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Facilitating Change Engagement: The Roles of Psychological Empowerment and Leadership Support and Skill Development Opportunities

Farzin Emamifar

Master's degree in Industrial and Organizational Psychology, University of Isfahan

Farzinemami08@gmail.com

Abstract

The problem under study is the lack of employee engagement during organizational change initiatives, which often leads to the failure of these initiatives. The objectives of this study were 1) to investigate the relationship between psychological empowerment and employee change engagement, and 2) to explore the mediating influence of leadership support and skill development opportunities on this relationship. The research method involved collecting data from 100 employees of Arshia Petro Sanat Company, which is undergoing a major organizational transformation. This change happened in the operational teams department, which included changing the size and internal levels of the operational teams. Psychological empowerment was measured using Spreitzer's (1995) 12-item scale. Change engagement was assessed with Herscovitch and Meyer's (2002) 6-item scale. Leadership support was measured using a 6-item scale adapted from Podsakoff et al. (1990), and skill development opportunities were assessed with a 5-item scale developed by Bartlett (2001). A hierarchical multiple regression analysis was conducted to examine the hypothesized relationships. The key findings of the study were: 1) The four dimensions of psychological empowerment (meaning, competence, self-determination, and impact) were significant positive predictors of employee change engagement; 2) Leadership support and skill development opportunities partially mediated the relationship between psychological empowerment and change engagement. These results suggest that fostering a psychologically empowered workforce, while also providing strong leadership support and skill development resources, can enhance employees' willingness to engage with and embrace organizational change initiatives. Organizations should consider these factors when implementing change management strategies.

Keywords: Organizational change, Psychological empowerment, Employee engagement, Leadership, skill development

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Introduction

Organizational change initiatives are often met with resistance and a lack of employee engagement, leading to high failure rates (Vakola & Nikolaou, 2005; Oreg & Berson, 2019). When employees are not willing to embrace and actively participate in change, the success of transformational efforts can be severely compromised. Understanding the factors that drive employee change engagement is, therefore, a critical challenge for organizations undergoing major transitions.

One promising avenue for enhancing change engagement is the concept of psychological empowerment. Psychological empowerment, as defined by Spreitzer (1995), encompasses four dimensions: meaning, competence, self-determination, and impact. Employees who feel psychologically empowered are more likely to exhibit proactive behaviors and a willingness to contribute to organizational goals (Seibert et al., 2003; Carasco-Saul et al., 2015). However, the relationship between psychological empowerment and change engagement remains underexplored.

Furthermore, the organizational context may play a key role in shaping employees' change-related behaviors. Factors such as leadership support and opportunities for skill development could potentially mediate the link between psychological empowerment and change engagement (Fernet et al., 2015; Bouckennooghe, 2012). Supportive leaders who provide resources and developmental opportunities may amplify the positive effects of psychological empowerment on employee willingness to embrace change.

The current study, therefore, had two main objectives: 1) to investigate the relationship between psychological empowerment and employee change engagement, and 2) to examine the mediating influence of leadership support and skill development opportunities on this relationship. It was hypothesized that psychological empowerment would be positively associated with change engagement, and that this relationship would be partially mediated by leadership support and skill development opportunities.

Methodology

Research Method

This study utilized a quantitative research design to examine the relationships between psychological empowerment, leadership support, skill development opportunities, and employee change engagement. A cross-sectional survey was conducted to collect data from employees undergoing a major organizational transformation.

Statistical Population and Sample

The target population for this study included employees of an organization that was in the process of implementing a significant change initiative. A convenience sampling approach was used to recruit participants. An invitation to participate in the survey was sent to 121 employees within the organization, and 100 employees (66.7% response rate) completed the questionnaire.

Measurement of Variables

Change engagement was measured using the 6-item scale developed by Herscovitch and Meyer (2002). Participants rated their level of engagement with the organizational change on a 5-point Likert

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scale ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree). The Cronbach's alpha coefficient for this scale was 0.92, indicating high internal consistency.

Psychological empowerment was assessed using Spreitzer's (1995) 12-item scale, which captures the four dimensions of meaning, competence, self-determination, and impact. Participants responded on a 5-point Likert scale from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree). The reliability coefficients for the four subscales ranged from 0.84 to 0.91, demonstrating good internal consistency. Leadership support was assessed using a 6-item scale adapted from Podsakoff et al. (1990). Participants rated the extent to which their immediate supervisors exhibited supportive behaviors on a 5-point Likert scale. The reliability of this scale, as measured by Cronbach's alpha, was 0.88. Skill development opportunities were measured using a 5-item scale developed by Bartlett (2001). This scale captured the extent to which employees perceived that their organization provided them with access to training and opportunities to acquire new skills. Participants responded on a 5-point Likert scale, and the Cronbach's alpha coefficient for this scale was 0.84.

A hierarchical multiple regression analysis was conducted to test the hypothesized relationships. In the first step, the control variables (age, gender, organizational tenure) were entered. In the second step, the four dimensions of psychological empowerment were added. In the third step, the mediator variables of leadership support and skill development opportunities were included. The statistical significance of the regression coefficients and the changes in R-squared were examined to assess the direct and indirect effects.

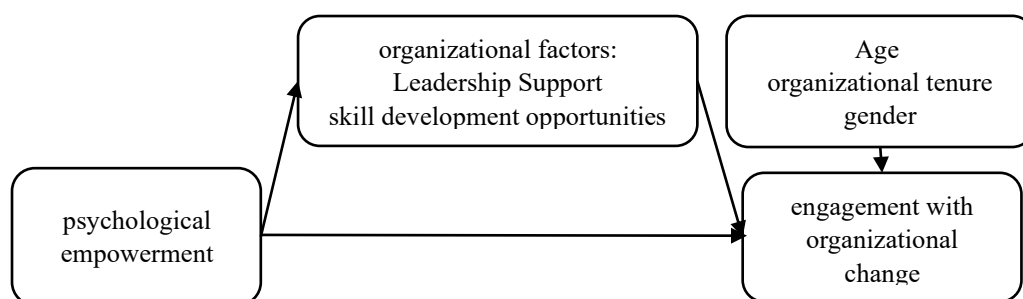


Figure 1. The conceptual framework of the relationship of variables

Findings

In the first step, the control variables of age, gender, and organizational tenure explained 9% of the variance in change engagement ($R^2 = 0.09$, $F(3, 96) = 9.63$, $p < 0.001$). Age was a significant negative predictor ($\beta = -0.16$, $p < 0.05$), while gender and organizational tenure were not significantly associated with change engagement.

In the second step, the addition of the four psychological empowerment dimensions (meaning, competence, self-determination, and impact) significantly increased the explained variance to 39% ($\Delta R^2 = 0.30$, $F(7, 92) = 17.84$, $p < 0.001$). All four empowerment dimensions were positively

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associated with change engagement, with standardized beta coefficients ranging from 0.16 to 0.22 (all $p < 0.01$).

In the third step, the inclusion of leadership support and skill development opportunities further increased the explained variance to 53% ($\Delta R^2 = 0.14$, $F(9, 90) = 19.44$, $p < 0.001$). Both mediators were significant positive predictors of change engagement, with standardized betas of 0.26 ($p < 0.001$) for leadership support and 0.22 ($p < 0.01$) for skill development opportunities.

Table 1. Hierarchical Regression Analysis Predicting Change Engagement

Variable		Model 1	Model 2	Model 3
Control Variables	Age	-0.16*	-0.10	-0.08
	Gender	0.08	0.04	0.01
	Organizational Tenure	0.11	0.06	0.03
Independent Variables	Psychological Empowerment: Meaning		0.22**	0.18*
	Psychological Empowerment: competence		0.19**	0.16*
	Psychological Empowerment: Self-Determination		0.21**	0.17*
	Psychological Empowerment: Impact		0.16*	0.13*
Mediators	Leadership Support			0.26***
	Skill Development Opportunities			0.22**
R ²		0.09	0.39	0.53
ΔR^2			0.30	0.14
F		9.63***	17.84***	19.44***

Note. N = 100. Standardized regression coefficients are reported. * $p < .05$. ** $p < .01$. *** $p < .001$.

Discussion and Conclusions

The findings of this study contribute to the growing body of research on the antecedents of employee engagement with organizational change initiatives. Consistent with previous literature, the results demonstrate that psychological empowerment is a significant positive predictor of change engagement (Carasco-Saul et al., 2015; Seibert et al., 2011). Employees who feel that their work is meaningful, who have a sense of competence and self-determination, and who believe they can have an impact on their organization, are more likely to exhibit a willingness to support and participate in change efforts. Importantly, the current study extends the existing knowledge by uncovering the mediating roles of leadership support and skill development opportunities. These findings align with the work of Odoardi et al. (2015) and Vakola (2014), who have emphasized the importance of contextual factors in shaping employee responses to change. Supportive leadership and opportunities for skill acquisition appear to amplify the positive effects of psychological empowerment, suggesting that organizations should focus on fostering both individual and environmental resources to enhance change engagement. The partial mediation effects observed in this study indicate that psychological empowerment has both direct and indirect influences on change engagement. This implies that simply providing leadership support and skill development opportunities may not be sufficient if employees do not feel a sense of psychological empowerment in the first place. Organizations should, therefore, adopt a multi-faceted approach that addresses both individual and organizational-level determinants of change engagement.

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The current research offers several practical implications for organizations undergoing change. First, it suggests that fostering a psychologically empowered workforce should be a key priority, as this can directly enhance employees' willingness to engage with and embrace change. Second, organizations should invest in developing supportive leadership behaviors and providing skill development opportunities, as these contextual factors can further strengthen the positive effects of psychological empowerment. In conclusion, this study highlights the importance of considering both individual and organizational factors when implementing successful change management strategies. By cultivating a psychologically empowered workforce and creating a supportive environment, organizations can better navigate the challenges of major transformations and increase the likelihood of achieving desired change outcomes.

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