

# LINKING AN INTEGRATED APPROACH OF EMPOWERMENT TO EMPLOYEE CREATIVITY

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## Abstract

Nowadays, considerable attention has been paid to employee creativity in organizations. Therefore, much studies have proposed various approaches to motivate employee creativity in organization. Accordingly, we will conduct a review of different empowerment approaches and employee creativity literature in organizations. The present paper offers insight on how different theories of leadership and empowerment can influence creativity of employees. The paper will start framing different approaches of empowerment. Specifically, empowering leadership, empowerment climate, psychological empowerment. This synthesize of various theories of empowerment has been depicted in an integrated approach of empowerment model. This model describes the mechanism for empowering leadership, empowerment climate and psychological empowerment and their influence on employee creativity.

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**Keywords:** Empowering leadership, empowerment approaches, creativity

## Introduction

In this era of globalization and due to the increasingly turbulent and unpredictable environments that surrounding organisations and time to time technological changes, employers need extra competitive edge from their employees to be more creative. Employee creativity has been proven to contribute in organizations effectively and innovatively (Amabile, 1988; Shalley et al., 2004). employee creativity qualities give extra competitive edge to react to the competition quickly and efficiently (Amabile et al., 2004).

However, it's the management responsibility to support and encourage employees to be creative (Amabile et al., 2004; Shalley et al., 2004; Zhang & Bartol, 2010; Sun et al., 2012). To do so, higher level of management experienced different methods and approaches to encourage employees to involve in the organizations activity. Thus, influence their creativity in the organization. For several decades a great effort has been devoted to define and explore different management practices such as, participative decision making, delegation, information sharing, job enrichment and TQM and their influence on employees' creativity. However, in the late of 1980s a new concept has saw the light in the organizations, this new concept has emerged from previous management practices. Namely, employee empowerment. Since then, a vast number of publications have appeared in the literature demonstrating the relationship between empowerment and its influence in the organizations. However, researchers and scholars have different understanding regarding employee empowerment. For this reason, a number of studies have proposed to integrate different approaches of empowerment to investigate their influence on employee creativity under three main categories. Specifically, leadership, climate or (structural) empowerment and psychological empowerment (Avey et al., 2008; Tierney, 2008; Zhang and Bartol, 2010; Vecchio et al., 2010; Sun et al., 2012).

Along the same vein, the present paper offers different definitions of empowerment and covers different aspects of empowerment. Besides, discusses the mechanism of an integrated approach of empowerment an its influence employee creativity.

### **General Definition of Empowerment**

Empowerment has been implicitly defined in the literature under different terms such as participative decision making (Lawler, 1992), job enrichment (Hackman & Oldham), delegation (Chen & Aryee, 2007). However, the literal meaning of empowerment has been referred to "authorise or give power to". Supporting this definition, Conger and Kanaungo (1988, p.477) indicate that power is the focal point of empowerment. And defined empowerment as "the process by which a leader or manager shares his/her power with subordinates". Furthermore, Spreitzer (1995a, p.1444) has defined empowerment from a psychological perspective and it is been defined as "intrinsic task motivational construct manifested in four cognitions, meaning, self-efficacy and impact." Along with these different definitions, researchers have arrived at the conclusion that it is impossible to limit employee empowerment to one single definition (Spreitzer, 2007; Siebert et al., 2011). For this reason, different perspectives of empowerment have been examined in the literature.

### **Approaches of Empowerment**

As mentioned earlier, the literature has documented a vast definitions of empowerment. Thus, empowerment cannot be limited to one single definition. Therefore, several researchers have suggested identifying empowerment from different perspectives (Spreitzer, 1996, 2007; Kirkman and Rosen, 1999; Cho and Faerman, 2010; Zhang and Bartol, 2010; Siebert et al. 2011; Sun et al., 2012). Furthermore, to understand the motivational effects on employees that lead to creativity, researchers have examined three major approaches of empowerment, leadership, structural (climate) and psychological approach of empowerment.

#### **Empowering leadership**

From the perspective of empowering leadership, this style of leadership focuses on enabling and to share power and responsibilities with subordinates, and it is highly related to the empowerment phenomena (Carmeli et al., 2011). Hence, followers of this style of leadership will contribute and participate in the decision making process which in turn enhance the self-efficacy (Gill et al., 2011; Dierendonck & Dijkstra, 2012). Moreover, Ahearne et al.(2005) proposed four dimensions for empowering leadership, 1. Enhancing the meaningfulness of work. 2. Providing autonomy from bureaucratic constrains. 3. Fostering opportunities for participation in decision making. 4. Expressing confidence in high performance. Undoubtedly, these dimensions are highly related to employee creativity (Zhang and Bartol, 2010).

#### **Empowerment Climate (Structural Empowerment)**

Structural approach has been recognized as a macro approach that concentrate on the structural or contextual factors that foster empowerment in organizations (Spreitzer, 2007; Mathieu et al., 2006; Cho and Faerman, 2010). Structural empowerment can be conceptualized as empowerment climate. That is, the mutual perception between employees towards management practices and policies relevant to the empowerment process in the workplace. (Seiber et al., 2004; Sun et al., 2012). Following to this conceptualization, the present paper conceptualize structural empowerment as empowerment climate. However, for this approach of empowerment, researchers have a great debate and argument regarding the dimensions of this approach (Spreitzer, 2007; Cho and Faerman, 2010; Seibert et al., 2011).

## **Psychological Empowerment**

While empowerment climate has been captured as a macro approach, psychological approach recognized as a micro approach that deals with the perception of employees towards empowerment in the workplace (Spreitzer, 1995). In contrast to empowerment climate dimensions, the literature has a general consensus regarding the dimensions of psychological empowerment. Namely, competence, meaning, self-determination and impact (Spreitzer, 1996; Walumbwa et al, 2010; Cho and Faerman, 2010; Yang and Choi, 2009; Zhang and Bartol, 2010; Liu et al, 2011; Sun et al, 2012).

## **Creativity**

Over the past decades many authors have raised theories about creativity and proposed it. One of the theories suggests that employee creativity is a production of story and is useful ideas in any department or sector (Amabile, 1988; Amabile et al., 2004; Shalley and Gilson, 2004). Moreover, Oldham and Cummings (1996) defined creative performance as ideas, products and procedures that satisfy various conditions. In addition, Cheung and Wong (2011) indicate that creativity relates to both of required tasks and sometimes beyond these required tasks. However, employee creativity will be encouraged and fostered through empowerment process.

Consistent with the above mentioned approaches of empowerment and creativity, the present paper discusses the relationship between an integrated approach of empowerment and employee creativity. Figure 1 depicts the model.

## **Theoretical Framework**

In this section, we examine the relationships in an integrated approach of empowerment on employee creativity. Specifically, we examine the relationship between empowering leadership and empowerment climate; empowerment leadership and psychosocial empowerment, and empowering leadership and creativity. Besides, investigate how empowerment climate influence psychological empowerment. Lastly, we examine the core relationship between psychological empowerment and creativity

## **An Integrated approach of Employee Empowerment and Creativity Empowering Leadership and Empowerment Climate**

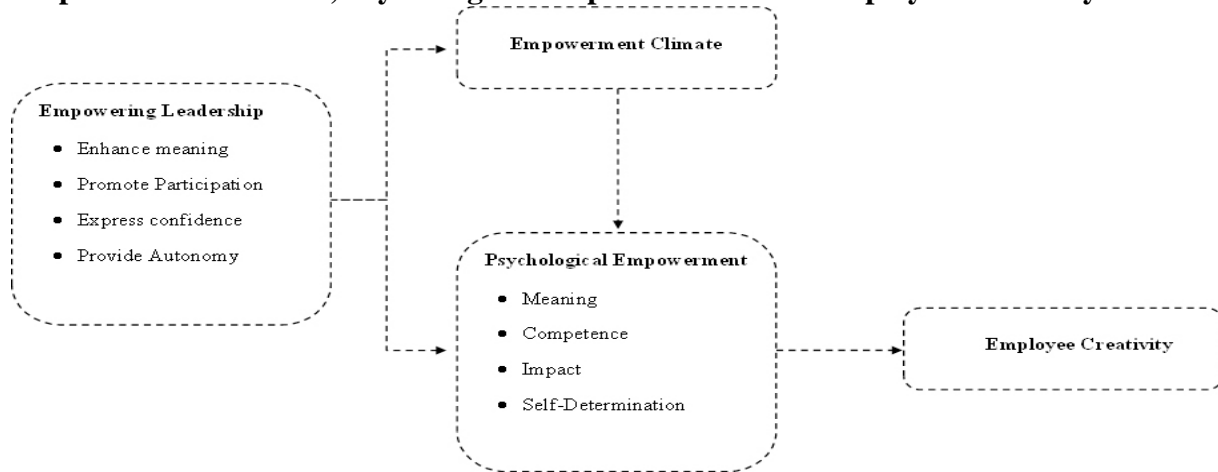
Empowerment climate has been defined as “employees’ shared perceptions of managerial structures, policies, and practices related to empowerment” (Seibert et al., p.333, 2004). Therefore, it is capture the empowerment practices in the organization. Such as, Job autonomy (Atwater & Carmeli, 2009); participative decision making (Dewettinck & Amejide, 2011) or delegation (Chen & Aryee, 2007). Although, there is a dearth of studies regarding the relationship between empowering leadership and empowerment climate. Conceptually, we can capture the relationship between empowering leadership and empowerment climate. empowering leaders express confidence in employees, foster participation in the decision making process and provide job autonomy in the workplace, these leadership components and behaviours will positively influence the shared perception of employees towards these practices. Thus, improve the empowerment climate (Wallace et al., 2011).

## **Empowering Leadership and Psychological empowerment**

In the same manner, empowering leadership enhance various dimensions for psychological empowerment (meaning, impact and self-determination). Besides, it will increase employees' sense of competence or self-efficacy (Chang et al. 2013). For instance, empowering leaders will enhance the meaningfulness of work and provide autonomy for their employees, such practices will positively influence the psychological state of mind for

employees and make employees recognize the meaning of their work and realize that they are self-determined employees in the organization (Pearce et al., 2003; Zhang and Bartol, 2010).

### Empowerment Climate, Psychological Empowerment and Employee Creativity



While, empowerment climate is the mutual perception of employees regarding the managerial practices in the workplace. Psychological empowerment is the employees' understanding and response of these conditions (Zhang and Bartol, 2010). In other words, the shared perception of empowerment in the workplace, produces major changes in the employees' psychological state of mind. Thus, influence employees' creativity (Laschinger et al., 2004). Put another way, psychological empowerment is the reflection of empowerment climate conditions on the employees' behaviour. Consequently, empowered employees consider themselves as more capable to do their work on their own. Due to this, employees can try to find creative approaches to perform their duties. To dig deep with more exposure to one of the psychological empowerment dimension (i.e. meaning) and their influence on creativity. Psychologically empowered employees realize that their work has a meaning and important to them will exert extra effort to understand the duties of their work to generate creative activities while accomplishing their tasks (Shalley & Gilson, 2004).

### Empowering Leadership and Employee Creativity

We can trace the relationship between empowering leadership and employee creativity, that empowering leadership practices energize, support and cultivate the empowerment climate. Which in turn influence psychological empowerment. That is, the employees' reaction to empowerment climate conditions. Thus, influence employee creativity. Simultaneously, empowering leadership has a direct influence on psychological empowerment of employees (Zhang and Bartol, 2010). For more illustration, employees will be psychologically empowered and motivated by empowering leaders' practices and behaviour. Put another way, empowering leaders provide autonomy to their employees in the workplace, which in turn make employees to recognize that they are autonomous and have a freedom to produce novel and creative ideas (Gange & Deci, 2005). Supporting this point, Ahearne et al. (2005) highlighted practices and behaviours of empowering leadership that are related to creativity. Specifically, providing autonomy in the workplace, encourage employees to participate in the decision making. These practices by empowering leaders are strongly related to creativity. To emphasize this point, creativity literature found that job autonomy and participation in the decision making are antecedents for employee creativity (Amabile, 1988; Amabile et al., 2004; Coveney, 2008; Lin and Liu, 2012).

### Conclusion

This paper contributes to the literature by explaining how this mixture of theories are consolidated it together. An integrated approach of empowerment suggested to combine

different approaches of empowerment. Namely, empowering leadership, empowerment climate, and psychological empowerment to investigate their influence on creativity of employees. Our research direct us to realize that there are relationships between empowerment variables. Such as, empowerment climate and psychological empowerment have a mediating role between empowering leadership and employee creativity. Empowerment climate has a direct influence on psychological empowerment, and indirect influence on employee creativity via psychological empowerment. Whereas, psychological empowerment has a direct influence on employee creativity. These findings proposed how an integrative approach of empowerment can be utilized, and extend previous studied on the affect of different empowerment variables on employee creativity. Future research should investigate various antecedents of psychological empowerment. Besides, examine the influence of different organizational factors on employee creativity.

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