The Impact of Psychological Empowerment on Career Satisfaction: A Review

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Abstract:

Psychological empowerment is the inner experience that an organization allows employees to gain through empowerment. In the context of rapid economic and social development and people-oriented management concepts, organizations and enterprises are paying more and more attention to employees' feelings at work. Psychological empowerment has become an important management measure. It has an essential impact on employees' career satisfaction, which is an individual's overall satisfaction with their career status and development. This paper adopts the literature research method to review and summarize the relevant literature on psychological empowerment and career satisfaction, define and explain the concepts and connotations of psychological empowerment and career satisfaction, explore the impact of psychological empowerment and its four dimensions on career satisfaction, and summarize the current research status and emphasize the importance of psychological empowerment for managers to enhance employees' career satisfaction.

Keywords: Psychological empowerment, Career satisfaction, Review, Impact

1. Introduction

In today's rapidly developing socio-economic context, knowledge, and human capital are more critical to enterprises and organizations than financial capital and have become indispensable resources for any organization (Armstrong & Taylor, 2023; Chiavenato, 2005; Rego et al., 2015).

In this context, it is becoming increasingly important for organizations to empower employees to improve productivity, and psychological empowerment has gradually become a popular concept in organizational research and practice (Schermuly et al., 2022). According to Spreitzer (1995), psychological empowerment is a positive mentality in which an individual feels touched and motivated internally, thereby changing his feelings and views on the external working environment and conditions and expressing them externally (Spreitzer, 1995).

Career satisfaction can be defined as an employee's satisfaction or dissatisfaction with his entire career (Armstrong-Stassen & Ursel, 2009). It refers to a person's overall satisfaction with his career experience (Huo & Zhou, 2021). Career satisfaction also positively impacts employees' attitudes and behaviors in their work life (Türe & Akkoc, 2020).

The conditions and processes of employee empowerment affect employees' satisfaction with career development Joo and Nam (2019). Psychological empowerment can significantly and positively improve career satisfaction (Türe & Akkoc, 2020). On the other hand, psychological empowerment can also mediate between career identity, organizational commitment, and career satisfaction, thus significantly

affecting career satisfaction (Maisarah et al., 2024). Organizations can positively impact career satisfaction through psychological empowerment, and these employees will also become more efficient and more willing to contribute to the organization's survival by making more efforts (Obeidat et al., 2018). Therefore, good management practices should strengthen relevant psychological empowerment factors to improve employees' career satisfaction, which may be conducive to the organization's long-term success (Maisarah et al., 2024).

Based on the analysis above, this paper summarizes the literature, explains the concepts and connotations of psychological empowerment and career satisfaction, confirms the positive impact of psychological empowerment and its inclusive dimensions on career satisfaction, and summarizes the latest research results and future research directions.

2. The concept and connotation of psychological empowerment

2.1. The concept of psychological empowerment

Regarding the theory of psychological empowerment, it is generally believed that in the 1990s, scholars proposed an accurate concept and determined its connotation, namely the four dimensions it contains (work meaning, competence, self-determination, and impact). Since then, researchers have begun extensive research on psychological empowerment in various fields(Conger & Kanungo, 1988; Spreitzer, 1995; Thomas & Velthouse, 1990).

Kanter proposed the term "empowerment" in 1977. He believed that by empowering employees, organizations could ensure that they can respond more flexibly to different situations that may arise, enable them to handle customer requirements more effectively, and even improve their status in the organization (Seibert et al., 2004).

Empowerment research includes two perspectives: structural perspective and psychological perspective. The psychological perspective focuses on employees' perception of empowerment, which is crucial in an organizational environment (Spreitzer, 1995; Thomas & Velthouse, 1990). It is related to intrinsic motivation, employee feelings, and personal views. Therefore, psychological empowerment is the motivational experience generated by an individual based on his or her cognition of himself or herself and his or her relationship with the work role (Spreitzer, 1995).

Conger and Kanungo (1988) are generally considered the first authors to discuss the concept of psychological empowerment (PE). In psychological terms, empowerment is motivating by improving personal effectiveness. Zimmerman (1995, 2000) believes that psychological empowerment is a multidimensional structure that includes three components: personal empowerment, interactive empowerment, and behavioral empowerment.

Based on these studies, this paper believes that psychological empowerment is when enterprises or organizations empower employees' behaviors so that individuals can feel psychologically motivated and recognized, thereby improving personal work efficiency.

With the development of psychological empowerment research, the theoretical community generally believes that Spreitzer (1995) clarified the concept of individual psychological empowerment. Spreitzer (1995) continued to conceptualize empowerment by focusing on the workplace based on the previous research of Thomas and Velthouse (1990). He believes that psychological empowerment is a positive mentality in which individuals feel touched and motivated in their hearts, thereby changing their feelings and views on the external working environment and conditions and externally manifesting themselves, which is considered to be the most comprehensive theory of psychological empowerment （Lei & Xu,

2022）.

In the latest research in recent years, Llorente et al.(2023) supplemented and improved the concept of psychological empowerment, believing that psychological empowerment (PE) is a subjective, cognitive, and attitudinal process that helps individuals feel capable, competent, and authorized to perform tasks. In the past two decades, research on psychological empowerment has reported strong evidence, once again confirming its role as a motivator in organizational psychology (Llorente et al., 2023).

Combined with the above research, this paper believes that psychological empowerment is a series of measures that companies or organizations can take to enable employees to feel recognized or motivated at the personal psychological level and to show a positive attitude in terms of work significance, effectiveness, autonomy, and work influence, thereby affecting personal work happiness, professional identity cognition, occupational burnout, etc. However, some people point out that psychological empowerment is a complex concept. It is not a static concept but is developed based on the experience of people and organizations who put it into practice (Rasher, 2015). Therefore, the concept and connotation of psychological empowerment will also have particular understandings and meanings in different cultural backgrounds and industries as society develops and organizations progress.

2.2. Dimensions of psychological empowerment

Spreitzer (1995) continued conceptualizing empowerment by focusing on the workplace, building on the previous research published by Thomas and Velthouse (1990). In 1995, he published the "Workplace Psychological Empowerment Model," which consists of four dimensions: work meaning, competence, self-determination, and impact. He also designed a measurement scale for psychological empowerment, which consists of 12 questions for measuring the four dimensions.

Summarizing the research on the four dimensions of psychological empowerment, it can be found that these four dimensions are considered sufficient to understand psychological empowerment (Spreitzer, 1995; Thomas & Velhouse, 1990) and have been used in many studies, which show that psychological empowerment is related to positive work outcomes (Arciniega & Menon, 2013; Dewettinck et al., 2003; Saif & Saleh, 2013; Zhang & Bartol, 2010), improved teamwork, motivational work performance experience, satisfaction, and the initiative and innovative behavior of individuals in the organization. These four dimensions strengthen relationships and increase an individual's commitment to the organization (Macário et al., 2020; Saleem et al., 2019). Therefore, they reflect a positive orientation toward the work role, indicating how an individual wants to fit into the work environment (Choong et al., 2011)

The "work meaning" dimension is defined as a sense of commitment to the goals of the job (Spreitzer, 1995). It refers to achieving goals based on an individual's intrinsic evaluation. Companies must ensure that the purpose of the work tasks is compatible with the employees' value system so that they feel that their tasks are meaningful, thus maintaining motivation and commitment to the organization (Choong et al., 2011). According to Spreitzer (1995), when an employee cares about and believes that the tasks they perform are essential to his function, the tasks he performs are meaningful. This empowerment perspective provides energy to the organization's human capital, enabling it to work towards common goals (Rua & Rodrigues, 2018).

The "competence" dimension involves an individual's belief in his ability to complete tasks with skill and success (Spreitzer, 1995). Individuals must believe that they have the skills and abilities to do their jobs and that they must do their best to do them. Their skills reflect a sense of self-efficacy, reflected in how individuals effectively handle different situations at work (Jordan et al., 2017).

"Self-determination" refers to the autonomy of individuals to decide how to complete tasks (Zhang & Bartol, 2010) and is related to the sense of freedom and autonomy at work. This is a characteristic of strong-willed people who can make significant changes. Self-determination exists when employees have some control over what they do, how much effort they put into their work, and the power to start or stop tasks (Choong et al., 2011).

Finally, the "impact" dimension reveals the intensity with which individuals believe they can influence the strategic, management, or operational results of the places involved (Ro & Chen, 2011). From this perspective, managers should allow subordinates to express their opinions and suggestions in the workplace (Meng & Han, 2014).

Regarding the measurement of psychological empowerment and its four dimensions, the scale of psychological empowerment developed by Spreitzer in 1995 is currently widely used. Many researchers have confirmed that this scale is practical in different industries. Through the use of this scale, research on psychological empowerment can play an essential role in maximizing employee potential (Maynard et al., 2014), promoting more outstanding organizational commitment (Arciniega & Menon, 2013; Macário et al., 2020), intrinsic motivation (Zhang & Bartol, 2010), career satisfaction (Gregory et al., 2010) and performance (Boudrias et al., 2014; Li et al., 2015；Oliveira et al.,2023).

3. Overview of career satisfaction

Career satisfaction is an essential psychological structure that plays a vital role in an individual's career. In recent years, career satisfaction has become a hot topic in theoretical research in organizational behavior and social psychology. At the practical level, career satisfaction is closely related to job performance, organizational commitment, and overall well-being（Liu & Deng，2022）. As companies and organizations pay more and more attention to employees' personal development, this concept has attracted widespread attention from scholars in various disciplines, especially in organizational behavior, psychology, and human resource management. There is no unified understanding of career satisfaction in many studies. Many people even believe that career satisfaction and job satisfaction are the same concepts in their research. However, the concepts and connotations of the two are not precisely the same.

Many researchers have given different answers regarding the concept of career satisfaction. Kong et al. (2012) believe that career satisfaction refers to a career's intrinsic and extrinsic value, including factors such as wages, salaries, growth, and development opportunities available to employees (Kong et al., 2012). Huo and Zhou believe that career satisfaction refers to a person's overall satisfaction with his or her career experience (Huo & Zhou, 2021). According to Wang and Yuan (2016), career satisfaction refers to a person's sense of achievement and value judgment of his or her career.

A more complete view points out that career satisfaction is regarded as the degree of subjective career success (Park, 2018). Subjective career success is a kind of self-realization, achievement, and satisfaction, and a person can be satisfied with his or her career (Judge et al., 1999). Career satisfaction, enjoyment, and achievement are essential criteria for subjective career success (McDonald & Hite, 2023). In addition, many previous studies have used career satisfaction to measure subjective career success (Zacher, 2014; Spurk et al., 2014; Spurket al., 2019). Therefore, at the theoretical level of academia, career satisfaction, and subjective career success reflect the same meaning.

It can be seen that more scholars prefer to define career satisfaction from the perspective of personal career development and career success（Liu & Deng，2022）. After summarizing, this paper concludes that the connotation of career satisfaction is the individual's inner recognition of the current status and

achievements of the profession he or she is engaged in and the confidence and hope for the future personal development of the profession. On the one hand, it includes the current salary, benefits, recognition, attention, and external factors; on the other hand, it also includes opportunities, potential, and hope for future development.

It is worth noting that when studying career satisfaction, many researchers tend to confuse it with job satisfaction(Liu & Deng，2022). Although career and job satisfaction overlap in some aspects, the two have significant differences. Job satisfaction usually refers to an individual's immediate reaction and attitude to the current job, which is short-term and local (Yang et al., 2020). Career satisfaction is an overall evaluation of the entire career, reflecting an individual's overall view of his or her career choice and career development path (Sun & Wang, 2023). There is a close connection between career satisfaction and job satisfaction. A high level of job satisfaction can improve career satisfaction, and high career satisfaction can also enhance an individual's work enthusiasm, thereby improving job satisfaction (Zhou & Tang, 2022). Career satisfaction is different from job satisfaction, but it is also related. Career satisfaction is more extensive, long-term, and critical, with more connotations and influencing factors. Job satisfaction focuses on the current working status and attaches more importance to short-term and actual benefits. The connotation of career satisfaction includes job satisfaction, but job satisfaction cannot represent career satisfaction(Liu & Deng，2022). At the same time, career satisfaction and job satisfaction are interconnected and mutually reinforcing. They will also positively impact the work status of individual employees and the organization's work efficiency.

4. The impact of psychological empowerment on career satisfaction

Psychological empowerment and career satisfaction are significant to the development of employees and organizations. Zhang et al. (2020) showed that when the level of psychological empowerment is higher, individuals can feel the meaning of work, the ability to self-determine, the ability to handle work, and the influence in the organization, their work enthusiasm will increase, thus reaching a state of satisfaction. Improving career satisfaction can reduce employee turnover, improve work performance and loyalty, and reduce work error rates (Afulani et al., 2021; Said & El Shafei, 2021; Kuang, 2016).

Kong et al. (2012) studied 1,000 middle-level managers from 52 four-star or five-star state-owned hotels in China, collected and analyzed data using quantitative methods, and used structural equation models to analyze the data and test the causal relationship between the structures. The study found that among the middle-level managers of Chinese hotels surveyed, psychological empowerment was positively correlated with career ability and satisfaction, indicating that when individuals believe their work is meaningful and influential, their overall career satisfaction will increase (Kong et al., 2016). Similarly, Joo and Lim (2013), studied the factors affecting career satisfaction among 303 government civil servants in South Korea. Through structural equation model analysis, they found that employees with high levels of psychological empowerment had higher career satisfaction and emphasized the importance of meaning in work.

Competence, as a dimension of psychological empowerment, is fundamentally related to an individual's belief in their ability to complete tasks effectively. Bharadwaja and Tripathi used a survey research method to collect data from 431 mid-level managers in 12 Indian organizations. The results showed that employees who believed they were competent were more likely to have career satisfaction because their sense of autonomy and ability to influence results contributed to the intrinsic rewards of work (Bharadwaja & Tripathi, 2020). According to Mathew and Nair's meta-analysis, a significant positive relationship exists between psychological empowerment and career satisfaction. Career satisfaction will significantly

improve, especially when employees recognize their abilities (Mathew & Nair,2021). The results showed that employees' overall career satisfaction increased when they felt competent and confident in their roles. Tran et al. (2021) used partial least squares (PLS) to survey 900 employees in the medical industry in Vietnam. They found that when employees were given a high degree of autonomy, they experienced greater psychological freedom in their decision-making process, positively correlated with job motivation and satisfaction. (Tran et al., 2020). This finding was echoed by Kim and Cho, who collected 33,420 cases in the fifth Korean Working Conditions Survey and used a hierarchical regression method to emphasize that job autonomy gives employees the freedom to decide their tasks, thereby increasing their career satisfaction (Kim & Cho, 2020). The ability to exercise autonomy fosters a sense of ownership of work and makes employees more engaged and satisfied.

The impact dimension of psychological empowerment refers to how employees believe they can influence important outcomes in their work environment. This sense of influence is essential for developing a sense of ownership and responsibility, thereby increasing career satisfaction. Li et al. conducted a systematic review and meta-analysis, and the results showed that when nurses believe they have a meaningful impact on their work, their career satisfaction increases (Li et al., 2018). Ahmad and Oranye conducted a descriptive correlation survey of 556 registered nurses in two teaching hospitals in the UK and Malaysia, comparing and analyzing the perception of influence that varies in different environments but always contributes to increased career satisfaction (Ahmad & Oranye, 2010). Joo and Lim found that employees who felt high in work influence and other dimensions of psychological empowerment reported higher career satisfaction (Joo & Lim, 2013).

Numerous studies have shown that psychological empowerment is critical to improving career satisfaction. Studies have determined that the direct relationship between psychological empowerment and career satisfaction is strong, positive, and significant (Mathew, 2021)—psychological empowerment and career satisfaction correlate positively (Türe et al., 2020). Joo & Lim studied transformational leadership in Korean companies and used hierarchical multiple regression analysis to show that when employees perceived high meaning, ability, self-determination, and influence of their work (i.e., psychological empowerment) and when they perceived the idealized influence of their leaders (i.e., a dimension of transformational leadership), they showed higher career satisfaction (Joo & Lim, 2013).

At the same time, there are also studies showing that psychological empowerment can also serve as a mediating variable and have a significant impact on career satisfaction. Tsang et al. (2022) studied how psychological empowerment affects the link between school bureaucracy and teacher burnout. This study revealed the role of psychological empowerment as a mediator in the work environment (Tsang et al., 2022). Lv et al. (2021) explored the mediating role of psychological empowerment between the innovation climate and innovative behavior in nursing organizations. They found that the mediating role of psychological empowerment can affect innovative behavior (Lv et al., 2021). Suherman et al. (2022) also studied how psychological empowerment affects the impact of knowledge sharing on lecturer performance. Together, these studies demonstrate the relevance of psychological empowerment in mediating various factors in the workplace, indicating its potential mediating role between professional identity and satisfaction (Maisarah, N et al., 2022).

However, the impact of psychological empowerment and its four dimensions on career satisfaction is not significant in all cases. In the study of Fock et al. (2011), through an employee survey in the hotel industry in China and Canada, it was found that collectivistic tendencies will increase (weaken) the impact of self-determination (influence) on career satisfaction. No significant results were found for meaning and

competence, and the impact of the four dimensions of empowerment on career satisfaction differs across cultures (Fock et al., 2011). Hui et al.'s (2004) study found that the impact of empowerment on career satisfaction varies depending on the individual's power distance value. Robert et al. (2000) similarly found that empowerment negatively impacts India compared to other sampled countries. Liden et al. (2000) studied the mediating role of empowerment in the relationship between job characteristics and satisfaction among service employees. Only the meaning and competence dimensions were found to be significant. Fulford and Enz (1995) reported in their study of service employees that self-determination did not affect career satisfaction, whereas meaning and influence were significant predictors. These studies highlight that empowerment practices considered adequate in one country may not be appropriate in another cultural context.

These studies confirmed the relationship between psychological empowerment and career satisfaction. Good psychological empowerment can improve career satisfaction in different career situations, which verifies its importance in personal and organizational development and requires managers to pay attention jointly. However, we must also see that the impact of psychological empowerment and the four dimensions on career satisfaction differs across cultural backgrounds.

5. Research Summary and Prospects

Through the review and summary of the literature related to psychological empowerment and career satisfaction in this study, it can be concluded that psychological empowerment is crucial to the development of enterprises or organizations, directly affecting employees' work enthusiasm, initiative, and creativity, and thus having a meaningful impact on employees' career satisfaction. In contrast, career satisfaction is the recognition and belonging of employees to the organization and the performance of individuals' successful career development. Psychological empowerment and its four dimensions positively impact employees' career satisfaction and mediate between variables such as career identity and organizational commitment, thereby strengthening the impact of these factors on career satisfaction.

However, given society's progress and organizational change, combined with previous research results, future research and practice can focus on the following aspects.

First, in the research and measurement of psychological empowerment, Spreitzer's "Workplace Psychological Empowerment Model," published in 1995, is one of the widely supported and consistent models in organizational empowerment models. It is widely used to measure psychological empowerment and is designed according to the four dimensions (Lei & Xu, 2022). However, in actual research, it is necessary to make necessary and perfect revisions based on this basis according to different research backgrounds and objects. For example, in the study of the psychological empowerment of Saudi women by Moubarak et al. (2022), the revised measurement model (MPES-SW) contains 26 indicators, namely "4 for meaning, 10 for influence, 7 for self-efficacy, and 5 for self-determination". It is concluded that "a strong, empowered woman" is a woman who feels meaning, ability, influence, and self-determination, which makes her a "psychologically empowered woman" (Moubarak et al., 2022). Lei and Xu (2022) also proposed a hypothetical model of CETPE in their study on the psychological empowerment of English teachers in Chinese universities, which has five dimensions: status, ability, influence, autonomy, and meaningfulness, and 15 items. It is expected to systematically open up a promising path for the professional development of teachers. (Lei and Xu, 2022)

Second, in the study of career satisfaction, it is necessary to distinguish it from job satisfaction. Many people even think that career and job satisfaction are the same concepts in their research, but the concepts

and connotations of the two are different. Job satisfaction usually refers to an individual's immediate reaction and attitude toward the current job, which is short-term and local (Yang et al., 2020). Career satisfaction is an overall evaluation of the entire career, reflecting an individual's overall view of his or her career choice and career development path (Sun & Wang, 2023).

Third, regarding the impact of psychological empowerment on career satisfaction, although it has been confirmed that psychological empowerment is considered to be an intrinsic motivation that can improve employees' work enthusiasm and career satisfaction, help reduce their willingness to leave, and maintain career stability (Yuan et al., 2020). However, psychological empowerment can also mediate between career identity and career satisfaction, significantly impacting career satisfaction (Zhang et al., 2020; Maisarah, N et al., 2024).

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