

# Organizational Empowerment: The Overlooked Dimension

70- 01/01/2024 Rarely mentioned, organizational or structural empowerment stands as the highest stratum of empowerment, surpassing individual and collective levels. Yet, this pyramidal image fails to take into account the reality of interactions within a system and its components. In an era where work efficiency is linked to employee empowerment, *"It is crucial to rethink this concept by incorporating more the influences of the organization on leadership and individual motivation."* This is the message of a recent publication on the "forgotten" dimension of empowerment by Tobias Dennerlein and Bradley L. Kirkman [1].

## An Improvement Challenge for Organizations

Most studies have focused on the psychological and collective aspects of empowerment, neglecting the interdependencies and synergies within any organization. *"The possibility that these factors interact has escaped the attention of researchers"* argue the authors.

According to their study, employee and team empowerment will only reach its full potential if there is a strong correlation between the evolution of organizations, managerial practices, and personnel expectations, namely:

- Access to information and resources,
- Knowledge of strategic performance,
- Participation in decision-making,
- Socio-political support defined by Kanter (1983) as the approval or legitimacy granted by supervisors, peers, subordinates, and team members. It translates into mutual trust and the formation of a support network.

However, there exists a gap between the mandate of empowerment and its reality within the organization. To assess it, it is

useful to analyze employees' perceptions of the authenticity of participative organizational culture:

- Do they feel well-trained and have the necessary human and logistical support for their work?
- Do they believe they have the skills and knowledge to fulfill their role?
- Do they have the latitude needed to plan and accomplish their missions?
- Do they feel genuinely involved in defining processes, problem-solving, and the quality of results?
- Do they believe their voices matter in decision-making bodies? Are their initiatives recognized?

The social structural factors of empowerment must align with managerial practices. Indeed, leadership alone cannot guarantee the motivational state necessary for individual empowerment. Without resonance with the organization, leaders' efforts to promote empowerment could prove ineffective, and their resolutions stifled (Spreitzer, 1995).

### **A Comprehensive and Authentic Approach**

It is therefore essential to examine the congruence between the organizational model and the expected strategic objectives. Leaders cannot rely solely on calls for more empowerment; they must "put into practice" its principles:

- Define and share clear objectives,
- Adopt a democratic framework,
- Make employee control of decisions effective in all aspects of their team and career life,
- Acknowledge decision-making capacity, autonomy in organization and work execution,
- Ensure resource availability and smooth information sharing,
- Promote authentic leadership and positive, prosocial attitudes from leaders.

It is also opportune to assess the alignment between stated values and the behavior of top managers, essential components of the informal environment. Any distortion between statements and decision-makers' behaviors will be perceived as a form of betrayal, leading to rejection and demotivation.

## **In Conclusion**

*"Our advice, as simple as it may seem, is very important considering our results; it is crucial that organizations adopt a 'holistic' approach to empowerment."* Tobias Dennerlein and Bradley L. Kirkman.

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[1] Dennerlein, T., & Kirkman, B. L. (2023). The forgotten side of empowering others: How lower social structural empowerment attenuates the effects of empowering leadership on employee psychological empowerment and performance. *Journal of Applied Psychology*.

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Kanter, R. M. (1983). *The change masters*. New York, NY: Simon & Schuster

Spreitzer, G. M. (1995). Psychological empowerment in the workplace: Dimensions, measurement, and validation. *Academy of Management Journal*, 38(5), 1442–1465.