equal to 0.84. Thus, H_1 assuming that reasons style is effective on verbal skill is approved.

Fifth hypothesis:

It seems that employees' reasons style affects managers' listening skill.

The fifth hypothesis values of coefficient of determination and normalized coefficient of determination

Model	Coefficient	coefficient of determination	Normalized coefficient of determination	Standard error
1	(a)0.845	0.714	0.711	0.23018

Regression test of the fifth hypothesis

Model		Non-standard coefficient		standard coefficient	T	Significance level
		B	Error	Beta	B	
1	(fixed)	0.443	0.176		2.525	0.013
	Reasons	0.571	0.048	0.545	18.272	0.000

Results of regression analysis between independent variable (reasons style) and dependent variable (listening skill) show that there is a significant positive correlation between these two variables. Significance

level is less than .05 and obtained Beta value is equal to 0.54. Thus, H_1 assuming that reasons style is effective on listening skill is approved.

Sixth hypothesis:

It seems that employees' reasons style affects managers' feedback skill.

The sixth hypothesis values of coefficient of determination and normalized coefficient of determination

Model	Coefficient	coefficient of determination	Normalized coefficient of determination	Standard error
1	(a)0.261	0.168	0.161	0.46997

Regression test of the sixth hypothesis

Model		Non-standard coefficient		standard coefficient	T	Significance level
		B	Error	Beta	B	
1	(fixed)	2.500	0.358		6.974	0.000
	Reasons	0.304	0.097	0.261	3.128	0.002

Results of regression analysis between independent variable (reasons style) and dependent variable (feedback skill) show that there is a significant positive correlation between these two variables. Significance level is less than .05 and obtained Beta value is equal to 0.26. Thus, H_1 assuming that reasons style is effective on feedback skill is approved.

Seventh hypothesis:

It seems that employees' process style affects managers' verbal skill.

The seventh hypothesis values of coefficient of determination and normalized coefficient of determination

Model	Coefficient	coefficient of determination	Normalized coefficient of determination	Standard error
1	(a)0.886	0.785	0.783	0.19420

Regression test of the seventh hypothesis

Model		Non-standard coefficient		standard coefficient	T	Significance level
		B	Error	Beta	B	
1	(fixed)	0.725	0.134		5.400	0.000
	Process	0.697	0.036	0.686	22.106	0.000

Results of regression analysis between independent variable (process style) and dependent variable (verbal skill) show that there is a significant positive correlation between these two variables. Significance level is less than .05 and obtained Beta value is equal to 0.68. Thus, H_1 assuming that process style is effective on verbal skill is approved.

Eighth hypothesis:

It seems that employees' process style affects managers' listening skill.

The eighth hypothesis values of coefficient of determination and normalized coefficient of determination

Model	Coefficient	coefficient of determination	Normalized coefficient of determination	Standard error
1	(a)0.774	0.599	0.596	0.27248

Regression test of the eighth hypothesis

Model		Non-standard coefficient		standard coefficient	T	Significance level
		B	Error	Beta	B	
1	(fixed)	0.987	0.188		5.239	0.000
	Process	0.715	0.051	0.774	14.138	0.000

Results of regression analysis between independent variable (process style) and dependent variable (listening skill) show that there is a significant positive correlation between these two variables. Significance level is less than .05 and obtained Beta value is equal to 0.77. Thus, H_1 assuming that process style is effective on listening skill is approved.

Ninth hypothesis:

It seems that employees' process style affects managers' feedback skill.

The ninth hypothesis values of coefficient of determination and normalized coefficient of determination

Model	Coefficient	coefficient of determination	Normalized coefficient of determination	Standard error
1	(a)0.774	0.599	0.596	0.27248

1	(a)0.245	0.060	0.053	0.47194
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Regression test of the ninth hypothesis

Model		Non-standard coefficient		standard coefficient	T	Significance level
		B	Error	Beta	B	
1	(fixed)	2.665	0.326		8.166	0.000
	Process	0.257	0.088	0.245	2.930	0.004

Results of regression analysis between independent variable (process style) and dependent variable (feedback skill) show that there is a significant positive correlation between these two variables. Significance level is less than .05 and obtained Beta value is equal to 0.24. Thus, H_1 assuming that process style is effective on feedback skill is approved.

Variables ranking:

Variance analysis is used to investigate whether study variables are the same or different in the sample. Thus, The following statistical hypothesis is evaluated:

H_0 : variables average ranking is the same.

H_1 : There is at least one pair of significantly different ranking average.

Results of this test are two outputs. The first shows that the importance of factors or examined independent variables are not the same from respondents' view because significance level is less than .05 and average ranking of dimensions is not the same. the second output shows the ranking of these factors. Process style and verbal skill have the highest average.

Friedman test results

Test results	Error value	Significance level	Degree of freedom	Calculated K^2
H_0 Refutation	0.05	0.04	5	11.7

Friedman test and average ranking of factors

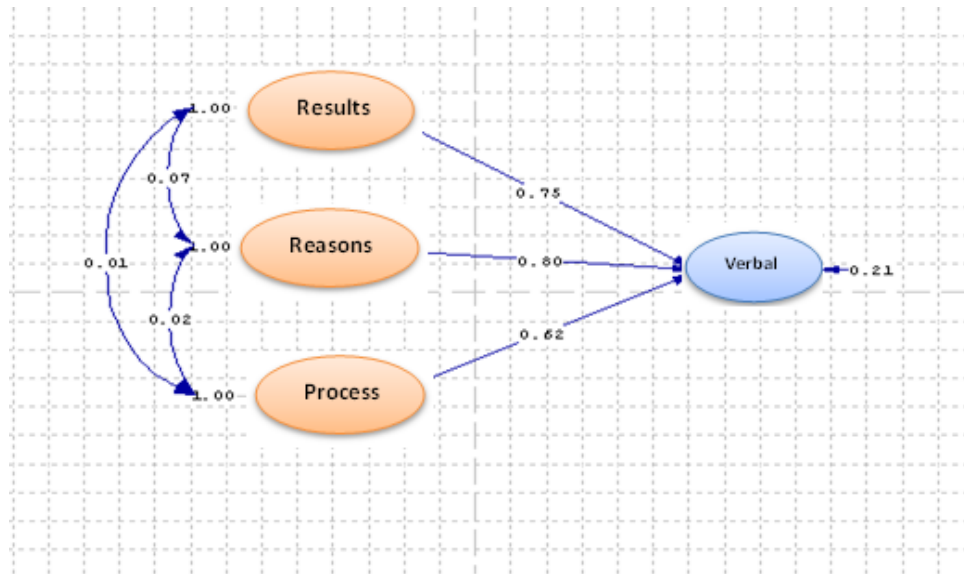
Average rankings	Dimensions
3.44	Feedback skill
3.32	Listening skill
3.66	Verbal skill
3.83	Process style
3.36	Reasons style
3.39	Results style

Analysis and test of research hypotheses based on Structural equation modeling:

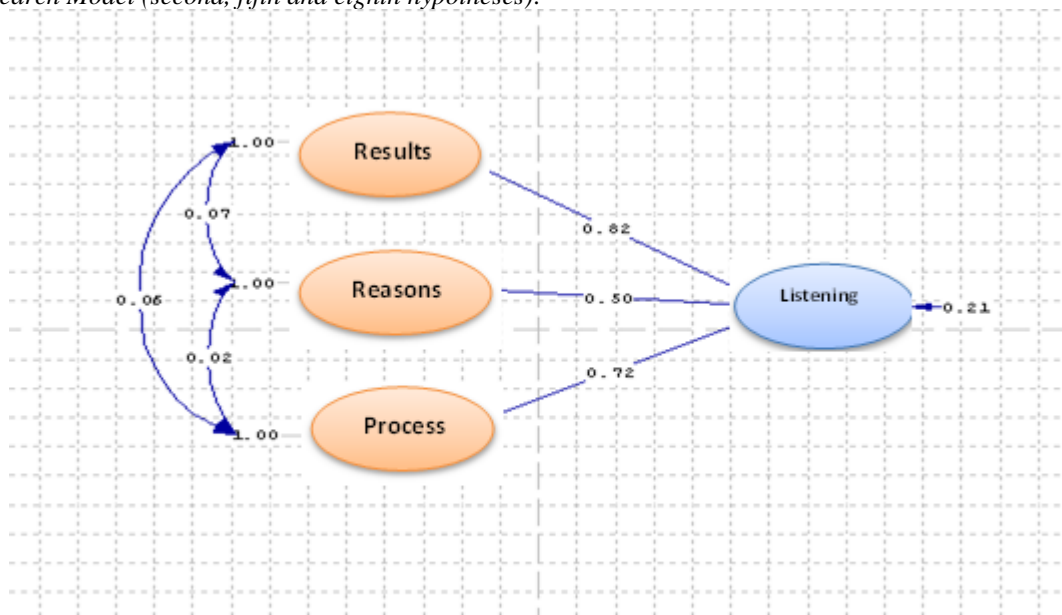
Structural equation modeling is a comprehensive statistical approach to testing hypotheses about the relationships between observed and latent variables. Through this approach, acceptability of theoretical models can be tested in certain communities using correlation, experimental and non-experimental data. One of the strongest and the most appropriate methods for the analysis of behavioral and social sciences research is the multivariate analysis, because the nature of such issues is multivariate and they cannot be solved with bivariate analysis (each time only one independent variable is considered alongside a dependent variable). Multivariate analysis refers to a set of analyzing methods whose main features is simultaneous analysis of K independent variable and N dependent variable. Covariance structures analysis, or causal modeling or structural equation modeling is one of the prime analyzing methods of complex data structures. Thus, since there are several variables in the present study whose effects on dependent variable should be investigated, it is necessary to use structural equation modeling.

LISREL software is used to examine whether model is appropriate or not. In this section, we try to analyze the model and its components separately. Research model is drawn using LISREL software and we subsequently achieved following results after performing operations on model in which the relationship between variables and coefficients are presented for each of them.

*A) Test of first, fourth and seventh hypotheses
Research Model (first, fourth and seventh hypotheses)*

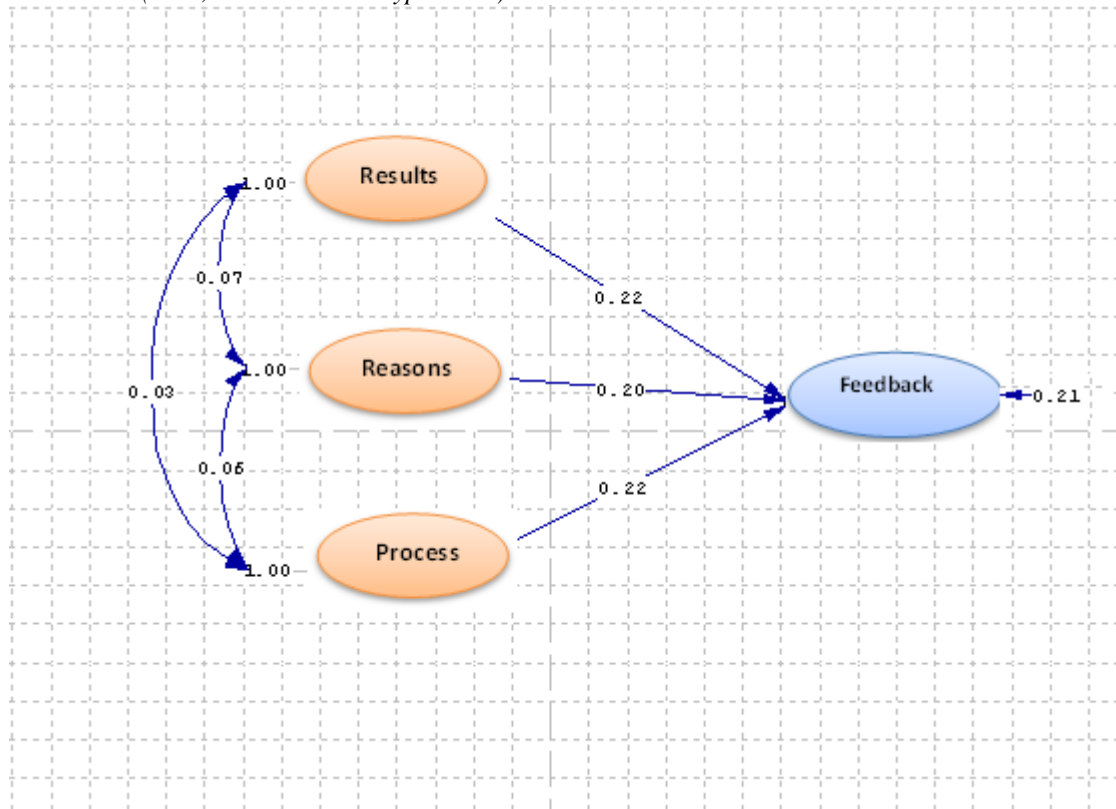


B) Test of second, fifth and eighth hypotheses:
 Research Model (second, fifth and eighth hypotheses):



C) Test of third, sixth and ninth hypotheses:

Research Model (third, sixth and ninth hypotheses):



Indices of model fit:

There are several fit indices for the evaluation of structural equation models some of which are used in this study including: the root mean square error of approximation, goodness of fit index, adjusted goodness of fit index. The results of the above indices are demonstrated in the following table:

The root mean square error of approximation is for good models is equal to 05 / or less. Models which this index for them is 0.1 or more have a poor fit. Confidence interval can be calculated for this index. Ideally, the lower limit of the confidence interval is very close to zero and its upper limit is too large. As it can be observed, RMSEA of this model is 0.08 which is in good condition.

Closer GFI and AGF are to one, better fit model have with the data. In this model, the two indices are equal to 0.92. and 0.90 Which indicate goodness of fit in model.

Indices of model fit

Index	Value of index in this model	Standard value of index	Conclusion
χ^2/df	2.01	About 2	Goodness of fit
P_Value	0.08	More than 0.05	Goodness of fit
GFI	0.92	More than 0.9	Goodness of fit
AGFI	0.90	More than 0.9	Goodness of fit
RMSEA	0.04	Less than 0.1	Goodness of fit
CFI	0.93	More than 0.9	Goodness of fit
NFI	0.88	More than 0.9	Goodness of fit

According to above table data, It can be said that model in terms of fit is good model.

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