

The measurement of citizens' satisfaction from the municipality accountability with an emphasis on good urban governance approach: Ghaemshahr city (a case study)

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Abstract:

A good urban governance pattern is defined as a participatory process for development whereby all stakeholders including government, NGOs, and civil society provide the means to solve urban problems. This study aimed to measure the Ghaemshahr (a city in Iran) citizens' satisfaction from the municipality accountability with an emphasis on good urban governance approach. For this purpose, the governance indices and the factors influencing the improvement of accountability had been identified. This was a descriptive analytical research. The population included 350 citizens. The questionnaires were distributed among them and the data were analyzed using SPSS and LISREL software. The results indicated that from the perspective of citizens, the accountability of Ghaemshahr municipality was not good. The participation and expertise indices were effective in the satisfaction of citizens from the accountability of staff. The lack of them along with problems such as lack of clarity, lack of accountability, lack of compliance with laws and regulations, and injustice would exacerbate the discontent of citizens. Also, the results showed that municipal inefficiency and lack of proper accountability had been influenced by various factors that existed in the organization. With precise examination, it was found that the response structure of the municipal, weaknesses and problems in the organization, lack of funds and facilities in the Municipal, lack of proper management and regulation, and dissatisfaction with salary had created difficulties for

many of the officials. The implementation of good urban governance indicators, especially the indicators impact on accountability, may lead to citizens' satisfaction.

Key words: accountability of municipality; citizens' satisfaction; urban governance; Ghaemshahr

STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

Nowadays, it is widely accepted in the world that the proper management of cities along with sustainable development will be realized if the goals including democracy, services equality, and environment protection may be followed simultaneously with the formation of united urban management and by following the principles of town planning and urban traffic, and a fair share of municipal revenues and sources. Given that cities are the driving force of economic growth, the center of work and activity, and social situations in around the world, the urban management in current multilevel urbanism situation should have indices such as clarity, accountability, participation, legitimacy, efficiency, consensus-orientation to take advantage of all the increasing conditions of urbanization. In recent decades, hence, a new concept in urban management system has been proposed: good urban governance. It emphasize on how to achieve efficient and optimum management with a democratic and fair development (Taghvaei, 2:2009). The urban management in the twenty-first century will face with a challenge. The challenge itself will be a function of technological, demographic, economic, political, and international changes (Saleh, 51:2002). For many years, the increasing developments along with serious social- physical, economic, cultural, and environmental challenges in the cities have gathered the experts for professional thinking about efficient solutions for solving the problems of living in cities and

urban management. In other words, the approaches and methods to exit out of unsustainable urbanism have emphasized on capacity building and empowerment of urban management. Each municipality and city management needs an accountability system to be able to act in a manner that is acceptable to society and citizens. Municipalities have been established to provide services to people. The services should meet the needs of the citizens, otherwise all activities and costs will waste the resources. In this regard, people should be aware of the spent funds and the effectiveness and cost-effectiveness of programs and services. Considering the special status of the municipality as the symbol of services division management, this study aims to investigate the accountability of staff in Ghaemshahr municipality and identify the mechanisms to respond to citizens. The necessity and importance of municipality employees' accountability is obvious. Citizens expect to know why the municipality services are not sufficient and its staff are not responsive despite the enormous costs and employment of dozens of people in the municipality. Considering the state of accountability system in municipality, therefore, the following questions will be discussed in this research:

- 1- How is the current status of employees' accountability in the municipality of Ghaemshahr?
- 2- What factors influence the employees' accountability in the municipality of Ghaemshahr?
- 3- What is the strategy for improving the employees' accountability in the municipality of Ghaemshahr?

MATERIALS AND METHODS

This is an applied - development and descriptive - analytical research. The data were collected based on observation, field study (questionnaire), and documents (books and articles).

Using Cochran method, the population size was determined 321 cases; but for further validating the results of research, 350 citizens were selected.

The logical reasoning, descriptive statistics (tables and charts), and inferential statistics were used for analyzing the data. However, the one sample T-tests were conducted by using SPSS and structural equation modeling or path analysis was done using LISREL software. The reliability and validity of questionnaire was confirmed according to the opinion of a group of professors and some experts. Factor validity is a type of construct validity that is measured through factor analysis. The confirmatory factor analysis is used to assess the validity of the questions in this study.

Table (1): the reliability of each of the variables			
Citizens	The number of questions	The research questions	Variables
Cronbach's alpha			
868.0	3	15-8-1	Responsibility
786.0	3	16-9-2	Justice
813.0	2	10-3	Clarity
835.0	3	17-11-4	Law abiding
849.0	3	18-12-5	Expertise and competence
844.0	3	19-13-6	Participation
885.0	3	20-14-7	Satisfaction
890.0	20	20-1	Total

The confirmatory factor analysis was used to investigate the validity of the six variables considered in the research model. The confirmatory factor analysis is a model for theory test in which the researcher begins her/ his analysis with a previous hypothesis. Table 2 shows the output of LISREL for confirmatory factor analysis model.

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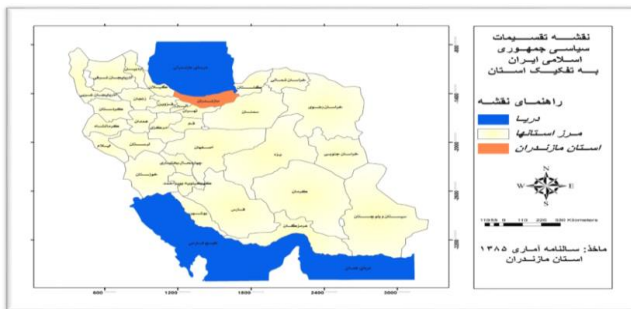
Table (2): The validity of any of the questionnaire questions by confirmatory factor analysis			
Significance coefficient	Standardized coefficient	Question	Variable
Citizens			
<i>77.10</i>	<i>82.0</i>	Question 1	Responsibility
<i>12.11</i>	<i>83.0</i>	Question 8	
<i>45.11</i>	<i>85.0</i>	Question 15	
<i>96.10</i>	<i>83.0</i>	Question 2	Justice
<i>04.11</i>	<i>83.0</i>	Question 9	
<i>97.6</i>	<i>59.0</i>	Question 16	
<i>93.11</i>	<i>89.0</i>	Question 3	Clarity
<i>50.9</i>	<i>75.0</i>	Question 10	
<i>20.10</i>	<i>78.0</i>	Question 4	Law abiding
<i>16.9</i>	<i>72.0</i>	Question 11	
<i>54.11</i>	<i>85.0</i>	Question 17	
<i>57.10</i>	<i>80.0</i>	Question 5	Expertise and competence
<i>02.11</i>	<i>82.0</i>	Question 12	
<i>65.10</i>	<i>80.0</i>	Question 18	
<i>71.10</i>	<i>81.0</i>	Question 6	Participation
<i>10.11</i>	<i>83.0</i>	Question 13	
<i>16.10</i>	<i>78.0</i>	Question 19	
<i>26.12</i>	<i>89.0</i>	Question 7	Satisfaction
<i>32.12</i>	<i>89.0</i>	Question 14	
<i>08.9</i>	<i>72.0</i>	Question 20	

According to the above table, the significance coefficient for all the questions is more than 1.96. So, this questionnaire has

validity and all of the questions measure the variables. Therefore, all questions of citizens' questionnaire are approved.

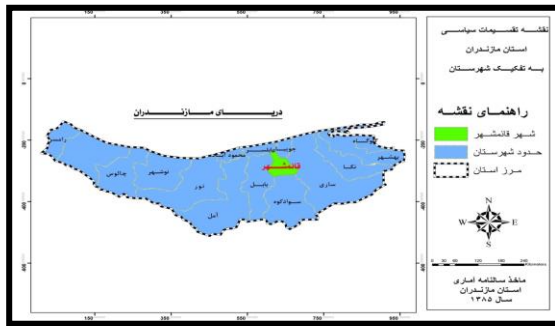
INTRODUCTION TO THE STUDY AREA

With an area of 24091.3 km, Mazandaran province forms 1.46% of the total area of the Iran. In terms of political situation, Caspian Sea, Gilan City, Golestan city, and Semnan and Tehran cities are located in north, west, east, and south of Mazandaran city, respectively. According to the Population and Housing Census (2006), this city consists of 16 province, 44 districts, 51 towns, and 113 villages (Consulting Engineers of Piravash, 2003).



Map (1): political divisions of Iran and the location of this city

With an area of 740 km (2006), Ghaemshahr city is located in the central part of the Mazandaran. The Population and Housing Census (2006) showed that the population of Ghaemshahr have increased 21.97% in the 10 years – 1996 to 2006- and has reached to 174,768 people.



Map (2): Political divisions of Mazandaran and the location of Ghaemshahr

The Analysis of Respondents' Characteristics

The findings related to personal characteristics of participants are described in the following tables.

1 – Age

Citizens are classified in five groups according to age. The objective of offering these age groups is providing basic understanding about the study population.

Table (4): Evaluation of respondents by age		
Citizens		Age group
percent	Frequency	
1.25	88	Less than 25 years
4.29	103	25 to 35 years
6.22	79	35 to 45 years
0.18	63	45 to 55 years
9.4	17	55 years or more
100	350	Sum

According to Table 4, 88 of citizens are less than 25 years old, 103 citizens are 25 to 35 years old, 79 cases are 35 to 45 years old, 63 cases are 45 to 55 years old, and 17 cases are 55 years and older.

2 – Gender

The second question of demographic questionnaire is about the respondents' gender. The data of this question categorize the respondents into two different class that their frequency is shown in the below table. According to Table 5, 215 citizens are men and 135 citizens are women.

Citizens		Gender
Percent	Frequency	
<i>4.61</i>	<i>215</i>	Male
<i>6.38</i>	<i>135</i>	Female

3 - Positive factors affecting citizens' satisfaction

The positive factors affecting citizens' satisfaction are prioritized in the following table. It shows that the internal and external regulatory bodies have been the first priority of people that represents citizens' level of understanding about the urban issues. What is seen by the citizens is considered a problem. Any problems including damages to pavements, traffic problems, and etc. that are subset of municipal services are seen every day by citizens. The failure to monitor will be considered the cause of deficiencies. Ignoring an important issue such as good service by citizens indicates their desire to eliminate the appearance and content factors. According to them, the appearance factors cause their dissatisfaction from the municipal services.

The fifth priority	The fourth priority	The third priority	The second priority	The first priority	Positive factors
<i>81</i>	<i>87</i>	<i>35</i>	<i>91</i>	<i>56</i>	Municipal facilities and its ability to perform the services

					and duties
63	77	98	91	21	Perform functions and provide services in a timely manner without undue delay
42	48	99	84	77	Appropriate and non-discriminatory dealing with clients
84	70	77	42	77	Responsibility commitment and competence of managers and employees
77	63	42	49	119	Internal and external regulatory bodies in the municipality

4 - Negative factors affecting citizens' satisfaction

With critical look, the negative factors are associated with positive factors. The employment of non-aligned and inefficient managers was prioritized as the first negative point in the municipality; this is somehow associated with an increase in supervising on the good work. When there is no confidence for doing good work and inefficiency of managers and employees can be seen clearly, the demand to increase supervision rises.

Table (7): Evaluation of respondents in terms of prioritizing negative factors by Citizens					
The fifth priority	The fourth priority	The third priority	The second priority	The first priority	Negative factors
126	119	56	21	28	Lack of financial strength
77	112	118	29	14	Lack of facilities
112	77	91	49	21	Special rules for urban
7	8	41	133	161	Employment of Non-Aligned Managers and staff
29	27	49	119	126	Lack of urban planning

5 - Analysis of factors affecting citizens' satisfaction from the perspective of citizens

5-1- Responsibility of managers and employees

According to Figure 1 and 2, the standardized coefficient between two variables is 0.22 and the significant coefficient between these two variables is 3.31 (greater than 1.96). It can be concluded that there is significant relationship between the responsibility of managers and staff in accountability and satisfaction level of citizens.

5-2- Justice of managers and employees

According to Figure 1 and 2, the standardized coefficient between two variables is 0.14 and the significant coefficient between these two variables is 2.89 (greater than 1.96). It can be concluded that there is significant relationship between the justice of managers and staff in accountability and satisfaction level of citizens.

5-3- Clarity of managers and employees

According to Figure 1 and 2, the standardized coefficient between two variables is 0.08 and the significant coefficient between these two variables is 1.40 (greater than 1.96). It can be concluded that there is no significant relationship between the clarity of managers and staff in accountability and satisfaction level of citizens.

5-4- Law abiding of managers and employees

According to Figure 1 and 2, the standardized coefficient between two variables is 0.43 and the significant coefficient between these two variables is 7.22 (greater than 1.96). It can be concluded that there is significant relationship between the law abiding of managers and staff in accountability and satisfaction level of citizens.

5-5- Expertise and competence of managers and employees

According to Figure 1 and 2, the standardized coefficient between two variables is 0.11 and the significant coefficient between these two variables is 2.13 (greater than 1.96). It can be concluded that there is significant relationship between the expertise and competence of managers and staff in accountability and satisfaction level of citizens.

5-6- Citizen Collaboration with managers and employees

According to Figure 1 and 2, the standardized coefficient between two variables is 0.31 and the significant coefficient between these two variables is 5.17 (greater than 1.96). It can be concluded that there is significant relationship between the citizen participation in staff accountability and satisfaction level of citizens.

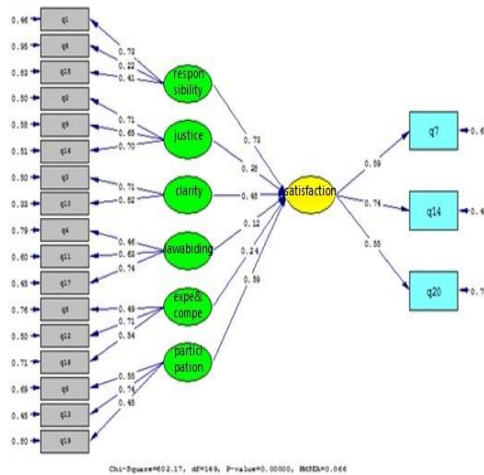


Figure (1): The model of standardized coefficients for testing the research variables – citizens

As is shown in Figure 1, the standardized coefficient for the responsibility, justice, clarity, law abiding, expertise and

competence, and participation is 0.73, 0.28, 0.48, 0.12, 0.24, and 0.59, respectively.

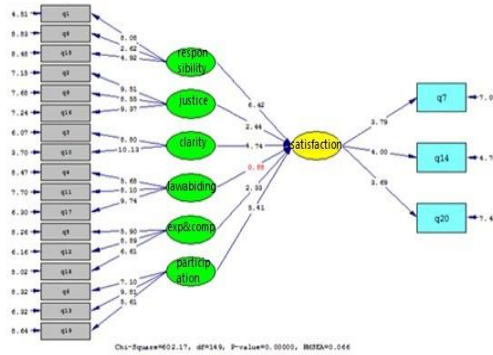


Figure (2): The model of significance coefficients for testing the research variables – citizens

As is shown in Figure 2, the significance coefficient for the responsibility, justice, clarity, law abiding, expertise and competence, and participation is 6.42, 2.44, 4.74, 0.88, 2.33, and 5.41, respectively.

6 - Assessment of model fit

After modeling and parameter estimation, the first question that arises is whether the measurement model is suitable. The answer to this question is possible only by examining fitness. The model fitness means the extent to which a model has consistency and agreement with the relevant data. The fitness measures for a model are obtained by comparing the estimated covariance matrix for population (based on the model, as specified by the researcher) with the sample covariance matrix which is calculated from the data. When the implied covariance matrix of model is equivalent to observed data covariance matrix, it will be said that the model fits the observed data; in other words, the residual matrix and its elements matrix is

near zero. When a model is exactly identified, has similarity characteristics, and its estimate and test is possible, then there will many criteria for evaluating its fitness. The most important ones are given in table 8:

Table (8): Indices of goodness of fit of model.		
Statistics of Citizens Model	Acceptance criteria	The fit index
1.6	$\chi^2/df \leq 3$	(Chi square) χ^2
0.066	RMSEA<0.08	RMSEA ¹
0.98	NFI>0.90	NFI ²
0.99	CFI>0.95	CFI ³
0.91	GFI>0.90	GFI ⁴
0.86	AGFI>0.85	AGFI ⁵

The presented indices and comparing them with the desired quantity for a fitted model show proper fit of both models. The remarkable point in model fitness is: while the model is confirmed by the fitness of structural model, it never proves that the model is the only valid model.

Table 9: Summary results of research variables			
Results	T value	Path coefficient	Path
Citizens			
Confirmation	42.6	73.0	Responsibility.....citizens satisfaction
Confirmation	44.2	28.0	Justice citizens satisfaction
Confirmation	74.4	48.0	Clarity..... citizens satisfaction
Rejection	88.0	12.0	law abiding..... citizens satisfaction

¹Root Mean Square error of Approximation

²Normed Fit Index

³Comparative Fit Index

⁴Goodness of Fit Index

⁵Adjusted Goodness of Fit Index

Confirmation	<i>33.2</i>	<i>24.0</i>	Expertise and competence..... citizens satisfaction
Confirmation	<i>41.5</i>	<i>59.0</i>	Public Participation..... citizens satisfaction

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

1. Research showed a significant relationship between responsibility of managers and staff and in accountability and satisfaction level of citizens. It shows that today, the role of urban managers is changing and this change is the practical result of reinforcing the commitment and responsibility.
2. The results showed that there is no relationship between the significance from the perspective of citizens and the relationship from the perspective of managers and employees. This index was found to be effective by managers and employees, but citizens did not consider this as a factor influencing accountability. It can be the sign of lack of existing rules fitness with current situation and lack of executive guarantee.
3. Although discrimination and inequality in dealing with citizens or employees leads to duality in accountability and relations between individuals in the organization or between staff and clients, citizens have stated that the relations prevail more than rules to the organization. Justice in dealing with citizens, and in evaluation system and promotion of employees influence their performance in responding to the citizens.
4. Citizens state that transparency depends on law abiding and if someone avoid it, they consider it as organizational corruption. They also believe that information should be freely available and directly accessible for all citizens. However, some managers and employees consider it ineffective and this is because of

non-expert internal and external monitoring that itself creates problems.

5. The present study tries to provide suggested strategies for improving the accountability of Municipality in Ghaemshahr. According to the gathered data from the citizens and analyzing the obtained data from the questionnaire, the following useful suggestions is provided to solve problems of accountability along with the urban good governance system:
 - Increasing the facilities and financial capabilities of Municipality to perform the services and duties when necessary
 - Reducing the focus of management in high level and delegation of authority to lower-level managers and employees
 - Attracting the trust of citizens and using of incentive policies for participation
 - Taking advantage of successful partnership programs of developed countries
 - Creating incentives for participation and engagement of citizens in urban planning tasks
 - Enhancing the sense of belonging in different social groups to integrate and increase the desire to participation, given the high proportion of immigrants in the Ghaemshahr
 - Strengthening the responsibility commitment and competence of managers and employees through mechanisms of reward and punishment
 - Investigating the characteristics and personality of Municipality employees and improving it through conducting psychological exams
 - Formulating suitable and permanent rules and regulations consistent with the cultural and national characteristics of Ghaemshahr

- Establishing legal support for law enforcement
- Institutionalizing of the pattern of preferring regulations rather than relations.

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