

Empowerment Constructs: An Implementation Model-A Case Study

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Abstract: Empowerment is an emerging construct, widely used by theorists/social scientists. Despite the recognized role of empowerment in management theory and practice, our understanding of the construct is limited and often confusing. Most management theorists have dealt with empowerment as a set of managerial technique and have not paid sufficient attention to its nature or the processes underlying the construct. This may reflect the pragmatic or practice orientation of theorists, and the result may be an inadequate understanding of the notion of empowerment and its theoretical rationale for related practices. As a construct, empowerment has not received the same analytical treatment from management scholars as the construct of power/control. We assume that empowerment is delegating or sharing power with subordinates and, hence, that the construct requires no further conceptual analysis beyond the power concept. Our objective is to address these shortcomings by providing an analytical treatment of the empowerment construct. We have made an attempt to integrate the diverse approaches to empowerment found in both the management and psychology literatures. This article offers some ways to implement empowerment programs more effectively: enlarge power, be sure of what you want to do, differentiate among employees, support power sharers, build fitting systems, and focus on results. The article contends that empowerment is still a useful concept that we need to learn to apply better.

Keywords: Empowerment constructs, Power, Self-efficacy, Conceptual analysis

I. Introduction

The organisations has undergone significant changes over the last decade due to Globalization and liberalization. As a result, management has to respond to issues such as increasing levels of client expectations, rapid changes in the economy, Inflation, cut-throat competition, and tight margins, inherent obstacles to operating in the sector, such as separation of design and construction, fragmented production methods, adversarial relationships, and a reluctance to innovate and take up information technology. Furthermore, the problems of poor and unstructured training, multi-tiered management systems, and poor communication provide less than optimal conditions for achieving high quality products in good time and to budget. One approach to addressing these issues is through the concept of employee empowerment. This article presents an overview of the empowerment concept in the context of construction field, highlighting the hurdles, an implementation process, and achievable benefits.

II. Riview Of Literature

This literature interprets power as a function of the dependence and/or interdependence of actors. Power arises when an individual's or a subunit's performance outcomes are contingent not simply on their own behavior but on what others do and/or in how others respond (Thibaut & Kelley, 1959).

The relative power of one actor over another is a product of the net dependence of the one on the other (Pfeffer, 1981). Therefore, if Actor A depends more on Actor B than B depends on A, then B has power over A. At the organizational level, the principal sources of an actor's power over an organization have been argued to be the actor's ability to provide some performance or resource that is valued by the organization or the actor's ability to cope with important organizational contingencies or problems (Pfeffer, 1982).

Despite increasing attention on the topic of empowerment, our understanding of the construct and its underlying processes remains limited. In addition, this concept identify certain antecedent conditions of powerlessness and practices that have been hypothesized to empower subordinates. There has been a growing interest in the concept of empowerment and related management practices among both management researchers and practitioners. This interest is due to several reasons. First, studies on leadership and management skills suggest that the practice of empowering subordinates is a principal component of managerial and organizational effectiveness. Second, analysis of power and control within organizations (Kanter, 1979; Tannenbaum, 1968) reveals that the total productive forms of organizational power and effectiveness grow with superiors' sharing of power and control with subordinates. Finally, experiences in team building within organizations suggest that empowerment techniques plays a crucial role in group development and maintenance.

Objectives of the study:

1. To explain the issues of the powerlessness of minority groups (e.g., women, blacks, and handicapped).
2. To analyze the notion of empowerment in management practices, and to find out the root constructs of power and control

Different Ways of Empowerment:

Empowerment as a Relational Construct:

If we consider empowerment in terms of relational construct, it becomes the process by which a leader or manager shares his or her power with subordinates. Power, in this context, is interpreted as the possession of formal authority or control over organizational resources. The emphasis is primarily on the notion of sharing authority. Burke's (1986) position is representative: "To empower, implies the granting of power delegation of authority". The MerriamWebster's Dictionary similarly describes the verb to empower as "to authorize or delegate or give legal power to someone." In the management literature, this idea of delegation and the decentralization of decision-making power is central to the empowerment notion.

As a result, we find that most of the management literature on empowerment deals with participative management techniques such as management by objectives, quality circles, and goal setting by subordinates as the means of sharing power or delegating authority. This manner of treating the notion of empowerment from a management practice perspective is so common that often employee participation is simply equated with empowerment.

Empowerment as a Motivational Construct:

In the psychology literature, power and control are used as motivational and/or expectancy belief states that are internal to individuals. For instance, individuals are assumed to have a need for power where power connotes an internal urge to influence and control other people. A related but more inclusive disposition to control and cope with life events also has been proposed by several psychologists who have dealt with the issues of primary/secondary control, internal/external locus of control (Rotter, 1966), and learned helplessness. Individuals' power needs are met when they perceive that they have power or when they believe they can adequately cope with events, situations, and/or the people they confront. On the other hand, individuals' power needs are frustrated when they feel powerless or when they believe that they are unable to cope with the physical and social demands of environment. Power in this motivational sense refers to an intrinsic need for self-determination (Deci, 1975) or a belief in personal self-efficacy (Bandura, 1986). Under this conceptualization, power has its base within an actor's motivational disposition.

Any managerial strategy or technique that strengthens this self-determination need or self-efficacy belief of employees will make them feel more powerful. Conversely, any strategy that weakens the self-determination need or self-efficacy belief of employees will increase their feelings of powerlessness. We propose that empowerment be viewed as a motivational construct—meaning to enable rather than simply to delegate. In McClelland's (1975) research, empowerment also is viewed as an enabling, rather than a delegating, process. Enabling implies creating conditions for heightening motivation for task accomplishment through the development of a strong sense of personal efficacy. We argue that delegating or resource sharing is only one set of conditions that may enable or empower subordinates. The process of delegation is too constrictive in scope to accommodate the complex nature of empowerment. Therefore, empowerment is defined as a process of enhancing feelings of self-efficacy among organizational members through the identification of conditions that foster powerlessness and through their removal by both formal organizational practices and informal techniques of providing efficacy information.

The Empowerment Process:

The need to empower subordinates becomes critical when subordinates feel powerless. Thus it is important to identify conditions within organizations that foster a sense of powerlessness among subordinates. Once these conditions are identified, empowerment strategies and tactics can then be used to remove them. However, removing external conditions is not always possible, and it may not be sufficient for subordinates to become empowered unless the strategies and tactics directly provide personal efficacy information to them. Bandura (1986) suggested several sources from which individuals directly receive information about their personal efficacy, and these sources should be used in developing empowerment strategies. Conceived this way, the process of empowerment can be viewed in five stages that include the psychological state of empowering experience, its antecedent conditions, and its behavioral consequences.

The five stages are shown in Figure-1.

Stage-1: Initially Diagnosis of conditions within the organization that are responsible for feeling of powerlessness among subordinates.

Stage- 2: This leads to the use of empowerment strategies by managers

Stage- 3: The employment of these strategies is aimed for removing external conditions responsible for powerlessness, and providing subordinates with self-efficacy information
Stage -4: As a result of receiving such information, subordinates feel empowered
Stage- 5: In this stage behavioral effects of empowerment are noticed.

III. The Empowering Experiences

To conceptualize empowerment it refers to a process whereby an individual's belief in his or her self-efficacy is enhanced. To empower means either to strengthen this belief or to weaken one's belief in personal powerlessness. Personal efficacy is sometimes postulated to stem from internal need-states such as the intrinsic need for self-determination (Deci, 1975), the competence motive (White, 1959), the need for power (McClelland, 1975), and the need for self-actualization (Maslow, 1954). However, we prefer not to adopt the content or need theory approach to explain the phenomenon of empowerment. We assume that everyone has an internal need for self-determination and a need to control and cope with environmental demands. Differences in the strength of this need among individuals can be explained by analyzing the underlying motivational process. We therefore follow the process theory approach to empowerment as a motivational phenomena by relating it to expectancy (Lawler, 1973) and self-efficacy theories (Bandura, 1977, 1986).

According to expectancy theory, an individual's motivation to increase his or her effort in a given task will depend on two types of expectations:

- (a) that their effort will result in a desired level of performance
- (b) That their performance will produce desired outcomes.

Bandura (1986) referred to the former as the self-efficacy expectation and the latter as the outcome expectation. When individuals are empowered, their personal efficacy expectations are strengthened. However, their outcome expectations are not necessarily affected. They develop a sense of personal mastery or a "can do" attitude regardless of hopes for favorable performance outcomes.

Self Efficacy expectations determine how much effort people will expend and how long they will persist in the face of obstacles and aversive experiences. The behavioral outcomes are of special significance to organizational leaders. Empowerment processes may allow leaders to lessen the emotional impact of demoralizing organizational changes or to mobilize organizational members in the face of difficult competitive challenges.

These processes may enable leaders to set higher performance goals, and they may help employees to accept these goals. Empowerment practices also may be useful in motivating subordinates to persist despite difficult organizational/environmental obstacles.

According to Onger (1986), conditions that lowered self-efficacy were found during major reorganizations, in start-up ventures, and in firms that had authoritarian managers and demanding organizational goals. Kanter (1977, 1983) argued that organizational communication systems, network forming arrangements, access to resources, and job design could contribute to employee powerlessness.

She noted primarily that people held accountable for the results produced by others, whose formal role gives them the right to command but who lack informal political influence, access to resources, outside status, sponsorship, or mobility prospects, are rendered powerless in the organizations. They lack control over their own fate and are dependent on others above them. Examples of first-line supervisors, certain staff positions, women, and minorities were cited.

Table-1: we identify the principal contextual factors that contribute to the lowering of self-efficacy beliefs in organizational members. These are organized into four categories: (a) organizational, (b) supervisory style, (c) reward systems, and (d) job design.

In terms of organizational factors, we hypothesize that organizations that experience major changes or transitions have an increased likelihood of their employees experiencing powerlessness. These transitions may be spurred on by financial emergencies, loss of key personnel, labor problems, significant technological changes,

Contextual factors	Factors Leading to Potential
Lowering of Self-Efficacy Belief	Organizational Factors
Significant organizational changes/transitions	
Start-up ventures	
Competitive pressures	
Impersonal bureaucratic climate	
Poor communications system	
Highly centralized organizational resources	Supervisory style
Authoritarian	
Negativism	
Lack of reason for actions/consequences	
Noncontingency (arbitrary reward allocations)	

Low incentive value of rewards	Reward Systems
Lack of competence-based rewards	
Lack of innovation-based rewards	
Lack of role clarity and unrealistic goals	Job Design
Lack of training and technical support	
Low task variety	
Lack of appropriate/necessary resources	job performance
Lack of network-forming opportunities	
Highly established work routines	High rule structure
Low advancement opportunities	
Lack of meaningful goals/tasks	

Limited contact with senior management acquisition or merger activity, major changes in organizational strategy, rapid growth, and/or the introduction of significant new products or new management teams. In any case, these events induce significant alterations in organizational structures, communication links, power and authority relations, and the organization's goals, strategies, and tactics. In these cases, existing organizational norms and patterns of action are likely to change (Nadler, 1980). As the organization seeks new guidelines for action, its goals and rules may no longer be clearly defined. Responsibilities and power may shift dramatically.

Uncertainty may be experienced by a large part of the organization. Certain functional areas, divisions, or acquired companies may experience disenfranchisement because they perceive their responsibilities as being diminished or subordinated to others. Therefore, transitions produce a period of disorientation (Tichy & Devanna, 1986). As a result, major organizational changes may seriously challenge employees' sense of control and competence as they deal with the uncertainty of change and accept new responsibilities, skills, and guidelines for action and behavior. Start-up ventures can present similar conditions of uncertainty that lead to lowered feelings of self-efficacy for employees. During the initial start-up phase, there may be uncertainty surrounding the market potential for the company's products and services. This can translate into lowered efficacy feelings among organizational members regarding their competence in directing and managing the organization. With a company's success and accompanying growth, other conditions of powerlessness may be fostered. As Greiner (1972) pointed out, employees who are accustomed to informal organizational systems and relations may find the organization and its systems becoming increasingly formalized and impersonal. As control systems grow in importance, they may diminish employees' sense of autonomy and responsibility.

As the company grows, managers' responsibilities may increase, requiring them to attain skill levels beyond their existing competencies. Problems may arise with role clarity and adequate training for employees. Furthermore, as the firm grows, entrepreneurial executives may be reluctant to relinquish control to subordinates. Bureaucratic organizations are characterized by patriarchal management/employee contracts (Block, 1987) and direct member behavior through established rules and routines. These factors inhibit self-expression and limit autonomy. Authoritarian management styles can strip control and discretion from subordinates, thereby heightening the sense of powerlessness for employees (Block, 1987; Conger, 1986). As Kanter (1979) suggested, a satisfactory degree of discretion is important for fostering empowerment on the job, and this discretion is something autocratic managers often remove.

The literature on reward systems and job design also describes conditions that lower the self-efficacy of organizational members. When organizations do not provide rewards that are valued by employees and when rewards are not offered for employee competence, initiative, and persistence in innovative job behavior, employees' sense of powerlessness increases.

Furthermore, when jobs provide very little challenge and meaning and when they involve role ambiguity, role conflict, and role overload, employees' beliefs in personal efficacy suffer. We argue that these contextual factors should be the focal points for diagnosis and the interventions aimed at rectifying sources of powerlessness among employees.

Empowerment Management Practices Organizational theorists have proposed or identified a number of management practices that heighten a sense of self-efficacy.

At the organizational level, it has been suggested that organizations design selection and training procedures to ensure requisite technical, linguistic, and social influence skills and that company policies and cultures emphasize self-determination, collaboration over conflict/competition, high performance standards, nondiscrimination, and meritocracy. In addition, organizations that provide multiple sources of loosely committed resources at decentralized or local levels, that structure open communications systems, and that create extensive network-forming devices are more likely to be empowering (Kanter, 1983).

Leadership and/or supervision practices that are identified as empowering include

- (a) expressing confidence in subordinates accompanied by high performance expectations
- (b) fostering opportunities for subordinates to participate in decision making
- (c) providing autonomy from bureaucratic constraint

(d) setting inspirational and/or meaningful goals

It also has been suggested by House (in press) that managers should be selected on the basis of their inclination to use power in a positive manner. It is argued that reward systems that emphasize innovative/unusual performance and high incentive values foster a greater sense of self-efficacy (Kanter, 1979). Jobs that provide task variety, personal relevance, appropriate autonomy and control, low levels of established routines and rules, and high advancement prospects are more likely to empower subordinates.

These practices can be viewed from the different perspectives of formal/organizational mechanisms or individual/informal techniques. For example, when organizations engage in participation programs, they establish formal systems that empower organizational members through the sharing of formal power and authority. But in order for this sharing of power to be effective at the individual level, employees must perceive it as increasing their sense of self-efficacy something a manager can accomplish through more informal practices.

Examples of Empowerment techniques :

Information in personal efficacy through enactive attainment refers to an individual's authentic mastery experience directly related to the job. When subordinates perform complex tasks or are given more responsibility in their jobs, they have the opportunity to test their efficacy. Initial success experiences (through successively moderate increments in task complexity and responsibility along with training to acquire new skills) make one feel more capable and, therefore, empowered.

For example, managers can structure organizational change programs in such a way that initial objectives are sufficiently attainable and subordinates are able to execute them successfully. The feeling of being empowered also can come from the vicarious experiences of observing similar others (i.e., co-workers) who perform successfully on the job.

Very often, a supervisor's exemplary behaviors empower subordinates to believe that they can behave in a like manner or that they can achieve improvement in their performance.

For example, Bennis and Nanus (1985), in their study of leaders, described how William Kieschnick, president of ARCO, learned to be an innovative risk taker through the modeling of leaders he served under. Words of encouragement, verbal feedback, and other forms of social persuasion often are used by leaders, managers to empower subordinates.

People who are persuaded verbally that they possess the capabilities to master given tasks are likely to mobilize greater sustained effort than if they harbor self-doubts and dwell on personal deficiencies when difficulties arise. However, the effect that persuasion has on strengthening personal efficacy expectations is likely to be weaker than effects developed from one's own accomplishments.

Finally, one's personal competence expectations are affected by one's emotional arousal state. Emotional arousal states that result from stress, fear, anxiety, depression, and so forth, both on and off the job, can lower self-efficacy expectations. Individuals are more likely to feel competent when they are not experiencing strong aversive arousal. Empowerment techniques and strategies that provide emotional support for subordinates and that create a supportive and trusting group atmosphere can be more effective in strengthening self-efficacy beliefs. These techniques assist in the empowering process by reducing the negative effects of aversive emotional arousal on the development of self-efficacy beliefs.

IV. Conclusion

Although empowerment has been discussed by several management scholars, little empirical work has been performed. This may be because of an inadequate conceptualization of the process. This article discussion suggests some new directions for research on empowerment. First, the effectiveness of the model should be tested. Researchers also should investigate and validate the proposed antecedent conditions of powerlessness and the appropriate intervention strategies. In addition, they should investigate and test the effect empowerment has on specific behaviors, such as initiation and persistence. Finally, a more direct link between empowerment practices and leadership should be studied. Empowerment may prove to be a vital form of influence for leaders attempting to induce and manage organizational change. Although we have focused on the positive effects of empowerment, it is conceivable that such management practices may have negative effects. Specifically, empowerment might lead to overconfidence and, in turn, misjudgments on the part of subordinates. Because of this sense of false confidence in positive outcomes, organizations might persist in efforts that are, in actuality, tactical or strategic errors.

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