

A Review of Psychological Empowerment

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Abstract: The concept of psychological empowerment has been widely studied by many scholars since its emergence. This paper reviews the literature on the connotation, structure, measurement and related research of psychological empowerment, and emphatically sorts out the influence of psychological empowerment as independent variable, mediating variable and moderating variable on employees' attitude, behavior and performance, and discusses the future research direction.

1. connotation and structure of psychological empowerment

Conger&kanungo (1988) defined empowerment as the motive concept of feelings of self-efficacy, transferring the concept of empowerment from management practice to subordinates' perception [1]. Mas&Velthouse (1990) further deepened the understanding of empowerment and proposed the concept of psychological empowerment for the first time, pointing out that psychological empowerment is a positive and valuable experience gained by individuals from the work that can generate motivation and satisfaction [2]. It is an internal incentive process, a continuous working motivation and a mental state or a synthesis of cognition of being empowered. Their research on empowerment cognition theory deepens employee psychological empowerment theory and lays a theoretical foundation for academic research on it. They define empowerment more broadly, and the increased intrinsic task motivation is reflected in a set of four perceptions, indicating the positive positioning of the individual's work role: meaningfulness(concerns the value of the task goal or purpose, judged in relation to the individual's own ideals or standards), competence(refers to the degree to which a person can perform task activities skillfully when he or she tries), choice(involves causal responsibility for a person's actions), and sense of impact(refers to the degree to which behavior is seen as "making a difference" in terms of accomplishing the purpose of the task). They think that the four dimensions together. Spreitzer (1992) found that the more complex 4-dimensional multiplication formula had no better predictive validity than the simpler addition formula [3]. Spreitzer (1995) replaced the dimension of "choice" with "self-determination", individual's sense of having choice in initiating and regulating actions and reflects autonomy in the initiation and continuation of work behaviors and processes [4].

Additionally, Spreitzer (1995) developed a measure of psychological empowerment based on work. These four dimensions are considered to be combined together to create the overall structure of psychological empowerment. Thus, these four dimensions specify "almost complete or sufficient cognition" for understanding psychological empowerment. Spreitzer (1999) began to develop and validate multidimensional measures of psychological empowerment in the workplace. Two complementary samples were used for the second-order confirmatory factor analysis to prove the convergence and discrimination effectiveness of the four dimensions of empowerment and its contribution to the overall structure of psychological empowerment [5], and the preliminary support for the structural effectiveness of psychological empowerment was found.

2. Measurement of psychological empowerment

The most representative one is the "psychological empowerment scale" developed by Spreitzer (1995) based on the empowerment model proposed by Thomas et al. (1990), which consists of 12 items. The questionnaire contains meaningfulness (3 items, for example: the work I have done is very meaningful to me), Self-efficacy (3 items, for example: I am confident that I have the ability to do all kinds of things in work well), Self-determination (3 projects, for example: I can decide for myself how to proceed with my work) and impact (3 projects, for example: I had a great influence on what happened in my department). This scale has become the most widely used psychological empowerment measurement tool in related researches. Chinese scholar Li Chaoping (2006) tested the applicability of the scale in the context of Chinese culture by using the sample of enterprise employees, and the results showed that the scale had good reliability (between 0.72 and 0.86) and validity, so it could be applied in domestic related researches [6].

3. Research on psychological empowerment

The relevant researches on psychological empowerment mainly include three aspects: antecedent variables, consequence variable, and the mechanism of psychological empowerment as a moderator variable and a mediate variable. Due to the popular studies on leadership style and psychological empowerment in previous literatures, we firstly sorted them out.

3.1 research related to leadership style

How to choose effective leadership and leadership behavior, improve employee performance and improve the overall performance of the organization is a problem that every organization leader must seriously consider. The main leadership styles are transformational/charismatic, transactional, inclusive, ethical, authentic, and authorized leadership.

Conger&Kanungo (1998) believed that transformational leadership has an obvious empowering effect on enhancing followers' self-efficacy belief. In addition, studies have shown that psychological empowerment plays a fully mediating role in the positive relationship between transformational leadership and organizational commitment of employees (Chen, jia, &li, 2006), where psychological empowerment is a representative of self-concept variables [7].

At the behavioral level, the research on the influence of transformational leadership on employee behavior through psychological empowerment has been supported by empirical research in the West, but no research has been done on what kind of behavior of transformational leadership causes subordinates' psychological empowerment. Ding&xi (2007) put forward the model that transformational leadership makes subordinates produce psychological empowerment through authorization behavior and then influences subordinates' organizational citizenship behavior, which has been verified in the context of Chinese culture [8]. Differently, when researching the influence of transformational leadership on organizational citizenship behavior via psychological empowerment, Wu (2007) considered the roles of the four dimensions of psychological empowerment. He found that Relationship-oriented transformational leadership exerts influence on job dedication through meaningfulness dimension and interpersonal promotion and organizational responsibility through self-efficacy. However, task-oriented transformational leadership only exerts influence on work dedication through the dimension of meaning [9]. Liu&sun et al. (2017) found that psychological empowerment partially mediated inclusive leadership and relationship conflict [10]. Xue&li (2017) found that psychological empowerment can partially mediate the influence of inclusive leadership on the work engagement of kindergarten teachers [11].

In terms of performance, wei&yuan (2007) found that the interaction between transactional leadership and authorization atmosphere on innovation performance was partially mediated by subordinates' psychological empowerment [12]. Zhang (2010) integrated the theories of leadership, empowerment and creativity, and found that authorized leadership has a positive impact on psychological empowerment, which in turn affects employees' intrinsic motivation and creative process participation [13].

Su&cheng (2016) found that psychological empowerment at the individual level partially mediated transformational leadership and employee service performance at the individual level, and authorization atmosphere at the branch level partially mediated transformational leadership and employee service performance at the branch level [14]. Baek-kyooJoo&Seongnam (2017) found that psychological empowerment partially mediates the relationship between true leadership and OCB, as well as the relationship between core self-evaluation and OCB [15]. Duan, Su. Etc (2018) found that psychological empowerment partially mediates the positive relationship between ethical leadership and employees' creative behaviors [16].

In general, these leadership styles can bring about a high level of psychological empowerment, and can promote employees' positive attitude, behaviors, and the achievement of both high quality and quantity of work performance, and even the personal career management and core self-evaluation through the intermediary role of psychological empowerment. Among them, it is worth noting the moderating effect of organizational power distance, as the boundary condition, especially in the context of Chinese culture.

3.2 Research on factors affecting psychological empowerment

3.2.1 Individual factors

Demographic variables. Based on previous literatures, demographic variables affecting psychological empowerment mainly include gender, age, education level, tenure and work status, etc. However, results of different studies are not completely consistent. For example, Speitzer (1996) took age, education level and gender as three indicators of individual characteristics and found that only education level had a significant positive correlation with psychological empowerment. However, Koberg. Etc (1999) found that tenure was positively correlated with psychological empowerment, while education level was not significantly correlated with psychological empowerment [17]. But there are some studies that show that only position have an effect on psychological empowerment.

Spreitzer (1995) designated a partial nomological network for psychological empowerment in the work environment, showing how personality (self-esteem and control points) and work environment variables (information and rewards) affect psychological empowerment and some of its individual outcomes (management effectiveness and innovative behavior).

Employee cognition. Azize Ergeneli. etc. (2009) results show that there is a significant relationship between cognitive-based trust in direct managers and overall psychological empowerment, and it is related to meaning and ability. Emotional-based trust is only related to impact while there is no relationship between trust in direct managers and self-determination [18]. Alexandre JS Morin (2015) [19] Research results show that psychological empowerment and emotional commitment to change are largely orthogonal responses. Psychological empowerment is more influenced by supportive beliefs.

3.2.2 Job characteristics

Each job has its own characteristics, which can be described from the aspects of skill diversity, task integrity and importance, autonomy and feedback. The empirical study of Corsun& Enz (1999) shows that peer help behavior is an important predictor of meaning, individual influence and self-efficacy.

The results of Wallach & Mueller (2006) [20] show that the large number of jobs and the uncertainty about the nature of job responsibilities indicate that the empowerment ability of auxiliary professionals in human service organizations is low and the latter is stronger. The level of decision participation and peer support are related to empowerment; Associate professionals who work with supervisors to build service tasks and rapport are more empowered; Peer support is related to empowerment.

3.2.3 Organizational environment

In the theoretical model of workplace empowerment, Thomas&Velthouse (1990) proposed that organizational environment could exert a strong influence on the cognition of empowerment. This

study expands its work by specifying the content and nature of the enabling environment within the initial theoretical framework. The relationship between social structure and empowerment may not be one-way. Over time, empowered individuals can also influence their environment through positive behavior (Thomas&Velthouse, 1990). Information about organizational vision is important because it helps to create a sense of meaning and purpose (Conger&Kanungo,1988).Spreitzer (1996) found social political support, opportunities to gain information, atmosphere and control range of participatory units were positively and significantly correlated with psychological empowerment, while role ambiguity was significantly and negatively correlated with psychological empowerment.

Lei &zhao et al. (2006) point out [21] employer-oriented culture is conducive to both the internal state and comparative state of psychological empowerment of knowledge-based employees. While task-oriented culture is not conducive to the former. In practice, we should build specific cultural orientation according to the characteristics of knowledge workers so as to improve their intrinsic motivation level.

3.3 Research on the effect of psychological empowerment and its mechanism

There are two main research directions on the effect of psychological empowerment—the effect on employee or organizational performance and how psychological empowerment affects individual's attitude and behavior at work.

3.3.1 Study of psychological empowerment as an independent variable

A large number of empirical studies using psychological empowerment as an independent variable show that the level of individual psychological empowerment has a certain impact on the outcome variables such as work attitude, work behavior and performance. The influence and degree of different dimensions of psychological empowerment on related consequence variables are different. In some cases, the influence of each dimension on the outcome is interactive. The relationship between its dimensions and relevant consequence variables is sometimes regulated by some situational factors.

In terms of research taking work behavior and performance as outcome variables, Thomas&Velthouse (1990) believed that empowerment would improve attention, initiative and flexibility, thus improving management efficiency, and proposed the connection between psychological empowerment and individual flexibility, which may contribute to innovative behaviors. Some studies have found that there is a significant positive correlation between the influence dimension of psychological empowerment and the innovation behavior of employees. Other studies have shown that psychological empowerment and performance are in an upward spiral: the initial psychological empowerment of new employees has a significant positive impact on their initial performance and performance improvement; Moreover, the initial performance of new employees also has significant positive predictive power on their subsequent psychological empowerment level.

3.3.2 Research on Psychological Empowerment as a mediator variable

In terms of studies with work behavior and performance as outcome variables, Samuel&Chen (2006) investigated the intermediary effect of authorization on the relationship between LMX and work results of job satisfaction, task performance and psychological withdrawal behavior in the context of China. The results showed that authorization fully mediated the relationship between LMX and the above work results [22].Zheng& Liu (2016) found that psychological empowerment mediated the impact of interactive equity on employee happiness, and power distance negatively moderated this mechanism [23].

From the above empirical results, we can see that psychological empowerment is a very important factor to reveal the internal mechanism of some variables (such as transformational leadership, LMX, etc.), and it is a very significant mediating factor for these variables to play a role in the relevant consequence variables.

3.3.3 Research on Psychological Empowerment as a Moderator variable

After the research on psychological empowerment was introduced into the field of psychology, researchers began to consider whether the effects of psychological empowerment on work outcome variables were different when individuals were in different situations. Therefore, researches on the moderator variables of psychological empowerment were carried out.

He Fangfang (2012) found that psychological empowerment has a moderating effect in the process where job burnout influences job satisfaction, yet the effects of different dimensions varies [24]. Berrin Erdogan. Etc. (2018) point out only in the case of low psychological empowerment, accident involvement was positively correlated with supervisors' evaluation of employee turnover, production deviation and disruptive behavior [25]. Chung, y. w. (2018) took one research revealing that only when individuals perceived low levels of psychological empowerment did perceived stress mediate the relationship between workplace exclusion and behavioral outcomes. It has such enlightenment for enterprises: workplace rejection is a stressor, and psychological empowerment can reduce the negative impact of rejection on behavioral outcomes [26].

4. Summary and prospect of psychological empowerment research

Both theoretical literatures and a large number of empirical studies show that psychological empowerment, as an independent factor, has significant positive impact on employees' positive attitude, performance, innovation behavior and organizational citizenship behavior, and can reduce the turnover rate and negative work attitude and behavior such as work aggression. Psychological empowerment is also an important intermediary path or boundary condition for certain factors (such as leadership behavior, work characteristics, organizational environment, etc.) to play a positive role in employees' work attitude, behavior and performance, which can provide more specific and accurate guidance and Suggestions for management practice.

At present, there are some problems and shortcomings in the research on psychological empowerment, which need to be further discussed and improved by scholars in future research. First of all, most of the current theories and measuring tools about psychological empowerment are produced under the background of western culture, and their cross-cultural universality is questionable. In particular, Chinese enterprises still have a large number of hierarchical concepts, and authorization is not encouraged in organizations. Therefore, it is necessary to continue and deepen the research on the localization of psychological empowerment in the future, and the cross-cultural comparative research on psychological empowerment is also a very meaningful topic.

Secondly, most researchers use cross-sectional design to investigate the static relationship between psychological empowerment and related variables, and pay little attention to the dynamic process. Therefore, it is necessary to strengthen the longitudinal process research with a large time span in the future, so as to deeply investigate the generation, trend of development and change, process and internal mechanism of psychological empowerment, as well as the dynamic change process of the relationship between psychological empowerment and related antecedents and consequence variables.

Thirdly, the interaction of various dimensions of psychological empowerment on outcome variables is not sufficient. And the degree of difficulty for each dimension to reach a higher level in different organizational situations and cultures may not be the same. How to control and adjust different dimensions according to different types of organizations and employees, strive to achieve low input and high output level, as well as improved management efficiency, is also a topic worthy of discussion.

Finally, how to use the existing psychological empowerment related theories to design a specific and effective management means to improve the level of psychological empowerment is still a relatively blank field. It is necessary to further strengthen the empirical research on intervention measures, strategies and mechanisms of psychological empowerment level in the future, and discuss how to use training and guidance to improve individual psychological empowerment specifically, so

that psychological empowerment can play its role as a positive state psychological variable and create practical value.

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