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Psychological Empowerment and Turnover: A Review of the Literature



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Abstract

An increase in turnover among the election administration workforce has been observed and become recently salient. Election administration work (e.g., poll workers) is certainly difficult. The impetus of the following review was to discover what lessons, supports, or specific interventions could be derived from selected literature to potentially help reduce turnover, turnover intention, and boost morale for election workers in particular. A selection of academic literature on psychological empowerment and turnover are reviewed for that purpose.

Introduction

Psychological empowerment has been studied extensively within organizational psychology and management studies with the aim of determining drivers for workplace performance and retention. Researchers of the field were interested in understanding how workers adapt and adjust to work environments, what motivates workers to go above and beyond minimal workplace performance, and what might decrease the likelihood of turnover. The reason for the interest in the individual psychology of the worker was seemingly prompted by the limitations of previous research up to that point. Prior to the shift toward the psychological, research was limited to classical bureaucratic explanations of how workplace performance and satisfaction was best improved. That is, work was assumed to have only *instrumental value* to the workers. As such, performance, retention, and workplace satisfaction was determined through different organizational controls in combination with contingent rewards and punishments. As will be seen, some researchers saw this tradition as limiting and were thus motivated to determine and study those organizational structures and workplace interventions that have the most empowering effects on the individual workers themselves. This branch of research introduced a novel paradigm exploring the significance of a worker's *internalized commitment* to the work itself in order to understand and help to foster worker empowerment (Thomas and Velthouse 1990). In other words, the degree to which a worker was *intrinsically motivated* to do their work became a much more prominent focus for interested researchers.

Drawing upon and contributing to the burgeoning psychology research on motivation in the later half of the 1980s and early 1990s, a prominent concept to emerge was *psychological empowerment*, which was theorized to be a multidimensional concept manifested as a set of four distinguished 'cognitions': *meaning, competence, self-determination, and impact*. The Psychological Empowerment Scale was later developed, tested, and applied in multiple studies inquiring into whether it served as a mediator for certain workplace behaviors and turnover intention.

The concerted focus in the psychological empowerment literature on individual differences between workers' feelings of empowerment, however, isn't able to offer much in terms of how to improve psychological empowerment among workers in general. Although some recommen-

dations are offered, it is difficult to recommend general “one-size-fits-all” solutions to increase psychological empowerment for individual workers or an entire workforce. Seeing as how individual people are quite different in terms of what motivates them, provides meaning, makes them feel competent, and so on, the reviewed literature is limited in that respect. As will be seen, for instance, one strategy to improve empowerment is to change the way the workers interpret the information gleaned from their workplace environment and outcomes (Thomas and Velthouse 1990).

The academic literature examining turnover intention provides a contrast to the research focused on psychological empowerment. Research on retention and turnover has tended to focus primarily on the workplace context and organizational factors that influence a workers job satisfaction and organizational commitment. Although empowerment is often included as a factor within this line of research, the focus is less concerned with individual level psychology and more concerned with factors such as quality of pay, benefits, advancement opportunities and the like. There are a few recommended intervention strategies to improve retention, but pertain more toward shaping a friendly, inclusive, and beneficial workplace environment.

This review summarizes a selection of the literature on the concept, measurement, and examination of psychological empowerment as it influences workplace behavior and worker attitudes. Also reviewed are the interventions suggested which aim to reduce turnover, increase empowerment, workplace satisfaction, and improve worker performance.

Psychological Empowerment: theory and measurement

Powerlessness in the workplace

Initially, the idea of *powerlessness* in the workplace referred to feeling a lack of autonomy and influence in the workplace (Ashforth 1989). Autonomy was generally understood as, “The degree to which the job provides substantial freedom, independence, and discretion to the employee in scheduling his work and in determining the procedures to be used in carrying it out” (Hackman and Oldham 1975). Ashforth (1989) argued that feelings of powerlessness were incurred from unmet expectations and desires of personal autonomy and involvement in the workplace. His argument was that the greater the difference between expectations and perception of reality in the workplace generates feelings of powerlessness. Such powerlessness kicks off a contrived process of psychological adjustment and coping. People first react to the difference between expectations and reality, then develop increased feelings of inability to improve their situation (i.e., helplessness) based on the realities of their experience at work. Then, finally, come to feel detached and alienated from the job and organization entirely.

“The findings, then, suggest that powerlessness and high generalized expectations of control¹ give rise to unmet expectations/desires for control; that the latter two constructs fuel reactance; that reactance in turn, along with powerlessness, increases helplessness; and that helplessness increases work alienation. The model suggests that the experience of powerlessness can be quite traumatic, entailing frustration, disruptive behaviors, feelings of helplessness, and loss of job involvement and organizational identification. Conversely, it suggests that fostering a sense of control can forestall frustration and reactance, increase perceptions of organizational legitimacy and self-efficacy, and stimulate involvement.” (Ashforth 1989, 234)

Recommended Interventions

The recommended interventions of this early study were simple and intuitive: make clear the actual link between the actions workers take and the resulting outcomes they can expect to see in order to increase perceptions of personal autonomy and control over workplace outcomes. To this end, “...provide realistic job previews, specific and challenging goals, prompt and balanced feedback, contingent reinforcement, and appropriate role models...”, and remove obstacles which impede personal control (Ashforth 1989, 234). In addition, it was suggested that management relax or delegate control to those workers whose jobs hold less actual influence or significance. By providing opportunities for workers with “low power jobs” to participate in the strategic and operational decisions usually confined to managerial roles, workers may come to feel as though their input is not only valued but influential upon the final decisions made². Although the reported findings of Ashforth (1989)’s study were narratively intuitive, and the interventions sensible, it is unclear whether the theoretical process of powerlessness results in powerlessness or begins from it³.

The Interpretive Model of Empowerment

The difficulties and limitations of prior research prompted later researchers to refine a more cohesive theoretical model of empowerment. The publication by Thomas and Velthouse (1990) elaborates on a theoretical model of empowerment based on review of relevant literature (up

¹Note that “generalized expectations of control” here simply refers to self-reported educational attainment on a 7-point scale.

²Note that this is the same reasoning explicated in procedural theories of representative democracy, though under different predicate assumptions (Dahl 1961; Dahl and Shapiro 2015).

³From Ashforth’s study, it’s unclear exactly which variables are the dependent versus the independent variables, but it is clear that the primary variable of interest, powerlessness, is the independent variable of most importance to the author. Powerlessness, however, was measured by a combination of five different subscale measures derived from multiple sources, one of which included 32 survey items. The measurement of powerlessness was assessed by a combination of 1) the 3-item Job Autonomy Scale from the Job Diagnostics Survey (Hackman and Oldham 1974, 1975), 2) the 4-item Job Authority scale from the revised Organizational Assessment Instrument, 3) self-reported job grade, 4) ratings of autonomy and participation (based on job title) by one job evaluation specialist, 5) a 32-item Powerlessness scale which consisted of a 15-item Participation subscale and a 17-item Autonomy subscale. It is not entirely clear where the 32-item powerlessness scale is adapted from.

to the point of publication in 1990)⁴. These authors conceptualized empowerment as a multidimensional concept and operationalized empowerment as *intrinsic task motivation*, which refers to positive experiences derived directly from doing some task. The cognitive model developed involves identifying certain cognitions, referred to as *task assessments*, which manifests as a set of four cognitions reflecting an individual's orientation to their task/work role: *meaning*, *competence*, *self-determination*, and *impact*. These task assessments are assumed to be the "proximal cause" of intrinsic task motivation. That is to say, these four "cognitions" are considered latent constructs of their own, which in turn manifest the second-order latent construct empowerment⁵.

An assumption of the conceptual definition of empowerment is that it is not understood as an enduring personality trait generalizable across situations. The set of four cognitions, i.e., task assessments, are said to be shaped by the work environment. This fixes empowerment to the specific workplace domain.

To put the theory in brief: People are empowered (i.e., energized) when they are *intrinsically motivated* to carry out some task, and they feel *intrinsically motivated* when they 1) judge the tasks as sufficiently *impactful* (i.e., the degree to which behavior is seen as making a difference in terms of accomplishing the purpose of the task), 2) judge themselves as *competent* (i.e., self-efficacy), 3) find the task *meaningful*, and 4) feel as though their decision to do the task is *self-determined* (i.e., autonomous). They come to judge specific tasks in this way by their particular kind of *interpretive style* and *global beliefs* about work in general as information is gleaned from event outcomes observed in the workplace environment. That is to say, they interpret information from the outcomes in whatever way is concordant to their interpretive style and "global assessments" of tasks. When their interpretation of the outcomes leads to higher task assessments (i.e., higher values of the four cognitive variables), they then feel *intrinsically* motivated to carry out the task, resulting in behaviors in which they may demonstrate *flexibility*, *initiative*, and *resilience*. Such behavioral outcomes are attributed purely to the authors' theory on the effects of the four components of "intrinsic task motivation".

Ultimately, this theory uses the word "intrinsic" when it is unnecessary and not aligned with its meaning. The authors could remove the word "intrinsic" entirely and it would make no dif-

⁴Note that in the article cited, no test of the theoretical model is included, and no empirical results presented to validate the model. Instead, the authors rely on references to literature from psychology and clinical researchers. The abstract of the cited article mentions preliminary evidence that substantiates it, but the preliminary evidence mentioned in the abstract is confined to brief summaries of two different studies near the end of the article, where the evidence described suggests support for the authors interpretive model of empowerment. Thus, the review article argues for a particular non-traditional paradigm of management which fosters a worker's empowerment in theory.

⁵The attempt to understand empowerment as "intrinsic task motivation" did not stick in the long run, but the multidimensional nature of the construct, as well as the four essential components, did.

ference; they confuse what intrinsic motivation means and don't properly distinguish it from extrinsic motivation. In so doing, this early work is undermined by logical inconsistency. Supposing that a person's motivation to do some task is indeed *intrinsic*, then information on outcomes in the environment should make little to no difference because the person is motivated *to do the task itself*. If the prospective outcome drives the individual behavior, then the motivation is instrumental, thus *extrinsic*. There's a vast literature on the psychology of motivation with multiple and competing perspectives, especially with regard to notions of 'intrinsic' v. 'extrinsic' motives (Deci and Ryan 2012; Ryan and Deci 2000, 2017, 2021; for contrast, see Kruglanski et al. 2017; and Kruglanski et al. 2022).

Psychological theories vary considerably in explanations of behavior, especially classics, whereas one theory maintains that all behaviors are motivated by rewards (see *operant theory*, Skinner 1965), another asserts that all behaviors are motivated by physiological drives, to which intrinsically motivated behaviors were ones that provided satisfaction of psychological needs (Hull 1943). More recent explanations of behavior still vary considerably, although a relatively recent Self-Determination Theory follows motivational theories to which behavior seeks to satisfy psychological needs (Ryan and Deci 2000). In this work, *intrinsic motivation* refers to doing something because the activity is inherently interesting or enjoyable itself; whereas doing something because it leads to some separable outcome refers to *extrinsic motivation*. Although, the distinction isn't necessarily as simple due to the fact that the classifying criteria for a behavior to be motivated intrinsically (opposed to extrinsically) is quite high and generally excludes many every-day behaviors. Ryan and Deci (2000), the progenitors of Self-Determination Theory proposed that the need for competence underlies all motivation, but full autonomy must be experienced for an activity to be truly intrinsically motivated⁶.

Recommended Interventions

Two different kinds of interventions are thought to increase empowerment (i.e., intrinsic task motivation): either adjust the working environment outcomes (i.e., environmental changes) or re-frame how environment outcomes are interpreted by individual workers (i.e., interpretive intervention strategies). The *environmental changes* intervention strategy relates to the ideas of prior research which professes that interventions modifying external variables such as organizational structure, managerial strategies, and types of information all work as interventions to produce increased feelings of empowerment. Thomas and Velthouse (1990) list a few environmental variables which they theorized would shape the four cognitions/task assessments:

⁶Autonomy, in the framework of Self-Determination Theory, refers to the need to experience volition by controlling one's own behavior such that it integrates with one's sense of self, and the experience of autonomy depends on the degree to which a person's behavior is motivated by the level of external control versus the intrinsic motivation (for review see Higgins and Nakkawita 2021).

leadership, delegation, job design, and reward systems (Thomas and Velthouse 1990, see Table 1 on page 676).

The latter “*interpretive intervention strategies*” are aimed at addressing/modifying how individual workers construe work outcomes and consequences to increase worker empowerment. Only one “interpretive intervention strategy” is mentioned as a feasible solution according to the model: self-empowerment programs. Such programs are thought to help individuals identify and practice styles theoretically conducive to enhance tasks assessments crucial to increasing empowerment. The authors say, “The interpretive styles in the model are viewed as developed *habits* rather than innate abilities. These habits are relatively isolated from day-to-day learning activities” (Thomas and Velthouse 1990, 677, emphasis original). They go on to say,

“...researchers/clinicians have demonstrated that such styles can be changed by making the individual aware of assumptions that are inherent in a style and by teaching individuals to consciously monitor those ongoing interpretations and their consequences...Thus, according to the model, “self-empowerment” programs are feasible solutions to help individuals identify and practice styles of attributing, evaluating, and envisioning, which would enhance their task assessments.” (Thomas and Velthouse 1990, 677)

The authors don’t detail what these self-empowerment programs look like, but the goal is essentially to change the way the worker interprets the things that happen at work in order to make such outcomes more empowering. Offering support to the theoretical claims posited, the authors cite to unpublished work⁷ in which the four cognition task assessments of the empowerment model mediated the relationship between positive feedback and self-reports of intrinsic motivation. In other words, *positive feedback* supposedly caused increases in the four cognitive task assessments (e.g., meaning, competence, self-determination, and impact) which, in turn, increased self-reported ratings of intrinsic motivation (Thomas and Velthouse 1990, 677). However, it is not clear how the four components of empowerment were measured. Development of a survey measurement instrument didn’t come about until about five years after the model was theorized.

Psychological Empowerment Scale

The theoretical model existed for some time before an attempt was made to develop a measure of psychological empowerment. Spreitzer (1995) developed and tested the validity of a novel

⁷The evidence the authors cite to are two unpublished doctoral dissertations. The description of the two studies suggests that these dissertations were directly testing the cognitive model of empowerment they introduce in their review. However, these studies were unable to be located for direct citation.

measure of psychological empowerment, following the cognitive model of empowerment (i.e., “intrinsic task motivation”) theorized by Thomas and Velthouse (1990) and based on measurement scales adapted from previous research.

“In sum, psychological empowerment is defined as a motivational construct manifested in four cognitions: meaning, competence, self-determination, and impact. Together, these four cognitions reflect an active, rather than a passive, orientation to a work role. By active orientation, I mean an orientation in which an individual wishes and feels able to shape his or her work role and context. The four dimensions are argued to combine additively to create an overall construct of psychological empowerment. In other words, the lack of any single dimension will deflate, though not completely eliminate, the overall degree of felt empowerment.” (Spreitzer 1995, 1444)

The scale includes 12-items with the component dimensions measured with three items each. In this case, psychological empowerment is understood as a common second-order latent factor that underlies the four latent component factors (e.g., meaning, impact, competence, self-determination)⁸.

Table 1: *Psychological Empowerment 12-item Measurement scale (Spreitzer 1995)*

Component	Item wording
Meaning	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• The work I do is very important to me.• My job activities are personally meaningful to me.• The work I do is meaningful to me.
Competence	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• I am confident about my ability to do my job.• I am self-assured about my capabilities to perform my work activities.• I have mastered the skills necessary for my job.
Self-Determination	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• I have significant autonomy in determining how I do my job.• I can decide on my own how to go about doing my work.• I have considerable opportunity for independence and freedom in how I do my job.
Impact	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• My impact on what happens in my department is large.• I have a great deal of control over what happens in my department.• I have significant influence over what happens in my department.

⁸See online appendix for additional notes on measurement for the scale.

Overall, the development and test for the original measurement scale for psychological empowerment can be viewed as a first step towards measuring empowerment in a work related context. However, no real useful measurement instrument for psychological empowerment is made readily available from this study. The methods used to test validity and reliability of the four measurement scales for empowerment is interesting but complex, and doesn't appear to result in an actual estimate of the latent construct for empowerment itself. Instead, convergent validity is obtained but not discriminant validity for the four components of empowerment. Interested researchers might be better off developing and validating a single measurement scale for empowerment itself rather than rely on measuring the presence of four separate latent component constructs with 12 requisite survey items.

Psychological Empowerment as a Mediator

Multiple subsequent studies inquired into whether psychological empowerment functioned as a mediator for workplace performance, or incorporated the concept or measurement thereof into studies investigating the antecedents to turnover intentions. This line of research generally finds that psychological empowerment plays a positive mediating role in helping to increase Organizational Citizenship Behavior (OCB)⁹ and levels of performance (Taylor 2013), workplace satisfaction and organizational commitment (Liden, Wayne, and Sparrowe 2000), and mediates the effect of perception of authentic leadership from one's supervisor (Shapira-Lishchinsky and Tsemach 2014). However, the latter two of the cited studies (Liden, Wayne, and Sparrowe 2000; Shapira-Lishchinsky and Tsemach 2014), which explore psychological empowerment as mediator for other outcomes, are questionable and should be reviewed with increased scrutiny before the reported findings are readily accepted¹⁰.

Research by Taylor (2013) is the least problematic of these studies and is easily summarized. Goal setting plans by organizations positively influenced psychological empowerment and helpful and cooperative behavior toward other employees in the organization (i.e., 'organizational citizenship behavior' toward individuals). Goal setting increased self-reports of individual-oriented organizational performance behavior (OCBI)¹¹ more so than self-reported organization-oriented performance behaviors (OCBO)¹². Perceived difficulty of

⁹Organizational Citizenship Behavior is defined differently by different scholars, but is best understood as voluntary work behavior done within an organization that is not required as part of the worker's duties of employment. It is a blanket term that refers to worker behavior that contributes benefit to the organization but is beyond their formal obligations.

¹⁰See online appendix for expanded scrutiny of the latter two articles cited.

¹¹OCBI: "I help others who have heavy workloads", "I take time to listen to co-workers' problems and worries". "I go out of my way to help new employees." "I assist my supervisor with his/her work even when I am not asked."

¹²OCBO: "My attendance at work is above the norm", "I obey informal rules that maintain order", "I give advance notice when I am unable to work"

goals¹³ positively influenced both OCBI and OCBO. Perception that job goals are clear, specific, and fully understood (goal-specificity)¹⁴ did not directly influence either OCBI or OCBO. However, goal-specificity indirectly influenced OCBI through the indirect effect of psychological empowerment. In other words, perception that job goals are clear, specific, and fully understood positively influences psychological empowerment which in turn indirectly influences individual-oriented performance (OCBI). Goal-specificity and goal-difficulty both positively influenced psychological empowerment, but the effect of goal-specificity was larger in comparison.

Recommended Intervention Strategies

Review of the aforementioned studies conveys the impression that anything which may increase any of the four components of psychological empowerment should result in positive improvement in worker performance, enthusiasm on the job, and helpful workplace behaviors. This, however, tells us little more than what may be obvious without providing specific interventions on how to go about doing so. That is, the results of Taylor (2013) are derived from comparison of attitudinal surveys but stops short of testing specific intervention strategies. Moreover, the sample was comprised of Australian public service workers, which may limit external validity—not to suggest anything special about Australia but rather the potential differences between public service workers and others generally. Further research may help to confirm whether interventions providing specific and challenging goals promotes improved worker performance, organizational commitment, or other such Organizational Citizenship Behaviors.

Perceiving the boss to be authentic, or otherwise nice, good, and honest, increases the degree to which a worker feels like they have an impact at work, but the research showing this also shows that perceiving the boss to be authentic also increases one's willingness to find work elsewhere (Shapira-Lishchinsky and Tsemach 2014). Said another way, perceiving the boss to be an authentic leader¹⁵ increases a worker's intent to leave their current job. The recommendation when it comes to leadership is to "...promote high standards of authentic leadership" (Shapira-Lishchinsky and Tsemach 2014, 701), which is not a recommendation but has more to do with a worker's perception of the boss's personal characteristics. Deriving meaning and feeling competent in one's work significantly influences work satisfaction, organizational commitment, and

¹³Goal-difficulty: "A high degree of skill and know-how is necessary to do my job well.", "Jobs like mine are quite demanding day after day."

¹⁴Goal-specificity: "My responsibilities at work are very clear and specific.", "I understand fully which of my job duties are more important than others."

¹⁵"Authentic leadership" was measured using four survey items: "My principal says exactly what he or she means", "My principal admits to mistakes when they are made", "My principal tells me the hard truth", and "My principal outwardly displays how she/he feels". (See Appendix in Shapira-Lishchinsky and Tsemach 2014)

better ratings of job performance from one's supervisor (Liden, Wayne, and Sparrowe 2000), but this research is highly dubious since it shows findings that are contradictory: deriving meaning from one's work increases work satisfaction but feeling competent in one's work also *decreases* work satisfaction. These perplexing findings are likely the result of limitations or flaws of the research. Attempts to replicate findings in the future may help our understanding in this area.

The best intervention suggestion comes from Taylor (2013),

"The findings suggest that public managers can promote OCB from goal-setting plans in two ways. One is to ensure that the goal-setting plans are well designed and implemented. In particular, challenging goals that are accepted by employees can motivate higher levels of performance. Another is to improve employees' views of their work environment and their individual capacity so that they feel psychologically empowered at work. To encourage employees to see their job as more meaningful and to satisfy their self-efficacy and self-determination needs, managers should help employees understand the scope of their job and responsibilities, articulate the overlap between the agency's goals and the employees' personal goals, and demonstrate support for employees in their pursuit of the goals (e.g., provide access to appropriate professional development programs)" (2013, 461).

Thus, organizations that set specific and difficult job goals may increase workers psychological empowerment and helpful performance behavior towards individuals in the organization. In particular, setting job goals may positively influence psychological empowerment which in turn is expected to improve levels of performance directed to help co-workers and benefit the broader organization. Psychological empowerment increases for employees who feel their job goals require a high degree of competence and are demanding. The same goes for employees who feel that their work goals are clear, specific, and fully understood.

Turnover Intention

A related line of research in management and organizational studies inquired into factors related to voluntary turnover, which include empowerment among others such as job satisfaction and organizational commitment. However, these studies do not maintain a strict focus on the presence and effect of psychological empowerment, and the 12-item scale is not used to measure empowerment in the following studies. At least one study measures empowerment by use of a single item measure on a 5-point agree/disagree Likert response option format, "Employees have a feeling of personal empowerment with respect to work processes." (Pitts, Marvel, and Fernandez 2011). Other research includes measurement of constructs which tangentially re-

late to the conceptual components of psychological empowerment without referencing them as such. For instance, as part of the measure for “functional preferences” Bertelli (2007) measures “intrinsic motivation” with three survey items drawn from the Federal Human Capital Survey (FHCS): “Employees have a feeling of empowerment and ownership of work processes.”, “My work gives me a feeling of personal accomplishment.”, “I like the kind of work I do.” The other half of the comprised “functional preferences” measure includes items intent on measuring *job involvement*: “My talents are used well in the workplace.”, “I recommend my organization as a good place to work.”, “The work I do is important.”

The variable use of different measurement items speaks to the discrepancies noted in results across multiple studies by Tett and Meyer (1993). In their meta-analysis, they attempt to untangle the variable findings from the disparate use of multiple measures of similar or identical constructs. Their aim was to compare job satisfaction and organizational commitment “as unique precursors of employee withdrawal...”

“Overall, results support the view that satisfaction and commitment each contribute uniquely to the turnover process. Those contributions, however, are largely limited to intention/cognitions, and depend on the choice of measures.” (Tett and Meyer 1993, 279).

The authors say that job satisfaction and [self-reported] turnover intention is sometimes included into an index of “withdrawal cognitions”, which refers simply to thoughts of quitting and intention to search for alternative employment. However, turnover intention is conceived as a conscious and deliberate willfulness to leave the organization. That is, turnover intention is conceptually different from a set of “withdrawal cognitions”. In other words, definitive intention to leave the job is different in that it is serious and intentional rather than merely passive thoughts about quitting.

The first set of hypotheses (Hypothesis 1a and 1b) expect that organizational commitment should show stronger negative correlation than job satisfaction with turnover intention (H_{1a}) and actual turnover (H_{1b}). The authors found that job satisfaction showed a stronger negative relationship with turnover intention than when compared with organizational commitment. This would imply, simply, that higher job satisfaction is negatively correlated with turnover intention. However, once the more deliberate and serious turnover intention is detached from the aforementioned set of passive “withdrawal cognitions”, the strength of the negative relationship is lessened substantially. Ultimately, the findings suggest that organizational commitment and job satisfaction are relatively equal in importance for predicting either serious

turnover intention or withdrawal cognitions (Tett and Meyer 1993, 280).

What is important to note, however, is that organizational commitment showed a much stronger negative relationship with actual turnover (contra. Passive thoughts or deliberate intention). The point is not only that organization commitment is likely more important than job satisfaction at predicting actual turnover, but crucially that an “intention to leave” measure is not viable as a proxy for actual turnover despite its predictive power (Tett and Meyer 1993). Perhaps just as important, the authors also note concerns with available measures for job satisfaction. They question the content of job satisfaction measures used in prior studies owing to “...contamination by items pertaining to withdrawal cognitions” and present a list of studies where such contamination was evident (Tett and Meyer 1993, 283). In other words, items measuring job satisfaction commonly include items that also measured thoughts about quitting.

The ultimate takeaway appreciable here is that researchers interested in ascertaining whether job satisfaction or organizational commitment are related to turnover are probably better off constructing and validating measurement scales *ex novo* (i.e., from the beginning).

Beyond the accounting of the study by Tett and Meyer (1993), this review finds that scholars from different fields approach questions related to empowerment in the workplace, job satisfaction, turnover and intention, and organizational commitment in distinct ways that place stronger emphasis on some factors over others. Of course, this is obvious—a trained economist is apt to approach questions about turnover intent by way of reviewing and comparing an organization’s incentive structure. This seems to be the case for the study conducted by Bertelli (2007), who compared the effect of the aforementioned “functional preferences” as a determinant for turnover intention between two distinct samples—one where performance-based pay reforms were put in-place for supervisors but not for non-supervisors, compared to another where no such merit-based pay reforms were enacted.

To summarize, Bertelli (2007) finds that it is easier to retain supervisors in federal agencies (the Internal Revenue Service, IRS, and Office of the Comptroller of the Currency, OCC) who feel like their work is important, who like their work and gain feelings of accomplishment from it (i.e., “functional preferences”). This applies to employees who are Non-supervisors too, but non-supervisors are also more likely to stay when they view their workplace as friendly. A friendly work environment is not related to turnover intention for supervisors. Perceptions of inadequate pay¹⁶ impacts the likelihood of turnover intention for non-supervisors. To put simply, federal agency jobs like the IRS and OCC for people in non-supervisory positions that

¹⁶Q58 from the Federal Human Capital Survey (FHCS): “How do you rate the amount of pay you get on your job?” (1=very poor...5=very good).

are not perceived as financially and psychologically rewarding are more likely to see increased turnover from non-supervisors. Having friendly coworkers helps, as does feeling like the work is important and feelings of accomplishment, but perceptions of inadequate pay, micromanaging boss, and merit-based performance incentives hanging over head all work to increase likelihood for turnover among non-supervisors. Those in supervisor positions are best retained when they find their work important and personally rewarding—perceptions of inadequate pay doesn't drive turnover intention for supervisors.

A brief note on the method. Bertelli writes (2007),

"The OCC is included in this study as a "control" group for examining the effect of perceptions of the management incentives unique to the IRS. OCC, located with the IRS in the U.S. Department of the Treasury, is the regulator of U.S. banks, and its employees engage in similar accounting oversight (i.e., auditing) as that performed by the IRS at the bank rather than at the individual and corporate levels. Both subagencies have a nationwide staff, and their employees possess generally similar backgrounds in accounting and financial matters. If there are unobserved attributes correlated with the responses to questions regarding performance incentives specific to the IRS, they can reasonably be addressed by the comparison between results for IRS and OCC supervisors. Among those attributes is the pay-banding system. In the absence of questions related specifically to pay-banding to facilitate a direct test, comparison of these groups is suggestive evidence of the effect of pay-banding on bureaucrats' intent to leave their jobs. When combined with the information included in survey responses, this comparison provides significant leverage in understanding the effects of performance incentives on turnover intention." (2007, 239–40)

The results of a Probit regression analysis for determinants of turnover intention for supervisors across the two samples shows that only "functional preferences" and being employed by the IRS negatively predict turnover intention. Bertelli's study takes the difference of agency employment as a proxy for the effect of the pay-banding reform scheme—that is, "In the absence of questions related specifically to pay-banding to facilitate a direct test, comparison of these groups is suggestive evidence of the effect of pay-banding on bureaucrats' intent to leave their jobs." (Bertelli 2007, 240).

An alternative interpretation may omit any acknowledgement of the pay-banding scheme enacted for supervisors in the IRS, stating simply be that working for the OCC as a supervisor positively predicts turnover intention among supervisors. The author relies on the strong as-

sumption that the two samples match closely enough that differences attributed to agency employment serve to indicate the effect of the performance-based pay reforms. However, by this logic, any differences between the two agencies in organizational or employee policies pertaining to supervisors can account for the differential effect. It isn't simply that the model doesn't account for every possible difference between the two agencies, but rather that the dummy effect of being employed as a supervisor in one agency rather another is posited to indicate the effect of this specific pay-banding scheme enacted within the IRS.

Additionally, Bertelli (2007) notes the striking insignificance of negative perceptions of pay quality for supervisors in both the IRS and OCC samples. A single-item question measures this attitude about quality of pay, "How do you rate the amount of pay you get on your job?" where response options range across a 5-point scale from very poor to very good. From what can be gathered, it appears that higher ratings about quality of pay were not significant predictors of turnover intention. The mean response for quality of pay across the whole sample ($n = 1842$) was 3.635 with a standard deviation of 1.003. The mean response for supervisors only was not displayed in the study.

As an aside, Bertelli measures quality of pay with a single-item, but does not take into consideration any other forms of compensation, especially those unique benefits related to federal employment compared to similar jobs in the private sector. Anecdotally, private contractors recruit large amount of veteran service members for their specific service-related skill sets by offering appealing payment incentives; but working as a private contractor does not always come with the benefits or other compensatory incentives afforded by work as an employee, nor as an employee of the federal government. The decision between working in the public or private sector for the same kind of work may come down to such a comparative assessment of the financial security offered by federal government employment over self-employed contractor work. Although the compensation across the two agencies is likely to be similar, if not identical, the notion that quality of pay or compensation/benefits is insignificant to turnover intention, or actual turnover for that matter, is questionable. Especially considering that pay quality across both agencies was a significant predictor of turnover intention for non-supervisors. Bertelli doesn't include descriptions of the average reported income for the studied samples, nor a reference to the relative pay scales for government employees that would apply to either agency, nor is any consideration made with regard to the overarching compensation/benefits structure. The quality of pay is demonstrably insignificant for turnover intention, but this should not be striking nor surprising for those who have reached supervisor status while employed with the federal government; they are paid quite well overall.

In contrast, Pitts, Marvel, and Fernandez (2011) does take *benefits satisfaction* into account when inquiring why federal employees choose to leave either their respective agencies or government work outright¹⁷. However, these authors also minimize the impact of pay on turnover intention but rely on self-reports of pay satisfaction¹⁸ while also asking confounding satisfaction questions related to benefits (e.g., health insurance, retirement benefits, life insurance)¹⁹, opportunities for advancement²⁰, and even job satisfaction²¹. All these are arguably related to the same underlying factor of compensation someone takes into consideration when searching for a job. And this notional latent factor is likely crucial to understand the reasons for both recruitment *and* retention. The reasons why a person intends to leave may not be related to their financial situation if said situation is far more comfortable in government work than elsewhere. Yet the reason for choosing to get into government work in the first place is likely strongly related to the perceived prospective financial security of working in the federal government, and might be a foundational reason for the prevalence of inter-agency turnover compared to government turnover in general. About 16.1% of federal employees in the sample stated their intent to leave their agency for another agency within the federal government. In comparison, about 3.6% of federal employees plan to leave government work all together²².

Recommended Interventions to Reduce Turnover and Turnover Intention

The literature reviewed here is mostly concerned with turnover intention for government employees. To summarize the findings and recommended interventions of Pitts, Marvel, and Fernandez (2011), workplace satisfaction plays largest role in predicting intention to leave an agency among government employees. Advancement opportunities and age also plays a sig-

¹⁷The dependent variables—turnout intention to leave agency and turnout intention to leave government—are derived from the same survey item question, “Are you considering leaving your organization within the next year, and if so, why?” How the authors are able to create two variables from one question with a dichotomous response of yes or no is beyond me. They don’t state that the Federal Human Capital Survey in 2006 asks the question twice for both agency and government turnover intentions, so the reader is left to presume such is the case.

¹⁸Pay satisfaction was measured with a single-item on a 5-point Likert scale: “Considering everything, how satisfied are you with your pay?”

¹⁹Benefits satisfaction was measured with three items on a 5-point Likert scale: “How satisfied are you with retirement benefits?”, “How satisfied are you with health insurance benefits?”, “How satisfied are you with life insurance benefits?”

²⁰Advancement Opportunity Satisfaction was measured with a single-item on a 5-point Likert scale: “How satisfied are you with your opportunity to get a better job in your organization?”

²¹Job satisfaction was measured with a single-item on a 5-point Likert scale: “Considering everything, how satisfied are you with your job?”

²²Pitts, Marvel, and Fernandez (2011) don’t specify the number of observations explicitly. Rather, the number of observations in the survey is found in Table 2 on page 755 ($n = 217, 504$). From the cumulative percentages of those indicating turnover, whether leaving agency or government, that amounts to about 42, 848 employees from the sample who reported an intention to leave within the next year (assuming my math is correct). The count of those who reported intention to leave an agency but stay working within federal government is approximately 35, 018. Whereas the approximate count of those who reported intention to leave federal government work overall is 7, 830. Seeing as how leaving government is far less substantial a figure than leaving an agency, I see the reason for the distinction between the two but it would have been better to include an actual turnover rate of some sort for the past year at least. A statistic from the Bureau of Labor Statistics, or some other concurrent figure that demonstrates just how significant turnover actually is for government employees. The authors mention some consistent 20 year decline, but don’t present the evidence of that.

nificant role for agency turnover intention. The most important factors predicting whether an employee intends to leave federal government are age, whether an employee is non-White, and job satisfaction.

These authors suggested a couple of interventions to decrease turnover for government agencies. First, offer advancement opportunities along with professional development programs in hopes that it will motivate new and younger employees to stay at their agency instead of move between government agencies. Second, relax performance-based workplace culture (merit-based pay/advancement, incentives) for new and younger employees as such performance-based cultural work environment predicts intra-agency turnover intention among this group (Pitts, Marvel, and Fernandez 2011).

As stated previously, Bertelli (2007) finds that “functional preferences” (i.e., a latent factor indicated by two component measurements of job involvement and intrinsic motivation) and solidarity preferences (e.g., “This is a friendly place to work.”) decrease the likelihood that agency bureaucrats will leave their government jobs (2007, 253). Bertelli does not recommend interventions outright, there may be distinct strategies implied depending on whether the target workers in question are supervisors or non-supervisors. However, since the perception of a friendly work environment reduces the likelihood of turnover intention among non-supervisor employees, it is unclear how or what interventions could be enacted to make the workplace appear friendly, generally speaking. Although performance-based incentives are weakly significant in predicting whether supervisors retain their jobs, such incentives imposed upon non-supervisor employees may increase turnover intention. However, bear in mind that turnover intention may not reflect actual turnover rates (Tett and Meyer 1993).

Discussion and Conclusion

Based on the review of the cited literature related to turnover intention for government employees, the findings suggest that government employees are generally more likely to stay for obvious reasons such as financial security and retirement potential. It seems more apparent that simply getting a federal government job matters more than which agency one settles with, and the longer one stays working in government then the less likely they are to leave. For instance, one finding suggests that a workplace environment with a “performance culture” (i.e., a work environment that incorporates merit-based pay and advancement incentives) *increases* turnover intention but only inter-agency turnover, i.e., those who plan to leave their agency to take another job within the federal government. Absent here is consideration as to whether government work in general is perceived to be more attractive compared to work outside of

the federal government for most current government employees. If it is, then the reasons for wanting to leave are unlikely to be entirely related to income and benefits. That is to say, there is likely a substantive difference between those who work for federal government agencies and those who don't.

This references back to the earlier literature on psychological empowerment, which emphasizes a focus on the individual differences between workers in terms of the meaning, impact, competence, and autonomy they derive from the work they do. This literature draws from organizational psychology and recommends interventions related to re-framing the workers' interpretation of workplace outcomes and proposes the increased use of self-empowerment programs (Thomas and Velthouse 1990), and generally recommends setting goals that are both challenging and well understood (i.e., specific) (Taylor 2013). Although the empowerment literature makes it clear that work satisfaction and positive perceptions of workplace leadership either increase or are increased by psychological empowerment, there is no clear way to intervene and adjust the perceptions of the individual worker. In that respect, it appears that the early recommendations by Ashforth (1989) may be the most practical and sensible overall, "...provide realistic job previews, specific and challenging goals, prompt and balanced feedback, contingent reinforcement, and appropriate role models...", and remove obstacles which impede personal control (1989, 234). In addition, delegating more influence to lower level employees in ways that make their input significant to workplace strategies and decision-making may also increase some demonstrably important component factors of empowerment such as competence, impact, and self-determination (i.e., autonomy).

In contrast, the turnover literature reviewed here focuses primarily on the organizational structure and workplace environment intervention. Although workers who feel like their work is important and gain feelings of accomplishment from it are far easier to retain, these attitudes become more significant to those who are in supervisor roles—i.e., those who are arguably already well settled into a job or career. The workplace environment and its overarching structural arrangement is most important to reduce turnover among the young and the restless (Bertelli 2007). Quality of pay, benefits, opportunities for advancement, and overall financial security are organizational factors that are significant to consider if the goal is to reduce turnover intention (Pitts, Marvel, and Fernandez 2011), and possibly actual turnover rates as well. Although recruiters and hiring managers might love to hear a potential hire genuinely respond to the question "Why do you want to work here?" with "To increase my sense of psychological empowerment", the real motivation for many potential and current employees may still be those basic instrumental factors.

A major aspect underlying the literature reviewed here is organizational contextual factors versus individual differences. Thomas and Velthouse (1990) contended that empowerment refers to the motivational content of a nontraditional form of management (a new paradigm of motivation, as they say) in which management establishes controls to foster an emphasis or internalized commitment to the task *itself*. Workers are “pulled” toward doing the tasks rather than “pushed” towards it because the tasks are made to be meaningful; workers identify with the task; and there is expressive value in doing the task. To put another way, figuring out ways to have workers want to do the tasks rather than simply making them do the tasks. Authors of the empowerment literature say that prior research professes the idea that external variables such as organizational structure, managerial strategies, and types of information all work as interventions to produce increased feelings of empowerment (i.e., self-efficacy) in work. In other words, the structural context of the organized work environment induces greater empowerment within the worker, and thus enhances their motivation to initiate, persist, and better perform. The empowerment authors view this as lacking as it doesn’t take into account how the perspective of the subject (i.e., subjective) influences the cognitive variables thought to determine feelings of empowerment. Stated otherwise, prior research doesn’t take into account the influence of individual differences (Thomas and Velthouse 1990).

Yet it appears as though that when organizational factors are relatively stable and insignificant—mainly for those workers who are in comfortable and secure supervisory positions—then turnover intent and actual turnover rates among them are likely to be more strongly associated with individual differences such as the components of psychological empowerment. Those who are relatively more secure and in roles in which they not only feel, but actually are in fact, impactful and competent, are seemingly more likely to appraise their work conditions in terms of how satisfying it is to them, how meaningful it is, and how intrinsically motivated they are to continue doing such work. In essence, when certain needs are sufficiently met, then other factors take on more significance. This may explain why federal employees are more inclined to change agencies but do not quit government work outright (Bertelli 2007). In contrast, psychological empowerment and other such factors are muted *unless* the individual worker is in fact legitimately *intrinsically motivated* to do that work for the sake of doing the work *itself*. Otherwise, it should be presumed that most workers retain jobs motivated by external factors related to basic instrumental incentives. It may be the case that workers seek out particular jobs or types of work based on more *internalized and integrated* extrinsic motivations, which are the closest approximations to intrinsic motivation along the extrinsic to intrinsic motivational spectrum (Ryan and Deci 2000, 2017). That is to say, the initial choice of what work one wishes

to get into is likely more powerful than palliative interventions such as self-empowerment programs.

Appendix A

The Public Service Motivation Construct and Scale

The following is a brief overview of the Public Service Motivation scale and construct as developed by Perry (1996). Perry defines Public Service Motivation (PSM), “as an individual’s predisposition to respond to motives grounded primarily or uniquely in public institutions” (1996, 6). An interesting aspect of the PSM construct and scale is that it is predicated on a particular understanding of motivation rooted in evolutionary psychology, and is also found elsewhere in social psychology literature (For review, see Higgins and Nakkawita 2021, 88). Here and in other related work, motives are driven by needs. In particular, certain “drive theories” of motivation suggest that humans recognize something as a ‘need’ when its deprivation threatens our survival, our growth, or our ultimate life satisfaction and well-being. The motivation to fulfill unmet ‘needs’ may guide our behavior, impact on our thoughts, explain our selective attention and memory (Gardner, Pickett, and Brewer 2000; Hull 1943; Mcleod 2022). As it relates to PSM, Perry (1996) recognized three analytically distinct motivational categories: rational, norm-based, and affective.

“Rational motives involve actions grounded in individual utility maximization. Norm-based motives refer to actions generated by efforts to conform to norms. Affective motives refer to those triggers of behavior that are grounded in emotional responses to various social contexts.” (Perry 1996, 6)

The PSM scale development was based on conceptual dimensions which were categorized into the motivational categories. The final PSM scale was confirmed as having four component dimensions: attraction to public policy making, commitment to the public interest, compassion, and self-sacrifice. However, the initial analysis of the finalized PSM scale demonstrated no distinct difference in model fit between a three and four dimensional PSM model. The public interest and self-sacrifice component dimensions were highly correlated, and so a comparison between the three and four-dimensional model was done. The four dimensional model showed a slighter higher χ^2 statistic, thus Perry (1996) opted to retain the self-sacrifice dimension to maintain the four dimensional model of the PSM scale because, “it has had a historical connection to how we think about public service that is explicitly preserved by retaining the dimension.” (Perry 1996, 20). However, it is recommended by Perry that further refinements to the PSM construct and scale be undertaken by future research.

The four component dimensions of the Public Service Motivation scale are described below;

Attraction to public policy making (rational motive) Refers to a rational motive in which the

opportunity to participation in the formation of public policy draws individuals to public service

Commitment to the public interest (norm-based) An altruistic desire to serve the public interest

Compassion (aka “patriotism of benevolence”, affective) An affective state that combines the love of regime values and the love of others which drives people to exemplify “a patriotism of benevolence”^[22]

Self-sacrifice (unclear motive) Refers to the willingness to substitute service to others for tangible personal rewards. In other words, the willingness of public servants to forego financial rewards for the intangible rewards received from serving the public.

After refinements were made to the initial scale, the resulting Public Service Motivation Scale was finalized to include 24-items measuring four component dimensions. The PSM measurement items are measured with Likert type response options. The items are listed in the table below

Table 2: *Public Service Motivation Scale Item Wording (Perry 1996)*

Motive type	Component Dimension	Item Wording
Rational Motive	Public Policy Making	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • PSM 11 Politics is a dirty word. (Reversed) • PSM 27 The give and take of public policy making doesn't appeal to me. (Reversed)
Norm-based motive	Public Interest	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • PSM 31 I don't care much for politicians. (Reversed) • PSM 16 It is hard for me to get intensely interested in what is going on in my community. (Reversed) • PSM 23 I unselfishly contribute to my community. • PSM 30 Meaningful public service is very important to me. • PSM 34 I would prefer seeing public officials do what is best for the whole community even if it harmed my interests. • PSM 39 I consider public service my civic duty.

Motive type	Component Dimension	Item Wording
Affective motive	Compassion (aka "patriotism of benevolence")	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • PSM 2 I am rarely moved by the plight of the underprivileged. (Reversed) • PSM 3 Most social programs are too vital to do without. • PSM 4 It is difficult for me to contain my feelings when I see people in distress. • PSM 8 To me, patriotism includes seeing to the welfare of others. • PSM 10 I seldom think about the welfare of people whom I don't know personally. (Reversed) • PSM 13 I am often reminded by daily events about how dependent we are on one another. • PSM 24 I have little compassion for people in need who are unwilling to take the first step to help themselves. (Reversed) • PSM 40 There are few public programs that I wholeheartedly support. (Reversed)
Unclear	Self-sacrifice	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • PSM 1 Making a difference in society means more to me than personal achievements. • PSM 5 I believe in putting duty before self. • PSM 6 Doing well financially is definitely more important to me than doing good deeds. (Reversed) • PSM 9 Much of what I do is for a cause bigger than myself. • PSM 12 Serving citizens would give me a good feeling even if no one paid me for it. • PSM 17 I feel people should give back to society more than they get from it. • PSM 19 I am one of those rare people who would risk personal loss to help someone else. • PSM 26 I am prepared to make enormous sacrifices for the good of society.

Appendix B

Methodological Notes and Critiques Related to Literature on Psychological Empowerment

On the Measurement of Psychological Empowerment: Reivew Speicific to Spreitzer (1995)

As stated in the main text, the Psychological Empowerment scale measurement instrument includes 12-items with the component dimensions measured with three items each. In this case, psychological empowerment is understood as a common second-order latent factor that underlies the four latent component factors (e.g., meaning, impact, competence, self-determination). Initial analysis of the measurement scale revealed significant correlation between the component factors, suggesting a lack of discriminant validity between the four dimensional components of empowerment. Further research should be done to further refine the theory and measurement of psychological empowerment (Spreitzer 1995, 1458).

Validity and reliability was assessed for the four components of empowerment by examination of the overall Cronbach's alpha (α) of the scale and the same was done for each component as well. The measurement scales for the four components of empowerment were found to be valid and moderately reliable. Second-order confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) was used to assess the convergent and discriminant validity of the empowerment measures in both samples. Second-order confirmatory factor analysis is structurally equivalent to first-order CFA: there is an unobservable latent factor (i.e., construct) theorized to be influential upon observable referents, or indicators. For second-order CFA, the latent factor is theorized to be a common higher level factor influential upon a set of other lower level latent component factors.

It's important to make a quick note on the survey sample and data collection strategy used in this study to develop and validate the measurement scale of psychological empowerment. Especially since this scale is referenced and drawn upon often in subsequent research. Survey data was collected for two distinct samples of a Fortune 50 industrial company. The first sample ($n = 393$) comprised of managers from across departments. Manager respondents were surveyed over a period of three years until a 100% response rate was achieved (this was not panel data). This first primary sample consisted of mid-level managers, 93% male, 85% White, average age of 46 years, an average tenure of 13 years at the company, and average time in position of 3 years. The extent that this sample is representative of people with jobs, generally speaking, is probably pretty low. But more importantly, the author was trying to develop and validate a novel measure of empowerment by testing it on a sample that is likely to be more empowered than the average worker. It is not clear why the sample was confined to this group, but it seems

like it would have made more sense to randomly sample all employees.

In contrast, the second sample was surveyed at two different intervals spanning five months in between survey administration, and consisted of (non-managerial) employees ($n = 128$) of the same company. The author reported a difference in measurement validity between the two samples; the Cronbach's alpha for the overall measure of empowerment was $\alpha = 0.72$ for the primary industrial sample of managers, but $\alpha = 0.62$ for the second sample of employees. This calls into question whether the equivalence assumption (Pietryka and MacIntosh 2022) holds for this measurement scale. Additionally, the primary sample of managers were surveyed across a period of three years at the beginning of a managerial development program. Seeing as how these managers all work in the same company, it apparently wasn't considered that any of the managers of the sample would talk to each other about the survey over the period of three years, which potentially may have contaminated the results of the study.

Using the new measure for psychological empowerment, Spreitzer (1995) tested whether the scale significantly predicted two outcomes: managerial effectiveness and innovative behavior. The former was defined as, "the degree to which a manager fulfills or exceeds work role expectations" (1995, 1448). Note that "managerial effectiveness" does not only pertain to workers who are employed as managers, but rather apparently refers to a kind of effectiveness which would be described as "managerial". Spreitzer explains, "Because, by definition, empowered managers see themselves as competent and able to influence their jobs and work environments in meaningful ways, they are likely to proactively execute their job responsibilities by, for instance, anticipating problems and acting independently, and hence are likely to be seen as effective." (1995, 1448). Innovative behavior was defined as "the creation of something new or different".

It is unclear what survey items were used to measure these two behavioral outcomes, but both managerial effectiveness and innovative behavior was ascertained by questioning the subordinate employees of the managers from the primary sample. The two behavioral outcomes were found to be significantly related to empowerment, but the marginal fit of the model was said to be likely due to multicollinearity between those two behavioral outcomes.

Spreitzer also fit a Multiple Indicators Multiple Causes (MIMIC) model to test whether certain factors were antecedent to empowerment. This attempt to identify individual and contextual factors antecedent to empowerment found partial support, but was not substantially convincing. Many of the independent constructs theorized to influence empowerment overlap in definition or description and are not independent in that they potentially cause or influence each other. Each factor is nevertheless theorized to have independent influence on empowerment.

For example, feedback (i.e., information about performance) and self-esteem are considered as two independent factors that are antecedent to empowerment. The former contextual, the latter a dispositional trait. However, feedback on performance likely impacts self-esteem despite its conception as a stable and enduring disposition. That raises issues of endogeneity (two independent variables not so independent).

Psychological Empowerment as a Mediator: Review Specific to Liden, Wayne, and Sparrowe (2000) and Shapira-Lishchinsky and Tsemach (2014)

As stated in the main text, two of the three studies examining psychological empowerment as a mediating variable appeared problematic upon review. What follows are my initial impressions and critiques upon review of Liden, Wayne, and Sparrowe (2000) and Shapira-Lishchinsky and Tsemach (2014).

The earliest of these studies shows that the meaning and competence dimensions of psychological empowerment have significant influence on organizational commitment (Liden, Wayne, and Sparrowe 2000). However, the cited study appears somewhat questionable in terms of method and measurement of the relevant variables. The cited study uses the term “mediator variables” to describe the empowerment component dimensions, but the analysis conducted appears to have consisted of multivariate OLS. The dependent variables were workplace satisfaction, organizational commitment, and job performance, whereas the independent variables included every component of empowerment, leadership-member exchange (relationship with leadership) and team-member exchange (relationship with coworkers), and job characteristics.

The authors present three OLS models, with the last multivariate OLS model being the most significant as it includes both the “mediator variables” (empowerment components) and other independent variables all together. Looking at this Table 4 (Liden, Wayne, and Sparrowe 2000, 413), the only statistically significant positively related independent variables to work satisfaction are job characteristics and the meaning component of empowerment, whereas competence shows a significant negative influence on work satisfaction—on average and holding all else equal. This finding in Table 4 suggests that an increase in feelings of competence in one’s job decreases work satisfaction. In addition, The measurement for work satisfaction was measured by marking “yes” for adjectives connotating satisfaction, but responses are coded so that a “yes” = 3, whereas a “no” = 0. This coding scheme would seemingly inflate the Cronbach’s alpha for the measure of work satisfaction and doesn’t convey convincing construct nor face validity. The measurement of the relevant variables (save for the empowerment components) and the analysis of the study makes the reported findings in Liden, Wayne, and Sparrowe (2000) article appear dubious.

A relatively more recent study examined whether psychological empowerment serves as a mediating variable between teachers' perceptions of authentic leadership and OCB and withdrawal behaviors (e.g., lateness and voluntary absence frequency) (Shapira-Lishchinsky and Tsemach 2014). The essential findings of the research intuitively suggest that when the boss is perceived as an 'authentic leader', employees (teachers) are increasingly motivated to perform above and beyond what is required of them and report no intent to leave their current job. Here, issues arise in the description and measurement of psychological empowerment, which somewhat undermine the reported findings. The cited authors employ a selective approach to the use of different measurement scales, and when it came to psychological empowerment, chose to reduce the component dimensions down to two and selected eight of the original 12 survey items.

The confirmatory factor analysis conducted by Shapira-Lishchinsky and Tsemach (2014) yielded two factors but the method is literally an analysis meant to confirm the number of expected factors previously theorized. The authors operationally conceived of psychological empowerment as a two-dimensional construct. The authors limited the number of factors down to two, selected 8 out of 12 items from the original psychological empowerment scale, and then conducted an analysis to confirm that survey data sufficiently loads onto only two factors. The thing is, the original psychological empowerment scale is comprised of four latent factors derived from 12-items, where 3 items are used to measure each component factor. The original conception of psychological empowerment has four (latent) dimensions. Seeing as how the analysis by Spreitzer (1995) found that divergent validity was lacking among the component factors, the selective use of various survey items from the original scale is likely to only exacerbate such issues of scale validity.

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