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Contents

The Mediating Role of Response to Environment in the Relationship between Organizational Solidarity and External Image

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Abstract

This study aims to predict the relationship between organizational solidarity and external image in Iranian technical and vocational training organization with mediating role of response to environment. Research population include employees and stakeholders all of organizations. As such, 224 people from each group were selected as sample through multistage cluster sampling as well as available sampling methods in the southwestern Iranian province of Fars. Research instruments used in this study include a set of questionnaires on organizational solidarity, response to environment and external image which were distributed among samples and collected after calculating their reliability and validity. Results showed that organizational solidarity is the positive and significant predictor of external image and the power of response to environment. In addition, this showed that organizational solidarity with a mediating role of response to environment is a positive and significant predictor of external image.

Keywords: Organizational Solidarity; Response to Environment; External Image; Technical and Vocational Training Organization

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Introduction

Over the past few decades, many countries have witnessed a growing call for a new approach to fill the gap between education offered by universities and industry needs. Hence, technical and vocational institutions were created in response to marked economic changes, continued technological advancement, increased demand for sustainable energy use, as well as social and demographic changes (Catts, Falk and Wallace, 2007). Many studies show that creating loyal customers has become more important due to a significant increase in competition and concentrated markets (Rehman and Afsarzo, 2012). Therefore, technical and vocational training organizations, like others need loyal and satisfied stakeholders to maintain their dynamism and effectiveness. In this regard, a positive image builds the strategic value for a company by granting it a competitive advantage over rivals. (Adeniji,Osibanjo and Abiodun,Oni-Ojo, 2015).

According to Dutton and Dukerich (1994), organizational image is the one members of an organization believe could help guide outsiders to judge them. To become a factor of business excellence, the image has to be of a good quality, i.e. positive, stable, clear, viable and capable of generating growth and development of each construction company (Šehanović, 2015). Such an image is the product of organizational performance. In general, organizational optimal performance gives it a chance to attract new customers, retain existing one and maximize customer satisfaction and loyalty (Abd al- Salam and Showsky, 2013). It should be noted that the optimal organizational performance is shown in terms of organizational high power in response to environmental needs and requirements. Responsiveness is recognized as one of the key and basic elements of modern organizations (Hal and Ferris, 2010). Response to environment is a process through which organizations respond and create balance between the needs of stakeholders engaging in activities and decision makings (Lioyd *et al.*, 2007). So, successful and effective organization is those which can respond to the needs of environment timely and fast.

As a whole, the power of response to environment makes a link between organization's internal and external factors. Accordingly, this variable helps internal functions change to optimal performance in the environment. As a result, when demands and contingencies of the environment and key stakeholders meet, a positive mental model of the organization is created in the minds of stakeholders. Researchers have shown that the responsibility of organizations is influenced by a number of internal factors, including organizational solidarity (Memarbaashi Aval, Sabri Nazarzadeh, and Bdkhdayy, 2012). Solidarity is a strong sense of engagement of employees toward organization (Kaiser, 2010). Paskov (2015) defined solidarity as individuals' willingness to contribute to the welfare of other people. Sanders *et al.* (2002) called solidarity as behavior toward other employees and define solidarity to the manager as behaving in the spirit of agreements, even when not convenient and not formally described.

Accordingly, any organization, particularly technical and vocational organizations should try to strengthen solidarity and inter-organizational relationship to achieve high responsiveness. As a result, the organizations make a good

performance and a positive image of themselves. In short, studying the relationship between organizational solidarity, response to environment, and external image can help organizations in determining, planning, and revising their organizational and educational strategies, hence contribute to the improvement of their public image. Also, this study provides organizational managers and planners a comprehensive tool. Accordingly, the aim of this study is to survey the relationship between organizational solidarity and external image in Iranian technical and vocational training organizations with mediating role of response to environment.

The following minor objectives were also pursued:
1. Determining the relationship between organizational solidarity and external image.
2. Determining the relationship between organizational solidarity and response to environment.

Literature Review
Organizational Solidarity
Changes in the environment and structure of organizations lead to an increasing demand for solidarity (Sanders and Emmerik, 2004). Any group or society heavily depends on the willingness of its members to help others in need, to contribute to a common good, to show themselves trustworthy, and to be fair and considerate (Fetchenahur *et al.*, 2006). Solidarity has been the subject of contention, evasion and confusion in human rights (Khoo, 2015). This is one of the venerable social science concepts for which there are almost as many definitions as theorists who have analyzed it. Solidarity is a broad social justice principle that implies unity, fellowship, harmony, common goals and

mutual responsibility (Gervais and Stevez, 2011). Solidarity can be regarded as a founding general principle of human rights ("fraternity" alongside liberty and equality) (Bayertz, 1998). In this study, the dimensions of organizational solidarity are regarded by Torkzadeh and Abdesharifi (2015) as a conceptual framework of organizational solidarity. These dimensions are:

Social-emotional solidarity: Social solidarity can be described as a morality of cooperation, the ability of individuals to identify each other in a spirit of mutuality and reciprocity without individual advantage or compulsion, leading to a network of individuals or secondary institutions that are bound to a political project involving social and political bonds.

Structural (instrumental) solidarity: Any orientation and arrangement that will lead to organizational goal achievement (Torkzadeh, 2009). In terms of organizational solidarity, different researches have been conducted in Iran and other countries, some of them have been addressed in the following. Huihua (2003) conducted a study entitled "Firm as coherent organization for transaction of human capital usufruct". The results showed that the more organizational solidarity, the less transaction of employee. Verhezen (2008) in his study showed that promoting coherence in the organization leads to a base on trustful climate, both within and outside the organization. Memarbaashi Aval *et al.* (2012) examined the relationship between sense of coherence and self-esteem with job performance. According to their results, increasing the sense of coherence leads to an increase in job performance.

Power of Response to Environment

Scholars believe that no organization could be identified apart from its environment (Scott, 2009). In other words, organizations are influenced by the environment in which they live and in turn affect them (Hoy and Miskel, 2013; Scott, 2009; Torkzadeh and Nekoumand, 2015). Organizations' existential philosophy is responding to the demands and contingencies of the environment and when organization is socially acceptable it can continue to survive on its philosophy of existence (Torkzadeh and Nekoumand, 2015). Based on Liao, Welsh and Stoica (2003) definition, the organizational response is linked to performance and reflects the speed and coordination with which the actions are implemented and periodically revised. Zhou and Li (2010) also think of responsiveness in the form of dynamic ability, which contributes to the success of the company in dynamic environments. According to Wei and Wang (2011), response to environment reflects organization's capacity to act based on the use of information as a resource. According to Thongsodsang and Ussahawanitchakit (2011), the definition of organizational response is associated with the ability of firm to respond to external market changes efficiently and promptly. From the perspective of Torkzadeh and Nekoumad (2015), the power of response to environment has four dimensions:

Conceptual dimension: It refers to necessity and benefits of responding to the conditions and contingencies within the organization's changing external environment and internal challenges, overall concept and purpose of response, territory, approaches, processes, ways of response, functional values of response, and requirements and

considerations in order to achieve effective responsiveness (Torkzadeh, 2008, Torkzadeh, 2009; Torkzadeh and Nekoumand, 2015).

Structural dimension: It refers to any orientation, internal and environmental mechanisms and arrangements that will lead to a timely and appropriate response (Torkzadeh, 2010). This important dimension can be studied from three aspects: *an appropriate and clear strategic orientation, organizational design and cultural context* (Cummings and Worly, 1997; Torkzadeh, 2010; Torkzadeh and Nekoumand, 2015).

Functional dimension: It is a set of activities and initiatives that are performed to promote and fulfill response, these activities and actions can be divided into three categories: main activities (central), underlying and supportive initiatives, and functional considerations (Torkzadeh, 2009; Torkzadeh and Nekoumand, 2015). The main activities deal with processes (diagnosis, orientation, implementation, evaluation, and learning), leadership and management (diagnosis and strategic orientation, goal setting, creating effective communication, guidance and control); leadership and management processes by providing the information from conditions and contingencies run the possibility of appropriate and timely response. Touan Mat (2010), in his study, showed that there is a significant positive relationship between management accounting system and organizational performance. Daigle and Cuocco (2002), in their study, stated that the response to environment is being introduced as a vital and major challenge that understanding it helps organizations operate more efficiently

via increasing their responsiveness. Hasani (2014) found a significant relationship between responsiveness and organizational performance. Furthermore, Naghizadeh (2013) proposed that competitive intelligence has a positive effect on organizational responsiveness.

Organizational Image

The complex environment of today's organizations, as well as an increase in the number and variety of their stakeholders makes improbable any longer the uniqueness of an organization's image. Organizations present themselves differently to different stakeholders. Furthermore, stakeholders perceive organizations differently (Boros, 2015). However, external perceptions can turn out to be different. It is crucial for an actor to be aware of his external images because of the subjectivity of self-perception and that's why others' perspective is necessary and can help us understand our identity better and avoid a narcissist behavior (Khayrizamanova, 2012). An organizational image is the "shared meanings, attitudes, knowledge, and opinions" of stakeholders, influenced, at least in part, by strategic communications emanating from the organization (Moffitt, 1994: 166). An organization's future image is shaped by the communication between management, employees and external audiences (Amon, 2004).

According to Barber (1998), perceptions of organizational image can be characterized as an overall impression that is based on facts, beliefs, and feelings about an organization, and on the other hand, practically we "scan" the market trends of buyers. The image is formed through the information that individuals receive about the organization, which they first receive and then organize in

their 'data bank', in a very personal way (Schuler, 2004). Knowing the hot side of consumers, to investigate trends and consumer purchase for a period, are essential in order to anticipate the preferences and demand for one or another product / service (Hristache, Paicu, and Ismail, 2014). From the perspective of Polate *et al* (2010), the external image has five dimensions: quality image, program image, infrastructure image, appearance image, social image, and general image. Taghizadeh (2012) following Polat's study, considered three dimensions which are:

Quality image: Customers are more demanding and hence; they are the judge of quality (Little and Little, 2009). In other words, service quality is one of the most important and widely researched topics (Zeithaml, Parasuraman, and Malhotra, 2000). This dimension represents the majority of today's economy, not only in developed countries but also developing countries throughout the world. (Abd- al-Salam, Shawsky, and El-Nahas, 2013).

Appearance image: Kazoleas, Kim and Moffit (2001) state that there are multiple changing images within each individual and these images are affected by certain factors. The formation of external image is defined as a comprehensive and multi-stakeholder process (Gray and Balmer, 1998) and factors such as branding, logos and emblems, building architecture are effective in image building. Besides, strong communicative factors such as brand name, logo, and advertisement can help create a good and strong image (Gray and Balmer, 1998).

General image: In research context, creating a public image and managing reputation

were discussed by Davies, Chun, Da Silva, Roper (2003), Costas and Thurber (2003) (Orzakaous and Smaiziene, 2007). The public image of an organization is present in social situations, political, traditional and religious reference (Taghizadeh, 2012). Barati (2015) conducted a study entitled "the relationship between leadership worldview, the power of response to environment and external image". The results suggested that the response to environment moderates the relationship between leadership worldview and external image. Rashid *et al.* (2012) carried out a study that investigates the relationship between environmental awareness and external image. Their findings suggested that there was a positive significant relationship between environmental awareness and external image. Also the results of Kordi's study (2013) showed that a positive organizational behavior is a positive predictor of organizational image.

Hypotheses and Conceptual Model

This research aims to examine the impact of organizational solidarity on external image through the power of response to environment. By studying theoretical and

Empirical literature on the research topic, following hypotheses were formulated and tested using data collection tools.

H1: Organizational solidarity is a positive and significant predictor of external image.

H2: Organizational solidarity is a positive and significant predictor of power of response to environment.

H3: Organizational solidarity with the mediating of power of response to environment is a positive and significant predictor of external image

Model and conceptual framework of this study was designed by revealing the fundamental variables of the subject and linking them through theoretical and empirical literature.
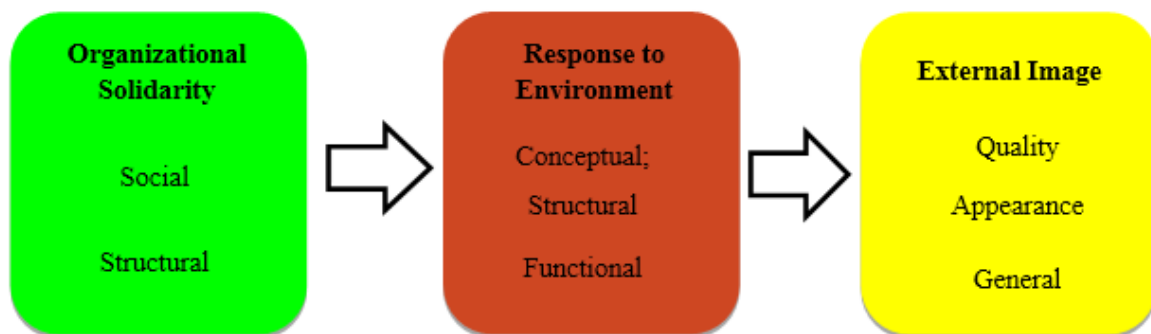
Fig. 1. Conceptual framework of the research

Methodology

In terms of the results, the present study is an applied one and in terms of the nature it is descriptive and correlational. The study population comprises employees and stakeholders of technical and vocational training organization in Iran's Fars province during 2012 and 2016. According to the

acquired data, the number of population was 863 employees and over 2,000 stakeholders. The sample size was determined to be 260 people using the Morgan table. According to the list of the population, in this study, the random cluster sampling method and available sampling method were used. A total of 300 questionnaires were distributed among

employees and stakeholders separately but just about 224 questionnaires were returned. In order to collect the data, the scales of Torkzadeh *et al.* (2010), Torkzadeh and Nekoumand (2015), and Torkzadeh and Taghizadeh (2012) were utilized. The organizational solidarity scale was developed by Torkzadeh *et al.* (2010) which included two dimensions: social-emotional solidarity and structural solidarity. Torkzadeh and Nekoumand (2015) measured three dimensions i.e., conceptual, structural and functional to determine the level of the power of response to environment. Finally, external image was measured though a questionnaire propounded by Torkzadeh and Taghizadeh (2012). This questionnaire included three dimensions: quality image, appearance image, and general image. Scale variables in this study, was the five-item Likert scale (from strongly agree to strongly disagree). To examine the reliability, the most common method for assessing the reliability of the questionnaire, namely the Cronbach's alpha coefficient was used. Results demonstrated that the reliability of the questionnaire was at an appropriate level. In addition, the validity of the questions of the questionnaire was determined by item analysis. Tables 1-3 show the results of validity and reliability indices. Also to test the hypotheses and the conceptual model of the study, the structural equation modeling (Partial Least Squares) was used with smart LISREL 8.8 software.

Table 1. Validity and Reliability of Organizational Solidarity

Dimensions	Correlation	Alpha Coefficient
Social	0.51-0.68	0.74
Structural	0.39- 0.69	0.88

Significant level at α <0.0001

Table 2. The Validity and Reliability of Response to Environment

Dimensions	Correlation	Alpha Coefficient
Conceptual	0.58-0.78	0.82
Structural	0.59- 0.72	0.78
Functional	0.65- 0.74	0.75

Significant level at α <0.0001

Table 3. The Validity and Reliability of External Image

| Dimensions	Correlation	Alpha Coefficient
Quality	0.54-0.69	0.87
Appearance	0.62- 0.80	0.82
General	0.43- 0.76	0.70

Significant level at α <0.000

Research Findings

The results provided answers to the three research hypotheses:

H1: Organizational solidarity is a positive and significant predictor of external image.

As indicated in Fig. 2, external image is predicted through organizational solidarity. There is a significant positive relationship between the organizational solidarity and external image ($\beta = 0.89$; $P \leq 0.01$).
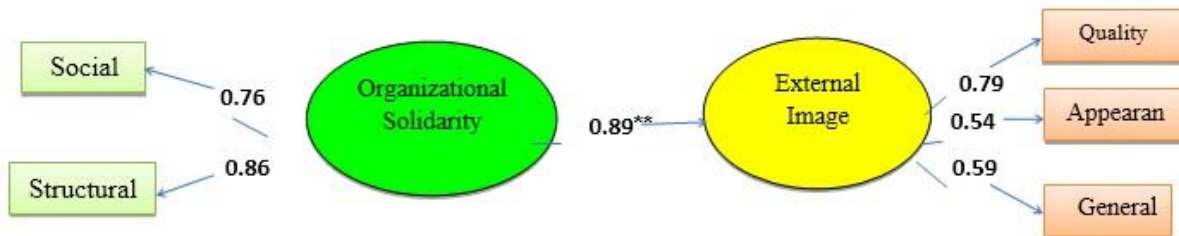
**p < 0.01   Ch – Square= 65.39, df=4, P- value=0.0004, RMSEA=0.11
Fig. 2. The relationship between organizational solidarity and external image

H2: Organizational solidarity is a positive and significant predictor of power of response to the environment.

According to Fig. 3, there is a significant positive relationship between the organizational solidarity and the power of response to the environment ($\beta = 0.59$; $P \leq 0.01$).
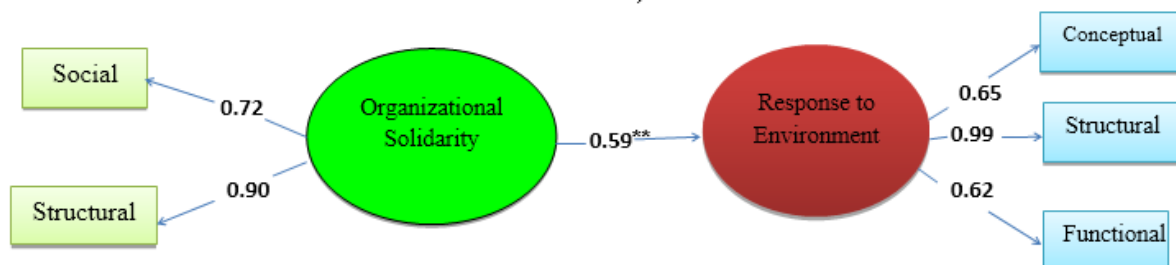
**p < 0.01   Ch – Square= 65.39, df=4, P- value=0.0001, RMSEA=0.26
Fig. 3. The relationship between response to environment and external image

H3: Organizational solidarity with the mediating of power of response to environment is a positive and significant predictor of external image.

As Fig. 4 indicate, there is a significant positive relationship between the organizational solidarity and external image

with mediating role of response to environment ($\beta = 0.589$; $P \leq 0.01$). In this stage, the significance of the relationship between response to environment and external image estimated (0.41) that conducted the role of responsiveness as an intermediation.
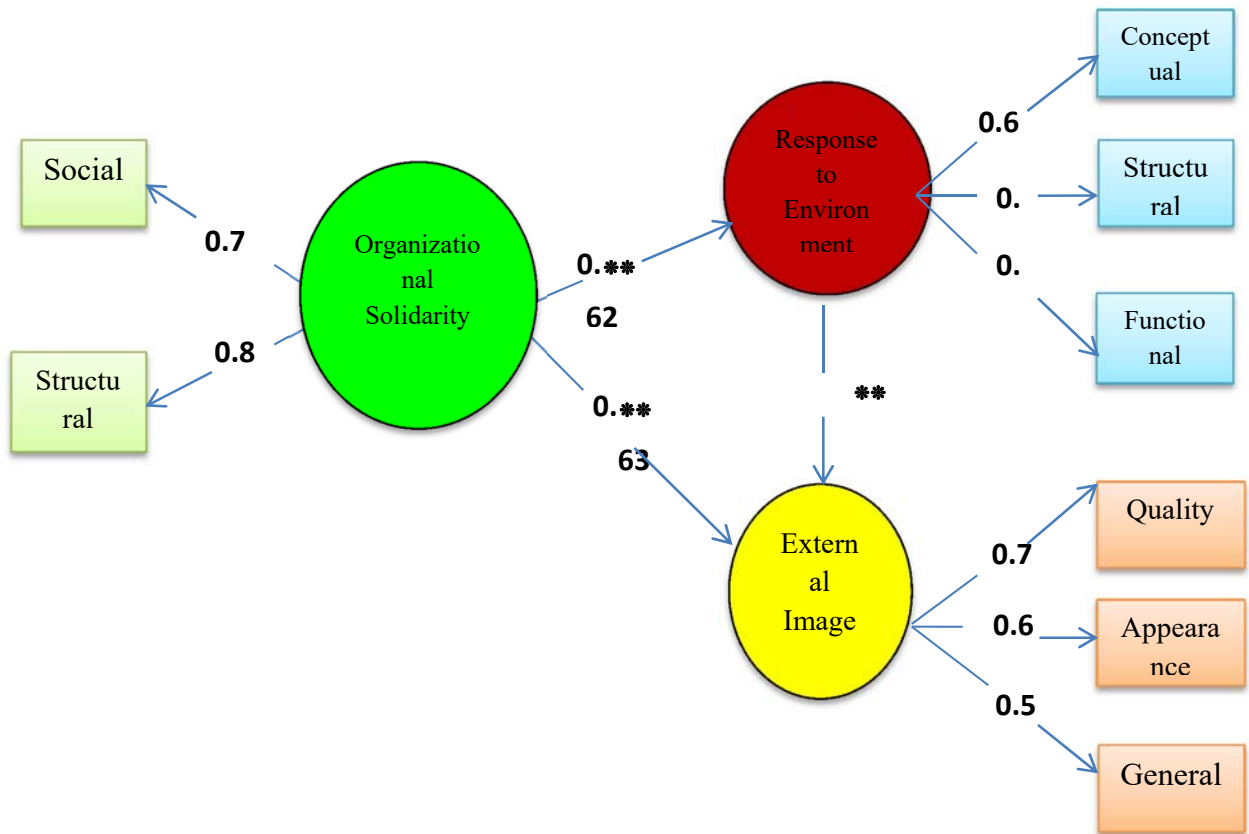
**p < 0.01   Ch – Square129.61, df=17, P- value=0.0001, RMSEA=0.17

Fig. 4. The relationship between organizational solidarity, response to environment and external image

Discussion and Conclusion

Stakeholders are the vital capital of organization and their satisfaction is an important factor for the organizational survival. Therefore, recognizing their needs and being responsive to their requests is necessary. On the other hand, in today's world, organizations are increasingly faced with dynamic and changing environment and inevitably have to adopt environmental factors (Brannen, 2016) to survive in the environment and make a positive image. Some researchers have determined the factors influencing the external image of organizations. The researchers intend to identify the internal factors influencing the external image of organizations. However, this study attempted to identify the influence of both internal (organizational solidarity) and external (the power of response to environment) factors on the organizational image. Furthermore, in this study, the response to environment was presented as a mediator to link both internal and external factors. Having such a comprehensive view helps balance the relationship between organization and its environment as an effective component. Therefore, based on previous studies in the field, a conceptual model was designed. Using the questionnaire, data were collected based on the structural equation modeling and using LISREL software, and then assumptions and conceptual model were tested. As Fig. 4 showed, a significant positive relationship was found between organizational solidarity, the power of response to environment, and external image. The findings of the study were aligned with Nekoumand (2013),

Torkzadeh and Abdesharifi (2014), and Baraati (2015).

Recommendations

Based on the findings and results of the study, the following recommendations are made in order to improve the organizational image and its responsiveness.

1. The external image of organizations should be measured and evaluated frequently; good image dimensions should be maintained and strengthened and negative dimensions should be improved.

2. Training classes should be organized for managers to make them aware about the necessity of response to environment and its emergency for the organizational survival.

3. Employees need to be attracted with high ability of environmental awareness and create a good development within them.

4. Similar studies should be conducted in other organizational areas to ensure the accuracy of the findings.

5. Obstacles need to be identified to response timely and fast.

Limitation

All researches are faced with limitations. One limitation of this study is the generalization of the results. According to the model fitness indicators, there is low fitness in the research models.

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بررسی نقش واسطه ای توان پاسخگویی به محیط
در ارتباط میان انسجام سازمانی و تصویر بیرونی

جعفر ترک‌زاده[1]، جعفر جهانی[2]، الهام راضی[3]

چکیده

هدف از انجام این پژوهش پیش‌بینی ارتباط میان انسجام سازمانی و تصویر بیرونی سازمان‌های فنی و حرفه‌ای با نقش واسطه‌ای توان پاسخگویی به محیط بود. جامعه پژوهش شامل تمامی کارکنان و ذی‌نفعان سازمان است که از هرگروه به‌ترتیب با استفاده از روش نمونه‌گیری خوشه‌ای چندمرحله‌ای و روش نمونه‌گیری در دسترس ۲۲۴ نفر به‌عنوان نمونه پژوهش در استان فارس انتخاب شدند. ابزارهای پژوهش شامل پرسش‌نامه انسجام سازمانی، پرسش‌نامه توان پاسخگویی به محیط و پرسشنامه تصویر بیرونی بود که پس از محاسبه روایی و پایی آنها توزیع و جمع آوری گردیدند. نتایج حاصل نشان داد که انسجام سازمانی پیش‌بینی کننده مثبت و معنادار تصویر بیرونی و توان پاسخگویی به محیط است. به‌علاوه، این پژوهش نشان داد که انسجام سازمانی با نقش واسطه‌ای توان پاسخگویی به محیط پیش‌بینی‌کننده مثبت و معنادار تصویر بیرونی است.

واژه‌های کلیدی: انسجام سازمانی، توان پاسخگویی به محیط، تصویر بیرونی، سازمان فنی و حرفه‌ای

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