Empowerment At Higher Educational Organizations

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Abstract

Empowerment is a concept which is widely used in management and many managers and professional in various organizations claim to be practicing it. The objective of this study was to assess the construct validity and internal consistency of the Psychological Empowerment Questionnaire (PEQ) for employees in higher education. The PEQ was administered at private university in Skopje. The study is empirical research on psychological empowerment, and more specifically research regarding a tool that can be used to assess the level of psychological empowerment of employees in higher education organisations. If psychological empowerment can be measured in a reliable and valid manner, interventions can be implemented to promote the empowerment of employees.

Exploratory factor analysis is used to verify the validity of the psychological empowerment comprising four cognitive dimensions i.e. meaning, competence, self-determination and impact in the context of private higher education institutions The subscales showed acceptable internal consistencies. Psychological empowerment can be measured in a reliable and valid manner in higher educational organizations.

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1.INTRODUCTION

Employee empowerment is considered by many organizational theorists and practitioners to be one of the most important and popular management concepts of our time. Empowerment of employees in the workplace provides them with opportunities to make their own decisions with regards to their tasks. Today many managers are practicing the concept of empowerment among their subordinates to provide them with better opportunities. Companies ranging from small to large and from low-technology manufacturing concerns to high-tech software firms have been initiating empowerment programs in attempts to enhance employee motivation, increase efficiency, and gain competitive advantages in the turbulent contemporary business environment. Empowerment is a desirable management and organizational style that enables employees to practice autonomy, control their own jobs, and use their skills and abilities to benefit both their organization and themselves.

The word "empower" has potency and strength. Similar to the concept of "motivation," the most common misuse of the idea of empowerment is that one person can empower another. Empowerment is an inner-to-outer dynamic, most useful when preceded by silence and awareness of inner guidance. Empowerment is not simply another way to "get" something, it's a condition that supports you in living life fully. It is the process of providing production and managerial guidelines, and then allowing employees to make the day-to-day decisions that affect their job duties. Empowerment is the process of enabling or authorizing an individual to think, behaves, take action, and control work and decision making in autonomous ways. It is the state of feeling self-empowered to take control of one's own destiny.

The problem for most executives is that managing employees is complex. An organization may simultaneously be working on employee empowerment and several other programs designed to improve performance. The key goal for managers is to understand the balance of performance elements with employees and trust their employees by empowering them to help the organization.

Empowerment represents a kind of moral hazard for managers (Pfeffer at all,1998); depends on the ability of the manager to reconcile the potential loss of control inherent in sharing power with the need to empower employees for higher levels of motivation and productivity that often come with empowerment (Mills & Ungson, 2003). To reduce the risk of the moral hazard, managers and organizations can (1) set clear limits and boundaries as to what level of empowerment is appropriate so employees know what is acceptable (Blanchard et al, 2001; Seibert et al., 2004), (2) build trusting relationships in which employees are less likely to operate on self-interest, and (3) measure and reward key performance goals to ensure that individual and organizational goals are aligned (Spreitzer & Mishra, 1997).

The above discussion suggests that a need for psychological empowerment exists for empirical research on psychological empowerment, and more specifically regarding a tool that can be used to assess the level of psychological empowerment of employees in higher education organisations. However, such a tool has to be proven reliable and valid and because no studies have been reported regarding the reliability and validity of a measuring instrument of psychological empowerment in Macedonia. If psychological empowerment can be measured in a reliable and valid manner, interventions can be implemented to promote the empowerment of employees.

The objective of this study was to determine the construct validity and reliability of the Psychological Empowerment Questionnaire.

2.Psychological Empowerment

Psychological empowerment exists when employees perceive that they exercise some control over their work life. Various schools of thought regarding psychological empowerment have evolved over time. Conger and Kanungo (1988) classified empowerment in terms of five stages. The first stage entails the diagnosis of conditions within the organization that are responsible for the feelings of powerlessness among employees. This leads to the use of empowerment strategies by managers in stage two, directed at removing the external conditions responsible for powerlessness. Thomas and Velthouse (1990) propose a cognitive model in which empowerment is shaped by an individual's work context and personality traits. According to them, psychological empowerment consists of a set of four cognitions reflecting an employee's orientation to his or her role, namely meaning (i.e. the value of his or her work), competence (i.e. his or her capability to perform the work), choice (i.e. the choice in initiating and regulating actions) and impact (i.e. the ability to affect organizational outcomes). Spreitzer (1995) modified the model of Thomas and Velthouse and defined empowerment as a motivational construct manifested in four cognitions: meaning, competence, self-determination and impact. According to Spreitzer, psychological empowerment reflects an individual's active orientation to his or her work role and consists of cognitions that are shaped by the work environment rather than a fixed personality attribute. According to Menon (2001), psychological empowerment represents a psychological state that can be measured. It is regarded as a continuous variable, meaning that people can be viewed as either more or less empowered rather than empowered or not empowered

The four dimensions of psychological empowerment, namely meaning, competence, self-determination and impact, combine additively to create an overall construct of psychological empowerment. The lack of a single dimension will deflate but not completely eliminate the overall effect of experienced empowerment (Spreitzer,1995). In summary, they are defined as follows:

'Meaning' is termed as "the value of a work goal or purpose, judged in relation to an individual's own ideals or standards" (Spreitzer, 1995). It reflects a sense of purpose or

personal connection to work (Mishra & Spreitzer, 1998). Quinn and Spreitzer (1997) state that empowered people feel that their work is important to them and they care about what they are doing.

'Competence' or `self-efficacy` is "an individual's belief in his or her capability to perform work role activities with skill" (Spreitzer, 1995). It indicates that individuals believe that they have the skills and abilities necessary to perform their work well (Mishra & Spreitzer, 1998). This dimension is labeled competence rather than self-esteem because of a focus on efficacy specific to a work role.

'Self-determination' is an individual's sense of having choice in initiating actions. It reflects a sense of freedom about how individuals do their own work (Mishra & Spreitzer, 1998). Self-determination relates to the opportunity to select task activities that make sense and to perform in ways that seem appropriate (Quinn & Spreitzer, 1997).

'Impact' is the degree to which a person can influence strategic, administrative or operating outcomes at work. It describes a belief that individuals can influence the system in which they are embedded (Mishra & Spreitzer, 1998). This describes an individual's ability to influence outcomes at work. Quinn and Spreitzer (1997) state that impact is the accomplishment one feels in achieving goals. The feeling of perceived impact involves the sense that employees' activities are really accomplishing something and that others listen to them. (Spreitzer, 1995). The above-mentioned four dimensions represent the psychological perspective of empowerment.

3. Measurement of psychological empowerment

Psychological empowerment was measured at a private university in Skopje/Macedonia by using 12 items from Spreitzer (1992, 1995b) based on four dimensions, namely meaning, competence, self-determination and impact. The scores from these dimensions are averaged to form an overall score for psychological empowerment for each respondent. The PEQ contains three items for each of the four sub dimensions of psychological empowerment (for example, Meaning: 'The work I do is meaningful to me'; Competence: 'I have mastered the skills necessary for my job'; Self-determination: 'I have significant autonomy in determining how to do my job'; and Impact: 'I have a great deal of control over what happens in my department'). Respondents were simply asked to indicate their agreement with the above items on a 5 points Likert scale ranging from "strongly disagree" to "strongly agree".

The problem with most of the studies that focused on the construct validity of the PEQ is that they made use of exploratory factor analyses. Exploratory factor analysis is used primarily as a tool for reducing the number of variables or examining patterns of correlations among variables (Tabachnick & Fidell, 2001). Decisions about the number of factors and rotational scheme are based on pragmatic rather than theoretical criteria. Confirmatory factor analysis, in which different competing theoretical models can be tested, is appropriate when the aim is to find the best fitting theoretical model. Confirmatory factor analysis also makes it possible to specify first-order and second-order latent variables. Notably, the literature review showed

that deviations for the four-factor model of psychological empowerment were observed when exploratory factor analysis was implemented. Based on the above discussion, the following hypothesis is formulated for this study:

Hypothesis 1: Psychological empowerment, as measured by the PEQ, is a four-dimensional construct (meaning, competence, self-determination and impact).

Description of Sample:

For our study, there were forty-two participants, or 80% of the employees. Majority of employees (88%) were younger than 40, or the ages of our participants range from the lowest of age twenty four to the highest of age sixty-two. More men (55%) than women (45%) participated in the research. The majority of employees as it is expected (32) had a level of highest education (PhD and MCs), or 31 of the respondents are academic stuff and 11 administrative.

4.Verification of psychological empowerment dimensions

The analysis was carried out with the SPSS 15.0 program (SPSS, 2006). The reliability and validity of the PEQ were assessed by means of Cronbach alpha coefficients and factor analysis. Descriptive statistics (means and standard deviations) were computed to describe the data. Table 1 below shows the mean and standard deviation for each factor. Low rating in any dimension will lower overall empowerment. Therefore, higher ratings in all dimensions are needed to ensure a high level of empowerment (Lee & Koh, 2001). According to Brancato (2006), a worker should understand the dimensions of psychological empowerment and the strategies related to this concept. The administration should examine each dimension and be ready to take actions necessary to increase the level of employee agreement towards the dimensions and increase the level of psychological empowerment experienced by employee (Hancer & George, 2003).

Table 1. Descriptive statistics and Cronbach alpha coefficients of the PEQ

	Mean	Std. Deviation	Cronbach alpha
Self-determination	10,9762	2,83263	0.836
Impact	9,5952	2,74137	0.846
Meaning	13,5714	1,50029	0.724
Competence	13,9286	1,27629	0.720
Psychological Empowerment	48,0714	5,63263	0.807

Competence and Meaning received the highest evaluation compared to other dimensions of psychological empowerment. This shows that employees feel that they are competent without an inconsistency between his or her personality and the job and their work is meaningful and important to them. However, comparatively the level of impact received the lowest evaluation by the respondents. This means that employees do not really feel that they can influence their work outcome. They might not feel that their work can affect the overall goal achievement and do not really believe that he/she can influence the strategic output, management and operation in the workplace. Therefore, the dimension of impact should be improved. Being self-determinant means for one that he or she is able to define alternatives and choose between them. The mean of self-determination is in the middle as important factor because it is about taking initiative and feeling competent and responsible about work. From Table 1 it is evident that the internal consistencies of the four subscales of the PEQ as well as the total scale are highly acceptable, compared to the guideline of 0.70 as set by Nunnally and Bernstein (1994).

Factor analysis utilizing principal component method with varimax rotation was carried out and identified four factors that explained 73% of the variance. This means that a large part of variances was caused by the first four factors. Hence, this study supported Spreitzer's (1992) theory that states that psychological empowerment is composed of four dimensions.

5.CONCLUSION

This study proves the validity and reliability of the psychological empowerment scale (Spreitzer, 1992) in the work context of private higher education institutions. The aim of this study was to assess the construct validity and internal consistency of the PEQ for employees in selected organizations. The results show that the PEQ can be assumed invariant across a test and replication sample of employees in selected university in Macedonia. A four-factor model (including competence, meaning, impact and self-determination) of psychological empowerment fits the data best. The four subscales of the PEQ and the total scale show highly acceptable internal consistencies. The results of this study provide support for the construct validity of the PEQ in selected university. The conclusion of the present study is similar to those of other related empirical studies. Similar study is hoped to be carried out in a public university as well. Future research could also compare the level of psychological empowerment and innovative behavior of employees from private higher education institutions with those from public higher education institutions. Clearly, more research is needed to establish the predictive, convergent and discriminant validity of the PEQ. Larger sample sizes might provide increased confidence that study findings would be consistent across other (similar) groups.

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