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6

Employee Empowerment and Engagement

Marisa Salanova and Susana Llorens

WONT (Work & Organization NeTwork) Research Team, Department of Social Psychology, Universitat Jaume I, Castellón, Spain

Introduction

The concept of empowerment in organizational settings is receiving an increasing amount of research attention, especially during these times of change, innovation, and economic and financial crisis. The competitive global environment requires employees to utilize their capabilities and their full potential. In fact, more than 70% of organizations adopt some kind of initiative to empower employees in order to maintain their effectiveness and competitiveness (e.g., Schein, 1980; Spreitzer & Doneson, 2005).

In difficult times, many organizations require their employees to be highly motivated, proactive, responsible, and involved. Instead of just "doing one's job," employees are expected "to go the extra mile." That is, organizations need *engaged employees*. Relatively little research has been conducted on the relationships between empowerment and engagement (E&E) at work. However, this research shows that empowerment is a kind of "driver" of work engagement.

In this chapter, we discuss how empowerment can be considered an important driver of work engagement, with emphasis on the role that work engagement plays in motivating employees. We describe the empowerment process, giving special attention to the psychological mechanisms by which empowerment enhances engagement at work based on the *HEalthy and Resilient Organization (HERO) Model* (Salanova, Llorens, Cifre, & Martínez, 2012). Finally, we address some practical recommendations to enhance engagement via the empowering of employees.

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What Is Empowerment?

About the concept of empowerment

In organizational context, empowerment is generally thought of as an individual learning process—especially during organizational changes—in which an employee reconstructs his or her ways of thinking and acting (Suominen, Savikko, Kiviniemi, Doran, & Leino-Kilpi, 2008). As a result, employees feel confident that they can successfully execute a certain action during the organizational changes. It is related to the feeling that employees always have the opportunity to use their abilities and the power and responsibilities they have in their jobs (Suominen et al., 2008). Empowerment can be defined in terms of encouraging and allowing individuals to take personal responsibility for improving the way they do their jobs and thus contribute to the organization's goals (Clutterbuck, 1995). The concept of empowerment has been approached from a developmental point of view, with the focus on personal growth and potential (Gibson, 1991).

Work empowerment is particularly important in job settings that (a) have experience in downsizing processes in which the survivors can determine the viability of the smaller workforce (Harter, Schmidt, & Hayes, 2002) and (b) are appreciated by society and require employees to possess special expertise to be able to work effectively (e.g., nurses, managers, supervisors, midwives, public sector; Suominen, Savikko, Puukka, Doran, & Leino-Kilpi, 2005). In these situations, empowerment may be considered not only as a way of preventing job dissatisfaction and negative effects (e.g., absenteeism) but also a means of enhancing positive experiences (e.g., engagement) (Spreitzer, 1996).

About the models of empowerment

Empowerment at work can be analyzed by attending to two different but related models: structural and psychological empowerment models.

Structural empowerment The structural model of empowerment is developed by Kanter (1977, 1993). She defined empowerment by focusing on the employees' perception of the job characteristics related to the presence or absence of empowering conditions in the workplace. The basic element in the model is the concept of power, which is "the ability to mobilize human and material resources to get things done" (Kanter, 1979, p. 210). Making an analogy with an electrical circuit, power at work is "on" when employees have access to lines of information, support, resources in the work settings, and opportunities to learn and grow. These empowerment resources are facilitated by the extent to which employees have developed a network of alliances within the organization (informal power) and through jobs that have a lot of discretion and are visible and important to organizational goals (formal power). Kanter (1993) argued that when employees have access to these working conditions, they are empowered to accomplish their work.

Structural empowerment is conceptualized as the presence of social structures in the workplace that enable employees to accomplish their work in meaningful ways (Kanter, 1977, 1993). Basically, empowerment is determined by four elements: the characteristics of the organization (formal job characteristics and informal alliances), the organizational mobility, the ability of employees to accomplish their work, and the possibility for personal growth. Research shows that nurses who worked in magnet hospitals (i.e., hospitals that are able to attract and retain nurses despite challenging economic conditions) experienced more structural empowerment and were involved in decisions that affected them, had more autonomy and control over their practices, and enjoyed better relationships with physicians. As a result, they were more satisfied with their jobs and experienced less burnout than nurses working in other nonmagnet hospitals (Aiken, Clarke, Sloane, Sochalski, & Silber, 2002).

Kanter (1977) proposed a four-dimensional model of empowerment: access to information, resources, support, and opportunities to learn and develop. She specified that empowering work environments provide access to information, resources, support, and the opportunity to learn and develop. The basic element of empowerment is the opportunity to take action, and it has a significant positive effect on commitment, trust in management, engagement, and organizational commitment. Kanter (1977, 1993) divided structural empowerment into two parts: power (i.e., access to resources, support, and information) and opportunity (i.e., access to challenge, growth, and development; see also Laschinger, Finegan, & Shamian, 2001).

Psychological empowerment The second model of empowerment is the one represented by Spreitzer (1995), which is focused on the *psychological state* of the employees who experience empowerment; that is, it is focused on how employees interpret or react to the structural empowerment conditions psychologically. In this sense, psychological empowerment could be interpreted as a positive psychological process/state. First, psychological empowerment could be defined as a process in which individuals feel confident that they can act and successfully execute certain kinds of actions (Suominen et al., 2008). From this perspective, work empowerment is composed of three unique and independent categories, namely, *verbal* (i.e., the ability to state one's opinion and to debate and to defend one's point of view, to participate in decision making, and to present work-related problems to one's superior), *behavioral* (i.e., the ability to manage in the job, to work with colleagues in groups, to identify problems that need to be solved, and to learn new skills and to handle more challenging jobs), and *outcome* empowerment (i.e., the ability to help colleagues and superiors to improve and change the way the work is done and to increase the effectiveness of the organization; Irvine, Leatt, Evans, & Baker, 1999; Suominen et al., 2008).

From this perspective, empowerment is conceptualized as a psychological motivational state, that is, as a form of intrinsic motivation to perform tasks. Empowerment is manifested in four cognitive factors relating to their work role: *competence*

(an individual's belief in his or her capability to be effective), *impact* (the degree to which an individual can influence strategic, administrative, or operating outcomes at work), *meaningfulness* (the value of a work goal or purpose, judged in relation to an individual's ideals or standards), and *self-determination* (an individual's sense of having a choice in initiating and regulating actions) (Conger & Kanungo, 1988; Thomas & Velthouse, 1990).

According to Spreitzer (1995), these four factors act additively to determine the extent of the psychological empowerment experienced by employees and, thus, enable them to exercise their empowered role. Together, these cognitions reflect an active rather than passive orientation to the work role, whereby the work situation is not seen as "given" but as one that can be shaped by employees' actions (Spreitzer, De Janasz, & Quinn, 1999). From this perspective, personal factors such as autonomy, education, skills, self-direction, and standing by professional decisions have been shown to be important for empowerment (Department of Health and Children/ Dublin City University (DOH & C/DCU), 2003). From our own point of view, these dimensions of empowerment are more a kind of cognitive drivers of empowerment (psychological antecedents), such as feeling competent, having influence, pursuing meaningful goals, and being self-determined, than the empowerment in itself (feelings of being empowered). In any case, we consider this psychological empowerment to be very close to the concept of self-determination because the employee has a choice in the process of initiating and regulating his or her own actions.

Despite these two models about empowerment exist (i.e., structural and psychological empowerment), there is evidence that both are related. In fact, structural empowerment enhances psychological empowerment, which in turn enhances employee effectiveness. In that sense, Laschinger, Finegan, Shamian, and Wilk (2004) used a longitudinal predictive design to show that changes in perceived structural empowerment had direct effects on changes in psychological empowerment and job satisfaction in a sample of 185 randomly selected staff nurses. The results suggest that fostering environments that enhance perceptions of empowerment can have enduring positive effects on employees.

The Measurement of Empowerment

There are two main instruments that can be used to measure empowerment: the *Work Empowerment Questionnaire* (Irvine et al., 1999) and the *Psychological Empowerment Scale* (Spreitzer, 1995). The first is the most widely used in research and its validity and reliability have been demonstrated in different studies (e.g., Suominen, Savikko, Kukkurainen, Kuokkanen, & Doran, 2006; Suominen et al., 2007). It consists of 22 items measuring three empowerment categories: verbal empowerment (6 items; e.g., "State my opinion about work problems to my manager"), behavioral empowerment (9 items; e.g., "Do well in my job"), and outcome empowerment (7 items; e.g., "Bring about changes in the way I do my work in this organization"). The respondents indicated how confident they felt about their ability

to execute a certain course of action as presented in the items on a scale from 0 (*I am not confident at all*) to 10 (*I am fully confident*). On the other hand, the *Psychological Empowerment Scale* (Spreitzer) consists of 12 items measuring four components of the psychological empowerment construct: competence (3 items; e.g., "I am confident about my ability to do my job"), impact (3 items; e.g., "My impact on what happens in my department is large"), meaningfulness (3 items; "The work I do is very important to me"), and self-determination (3 items; "I have significant autonomy in determining how I do my job") with a response scale from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree). Spreitzer found evidence of convergent and divergent validity for these subscales in a study of managers and nonmanagement personnel. Furthermore, there is empirical evidence that they could be collapsed into a composite empowerment scale (e.g., Chen, Kirkman, Kanfer, Allen, & Rosen, 2007; Spreitzer, 1995). This scale tests psychological empowerment as a motivational construct.

Antecedents of Empowerment

Research on psychological empowerment shows the main antecedents of empowerment are (a) task and social resources, (b) empowering leadership, (c) work changes, and (d) personal resources.

Task and social resources

Research has evidenced that in order to develop empowerment, it is necessary to invest especially in task (autonomy) and social resources (supportive climate, cooperation). For example, only those employees who felt that job autonomy is an important characteristic of their work experienced stronger empowerment (e.g., Suominen et al., 2007). In addition, through studies conducted on samples of nurses, different scholars have shown that continuous work development in cooperation with different professional groups and in a good social climate is a basic requirement for growing empowerment (Rankinen, Suominen, Kuokkanen, Kukkurainen, & Doran, 2009; Suominen et al., 2006). Finally, it is important to note that one of the most relevant social resources in enhancing empowerment is leadership. Such is this relevance that we deal with it in a specific and detailed way in the following lines.

Empowering leadership

Empowering leadership is defined as the process of implementing conditions that enable power to be shared with an employee by delineating the significance of the employee's job, providing greater autonomy in decision making, expressing confidence in the employee's capabilities, and removing hindrances to performance

(Ahearne, Mathieu, & Rapp, 2005). Empowering leadership involves highlighting the significance of the work, providing participation in decision making, conveying confidence that performance will be high, and removing bureaucratic constraints (Ahearne et al., 2005). Inherent to this process, empowerment leadership delegates authority to employees, who are able to make decisions and implement actions without direct supervision or intervention (Jung, Chow, & Wu, 2003).

One type of leadership that is a promising means of enhancing empowerment at work is *authentic leadership* (Ilies, Morgeson, & Nahrgang, 2005; Walumbwa, Wang, Wang, Schaubroeck, & Avolio, 2010). Authentic leaders promote psychological capacities and a positive ethical climate, foster greater self-awareness and internalize moral perspective, and balance the processing of information and relational transparency on the part of leaders working with followers, thus fostering positive self-development (Walumbwa, Avolio, Gardner, Wernsing, & Peterson, 2008). Research shows that an authentic leader is one that has followers who increasingly identify with and feel more psychologically empowered to take on greater ownership for their work (Ilies et al., 2005).

There are several different reasons that can explain this positive relationship. Specifically, authentic leaders are likely to have a positive influence on followers' behaviors by (a) providing support for followers' self-determination; (b) creating organizational cultures and practices that determine the degree to which employees are involved in the decision-making processes; (c) understanding followers' needs for meaning in their work and the confidence that comes with being trusted to act with initiative and autonomy (Arnold, Turner, Barling, Kelloway, & McKee, 2007; Ilies et al., 2005; Kelloway, Turner, Barling, & Loughlin, 2012); (d) promoting a more inclusive unit climate and readily shared information by providing their followers with higher levels of constructive feedback (Spreitzer, 1996); (e) enhancing followers' trust in organizational leaders (Barton & Barton, 2011); and (f) providing an atmosphere of psychological safety in which criticism is accepted, mistakes are discussed and thoughts are freely expressed (Erdem & Ozen, 2003), and ideas are openly explored and communicated (Parayitam & Dooley, 2007).

Work changes

Investing in work changes is also a key factor to enhance empowerment. In fact, in a study on multidisciplinary teams in a hospital, Rankinen and colleagues (2009) revealed that organizational change factors (i.e., staff at each unit support one another during organizational change, the confidence during organizational change, the accurate information about the change, enough staff at the unit to do the work, and, finally, the views of staff members regarding the changes have received sufficient attention) are positively related to psychological empowerment. Hence, the planning and implementation of these organizational changes should be undertaken with the cooperation of staff throughout the organization at all stages. Specifically, different strategies explain the positive relationship among work changes, positive reactions

toward the changes, and empowerment in employees. These strategies include taking employees' opinions regarding the changes into account, having enough staff, supporting one another in their work unit, and feeling confident during organizational change (e.g., the optimization of the time used by nurses for providing patient care, the increase of operational efficiency).

Personal resources

Research has shown that personal resources also constitute a key element to promote empowerment at work. First, there is evidence that stronger employees' skills and competencies are associated with higher level of outcome empowerment (Suominen et al., 2007). Second, investing in moral principles, personal integrity, expertise, future-orientedness, and sociability have also demonstrated their impact in increasing empowerment in nurses. In particular, these resources could be improved by (a) sharing values and a general agreement on the basic principles, (b) giving opportunities for participation by personal management, (c) increasing expertise by a positive attitude toward training and new methods of working, (d) joint planning and mutual meetings about future orientation, and (e) creating an atmosphere of freedom that allows for experimentation and involves a stimulus to the support given by others (Suominen et al., 2006). Third, the expectation to be effective is related to a more positive interpretation of work experiences and consequently to feeling more work empowered (Thomas & Velthouse, 1990). Fourth, the potential to cope with their responsibilities is a quality related to strong empowerment (Suominen et al., 2005).

Consequences of Empowerment

In addition to the antecedents, there is also empirical evidence regarding the consequences of empowerment at work. Basically, we can classify the most significant consequences of empowerment into three main categories—societal, organizational, and psychological consequences:

1. Societal consequences. Work empowerment has shown positive relationships with political philosophy, the role of the citizen in the polis, and the achievement of justice in civic life (Spreitzer & Doneson, 2005). In addition, empowerment is also related to the perceptions of the appreciation of one's work in society (Kuokkanen et al., 2007).
2. Organizational consequences. Work empowerment tends to generate positive organizational outcomes, such as organizational commitment (Huang, Iun, Liu, & Gong, 2006; Laschinger, Finegan, & Shamian, 2001); employee loyalty (Niehoff, Moorman, Blakely, & Fuller, 2001); organizational trust, justice, and respect (Laschinger et al., 2001); organizational learning capability (Bhatnagar,

2007); work and organizational performance, productivity, and success at the individual and team levels (Chen et al., 2007); and organizational citizenship behavior (Walumbwa et al., 2010).

3. Psychological consequences. Research has shown that work empowerment is negatively related to job stress and positively related to positive well-being. More specifically, high levels of empowerment may reduce nurses' job stress (Laschinger et al., 2001; Spreitzer, Kizilos, & Nason, 1997) and burnout (Manojlovich & Laschinger, 2002). In contrast, nurses with less structural (i.e., insufficient access to support, information, opportunity, and resources to get their work done) and less psychological empowerment perceive more work stress (Li, Chen, & Kuo, 2008). Work empowerment also is positively related to increases in psychological capital in terms of self-determination (Deci, Connell, & Ryan, 1989); self-worth (Nielson, 1986); satisfaction of their needs for power, autonomy, control, and self-efficacy (Thomas & Velthouse, 1990); competence, innovation, and creativity (Zhang & Bartol, 2010); and decision involvement (Laschinger, Sabiston, & Kutzscher, 1997). Other consequences of empowerment are better work attitudes (Mishra & Spreitzer, 1998), job satisfaction (Patrick & Laschinger, 2006), job motivation (Laschinger et al., 2004), trust in managers (Laschinger et al., 2001), and engagement at work, which will be the focus of interest in the next section.

How Does Empowerment Enhance Engagement at Work?

First, to describe how empowerment is related to work engagement, we will review the concept, main dimensions, and measurement of work engagement, as well as looking at the recent research on the topic. Engaged employees have a sense of energetic and effective connection with their work and organizations (Schaufeli & Salanova, 2007). The term *employee engagement*, often used interchangeably with *work engagement*, was defined by Shuck and Wollard (2010, p. 103) as "an individual employee's cognitive, emotional, and behavioral state directed toward desired organizational outcomes." Work engagement refers to the relationship of the employee with his or her work. In contrast, employee engagement is a broader concept and may also include the relationship with the employee's professional or occupational role and with his or her organization (Schaufeli & Salanova, 2011). Concretely, we define engagement as "a positive, fulfilling, work-related state of mind that is characterized by vigor, dedication, and absorption" (Schaufeli, Salanova, González-Romá, & Bakker, 2002, p. 74). *Vigor* is characterized by high levels of energy and mental resilience while working, the willingness to invest effort in one's work, and persistence even in the face of difficulties. *Dedication* refers to being strongly involved in one's work and experiencing a sense of significance, enthusiasm, inspiration, pride, and challenge. *Absorption* is characterized by being fully concentrated and happily engrossed in one's work, whereby time passes quickly and one has difficulties to detach oneself from work. Research has shown that vigor and dedication are considered direct opposites of exhaustion and cynicism, respectively—the two

core symptoms of burnout (González-Romá, Schaufeli, Bakker, & Lloret, 2006). The continuum that is spanned by vigor and exhaustion has been labeled "energy," whereas the continuum that is spanned by dedication and cynicism has been labeled "identification." Hence, a high level of energy and strong identification with one's work characterizes work engagement, whereas burnout is characterized by the opposite: a low level of energy and poor identification with one's work (Schaufeli & Salanova, 2011).

It is interesting to note that, rather than a momentary, specific emotional state, work engagement refers to a more persistent and pervasive affective-cognitive process focused on one's own work. We also think that work engagement—reflecting an employee's current state of mind in the immediate present—should be distinguished from a personality trait which, being a durable disposition, reflects a person's typical reaction (see Gray & Watson, 2001). In that sense, Macey and Schneider (2008), for example, proposed a three-dimensional model of engagement that might reconcile Kahn's (1990) "momentary" and Schaufeli and Bakker's (2004) "persistent" portrayals of engagement. Macey and Schneider's model included three engagement components: behaviors, state, and traits. According to them, engaged behaviors may result from a "state" of engagement. The person who goes "above and beyond" at work may do so because of general and longer-term feelings of energy, enthusiasm, and pride. Macey and Schneider proposed that the "state" of engagement is a complex combination of constructs such as job satisfaction, organizational commitment, job involvement, and *empowerment*. Hence, empowerment is part of the state of work engagement. However, we think that work engagement is independent from, although positively related to, other constructs such as satisfaction, commitment, involvement, and empowerment.

Accordingly, our concept of work engagement is close to the Utrecht Work Engagement Scale (UWES) measure. However, research on this topic is also based on other conceptualizations such as the earlier ethnographic work of Kahn (1990), who conceptualized engagement at work as "...the harnessing of organizational members' selves to their work roles" (p. 694). For example, May, Gilson, and Harter (2004) introduced a three-dimensional concept of engagement similar to the one described earlier. Finally, Harter and colleagues (2002) described engaged employees in terms of cognitive vigilance and emotional connectedness: according to those authors, engaged workers "...know what is expected of them, have what they need to do their work, have opportunities to feel an impact and fulfilment in their work, perceive that they are part of something significant with co-workers they trust, and have chances to improve and develop" (p. 269). Thus, the feelings of meaningful goals that are part of the empowerment construct are also important in the engaged employee construct.

In that vein, Shuck (2011) identified four approaches used to study engagement: need-satisfying, burnout-antithesis, satisfaction–engagement, and a multidimensional approach. However, of the 20 studies used by Kim, Kolb, and Kim (2012) in their review of the relationships between work engagement and performance, all except three used the burnout-antithesis approach as operationalized by the use of the UWES, which is the most widely used measure in academic research on work

engagement. In their study, they found that work engagement has a positive relationship with performance in organizations and that it also plays a mediating role in the relationship between antecedents (e.g., job and/or personal resources) and outcomes (e.g., job performance).

Furthermore, from structured qualitative interviews with a heterogeneous group of Dutch employees who scored high on the UWES, we know that engaged employees are active agents who take the initiative at work and generate their own positive feedback loops (Schaufeli et al., 2001). More recent research shows that engagement is related to autonomy at work (Llorens, Schaufeli, Bakker, & Salanova, 2007; Salanova, Llorens et al., 2012; Vera, Salanova, & Lorente, 2012) and proactive behavior (Salanova & Schaufeli, 2008). In a way, engaged employees have the power to make decisions and have a feeling close to the concept of psychological empowerment.

As noted previously, our definition of work engagement is assessed using a specific self-report questionnaire—the UWES—which includes the three constituting aspects of work engagement: vigor, dedication, and absorption. Originally, the UWES included 24 items. But after careful psychometric evaluation in two different samples of Spanish employees and students (Schaufeli et al., 2002), seven items were determined to be unsound and were eliminated, leaving 17 items. Later, a reduced nine-item version was validated (Schaufeli, Bakker, & Salanova, 2006). Vigor is assessed by six items; those who score high on this aspect have a lot of energy, zest, and stamina when working. Dedication is assessed by five items; those who score high identify strongly with their work because it is experienced as meaningful, inspiring, and challenging. Moreover, they feel enthusiastic about their work and proud of it. Absorption is measured by six items; those who score high are happily engrossed in their work and have difficulties detaching themselves from their work because they get carried away with it. As a consequence, everything else is forgotten and time seems to fly. Research on the UWES shows good psychometric proprieties (i.e., factorial validity, expected intercorrelations, cross-national invariance, internal consistence, stability over time, and construct validity). In particular, it shows that work engagement is a different construct from burnout, satisfaction, commitment, and workaholism (more info about the UWES can be found at www.schaufeli.com).

Research has shown that, as expected, work engagement consists of three highly related aspects—vigor, dedication, and absorption—which can be assessed by three internally consistent and stable multi-item scales. However, these three aspects are so highly correlated that, for practical purposes, the total score of the (shortened) UWES also may be used as a single indicator of work engagement (Schaufeli, Bakker, & Salanova, 2006). Moreover, engagement is negatively related to burnout, and it can be discriminated from workaholism despite the fact that absorption seems to play a role in both of them (Del Líbano, Llorens, Salanova, & Schaufeli, 2010). In addition, no systematic differences in work engagement have been observed between men and women or across age groups (Salanova & Schaufeli, 2008). However, in some occupational groups, engagement levels were higher than in other groups (e.g., executives vs. blue-collar workers). Interestingly, perception of autonomy and discretion

at work are job characteristics that are higher among engaged than among nonengaged workers. Similar psychometric results were observed among different samples from various countries, which confirm the robustness of the psychometric findings (Schaufeli & Salanova, 2007).

Finally, it is important to note that work engagement has positive consequences at the individual, team, and organizational levels, such as positive job-related attitudes, individual health, extrarole behaviors, and performance. These positive consequences are quite similar to the consequences of psychological empowerment that we discussed earlier. Compared to those who do not feel engaged, those who do feel work engaged are more satisfied with their jobs, feel more committed to the organization, and do not intend to leave the organization and look for an alternative job elsewhere (e.g., Schaufeli & Bakker, 2004). Furthermore, they exhibit proactive behavior (i.e., looking for challenging goals, searching for a solution immediately when things are wrong, taking risks because of the fascination provoked by the challenges of the job) (Salanova & Schaufeli, 2008), whereby—as discussed earlier—engagement seems to play a mediating role between access to job resources and these positive organizational behaviors. Taken together, the results concerning positive organizational behavior suggest that engaged workers are willing and able to "go the extra mile." This extra effort is also illustrated by the finding that (compared to nonengaged employees) engaged employees work more overtime (Beckers et al., 2004). However, this extra work only affects negatively to healthy workplace and work–life balance when the work is done compulsively because of a strong internal drive (i.e., workaholism) (Del Líbano, Llorens, Salanova, & Schaufeli, 2012). Finally, and most importantly, employees and teams that are work engaged perform better (Salanova, Agut, & Peiró, 2005; Salanova, Llorens et al., 2012; Torrente, Salanova, Llorens, & Schaufeli, 2012). This positive link between engagement and performance was also found in samples of university students: the more engaged students were, the more exams they passed during the following semester and the better GPA they had over time. In addition, it seems that past success increases students' efficacy beliefs and levels of engagement, which—in turn—increase future academic success (another illustration of a gain spiral; Salanova, Martínez, & Llorens, 2012).

Empowerment as a Driver of Work Engagement

Research shows that work engagement is positively associated with job resources, which by definition have a motivating potential (e.g., Bakker & Demerouti, 2007; Demerouti, Bakker, Nachreiner, & Schaufeli, 2001; Llorens et al., 2007; Salanova, Llorens, Cifre, Martínez, & Schaufeli, 2003). Job resources refer to job characteristics that are conducive to attaining work and personal goals. For that reason, resources invigorate employees, encourage their persistence, and make them focus on their efforts—and that is exactly what work engagement is about. Hence, work engagement is positively related to job autonomy, social support from coworkers and superiors, performance feedback, coaching, task variety, and training facilities (Salanova et al., 2003). Thus, job resources

improve employee engagement, but employee engagement also can improve job resources. That is, the relationship between resources and engagement has been shown to be reciprocal (Llorens et al., 2007).

Some research has been conducted on work empowerment as a driver (or antecedent) of work engagement. For example, a multigroup structural equation modeling (SEM) study involving 185 nurses who had completed a 2-year postgraduate course (i.e., new graduates) and 294 nurses with more than 2 years' experience showed that work engagement significantly mediated the empowerment/effectiveness relationship in both groups, although the impact of engagement on work effectiveness was significantly stronger for experienced nurses. Generally, these analyses suggested that engagement is a key psychological mechanism. That is, engagement is a significant mediator between empowerment working conditions (structural empowerment) and positive outcomes (perceived feelings of work effectiveness; Laschinger, Wilk, Cho, & Greco, 2009). According to Spreitzer (1996), empowered individuals believe they have greater autonomy and impact on work processes and performance, and they are likely to be more intrinsically motivated and in turn engaged in their respective work roles.

In that way, Tuckey, Bakker, and Dollard (2012) in a multilevel study among 540 volunteer firefighters and their 68 brigade captains found that empowering leadership also had the effect of optimizing working conditions for engagement by strengthening the positive effect of a work context in which both cognitive demands and cognitive resources were high. Empowering leaders means encouraging and facilitating employees to lead and manage themselves. They showed a process through which leaders can empower workers and enhance well-being: via their influence on and interaction with the work environment.

In another study with 322 Canadian nurses (Laschinger, 2010), structural empowerment was linked to work engagement through Maslach and Leiter's (1997) six areas of work–life model. The model suggests that higher levels of empowerment would be connected to a greater fit within the six areas of work life (i.e., workload, control, rewards, community, fairness, and values), which in turn would lead to greater work engagement. Results showed that four of the six areas of work life (control, rewards, fairness, and values) mediate the influence of empowerment on work engagement, control being the most important due to the fact that, apart from predicting engagement directly, it was also predictive of greater rewards, better relationships with peers, a greater sense of fairness in the organization, and person–organization value congruence. Additionally, rewards, fairness, and value congruence had a direct influence on work engagement.

These linkages appear to be consistent with Bandura's (1977) social cognitive theory, in which individuals who see a connection between their work behavior and feelings of personal mastery are also expected to experience positive self-reactive effects that promote higher levels of positivity at work (such as work engagement). In this sense, Walumbwa and colleagues (2010) examined the direct and indirect effects of authentic leadership behavior (structural empowerment) on the behavior of the organizational citizenship and work engagement of followers in 387 employees

and their 129 immediate supervisors. Hierarchical linear modeling revealed that authentic leadership behavior was positively related to positive outcomes such as supervisor-rated organizational citizenship behavior and work engagement through the mediating role of followers' level of identification with the supervisor and their feelings of psychological empowerment (ideal power distance, company type, and followers' age and sex were control variables). Furthermore, using survey data from professional employees and their supervisors in a large information technology company in China, Zhang and Bartol (2010) found that, as anticipated, empowering leadership positively affected psychological empowerment, which in turn influenced both intrinsic motivation and created the process of work engagement. These results provide evidence to show that empowerment is an important motivational mechanism through which authentic leaders may have an impact on followers' work-related outcomes (e.g., work engagement).

A Theoretical Framework: The HERO Model

In the following discussion, we would like to propose a theoretical framework to explain how empowering the work environment and employees' conditions can promote engagement at work and consequently positive outcomes for organizations and individuals. To do so, we focus on the *HERO Model* (Salanova, 2008, 2009; Salanova, Cifre, Llorens, Martinez, & Lorente, 2011; Salanova, Llorens et al., 2012). This is a heuristic theoretical model that integrates results from empirical and theoretically based evidence on topics such as job stress, human resource management (HRM), organizational behavior, positive occupational health psychology, and salutogenesis theory (Antonovsky, 1996) to develop HEROs. A HERO is defined as an organization that makes systematic, planned, and proactive efforts to improve employees, teams, and organizational processes and outcomes and is able to maintain positive adjustment and desirable functions and outcomes under challenging conditions or in crises. It is interesting to notice that Luthans in 2012 used the HERO acronym as well but in a more individual level in order to describe the elements of PsyCap—Hope, Efficacy, Resilience, and Optimism (Luthans, 2012).

The main assumption of the HERO Model is that the collective experience of well-being at work is a result of the combination of three interrelated elements: healthy organizational resources and practices (e.g., job resources, healthy organizational practices), healthy employees/teams (e.g., trust, work engagement), and healthy organizational outcomes (e.g., high performance, corporate social responsibility). A recent study (Salanova, Llorens et al., 2012) provides support for the model. In this study, confirmatory factor analyses provided support for the reliability and validity of semistructured interviews with the chief executive officers (CEOs) in 14 companies as well as for questionnaires for the stakeholders (710 employees, 84 work units and their immediate supervisors, and 860 customers). Furthermore, SEM using data aggregated at the work-unit level (303 teams and their immediate supervisors) from 43 companies also showed the expected positive relationships

among the elements in the HERO Model. Specifically, results showed that healthy employees (i.e., team efficacy, team work engagement, team resilience) fully mediated the positive relationship between healthy organizational resources and practices that are close to the concept of structural empowerment (i.e., team autonomy, team feedback, supportive team climate, team working, team coordination, transformational leadership) and healthy organizational outcomes (team intra-role and extrarole performance as assessed by their immediate supervisors), controlling for team size. Finally, regression analyses (using data aggregated at the organizational level, made up of 2,098 customers from 43 companies) showed that employees' excellent job performance positively predicts customer loyalty and satisfaction with the company (Salanova, Llorens et al., 2012).

In order to study a HERO, some methodological questions should be attended to: (a) data are collected from different respondents such as CEOs, teams' immediate supervisors, employees (internal criteria), and customers (external criteria); (b) this is done by combining qualitative (interviews with CEOs) and quantitative (questionnaires for employees, supervisors, and customers) methodologies; (c) the referents in the questionnaires are collective, that is, respondents answer the items thinking about the team ("My team...") and the organization ("My organization...") instead of thinking about themselves ("I..."); (d) data analyses are computed at the collective level of analysis following a multilevel perspective (i.e., individuals, teams, and organizations); and (e) objective—and subjective—data from the organizations are included (e.g., return on assets—ROA).

Research has shown that team empowerment is positively related to team productivity and proactivity (Kirkman & Rosen, 1999). According to Mathieu, Gilson, and Ruddy (2006), team empowerment consists of both a psychological and a structural component. Team psychological empowerment refers to a team's "collective belief that they have the authority to control their proximal work environment and are responsible for their team's functioning" (p. 98). Empowered teams have the decision-making authority to determine their own course of action, which can heighten an overall sense of determination and internal motivation (Spreitzer, 1995). In the same line, Richardson and West (2010) consider that team empowerment is an antecedent of team engagement. They conceptualize team engagement as an emergent collective construct whereby a team experiences a heightened positive affective motivational state characterized by a sense of vigor, absorption, and determination. Team engagement emerges bottom-up from the combined pattern of team members' resource allocations and interaction processes toward the team task and objectives. They develop a multilevel team engagement model where team engagement operates as a mediator variable at (a) the microlevel between team inputs and team outcomes and (b) at the macrolevel across organizational variables such as organizational climate and transformational leadership. The model is fundamentally based on an input–mediator–outcome (IMO) framework (Ilgen, Hollenbeck, Johnson, & Jundt, 2005) with the general premise that team processes mediate input–outcome relationships.

Focused on empowering literature, we proposed to integrate "empowerment" into the HERO Model. We assume that structural empowerment could be integrated in

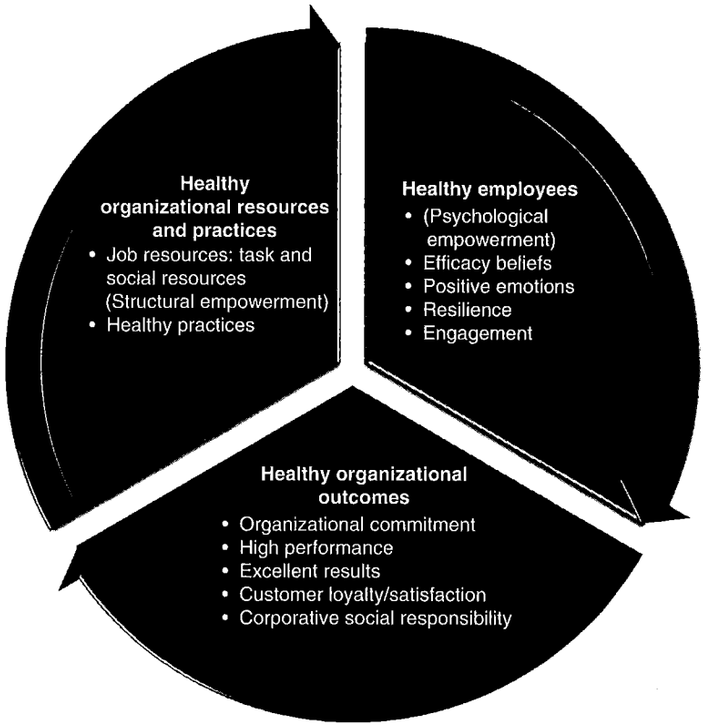

Figure 6.1 Adding empowerment to the HERO Model. Salanova et al. (2012). Reproduced with permission.

the first element of the model (i.e., healthy organizational resources and practices), whereas psychological empowerment is related to the second of the dimensions of the HERO Model (i.e., healthy employees/teams). Specifically, we could assume that an "empowered HERO" is an organization to which the following three elements have also been added: structural empowerment (in terms of healthy organizational resources and practices), psychological empowerment (in terms of healthy employees), and healthy organizational outcomes (see Figure 6.1). More evidence for the HERO Model is shown in other studies, where dimensions of empowerment such as leadership, trust, and task/social resources are included (Acosta, Salanova, & Llorens, 2012; Torrente et al., 2012).

Empowering Work Engagement: Some Practical Strategies

Based on the premises of the *HERO Model* (Salanova, 2008, 2009; Salanova, Cifre, et al., 2011; Salanova, Llorens, et al., 2012; Salanova, Llorens, Acosta, & Torrente, 2013) and on previous research on the relationship between E&E (e.g., Walumbwa et al., 2010), the main empowering strategies that can be used to increase engagement

are described in the following. These strategies are classified into (a) the assessment and evaluation of engagement, (b) job and organization (re)design and changing workplaces, (c) the enhancement of positive and empowering leadership, (d) work training in efficacy beliefs, (e) career management, and (f) potentiation of employees.

Strategy 1: Assessing and evaluating engagement

Attract, retain, and potentiate engaged employees. This involves defining and presenting the company brand, which is based on enhancing the strengths of the workers, for example, through E&E. These companies are shown as being appealing to potential employees and therefore more attractive to "headhunters." In addition, it involves recruiting and selecting the right people based on specific strengths (i.e., based on the employee's preexisting natural capabilities to behave, think, or feel in a specific and authentic way). Consequently, the employee will be full of energy, which will allow him or her to reach an optimum level of performance, development, and functioning.

"Monitor me!" Assessing, negotiating, and monitoring the employee's meaningful values, preferences, and personal and professional goals are key drivers. Another important strategy to drive engagement through empowerment is to establish and monitor the psychological contract in terms of mutual reciprocity between challenging employees and the organization's expectations. This can be achieved through different strategies: (a) by assessing the employee's meaningful values, preferences, and personal and professional goals; (b) by negotiating, empowering, and drafting a written contract (*Employee Development Agreement*) that ensures the organization gives the employee the resources needed to achieve his or her meaningful personal and professional goals; and (c) by monitoring this written agreement periodically in terms of goal achievement.

Engagement audits: A positive and empowering habit. Periodic engagement audits are welcome. These audits allow organizations as well as employees to be informed about the levels of individual and team engagement, as well as their consequences (e.g., performance, quality). This information is important for making decisions about measures for improvement that should be taken at the individual, team, or organizational levels. These audits could be implemented by testing engagement at the individual (UWES; Schaufeli et al., 2002) and the collective levels (Salanova et al., 2003; Torrente et al., 2012). Audits could be expanded by assessing not only engagement but also its antecedents and consequences, such as the level of structural empowerment of jobs. To do so, the HERO questionnaire for testing engagement, antecedents, and positive consequences at the collective level (teams and organizations) is employed (Salanova, Llorens et al., 2012).

Workshops on engagement and positivity are a good ally. Workshops can be held to promote engagement as well as team empowerment, positive emotions, emotional intelligence, and resilience. The focus is on the enhancement of personal resources, such as cognitive, behavioral, and social skills (e.g., positive thinking, goal setting, time management, and lifestyle improvement; e.g., Fredrickson, 2003). This can be achieved by the active participation of employees with the main goal of developing

abilities to enjoy and become committed to work; manage interpersonal relationships among colleagues, supervisors, and customers; as well as improve work quality.

Strategy 2: Job and organization (re)design and changing workplaces

Be sure to invest in job resources. Please don't stop. Research has evidenced that in order to develop engagement and its positive consequences, it is necessary to invest in job resources. Specifically, research has shown that job resources regarding empowerment, such as job autonomy, supportive supervision, performance feedback, as well as rewards and positive relationships with coworkers, are predictive of work engagement (Salanova et al., 2003). Moreover, in a longitudinal study with students working in groups, research has shown that engagement is boosted when time and method control are increased; as a consequence, efficacy beliefs were also increased in a positive cycle (Llorens et al., 2007). Similarly, Vera et al. (2012) demonstrated that job and social resources (job autonomy, social support climate) played an important role in how the efficacy beliefs of secondary school teachers predict work engagement. Furthermore, resources not only increase engagement at individual level but also engagement at the collective level in teams. Thus, research has evidenced the positive impact of team resources (i.e., team autonomy, team feedback, supportive team climate, teamwork, team coordination, and transformational leadership) on team engagement and its organizational outcomes (intra- and extrarole performance as assessed by the immediate supervisors; Salanova, Llorens et al., 2012; Torrente et al., 2012). Finally, using *problem-based learning* (PBL) as an intervention tool to enhance empowerment, Arneson and Ekberg (2005) showed that systematic improvements of social support and group coherence (two relevant social resources) among employees ought to be facilitated by the organization as a health-promoting arena. They also noted that PBL appears to be a profitable and powerful instrument with the potential to enable empowerment.

Invest in healthy organizational practices, spare no effort. Another driver to increase engagement is to invest in healthy organizational practices. In this regard, Acosta and colleagues (2012)—using a sample of 518 employees distributed in 55 teams from 13 companies—showed that organizational practices (i.e., work–family balance, mobbing prevention, psychosocial health, and communication strategies) increase the levels of healthy employees, in terms of organizational trust (i.e., vertical trust) and team work engagement. In addition, research on 303 teams and 303 immediate supervisors from 43 companies suggests that organizational practices are responsible for increasing team work engagement, efficacy, and resilience (Salanova, Llorens et al., 2012).

Look for work changes: Take time to invest in rotation, and challenging and empowering jobs. Another driver of engagement is not only to provide additional job resources but merely to change them, especially when employees perceived that they have enough competences to meet the changes (Salanova, Peiró, & Schaufeli, 2002). Research has revealed the role of three types of changes: (a) rotation, (b) assigning

employees temporarily to work with special projects (probably with other people), or (c) assigning employees to entirely different jobs.

Strategy 3: Enhancing positive, empowering leadership

Follow the leader! A key driver to enhance well-being and engagement is positive leadership (European Agency for Safety and Health at Work (EU-OSHA), 2012). Research has suggested that leadership inspires trust, respect, and pride, as well as increasing optimism, hope and resilience, health, and well-being (Nielsen, Yarker, Randall, & Munir, 2009). Other research also has evidenced the power of transformational leadership in the development and in the contagion of engagement from members of the group (Bakker, Demerouti, & Euwema, 2005; Salanova et al., 2003), as well as in the prediction of extra- and intrarole performance in teams (Salanova, Lorente, Chambel, & Martínez, 2011). Recently, authentic leaders (i.e., those who behave in accordance with their values and strive to achieve openness and truthfulness in their relationships with followers; Avolio & Gardner, 2005) also have been shown to exert a positive effect as a driver of engagement (Kernis & Goldman, 2005). It seems that the levels of engagement increase in contexts in which (a) the leader promotes "psychological safety" environments (i.e., individuals feel accepted, supported, and able to participate without negative consequences; Kahn, 1990) and (b) employees identify themselves with their supervisors and they feel themselves to be psychologically empowered (Walumbwa et al., 2010; Zhang & Bartol, 2010).

Strategy 4: Work training in efficacy beliefs

Efficacy? Yes, please. Be sure that employees/groups believe in their own ability/capacity. Efficacy's results on promoting engagement are spectacular. Work training in efficacy beliefs is a traditional HRM strategy that is used to enhance employee's levels of well-being and health, especially engagement (e.g., Llorens et al., 2007; Salanova, Martínez, & Llorens, 2012). Furthermore, research suggests an upward gain spiral in which efficacy beliefs (both individual and collective) reciprocally influence activity engagement (work and task engagement) indirectly through their impact on positive affect (enthusiasm, satisfaction, and comfort) over time. This result has been demonstrated in two longitudinal field studies in terms of gain cycles and gain spirals in 274 secondary school teachers and in 100 university students working in groups, respectively (Salanova, Llorens, & Schaufeli, 2011).

Strategy 5: Career management

Filling the bag. Because a permanent job is a utopia nowadays, organizations have to invest in employability. The personal initiative of employees/teams to continuously develop themselves both professionally and personally should be rewarded. This

investment in career management has been shown to have positive relationships with engagement. Employees who carefully plan their career successively select jobs that provide ample opportunities for professional and personal development. The development of specific skills and competencies in the *Employee Development Agreement*, as well as the redesign of jobs and organizations, fosters employee development, and specific work training on efficacy beliefs is a mechanism to increase career management and consequently increase engagement (see Salanova & Schaufeli, 2008).

Strategy 6: Potentiate me!

Engagement can also be developed by potentiating happiness both inside and outside work (see Schaufeli & Salanova, 2010). Different strategies could be used to enhance engagement, including (a) practicing virtues; (b) being kind to others; (c) expressing gratitude toward colleagues, supervisors, and customers; (d) learning to forgive; (e) sharing good news; (f) nurturing social relationships; (g) counting one's blessings; (h) cultivating optimism; (i) enhancing positive affect; (j) savoring pleasurable moments; (k) setting and pursuing personal goals; and (l) increasing resilience.

A General Overview of the Chapter and Conclusions

The general aim of this chapter was to provide an overview of the relationship among empowerment and work engagement. Likewise, its purpose was to discuss conceptual questions about empowerment (structural and psychological) which could be considered a key driver of work engagement with the aim to address some practical recommendation to enhance engagement via the empowering of employees.

Throughout the chapter, we showed the state of the art of the concept and measurement of empowerment attending to both related frameworks, that is, structural and psychological. Also, the chapter offers a revision of empowerment main antecedents. There is empirical evidence in favor that investing in task and social resources, empowering leadership, attending the work changes, and potentiating personal resources are the key to empower.

Different positive consequences of empowerment at work attending to societal, organizational, and psychological consequences were showed. Specifically, we focused on one of the most relevant consequences of empowerment, which is the engagement at work. After describing the concept and measurement of work engagement, we offered a review about the empowerment as a driver of work engagement, and we focused on a theoretical new framework: the HERO Model (Salanova, Llorens et al., 2012) which is based on positive psychology.

The final contribution of this chapter deals with some practical empowering strategies based on the premises of the HERO Model to increase work engagement.

The chapter illustrates the needs to assess and evaluate engagement, (re)design jobs and organizations and change workplaces, enhance positive and empowering leadership, invest in training focused on efficacy beliefs, plan for career management, and potentiate employees.

In sum, this chapter shows that investing in E&E is the winning combination for guaranteeing the business success nowadays.

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