

## Concepts and Theories of Empowerment and Competency

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### Abstract

This paper will present the conceptual analysis from the narrative literature review related to empowerment and competency from community development and social work disciplines. In research literature review will identifies, selects, and critically appraises research to clearly define the related concept and formulated question. Empowerment is one of concepts that become popular recently, but the debate on empowerment dates back several decades and frequently used by policy makers, politicians, community workers, social workers, and academicians. Four aspects of empowerment including a sense of efficacy, right to choose, competency, and meaningful. One of the important factors in empowerment is feelings of competence which is describe that people should have the necessary skills, knowledge, experience, and abilities to move forward to achieve empowerment. Competency is a combination of the set of knowledge, skills and abilities required to perform the role as a Social Worker (NASW, 2017) Competency is also used as a guideline that becomes a platform for evaluating the ability of Social Workers and community workers in carrying out their daily duties. Three theoretical approach are related to studies of empowerment including the social structural empowerment theory, psychological empowerment theory and critical perspective.

**Keywords:** Empowerment, Competency, Community Development, Community Worker, Social Worker

### Introduction

Narrative literature review is activities in research to identifies, selects, and critically appraises research to clearly define the related concept and formulated question (Dewey & Drahota, 2016). In the process of carrying out research, a clear understanding of the concept and variables has been studied is very important, therefore narrative or comprehensive literature review is one of the steps that should be done by all researchers.

Empowerment in recent years has become a significant topic in community development and social work. Empowerment definitions vary widely across scholars. Various research studies describe empowerment as intrinsic duty motivation (Conger & Kanungo, 1988; Thomas & Velthouse, 1990) or motivation reflective of the person–environment fit (Zimmerman, 1990). Others have defined it as the perception (Parker, and Price 1994) as a commitment-based design (Spreitzer, 1996), and in terms of duty structure the move of power or authority. Empowerment is giving employees a certain degree of autonomy and responsibility for decision-making about their specific organizational tasks (Dobre, 2013). It allows decisions to be made at the lower levels of an organization where employees have a unique view of the issues and problems facing the organization at a certain level.

Competency explains how the level of role, skills and expertise required by Social Workers to deal with different individual and social problems in society (Delavega et al., 2018; Sopian, 2017; Jada & Mukhopadhyay, 2019). Competency is also linked to attitudes in the practice of social work that has a close relationship with the response of the system and community environment including culture, language, class, race, ethnicity, religion, and diversity factors in a community where the social work service is delivered (Siti Hajar et al., 2020, Gallegos et al., 2008). It includes a set of behaviours and attitudes among social work professionals to enable systems, agencies, or professionals to work effectively in cross-cultural situations. It also includes the integration and transformation of knowledge about individuals and groups in standards, policies, practices, and attitudes used in appropriate cultural settings for community development (Siti Hajar et al., 2020).

As a profession, Social Workers act as a driving force to solve social and humanitarian problems based on science and values by fulfilling the wishes and aspirations of people. Its main task is to improve the social function of individuals or groups in their environment. It is also the basis for producing competent and competent Social Workers in carrying out welfare service responsibilities (Zhao & Liu, 2020). The existence of KPKS also supports the mission and vision of JKM in fulfilling the wishes of the Ministry of Women, Family and Community Development (WFCDM) and complying with the National Social Policy (NSP) in the aspect of community development which ultimately results in social well-being.

### **Literature Review**

Empowering principals is one of the most important principals' needs and it is a significant potential capacity for optimal use of employee abilities and developing creativity and innovation in carrying out activities and improving the organization in general (Khany & Tazik, 2016). Management of organizational transformation has introduced the principals' empowerment as an effective strategy to improve human resources performance (Conger & Kanungo, 1988; Alnaser et al., 2018). They believe that empowerment of human resources is one of the new-age attitudes that organizations apply nowadays and in fact, it is the answer to the critical needs of contemporary management.

Although empowerment allows leaders to use the knowledge, skills, and experience of everyone within the organization, but a few leaders and groups know how to create an empowerment culture (Blanchard et al., 1999; Cheong et al., 2019). Empowerment begins by making some changes in beliefs, thoughts, and attitudes. This means, leaders must be convinced that they have the ability and competence to perform their tasks successfully and feel that they have the freedom to act and independence in carrying out their activities and believe that they could influence and control the job results. They should feel that they pursue

meaningful and worthwhile career goals (Gardner and Pierce, 2016; Shor, 2012). A prerequisite technique for achieving these goals is motivated and empowered leaders. Thus, organizations in today's complex and dynamic world must find this potential and use it. Empowered leaders improve the organizations and the way they work, put feelings in their lives and works, and their engagement with this subject makes a continuous improvement in systems and processes (Ellsworth, 1989; Jada and Mukhopadhyay (2019).

Kim et al (2018) examined the relationship between perceived structural empowerment, psychological empowerment, exhaustion, and intention to stay in a nursing job. Based on structural modelling, structural empowerment, and psychometric empowerment, had a positive and significant effect on the intention of staying in nursing jobs and had a negative effect on job burnout. Chan et al (2013) conducted research with the goal of analysing the relationship between motivational empowerment and competency with the job performance of project principals in an organization in China. Findings supported the relationship between competency and alignment and their effect on job performance. Stanley et al (2013) explored the relationship between the alignment and control location with staff dedication and performance. The results showed that the perceived empowerment dimensions and dedication were affected by the modifier variable, control location.

The empowerment aspects had a significant and positive effect on staff dedication. Singh and Sarkar (2012) examined the relationship between psychological empowerment and the development of innovative behaviours in terms of the role of job-adjustment modalities. In this study, 401 teachers were studied in India. The findings of this study showed that self-determination at occupational and organizational levels was directly associated with innovative behaviours. Sufficiency and effectiveness did not have a direct or indirect effect on initiative behaviours. Mendes and Stander (2011); Amundsen (2015) conducted research to investigate the relationship between job empowerment, job satisfaction, job insecurity and employee involvement using correlation. The results showed that there was a definite relationship between job empowerment, job insecurity and employee involvement. The results of multivariate variance analysis showed that job insecurity had a significant effect on the three aspects of psychological empowerment (competence, meaningfulness, and effectiveness), and job involvement. Job insecurity had a moderating effect on the relation between psychological integration and job involvement.

Empowerment is often defined as the act of giving people the opportunity to make workplace decisions by expanding their autonomy in decision-making (Vogt, 1997). Also, empowerment is described as the breaking down of traditional hierarchical structures (Blanchard, 1997). From a service viewpoint, empowerment gives subordinates the authority to give decisions about customer service issues. Management from the industry sector and organizational psychologists, empowerment to them is an enrichment of the autonomy of employees in their work, thus increasing employee involvement in decision-making for the better interests of the organization Geroy et al (1998) insisted that organizational perspective empowerment calls for an act of providing employees with the essential guidance and skills for giving autonomous decisions and their accountability and responsibility for those decisions.

An empowered and committed workforce is generally claimed to be essential for the effective functioning of modern organizations (Bowen, 1992). Employee empowerment is a significant drive-in facilitating commitment to the firm. Empowerment is measured through two constructs. One is psychological. empowerment construct, which has received much

attention from researchers in many business fields (Thomas and Velthouse, 1990). Three key organizational practices associated with empowerment, climate is autonomy boundaries, information sharing, and team accountability (Blanchard, 1997). Organizational climate perceptions are related to each attitude and behavior. Empowerment is defined as increased intrinsic task motivation manifested in a set of four cognitions (task assessments) reflecting the individual orientation to his or her job role: meaningfulness, impact, competence, and choice (Spreitzer, 1995). The meaningfulness concept is regarded as the individual intrinsic help on a given task and is concerned with the value of the task goal, judged to the individual own value system, ideas, and/or standards. In other words, feelings of meaning or purpose emerge out of a fit between the needs of work role and beliefs, values, and behaviors. Lack of meaningfulness is believed to result in indifference and feelings of lack of involvement that are unfavorable to job motivation and excellence of job performance.

Competence is the degree to which an individual can do a job or activity competently when one tries it. It is regarded as self-efficacy (Bandura, 1986). This competence should be specific to the individual job and distinguished from self-respect as the former dealt with a job role, in contrast to the latter being a global efficacy. Certainly, self-efficacy, under social cognitive theory, has proven to have created interest in most researchers in the field of contemporary psychology. To date, more than 10,000 studies have been conducted worldwide over the past 25 years. There is a vast amount of evidence acknowledging the existence of a positive relationship between self-efficacy and competency.

The result of Farooq & Aslam (2011), study depicts the positive correlation between training and employee performance as  $r=.233$ . Thus, we can predict from this finding that it is not possible for the firm to gain higher returns without the best use of its human resources, and it can only happen when a firm is able to meet its employee job-related needs in a timely fashion. Training is the only way of identifying the deprived need of employees and then building their required competence level so that they may do well to make organizational goals.

A Study by Suresh and Jaleel (2015) on the impact of Employee Empowerment on Organizational Performance. A Case of Automobile Industry in Chennai City of Tamil Nadu in India. It consists of 100 Employee leaders/Employee members and 87 have responded. It showed the high contribution of employee empowerment to Organizational performance. The value of R squared ( $R^2$ ) = 78.8 % and Adjusted  $R^2$  is almost 78.6%. Positive 0.76 correlation coefficient between empowerment and organizational performance.

The beta coefficient of Employee empowerment is .88. This indicates that Employee empowerment brings enough variation in the dependent variable. The paper major finding was that highly empowered employees are effective. In the research established that there is a positive relationship between Employee empowerment and Organizational performance. Moreover, the study results of Sultana et.al (2012), conducted in the telecom sector of Pakistan, state the  $R^2$  as .501 which means that 50.1% of the variation in employee performance is brought by training programs. Further, the T-value was 8.58 that explains training is the best predictor of employee performance.

As depicted by the work of Ackerson and Harrison (2000); Zhao (2020) learning through training influences organizational performance by greater employee performance and is said to be a key reason in the achievement of corporate goals. However, implementing training

programs as a solution to covering performance issues such as filling the gap between the standard and the actual performance is an effective way of improving employee performance (Swart, 200; Wingerden, 2020)

Skorkova's (2016) study on empowering public sector employees to improve performance explored the link between various empowerment practices and perceived performance in federal agencies. It is found that empowerment practices aimed at providing employees with access to job-related knowledge and skills and at granting them discretion to change work processes have a positive and substantively significant influence on perceived performance. Other empowerment practices geared toward providing employees with information about goals and performance and offering them rewards based on performance are found, however, to have little bearing on perceptions of performance.

According to Swart (2005); Ahmad (2018) bridging the performance gap refers to implementing a relevant training intervention for the sake of developing skills and abilities of the workers and enhancing employee performance. He further elaborates the concept by stating that training facilitates the organization to recognize that its workers are not performing well and thus their knowledge, skills and attitudes need to be molded according to the firm needs. There might be various reasons for the poor performance of the employees such as workers may not feel motivated any more to use their competencies, maybe not being confident enough in their capabilities, or they may face work-life conflict.

All the above aspects must be considered by the firm while selecting the most proper training intervention that helps organizations to solve all problems and enhance employee motivational levels to take part and meet firm expectations by showing desired performance. As mentioned by Swart (2005) this employee, superior performance occurs only because of good quality training programs that lead to employee motivation and the fulfillment of their needs.

According to Wright and Geroy (2001), the study noted that employee competency changes through effective training programs. It not only improves the overall performance of the employees to effectively perform the current job but also enhances the knowledge, skills and attitude of the workers necessary for the future job, thus contributing to superior organizational performance. Through training the employee competency development and enabling them to carry out job-related work efficiently and meet firm goals in a competitive way. However, employee performance is also affected by some environmental factors such as corporate culture, organizational structure, job design, performance appraisal systems, power and politics prevailing in the firm and the group dynamics. If the above-mentioned problems exist at the firm, employee performance decreases not due to a lack of relevant knowledge, skills and attitude, but because of the above-mentioned hurdles. To make training effective and to make sure the positive effect of training on employee performance these elements be taken into consideration (Suresh and Jaleel, 2015)

Bartel (1994) and Bester Stander and Van (2015), reported that there is a positive correlation between effective training programs and employee productivity. However, to make it possible, it is the responsibility of the managers to find the factors that hinder training program effectiveness and should take necessary measures to neutralize their effect on employee performance.

Generally, it can be debatable that the effect of the training program on employee outcomes such as motivation, job satisfaction and organizational commitment, has not received much attention so far. A rare work has been done to test whether firms can affect their workers' attitudes, through proper training interventions. According to c. training is planned in such a way that it results in organizational commitment. On the other hand, Gaertner and Nollen (1989) proposed that employee commitment is a result of some human resource practices, that is, succession planning and promotions, career development and training opportunities. All these practices, when achieved, result in greater employee performance. Moreover, Meyer and Smith (2000), investigate the link between Human Resource Management practices and organizational commitment, to discover the causes of effective employee performance (Hao et al., 2018).

**Methodology**

This paper was based on narrative literature review and in terms of methodology, required information was collected by reviewing books and journal articles and papers in the research field using a checklist. This paper will present the conceptual analysis from the literature review related to empowerment and competency from community development and social work disciplines. These literature review identifies, selects, and critically appraises research to clearly define the related concept and formulated question. Definition and understanding of all concepts and variables will be use in the actual research.

**Empowerment Concept**

Empowerment is widely used in different ways. Many of the managers talk about empowerment in the workplace and the writers and experts recommend empowerment management as the solution to many organizational problems. Empowerment has been used in areas such as social work, urban redevelopment, and external development for many years in the public and private sectors.

Empowerment means sharing power and 1) judgment (work value), 2) competence (ability to do the task), 3) independence (choice of action and initiative), and 4) impact (the ability to affect organizational outcomes). Mirklaei et al (2013) argued that empowerment is guiding the decision-making process in the lower ranks of the organization. Zanganeh et al (2014) have defined empowerment as transferring responsibility to those closest to the problem. They believed that work, vote independence, power, commitment, and culture affect empowerment.

No.	Authors	Approach	Concepts / Terms
1.	Bowen and Lawler, Blanchard.	Mechanical / rational / structural approach	Delegation of power and authority
2.	Kanger and Kanengo	Motivational approach	Staff autonomy and self-sufficiency
3.	Thomas and Voltheus, Spritzer.	Psychological approach	Internal motivation
4.	Gary, Phillip and Anderson	Cognitive approach	Increasing knowledge and skills

5.	Quinn & Spritzer	Cultural value approach	Strengthen beliefs, ethics and commitment
6.	Robbins, Crino and Ferdinand	Integrated approach	Environmental factors, individual elements, managerial strategies

**Competency Concepts**

No.	Authors	Concepts / Terms
1.	McClelland 1973)	Competence is defined as the skills, knowledge, personal attributes, motives, social roles and self-image needed by all to obtain superior and effective work performance in a job.
2.	Boyatzis (1982)	The nature or personal characteristics of an individual that determine the excellence of performance in a job.
3.	Mirabile (1985)	Knowledge, skills, or personal characteristics of a person are required in his job to achieve success in job performance.
4.	Spencer & Spencer (1993)	Traits, personal characteristics or basic values of a person that are the reason for achieving superior and effective performance.
5.	Dubois (1993)	Personal characteristics or attributes of a person that are used in various forms either separately or in groups and can produce success in performance.
6.	Hartle (1996)	The nature or personal characteristics of an individual that have been shown to achieve effective work performance. It includes competencies that are based on elements of nature and motive as well as clear competencies such as knowledge and skills.
7.	Blancero, Boroski, Dyer (1996)	Skills, knowledge, abilities, and other characteristics required to perform a desired task in the future.
8.	Mansfield (1996)	Skills or attributes required by an employee to achieve effective job duties.
9.	McLagan (1997)	Skills and knowledge that are the basis for achieving effective performance.
10.	Marelli (1998)	A measured human ability to achieve effective work performance.
11.	Weinert (2001)	Is a combination of a complex system consisting of cognitive skills, intellectual abilities, motivational tendencies, domain-specific strategies, personal value orientation and

		behaviours, control system appeals, routines and subroutines, and content-specific knowledge.
12.	Kurz and Balrtram Kurz (2008)	Is a response activity and involves processes and capabilities that will complete the demands of a task in the job rather than about the performance and behaviours themselves.
13.	Jackson, Schuler and Jiang (2014)	A pattern in the form of behaviours and skills, abilities or knowledge or other characteristics required by an individual in carrying out his duties effectively.
15.	Shermon (2004)	The nature or personal characteristics of a person make the individual able to achieve the best performance in a certain situation or in the field of work.
16.	Draganidis and Mentzas (2006)	A combination of clear or implicit behaviours and knowledge and the skills possessed allows him to achieve the effective potential to achieve performance in job tasks.
17.	Boyatzis and Sala (2004)	An ability related to a set of behaviours is called an intention. Therefore, behaviours is the result of intentions that can be applied in various situations and times.
18.	Koepfen, Harttig, Klieme and Leutner (2008)	Competence is a concept that is able to form a relationship that is specific and closely related to the real world.
19.	Tripathi and Ranjan (2009)	Competence is not a concrete action that is easy to imitate. It is an action driven by a person's basic skills, knowledge and personality and can be a manifestation if driven with the intention to deepen the field.
20.	Xiong and Lee 2011)	Competence is a measure of the application of knowledge and skills used to measure a person's intellectual performance.
21.	Blömeke, Gustafsson and Shavelson (2015)	A structure or theory that cannot be separated because even though the aspects of competence are different, they are interconnected with each other and act in certain situations with each other and result in a behaviour that can be seen.

### Theoretical Review

Three theoretical approaches are used in most studies of empowerment: the social structural perspective, the psychological approach, and the critical perspective. The social structural perspective focuses its attention on developing or redesigning organizational policies, practices, and structures to give employees power, authority, and influence over their work. The psychological approach focuses on enhancing and enabling personal effectiveness by



helping employees develop their sense of meaning, competency, self-determination, and impact. The critical perspective challenges the notion of employee empowerment and argues that efforts to create empowerment may lead to more, albeit less obvious, controls over employees. Several various theories attempt to describe employee empowerment through motivation within the discipline of psychology. Most of these theories are divided into the four broad categories of need-based, cognitive process and behavioral and job-based. However, this article will discuss empowerment theories that relate to it.

### **(i) Kanter Structural Empowerment Theory**

Structural empowerment focuses on empowering management practices. This includes delegating decision-making from superiors to reduce the level of organization and to advance access to information and resources for subordinates at the lower level within an organization (Heller, 2003).

Referring to Kanter (1977), the structural empowerment theory is a good framework to clarify concepts in relation to negative work behavior. Moreover, Kanter (1977, 1993) argues that people rationally react to situations that they find by themselves. When particular situations are arranged in a way of which employees feel empowered, so they are likely to be more satisfied with their job and feel achieving high-quality results. Empowerment occurs when the work environment is organized in a way of which employees are allowed to do their jobs freely. Such a situation emerges an organizational structure that Kanter believes. In other words, it is essential for the development of empowerment to have access to information, receive assistance, have access to resources that are required for work, and have an opportunity to learn and grow. The admittance of structural empowerment can be facilitated through formal employment characteristics. In other words, the employees' jobs are visible and fundamental to achieving the organizational goals. Furthermore, these enable employees to increase their empowerment flexibility.

Kanter's (1993) theory of structural empowerment deals with a dialogue between organizational performance and employee autonomy. According to the theory, empowerment is best to suffice in work settings that give individuals access to information, resources, support, and the occasion to learn and develop. Kluska et al (2004) also, noted that emotional empowerment embraces feelings of competence, autonomy, job meaningfulness, and an ability to influence the organization.

Individuals who are empowered are highly committed to the organization, more accountable for their work, and better able to fulfill job demands in an effective way (Degner, 2005). Surduli et al (2016) noted that Kanter's theory has been widely applied to the practice of professional nursing showing how structures within the place of work make possible access to resources can allow employees to carry out their work in effective ways. As noted by Erickson et al (2003), empowerment is thought to occur when an organization sincerely engages people and progressively responds to this engagement with mutual interest and intention to promote growth (Surduli et.al., 2016). Empowerment develops over time as employees gain greater control over their lives and increasingly take part in decisions that affect them. "The findings of Erickson et al, have suggested that membership on a Collaborative Governance committee increased the participant's sense of empowerment and fostered self-growth and organizational development". The principles associated with four guiding concepts support successfully shared governance structures. These concepts include equity (the integration of roles to make common goals and the willingness of each member

to give collectively toward a common goal), ownership (recognition by the individual of the connection between his or her personal job performance and the success of the organization), partnership (development of relationships to promote mutual respect, enhanced communication, and collaboration to meet organizational objectives), and accountability which is willingness to invest in decision-making and sharing a sense of responsibility for individual and collective outcomes (Batson, 2004; Porter-O'Grady, 2007).

### **(ii) Psychological Empowerment Theory**

Psychological empowerment is a condition employees need to acquire so their working empowerment actions can succeed. Psychological empowerment is a logical impact of management's efforts to constitute circumstances of empowerment in the workplace (Laschinger et al., 2001b). Instead, Spreitzer and Mishra (2002) state that psychological empowerment allows employees to confront their stress in the working situation in order to improve their loyalty to their organization, even in difficult situations.

Moreover, Thomas and Velthouse (1990); Spreitzer (1995) define psychological empowerment as an intrinsic motivation to carry out the employees' tasks. This intrinsic task motivation is embedded into four dimensions of consciousness or cognitions that reflect employees' adjustments to their work. The first dimension is meaningfulness which is valued as the employees' individual standard on working goals (Thomas and Velthouse, 1990). The second dimension is competence or self-efficacy. This refers to the employees' belief of ability on how they perform their office activities skillfully (Gist, 1987; Kim and Beehr, 2020). Competence in this context refers to how employees can play their roles at work and how they work effectively, but not as global effectiveness. The third dimension is self-determination employees may feel having an opportunity to decide, start, and regulate particular actions by themselves (Deci et al., 1989). The last dimension is the impact which refers to the degree to which employees can influence the strategies and the results of operations in the workplace (Ashforth, 1989, Kim et al., 2018).

### **Research Gap and Conclusion**

The literature review suggests that empowerment as part of motivation has been an area of interest for human resource professionals, managers, owners and researchers. Various aspects of empowerment have been studied in recent years, but there are very few studies conducted on empowerment with a common approach to all organizations on motivating their employees leave alone a common empowerment context. On the motivation side, there exist several theories with differing views. These include need-based theories, cognitive theories, drive and reinforcement theories. Most of the literature reviews emphasize empowerment through two approaches, namely psychological empowerment and climate empowerment.

According to Boussalem (2014); Onsardi et al (2017), studied the relationship between employee empowerment by meaningfulness, autonomy, the know-how of the employee and impact on work performance and excellence, furthermore at investigated empowerment of the employees in health organizations having identified empowerment factors as serving others, coaching others, mentoring others and, monitoring others as employees. On the other hand, employee effectiveness outcomes are introduced by employee satisfaction and employee performance about their extra efforts. From the above-cited studies and others, it's evident that empowerment has been exhaustively dealt with.

According to Robbins et al (2015) although empowerment has been defined as instinctive incentives or reactions to an instinctive stimulus in many studies, empowerment is the adoption of a specific plan, adoption of the job's new structure, power transfer, authority delegation, and participation in information and resources. These three scholars argued that by focusing on environmental factors and individual elements, the best empowerment process can be attained. The most basic step in this process is creating a job environment with a broad organizational context to create an opportunity to benefit from all areas and aspects of empowerment and to provide the motivation required to develop it.

However, despite abundant research studies in the private sector, there is little evidence that empowerment based on employee training, employee access to information and employees' inputs and feedback of their area of work and job-related in the public sector is addressed. Therefore, this article bridges the gap by investigating the effect of empowerment under employee training, employees' inputs and control and accessibility of information as it influences the competency and organizational performance in the public sector.

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