

Employee Empowerment: An Integrative Psychological Approach

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Une approche psychologique globale de la prise de pouvoir des salariés a été développée en partant du principe que l'expérience psychologique du pouvoir soutient les sentiments de prise de pouvoir. Cette recherche élargit les perspectives existantes sur la prise de pouvoir en incorporant les effets d'objectifs valorisés tels que ceux fournis par le leadership transformationnel.

L'internalisation des objectifs a été identifiée comme élément majeur de l'expérience psychologique de la prise de pouvoir s'ajoutant ainsi aux aspects plus traditionnelsque sont la perception de la maîtrise de l'environnement de travail, et celle d'efficacité personnelle ou de compétence.

Des procédures de mesures standards sur un échantillon de salariés du Québec, Canada, et la validation ultérieure par un échantillon d'organisation de l'Ontario, Canada, ont fourni une échelle, à trois facteurs, de la prise de pouvoir psychologique correspondant à ces trois dimensions. Les implications d'une définition de la prise de pouvoir comme état psychologique et la nécessité de mesures multiples de la prise de pouvoir sont aussi débattues.

An integrative psychological approach to employee empowerment was developed based on the premise that the psychological experience of power underlies feelings of empowerment. This research extends existing perspectives on empowerment by incorporating the empowering effect of valued goals, such as those provided by transformational leadership. Goal internalisation was identified as a major component of the psychological experience of empowerment, in addition to the two traditional facets of perceptions of control over the work environment and perceptions of self-efficacy or competence. Standard measure development procedures using a sample of employed individuals from Quebec, Canada and subsequent validation with an organisational sample from Ontario, Canada yielded a three-factor scale of psychological empowerment corresponding to these three dimensions. The implications of defining empowerment as a psychological state and the need for multiple measures of empowerment are also discussed.

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This article, which is partly based on the author's doctoral dissertation, was conducted in English and French.

INTRODUCTION

Workplace empowerment has been hailed as the major new industrial weapon against domestic and international threats (Mathes, 1992; Shipper & Manz, 1992). While the word "empowerment" is relatively new, the notion of granting work-related decision-making authority to employees as a means of enhancing performance is not altogether new in the management literature. The concept of job enrichment through vertical loading (Hackman & Oldham, 1980; Herzberg, Mausner, & Snyderman, 1959) and managerial practices such as delegation, have long had currency among management scholars. But it is only recently that researchers have enlarged these approaches under the rubric of employee empowerment to include transfer of organisational power (Kanter, 1977, 1983), energising followers through leadership (Bennis & Nanus, 1985; Block, 1987; Burke, 1986; Conger, 1989; Neilsen 1986), enhancing self-efficacy through reducing powerlessness (Conger & Kanungo, 1988), and increasing intrinsic task motivation (Thomas & Velthouse, 1990).

Although the popular press periodically reports on the success or failure of empowerment initiatives (see for example, Fleming, 1991), there has been little rigorous research on employee empowerment, its antecedents, and its consequences. Thorlakson and Murray (1996) studied the effects of empowerment efforts by comparing an empowered work group to a control group in an organisational setting, but they did not actually measure psychological empowerment. Empirical studies involving measurement of empowerment are limited to the works of Thomas and Tymon (1994), who relate cognitions about empowerment to job satisfaction, stress, and work effectiveness; Spreitzer (1996), who relates psychological empowerment to organisational variables such as socio-political support and participative climate; and Spreitzer, Kizilos, and Nason (1997), who also relate psychological empowerment to work satisfaction, stress, and effectiveness.

The motivation for the present research stems from several quarters. First, the diversity of thinking on empowerment has resulted in some ambiguity with regard to the nature of the empowerment construct. One major cause for concern is the tendency of scholars to use the word "empowerment" to refer to very different concepts. "Empowerment" has been used to denote the act of empowering (others) and also to describe the internal processes of the individual being empowered (i.e. psychological empowerment). For instance, Burke (1986), who equates empowerment to delegation, refers to the act of empowering, while Thomas and Velthouse (1990) allude to the internal state of the empowered individual (i.e. psychological empowerment). A related cause for concern is conceptual redundancy. If empowerment is equivalent to delegation (as defined by Burke, 1986) or intrinsic motivation (as defined by Spreitzer, 1995, 1996)

then the status of empowerment as an independent construct is debatable. There is significant extant research on delegation either as participation in decision making (Dachler & Wilpert, 1978) or as increase in job autonomy (Hackman & Oldham, 1980). Similarly, intrinsic motivation is also a well-documented construct either in connection with practices such as job enrichment (Herzberg et al., 1959) or more recently, high-involvement management (Lawler, 1986). Thus, there is a need for definitional and conceptual clarity in empowerment research.

Our understanding of the empowerment construct would also be advanced by the development of multiple measures. Cook and Campbell (1976) called for multiple measures of a given construct to facilitate triangulation, which will help in gaining a better understanding of the construct. A construct measured by a single exemplar is susceptible to underrepresentation. Empowerment research might also face this danger if a single measure is relied on. For example, a number of researchers have alluded to the empowering nature of leadership (Bennis & Nanus, 1985; Conger, 1989). Yet, Spreitzer's (1995) measure, which was the only measure available at the time of this study, does not capture this facet of empowerment. Thus, there is a need to develop measures of empowerment that will more comprehensively represent the construct. Availability of a variety of valid measures is also likely to stimulate rigorous empirical research.

This article addresses some of the concerns outlined above. It aims to clarify the definitional and conceptual issues surrounding the empowerment construct by proposing an employee-centred psychological approach. After a brief review of existing literature on empowerment, an integrative psychological perspective on employee empowerment is developed. The results of a measure development study based on this integrative approach are then presented.

MAJOR APPROACHES TO EMPOWERMENT RESEARCH

Although there are numerous popular books and articles on empowerment, scholarly writing on the topic has been rather limited. In line with Tymon's (1988) suggestion, academic literature on empowerment can be classified into three broad categories based on the underlying thrust and emphasis of the various streams of research: (a) the structural approach, (b) the motivational approach, and (c) the leadership approach.

In the structural approach, empowerment is understood as the granting of power and decision-making authority. According to Astley and Sachdeva (1984), power in organisations stems from sources such as hierarchical authority, control of resources, and network centrality. To Mintzberg (1983), power is the ability to effect (or affect) organisational outcomes.

Empowering employees would thus involve moving decision-making authority down the organisational hierarchy and granting employees the ability to significantly affect organisational outcomes. For example, according to Kanter (1977), empowerment results from decentralisation, a flattening of the hierarchy, and increased employee participation. More recently, London (1993) stated that empowerment is “ensuring that the employee has the authority to do his or her job” (p. 57). This has been the traditional approach to empowerment and it focuses on the actions of the “powerholders” who transfer some power to the less powerful. The psychological state of those being empowered is not addressed by this line of research.

In the motivational approach pioneered by Conger and Kanungo (1988), empowerment was conceptualised as psychological enabling. These authors defined empowerment as “a process of enhancing feelings of self-efficacy among organisational members through the identification of conditions that foster powerlessness and through their removal by both formal organisational practices and informal techniques of providing efficacy information” (p. 474). Thomas and Velthouse (1990) extended this approach by viewing power as energy: to empower is to energise. According to these authors empowerment is associated with “changes in cognitive variables (called task assessments), which determine motivation in workers” (p. 667). Spreitzer’s (1995) model, based on the Thomas and Velthouse (1990) approach, defines empowerment as increased intrinsic motivation manifested in four cognitions: meaning (value of work goal or purpose), competence (self-efficacy), self-determination (autonomy in initiation and continuation of work behaviours), and impact (influence on work outcomes).

In the leadership approach, the emphasis is also on the energising aspect of empowerment. Leaders energise and hence empower their followers to act by providing an exciting vision for the future. They inspire subordinates to participate in the process of transforming the organisation (Yukl, 1989). The writings of Bennis and Nanus (1985), Block (1987), Burke (1986), Conger (1989), and Neilsen (1986) are major examples of the leadership approach. For example, according to Burke (1986), leaders empower followers by providing clarity of direction: “. . . *but not just any direction—a direction that encompasses a higher purpose, a worthy cause, an idea, and will require collective and concerted effort*” (p. 69, italics added). Burke also suggests stimulating employees through intellectually exciting ideas and encouraging them to take on difficult challenges, as empowerment strategies.

More recent empowerment research includes viewing empowerment as a psychological process (Eylon, 1994), empirically assessing empowerment and its antecedents (Spreitzer, 1995, 1996), and addressing the ethical implications of empowerment strategies (Gandz & Bird, 1996; Kanungo, 1992; Kanungo & Mendonca, 1996). At the same time, authors have raised

concerns about the direction of empowerment research. For example, St. Clair and Quinn (1997) opine that overemphasis on precise definitions might hinder the development of the empowerment construct. Similarly, Bartunek (1995) cautions that it is inappropriate to treat the construct of empowerment as having a single agreed-upon definition since empowerment might not mean the same thing to everybody, leading to manifest differences in thought and action. Finally, Liden and Arad (1996) suggest that treatments of empowerment be subsumed under the rubric of power.

STUDYING EMPOWERMENT

The various approaches to empowerment briefly outlined above are testimony to the diversity of thinking on empowerment. Empowerment has been considered an act: the act of granting power to the person(s) being empowered (e.g. Kanter, 1977; London, 1993). It has been considered a process: the process that leads to the experience of power (e.g. Conger & Kanungo, 1988; Thomas & Velthouse, 1990). It has also been considered a psychological state that manifests itself as cognitions that can be measured (e.g. Spreitzer, 1995).

The origins of these distinctions can be traced to broad differences in the approach to studying power. Sociological approaches treat power as potential influence in the context of social interaction (e.g. Bacharach & Lawler, 1980; French & Raven, 1959). In contrast, psychologists have treated power as motivating factors (e.g. McClelland, 1961; Sampson, 1965) and/or as expectancy belief states within the individual (e.g. De Charms, 1968; Rotter, 1966). Empowerment researchers from the sociological tradition focus on the granting, transfer or sharing of power, that is, the act of empowering. In contrast, researchers from the psychological tradition focus on the cognitions of the individual being empowered, that is, the internal process or psychological state of the individual. In addition, when empowerment is considered an act, the emphasis is on the employer or others doing the empowering. On the other hand, when it is considered a process or state, the emphasis is on the employee or the person(s) being empowered.

These three treatments of empowerment are not mutually exclusive; rather they provide a comprehensive picture of the empowerment phenomenon. Empowering acts (such as delegation) lead to changes in employee perceptions about the workplace. Empowerment as a process describes these changes, the contributing factors, and the mechanism by which cognitions are affected. Empowerment as a state is a cross-sectional snapshot of certain employee cognitions (e.g. feelings of self-efficacy, sense of control over the work environment, etc.) at a given point in time. For the sake of clarity, researchers on empowerment should explicitly identify how they wish to define empowerment and what perspective they are adopting.

It is the contention of this article that the true nature of empowerment can be better understood by integrating these various streams of research from the perspective of the individual employee and by focusing on the effects of various empowering practices (e.g. delegation) on the psychological state of the individual employee. There are several reasons for this preference. First, the expected benefits of empowerment will be realised only if the employees actually experience empowerment (i.e. they are in the psychological state of empowerment). An organisation, with much fanfare, might direct its managers to empower employees by including subordinates in the decision-making process. Yet, whether an individual employee feels empowered or not depends on a host of factors including the actual behaviour of the manager, the presence of other environmental conditions (such as a rigid hierarchy), and individual difference variables such as locus of control. Conversely, an individual can feel empowered even in the absence of formal empowerment initiatives. Secondly, given the diverse nature of actions that can be construed as “empowerment”, from a research standpoint it is more efficient to focus on the psychological state of the employee. Empowerment initiatives can be as diverse as job enrichment, flex time, joint labour–management committees, self-managed workgroups, equity participation, and labour representation on the board. All of these actions are expected to empower employees, resulting in enhanced organisational performance. The common denominator in the above context is the intended effect of these various actions on the individual employee. Hence, to understand the empowerment process, it more efficacious to study empowerment from the perspective of the individual employee. Thirdly, considering empowerment as a psychological state provides a mediating link between empowering acts and employee outcomes such as satisfaction, involvement, and organisational commitment. For example, an empowering act such as delegation presumably leads to the empowered state, which in turn possibly leads to desirable employee behaviours and outcomes such as satisfaction. Lastly, defining empowerment as a cognitive state lends itself to the development of measures of individual psychological empowerment, which in turn permit systematic research involving statistical techniques.

The psychological state of those doing the empowering is also worthy of study. The failure of many empowerment initiatives has been linked to the inability of superiors to delegate effectively, their need for power, their insecurity with respect to their own jobs, and role ambiguity (see e.g. Fleming, 1991). However, the psychological state of the employer is more relevant to the success or failure of the empowerment initiative than to the fundamental nature of empowerment as experienced by the employee. For reasons stated earlier, the present research focuses on the target of the empowerment initiatives, and the integrative approach outlined below is based on the analysis of power from an individual psychological perspective.

PSYCHOLOGICAL EMPOWERMENT

At the root of the empowerment construct is the concept of employee-experienced power. Review of the major approaches to the experience of power in conjunction with the various streams of empowerment research described above reveals that, at an individual level, the three main dimensions of the experience of power underlying the empowerment process are: (a) power as perceived control, (b) power as perceived competence, and (c) power as being energised toward achieving valued goals.

Perceived Control

A predominant approach to power has been to treat it as an internal urge or drive to influence and control others (see e.g. Adler, 1956; White, 1959). These internal drives have been variously referred to as the power motive or need for power (McClelland, 1961; Winter, 1973), effectance motivation (White, 1959), striving for personal causation (De Charms, 1968), and intrinsic motivation to feel competent and self-determining (Deci, 1975). The perception of control or the lack of it has also received the attention of psychologists in research on locus of control (Rotter, 1966), powerlessness (Seeman, 1959), learned helplessness (Abrahamson, Garber, & Seligman, 1980), and primary and secondary control (Rothbaum, Weisz, & Snyder, 1982). A review of these various formulations suggests that a sense of perceived control is vital for feelings of power. If so, perceived control must be one of the basic psychological states constituting the experience of empowerment. Trickett's (1991) case study supports this contention. The case describes the setting up of an alternative high school in New Haven, Connecticut, in a predominantly black neighbourhood, using empowerment concepts. Trickett describes empowerment as the "feeling of being heard" (p. 141). Commenting on the results of the empowerment effort he notes that: "Students, parents and teachers all felt that they had the power to influence the school if they so desired . . . the overall impact of the school suggests that empowerment, defined as feelings of influence, was real" (p. 141). Clearly, in this instance of empowerment, the underlying psychological mechanism is the feeling of perceived control experienced by community members.

Perceived control has been emphasised by much of the empowerment literature reviewed earlier. Empowering strategies such as delegation, increased participation, and providing information and resources (Kanter, 1983) can lead to a sense of perceived control. Empowered employees feel confident and in control of their environments (House, 1988). The removal of conditions that lead to powerlessness is the first stage of Conger and Kanungo's (1988) empowerment process. Two elements in Thomas and

Velthouse's (1990) formulation—impact (the degree to which the individual's behaviour makes a difference) and choice (the extent of personal causation for the behaviour)—also reflect the importance of perceived control for psychological empowerment.

Perceived Competence

Wood and Bandura (1989) refer to self-efficacy as “beliefs in one's capabilities to mobilise the motivation, cognitive resources, and courses of action needed to meet given situational demands” (p. 408). According to Bandura (1977), self-efficacy affects the choice of behavioural settings and initiation of effort. People tend to avoid situations that they believe would exceed their coping skills. On the other hand, they get involved in activities that they believe to be within their power to handle. It follows that a sense of competence is essential for psychological enabling.

Perceived competence is an underlying theme of a majority of empowerment research. Enhancing self-efficacy beliefs is the cornerstone of Conger and Kanungo's empowerment strategy. Research in the leadership tradition (e.g. Bennis & Nanus, 1985) also identifies competence as a critical dimension of empowerment. Perceived competence is also a major component of Thomas and Velthouse's (1990) model of empowerment.

Goal Internalisation

As noted earlier, the word power can also be used to denote energy and strength. At a psychological level, an important energising element is a goal, particularly a valued cause or meaningful project. The energising power of a mission or a valued cause has often been noted in the context of religious or missionary work and sovereignty movements. If employees in modern organisations are to be similarly enjoined in the organisational cause, then they need to internalise the goals of the organisation. It is the task of organisational leadership practices such as visionary and inspirational leadership (Bass, 1985), charismatic leadership (Bass, 1985; Conger & Kanungo, 1987; House, 1988), and more generally, transformational leadership (Burns, 1978) to transform the beliefs and attitudes of employees in line with the organisation's mission and objectives.

Yukl (1989) asserts that such transformational leadership empowers subordinates to take part or be involved in the process of reforming or transforming the organisation. Burke (1986) stated that leaders empower subordinates by emphasising a higher purpose or worthy cause. According to Bennis and Nanus (1985), critical dimensions of empowerment include significance (the feeling of making a difference both for the organisation and

in the greater context of the world), competence (development and learning on the job and increased sense of self-mastery), community (sense of family, interdependence, and common purpose), and enjoyment/fun (work as a pleasing, enjoyable experience). Feelings of significance, community, and enjoyment/fun reflect the appeal of ideas and goal internalisation. Leaders formulate and articulate idealised future goals that serve to energise and hence empower subordinates to the extent that these goals are internalised (Kanungo & Mendonca, 1996).

Building on these three elements from the perspective of the state of mind of the empowered individual, the following definition can be proposed: *The psychologically empowered state is a cognitive state characterised by a sense of perceived control, competence, and goal internalisation.* The integrative approach thus envisages empowerment as a multifaceted construct corresponding to the different dimensions of being psychologically enabled. Perceived control refers to beliefs about autonomy in the scheduling and performance of work, availability of resources, authority and decision-making latitude. Perceived competence denotes self-efficacy and confidence with regard to role demands: the individual believes that he or she can successfully meet routine task demands as well as any nonroutine challenges that might arise in the course of work. The third dimension, goal internalisation, represents the enabling power of ideas such as a valued cause, mission, or a vision for the future. The individual believes and cherishes the goals of the organisation and is ready to act on its behalf.

MEASURING EMPOWERMENT

From the perspective of the individual employee, an empowered employee is one who can say: (a) “I have control over my work and work context”, (b) “I have the personal competence to do my work”, and (c) “I am personally energised by the goals of the organisation”.

Having defined empowerment at the individual level in terms of these three psychological dimensions, it is now possible to develop a measure of psychological empowerment. The measure could potentially consist of items that capture these three dimensions. As each of the three dimensions of perceived control, perceived competence, and goal internalisation is considered to be conceptually distinct, empowerment is conceived as a positive additive function of these dimensions. This treatment assumes that there are no significant interactions among these dimensions. While there are no *a priori* conceptual reasons to envisage such interactions, this assumption needs to be verified empirically. Measure development and construct validation were carried out using separate samples and are described below as Study 1 and Study 2.

STUDY 1: MEASURE DEVELOPMENT

Method

The measure development process was patterned on the De Vellis (1991) procedure for scale development. The major stages are described in the following sections.

Item Generation. In this stage, the intention was to generate a large pool of items for possible inclusion in the scale. In the present formulation, as empowerment is envisaged as a multidimensional construct, items that tap all three dimensions needed to be included. Given the dearth of empirical precedent, the bulk of the items had to be written anew. Dwyer and Ganster's (1991) scale of perceived control, Paulhus's (1983) sphere-specific measures of perceived control, Jones's (1986) measure of generalised self-efficacy, and Hill, Smith and Mann's (1987) scale for computer efficacy were referred to for initial guidance. Initially, an item pool of 60 items was generated, 20 items for each dimension.

Expert Review. The 60 items were then evaluated by a panel of two faculty members and three doctoral students. The faculty members, both familiar with the content area of empowerment, were first asked to review each item in terms of its relevance to the domain of empowerment. This initial screening resulted in a reduced list of 40 items for further consideration. The doctoral student reviewers were then provided with the definition of empowerment developed for this research and were asked to judge each item with regard to (a) its relevance to the empowerment construct as defined, (b) conceptual ambiguity, (c) sentence clarity, (d) conciseness, (e) the subscale to which it belonged, and (f) social desirability. Each item was ranked on all the above dimensions and a mean rank was calculated by averaging the ranking of the three reviewers. For each dimension, the highest ranking five items were selected to form the final list of 15 items to be included in the questionnaire. At the time of questionnaire development, it was felt that a response format having an odd number of responses with a neutral "neither agree nor disagree" option might encourage equivocation or preference for the neutral option on potentially sensitive questions. An even number of responses forces the respondent to make at least a weak commitment (DeVellis, 1991). Therefore, a six-point (strongly disagree, moderately disagree, mildly disagree, mildly agree, moderately agree, strongly agree) response format was adopted.

Inclusion of Validation Items. To check for social desirability bias, a 10-item social desirability scale developed by Strahan and Gerbasi (1972)

was included. This is a shortened version of the Crowne–Marlowe Social Desirability Scale (Crowne & Marlowe, 1960) and is recommended by DeVellis (1991). At the time of this study, the only other measure of empowerment available was the one used by Spreitzer (1995), which was based on the motivational approach of Thomas and Velthouse (1990) discussed earlier. This 12-item scale and Ashforth's (1989) six-item helplessness scale were included for possible tests of construct validity; the psychological empowerment scale developed here was expected to be positively correlated to the Spreitzer's empowerment scale and negatively correlated to Ashforth's helplessness scale.

Procedure and Sample. Standard translation–back translation procedures as recommended by Brislin, Lonner and Thorndike (1973) were used to produce a bilingual questionnaire in French and English. This was necessary as the study was conducted in Quebec, Canada where there are significant Francophone and Anglophone populations. The respondents were part-time business students in Montreal's two French and two English universities who were also employed full time. During regular class sessions, the bilingual questionnaire was administered to 355 individuals, 88% (311) of whom returned usable responses. A separate sample of 94 respondents was used for test–retest purposes. After initial analysis, a reduced version of the scale was administered twice to this second sample with a two week hiatus between administrations. The response rate for this second sample was 90% as only 85 matched pairs were obtained.

The main sample was fairly heterogeneous in terms of demographic variables such as sex (59% men), linguistic background (55% Anglophone), and other variables such as industry type or nature of business. Respondents were fairly evenly distributed by functional specialisation and industrial sector with no specialisation or sector accounting for more than 28% and 23% of the respondents respectively. Sixty-eight per cent had at least a college degree and 45% worked for large organisations. Their annual incomes ranged from less than \$10,000 (8%) to over \$50,000 (28%) and average job tenure was 5.4 years ($SD=4.7$ years). Fifty per cent of the respondents were single and the average age of the respondents was 30 years ($SD=6.5$ years). A similar demographic pattern was observed in the test–retest sample (55% men, 57% Anglophone) with a mean age of 28 years ($SD=5.9$ years).

Analysis and Results

Item Analysis and Correlations. The descriptive statistics and the correlation matrix are as shown in Table 1. The actual wording of

individual items is available in Table 2. The means and variances for the scale items were first examined. There were no items with very low variance and there were no significant differences in means and variances across language or sex. Box's M test of equality of covariance matrices was conducted to confirm the absence of significant differences between the groups. Therefore, for further analyses, all 311 respondents were considered as belonging to a single sample.

Items within each subscale were by and large significantly correlated with each other (mean $r = .51$). These correlations are shown in bold in Table 1. On the other hand, as expected, the items from dissimilar subscales had relatively low correlations with each other (mean $r = .26$). The correlations between individual scale items and the social desirability scale were then examined. All correlations were trivial in terms of magnitude with a majority being statistically nonsignificant. The absolute values of correlations with individual items ranged from .02 to .17 and the average correlation was .10.

Factor Analysis. Principal component analysis was carried out on the 15 items with no restrictions on the number of factors. The resulting three-factor solution was subject to varimax rotation yielding three components corresponding to the three subscales, as shown in Table 2. The orthogonal varimax rotation was preferred as the three dimensions of empowerment were envisaged to be conceptually distinct. However, given the many statistically significant between-subscale correlations (see Table 1), an oblimin rotation was also carried out to explore whether an oblique rotation resulted in a different pattern of factor loadings, leading to a potentially different interpretation. The oblique solution also yielded the same factor pattern with the same items loading on the same factors with roughly the same ordering of items in terms of the magnitude of factor loadings. Therefore, the varimax solution was retained. As can be seen from Table 2, the first three items in each subscale have high loadings on their respective components and relatively low loadings on the other two factors. The fourth and fifth items in each scale have relatively lower factor loadings on their respective factors. Further, in the case of items PC3 and PC5, not only do these items have relatively low loadings on their associated factor (Factor 2), they also have relatively high loadings on Factor 1. In the interest of brevity and subscale purity, the last two items in each subscale (in terms of the factor loadings given in Table 2) were dropped from further analysis. All of the remaining three-item subscales had acceptable alpha reliabilities: goal internalisation (.88), perceived control (.83), and perceived competence (.80). The test-retest reliabilities of the three subscales, using data from the test-retest sample, were also acceptable: goal internalisation (.86), perceived control (.87), and perceived competence (.77).

TABLE 1
Means, Standard Deviations, and Intercorrelations

| <i>Item*</i> | <i>Mean</i> | <i>SD</i> | <i>1</i> | <i>2</i> | <i>3</i> | <i>4</i> | <i>5</i> | <i>6</i> | <i>7</i> | <i>8</i> | <i>9</i> | <i>10</i> | <i>11</i> | <i>12</i> | <i>13</i> | <i>14</i> |
|-----------------------------|-------------|-----------|------------|------------|------------|------------|----------|------------|------------|------------|------------|-----------|------------|------------|------------|------------|
| Perceived Control | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| 1. PC1 | 4.58 | 1.18 | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| 2. PC2 | 4.50 | 1.26 | .57 | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| 3. PC3 | 4.72 | 1.11 | .44 | .61 | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| 4. PC4 | 4.47 | 1.29 | .75 | .57 | .45 | | | | | | | | | | | |
| 5. PC5 | 4.87 | 1.01 | .43 | .48 | .36 | .46 | | | | | | | | | | |
| Perceived Competence | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| 6. COMP1 | 5.54 | 0.62 | .15 | .14 | .25 | .15 | .06 | | | | | | | | | |
| 7. COMP2 | 5.53 | 0.69 | .09 | .10 | .16 | .11 | .13 | .45 | | | | | | | | |
| 8. COMP3 | 5.56 | 0.57 | .16 | .13 | .28 | .18 | .12 | .66 | .63 | | | | | | | |
| 9. COMP4 | 5.39 | 0.79 | .24 | .27 | .32 | .30 | .15 | .33 | .37 | .43 | | | | | | |
| 10. COMP5 | 5.26 | 0.77 | .19 | .18 | .37 | .26 | .15 | .37 | .38 | .45 | .47 | | | | | |
| Goal Internalisation | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| 11. GI1 | 4.45 | 1.18 | .29 | .38 | .40 | .34 | .42 | .05 | .20 | .18 | .23 | .19 | | | | |
| 12. GI2 | 4.67 | 1.11 | .29 | .39 | .43 | .38 | .38 | .17 | .11 | .17 | .24 | .20 | .68 | | | |
| 13. GI3 | 4.79 | 0.92 | .34 | .39 | .44 | .30 | .35 | .16 | .21 | .20 | .32 | .27 | .46 | .55 | | |
| 14. GI4 | 4.38 | 1.19 | .29 | .36 | .43 | .39 | .40 | .10 | .22 | .22 | .28 | .25 | .73 | .69 | .52 | |
| 15. GI5 | 5.25 | 0.95 | .29 | .34 | .38 | .36 | .41 | .08 | .16 | .25 | .32 | .29 | .45 | .52 | .43 | .52 |

* Item wordings are available in Table 2.

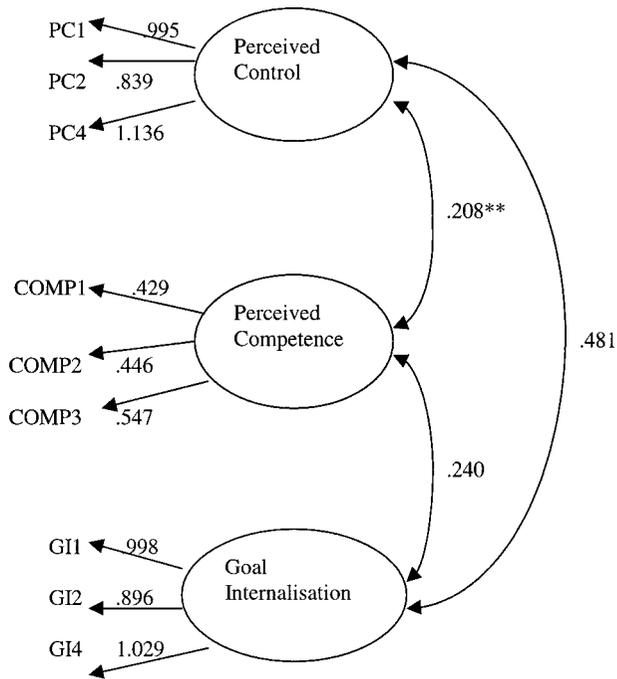
Correlations <.12 nonsignificant. Correlations .12 to .15, $p < .05$. Correlations .16 to .19, $p < .01$. All other correlations, $p < .001$

TABLE 2
Principal Component Analysis Results (Factor Loadings)

| <i>Item</i> | <i>Factor 1</i> | <i>Factor 2</i> | <i>Factor 3</i> |
|--|-----------------|-----------------|-----------------|
| GI4: I am inspired by what we are trying to achieve as an organisation | .85 | .17 | .14 |
| GI1: I am inspired by the goals of the organisation | .84 | .17 | .06 |
| GI2: I am enthusiastic about working toward the organisation's objectives | .83 | .20 | .09 |
| GI5: I am keen on our doing well as an organisation* | .64 | .25 | .18 |
| GI3: I am enthusiastic about the contribution my work makes to the organization* | .63 | .26 | .20 |
| PC1: I can influence the way work is done in my department | .10 | .86 | .10 |
| PC4: I can influence decisions taken in my department | .20 | .83 | .12 |
| PC2: I have the authority to make decisions at work | .28 | .79 | .08 |
| PC3: I have the authority to work effectively* | .37 | .58 | .27 |
| PC5: Important responsibilities are part of my job* | .42 | .54 | .01 |
| COMP3: I have the capabilities required to do my job well | .10 | .05 | .86 |
| COMP1: I have the skills and abilities to do my job well | -.03 | .09 | .78 |
| COMP2: I have the competence to work effectively | .14 | -.05 | .76 |
| COMP5: I can do my work efficiently* | .17 | .17 | .65 |
| COMP4: I can handle the challenges I face at work* | .21 | .22 | .61 |
| Eigenvalue | 5.67 | 2.25 | 1.44 |
| % variance (cumulative) | 37.8 | 52.8 | 62.3 |

* The empowerment scale used in Study 2 did not include these items.

Confirmatory Factor Analysis. Fig. 1 shows the results of a confirmatory factor analysis conducted using the nine items retained from the earlier factor analysis. An absolute null model with no relationships between the nine items (indicators) yielded a $\chi^2_{(df=36)}$ of 1287.26, with adjusted goodness of fit (AGFI) of .328 and root mean square residual (rmsr) of .427. A single-factor model with all nine indicators loading on a single factor resulted in a $\chi^2_{(df=27)}$ of 613.55, with an AGFI of .470 and rmsr of .171. In contrast, the three-factor model yielded a $\chi^2_{(df=24)}$ of 50.67 ($p = .001$), with an AGFI of .933 and rmsr of .051. Using the absolute null model as the baseline model, the normed fit index (NFI) was .96 and the Tucker–Lewis index (TL) was .97. A more conservative test, with the single-factor model as the baseline model yielded an NFI of .92 and a TL of .95. The results of the confirmatory factor analysis thus provide further evidence of the three-factor structure of the proposed psychological empowerment scale.



** $p < .01$
 All other coefficients $p < .001$

FIGURE 1. Confirmatory factor analysis of the empowerment scale

Preliminary Validity Assessments. Table 3 shows the bivariate correlations among the subscales of the refined empowerment scale, the Spreitzer (1995) empowerment scale and its subscales, and helplessness as measured by the Ashforth (1989) scale. As a test of convergent validity, the subscales of the empowerment scale under development should be significantly and negatively related to the helplessness scale and significantly and positively related to the Spreitzer scale. Subscale scores were calculated by summing the three items that formed each subscale. As can be seen from Table 3, the subscales of the new psychological empowerment scale are significantly and negatively correlated with helplessness while being significantly and positively correlated with the Spreitzer empowerment scale. It may also be recalled at this point that the items in the new scale had no significant correlations with the social desirability scale.

Discriminant validity at the subscale level can be assessed by examining the relationships among the subscales of the new scale and the subscales of the Spreitzer scale. As alluded to earlier, the Spreitzer scale has four subscales: impact (belief that one can influence organisational decisions), competence (belief in one's capability to perform a job well), meaning

TABLE 3
Correlations of Empowerment Subscales with the Spreitzer Scale and Helplessness

| | <i>Empowerment subscales</i> | | |
|--|------------------------------|-----------------------------|-----------------------------|
| | <i>Perceived Control</i> | <i>Perceived Competence</i> | <i>Goal Internalisation</i> |
| Spreitzer scale (12 items, $\alpha = .84$) | .66 | .32 | .53 |
| Helplessness (6 items, $\alpha = .86$) | -.74 | -.17** | -.52 |
| <i>Spreitzer subscales</i> | | | |
| Impact (3 items, $\alpha = .93$) | .75 | .12* | .40 |
| Self-determination (3 items, $\alpha = .74$) | .53 | .16** | .33 |
| Competence (3 items, $\alpha = .72$) | .13* | .66 | .27 |
| Meaning (3 items, $\alpha = .85$) | .30 | .18** | .48 |

* $p < .05$

** $p < .01$

All other correlations significant at $p < .001$

(correspondence between the job and individual beliefs and attitudes), and self-determination (a sense of choice regarding job execution), with three items to each subscale. These subscales can be compared and contrasted with the empowerment scale developed here. The subscales “self-determination” and “impact” should correspond to the dimension of perceived control while the subscale “competence” should correspond to the dimension of perceived competence in the new scale. The subscale “meaning” has no strict parallel in the scale under development, although it is closest to goal internalisation.

As can be seen from Table 3, in line with expectations, perceived control is positively and significantly related mainly to the “impact” and “self-determination” subscales of the Spreitzer scale. The relationship between perceived control and “impact” is also the strongest between any two subscales. As expected, perceived competence is strongly related only to the “competence” subscale of the Spreitzer scale. None of the correlations among goal internalisation and the Spreitzer subscales are of the same magnitude as the correlation between perceived control and “impact” or the correlation between perceived competence and “competence”. However, as expected, goal internalisation has the highest correlation with the “meaning” subscale. The results support the contention that the subscales perceived control, perceived competence, and goal internalisation are sufficiently distinct, conceptually and empirically.

It should be borne in mind, however, that these validity assessments are preliminary in nature to the extent that they are based on correlations of the new scale with another scale measuring the same construct (the Spreitzer scale) or a related scale in the same domain (the helplessness scale). Further evidence of validity based on relationships between the new scale and relevant organisational variables is required to conclusively demonstrate construct validity. Additionally, as the correlations between the subscales are statistically significant (see Fig. 1), it is also necessary to explore the possibility of subscale interactions in relation to organisational outcome variables. With these aims in mind, Study 2 was conducted as described below.

STUDY 2: SCALE VALIDATION

Method

The purpose of this study was to relate the psychological empowerment scale developed in Study 1 to select organisational variables in order to demonstrate construct validity. The organisational variables chosen were those that were expected to be related to psychological empowerment while also having the potential to discriminate between the subscales of the new scale.

Variables and Measures. The first organisational variable chosen was centralisation, which refers to the distribution of decision-making authority in an organisation. Typically, the more the centralisation, the less the participation of lower level employees in decision-making. In line with earlier discussions one can expect that the greater the centralisation, the lower the perceptions of control; hence, the lower the psychological empowerment. A related organisational variable chosen was delegation. The higher the delegation behaviours of the immediate supervisor, the greater the perceptions of control; hence, the greater the empowerment. Another managerial behaviour that can be expected to be positively related to psychological empowerment is consulting behaviour, which refers to behaviours that invite subordinates to suggest improvements and innovations regarding their work and major work-related changes. Consulting behaviours should increase subordinates' perceptions of control and competence, resulting in greater empowerment. Perceptions of competence could also be influenced by an individual's global self-esteem. Hence, one could expect the empowerment scale to be positively related to global self-esteem. Based on the above reasoning, centralisation, delegation, consulting, and self-esteem were considered antecedent variables with respect to empowerment. Dewar, Whetten, and Boje's (1980) scale was used to measure centralisation. Items from Yukl's (1988) Managerial Practices Survey were used to measure delegating and consulting behaviours of immediate supervisors. Rosenberg's (1965) self-esteem scale was used to measure global self-esteem.

According to the present formulation, an empowered employee has strong perceptions of control and competence, and has internalised the goals of the organisation. One can expect such an employee to be highly job involved, emotionally committed to the organisation, and willing to engage in extra-role behaviours, such as organisational citizenship behaviour. Indeed, this is the principal hope of organisations adopting empowerment initiatives! If this is so, the empowerment scale should be related to these outcome variables. Kanungo's (1982) scale and the Allen and Meyer (1990) affective organisational commitment scale were used to measure job involvement and organisational commitment respectively. Extra-role behaviour was operationalised as citizenship behaviour (Smith, Organ, & Near, 1983) and was measured by five items from the original questionnaire suitably modified for use as self-report questions.

Procedure and Sample. The respondents for Study 2 were all employed in a financial services company based in Ontario, Canada. A questionnaire containing the above-mentioned measures, demographic variables, and the nine-item empowerment scale, was sent to all 162 employees through internal mail. A total of 66 employees (41%), mostly women (92%) mailed completed questionnaires directly to the researcher. Forty-two per cent of

the sample had college degrees and the average organisational tenure was 4.2 years ($SD = 2.8$ years). The average age of the sample was 27.3 years ($SD = 3.6$ years)

Analysis and Results

First, the nine-item empowerment scale was subjected to a principal component analysis, with no restriction on the number of factors. Three factors emerged (eigenvalues 3.63, 1.75, and 1.54; 77% variance explained). Varimax rotation revealed the three subscales perceived control, perceived competence, and goal internalisation. The alpha reliabilities of the subscales were as follows: perceived control (.86), perceived competence (.78), and goal internalisation (.86). Thus the new scale displays factor stability in an independent organisational sample and the subscales have very good reliability values. As before, subscale scores were calculated by summing up the items forming each subscale. Further, as the present formulation considers psychological empowerment to be an additive function of these subscales, an overall empowerment score was calculated by summing up the three subscales.

Table 4 shows the bivariate correlations among the overall empowerment score, the empowerment subscales, and the antecedent variables. As expected, empowerment is significantly and positively correlated with delegation while being significantly and negatively correlated with centralisation. Among the

TABLE 4
Correlations of Empowerment Scale with Antecedent Variables

| <i>Antecedent Variables</i> | <i>Empowerment subscales</i> | | | <i>Overall Empowerment Score</i> |
|--|------------------------------|-----------------------------|-----------------------------|----------------------------------|
| | <i>Perceived Control</i> | <i>Perceived Competence</i> | <i>Goal Internalisation</i> | |
| Centralisation (9 items, $\alpha = .78$) | -.69 | -.06ns | -.37** | -.64 |
| Delegation (3 items, $\alpha = .68$) | .42 | .08ns | .27* | .40 |
| Consulting (5 items, $\alpha = .82$) | .33** | .34** | .32** | .43 |
| Self-esteem (10 items, $\alpha = .78$) | .37** | .52 | .33** | .50 |

ns = nonsignificant

* $p < .05$

** $p < .01$

All other correlations significant at $p < .001$

subscales, perceived control has a strong positive relationship with delegation while having the strongest negative relationship with centralisation. This is not at all surprising since decentralisation and delegation are staple, traditional components of empowerment initiatives (e.g. see Kanter, 1977). Empowerment is also significantly and positively correlated with consulting behaviours on the part of the immediate supervisor and the individual's global self-esteem. As hypothesised, consulting behaviour is positively related to perceived control and competence. It is also related to goal internalisation, which is not surprising since participation has been shown to be related to goal acceptance (Latham & Yukl, 1975). Also, as expected, the subscale perceived competence has the strongest relationship with global self-esteem.

In summing up the subscales to form an overall empowerment score, the implicit assumption is that there are no interaction effects among the subscales. However, two of the three correlations among the subscales are statistically significant: goal internalisation was significantly correlated to perceived control ($r = .36$; $p < .01$) and to perceived competence ($r = .25$; $p < .05$); perceived control was not significantly correlated ($r = .23$; $p = .06$) to perceived competence. To test for the possibility of interaction among the subscales, a regression approach was adopted in investigating the relationships between empowerment and the outcome variables. The three outcome variables organisational commitment, job involvement, and organisational citizenship behaviour were considered dependent variables and the three subscales were considered independent variables. Four interaction terms (three two-way and one three-way) were formed by multiplying centred subscale scores. First each of the three outcome variables was regressed on all three subscales. The resulting beta coefficients are available in Table 5. The two-way interaction terms were then entered into the regression equations followed by the three-way interaction term. In no case was any of the interaction terms significant. These results indicate that there are no significant interactions among the subscales, thereby justifying the treatment of empowerment as an additive function of these subscales.

As can be seen from Table 5, the subscale with the strongest relationship to organisational commitment and job involvement is goal internalisation. This is not surprising since one can expect greater identification with the organisation's objectives to be positively associated with commitment and involvement. With regard to organisational citizenship behaviour, the subscale with the strongest relationship is perceived control. This is probably because citizenship behaviour is a proactive behaviour for which perceptions of control over one's work environment is a necessary condition. There is also a positive relationship between citizenship behaviour and goal internalisation. This is probably a reflection of the fact that attempting citizenship behaviours presupposes a willingness, stemming from goal internalisation, to initiate such acts.

TABLE 5
Regression Results (Beta Coefficients): Outcome Variables on Empowerment Subscales

| <i>Outcome Variables</i> | <i>Empowerment subscales</i> | | |
|---|------------------------------|-----------------------------|-----------------------------|
| | <i>Perceived Control</i> | <i>Perceived Competence</i> | <i>Goal Internalisation</i> |
| Organisational Commitment (8 items, $\alpha = .84$) | .064 | -.002 | .655*** |
| Job Involvement (10 items, $\alpha = .84$) | -.140 | .088 | .642*** |
| Citizenship Behaviour (5 items, $\alpha = .79$) | .381*** | .186 | .238* |

* $p < .05$

*** $p < .001$

In conclusion, the results from the supplementary study provide strong evidence of construct validity. The relationships between psychological empowerment as measured by the new scale and each of the select organisational variables are of the magnitude and direction hypothesised. In addition, the conceptual distinctions at the subscale level are borne out by the magnitude and direction of the relationships among the organisational variables and the empowerment subscales.

GENERAL DISCUSSION

The psychological approach to empowerment developed in the present research can be viewed as a logical next step in the research direction suggested by Conger and Kanungo (1988). In their model, Conger and Kanungo conceive of empowerment as the process of psychological enabling, primarily through the enhancement of self-efficacy beliefs. In the present research, the domain of psychological enabling is expanded to include perceived control and goal internalisation. Besides perceptions of competence, perception of control over the work environment and an internalisation of the organisational goals also psychologically enable individual employees, thus empowering them.

The present research adds clarity to empowerment research by explicitly defining empowerment as a cognitive state. Such a definition also helps to reconcile semantic differences in the use of the word "empowerment". An empowered employee is one who "possesses the attribute of empowerment",

that is, he or she is in a state of empowerment. In the present research, this state is characterised by perceptions of control, competence, and goal internalisation. When the word “empowerment” is used to denote an act, then it is referring to those actions (e.g. delegation) that lead to the empowered state. When the word “empowerment” is used to denote a process, then it describes a sequence of actions (e.g. transfer of power) and/or intermediate psychological states (e.g. perceived decision-making authority) that ultimately lead to the empowered state. This sequence may be extended to other psychological states (e.g. organisational commitment) and/or to actions (e.g. taking initiative) that follow from the empowered state.

The multidimensional formulation and the measure developed here also represent an integration of existing thinking on empowerment. The dimension of perceived control captures the effects of traditional empowering techniques such as delegation, increased employee autonomy, etc., advocated by the structuralist approach. It roughly corresponds to the task assessments of “impact” and “choice” or “self-determination” in the Thomas and Velthouse (1990) and Spreitzer (1995) models. The dimension of perceived competence has parallels in the Conger and Kanungo (1988) model, the Thomas and Velthouse (1990) model, the Spreitzer (1995) model and in the Bennis and Nanus (1985) formulation. The dimension of goal internalisation represents the energising aspect of empowerment, which in turn is the main thrust of the leadership approaches to empowerment. It is a reflection of the commitment to organisational objectives and goals that transformational leaders want to engender in their employees.

The goal internalisation dimension is a unique feature of the present conceptualisation of empowerment. Although perceived control is the dimension intuitively associated with psychological empowerment, goal internalisation items formed the first factor in the principal component analysis in Study 1 (see Table 2) and in Study 2. The goal internalisation subscale was also strongly related to the perceived control subscale (see Fig. 1). This observed empirical association may reflect the fact that perceived control and goal internalisation have a common organisational link. Goal internalisation is a measure of the ownership of the organisational goal, while perceived control is a measure of ownership (or control) of the means (e.g. decision-making authority) to achieve that goal.¹ Further research is needed to understand the nature of the goal internalisation dimension more completely.

In general, the absence of widely available standardised measures of empowerment has precluded the systematic study of the empowerment process and its effect on employees. According to Cook and Campbell

¹ The author is grateful to an anonymous reviewer for this insight.

(1976), researchers need multiple measures of any given construct to demonstrate high construct validity, as a single exemplar can never perfectly capture the construct it aims to represent (p. 239). The researcher can test whether different versions of the same construct are similarly related. Cook and Campbell also categorically state that any given measure could both underrepresent the construct and contain irrelevancies, leading to lower construct validity in single-exemplar research. This could be mitigated by the use of multiple measures that permit triangulation on the referent (p. 242). More recently, Messick (1995) also warned that construct underrepresentation is a major threat to construct validity. A given measure is only one of many possible indicators of a construct; excessively narrow assessment or the failure to include important dimensions of the construct could compromise construct validity.

The threat that a single measure may underrepresent the focal construct applies to existing measures of empowerment as well. For example, Hayes (1994) presents an empowerment measure that could be of interest to those wishing to study the empowering effects of quality improvement initiatives. An examination of the items in the measure reveals that all the items correspond to the dimension of perceived control. As has been previously indicated in the present article, perceived control is only one aspect of psychological empowerment. Similarly, although Spreitzer's (1995, 1996) measure assesses multiple dimensions of empowerment, it does not tap into that aspect of empowerment that is related to inspiring leadership or an exciting organisational vision. The dimensions of "self-determination" and "impact" in the Spreitzer measure could correspond to the dimension of perceived control in the present formulation, and the dimension of "competence" in the Spreitzer measure corresponds to the dimension of perceived competence in the present formulation. But there is no strict parallel to the goal internalisation dimension. Spreitzer's dimension of "meaning" refers to "a fit between the requirements of a work role and a person's beliefs, values and behaviours" (Spreitzer, 1996, p. 484). There is no allusion to the energising power of a valued cause or a cherished goal, and the scale items for this dimension (see Spreitzer, 1995) are restricted to task level assessments. In contrast, items measuring goal internalisation refer to organisational goals and are designed to capture the energising effect of ideas, such as an inspirational goal. Additionally, Spreitzer (1995, 1996) explicitly equates psychological empowerment with intrinsic task motivation. This could also lead to construct underrepresentation, as such a treatment does not provide for extra-task or supra-task dimensions of empowerment, deriving, for example, from the effect of transformational leadership. It also leads one to wonder if psychological empowerment is distinct from intrinsic task motivation as conceptualised by other researchers, such as Hackman and Oldham (1980).

Cook and Campbell's and Messick's (1995) caution of construct under-representation is also reflected in Bartunek's (1995) observation that there are multiple definitions and interpretations of the word "empowerment" in currency today. It is possible, therefore, that the new empowerment scale developed here and the one developed by Spreitzer (1995) do not capture the phenomenon of psychological empowerment in its entirety. Given the nascent nature of empirical research on empowerment, it would thus seem that empowerment research would only benefit from the availability of multiple and ever more comprehensive measures in the immediate future.

The scale development process used in this study has adhered to standard scale development practice as recommended by DeVellis (1991). The results of the study indicate that the empowerment scale developed here has excellent internal consistency, test-retest reliability, stability of factor structure, and validity. Besides providing evidence of construct validity, the regression analysis results also provide evidence of discriminant validity at the subscale level. Although common method variance is a potential explanation for the observed correlations among variables in Study 1 and Study 2, the results of the factor analysis, and evidence of discriminant validity at the subscale level, provide reassurance with respect to validity of the results.

The respondent sample in Study 1 was fairly heterogeneous, in terms of gender, language, functional specialisation and industrial sector. It must be remembered, however, that while all respondents in the sample were employed individuals, they were also part-time students and hence represent only a subsection of the total working population. This limitation is partly mitigated by the use of an organisational sample from a different milieu in Study 2. The results of Study 2 replicate those of Study 1 in terms of factor structure and internal consistency. This provides further evidence of validity and preliminary evidence of the generalisability of the results. The sound psychometric properties of the scale justify its use in future research involving the empowerment construct as defined here.

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