

Research Article**Impact of Internal Marketing on Employees' Customer Orientation in Social Security Organization of Gilan****Rashid Shadab Jouposhti**

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^a Corresponding Author: r.sh_raha@yahoo.com**ABSTRACT**

With increasing competition between public and private insurance companies and Social Security Organization as the greatest insurance organization in the country, managers of this organization inevitably seek for the ways to acquire higher customer satisfaction and loyalty so as to obtain and retain higher share of insurers. Meanwhile, role of employees in retention and increasing insurers is evident to all. Satisfied employees can focus their entire attempt for absorbing and retaining customer satisfaction. Internal marketing is the concept which can help Social Security Organization in gaining the goals. Thus, current research was conducted aiming at investigating impact of internal marketing on employees' customer orientation in Social Security Organization of Gilan province. Descriptive-survey research method was used based on structural equation modeling which is recognized as a model for indicating internal marketing impact on customer orientation considering reviewed literature and research hypotheses, fit of which is suitable according to LISREL 8.5 output.

In the current research, internal marketing is considered as an independent variable and customer orientation is considered as a dependent variable and organizational commitment acts as a mediator variable. Stratified random sampling method was used for sampling in this research and field study and questionnaire was used for data collection. Statistical population included employees of Social Security Organization of Gilan province (N = 677). Following distribution of questionnaires, 244 perfect ones were collected. Research hypotheses were tested using structural equations method. Following analysis of questionnaire data, all research hypotheses were supported and it was shown that organizational commitment plays an intermediary role in relationship between internal marketing and customer orientation.

Keywords: Internal marketing, organizational commitments, customer-orientation, social security**INTRODUCTION**

Today service industries play a crucial and important role in economic development and growth of countries and role and importance of

insurance industry as a supporting industry is evident to all. On the other hand increased competition in insurance market has caused that

all managers in this industry to think for suitable presence in the business area. Thus, they are inevitable to find ways to increase customer satisfaction and loyalty. Improved quality of insurance services is one of the ways to achieve this goal. Improved quality of internal services in the organization leads to increased satisfaction of outsider customers (Abolhasani, 2008). In service organizations, employees working with customers have critical role in service delivery process. Achieving long term mission of the organization considerably depends on the employees. If these employees are allowed to identify themselves, become familiar to the organizational mission, such understanding influences their service behavior and leads to increased quality of services provided for the outsider customers (Tsai et al, 2010).

Since future of the world in 21st century is repelled with competition, development of emerging markets, uncertain environmental factors, and prevalence of top technologies, customer-orientation and trade development, the requisite for success in such area is utilizing opportunities and facing with challenges. One of the main challenges for today organizations is customer orientation and attracting customer satisfaction (Kerdnaech, 2004).

Customer orientation is applied on the collection of behaviors which direct one's behavior toward customers and clients. In fact, foundation of these beliefs is the idea that favorite and interest of the customer is superior over anything else (Golparvar et al., 2009).

Most sellers enjoy providing optimal services for their customers and can simply overcome negative environmental factors obtaining higher job satisfaction compared to others (Yoh, 2010).

Smart organizations review their employees' behavior and relationship and firstly attempt to keep them satisfied (Salehi and Abasi, 2011).

Customer orientation is applied to tendency of employees toward eliminating needs of the customer in the job and can influence occupational outcomes such as job satisfaction and

organizational commitment. People with high customer orientation highly tend to overcome needs of their customers and thus they have higher job satisfaction and organizational commitment and leaving the organization is reduced in them (Rod and Ashil, 2010).

Organizational commitment means positive or negative attitudes of individuals toward to the whole organization (not the job) in which they work. In organizational commitment, one feels strong loyalty toward the organization and identifies himself through the organization (Ismaeeli, 2001).

Employees with high customer orientation have high levels of organizational commitment and organizational commitment is increased with increased tendency of employees to overcome customer needs (Rod and Ashil, 2010).

Committed employees believe in hard working and want to use more time, effort and their best talents for their organization. Thus, long term customer relationship may be obtained through long term committed labor force (Salehi and Abasi, 2011).

Commitment to service delivery to the customers should be real, not as a slogan or a means for promoting organizational commitment (Yamini, 2006).

According to various theories it is claimed that job satisfaction is developed before organizational commitment and it extends over the time. People with high organizational commitment accept organizational goals and values, they seriously tend to realize organizational goals, they attempt for doing works better and the individuals stay in the organization because of this fact that they know going to other organization is cost consuming (DaneshFard and MahjoobRoshan, 2009).

Current research aims at investigating impact of internal marketing on employees' customer orientation in Social Security Organization of Gilan, and this question is raised that if internal marketing influences employees' customer orientation in this organization.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Farzad (2006) studied effects of internal marketing dimensions on employees' customer orientation. Internal marketing dimensions in this work included as follows: motivation, job satisfaction, understanding and differentiation, coordination and integration of internal activities. The results of this study showed that the coordination and integration of internal activities, training and motivation have positive impact on organizational commitment in state-owned banks of Isfahan.

Moradi (2010) investigated internal marketing factors and their priority in improving service delivery to customers in Mobile Communication Co. The research findings showed environmental material factors, tools and equipment of work, experience and education and immaterial motivational factors ranked first to fifth respectively in improving service delivery. Abzari et al. (2010) found positive relationship between internal marketing and occurrence of organizational citizenship behavior. Rahmani (2011) found positive relationship between internal marketing and market orientation. Rahmani (2011) in his work entitled "Impact of internal marketing on organizational performance in traveling services companies in Tehran" observed significant relationship between internal marketing and organizational performance. In the study by Abasi and Salehi (2011) entitled as "Impact of internal marketing on customer orientation in insurance industry" it was shown that job satisfaction of insurance companies' employees influences their customer orientated behavior and higher job satisfaction in employees leads to reduced job level. However, no positive significant relationship was observed between organizational commitment and customer orientations. This research showed that there is significant relationship between organizational commitment and job satisfaction showing that employees with higher job satisfaction are more tended to stay in the insurance companies and job leave is less in them. Apoka et al. (2009) studied

impact of five aspects of internal marketing (employees, organization, customer satisfaction, external marketing techniques and dissemination of knowledge) on the quality of service. The findings showed that internal marketing can influence quality of services. Avad and Egti (2011) studied relationship between internal marketing, organizational commitment, organizational citizenship behavior and orientation managers of commercial banks began: The results showed that the domestic market has a positive effect on organizational commitment and customer-oriented management. Results showed internal marketing positively influences organizational commitment and customer orientation of managers. Also, organizational commitment and organizational citizenship behavior positively affect market-oriented bank managers. Liao (2009) in their study investigated the effect of internal marketing on organizational commitment, job satisfaction, and customer orientation: His study showed that the internal marketing has positive impact on organizational commitment, job satisfaction and customer-orientation of employees.

Definition and Conceptualization of Internal Marketing

Internal marketing is focused on appropriate internal relationships among individuals at all levels of the organizations. Thus, a service-oriented and customer-oriented approach is developed among staff in touch with customers. Internal marketing acts as a management process that integrates multiple functions of the organization at the two paths. It means that all employees at all levels of the organization understanding and experience business activities and processes within an environment. Secondly, it causes that all employees are prepared and motivated to work in a service-oriented way (Gronroos, 2000). Dennis (1995) defines internal marketing as a strategic management philosophy that attracts, developed, motivated and retains prominent employees by providing high quality

work environment and meeting their needs (Dennis, 1995). Internal marketing as a management technology solves the problems related to the efficiency of internal services, market orientation and customer orientation as well as successful implementation of appropriate programs (Varey, 1999).

Hogg and Carter defined internal marketing as an integral part of market orientation which necessitates use of marketing techniques within an organization to establish and communicate the company's values (Hogg and Carter, 2000). One of the most comprehensive definitions of internal marketing was given by Rafiq and Ahmad that consider internal marketing as "a planned effort by using a similar approach like marketing to overcome organizational resistance to change and balance, motivate and integrate coordination between staffs in order to implement effective corporate strategies and tasks to create customer satisfaction through developing customer-centric motivated employees (Rafiq and Ahmad, 2000).

Gummeson considers internal marketing as critical part of market orientation (Gummeson, 1991) and Kotler and Armstrong stated that internal marketing should have priority over external marketing (Kotler et al., 2005). Thus, internal marketing is crucial for the organization for value creation for the customers whether internal or external.

Organizational Commitment

Authors traditionally consider organizational commitment as composed of two distinctive concepts known as attitudinal commitment and behavioral commitment. Attitudinal commitment includes one's loyalty to the organization and emphasis on assimilation and attachment to the respective organization, while behavioral commitment reflects the process through which individuals stay in the organization due to leave costs (Golparvar Arizi, 2008). Lee (2001) quoted in Baker writes that commitment is collection of continuous activities due to storing learning and

assets which will be lost with the leave of that activity (Abili and Nastizae, 2009).

Sheldone defines organizational commitment as follows: it is a kind of attitude or direction which connects the one's identity to the respective organization. Cunter regards organizational commitment as tendency of social agents to giving their power and loyalty to the social systems. According to Salansik, commitment is the state in the human in which the person believes in continuing the activities with his behavior, and preserves his activity participation in implementing activities.

Bukanan considers commitment as a kind of affective and biased attachment to the organizational values and goals. One feels dependent on the organizational values and goals rather on his own ones (Shams Ahar et al., 2011).

Types of Commitment

There are five types of commitment including organizational commitment, professional commitment, and commitment to group, job attachment and work attachment. Various studies suggest that types of commitments show different relationships with different variables. Research has proven that these five types of commitments have interaction, for example, professional commitment is under influence of organizational commitment and job attachment (Akhbari et al., 2010).

Accurate understanding of constituents of organizational commitment and measurement of them and their impact on organizational commitment is critically important and may be helpful in selecting employee evaluation and training for the national management system. For example, type of one's commitment at the beginning of recruitment is naturally different from his commitment over the service years. Thus, level and type of commitment which is expected from the employees in annual evaluation is important.

In addition, organizational commitment can be promoted with suitable educational planning and it

would be possible through accurate and scientific understanding of commitment phenomenon (ShayanJahromi et al., 2009). Some authors mentioned five types of commitment:

- 1- Commitment to organization
- 2- Commitment to people
- 3- Commitment to work
- 4- Commitment to self
- 5- Commitment to clients

Some of the researchers divided commitment associated with the work into five categories:

- 1- Commitment to the job
- 2- Commitment to the organization
- 3- Commitment to working group
- 4- Commitment to profession
- 5- Commitment to working values (Farid et al, 2009)

Customer Orientation

Customer orientation at organizational level is considered as form of organization's culture and it refers to recognition of customer value cycle. Customer orientation may cause loss of some short term goals, but it is very effective in absorbing permanent customers and creates long term relationship between customer and organization. Thus, the main foundation of customer orientation beliefs is emphasis on the customer priority and long term relationship with the customers (Zali et al, 2013).

Customer orientation can be defined as putting customer at the center of organization's strategic attention, and customer satisfaction is the optimal level which customer acquires due to different features of goods and services and it is source of profitability and continuation of the organization's activity. Tom Peters, author of the popular management literature, considers so much importance for the customers that says businesses which are important profitability are never as profitable as ones which give priority to the quality of customer service (Mojtabae and Ramazani, 2010).

Customer orientation is traditional confirmation of market orientation. That is, it is focus on customer

needs and creating profitability through developing satisfaction in customers. According to Rokretdefinition, customer orientation refers to the level at which a business unit acquires customer information and uses them for formulating and implementing strategies to meet customer needs (Tajeddini, 2010).

According to the definition, customer orientation is characteristic of an employee for meeting needs of his customers in his working field. Results of research works show that customer oriented employees have higher job performance and organizational citizenship behavior (Ro and Chen, 2011).

Theoretical Framework

Theoretical framework is the foundation which the research is based on it. Theoretical framework is a logical, developed, described and perfect network among the variables which is provided through such processes as interview, observation and review of literature (Khaki, 2008).

In the current research, the author aims at investigating internal marketing impact on customer orientation based on adjusted model of Liao (2009) in Social Security Organization.

Research model indicates that internal marketing in the organization affects customer orientation and this influence is adjusted by organizational commitment. Organizational commitment is effective in retention of employees in service sector (Donavan et al., 2004) and also affects increasing performance (Ashill et al., 2008).

Service delivery to customers depends on optimal and suitable responding to their needs and demands. Service delivery should be organized, systemic, rapid and easy so that it can be accessible at every time and location in low cost and appropriate price (Dehnavi, 2009).

Service marketing includes all activities related to understanding audience, customers, competitors and environmental factors affecting the service and match of services with the market's needs, expectations and preferences. In fact, service marketing is part of service system in the

companies which have highest level of contact with customers for performing their services. In majority of service companies, employees' service quality, training, and positive commitment to service delivery to customer, etc. are more important than other factors such as price, information, promotion, and other features in development of the organization.

In these organizations, interaction or communication of employees with the customer leads to customer satisfaction, his decision for purchase, continuation of organization's activity, and finally increased sale and market share, and providing this performance causes competitive advantage for the organization at long term (Jamal and Kamal, 2002).

Personal evaluation and attitude toward the customers influence effective motivations toward the job and organization.

Employees with high customer orientation are those who have high levels of commitment and their performance is higher than employees with low customer orientation. Job- employee match is defined as fit between abilities and personality and job demands. Employees with high customer orientation have higher capacity in meeting customer needs. Customer orientation leads to job satisfaction through customer happiness.

Also, employees with high levels of customer orientation are more tended to have organizational commitment and experience higher level of attachment toward the organization (Allen and Meyer, 1990).

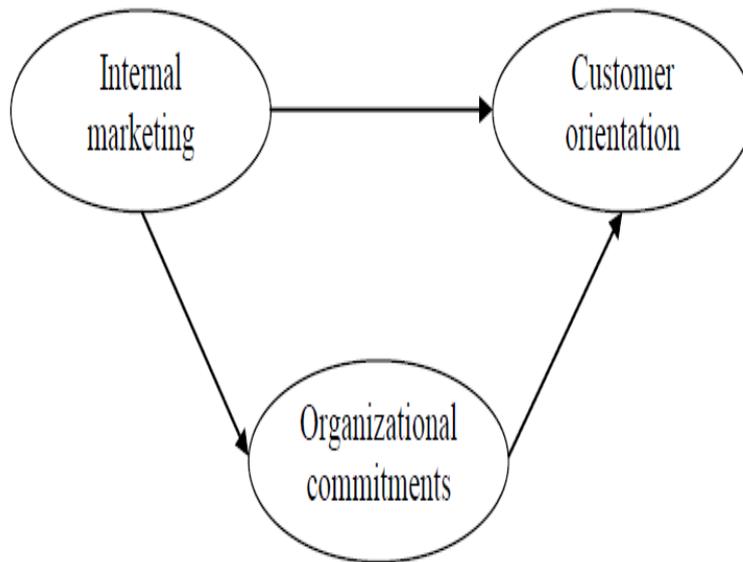


Figure 1: Research conceptual mode (Liao, 2009)

According to the analytical model, research hypotheses include as follows:

Major Hypothesis

Internal marketing influences customer orientation in Social Security Organization.

Minor Hypotheses

1- Internal marketing perception influences organizational commitments.

2- Organizational commitments influence customer orientation.

Intermediate hypothesis can be extracted considering review of above materials. Intermediates denote a causal hypothesis by which an independent variable causes an intermediate which in turn causes another dependent variable.

3- Organizational commitment plays intermediate role in relationship between internal marketing perception and customer orientation.

METHODOLOGY

Current research is applied research in terms of purpose. It is a survey research in terms of path in which it is attempted to investigate impact of variables on each other through a process. This process includes steps of decision making on research hypothesis, selection of research population and sample, data collection method, and data organization and analysis.

In terms of time, current research is a cross sectional research, and observations are done in a short period of time when data are collected. In

terms of data collection, it is a field study. Statistical population included all employees of Social Security Organization of Gilanprovince (N = 672). For calculation of sample size, since the population variance was uncertain, firstly a pilot study was performed on a group (N = 35) of employees.

Following distribution and collection of questionnaire and analysis of findings, and considering optimal probable accuracy and confidence coefficient s 95% and statistical population volume, sample size was estimated as 244 using sample size formula. Sample was selected from branches of the organization in the province using stratified random sampling method.

$$n = \frac{Z_{\frac{\alpha}{2}}^2 \cdot S_x^2 \cdot N}{e^2 \cdot N - e^2 + (Z_{\frac{\alpha}{2}}^2 \cdot S_x^2)}$$

n = Sample size

$Z_{\frac{\alpha}{2}}^2$ = Variable size under study according to standard normaldistribution with level of uncertainty as α

e^2 = Error level

S_x^2 = Variance of population (based on variable under study)

N = Population volume

P = q = Estimate of ratio to attribute 0.5 (Z = 1.96) (value in Table D) (error level = 0.05)

$$n = \frac{672 \times (1/96)^2 \times 0/5 \times 0/5}{(0/05)^2 \times 672 + (1/96)^2 \times 0/25} \approx 244$$

Above calculations indicate that minimum sample size is 244. Also, in order to determine reliability of questionnaires using Cronbach's alpha, 35 questionnaires were distributed and Cronbach's alpha was determined for each of variables and finally, Cronbach's alpha coefficient was calculated for the total questionnaire and it was specified that Cronbach's alpha for each of variables was above 0.7. As a result, reliability of the questionnaire was approved.

Table 1: Coefficient of cronbach alpha

No.	Variable	Cronbach's alpha coefficient
1	internal marketing	0.907
2	Organizational commitments	0.918
3	customer orientation	0.919

RESEARCH FINDINGS

Questionnaire tool was used in this work for data collection. Thus, overall structure of the research questionnaire was content validated using confirmatory factor analysis. Standard factor loading and t-statistics were calculated for confirmatory factor analysis and structural equation modeling. In this section, using measurement models of structural equation modeling, measurement accuracy of constructs was evaluated by the relevant indexes. In this part, it is determined whether the questions designed for each construct can really measure the construct at the first step in confirmatory factor analysis, in other words, if the questions and indexes have acceptable reliability.

For investigation, it is observed that all considered indexes for all questions related to the model variables have correlation above 0.3. Also, considering that all values obtained in the significance model are larger than 1.96, reliability of constructs for measurement of variables are confirmed at significance level 0.05.

Model fit indexes suggest fit of model. Chi-square to degree of freedom ratio is below 4, and Root Mean Square Error of Approximation (RMSEA) is below 0.08. RMSEA, which is related to model residual, is fluctuating between 0 and 1, and the smaller is its value, the model has better fit. Chi square test shows difference between observed and expected covariance matrix.

Table 2: Fit indices

Fit Indexes	Value
Chi-square	35554.86
Degree of freedom	942
Chi-square / degree of freedom	3.77
Root Mean Square Error of Approximation (RMSEA)	0.064
goodness of fit index (GFI)	0.91
adjusted goodness of fit index (AGFI)	0.89
Comparative Fit Index (CFI)	0.92
normed fit index (NFI)	0.88

Testing Research Hypotheses

Based on research model, results of testing research structural hypotheses are given in Table 9-4.

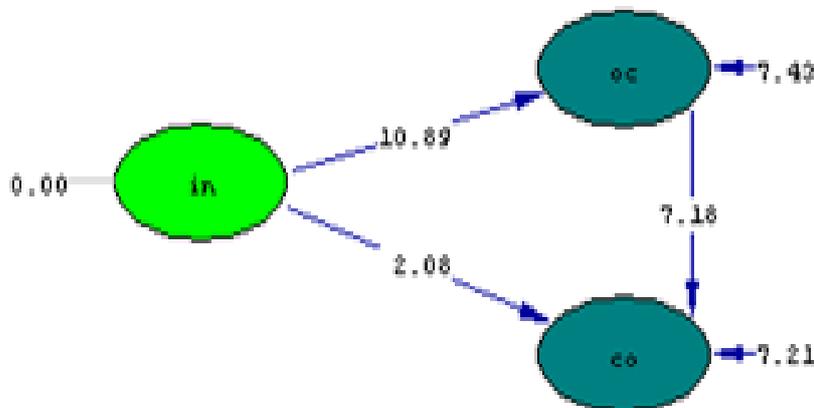


Figure 2: Structural model for testing hypotheses (t-value)

Table 3: Results for testing structural model

Hypothesis	Standard Estimation	t	Result
1- There is significant relationship between internal marketing perception and customer orientation.	0.16	2.08	Support
2- There is significant relationship between internal marketing perception and organizational commitment.	0.67	10.89	Support
3- There is significant relationship between organizational commitment and customer orientation.	0.63	7.18	Support
4- Organizational commitment plays role as intermediate in relationship between internal marketing and customer orientation.	0.63* 0.67 = 0.42	---	Support

If the model fit is acceptable, estimation of parameters is investigated. Ratio of estimation of each parameter to its standard error is shown by Z statistics. If Z is larger than 1.96, it would be significant at level 0.05, and if it is larger than 2.56, it would be significant at level 0.01. Since estimation of parameters is not standardized, it has scale of variables.

Thus, these estimations can be analyzed only based on scales of variables. In turn, standardized parameter estimations allow comparison of model parameters because it makes variables as scale free. Considering Table 9-4, it is observed that t statistics is larger than 1.96, and it can be stated all hypotheses are supported.

RESULTS for Testing Structural Hypotheses

Considering model diagram at significance state, it is observed that t-value is 2.08 in H1, which is larger than 1.96. Thus, significance of relationships can be accepted, and considering research model at standard state, impact of internal marketing on customer orientation is 0.16. T-value in H2 is 10.89 which is above 1.96, thus significance of relations can be accepted, and considering research model at standard state, impact of internal marketing perception on organizational commitment is 0.67. Also, t-value in H3 is 7.18 which are above 1.96, thus significance of relations can be accepted, and considering research model at standard state, impact of organizational commitment on customer orientation is 0.63. In H4 it is specified that indirect impact of internal marketing on customer

orientation through organizational commitment is 0.42.

DISCUSSION

S found by Boranta et al., internal marketing and its elements have positive impact on market orientation in bank. Studies by Abzari et al. (2009) showed internal marketing has significant impact on market orientation in hoteling industry. Also, Boranta et al. stated adequate forefront staff should be considered for customer satisfaction in banks and the key internal competence for staff in this regard is internal marketing.

One of the main challenges in today organizations is customer orientation and customer satisfaction attraction. It necessities customer orientation and customer satisfaction is studied in various aspects so that they can survive in the competition world (Kerndnaeech, 2004).

Employees, as the organization's internal customers, play basic role. Thus, absorption, development, motivation, and quantitative and qualitative promotion of abilities, value creation, continuous development of services to them and increasing working quality level as a product and their participation in processes help management and direct the organization toward high quality products and services leading to increased customer satisfaction among outside costumers of the organization (KhodabakhshGorgani, 2010).

Liao (2009) found that internal marketing perception by employees and its application in bank leads to customer satisfaction and it is effective in tendency of employees toward the customer. Abasi and Salehi (2011) in their work in

insurance industry found some findings which are consistent with findings in the current research.

Caruana and Calleya (1998) performed experimental work in local banks and found a positive significant relationship between internal marketing and organizational commitment. In Iran, Abasi and Salehi found there is a relationship between internal marketing and organizational commitment and findings in the current work support their findings.

On the other hand, it is improbable that a company or organization has loyal customers without having loyal employees (Reichheld, 1996). It is exactly the same as customer orientation feeling: that is, a long-term relationship with customers. Committed employees believe in hard working and demand utilization of more time, more effort, and highest talents for the organization. Thus, a long-term relationship with customer may be obtained by a long-term committed labor force (Liao, 2009).

Recommendations

Recommendations in this work are as follows according to the results and consider goals as well as research questions.

Recommendations related to H1:

It is suggested that the organization value the effort of employees and reward employees who do their best for providing the best services to the customers.

Also, it is suggested that the organization care for information of employees and utilize it for optimizing their jobs and developing organizational strategies and the organization should improve its relationship with employees. Evaluation and reward system should be designed in such a way that encourages teamwork and most rewards should be given to teamwork.

Also, it is needed that organizational goals are identified and the best and most effective training are provided for better efficiency to the employees and employees' knowledge and skill improvement should be looked as an investment rather than

cost. It is suggested that organization is flexible as much as possible for matching different needs of employees and the reason and way of doing works should be taught to employees.

Recommendations related to H2:

In relation with impact of organizational commitment on customer orientation, the organization is suggested to create such an atmosphere so that employees feel job security and do not leave the organization. They should have good feeling toward the organization and they prefer staying in the organization despite of having better job proposals.

Affective commitment should be developed in employees and they should love the organization and feel that they would not have good life without their current colleagues and organization and no better positions would wait them. The managers should attempt to provide happiness feeling in the employees so that they stay in the organization and enjoy talking about their organization with others.

Thus, it is recommended that employees' career path is specified and they can monitor their progress path in the organization and the organization care for their loyalty.

RESEARCH LIMITATIONS

It is evident that research works on humanities are not comprehensive and perfect and they face some limitations which are criticized by authors gradually and their findings become more reliable and perfect.

Some limitations were confronted also in the current work as follows:

- 1- Lack of similar research works
- 2- Current research was focused on Social Security Organization of Gilan province and its findings cannot be generalized to other companies and organizations with different competitive environment.
- 3- One of the limitations in the current work is using questionnaire as measurement tool. Qualitative tools usually measure behavior or

attitude of the subject by questionnaire and Likert scale. Such tools have some problem as lack of accuracy by respondent, conservatism in responding, etc. and quantitative tools have fewer problems in such cases.

Recommendations for Future Works

Recommendations are given to the authors for future research works:

- 1- Conducting this research in other companies and organizations
- 2- Conducting this research with higher number of samples and other statistical population and comparing the findings
- 3- Identifying factors affecting customer orientation other than factors used in the current research

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