

Employee empowerment and personality attributes



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This paper attempts to establish a link between the personality attributes of Machiavellianism, self-esteem, risk-taking propensity along with type A personality and workplace empowerment. The papers hypotheses state that there exist definite links between the above co-relates of an individual, and how empowered he or she feels at the workplace. The paper also links employee empowerment to innovative behaviour, and states that innovative behaviour is a function of empowerment.

Typically, there are 3 phases which associates an employee with an organization: Employee Attraction, Employee Retention and Employee Exit. Empowering employees at the first 2 stages would enable the organization to retain the employee, develop a positive connect between the employee and the organization, and enable him or her to contribute to overall organization success. Empowerment calls for a substantial increase in the influence that employees have in an organization. In the knowledge-based emerging economy which is globally connected through Information Technology, decentralized decision-making plays a significant role.

This paper studies the variables associated with Machiavellianism, self-esteem, risk-taking propensity, type A personality and workplace empowerment, along with some of the tools developed to measure these attributes. It then attempts to create a model by connecting the common variables of these personality co-relates with those of workplace empowerment, hence explaining the impact that these co-relates have on how empowered an employee feels. The paper also examines the impact of employee empowerment on innovation. The scope of this paper is restricted

to creating the hypotheses, and further empirical research can be undertaken to prove/disprove them.

Employee Empowerment

That the term 'empowerment' is so widely used today in 'progressive' management circles suggests not just manipulative intent but an awareness that even in periods of deep recession the boundaries of workplace control continue to be challenged by workers striving to attain a measure of power, security and dignity.

– James W. Rinehart

Empowerment is one of the critical issues confronting the managers in the process of transforming organizations. Theoretically it is accepted as democratizing function with the employee involvement and commitment as key factors.

Employee Empowerment was referred to as a “ process of enhancing feelings of self-efficacy among organizational members through the identification of conditions that foster powerlessness and through their removal both by formal organizational practices and informal techniques of providing efficacy information.” (Conger & Kanungo, 1988).

An empowered person or a team has a better control over his/her surroundings and more specifically the work area. Conger and Kanungo (1988) popularized this concept and gave it relational as well as motivational dimensions. More specifically, Employee Empowerment was referred to as a “ process of enhancing feelings of self-efficacy among organizational

members through the identification of conditions that foster powerlessness and through their removal both by formal organizational practices and informal techniques of providing efficacy information.” Thomas and Velthouse (1990) approached the concept in a structured manner. They developed the empowerment process in terms of changes in cognitive variables that determine motivation in workers. Conceptually, empowerment was made more precise by identifying it with a type of motivation i. e. ‘intrinsic task motivation’ and a set of task assessments that provide this motivation. The proposed model also attempted to capture the interpretive processes through which the workers arrive at these assessments. Empowerment hence was viewed by these two authors as a motivational construct and how to achieve this motivation.

Bowen and Lawler (1992) focused on empowering management practices including delegation of decision making from higher to lower organizational levels, increasing access to information and resources from higher to lower levels.

Spreitzer (1995) defined Employee Empowerment as a motivational construct manifested in four cognitions-meaning, competence, self-determination and impact. Meaning implies the value of a work goal or purpose, judged in relation to an individual’s own ideas or standards. Competence or self-efficacy is an individual’s belief in his or her ability to perform activities with skill. Where competence is a mastery of behaviour, self-determination is an individual’s sense of having choice in initiating and regulating actions. Impact is the degree to which an individual can influence strategic administration or operating outcomes at work.

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Menon (1999) dwelt on three major psychological facets of power and defined psychological empowerment as a cognitive state characterized by a sense of perceived control, perceived competence and goal internalization. Perceived control includes beliefs about authority, decision-making, latitude and availability of resources, autonomy in scheduling etc. The second dimension of perceived competence reflects role mastery, which in addition to successful completion of assigned tasks also requires coping up with the non-routine tasks. The goal internalization dimension captures the energizing property of a worthy cause or exciting vision provided by the organization leadership.

By itself, employee empowerment has no specific definition. It is an essentially contested concept. It depends on what we think, not only in factual terms and in particular cases, but also in sweeping historical, political and theoretical terms (Doughty).

According to Doughty, employee empowerment could represent any of the below fundamentally contradictory schools of thought, each with its own set of assumptions, perceptions, judgements and reflections:

It could be a strategy by the management to placate their employees and lull into them a false sense that they matter and play an important role in the workplace

It could be an important concept in organization psychology which has the potential to build an efficient and flexible workplace by increasing job satisfaction and self actualization of the employee

The first group (opponents) argue that the basis of any human relationship is dominance and control. Individual satisfactions and personal frustrations are inevitable in any structural relationship. This group of the view is that any move or process to 'empower' employees at the workplace is merely cosmetic in nature and would only subdue or mask any oppression, but not address or eliminate it altogether.

The second group (proponents) argue that workplace atmosphere, productivity and motivation will improve by bringing people together and giving them more responsibilities. Their perspective is that employee empowerment is intended to reduce mental anguish, existential angst and emotional fatigue that workers experience when:

They are denied considerations as individuals

They are treated with less respect than what they think they deserve

Their experience is discounted and their opinions are dismissed

They are subjected to constant monitoring

They have no say in their routine and they are micromanaged

Employee empowerment promotes shared responsibility between the organization and the employees, which creates a culture of mutual respect, trust and bonhomie thereby resulting in a positive organizational culture.

Thus, employee empowerment is a means to increase the collective efficiency of the workplace and at the same time enhance the employee's

quality of working life. Employees who are content and feel empowered will be proud of their work.

The creation of a contented, competent and perhaps even enthusiastic organization depends on both its leadership and its subordinate staff being persuaded of the efficacy of employee empowerment in a corporate culture and possessing the will to see it through (Doughty).

Variables

Authority

Loyalty

Commitment

Self-efficacy

Persistence

Meaningfulness

Competence

Impact

Self-determination

Intrinsic motivation

Information

Measuring Employee Empowerment

There is a dearth of tools to measure employee empowerment. However, some attempts were made, which are as under:

Spreitzer (1995) developed an instrument based on the four cognitions proposed by the Thomas Velthouse model. These four dimensions of meaning, competence, self-determination and impact reflect an active orientation to the work role. The 12 item tool considered empowerment to be a continuous variable and a motivational construct specific to work domain and not global in nature.

Leslie (1998) created and tested a Worker Empowerment Scale (WES) in an attempt to fill the perceived gap created by lack of earlier instruments to empirically measure changes in the perceived sense of empowerment among staff and to measure differential levels of empowerment. An original pool of 51 items was tested and reduced to 24. WES with 18 items was validated and divided into 3 subscales of 6 statements each, namely; empowerment and personal work orientation, empowerment and control of work environment and empowerment and work relationships. The WES provided a tool that could be used for a quick assessment of workers' perceived empowerment.

Menon (1999) used an original pool of 60 items to measure psychological empowerment in three cognitive areas; sense of perceived control, perceptions of competence and internalization of goals and objectives. The questionnaire included items from existing scales to measure centralization,

delegation, consulting, global self-esteem, job involvement and citizenship behaviour.

Konczack (2000) determined that Thomas and Velthouse multifaceted construct of empowerment and the Spreitzer measures did not adequately provide a means to measure leader behaviour that encouraged empowerment. They proposed seven dimensions of leader empowering behaviour i. e. delegation of authority, accountability, encouragement of self-directed problem solving, information sharing, skill development and coaching for innovative behaviour. LEBQ when compared with Spreitzer empowerment scale reported that with the exception of the competence component, the correlation coefficients between LEBQ and the empowerment components were moderate to large.

Cloete, et. al. (2002) validated a 90 item Employee Empowerment Questionnaire (EEQ) using an instrument developed by Scott and Jaffe (1992) as the base. The original instrument was based on the following dimensions or qualities: clarity of purpose, morale, fairness, recognition, teamwork, participation, communication and healthy environment. Since the metric properties of Scott and Jaffe instrument were found to be inadequate, Cloete and others developed a more comprehensive EEQ. Gender, age, length of service, qualifications and mother tongue were also included.

A Partial Nomological Network

H2

Self – esteem

H3

Employee Empowerment

Innovation

Risk taking propensity

H5

H4

Type A personality

H1

Machiavellianism

The above figure depicts a partial nomological network of employee empowerment. An employee's perception of being empowered is shaped by personality attributes; and empowerment in turn shapes innovative behaviour. We now get into the hypotheses regarding the various antecedents and consequences of the above network.

Antecedents of employee empowerment

Machiavellianism

In the actions of men ... from which there is no appeal, the end justifies the means.

– Niccolo Machiavelli (1531)

Machiavellianism is the belief that people will resort to persuasive, manipulative behaviour in order to achieve their goals (Machiavelli, 1513/1952). The term 'Machiavellianism' usually has a negative perception. It defines the extent to which individuals hold a cynical view of human nature and has internalized manipulative traits. High mach individuals are opportunistic, and use guile and deception in their interpersonal affairs. They tend to be politic, impersonal, and exploitive. They generally are unconcerned with conventional morality, have low ideological commitment, and exhibit a lack of emotional involvement with others. Low machs as opposed to high machs, tend to open themselves emotionally to others and take others' needs and concerns as their own. They are more likely to become emotionally involved with other people and with sensitive issues. They also are more apt to adhere to norms of fair play and reciprocity (Christie & Geis, 1970).

Machiavellian individuals are willing to sacrifice ethics in order to obtain their objectives. According to Calhoun's (1969),

' A definition of the twentieth century Machiavellian administrator is one who employs aggressive, manipulative, exploiting and devious moves in order to achieve personal and organizational objectives. These moves are undertaken according to perceived feasibility with secondary consideration (what is necessary under the circumstances) to the feelings, needs and/or rights of others'

So far, research on the relation between Machiavellian orientation and behavioural outcomes has been substantial. High Mach individuals tend to

manipulate more, persuade other more than they are persuaded when compared to low Machs (Ramanaiah et al., 1994). Thus, they tend to be distrustful of others and as such, may act in an unethical way. Research suggests that Machiavellian orientation can predict unethical employee actions (Andersson & bateman, 1997). Gemmill and Heisler (1972) studied 150 managers working in a large manufacturing firm in the Northeastern section of the United States and found a positive relation between Machiavellian orientation and job strain, and formal control. However, the relation with job satisfaction was negative, with no relation to upward mobility. A recent study by Chung C. Liu (2008) concluded that managers can predict employees' knowledge sharing willingness based on the employees' Machiavellian orientation, and that Machiavellian orientation and Knowledge sharing willingness are negatively related.

Yet, with all the negative implications towards Machivallian orientation, we find that more High Machiavellian individuals are chosen as leaders since they are very effective in manipulating others and tend to be very skillful in finding a satisfying environment that fits their values and beliefs (Gemmil and Heisler). However, Hambirk and Bradon (1988) argued that Machiavellian oriented CEO's will apply a hierarchical and centralized organizational structure that will grant them power. As such, they prefer employees who are dependent (Zaleznik and Kets de Vries, 1975). According to McGuire & Hutchings (2006), although Machiavellian thinking ignores the importance of integrity and honesty in their pursuit for power, this thinking plays an important role in understanding and managing change in a complex business environment. Leaders and teams should seize this way of thinking

because it improves their dealing with change and all the related variables a business faces. This thinking also provides a precious guide for leaders and managers when facing challenges and barriers while negotiating especially when it relates to accepting or rejecting organizational change. Lau and Shaffer (1999) based their study on social learning theories and stated that personality traits such as self mentoring, self esteem, locus of control, Machiavellianism, and their correlations are determinants of career success. They found that Machiavellian orientation is a predictor of job performance, and subjective and objective career success.

Age and Machiavellianism: Prior studies indicate that Machiavellianism is negatively related to age. In the original study, college students had significantly higher Mach scores than both adults in general and college-educated adults (Christie and Geis 1970). Younger marketers were found more Machiavellian than older marketers (Hunt and Chonko 1984), and younger managers were more Machiavellian than older managers (Gable and Topol 1988). Pratt et al. (1983) suggest that Machiavellianism and age are closely related and older individuals may be more philosophically reflective and consistent in their moral beliefs.

Gender and Machiavellianism: Prior research shows mixed results between Machiavellianism and gender. In studies involving the general population, females generally tended to score lower on the Mach scale than males (Christie and Geis 1970). However, female marketers were found to be more Machiavellian than male marketers (Hunt and Chonko 1984). No significant differences were found between male bankers and female bankers (Corzine

et al. 1999), or between male undergraduate business majors and female business majors (Rayburn and Rayburn 1996).

Education and Machiavellianism: Research also shows mixed results between Machiavellianism and education. Although less educated adults tended to score higher on the Mach scale (Christie and Geis 1970), no significant difference in Mach scores was found among the educational attainments of marketers (Hunt and Chonko 1984). Christie and Geis (1970) explain the negative relationship as the result of less educated adults being more willing to reveal socially undesirable characteristics. However, when social desirability was held constant in the analysis, a positive correlation resulted. Furthermore, Siegel (1973) found that M. B. A. students had higher Mach scores than business managers with less education.

Machiavellianism, Codes of Professional Conduct, Job, and Career

Satisfaction: In occupations where Machiavellian-type skills are useful or encouraged, it is likely that high Mach individuals will be more satisfied with their daily activities and careers, in contrast to occupations that discourage these abilities. However, professional standards of behaviour may inhibit and/or prohibit Machiavellian-type behaviours (e. g., manipulation, opportunism).

Variables

Aggressiveness

Manipulative

Exploitative

Individualism

Less ethical behaviour

Gender

Charismatic

Confident

Distrustful

Influencing

Duplicity

Cunning

Opportunist

Measuring Machiavellianism

The most frequently used and popular instrument to measure Machiavellianism is the Mach IV scale, developed by Christie and Geis (1970). This a 20 point, Likert-type instrument, with statements that address an individual's morality, views and tactics in order to measure Machiavellian orientation. Scores could range from 40 to 160, with 100 being the theoretical neutral.

Christie and Geis (1970) developed the original Machiavellianism scale used almost exclusively in studies of the trait. The Mach IV scale was developed from seventy-one items based on Machiavelli's writings, *The Prince* and *The*

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Discourses. The 20 scale items represent the essence of the Machiavellian trait; nine statements categorize Machiavellian tactics, nine statements address personal views, and two statements characterize abstract morality. Christie and Geis (1970) use the scale in 38 separate studies to evaluate how "high" Machs differ in attitudes and behaviours from individuals scoring low on the scale. 1 Generally, individuals scoring "high" on the scale manipulate more, win more, are persuaded less, and persuade others more than those scoring lower on the scale.

Machiavellianism and employee empowerment

High Mach people demonstrate behaviours such as being highly aggressive, manipulative, and exploitative. They do not care much for ethics and operate in a highly individualistic manner. Moreover, gender plays a crucial role in determining Machiavellianism. Individuals with high mach personalities are charming, charismatic and supremely self- confident. They are sometimes two-faced, and very opportunistic. As a result of these, there does not seem to be much correlation between Machiavellianism and employee's perception of feeling empowered. Although common variables such as confidence exist, it does not seem to appear that high mach employees feel more empowered.

H1: There is no significant correlation between Machiavellianism and employee empowerment

Self-esteem

Probably one of the most central constructs in psychology, self-esteem refers to a person's evaluation of or attitude towards himself or herself. It is an indication of an overall feeling of self-worth that influences an individual's functioning (Tafarodi & Swann, 1995). Some psychologists have attempted <https://assignbuster.com/employee-empowerment-and-personality-attributes/>

to classify self-esteem into various sub-types, such as domain-specific self-esteem (Harter, 1999), contingent self-esteem (Crocker, Luhtanen, Cooper, & Bouvrette, 2003), stable self-esteem (Kernis, 2005) and so on. In one of the earliest formulations of defining self-esteem, James (1890/183) defined self-esteem as the degree to which the self is judged to be competent in life domains. Cooley (1902/1964), argued that self-esteem stems not only from self-evaluations but also the perceived evaluations of others. For decades, global self-esteem was seen to be practically equivalent to mental health (Pyszczynski, Greenberg, Solomon, Arndt, & Schimel, 2004). Part of self-esteem's appeal is its link to positive states such as happiness and optimism (Lucas, Diener, & Suh, 1996; Lyubomirsky, Tkach, & DiMatteo, 2006), as well as its negative link to dysfunctional states such as depression and anxiety (Harter, 1990). Additionally, Deci and Ryan (1995) have proposed that some people possess 'true self-esteem,' a self-determined and autonomous way of evaluating oneself that is not dependent on particular outcomes or social approval. Similarly, Kernis (2003) has proposed the concept of 'optimal self-esteem' which is founded on stable and non-contingent self-evaluations.

(1890) defined self-esteem as a summary evaluation that reflects a ratio of our "pretensions" divided by our "successes" (p. 310). Self-esteem reflects a "baseline" feeling of worth, value, liking, and accepting of self that one carries at all times regardless of objective reality. Cooley (1902) postulated that the self is determined and judged by the perception of others. Mead (1934) saw the self as a product of interactions in which the individual experiences him- or herself as reflected in the behaviour of others. Rogers (1951) referred to self-esteem as the extent to which a person likes, values,

and accepts him- or herself. Unconditional, positive self-regard is dependent on the unconditional positive regard of significant others (Rogers, 1959).

White (1963) described self-esteem as a process developing from two sources: an internal source of a sense of accomplishment and an external source of affirmation from others. Maslow (1968) defined self-esteem as “the desire for strength, for achievement, for adequacy, for mastery and competence, . . . and for independence and freedom” (p. 45).

Rosenberg (1965, 1979) and Coopersmith (1967) each developed a theory of self-esteem as a significant personality construct based on empirical methods. Both reached similar conclusions. Concerned with the development of a positive self-image during adolescence, Rosenberg (1965) considered self-esteem to be global, a unidimensional phenomenon, an attitude toward a specific object, the self. According to him, attitudes about every characteristic of the self have an evaluative dimension that results in a self-estimate of that characteristic. Each element of the self is actually rated and judged against a self-value that has developed during childhood and adolescence. Feedback from others, particularly significant others, is an important element of self-esteem (Rosenberg, 1979). Yet self-esteem is also unconditional in the sense that the person respects (or does not respect) him- or herself independent of qualities or accomplishments (Rosenberg, 1985).

Coopersmith (1967) researched pre-high-school children and saw self-esteem as a more complex phenomenon involving self-evaluation and manifestations of defensive reactions to that evaluation. Self-esteem consists of two parts: subjective expression and behavioural manifestation.

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Coopersmith (1967) attempted to address both true self-esteem (manifested in those who actually feel worthy and valuable) and defensive self-esteem (manifested in those who feel unworthy but who can-not admit this threatening information). Coopersmith's (1981) definition included a decision of personal worthiness, a judgmental process in which " performance, capacities, and attributes" are examined according to personal standards and values that develop during childhood. It focuses on the " relatively enduring estimate of general self-esteem rather than on specific and transitory changes in evaluation" (p. 5).

These two theorists were followed by others, who reiterated, extended, or refined these basic elements. Fitts (1972) suggested that self-esteem is primarily a result of the judgments of significant others, thus supporting Coopersmith's (1967) view. Wells and Maxwell (1976) categorized existing definitions as attitudinal toward the self as the object of attention; as relational between different sets of self-attitudes; as psychological responses toward the self; and as a function of personality, a part of the self-system. Gecas (1982) pointed out a distinction between self-esteem based on a sense of competence, power, or efficacy and self-esteem based on a sense of virtue or moral worth. Competency-based self-esteem is related to effective performance and is associated with self-attribution and social comparison processes. Self-esteem based on self-worth, or virtue, is grounded in values and norms of personal and interpersonal conduct. Sense of worth may be strongly affected by sense of competence and vice versa (Gecas, 1982). Pope et al. (1988), echoing James's (1890) original work, defined self-esteem as the evaluation of information within the self-concept

that arises from the discrepancy between the perceived self and the real self. Frey and Carlock (1989) also recognized self-esteem as an evaluative term and discussed the components of competence and worthiness as interrelated. Mruk (1999) considered self-esteem as an interaction between worthiness and competence and conceptualized a self-esteem matrix indicating a continuum of competent or effective behaviour.

Variables

High internal locus of control

Competent

Self confidence

Optimism

Positive attitude

High sense of self worth

Satisfaction

High degree of self respect

Measuring self-esteem

Many scales are available for measuring self-esteem, and different investigations have used different ones, which compounds the difficulty of comparing results from different investigations (especially if the results are inconsistent). Blascovich and Tomaka (1991) reviewed multiple measures and found them of uneven quality, giving high marks to only a few (such as

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Fleming & Courtney's, 1984, revision of Janis & Field's 1959 scale, and Rosenberg's, 1965, global self-esteem measure). In essence, self-esteem scales ask people to rate themselves in response to questions such as "Are you a worthwhile individual?" "Are you good at school or work?" "Do people like you?" and "Are you reliable and trustworthy?" When researchers check self-esteem measures against the so-called lie scales (also called measures of social desirability, because they assess tendencies to give distorted, even unrealistic answers just to make a good impression), they conclude that self-esteem scores are somewhat contaminated by people's efforts to make themselves look good. These measures also obscure needed distinctions between defensive, inflated, narcissistic, and so-called genuine high self-esteem. (We discuss different varieties of high self-esteem in the next section.) Unfortunately, there is no objective criterion against which to compare self-reported self-esteem, because of the nature of the construct: Self-esteem essentially consists of how a person thinks about and evaluates the self. In the case of intelligence, for example, self-ratings can be compared against objective performance on intellectual tests, and the results can (and often do) show that people's self-reports of their own intelligence are wrong. But there is no known basis for saying that certain people really have more or less self-esteem than they think they have. To overcome these measurement problems, some researchers measure implicit, or unfakeable, self-esteem by using a variety of subtle methods, such as reaction times to good and bad thoughts that can be paired with the self (Greenwald & Farnham, 2000). Though promising, this research has only recently begun, and it therefore does not play a significant role in this review. Despite the potential pitfalls of explicit (i. e., self-report) measures, <https://assignbuster.com/employee-empowerment-and-personality-attributes/>

the fact that scores on different scales are positively correlated (e. g., Greenwald & Farnham, 2000) is an indication that they can be used with some confidence. Even more significantly, the Rosenberg scale, which is by far the most popular among researchers, has been shown to be highly reliable (e. g., if a person completes the scale on two occasions, the two scores tend to be similar). As a measure of global self-esteem, this scale is unidimensional (Gray-Little, Williams, & Hancock, 1997; Robins, Hendin, & Trzesniewski, 2001). Indeed, its reliability is so high that a single item (“ I have high selfesteem”) may be sufficient (Robins et al., 2001).

Usually, a straightforward method is used to measure self-esteem where an individual is asked to rate himself or herself in different areas of life. Weights are allocated depending on the relative importance of each area, and an aggregate score is calculated.

Rosenberg’s (1965) self-esteem scale is one of the most popular and widely used methods for measuring self-esteem. This consists of a questionnaire of 10 items, each of which requires responses on a 4-point scale.

Another scale used for measuring self-esteem is Vonk’s scale (Vonk et al., 2008). This measure also assesses self-esteem using various brief statements such as ‘ I have confidence in myself’, and ‘ I wish I were different’.

Paradise and Kernis (1999) developed an instrument to measure contingent self-esteem, and Crocker et al. (2003) developed a measure that distinguishes domains of contingency on which people base their self worth.

Self -esteem and employee empowerment

There seems to some linkage between self-esteem and employee empowerment. Employees with high self-esteem are very confident of their abilities to handle difficult situations at the workplace. Moreover, they are very confident about their abilities to make a positive difference to the organization. They take responsibility for their actions, and also operate with a high degree of autonomy, due to their internal locus of control. Because of their high sense of self-worth and self respect, they feel that they are making a significant contribution to the organization. They are also more satisfied with their work, and feel empowered to take decisions which will impact the organization on multiple levels.

H2: There is a positive correlation between employee self-esteem and employee empowerment

Risk Taking Propensity

Important decisions take place under conditions of uncertainty and risk.

Decision making cannot be reduced to a routine function, and hence the link between personality attributes and decision making is very relevant (Ka