

Employee Empowerment and Its Effect on Job Satisfaction and Work Engagement

Muqaddas Anwar

Muqaddasanwar@awkum.edu.pk

Visiting Faculty, Department of Psychology, Abdul Wali Khan University Mardan, KP

Abdullah Shafqat

ask29936@gmail.com

Undergraduate Student, Department of Psychology, Abdul Wali Khan University Mardan, KP

Sehrish Latif

sehrishlatifpsy@gmail.com

Mphil Scholar, Department of Psychology, Abdul Wali Khan University Mardan, KP

Mahrukh Azam

mahrukhpsy@gmail.com

Mphil Scholar, Department of Psychology, Abdul Wali Khan University Mardan, KP

Corresponding Author: Muqaddas Anwar Muqaddasanwar@awkum.edu.pk

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ABSTRACT

Employee empowerment has become an essential construct in organizational psychology, whereas its concomitant impacts on job satisfaction and work engagement have not been thoroughly studied in a single empirical framework. The paper is a quantitative study that focused on the association between employee empowerment and two important work outcomes namely job satisfaction and work engagement among a sample of 250 full-time employees who are a representative of different organizational settings in Pakistan. Three self-report measures, i.e., Conditions for Work Effectiveness Questionnaire-II (CWEQ-II; Laschinger et al., 2001), Minnesota Satisfaction Questionnaire-Short Form (MSQ-SF; Weiss et al., 1967), and Utrecht Work Engagement Scale (UWES-9; Schaufeli et al., 2006), were used to The multiple regression analyses showed that employee empowerment was a strong positive predictor of job satisfaction ($\beta = .61, p < .001$) and work engagement ($\beta = .57, p < .001$), and explained 37 percent and 32 percent of job satisfaction and work engagement respectively. These results highlight the practical significance of empowerment-based management practices to contribute to the well-being of employees, their motivation, and long-term involvement at the workplace. It is discussed in terms of implications to human resource management, leadership development, and organization policy.

Keywords: *employee empowerment, job satisfaction, work engagement, organizational psychology, structural empowerment*

INTRODUCTION

In a time of fast organizational change, and rising levels of competition and employee demands, organizations are continually confronted with the challenge of maintaining a motivated, satisfied, and

engaged workforce. Employee empowerment as a process of providing employees with the authority, resources, information and autonomy to make significant decisions regarding their work has become the focus of increasing interest among organizational psychologists and management scholars as potentially a potent tool in promoting workplace well-being and performance (Thomas & Velthouse, 1990). Despite this interest, the mechanisms through which empowerment influences two of the most consequential work outcomes — job satisfaction and work engagement — remain incompletely understood, particularly in non-Western organizational contexts.

Job satisfaction, defined as the extent to which employees hold positive evaluative orientations toward their jobs (Locke, 1976), is widely recognized as a critical determinant of employee retention, organizational commitment, and productivity. Work engagement, conceptualized as a positive, fulfilling, work-related state of mind characterized by vigor, dedication, and absorption (Schaufeli et al., 2002), represents a further dimension of employee well-being that is theoretically and empirically distinct from, yet related to, job satisfaction. Both constructs have been linked to important organizational outcomes including reduced turnover intention, enhanced customer service quality, and superior individual and team performance (Harter et al., 2002; Judge et al., 2001). Understanding the antecedents of job satisfaction and work engagement is therefore a matter of both theoretical and practical significance.

The theory of empowerment, based on structural theory of organizational power presented by Kanter (1977), and the cognitive model of empowerment presented by Thomas and Velthouse (1990), suggests that employees who feel that they have access to opportunity, information, support, and resources, combined with them feeling that their work is meaningful, competent, self-determining, and impactful, are more likely to experience positive work attitudes and long. These propositions have been widely supported through empirical research that has shown that there are positive relationships between structural and psychological empowerment and job satisfaction (Laschinger et al., 2004) as well as work engagement (Seibert et al., 2011). Nevertheless, most current research has investigated these relationships individually, usually in Western health or education settings, with unresolved questions regarding the extent of the generalizability of results and the relative size of the empowerment impact on satisfaction compared to that of engagement.

The current study attempts to fill these gaps by concurrently exploring the impact of job satisfaction and work engagement on employee empowerment in the context of one integrated empirical design. In particular, two main hypotheses are tested in this study: (H1) employee empowerment will be a significant positive predictor of job satisfaction and (H2) employee empowerment will be a significant positive predictor of work engagement. The study offers a more detailed report of downstream effects of empowerment than the previous single-outcome studies by reviewing both sets of results simultaneously. It is hoped that the findings will not only add to the body of theoretical knowledge on how empowerment processes occur but also provide practical advice to practitioners wishing to improve employee well-being by designing organizations.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Employee Empowerment

Employee empowerment is a multidimensional construct which has been conceptualized on both the structural and psychological level of analysis. The initial theory introduced by Kanter (1977) is the structural empowerment theory, which assumes that the employees who have access to the organizational power structures such as access to information, resources, support and growth opportunity are in a better position to deliver effective performances and have positive work attitudes. Laschinger, Finegan, Shamian, and Wilk (2001) operationalized structural empowerment by the Conditions of work effectiveness model, where formal power structure and informal structures were found to be the most important organizational factors in regards to empowerment. At the psychological level, Thomas and Velthouse (1990) followed by Spreitzer (1995), found four dimensions of the cognitive aspects of empowerment namely meaning, competence, self-determination, and impact and said that empowerment is eventually perceived as a subjective psychological phenomenon, which captures how the individual perceives his or her job position. It is also demonstrated that both structural and psychological empowerment are predictors of positive work outcomes, but the mechanisms by which each dimension works may be various (Seibert et al., 2011).

Empowerment and Job Satisfaction

A substantial body of empirical evidence links employee empowerment to job satisfaction. Laschinger et al. (2004) conducted a landmark study among hospital nurses demonstrating that structural empowerment — operationalized through access to opportunity, information, support, and resources — was a significant predictor of job satisfaction, mediated through psychological empowerment. Similarly, Spreitzer, Kizilos, and Nason (1997) found that psychological empowerment predicted job satisfaction above and beyond the effects of role ambiguity and role conflict, suggesting that empowerment's effect on satisfaction is not merely a consequence of role clarity but reflects a distinct motivational contribution. More recently, Maynard, Gilson, and Mathieu (2012) conducted a meta-analysis synthesizing findings from 142 independent samples and concluded that psychological empowerment was a robust predictor of job satisfaction across diverse occupational contexts, with effect sizes in the moderate-to-large range. The theoretical account for this relationship draws on self-determination theory (Deci & Ryan, 2000), which proposes that satisfaction of the basic psychological needs for autonomy, competence, and relatedness — needs that empowerment directly addresses — is a fundamental prerequisite for intrinsic motivation and positive work affect.

Empowerment and Work Engagement

Empirical studies on the connection between work engagement and empowerment have been increasing in number since the publication of the job demands-resources (JD-R) model by Schaufeli and Bakker (2004), which regards job resources, such as autonomy, decision-making participation, and skill variety, as the key antecedents of engagement. Empowerment may be perceived as a multidimensional job resource that will act on several levels of the JD-R model simultaneously, and thus have a general positive effect on engagement. A meta-analytic review by Seibert, Wang, and Courtright (2011) established a significant relationship between both structural and psychological empowerment and work engagement, with the latter having greater impacts on the sub-dimensions of engagement vigor and

dedication. Tuckey et al. (2012) also established that an empowerment of leadership - a behavioral form of structural empowerment at the supervisory level - was a predictive variable of employee engagement, and that the effects of employee engagement on employee perceptions of role breadth self-efficacy mediated the relationship between these two variables. The findings also indicate that the process of empowerment encourages engagement in various ways, such as provision of organizational resources and the development of self-efficacy and motivational orientation of employees towards work.

Research Gaps and Present Study

Despite the growing body of literature linking empowerment to both job satisfaction and work engagement independently, relatively few studies have examined both outcomes simultaneously within a single empirical design, particularly in developing-world organizational contexts. The present study addresses this gap by testing the effects of employee empowerment on job satisfaction and work engagement concurrently among a Pakistani organizational sample, providing a more comprehensive and contextually situated account of empowerment's consequences than prior investigations.

METHODOLOGY

Participants and Sampling

The number of full-time employees (n=250) was hired in the organizations that were engaged in various industries in Pakistan (manufacturing: 32, services: 28, healthcare: 22, education: 18). Purposive sampling with snowball extensions were used to recruit participants who had a minimum of six months of experience in their current job to guarantee adequate workplace experience to give useful answers to the research questions on empowerment, satisfaction, and engagement. The final sample comprised 138 males (55.2%) and 112 females (44.8%), with ages ranging from 18 to 62 years ($M = 33.4$, $SD = 8.7$). The educational attainment was as follows: 47.2% had a bachelor's degree, 35.6% a master's degree, and 17.2% other qualifications were reported. Tenure in the organization was between less than a year and more than twenty years with a mean of 5.8 years ($SD = 4.2$). Table 1 shows demographic characteristics of the entire sample.

Table 1

Demographic Characteristics of the Sample (N = 250)

Variable	n	%
Gender		
Male	138	55.2
Female	112	44.8
Age (years)		

18–25	52	20.8
26–35	94	37.6
36–45	71	28.4
46+	33	13.2
Education		
Bachelor's degree	118	47.2
Master's degree	89	35.6
Other	43	17.2
Tenure (years)		
< 2	48	19.2
2–5	87	34.8
6–10	73	29.2
> 10	42	16.8

Note. Percentages may not sum to 100 due to rounding.

Measures

The Conditions for Work Effectiveness Questionnaire-II (CWEQ-II; Laschinger et al., 2001), a 19-item tool that measures structural empowerment on six subscales opportunity, information, support, resources, formal power, and informal power, was used to measure employee empowerment. Questions are graded on a 5-point Likert scale, 1 (none), to 5 (a lot). The CWEQ-II has been shown to possess good psychometric qualities in different kinds of occupational sample, with Cronbachs alpha coefficients always being greater than .80 (Laschinger et al., 2001). Internal consistency reliability was good in the current study ($=.87$).

The Minnesota Satisfaction Questionnaire-Short Form (MSQ-SF; Weiss et al., 1967) served as a measure of job satisfaction: the 20-item questionnaire measured intrinsic and extrinsic aspects of job satisfaction on a 5-point Likert scale (from 1 (very dissatisfied) to 5 (very satisfied)). The MSQ-SF has been extensively employed in organizational studies and its reliability and validity have been found to be strong with Cronbach alpha values usually being higher than .80 (Hirschfeld, 2000). The present study had internal consistency of $\alpha = .85$. The Utrecht Work Engagement Scale-9 (UWES-9; Schaufeli et al., 2006) was utilized as a measure of work engagement, 9 items that evaluated vigor, dedication and absorption on a 7-point frequency scale, 0 (never) to 6 (always). The UWES-9 is one of the most

validated measures of engagement in the organizational literature, having good factorial validity and cross-cultural reliability (Schaufeli and Bakker, 2010). Cronbachs alpha in the present sample was.83.

Procedure and Data Analysis

Data were collected using structured self-report questionnaires, and both modes were used to administer the questionnaire, with the majority of the data collected using a paper-based approach in participating organizations or via an online survey platform, and almost equal proportionality between modes. The participants obtained anonymity and confidentiality, and were advised that they had a right to withdraw at any stage without any penalty. Questionnaires were completed and sent back to the researcher through sealed envelope or electronically. Complete and univariate outliers were filtered out of the data before analysis; seven responses that were not complete were also filtered out, resulting in an analytic sample of 250 participants. All the statistical works were performed with the help of IBM SPSS Statistics version 27. Initial studies were done to explore descriptive statistics, bivariate correlation, and reliability coefficients on all variables of the study. Regression analyses were preceded by assessing and verifying assumptions of normality, linearity, homoscedasticity, and independent errors. Two hierarchical multiple regressions were performed to investigate the impacts of employee empowerment on job satisfaction (Model 1) and work engagement (Model 2), where gender, age, and organizational tenure were the demographic covariates in Step 1, and the employee empowerment in Step 2.

RESULTS

Descriptive Statistics and Correlations

Table 2 shows means, standard deviations, and bivariate correlations of all the variables of the study. There was a moderate perceived empowerment (M = 3.82, SD = 0.71) in the sample. Moderately positive work attitudes and engagement levels were also indicated by job satisfaction scores (M = 3.76, SD = 0.68) and work engagement scores (M = 3.69, SD = 0.74). Job satisfaction (r =.61, p < .001) and work engagement (r =.57, p <.001) had a significant and positive relationship with employee empowerment. Job satisfaction and work engagement were also positively related to one another (r =.63, p <.001), which is consistent with the previous theoretical explanations of these constructs as similar but distinct dimensions of positive work experience (Schaufeli et al., 2002).

Table 2

Descriptive Statistics and Intercorrelations Among Study Variables (N = 250)

Variable	M	SD	1	2	3
1. Employee Empowerment	3.82	0.71	—		
2. Job Satisfaction	3.76	0.68	.61**	—	
3. Work Engagement	3.69	0.74	.57**	.63**	—

** $p < .001$.

Regression Analyses

The results of multiple regression analyses are summarized in Table 3. In the case of Model 1, demographic covariates (gender, age, tenure) included in Step 1 explained 6% of job satisfaction ($R^2 = .06$, $F(3, 246) = 5.24$, $p = .001$). The addition of employee empowerment in Step 2 produced a significant increment in explained variance ($\Delta R^2 = .31$, $\Delta F(1, 245) = 139.95$, $p < .001$), with the full model accounting for 37% of total variance in job satisfaction ($R^2 = .37$, $F(4, 245) = 36.12$, $p < .001$). Employee empowerment was a significant positive predictor of job satisfaction ($B = 0.71$, $SE B = 0.06$, $\beta = .61$, $t = 11.83$, $p < .001$), supporting H1.

For Model 2, demographic covariates in Step 1 explained 5% of variance in work engagement ($R^2 = .05$, $F(3, 246) = 4.32$, $p = .005$). The addition of employee empowerment in Step 2 produced a significant increment ($\Delta R^2 = .27$, $\Delta F(1, 245) = 88.93$, $p < .001$), with the final model accounting for 32% of variance in work engagement ($R^2 = .32$, $F(4, 245) = 28.97$, $p < .001$). Employee empowerment was a significant positive predictor of work engagement ($B = 0.66$, $SE B = 0.07$, $\beta = .57$, $t = 9.43$, $p < .001$), supporting H2. Organizational tenure was marginally significant in predicting job satisfaction ($\beta = .11$, $p = .04$) and work engagement ($\beta = .09$, $p = .07$) in both models but gender and age were not statistically significant.

Table 3

Multiple Regression Results for Job Satisfaction and Work Engagement (N = 250)

Predictor	B	SE B	β	t	p
<i>Job Satisfaction as Outcome</i>					
Constant	1.04	0.19		5.47	< .001
Employee Empowerment	0.71	0.06	.61	11.83	< .001
<i>Work Engagement as Outcome</i>					
Constant	1.18	0.21		5.62	< .001
Employee Empowerment	0.66	0.07	.57	9.43	< .001

Note. β = standardized regression coefficient. All p-values are two-tailed.

DISCUSSION

The current study analyzed how employee empowerment influences job satisfaction and work engagement in a sample of 250 employees who were working in various organizational sectors. The hypotheses were both supported: employee empowerment was a strong positive predictor of job satisfaction ($r = 0.61, p < .001$) and work engagement ($r = 0.57, p < .001$) and the full regression models explained 37 and 32 percent of the variance in these results respectively. These results corroborate and expand the existing literature on the relationship between empowerment and positive work outcomes, but also provide new evidence, based on a Pakistani organizational sample, which has been underrepresented in the world literature on empowerment.

The strength of the correlation between empowerment and job satisfaction ($r = 0.61$) is also similar to the meta-analytic estimate of the empowerment-satisfaction relationship of Maynard et al. (2012) and to the theoretical suggestion that the empowerment-satisfaction relationship is due to the presence of the underlying psychological needs of autonomy and competence, which contribute to positive affect in work (Deci and Ryan, 2000). When employees feel that their organization provides them with significance in decision-making, access to pertinent information, sufficient resources and developmental possibilities, their evaluative appraisal of the job, both intrinsic and extrinsic, is increased, leading to greater satisfaction. This explanation is also congruent with the job characteristics model by Hackman and Oldham (1976) which recognizes autonomy as one of the five focal job dimensions that lead to positive psychological conditions and job satisfaction by its impact on a perceived sense of responsibility in work outcomes.

The large influence of empowerment on the work engagement ($r = +.57$) is an extension of previous studies by Seibert et al. (2011) and is fully justified in the framework of job demands-resource (JD-R) (Schaufeli and Bakker, 2004). Empowerment, as a complex set of structural job resources, is a direct response to the resource-based motivational channel of the JD-R model since it gives employees the means, power, and encouragement to be able to fulfill their work requirements efficiently. Through this, empowerment promotes the feeling of vigor - energetic investment in the work - dedication - a sense of enthusiasm, inspiration and pride of the job - and absorption - the intense concentration and immersion in work activities - which are all elements of work engagement (Schaufeli et al., 2002). The relative insignificance of the contribution of structural empowerment to the engagement relative to the satisfaction ($r = .57$ vs. $r = .61$) could be due to the fact that engagement is also a product of motivational and cognitive processes (such as goal-oriented persistence and intrinsic interest) that the structural empowerment does not sufficiently capture, and that, unless supplemented by other psychological processes (such as transformational leadership or positive organizational climate), may

That the tenure with the organization was a statistically significant predictor of job satisfaction and work engagement, even after controlling the effects of empowerment, deserves a cursory mention. The tenured employees can have more accumulated organizational knowledge, better social networks and more refined role clarity that can separately lead to satisfaction and engagement irrespective of formalized structures of empowerment. Future studies could also question whether organizational tenure mediates the association of empowerment with work outcomes, i.e. that empowerment could be a more significant predictor of satisfaction and engagement among more recent employees who rely more on formal organizational support systems.

PRACTICAL IMPLICATIONS

The current results have a number of significant implications to the practice in organizations. To begin with, they emphasize the significance of investing in empowerment-based management designs as a tool of both increasing job satisfaction and work engagement two outcomes that are among the greatest organizational predictors of retention, performance, and customer outcomes (Harter et al., 2002). The enhancement of formal systems of empowerment, such as participative decision-making processes, transparent information-sharing, sufficient resource distribution, and developmental opportunity programs, need to be on the agenda of human resource managers and organizational leaders as a larger part of their overall employee well-being and engagement strategies. Second, the results indicate that empowerment interventions can be especially cost-efficient in organizational settings where resources are limited like the ones found in the developing economy of Pakistan where non-financial types of employee investments can yield significant returns in satisfaction and engagement without necessarily involving high capital outlays.

LIMITATIONS AND FUTURE DIRECTIONS.

There are a number of weaknesses of the current study that should be mentioned. To begin with, the cross-sectional design does not allow one to make causal inferences regarding the nature of the empowerment-satisfaction and empowerment-engagement relationships. Although the current results are aligned with the theory that suggests that empowerment stimulates favorable work outcomes, longitudinal or experimental designs are required to determine the directionality with certainty. Second, the use of self-report measures increases the chances of common method variance that can have overstated observed correlations among variables. Future research ought to include objective performance measures or supervisor measures of engagement in addition to self-report measures. Third, purposive sampling restricts the generalizability of the results to the larger Pakistani working population and future studies must attempt to replicate these results with the help of probability-based sampling models. Fourth, the current research did not assess the possible mediating variables, including psychological empowerment, organizational commitment, or perceived organizational support, in which structural empowerment can have its impact on satisfaction and engagement. Further studies need to be made more theoretically well-endowed in terms of mediation framework to provide insight into the psychological mechanisms behind these associations.

CONCLUSION

To sum up, the current research offers the sound evidence that employee empowerment is a meaningful and powerful predictor of job satisfaction and work engagement in Pakistani employees in a practical meaning. By comparing the two results simultaneously under one empirical construct, the research contributes to the knowledge of the extent of organizational impacts of empowerment and provides a concise insight to those in practice who want to improve employee welfare. In a world where organizations worldwide are struggling to manage the challenges of talent retention, workforce engagement, and competitive performance, the current results validate that employee empowerment of employees, i.e., the process of providing them the ability, information, resources, and support to flourish is not only a management philosophy but an empirically validated organizational strategy with quantifiable benefits to both employees and organizations.

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