

The Impact of Psychological Empowerment on Lecturers' Innovative Behaviour in Malaysian Private Higher Education Institutions

L'IMPACT DE L'HABILITATION PSYCHOLOGIQUE SUR LES COMPORTEMENTS INNOVATEURS DES ENSEIGNANTS DANS LES ÉTABLISSEMENTS DE L'ENSEIGNEMENT SUPÉRIEUR PRIVÉS

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Abstract: Psychological empowerment comprising four cognitive dimensions i.e meaning, competence, autonomy and impact in the context of private higher education institutions was validated. The behavioral outcome of psychological empowerment was operationalized as innovative behavior. This study examined on a sample of 312 lecturers from 25 private higher education institutions in three states (Penang, Kedah and Kelantan) in Malaysia. The study verified the validity of the psychological empowerment scale of comprising four dimensions whereas innovative behaviour scale was unidimensional. Survey data was analyzed using correlation and regression analyses to assess the relationship between psychological empowerment and innovative behaviour as well as the impact of psychological empowerment on the behavioral outcome. The results indicate that psychological empowerment has significant relationship with innovative behaviour. Psychological empowerment is also found to be a significant predictor of innovative behavior (adjusted $R^2 = .109$).

Key words: Academia; Psychological empowerment; innovative behaviour; Private Higher Education; Malaysia

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Résumé: L'habilitation psychologique qui comprend quatre dimensions cognitives, c'est-à-dire le sens, la compétence, l'autonomie et l'impact dans le contexte des établissements de l'enseignement supérieur privés a été validée. Le résultat comportemental de l'habilitation psychologique a été opérationnalisée en tant qu'un comportement innovateur. Cette étude a examiné un échantillon de 312 enseignants de 25 établissements de l'enseignement supérieur privés dans trois provinces (Penang, Kedah et Kelantan) en Malaisie. L'étude a vérifié la validité de l'échelle de l'habilitation psychologique comportant quatre dimensions alors que l'échelle des comportements innovateurs est unidimensionnelle. Les données indiquent qu'il y a une relation significative entre l'habilitation psychologique et les comportements innovateurs. L'habilitation est également un facteur prédictif important de comportements innovateurs.

Mots-Clés: académie; habilitation psychologique; comportements innovateurs; enseignement supérieur privé ; Malaisie

1. INTRODUCTION

In 1991, the Malaysian government unveiled its Vision 2020, the year by which Malaysia would achieve the status of an industrialised and developed country in terms of its economy, national unity, social cohesion, social justice, political stability, government system, quality of life, social and spiritual values, national pride and confidence. Under Vision 2020, the liberalization of education policies has caused democratization, privatization and decentralization of Malaysian education system. The development and changes in education make the educational administration and management could not be effectively done at central level. Decentralization also could overcome bureaucracy and enable decisions and actions, especially those that are not related to policy making, to be carried out at the lower level (Bahagian Perancangan dan Penyelidikan Pendidikan, 1995). According to Associate Professor Dr. Majid Konting, decentralization is difficult to be implemented because the nation's education system is still centralized (Marzita, 2005).

The decentralization of education management system is to promote institution-based management and empowerment of teachers (Lee, 1999). The practices of empowerment have actually being implemented long ago at all levels in the Malaysian Ministry of Education (Bahagian Perancangan dan Penyelidikan Pendidikan, 1995). The department of Educational Planning and Research has proposed a few aspects that ought to be empowered i.e. managing teaching time, controlling the class, communication and developing relationship with the students according to ways that are considered best and suitable with the curriculum used, students' ability and the environment. An empowered teacher has significant authority in the strategy selection process and implementation methods of education policies (Bahagian Perancangan dan Penyelidikan Pendidikan, 1995). Empowerment is defined by the Ministry of Education as 'a professional practice of the educational administration and management'. These empowerment practices include those related to the smooth and efficient implementation of education policy; teachers' and teaching autonomy; and the sharing of power by the leader of the institution with its subordinates (Bahagian Perancangan dan Penyelidikan Pendidikan, 1995).

The concept of empowerment carries different meanings in different context (Zimmerman, 1990). Hence, to study the concept of empowerment at the workplace, Spreitzer (1995a) used the intrapersonal concept specifically for workplace as described by Thomas and Velthouse (1990). This psychological perspective of empowerment focuses on the perception of employee on empowerment (Spreitzer, 1995b, 1997; Thomas & Velthouse, 1990). The level of psychological empowerment experienced could be influenced by geographical location and organizational environment and work (Spreitzer, 1995b). Therefore, the psychological empowerment experienced by lecturers depends the lecturers' perception

of empowerment in their institutions.

Conger and Kanungo (1988) defined psychological empowerment as the process of enhancing the feeling of self-efficacy among the members of an organization through the identification of condition that caused powerlessness and also through the reduction of the powerlessness state. The state of powerlessness can be reduced by giving efficacy information through formal and informal technique of organizational practices (Conger & Kanungo, 1988). The psychological approach to empowerment focused on the intrinsic motivation and not on the managerial practices that are used to increase the level of power owned by the employees (Dee, Henkin & Duemer, 2003).

Based on the definition given by Conger and Kanungo (1988), Thomas and Velthouse (1990) and Spreitzer (1995b) identify four main attributes or cognitions of psychological empowerment i.e. meaning (perceived value of work objectives), competence (feelings of self-efficacy), choice (feeling of self determination or autonomy) and impact (one's perception of his capability to influence). Conceptually, psychological empowerment is a multi-dimensional construct that comprises the four cognitions (Spreitzer, 1995b; 1996).

Meaning is defined by Thomas and Velthouse (1990) as the value of work goal and purpose, in relative to the individual's own value and standard. Spreitzer (1995b) defines meaning as the value of work goal and purpose as perceived by the individual in relative to his own personal mission and expectation. When the organizational mission and goal are congruent to their own value system, employee will feel that their work is important and they care about whatever they do (Spreitzer, 1995b; Thomas & Velthouse, 1990).

Through the competence dimension, employees that are empowered feel that they are efficient and able to influence their work and organization meaningfully (Spreitzer, 1995b). Competence refers to the self-efficacy specific to work i.e ability of an individual to perform his/her job activities with the needed knowledge and skill (Spreitzer, 1995b). Conger and Kanungo (1988) state that competence is knowledge that an individual possess the skills needed to perform his/her job successfully in certain context. On the other hand, Thomas and Velthouse (1990) refer to competence as how far an individual can perform his/her job using high level of skill.

Autonomy or self-determination refers to the feeling of choice possessed by an individual in initiating and controlling his/her actions (Deci, Connell & Ryan, 1989). Work environment that is supporting can increase the employees' autonomy and interest in their work. Employees that have autonomy will make more rational choices, ignite and arrange their own actions (Deci et al., 1989). Autonomy can be seen in making decision especially concerning work methods, procedure, time and effort (Spreitzer, 1995b).

Lastly, impact refers to the extent that an individual can influence its work outcome (Ashforth, 1989). It refers to the extent that an individual feel that his work can affect the overall goal achievement (Thomas & Velthouse, 1990) and how far that an individual believe that he/she can influence the strategic output, management and operation in the workplace (Spreitzer, 1995b). Feedback from colleagues is important to make the teachers feel that they do have impact (Short, 1994).

These dimensions reflect the individual orientation towards his task role (Thomas & Velthouse, 1990) which are the basic core for psychological empowerment in the workplace (Houghton & Yoho, 2005). Low rating in any dimension will lower overall empowerment. Therefore, higher ratings in all dimensions are needed to ensure a high level of empowerment (Lee & Koh, 2001). According to Brancato (2006), a worker should understand the dimensions of psychological empowerment and the strategies related to this concept. The administration should examine each dimension and be ready to take actions necessary to increase the level of employee agreement towards the dimensions and increase the level of psychological empowerment experienced by employee (Hancer & George, 2003).

This study outlines innovative behaviour as the behavioural outcome of psychological empowerment. Innovative behavior can be defined as the ignition, promotion and realization of new ideas in the intended work role (Kanter, 1988; West, 1987; West & Farr, 1989; Woodman, Sawyer & Griffin, 1993). Janssen (2000) defined innovative work behavior as the creation, introduction and application of new

ideas intended in the work role, group or organization for the sake of the role, group and organization performance. The basis of all innovative improvement is idea (Scott & Bruce, 1994) and ideas are developed, proceeded, reacted upon and modified by employees individually (Van de Ven, 1986).

Innovation is often characterized by discontinuous activities (Kanter, 1988). Innovation is viewed as a multistage process with different activities and different individual behaviour necessary at each stage. Therefore, an individual can be expected to involve in any combinations of these behaviours at any particular time (Scott & Bruce, 1994). Innovative behaviour may result from individual reaction toward high work load. Employees try to adapt themselves to the high work load by generating, promoting and implementing ideas to adapt themselves or work environment (Janssen, 2000).

The study conducted by Spreitzer et al. (1999) finds that supervisors who reported higher level of empowerment were seen by their subordinates as more innovative, upward influencing, and inspirational. However, innovative behaviour of lecturers may receive opposition from other lecturers. According to Janssen (2003), an employee who tries to push new ideas is likely to be obstructed by other employees' resistance who have an interest in safeguarding the existing paradigm or want to avoid the uncertainty and insecurity surrounding change.

2. METHODS AND MATERIALS

2.1 Sampling design

This cross sectional study utilizing ex-post facto research methodology and correlational in nature is carried out in 25 higher education institutions in three states in Malaysia, i.e. Penang, Kedah and Kelantan. The sample comprised 312 lecturers. The researcher used multi-stage sampling method to select the states, the institutions and respondents. Random sampling method was used to select the institutions from the list provided by the Department of Higher Education Institution (Private) Administration while convenience sampling was used to select the respondents as the researcher did not have any influence in the selection process. Cochran's (1977) sample size formula and finite population adjustment (Lohr, 1999) was used to determine the sample size. A total of 430 questionnaires were distributed to achieve the 312 completely filled questionnaire, hence, the response rate was 73%.

2.2 Sampling design

Psychological empowerment was measured using 12 items from Spreitzer (1992, 1995b) based on four dimensions, namely meaning, competence, autonomy and impact. The scores from these dimensions are averaged to form an overall score for psychological empowerment for each respondent.

Innovative behaviour of lecturers was measured by adapting the instrument used by Janssen (2000) based on the individual innovative behaviour at the workplace by Scott dan Bruce (1994). This instrument consists of nine items that is filled out by respondents. Three items each are designated to measure the generation, promotion and realization of new ideas.

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

3.1 Verification of psychological empowerment dimensions

Psychological empowerment comprises four different cognitive dimensions: meaning, competence, autonomy and impact (Spreitzer, 1995b; Thomas & Velthouse, 1990). These dimensions reflect the

individual orientation towards his task role (Thomas & Velthouse, 1990) and are the basic core for psychological empowerment in the workplace (Houghton & Yoho, 2005). Low rating in any dimension will lower overall empowerment. Therefore, higher ratings in all dimensions is needed to ensure a high level of empowerment (Lee & Koh, 2001). According to Brancato (2006), a worker should understand the dimensions of psychological empowerment and the strategies related to this concept. The administration should examine each dimension and be ready to take actions necessary to increase the level of employee agreement towards the dimensions and increase the level of psychological empowerment experienced by employee (Hancer & George, 2003).

According to Thomas and Velthouse (1990), psychological empowerment can be increased by changing the psychological environment or climate. This statement is supported by Spreitzer (1992) who states that empowerment is a dynamic phenomenon that is influenced by the context surrounding an individual. The feeling of empowerment can be encouraged or constrained by the things that happen in the environment (Spreitzer, 1992). Table 1 below shows the mean and standard deviation for each variable in this study. Meaning received the highest evaluation compared to other dimensions of psychological empowerment. This shows that lecturers feel that their work is meaningful and important to them. However, comparatively the level of impact received the lowest evaluation by the lecturers (min = 4.57, SD = 1.27). This means that lecturers do not really feel that they can influence their work outcome. They might not feel that their work can affect the overall goal achievement and do not really believe that he/she can influence the strategic output, management and operation in the workplace. Therefore, the dimension of impact should be improved. The level of innovative behaviour is also quite low and need to be improved.

Exploratory factor analysis utilizing principal component method with varimax rotation was carried out and identified three factors that should be maintained based on eigenvalue more than 1. Two of the items supposed to measure competence were included in dimension of meaning while one item measuring competence was included in the dimension of autonomy. However, if the analysis was done using maximum likelihood method with varimax rotation, all three competence items were combined with items for autonomy.

Next, the researcher conducted the scree test to make a more accurate decision and prevent the occurrence of over- or under-factoring. According to Green et. al (1997), the scree test criteria produce more accurate results compared to eigenvalues greater than 1 criteria. The scree test involves visual examination of the graph of eigenvalues plotted on the vertical axis and the factor sequence number plotted on the horizontal axis. The process involves the separation of trivial factors from the “cliff” of nontrivial factors (Cattell, 1966).

Based on the scree plot, it was obvious that the break in the scree line began at the fifth eigenvalue. The fourth factor was obvious because the eigenvalue was very close to 1 i.e. .95 but quite distant compared to the fifth factor with eigenvalue of .50. This means that a large part of variances was caused by the first four factors. Therefore, the number of factors to be retained in the psychological empowerment scale was four. Hence, this study supported Spreitzer’s (1992) theory that states that psychological empowerment is composed of four dimensions.

3.2 Verification of innovative behaviour dimensions

To test the construct validity of innovative behaviour scale, the researcher conducted an exploratory factor analysis utilizing SPSS 15.0. The result of the analysis found that all the items loaded on only one factor with eigenvalue of 6.45. The KMO coefficient of sampling was also sufficient i.e. .92. This illustrates that innovative behaviour is unidimensional because all the items load on only one latent construct. Therefore, the researcher decided to combine all the three subscales under one construct i.e. innovative behaviour. Factor loading value for each item was high ranging from .77 to .88. This means that all items are reliable estimation to measure innovative behaviour construct.

3.3 Relationship between psychological empowerment and innovative behaviour

Correlation analysis was conducted to identify the relationship between psychological empowerment and innovative behaviour. The analysis shows that psychological empowerment has moderate positive relationship ($r = .33$) with innovative behaviour. In terms of the dimensions of psychological empowerment, all the dimensions have low positive relationships with innovative behaviour (r values ranged from .13 to .16). Therefore, it can be concluded that psychological empowerment has significant relationship with innovative behaviour at significance level of .01. Table 2 shows the results of the correlation analysis.

The regression analysis also finds that psychological empowerment has a significant relationship with innovative behavior with $F_{1,310} = 38.94$, $p < .001$. The value of $R^2 = .11$ indicated that 11 per cent of variance in innovative behavior is explained by its linear relationship with psychological empowerment. The value of adjusted R^2 (.11) indicated that 11 per cent of variance in innovative behavior is explained by psychological empowerment after taking the assumptions of fixed-effects model into account. The regression analysis shows that psychological empowerment ($t_{311} = 6.24$, $p < .001$) is a significant predictor of innovative behavior with β value of .33. Based on the regression coefficient, the following regression equation is derived:

$$Y = .55 X_1 + 1.58$$

where: Y = innovative behavior

X_1 = psychological empowerment

Psychological empowerment ($t_{311} = 6.24$, $p < .001$, $\beta = .33$) is also a significant predictor to innovative behavior. A total of 10.9 per cent variance (adjusted $R^2 = .109$) in innovative behavior is explained by psychological empowerment after taking into account the fixed-effects model. Lecturers who have higher level of psychological empowerment are expected to be more likely to create new ideas, work methods, techniques and equipment to solve problems and gain support and endorsement for innovative ideas. They are also more likely to apply and introduce innovative idea and to evaluate the use of innovative ideas. This finding is consistent with that of Spreitzer (1995b) who finds that psychological empowerment has a significant relationship with innovative behavior.

Regression analysis finds that a total of 14 per cent variance (adjusted $R^2 = .14$) in innovative behavior is explained by the dimensions of psychological empowerment after taking fixed-effects model into account. The dimension of impact ($t_{311} = 5.79$, $p < .001$, $\beta = .34$) is a significant predictor of innovative behavior followed by the competence dimension ($t_{311} = 2.28$, $p < .05$, $\beta = .15$). This indicates that lecturers who feel that they have influence and can affect what happen in the institution and have the ability, capability and skills to perform their work are more likely to create, suggest and implement new ideas in the work role, group and institution. They are more likely to create new idea, work methods, techniques and equipments to overcome problem, initiate support and seek endorsement for innovative ideas. They are also more likely to apply and introduce innovative ideas and evaluate the use of innovative ideas.

This study also proves the validity and reliability of the psychological empowerment scale (Spreitzer, 1992) in the work context of private higher education institutions. This scale defined psychological empowerment as a motivational construct manifested through four cognitive dimensions, i.e meaning, competence, autonomy and impact (Spreitzer, 1992; 1995a; 1995b). Therefore, high rating in all dimensions is needed to ensure high level of overall psychological empowerment (Lee & Koh, 2001). First, management ought to evaluate the level of psychological empowerment at their institution to get information on the lecturers' perception about the structure of psychological empowerment. The management should examine each dimension of psychological empowerment and play active role to increase psychological empowerment by focusing on dimensions that are poorly evaluated by lecturers.

5. CONCLUSION

This study proves the validity and reliability of the psychological empowerment scale (Spreitzer, 1992) in the work context of private higher education institutions. The correlation analysis shows that psychological empowerment has significant relationship with innovative behaviour at significance level of .01. On the other hand, the result of regression analysis shows that the dimension of impact is the most important predictor for innovative behaviour ($t_{311} = 5.79$, $p < .001$, $\beta = .34$) followed by the dimension of competence ($t_{311} = 2.28$, $p < .05$, $\beta = .15$).

This study was carried out in three states in Peninsular Malaysia. Similar study is hoped to be carried out in other states as well as in Sabah and Sarawak so that more comprehensive information can be studied and enable generalization to all private higher education institution in the country. Future researchers should combine the quantitative and qualitative methods to gather holistic information on certain variable. Innovative behavior can be verified through observation. This can reduce bias in data collecting and findings with higher validity and reliability can be improved. Future research could also compare the level of psychological empowerment and innovative behavior of lecturers from private higher institutions with those from public higher education institutions.

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TABLES

Table 1. Means and Standard Deviations of Variable

Variable	$\bar{X}$	SD
Meaning	6.34	0.79
Competence	6.15	0.73
Autonomy	5.59	0.97
Impact	4.57	1.27
Psychological empowerment	5.66	0.68
Innovative behavior	4.70	1.16

Table 2. Pearson Correlation between Psychological Empowerment and Innovative Behaviour

Dimensions of Psychological Empowerment	Innovative Behaviour
Meaning	.16(**)
Competence	.16(**)
Autonomy	.13(*)
Impact	.15(*)
Psychological Empowerment	.20(**)

* correlation is significant at .05 level (2-tails).

** correlation is significant at .01 level (2-tails).

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