The power of goal internalization: studying psychological empowerment in a Venezuelan plant

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The power of goal internalization: studying psychological empowerment in a Venezuelan plant

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This study, based in a manufacturing plant in Venezuela, examines the relationship between perceived task characteristics, psychological empowerment and commitment, using a questionnaire survey of 313 employees. The objective of the study was to assess the effects of an organizational intervention at the plant aimed at increasing productivity by providing performance feedback on key aspects of its daily operations. It was hypothesized that perceived characteristics of the task environment, such as task meaningfulness and task feedback, will enhance psychological empowerment, which in turn will have a positive impact on employee commitment. Test of a structural model revealed that the relationship of task meaningfulness and task feedback with affective commitment was partially mediated by the empowerment dimensions of perceived control and goal internalization. The results highlight the role of goal internalization as a key mediating mechanism between job characteristics and affective commitment. The study also validates a Spanish-language version of the psychological empowerment scale by Menon (2001).

\textbf{Keywords:} affective commitment; goal internalization; job characteristics; organizational commitment; psychological empowerment

Introduction

Starting with the Hawthorne studies in the first half of the twentieth century, management researchers have been interested in employee perceptions of the work environment, and the effect of these cognitions on employee morale and productivity. A prime example of this genre of research has been the body of work inspired by Hackman and Oldham’s (1976) job characteristics model of work redesign. In this model, employee perceptions of job characteristics, such as the range of skills required to perform the job (skill variety), decision-making latitude (job autonomy) and availability of direct feedback from performing the job (task feedback), lead to critical psychological states, which in turn result in a number of desirable outcomes such as motivation, performance quality and job satisfaction, as well as reduced absenteeism and turnover (Hackman and Lawler 1971; Hackman and Oldham 1976). The critical psychological states were considered the ‘causal core of the model’ (Hackman and Oldham 1976, p. 250). Thus, it is employees’ cognitions of the work environment that result in beneficial outcomes, rather than the objective nature or actual reality of workplace factors.

It is this basic reasoning that underlies research on psychological empowerment in the past two decades. Most of the research (Conger and Kanungo 1988; Thomas and Velthouse 1990; Spreitzer 1995; Menon 2001; Avolio, Zhu, Koh and Bhatia 2004; Seibert, Silver and Randolph 2004) has adopted a basic mediation framework wherein, cognitions

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of empowerment, that is psychological empowerment, are a result of antecedent conditions in the workplace, and many desirable work outcomes are a consequence of these cognitions (e.g. Ahearne, Mathieu and Rapp 2005). While much of the initial research has been focused in North America, interest in empowerment research is now global (e.g. Amenumey and Lockwood 2008) and models of psychological empowerment have been tested in countries as diverse as Greece (Dimitriades 2005), Singapore (Avolio et al. 2004) and Australia (Menon and Hartmann 2002). Given the vast number of possible antecedent variables and consequences, different researchers have focused on different subsets of these variables, resulting in tests of a variety of hypotheses at the individual and group level (e.g. Mathieu, Gilson and Ruddy 2006).

The present study, based in a Venezuelan bottling plant, links the antecedent variables’ task meaningfulness and task feedback to organizational commitment, through the mediating mechanism of psychological empowerment. To the best of our knowledge such a relationship has not been directly tested in the literature. Extant research on psychological empowerment and associated cognitions is first reviewed, followed by a review of research linking psychological empowerment to task meaningfulness, task feedback and affective organizational commitment. The paper then describes the empirical study testing specific hypotheses linking these variables and in the process validates a Spanish-language version of the psychological empowerment scale by Menon (2001). We conclude with implications for practitioners and directions for future research.

Psychological empowerment and underlying cognitions

Psychological empowerment can be distinguished from sociological or structural empowerment. Sociological approaches to empowerment focus on the sources of power in organizations, the uneven distribution of power in organizations and the mechanisms to transfer power from the more powerful to the less powerful in organizations. Psychological empowerment, on the other hand, is concerned with employees’ cognitions of autonomy, power and influence with regard to their work environment (Conger and Kanungo 1988; Spreitzer 1995; Menon 2001). The most widely used measure of psychological empowerment is based on Spreitzer’s (1995) approach. Spreitzer’s (1996, p. 484) model has four components: meaning (fit between role requirements and personal beliefs), competence (work-specific self-efficacy), self-determination (choice and autonomy regarding one’s work) and impact (perceived influence over work outcomes). However, empirical research on psychological empowerment also suggests that there are only three basic cognitions underlying the construct.

Employees’ cognition typically associated with psychological empowerment is related to experiencing control of one’s work environment. Employees in control of their work environment can decide what to do when, and in what order. They also feel that their actions make a difference. These aspects of experienced control have been referred to as ‘choice’, ‘self-determination’ and ‘impact’ (Thomas and Velthouse 1990; Spreitzer 1995), as well as ‘perceived control’ (Menon 2001). There is some evidence that the dimensions of impact and self-determination may not be sufficiently distinct empirically. Spreitzer (1996, p. 496) reported a correlation of 0.54 between these dimensions. Kraimer, Seibert and Liden (1999), in a confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) test of the dimensionality of the Spreitzer scale, found that the covariance between the two first-order factors of self-determination and impact was significant enough ($r = 0.70$) to affect the fit of the model. They recommended a model with a direct relationship between self-determination and impact.
Another empowering cognition is that related to efficacy with respect to one’s work. Conger and Kanungo (1988) identified feelings of self-efficacy as the fundamental cognition underlying psychological empowerment and later researchers (Thomas and Velthouse 1990; Spreitzer 1995; Menon 2001) used the term ‘competence’ or ‘perceived competence’ to refer to feelings of self-efficacy with regard to organizational tasks. Examples of recent research linking empowerment initiatives and self-efficacy include Ahearne et al. (2005) and Biron and Bamberger (2011). The former found self-efficacy to be the mediating mechanism between empowering leadership behavior and job performance, while the latter found that self-efficacy mediates the relationship between empowerment and well-being.

A final cognition typically associated with psychological empowerment relates to the employee’s understanding of the significance of his or her work. Both Thomas and Velthouse (1990) and Spreitzer (1995) capture this aspect of psychological empowerment as ‘meaning’, referring to the experience of work as personally meaningful. In a significant departure, the third cognition in Menon’s (2001) approach is ‘goal internalization’, which refers to employee identification with the goals of the organization, which in turn provides meaning to the work performed. Menon (2001) posited that goal internalization best captures the empowering effect of transformational leadership or the energizing aspect of a cherished goal.

Menon (2001, p. 161) defined the empowered state as a cognitive condition ‘characterized by perceived control, competence, and goal internalization’. While early conceptualizations of psychological empowerment (Conger and Kanungo 1988; Spreitzer 1995) highlighted the distinction between structural and psychological empowerment, Menon (2001) pointed out that the two approaches are complementary. According to him, the empowering actions that are the focus of the structural approach result in the cognitive states that are the focus of the psychological approach. Mathieu et al. (2006, p. 98) concurred with Menon and called his approach a ‘unifying view of empowerment’. They further suggested that from this perspective, structural aspects of the workplace such as work design and other organizational factors should be considered antecedent conditions that lead to the psychological state of empowerment. The emphasis on the psychological state of the empowered individual also serves to highlight the fact that the true test of empowerment is whether the individual actually feels empowered. Zhang and Bartol (2010, p. 110) cited this aspect of Menon’s approach as the theoretical underpinning for linking antecedent conditions, such as empowering leadership, to outcomes, such as employee creativity. Empirically, Menon’s three-factor model has been tested and validated in many international settings such as Greece (Dimitriades 2005), Israel (Sagie 2002), Spain (Barroso Castro, Villegas Periñan and Casillas Bueno 2008) and Turkey (Erturk 2010). It is particularly relevant when the research emphasis is on the empowering effects of leadership, as the dimension of goal internalization is particularly suited to capture the alignment between individual and organizational goals (see, for example, Barroso Castro et al. 2008; Erturk 2010).

**Goal internalization**

Goal internalization is a relatively understudied dimension of psychological empowerment. As mentioned earlier, the dimension of ‘meaning’ in the Spreitzer (1995) model is related more to the significance of the immediate task, whereas in the Menon (2001) formulation, goal internalization captures the energizing effect of organizational levels, goals and aspirations. Goal-setting research (see Locke and Latham 1990) has already...
established that acceptance at the level of the task has positive motivational effects on the performance of that task. Goal internalization goes beyond employee-level task goals to that of broad organizational objectives. Especially in times of change, leaders energize and hence empower followers by enlisting them in achieving the vision of the organization (Yukl 1989). Goals that reflect a higher purpose or worthy cause are particularly empowering (Burke 1986). Bennis and Nanus (1985) identified sharing a meaningful common purpose as critical to empowerment. According to Kanungo and Mendonca (1996), transformational leadership only empowers to the extent that goals are internalized.

Organizational practices and empowerment

In organizations, the work context as experienced by the employee constitutes the antecedent conditions for empowerment. This context can include actions of leaders and managers (e.g. Zhang and Bartol 2010), the design of work (e.g. Spreitzer 1996), organizational factors such as structure, design and organizational culture (e.g. Amenumey and Lockwood 2008; Butts, Vandenberg, DeJoy, Schaffer and Wilson 2009), as well as the larger societal culture in which the organization and all its actors are embedded (e.g. Robert, Probst, Martocchio, Drasgow and Lawler 2000). Typically, achieving the empowered state is viewed as a prelude to a host of individual-level outcomes, thus completing the mediation model. For example, Avolio et al. (2004) showed that psychological empowerment mediated the relationship between transformational leadership and organizational commitment. In this paper, we focus only on variables relevant to the ongoing transformation at the research site, namely organizational practices, job characteristics and organizational commitment. The present study is restricted to individual-level empowerment.

Research evidence in the fields of HRM and industrial relations has shown that high-performance work systems, also named as high-involvement work practices (HIWPs), can have a consistent impact on organizational performance (Gibson, Porath, Benson and Lawler 2007; Subramony 2009). These practices include sharing power and information with employees at all levels of the organization, setting boundaries between processes and implementing teamwork systems, among others. A recent study using data from 200 ‘Fortune 1000’ firms in the United States revealed specific relationships between implementation of these practices and organizational performance (Gibson et al. 2007). It was found that practices related with information sharing, for example communicating information such as the firm financial results or specific business unit outcomes, at all levels of the organization are positively related to the financial performance of the firm. In a similar vein, practices fostering boundary setting or establishing key indicators of the firm’s processes are related to firm-level customer service.

These practices, dealing with granting or sharing information with employees in lower levels of the organization’s structure and defining key performance indicators (KPIs) to focus on, are supposed to provide objective elements of task feedback and task meaningfulness (i.e. job characteristics) and, as a consequence, affect the feelings and mind-set of employees by increasing their perceptions of control, competence and inspiration to perform their jobs (i.e. psychological empowerment). For example, Butts et al. (2009) showed that HIWPs lead to psychological empowerment, which in turns leads to various individual-level outcomes. Spreitzer (1996) showed that a participative climate and perceived access to information lead to psychological empowerment.
Job characteristics and empowerment

The job characteristics proposed by the classic model of Hackman and Oldham (1975) could be a set of reliable measures for assessing HIWPs at the job level. Variables such as task meaningfulness (measured as a composite of skill variety, task identity and task significance) and task feedback could provide an objective photograph on how these practices are affecting the day-to-day work of job occupants in a particular point of time. These job characteristics are of particular interest in this study because the organizational change adopted in the research site involved implementing measurement and monitoring systems that allowed employees to self-monitor the production performance and take necessary corrective action. The new procedures are aimed to make the production process and overall unit performance more relevant to employees and to provide them immediate task feedback.

Task meaningfulness

In the Hackman and Oldham (1976) model, the critical psychological state of meaningfulness of work is derived from three job characteristics, namely, skill variety (i.e. degree to which a job demands a variety of different activities to perform the work), task identity (i.e. the degree to which a job demands the completion of a whole work or a clearly identifiable part of it, with a specific outcome) and task significance (i.e. the degree to which the job has a substantial impact on the work of other people within or outside the organization). In an empirical test of the job characteristics model, Renn and Vandenberg (1995) found task identity and task significance to be related to meaningfulness, but not skill variety. The former two characteristics are key aspects of task meaningfulness and are focused on assessing if job occupants can experience indicators that allow them to visualize how the execution of their assigned tasks is related to other processes and jobs in the unit, that is, where are they in the ‘picture’? (i.e. task identity), and also, on how their day-to-day activities are affecting the jobs performed by other peers, the satisfaction of internal and external clients, and the performance of the unit itself (i.e. task significance). Thus, if an organization is able to provide these metrics to its employees, it could expect to see positive ratings on task meaningfulness. As a consequence of this perception, the individual would experience feelings of power regarding the influence or perceived control she or he has on his or her unit’s performance and also on the attainment of organizational goals. This is in line with Kanter’s (1983) contention that sharing information with employees is in itself empowering. The understanding of his or her position or role in the overall effectiveness that task meaningfulness provides should also increase goal internalization. Not surprisingly, Gagne, Senecal and Koestner (1997) found task significance to be related to the empowerment dimension of meaning.

Discussing the results of a recent meta-analysis, Humphrey, Nahrgang and Morgeson (2007) noted the positive relationship between the pursuit of cherished goals and meaningfulness. They further noted the positive relationship between meaningfulness and various work outcomes, however, being engaged in a meaningful task will be energizing only if the goals are internalized. According to Bennis and Nanus (1985), the feeling of making a difference is an integral dimension of empowerment.

There is no a priori reason to expect a relationship between task meaningfulness and the empowerment dimension of perceived competence. The latter derives from a feeling of enhanced self-efficacy (see Conger and Kanungo 1988), and according to Bandura’s (1977) conceptualization, self-efficacy beliefs stem mainly from information on actual performance (enactive attainment), observing others (vicarious experience) and being told
by others (verbal persuasion). Therefore, perceptions of competence would seem to be related more to direct and indirect feedback from task performance, rather than task meaningfulness.

On the basis of these ideas, we can hypothesize that:

Hypothesis 1: Task meaningfulness will be positively related to perceived control and goal internalization

Task feedback

Task feedback refers to the degree to which an employee is able to obtain clear and direct information concerning his or her performance by executing their work (Hackman and Oldham 1975, pp. 161–162). Theory and research findings suggest that task feedback is an important source of self-efficacy for individuals because it provides a line of sight to the attainment of performance goals, allowing individuals to track their own progress (Gist 1987). In this way, if a set of performance indicators is implemented in a business unit to allow employees to track their performance by themselves, it would have a positive impact on the ratings of job occupants on the task feedback dimension. Research has shown that individuals use individual- and team-level feedback to regulate their actions with respect to individual and team goals (DeShon, Kozlowski, Schmidt, Milner and Wiechmann 2004). Gagne et al. (1997, p. 1233) found task feedback to be related to the empowering dimensions of impact and autonomy. Hon and Rensvold (2006) found task feedback to be related to competence and self-determination. If the employee perceives this feedback to be an effective tool for tracking his or her personal advancement on attaining a particular goal, a positive relationship will be found between task feedback and perceived control. Increased feedback leads to increased job satisfaction (Renn and Vandenberg 1995), and increased feedback coupled with increased autonomy or perceived control will result in enhanced performance (Dodd and Ganster 1996).

In a similar vein, if performance indicators used by the organization are interconnected among themselves to provide a clear snapshot of the performance of the business unit or the department, this information could be transformed into a perception of how the employees’ daily work is affecting the unit’s goals and how their decisions and ideas are affecting these results. In an experimental setting, Ilies and Judge (2005) demonstrated that the nature of feedback influences individual’s cognitions of goals. One could expect that giving feedback about performance and goal achievement would increase employee identification with organizational goals, thus increasing goal internalization. Humphrey et al. (2007) also note that feedback from the job about job accomplishment has the potential to enhance meaning. More recently, Lepmets and Ras (2011) demonstrate that engaging in process assessments leads to internalization of the goals of the process improvements.

On the basis of the above reasoning, we can hypothesize that:

Hypothesis 2: Task feedback will be positively related to perceived control, perceived competence and goal internalization

It is worth mentioning at this point that autonomy, one of the five original job characteristics contained in the model of Hackman and Oldham (1975), was not included in this study because of potential confusion with the dimension of perceived control in Menon’s psychological empowerment scale (2001). The potential overlap not only resides...
in the parallel definitions, but also in the items that operationalize both constructs. Job autonomy deals with the degree to which a job provides substantial freedom, independence and discretion to the employee in determining the procedures to be used to perform his job, and is operationalized with items such as: The job gives me considerable opportunity for independence and freedom in how I do the work. Perceived control refers to beliefs about autonomy in the scheduling and performance of work, authority and decision-making latitude. The construct is measured through items such as: I have the authority to make decisions at work.

Organizational commitment and empowerment

Organizational commitment has been one of the most widely studied outcome variables in the management literature in the past two decades. Researchers (e.g. Meyer and Allen 1997) have identified different dimensions of organizational commitment such as affective commitment (based on identification with the organization), continuance commitment (based on lack of choice or external options) and normative commitment (based on perceived obligations and moral imperatives). Research evidence has found strong correlations between affective commitment and different variables of relevance to both organizations (e.g. in-role performance and attendance) and employees (e.g. stress and work–family conflict; Meyer, Stanley, Herscovitch and Topolnytsky 2002). Considering that psychological empowerment satisfies some basic motives and needs such as the need for power, self-determination, self-efficacy and feelings of significance, one should expect that empowered employees would be satisfied with their jobs and committed to their organizations. In fact, many studies have demonstrated significant relationships between psychological empowerment and affective commitment, even when using different scales for measuring empowerment (e.g. Menon 2001; Avolio et al. 2004; Arciniega and González 2006; Barroso Castro et al. 2008).

Some studies have also found evidence of psychological empowerment as a meditational link between job characteristics and organizational commitment, in particular, affective commitment. Liden, Wayne and Sparrow (2000) found that psychological empowerment mediated the relationship between job characteristics and organizational commitment, through the meaning dimension. However, they used a composite measure of job characteristics and did not separate out the effects of individual job characteristics. Kraimer et al. (1999), using a sample of nurses, found that the empowerment dimension of impact mediated the relationship between task feedback and organizational commitment. However, in their meta-analysis, Humphrey et al. (2007) found job characteristics to be related to many outcome variables, including organizational commitment. Thus, we can expect the meditational effect of psychological empowerment to be partial rather than total.

Many studies on organizational commitment have shown that when affective and normative commitment are used to assess the impact of job characteristics and work experiences, the normative component tends to show weaker relations with those constructs than with the affective dimension. A recent review of the literature suggests that even when the normative dimension has its unique antecedents, these have to be evaluated through longitudinal studies, in which the nature of the construct is effectively captured, since its essence is rooted in processes of acculturation, socialization and social exchange (Bergman 2006). Because of these reasons, normative commitment was not included in the model.

With respect to continuance commitment, the literature and research findings have shown that the main antecedents of the construct are concentrated in external
factors such as the situation of the job market, the perception of the compensation received by the employee and some other aspects not related with the employees’ day-to-day work, such as the perception of the transferability of their skills and education to other organizations (Meyer and Allen 1997). Specifically, with regard to the variables in the study, Humphrey et al. (2007) found no significant relationship between job characteristics and turnover intentions. On the other hand, Réaume, Clément and LeBel (2011) found, in a sample of Canadian nurses, that 24% of the intent to leave was explained by the empowerment dimension of goal internalization. The present study was conducted in Venezuela, where labor mobility is very low compared to Western economies. Therefore, one cannot intuitively expect to find much variability in continuance commitment. At best, it is possible that task characteristics may have a weak, indirect effect on continuance commitment as mediated by goal internalization.

On the basis of the above research and reasoning, we can hypothesize:

Hypothesis 3a: Psychological empowerment will be positively related to affective commitment.

Hypothesis 3b: Psychological empowerment will partially mediate the relationship between task meaningfulness and affective commitment.

Hypothesis 3c: Psychological empowerment will partially mediate the relationship between task feedback and affective commitment.

Hypothesis 3d: Goal internalization will mediate the relationship between task characteristics and continuance commitment.

Figure 1 shows all the hypothesized relationships previously discussed.

![Figure 1. The proposed model.](image-url)
Method

Context and sample

To test the various hypotheses, a questionnaire survey design was adopted. Questionnaires were administered to employees of a manufacturing facility of a leading organization in the Food and Beverage sector in Venezuela. The plant was one of the largest of its type, with more than 1000 employees. This company was implementing a system of continuous improvement in its manufacturing and logistics processes. Six months before data were collected, the plant adopted the use of a set of KPIs concerning core aspects of its operations (e.g., productivity, waste reduction, quality and safety). To increase the visibility and salience of the KPIs, the organization made the employees aware of the progress and overall performance periodically. Data were also prominently displayed in high traffic areas frequented by employees. In addition, employees received training so that they could appreciate the significance of these measures and have a good grasp of how these indicators affected overall results.

As the plant was unionized, the support of the union for the study effort was first secured. With the help of the human resource department, a random sample of approximately one-third of the population of employees was chosen to participate in the study. As is common practice in these types of settings, supervisors were instructed to release employees during regular work time to go to a central location to fill out the survey, which was administered directly to the employees. To relieve anxiety about confidentiality, employees were assured that the survey was anonymous and would be processed only by the researchers. To ensure this, the survey was handed out by one of the researchers who also received the completed responses without any involvement by company representatives.

All 335 of the randomly chosen employees filled out the questionnaire. However, 22 questionnaires were not usable and were discarded due to incomplete answers. Thus, a total of 313 employees took part in this study for an effective response rate of 93%. Participants were 89% male and the mean age was 30.5 (SD = 7.03) years, ranging from 20 to 56 years. Concerning tenure, the mean was of 3.1 (SD = 4.05) years, ranging from 1 month to 30 years. Of the participants, 54% had attended high school and 44% had been to college. Only a minority of them (2%) had only secondary school education.

Regarding their jobs, 72% of the respondents were operators in charge of monitoring their bottling lines, watching for problems such as pileups, jams or the correct tagging of the bottles, as well as observing machine operations to ensure quality and product conformity to company standards, and inspecting and removing defective products. Of the employees who participated in the study, 8% performed tasks related to preventive and corrective maintenance. Just 7% were white-collar employees performing tasks concerning plant administration. The rest of the employees performed jobs related to quality assurance, safety and warehousing.

Measures

To measure empowerment, we developed a Spanish-language version of the Menon’s psychological empowerment scale (2001) following the back-translation process proposed by Brislin (1986). This scale consists of nine items, with three items operationalizing each of the three dimensions proposed by Menon’s model: perceived competence, perceived control and goal internalization. Responses to all items are made on a seven-point scale (1 = strongly disagree, 7 = strongly agree).
To assess organizational commitment, we employed a Spanish-language version of the Meyer and Allen (1997) questionnaire. This version (Arciniega and González 2006) has been previously used in samples of employees in Latin America reporting adequate psychometric properties. The questionnaire also uses a seven-point Likert-type scale, ranging from 1 = strongly disagree to 7 = strongly agree. The internal consistency index (Cronbach’s $\alpha$) for the six items of affective dimension was 0.74, meanwhile for the continuance commitment scale was 0.70.

Task meaningfulness and feedback were measured using a Spanish-language version of the Job Diagnosis Survey of Hackman and Oldham (1975). This version has been previously employed in other Spanish-language populations reporting acceptable psychometric properties (Gonza´ lez 1997). For measuring task meaningfulness, we used the items associated to skill variety (3), task identity (3) and task significance (3). The Cronbach’s $\alpha$ for this scale was 0.73. Concerning task feedback, we used the three items of the scale obtaining an internal consistency index of 0.64.

Analyses
For the purpose of evaluating the construct validity of the new Spanish-language version of the psychological empowerment measure, we employed a cross-validation process splitting the sample into two random halves (Bollen 1989; Thompson 1994). Using the data of one of the subsamples, we computed an exploratory factor analysis (EFA) using the principal components extraction method with oblimin rotation, due to the theoretical relationships between the three dimensions of the construct. As an approach to assess the replication of the findings using the EFA method, we computed a nested sequence of CFAs employing the data of the second half. First, we assessed the goodness of fit of the data to a single-factor model, indicating a global uniform construct. Then, we tested a model with three oblique factors.

Once the construct structure validity of the Spanish-language version of the psychological empowerment scale was assessed, we proceeded to evaluate the goodness of fit of the proposed model using the path analysis technique. Since all variables included in the model were measured using self-reported scales, we decided to run a Harman’s single-factor test, that is, an EFA including all of the variables in the model to diagnose for common method bias. This technique allows us to determine if common method variance may be a problem (Podsakoff, MacKenzie, Lee and Podsakoff 2003).

Results
Three clear factors with eigenvalues higher than 1 were found when the EFA was computed on the data of Subsample A. The three factors explained 34.12%, 16.98% and 14.95% of the variance, respectively, accounting for a total of 66.05%. The estimated factor loadings are reported in Table 1. As can be seen, five out of nine coefficients are higher than 0.80, all being higher than the cutoff point of 0.40. The correlation between the factor associated with goal internalization and the one associated with perceived control was 0.28; a coefficient with the same magnitude was found between the factors of perceived competence and goal internalization. The correlation coefficient between the factors of perceived control and perceived competence was 0.21. These results suggest a clear, three oblique factors structure.

As a strategy to cross-validate the findings obtained from the EFA, CFAs were conducted to examine the fit of the proposed construct structure model for the psychological empowerment measure to the data of the Subsample B. First, the data were
tested for normality. Multivariate normality in the data was assessed through Mardia’s statistic test, which is based on functions of skewness and kurtosis. It is suggested that Mardia’s PK should be less than 3 to undertake the assumption of multivariate normality (e.g. Mardia 1970; Mardia and Foster 1983). We obtained an index of 2.32, indicating that multivariate normality was not violated.

Then, we proceeded to assess the previously described models. A poor goodness of fit was found for Model 1, that is, the model proposing a unidimensional structure for the construct of psychological empowerment with a CFI of 0.716, a RMSEA of 0.199 and a $\chi^2 (df=27) = 186.06$. We next turned to examine Model 2, the model suggesting a three oblique factors structure. The CFI for this model was 0.964, while the RMSEA was 0.038 and a $\chi^2 (df=24) = 44.19$, suggesting all indices are a good fit between the model and the data. The substantial improvement from Model 1 to Model 2 was confirmed by a $p < 0.001$ for the $\Delta \chi^2/\Delta df$ test between the two.

The cross-validation approach followed suggests that the three oblique dimensions structure is clear and robust, and based on this, we computed reliability indices using the data of the full sample. Cronbach’s $\alpha$ was 0.80 for goal internalization, 0.70 for perceived control and 0.76 for perceived competence.

On the basis of the fact that Cronbach’s $\alpha$ could provide an inaccurate measure of reliability when a multidimensional construct is analyzed, as in the case of psychological empowerment, we decided to conduct an additional assessment of construct reliability. We computed the composite reliability index for each of the three dimensions. To calculate the composite reliability, a CFA was performed assessing the fit of a three oblique-factor

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Table 1. Estimated factor loadings for the items of each dimension of the psychological empowerment scale.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Items/scale</th>
<th>1</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>3</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Goal internalization</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I am enthusiastic about working toward the organization’s objectives</td>
<td>0.699</td>
<td>0.038</td>
<td>0.004</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I am inspired by what we are trying to achieve as an organization</td>
<td>0.875</td>
<td>-0.046</td>
<td>0.059</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I am inspired by the goals of the organization</td>
<td>0.886</td>
<td>0.028</td>
<td>-0.067</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Perceived control</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I can influence the way work is done in my department</td>
<td>0.092</td>
<td>0.661</td>
<td>0.070</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I have the authority to make decisions at work</td>
<td>-0.115</td>
<td>0.848</td>
<td>-0.078</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I can influence decisions taken in my department</td>
<td>0.085</td>
<td>0.798</td>
<td>0.052</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Perceived competence</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I have the capabilities required to do my job well</td>
<td>-0.079</td>
<td>0.009</td>
<td>0.892</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I have the skills and abilities to do my job well</td>
<td>0.092</td>
<td>-0.026</td>
<td>0.653</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I have the competence to work effectively</td>
<td>-0.034</td>
<td>0.038</td>
<td>0.891</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: Estimated factor loadings obtained from an EFA using the method of principal components with oblimin rotation. The Spanish-language version of the items is available from the authors upon request.
Table 2. Means, standard deviations and intercorrelations among study variables.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>SD</th>
<th>1</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>3</th>
<th>4</th>
<th>5</th>
<th>6</th>
<th>7</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>(1) Task meaningfulness</td>
<td>5.61</td>
<td>0.80</td>
<td>(0.73)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(2) Task feedback</td>
<td>5.96</td>
<td>0.86</td>
<td>0.50**</td>
<td>(0.64)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(3) Goal internalization</td>
<td>6.49</td>
<td>0.64</td>
<td>0.37**</td>
<td>0.42**</td>
<td>(0.80)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(4) Perceived control</td>
<td>5.80</td>
<td>0.98</td>
<td>0.45**</td>
<td>0.33**</td>
<td>0.39**</td>
<td>(0.70)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(5) Perceived competence</td>
<td>6.78</td>
<td>0.40</td>
<td>0.14*</td>
<td>0.27**</td>
<td>0.36**</td>
<td>0.31**</td>
<td>(0.76)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(6) Affective commitment</td>
<td>6.12</td>
<td>0.73</td>
<td>0.40**</td>
<td>0.35**</td>
<td>0.58**</td>
<td>0.44**</td>
<td>0.29**</td>
<td>(0.74)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(7) Continuance commitment</td>
<td>5.15</td>
<td>1.02</td>
<td>0.06</td>
<td>0.08</td>
<td>0.19*</td>
<td>0.07</td>
<td>0.10</td>
<td>0.26**</td>
<td>(0.70)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Notes: Cronbach’s αs of each scale are reported on the diagonal. *p < 0.05; **p < 0.01.
model to the data of the total sample. The results suggested an adequate fit: $\text{CFI} = 0.981$, $\text{RMSEA} = 0.048$, $\chi^2_{(df=24)} = 41.28$. On the basis of the coefficients of the solution, we computed the Rho reliability index for each subscale, using the Raykov and Shrout (2002) formula. A coefficient of 0.78 was found for goal internalization, 0.71 for perceived control and 0.72 for perceived competence, all coefficients being above the recommended value of 0.60 (Bagozzi and Yi 1988).

Once the psychometric properties of the new scale were established, we computed the zero-order correlations between all variables in the study, as shown in Table 2. The correlation between the two variables of the job characteristics model was 0.50. The mean of the correlations for the three dimensions of the psychological empowerment construct was 0.35 (SD = 0.03), this pattern being consistent with previous findings in developing countries (Menon and Kotze 2007).

As shown in Table 2, positive and significant correlations were found between task meaningfulness and the empowerment dimensions of perceived control and goal internalization. These results are consistent with Hypothesis 1. Also as expected (Hypothesis 2), the correlations between task feedback and the three dimension of psychological empowerment are significant and positive, the highest being the one between task feedback and goal internalization ($r = 0.42$). The high correlations of affective commitment with goal internalization ($r = 0.58$) and perceived control ($r = 0.44$), in conjunction with the slightly lower coefficients of task meaningfulness with task feedback and affective commitment, could suggest the proposed mediating role of psychological empowerment between the job characteristics and affective commitment.

As shown in Table 2, continuance commitment had very low, non-significant correlations with task meaningfulness and task feedback, as well as with perceived control and perceived competence. It had a small, but significant relationship with goal internalization. In contrast, the pattern of correlations between affective commitment and the above-mentioned variables is very different, with all of them being significant and of much greater magnitude.

Before computing the path analysis to assess the proposed model, we conducted a Harman’s one-factor test to diagnose if common method variance could be an issue of concern. An EFA, using the method of principal components, showed that only eight factors with eigenvalues higher than 1, emerged when all items used to operationalize the variables contained in the model were introduced in the analysis. The first factor explained 24.95% of the variance in the data, meanwhile, the other seven factors explained the remaining 75.05% of the variance. The mean explained variance of the seven factors was 5.25% (minimum = 3.75%, & maximum = 7.9%). These results suggested that common method variance was not a problem in the data. On the basis of the high correlations obtained between affective commitment and the rest of the variables in the model, and the contrasting low correlation between the formers and continuance commitment (see Table 2), and in light of the results of the Harman test described above, one can reasonably conclude that common method bias is unlikely to be a major concern affecting the results and conclusions of this study.

Next, we computed a path analysis to validate the proposed hypotheses and assess the adequacy of the set of relationships depicted in Figure 1. The results were: $\text{CFI} = 0.945$, $\text{GFI} = 0.971$, $\text{RMSEA} = 0.111$ and a $\chi^2_{(df=7)}$ of 33.78. It is important to say that the Mardia’s PK index was also lower than 3 (PK = 1.61). A deeper look into the standardized solution revealed low and non-significant relationships between task feedback and affective commitment, and also between perceived competence and affective commitment. On the basis of this, both paths were discarded from the model to be
reassessed. The goodness-of-fit indices of the revised model (see Figure 2) were: CFI = 0.948, GFI = 0.971, RMSEA of 0.095 and a \( \chi^2_{(df=7)} = 34.56 \). Even when the RMSEA could suggest that the goodness of fit could be improved, we decided to retain the model shown in Figure 2 as the best representation of our set of original hypotheses, without any modification.

As shown in Figure 2, only the dimensions of perceived control and goal internalization are significantly related to affective commitment, thus only partially supporting Hypothesis 3a. As the direct path between task meaningfulness and affective commitment was significant, Hypothesis 3b was only partially supported. As the coefficients of the indirect paths between task meaningfulness and affective commitment via perceived control and goal internalization are significant, the dimensions of perceived control and goal internalization partially mediate the relationship between task meaningfulness and affective commitment. The direct path from task feedback to affective commitment was not significant, nor was the path from perceived competence to affective commitment. Thus, while Hypothesis 3c was only partially supported, there is evidence of complete mediation as the variables’ perceived control and goal internalization completely mediate the relationship between task feedback and affective commitment. Concerning Hypothesis 3d, it was supported. The results suggest that goal internalization acts as a mediator between job characteristics and continuance commitment. It is important to remark that, as expected, the relationship is weak showing a coefficient of 0.19. This result is consistent with a previous study conducted in Latin America assessing the impact of HRM practices on organizational commitment (Arciniega and González 2006), but using a different measure for psychological empowerment.

![Figure 2](image_url)  

Figure 2. The revised model. Note: All path coefficients are significant at \( p < 0.05 \).
Discussion

Most of the research on psychological empowerment has used the Spreitzer (1995) model, with its four dimensions of meaning, impact, self-determination and competence, as the basic framework. This study used the more recent Menon (2001) three-factor model partly because of empirical evidence of discriminant validity issues between impact and self-determination mentioned earlier (see Spreitzer 1996; Kraimer et al. 1999). Dimitriades (2005) also reported problems of discriminant validity with the dimension of self-determination. In her factor analysis, the self-determination items loaded on the ‘impact’ factor. More recently, Amenumey and Lockwood (2008) also reported a three-factor solution with self-determination and impact loading on the same factor. It is interesting to note that Spreitzer and colleagues combined the ‘self-determination’ and ‘impact’ items from her scale to measure the construct of perceived control (see Brockner et al. 2004), which is the empowerment cognition favored by Menon (2001) as part of his three-factor model.

While the Menon (2001) scale used in the present research is similar with respect to the dimensions of perceived control and competence, the dimension of goal internalization has no strict parallel in the Spreitzer scale. The meaning dimension in the Spreitzer scale is mainly focused at the level of job activities or work performed, while the goal internalization dimension reflects the alignment between organizational goals and the individual’s work. It portrays the sense of ownership that the individual feels with regard to the goals of the company. It is the dimension of goal internalization that captures the effect of transformational leadership on followers and their willingness to work toward organizational objectives. This is the reason why recent research has used the Menon scale for studying the empowering effects of transformational leadership (see, for example, Barroso Castro et al. 2008; Erturk 2010). The Menon scale was considered appropriate for the present study, and also it was conducted in the aftermath of organizational changes potentially affecting goal internalization.

The organizational change that prompted the present research was focused on changing the objective features of the job environment to promote a participatory culture, thereby transforming the beliefs and attitudes of the employees. The results of the present study suggest that goal internalization might be one of the main mediating mechanisms between job characteristics and organizational commitment. Specifically, goal internalization mediated the path between task meaningfulness and affective commitment (Hypothesis 3b), and the path between task feedback and affective commitment (Hypothesis 3c). It also acts as a mediator between job characteristics and continuance commitment (Hypothesis 3d). It may be noted that even though there is a weak significant direct relationship between task meaningfulness and affective commitment and no significant direct relationship between task feedback and affective commitment, their combined effect through goal internalization is significant and substantial.

This result is consistent with the specifics of the implementation which involved introducing a set of KPIs, explaining their relevance for organizational results, and allowing employees to monitor them. Employees were now in a position to see how what they did on the job had an impact, thereby increasing task meaningfulness. Monitoring the KPIs themselves increased their task feedback. The more they knew about the goals of the organization, the impact of their actions and the results of their interventions, the more they internalized the goals of the organization. It increased their sense of ownership of the goals. One of the authors overheard a conversation between two employees on their way home from work, where they were discussing the KPIs! The employees were waiting for
their shuttle in front of a bulletin board where the KPIs were prominently displayed. Even though they were done with their shift, they chose to discuss the line graphs that depicted progress toward goals. There seemed to be some friendly competition between the two as they compared the results of their units. It was clear to the author that the employees had internalized the plant’s goals and the objectives of the organizational change.

The results obtained in the study are also in line with findings of previous research. Liden et al. (2000) found that Spreitzer’s meaning dimension mediated the link between a composite measure of job characteristics and commitment. Kraimer et al. (1999) found the relationship between task feedback and commitment being mediated by Spreitzer’s impact dimension. In the present research, perceived control mediates the link between task feedback and affective commitment. Perceived control also mediates the link between task meaningfulness and affective commitment, a finding not revealed in previous studies. To the best of our knowledge, no previous study has explicitly linked task meaningfulness to affective commitment as mediated by perceived control and goal internalization. Similarly, the fully mediated path between task feedback and affective commitment via goal internalization has not been tested or demonstrated in previous research. The emergence of goal internalization as an important mediational variable is a major contribution of this study.

It may be noted that there was no significant path between the dimension of perceived competence and affective commitment. This may reflect the fact that while task feedback increases perceived competence in line with the self-efficacy theory (Gist 1987), it need not necessarily increase affective commitment. Employees can feel competent without necessarily being committed to the organization.

From a practitioner’s perspective, the results highlight the importance of increasing task meaningfulness and task feedback as an empowering strategy, particularly as it relates to employees internalizing organizational goals. Merely instituting a formal empowerment program with an emphasis on delegation without goal internalization will only lead to stress and perceptions of overwork, rather than enhanced motivation. Goal internalization can be achieved only through initiatives rooted in transformational leadership.

In this study, no specific hypothesis was developed regarding culture and empowerment because all subjects shared the same culture; thus, culture as a variable would have no bearing on the results. However, as a practical matter, one must be cognizant of the effect of national culture on the transfer and adoption of management practices. Randolf and Sashkin (2002) caution that empowerment initiatives may not be welcomed in cultures high in power distance and uncertainty avoidance, such as Venezuela. Although the high power distance may facilitate compliance (Kirkman and Shapiro 2001), it must be noted that in high power distance cultures, increased training, particularly for supervisors, might be required to attain the necessary ‘buy-in’. For example, Acosta, Leon, Conrad, Gonzalez and Malave (2004) describe how a US company overcame initial resistance to change in its Mexican acquisition by increased training, particularly for supervisors. Supervisors had to ‘let go’, but still needed to be involved and take the lead from time to time. They had to explain the benefits of the changes to the employees: employees had to be convinced that their suggestions were being taken seriously and that there was a follow-through on their proposals.

Limitations
Although the job characteristic job autonomy would intuitively seem to be an obvious choice to include, it was not explicitly measured in this study. This is a limitation as
previous research has associated increases in job autonomy with increases in psychological empowerment. Despite this, job autonomy was not included in the study for two reasons. First, the organization change that is the focus of this study emphasized the two dimensions of task meaningfulness and task feedback. It did not emphasize job autonomy, even though one can imagine that job autonomy would have increased to some extent. Second, there is potential for overlap and lack of discriminant validity between job autonomy and the perceived control dimension of the psychological empowerment. It is worth recalling that Spreitzer (1995) adapted the three items of the Hackman and Oldham job autonomy scale for her self-determination measure. Therefore, even though the Hackman and Oldham (1975) model includes job autonomy as a job characteristic, we did not include this variable in the present research.

This study is cross-sectional in nature and hence it only captures the relationships between the variables at a certain point of time, which may or may not hold in the long run. For example, the substantial role of goal internalization may be due to the novelty or honeymoon effect. Workers who have never been involved in tracking results could be understandably enamored by their enhanced responsibilities. However, once the proverbial ‘low-hanging fruit’ has been harvested and the initial significant gains in productivity have been realized, whether worker enthusiasm can be maintained is an open question. Only follow-up longitudinal studies can answer that question. The cross-sectional nature of the study also means that the direction of causality cannot be established, nor can reciprocal relationships and alternative explanations for results be ruled out. These would also require longitudinal studies and replications. Another point to note is that the study was conducted in Venezuela, which has its own unique set of circumstances. These results would, therefore, need to be replicated in other settings. However, the fact that some of the results are in line with previous research is testimony to the universal nature of the relationships under study.

This study also contributes to the development of the Menon (2001) model in a number of ways. First, Menon (2001) used varimax rotation in the initial factor analysis implying that the dimensions of perceived control, perceived competence and goal internalization are orthogonal to each other. The current research demonstrates that an oblimin rotation resulting in correlated factors might be a better formulation of the model, more in line with the small correlations among the dimensions one can expect in most organizational samples. Second, and more significant, this research highlights the role of goal internalization as perhaps the most important dimension of the model, especially in contexts involving organizational transformation. Goal internalization is an under-researched and perhaps an under-appreciated aspect of psychological empowerment. As employment engagement becomes the objective in more and more workplaces, empowerment initiatives will have to go beyond merely delegation and participation in decision-making to an explicit emphasis on engaging employees through a compelling organizational vision. If so, perceived control and perceived competence will become baseline requirements for psychological empowerment, while goal internalization will become the decisive factor that provides competitive advantage. Third, this research has demonstrated the cross-cultural generalizability of the Menon (2001) model in yet another setting, this time in South America.

The development and validation of a Spanish-language version of the Menon (2001) scale constitutes a useful byproduct of this study. Not only can the instrument be used by scholars and practitioners in Spanish-speaking countries, but it can also be used in cross-cultural research. It can also prove useful in the United States, where Hispanics are the fastest growing minority and the second-largest linguistic group.
Acknowledgements
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References


