

Measuring Empowerment  
The Perception of Empowerment Instrument (PEI)

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## ABSTRACT

The concept of employee empowerment is addressed frequently in the organizational communication, organizational behavior, organization theory, organizational development, and management literature, and is of significant interest to organizational and management researchers and practitioners.

Despite all the attention given employee empowerment by both the academic and popular media, and by organizations themselves, there is little agreement among either scholars or practitioners as to the exact nature of the empowerment construct. There is no generally accepted definition of empowerment, and consequently no commonly approved method used to measure it.

Attempts to identify the specific individual components or dimensions of empowerment and to develop measurement around these specific dimensions have only begun recently. The Perception of Empowerment Instrument presented here measures the empowerment dimensions of *autonomy*, *responsibility*, and *participation*. The dimensions measured in the new instrument are based on previous research and earlier assessment scales, but are more behaviorally specific than those measured in any previous scale. Respondents rate their level of agreement to 15 items describing the presence of the three dimensions in their work environment. The scale can be used to compare individuals within groups, or groups within organizations, to identify individual perceptions and areas for organizational intervention and development.

## INTRODUCTION

An effective and useful assessment scale measures a construct by assessing specific behaviors that are inferred from the content of the construct. Theoretical concepts that cannot be measured directly in a real setting are referred to as theoretical constructs. Empowerment is a theoretical construct. As a construct, it cannot be measured directly, but only through the observation of related phenomena. It is important that theoretical concepts be related to sensory impressions in concrete situations. The Perception of Empowerment Instrument measures specific behaviors associated with individual empowerment.

Any measure of a construct may represent part of a broader measure of the same construct. The three dimensions measured by the Perception of Empowerment Instrument are more concrete representations of the empowerment dimensions measured by previous assessment scales. By gaining a clearer understanding of these empowerment dimensions, and of how to measure them in individual employees, scholars and practitioners will be able to design effective organizational strategies and structures that support the development of empowering and empowered organizational cultures.

The Perception of Empowerment Instrument expands the limited amount of work that has been done in an attempt to identify and measure the dimensions of empowerment. The PEI measures empowerment dimensions that are less abstract and more behaviorally specific than those included in any previously validated measure of the construct. The PEI provides a unique measure of the

construct, and broadens the body of knowledge about empowerment and the ability to measure it effectively.

Consultants, researchers, and practitioners using the Perception of Empowerment Instrument as an assessment tool should possess a thorough grounding in the role of empowerment in the workplace in order to provide context and effective processing of individual and aggregate participant scores.

## **DESCRIPTION OF THE INSTRUMENT**

The instrument is composed of 15 items measuring dimensions of autonomy, participation, and responsibility. Each participant should respond to the items in the instrument using the five point Likert-type scoring scale provided on the survey sheet. After completing the survey, each individual can self-score their survey by following the directions on the attached scoring sheet. A scoring interpretation sheet is also provided. A duplicate scoring sheet is provided for the collection and determination of aggregate scores.

## **ADMINISTRATION OF THE INSTRUMENT**

Participants are informed that all responses to the survey will be confidential, and that any scores revealed to the entire group will represent group averages only. A discussion of empowerment does not precede administration of the survey. Individuals are told that the survey measures certain attributes that are important in modern organizations and that when the survey has been completed the findings will be discussed. When all of the participants have

finished scoring their surveys, the facilitator collects the duplicate scoring sheets from each participant.

The facilitator then defines empowerment in terms of the empowerment dimensions included in the survey instrument and briefly discusses the relevance of empowerment in organizational environments. The facilitator determines the group's average overall item scores and, if possible, the group's average item scores for each dimension. The facilitator posts these averages and asks each participant to compare the average group scores to their own average scores. The facilitator leads a dialogue to examine how each participant might respond to the findings with the focus on increasing individual and organizational effectiveness.

## **THEORY BEHIND THE INSTRUMENT**

As mentioned, the empowerment construct has been examined and applied in a broad variety of contexts. Various scholars adopting diverse perspectives have viewed the nature of the construct differently. Nonetheless, a growing body of research indicates certain common dimensions of the empowerment construct can be identified. Three dimensions appear to be particularly important to the construct. These dimensions relate to individual perceptions of self control, control of one's environment, and personal commitment. The three dimensions are discussed below.

## Autonomy

A common dimension of individual empowerment evident in prior research is perceived individual self-control. When empowerment is viewed in the context of a relational dynamic, it is described as the process whereby a leader or manager delegates or shares power with his or her subordinates. Power is seen as the possession of formal authority or control over resources and individuals, and is viewed as the basic element of empowerment.

This common description of empowerment as the simple delegation of authority to subordinates does not address important questions regarding the nature of the individual experience of empowerment. It does not adequately describe a construct which might be much more complex than the simple sharing or shifting of authority. Power, as the basic element of empowerment, is a construct internal to individuals. It addresses their perceptions of their own abilities to successfully deal with the challenges they face. Power in this context is not the power to dominate but rather the power to accomplish. Power from this perspective refers to the intrinsic individual need for self-determination and personal self-efficacy.

Empowerment is the process of enabling an individual by increasing his or her level of perceived self-efficacy through increased self-determination. The dimension of individual empowerment referred to as *autonomy* in the Perception of Empowerment Instrument refers to an individual's perception of the level of freedom and personal control that he or she possesses and is able to exercise in the performance of his or her job.

## **Participation**

This empowerment dimension refers to an individual's perception of his or her influence in producing desired effects in his or her environment. It represents the degree to which an individual feels that he or she has input into their organization's administrative or strategic decisions. This dimension, which represents an individual's perceived influence in organizational decisions and processes beyond his or her specific job requirements, is measured as the *participation* dimension in the PEI.

Individual participation in organizational decision making is an important dimension of individual empowerment. Individual employees cannot become empowered unless they are encouraged to participate fully in developing and improving organizational processes.

## **Responsibility**

This dimension is related to the level of concern, care, commitment or responsibility that an individual brings to a task or position, and to a feeling of psychological investment that produces commitment and energy. The dimension of individual empowerment involving personal commitment, caring, and psychological investment is measured as the *responsibility* dimension in the PEI. Empowered employees exhibit commitment, ownership, and responsibility regarding the jobs they do and the outcomes of the decisions they make. Organizational members in an empowered organization, provided with increased

autonomy, participation, and access to information and knowledge, will respond with increased commitment and effectiveness.

## **DESCRIPTION OF THE SCORING PROCESS**

After completing the survey, respondents transfer their responses from the survey page to the appropriate spaces in Table 1 on the Scoring Sheet. They are reminded to reverse score item #6. Participants add the responses in each dimension and record the number as the dimension total. They divide each dimension total by the number of items in the dimension to find the dimension average. Dimension totals are transferred to Table 2. Individual Dimension scores are totaled to provide a Scale Total. The Scale Total is transferred to Table 3, and divided by the number of scale items to reach an Average Item Score. The records are recorded on the Scoring Sheet and the Duplicate Scoring Sheet. The Duplicate Scoring Sheet is collected by the facilitator and used to determine aggregate scores.

## **HELPING PARTICIPANTS INTERPRET THE SCORES**

An interpretation sheet is attached. Respondents are asked to record their individual scores in the spaces provided, and to record group scores as they are provided by the facilitator. When scores are posted and transferred, the facilitator reviews the definitions of each empowerment dimension, and asks the respondents to look for patterns in their scores relative to the aggregate group scores. The facilitator asks open-ended questions that promote dialogue within

the group regarding the meaning of the scores and individual suggestions regarding how this information may be used to formulate action plans that will improve individual or organizational effectiveness.

## **OTHER SUGGESTED USES FOR THE INSTRUMENT**

Although the instrument is used primarily to generate dialogue, inquiry, and action planning within intact groups, it can also be used to examine variations between intact groups or teams, or within or between organizations.

## **RELIABILITY AND VALIDITY OF THE INSTRUMENT**

### **Reliability**

A test can be described as reliable if it 1) is self-consistent and 2) yields the same score for each respondent (assuming that respondents have not changed) on re-testing. The first measure of reliability described is referred to as internal consistency reliability, and the second is referred to as test-retest reliability. The Perception of Empowerment Instrument demonstrated has been tested for reliability using measures of both test-retest reliability and internal consistency reliability.

Internal consistency reliability estimates were obtained by computing Cronbach's alpha for the responses to the items measuring each of the three empowerment dimensions included in the scale. The items in the *autonomy* factor displayed an internal consistency estimate of .796. The *responsibility*

factor items showed an internal consistency estimate of .803. Analysis of the *participation* dimension items revealed an internal consistency estimate of .866. The test-retest reliability of the instrument was determined by calculating the correlation between paired response sets. The correlation between average scores from the paired response sets was .746.

## Validity

*Content validity* refers to how well an instrument captures the domain or domains of the dimensions of interest. Content validity can be evaluated subjectively by experts in the field of interest. Four experts in the area of empowerment were asked to subjectively evaluate the content validity of the Perception of Empowerment Instrument. All of the panel members strongly agreed that the items in the instrument satisfactorily assessed each of the dimensions. The internal consistency reliability demonstrated by the instrument also indicates that the items in the instrument or instrument factors reflect the same behavioral domain.

*Criterion-related validity* refers to the extent to which a measure demonstrates a correlation with some external indicator of the same attribute. A significant correlation has been demonstrated between responses to the PEI and a previously validated empowerment instrument measuring related dimensions. The correlation between average scores on the Perception of Empowerment Instrument and average scores on the criterion scale was .816.

# Development Survey

Please provide your reactions to the following statements using the scale below.

Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
5	4	3	2	1

ITEM #	ITEM	RESPONSE
1	I have the freedom to decide how to do my job.	
2	I am often involved when changes are planned.	
3	I can be creative in finding solutions to problems.	
4	I am involved in determining organizational goals.	
5	I am responsible for the results of my decisions.	
6	My input is never solicited in planning changes. **	
7	I take responsibility for what I do.	
8	I am responsible for the outcomes of my actions.	
9	I have a lot of autonomy in my job.	
10	I am personally responsible for the work I do.	
11	I am involved in decisions that affect me.	
12	I make my own decisions about how to do my work.	
13	I am my own boss most of the time.	
14	I am involved in creating our vision of the future.	
15	My ideas and inputs are valued.	

# Scoring Form

TABLE 1					
Dimension 1		Dimension 2		`Dimension 3	
Item #	Response	Item #	Response	Item #	Response
1		2		5	
3		4		7	
9		6	**	8	
12		11		10	
13		14			
		15			
DIMENSION TOTAL		DIMENSION TOTAL		DIMENSION TOTAL	
DIMENSION AVERAGE (TOTAL/5)		DIMENSION AVERAGE (TOTAL/6)		DIMENSION AVERAGE (TOTAL/4)	

\*\* Item 6 is reverse scored

TABLE 2					
TOTAL 1	+	TOTAL 2	+	TOTAL 3 =	SCALE TOTAL

TABLE 3		
SCALE TOTAL/3	=	AVERAGE ITEM SCORE

**Instructions:**

1. Transfer your responses from the previous page to the appropriate spaces in TABLE 1. Remember to reverse score item #6.
2. Add the responses in each dimension and record the number as the DIMENSION TOTAL.
3. Divide the DIMENSION TOTAL as shown to find the DIMENSION AVERAGE.
4. Transfer DIMENSION TOTALS to TABLE 2.
5. Add DIMENSION TOTALS to find SCALE TOTAL.
6. Transfer SCALE TOTAL to TABLE 3.
7. Divide SCALE TOTAL as shown to find AVERAGE ITEM SCORE.

## Duplicate Scoring Form

TABLE 1					
Dimension 1		Dimension 2		`Dimension 3	
Item #	Response	Item #	Response	Item #	Response
1		2		5	
3		4		7	
9		6	**	8	
12		11		10	
13		14			
		15			
<b>DIMENSION TOTAL</b>		<b>DIMENSION TOTAL</b>		<b>DIMENSION TOTAL</b>	
<b>DIMENSION AVERAGE (TOTAL/5)</b>		<b>DIMENSION AVERAGE (TOTAL/6)</b>		<b>DIMENSION AVERAGE (TOTAL/4)</b>	

\*\* Item 6 is reverse scored

TABLE 2					
TOTAL 1	+	TOTAL 2	+	TOTAL 3 =	SCALE TOTAL

TABLE 3		
SCALE TOTAL/3	=	AVERAGE ITEM SCORE

**Instructions:**

8. Transfer your responses from the previous page to the appropriate spaces in TABLE 1. Remember to reverse score item #6.
9. Add the responses in each dimension and record the number as the DIMENSION TOTAL.
10. Divide the DIMENSION TOTAL as shown to find the DIMENSION AVERAGE.
  
11. Transfer DIMENSION TOTALS to TABLE 2.
12. Add DIMENSION TOTALS to find SCALE TOTAL.
  
13. Transfer SCALE TOTAL to TABLE 3.
14. Divide SCALE TOTAL as shown to find AVERAGE ITEM SCORE.

## Interpretation Form

RESULT	SELF	GROUP
SCALE TOTAL		
AVERAGE ITEM SCORE		
AVERAGE SCORE DIMENSION 1 (AUTONOMY)		
AVERAGE SCORE DIMENSION 2 (PARTICIPATION)		
AVERAGE SCORE DIMENSION 3 (RESPONSIBILITY)		

### Instructions

Record your scores and the group's scores in the spaces provided.

Remember that a higher score indicates increased strength in that dimension.

Look for patterns in your scores relative to group scores.

Keep these dimension definitions in mind:

#### **Autonomy**

An individual's perception of the level of freedom and personal control that he or she possesses and is able to exercise in the performance of his or her job.

#### **Responsibility**

The level of concern, care, commitment or responsibility that an individual brings to a task or position, and the feeling of psychological investment that produces commitment and energy.

#### **Participation**

The degree to which an individual feels that he or she has input into his or her organization's administrative or strategic decisions, which represents an individual's perceived influence in organizational decisions and processes beyond his or her specific job requirements.

## Biographical Sketch

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Dr. Roller is an independent consultant with extensive experience as a professional manager, consultant, instructor, facilitator, and trainer. He is an expert in change management, organizational design and development, interpersonal and organizational communication, systems thinking, small group facilitation, team building, and experiential training.