

traditional face-to-face method. Most studies have examined applicant reactions to different interview methods. The general finding is that applicants, and to some extent interviewers, seem to prefer face-to-face interviews to telephone and videoconferencing interviews. Other research has found that alternative methods tend to result in lower interview scores than those based on face-to-face interviews. Very few studies have investigated whether alternative interview methods differ on factors such as validity, reliability, or equal opportunity, although there is some evidence that structured telephone interviews have similar levels of criterion-related validity as do face-to-face interviews.

SUMMARY

Employment interviews play a key role in the hiring process for virtually all jobs. Early reviews of the interview literature were pessimistic about the usefulness of the interview as a selection technique. This pessimism was likely caused by the extensive use of less structured interview formats and by research showing how various interviewee and interviewer factors can unduly affect interview outcomes. The advent of structured interviews, however, has reestablished the interview as an effective method for evaluating job candidates. There is evidence that structured interviews can predict important outcomes such as job performance, can provide incremental validity beyond that of other selection techniques, and tend not to produce large score differences among candidates from different ethnic backgrounds. Furthermore, because the interview is a method, it can be used to assess a variety of job-relevant attributes. Although much has been learned about the employment interview, more research is needed to determine (a) what elements of structure are most important for reliability and validity, (b) how interviewees and interviewers react to different aspects of structure, (c) what types of attributes employment interviews are best suited to assess, and (d) the extent to which alternative interview modes yield similar results.

—Chad H. Van Iddekinge

See also Adverse Impact/Disparate Treatment/Discrimination at Work; Applicant/Test-Taker Reactions; Employee Selection; Job Analysis; Reliability; Selection Strategies; Validity

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EMPOWERMENT

Today, more than 70% of organizations have adopted some kind of empowerment initiative for at least part of their workforce. To be successful in today's business environment, companies need the knowledge, ideas, energy, and creativity of every employee, from frontline workers to the top-level managers in the executive suite. The best companies accomplish this by empowering their employees to take initiative without prodding, to serve the collective interests of the company without being micromanaged, and to act like owners of the business. So what is empowerment, and how can it be effectively implemented in work organizations?

Over the last two decades, two complementary perspectives on empowerment at work have emerged. The first focuses on the social structural conditions that enable empowerment in the workplace, and the second focuses on the psychological experience of empowerment at work. Each perspective plays an

important role in empowering employees and is described in the sections below.

SOCIAL-STRUCTURAL EMPOWERMENT

The roots of the social-structural perspective on empowerment are found in theories of social exchange and social power. The emphasis is on building more democratic organizations through the sharing of power between superiors and subordinates, with the goal of cascading power to lower levels of the organizational hierarchy. In this perspective, *power* means having formal authority or control over organizational resources and the ability to make decisions relevant to a person's job or role. In short, social structural empowerment is about employee participation through increased delegation of responsibility down throughout the organizational chain of command.

The goals of the social-structural perspective focus on understanding how organizational, institutional, social, economic, political, and cultural forces can root out the conditions that foster powerlessness in the workplace. Practically, organizations can change organizational policies, processes, practices, and structures from top-down control systems to high involvement practices in which power, knowledge, information, and rewards are shared with employees in the lower reaches of the organizational hierarchy. For example, management can change its policy to allow employees to decide on their own how they will recover from a service problem and surprise and delight customers by exceeding their expectations rather than waiting for approval from a supervisor.

Specific practices that exemplify a high involvement system include the following:

- *Shared decision making.* Employees and/or teams may have input into and influence over decisions ranging from high-level strategic decisions to routine day-to-day decisions about how to do their own jobs.
- *Performance-based pay.* Employees share in the gains of the organization and are compensated for increases in their own skills and knowledge.
- *Open flow of information.* This includes the downward flow of information (about strategic direction, competitive intelligence, and financial performance) and the upward flow of information (concerning employee attitudes and improvement ideas).
- *Leadership development and training.* Training enables leaders to do their own jobs better and also

may provide interpersonal/leadership skills and knowledge of the economics of the business.

However, although this perspective has garnered much attention by practitioners because it helps them see how the kinds of managerial actions can facilitate empowerment at work, it is limited because it provides an organization-centric perspective on empowerment. It does not address the nature of empowerment as *experienced* by employees. This is important because in some situations, power, knowledge, information, and rewards were shared with employees yet they still felt disempowered. And in other situations, individuals lacked all the objective features of an empowering work environment yet still felt and acted in empowered ways. This limitation helped to spur the emergence of the psychological perspective on empowerment, which is described in the next section.

PSYCHOLOGICAL EMPOWERMENT

Psychological empowerment has its roots in early work on employee alienation and quality of work life. Rather than focusing on managerial practices that share power with employees at all levels, the psychological perspective examines how employees experience empowerment at work. This perspective refers to *empowerment* as the personal beliefs that employees have about their role in relation to the organization. When people feel empowered at work, they experience four dimensions:

1. *Meaning.* Meaning involves a fit between the needs of one's work role and one's beliefs, values, and behaviors.
2. *Competence.* *Competence* refers to self-efficacy specific to one's work, or a belief in one's capability to perform work activities with skill.
3. *Self-determination.* Self-determination is a sense of choice in initiating and regulating one's actions. It reflects a sense of autonomy over the initiation and continuation of work behavior and processes (e.g., making decisions about work methods, pace, and effort).
4. *Impact.* Impact is the degree to which one can influence strategic, administrative, or operating outcomes at work.

Together, these four cognitions reflect an active, rather than passive, orientation to one's work role. In

other words, the experience of empowerment is manifest in all four dimensions—if any one dimension is missing, then the experience of empowerment will be limited. For example, if people have discretion to make decisions (i.e., self-determination) but they don't care about the kinds of decisions they can make (i.e., they lack a sense of meaning), they will not feel empowered. Alternatively, if people believe they can make an impact but don't feel like they have the skills and abilities to do their job well (i.e., they lack a sense of competence), they also will not feel empowered.

The social-structural perspective is limited because it is organization-centric, and the psychological perspective is also limited because it is individual-centric. A complete understanding of empowerment at work requires the integration of both perspectives. In the sections below, we describe the key research findings on the two empowerment perspectives.

RESEARCH ON EMPOWERMENT

Social-Structural Empowerment Findings

In terms of the social-structural approach on empowerment, much of the work has been conducted under the terms *high-involvement work practices* and *high-performance work systems* and has focused on organization-level outcomes. Programmatic research on high-involvement work practices has been conducted by researchers at the Center for Effective Organizations at the University of Southern California. Their research has shown that high-involvement practices that involve sharing power, information, knowledge, and rewards with employees at all levels have positive outcomes for organizations, particularly in terms of improvements to employee quality of work life, the quality of products and services, customer service, and productivity. Broader research in the area of high-performance work systems (these include employee involvement but also things such as long-term job security, flexible scheduling, and multi-skilling) shows similar findings but also documents the higher labor costs that are incurred with these practices.

Psychological Empowerment Findings

Unlike the social-structural perspective, in which many different instruments have been used to measure empowerment, a single measure of psychological empowerment has been predominately used in empirical

research. Much of the work on the psychological experience of empowerment has been conducted at the individual level of analysis, although more recent research has examined team-level empowerment. In terms of the demographics of empowerment, employees with higher levels of education, more tenure, and greater rank report experiencing more feelings of empowerment.

Research suggests that when people experience empowerment at work, positive outcomes are likely to occur. When employees experience more empowerment, they report less job strain and more job satisfaction and organizational commitment. They are also less likely to leave the company. But empowerment does not affect only employees' attitudes; it also affects their performance (i.e., managerial effectiveness and employee productivity/performance) and work behaviors (i.e., innovation, upward influence, and being inspirational to others).

Research on empowered teams also indicates positive outcomes. More empowered teams have better process improvement, higher quality products and services, and more customer satisfaction than less empowered teams. Empowered teams are also more proactive, less resistant to change, more satisfied with their jobs, and more committed to the team and the organization.

Recent research also suggests that empowerment is particularly important in certain kinds of contexts. Empowerment is found to be especially important in virtual settings where people do not have face-to-face interactions and must work independently. And empowerment has been found to be particularly important to preserve the hope and attachment of survivors during times of organizational downsizing.

Findings Linking the Social-Structural and Psychological Perspectives on Empowerment

Research has also examined the relationship between different elements of social-structural empowerment and the psychological experience of empowerment. In an array of studies, employees experience more psychological empowerment under the following conditions: wider spans of control between management and workers, more access to information about the mission and performance of the organization, rewards based on individual performance, role clarity, enriching job characteristics, and supportive

organizational cultures in which employees feel valued and affirmed. Strong work relationships also enable feelings of empowerment. Employees experience more empowerment when they have more sociopolitical support from subordinates, peers, superiors, and even customers. Employees also experience more empowerment when their leaders are approachable and trustworthy.

Although the above findings indicate that social-structural empowerment enables psychological empowerment, the converse is also true. Employees who experience empowerment at work seek out and shape their work contexts to further enable their empowerment. They act to create and sustain work environments that provide social-structural empowerment.

SOME KEY CHALLENGES IN BUILDING EMPOWERMENT AT WORK

Empowerment practices are implemented in hopes of building employee commitment, overcoming worker dissatisfaction, and reducing absenteeism, turnover, poor-quality work, and sabotage. But all too often these implementation efforts fail to achieve their hoped-for results. Why?

First, some managers confuse empowerment with a quick fix and give up before it has been successfully implemented. The transition from a more traditional command-and-control system to an empowered organization requires a culture change. It is not unusual for a culture change to take more than 5 years to be completed. Culture changes take discipline, consistency, and patience. The long-term approach necessary for successful empowerment implementation efforts appears at odds with a business environment that requires quarterly results. This long-term approach is especially difficult as leadership transitions bring frequent changes to the vision for the organization.

Second, sometimes there is confusion about what is meant by the term *empowerment*. For example, it is not uncommon for managers to tell employees that they are empowered but not explain what they mean by empowerment. An employee may make an assumption about what the manager means by empowerment—he or she responds enthusiastically by independently making a decision that might have required approval in the past. The manager responds negatively because he or she was just looking for employees to share more ideas with him or her, not actually make decisions on their own. The employee

feels dejected and returns to his or her old ways of working. As this scenario illustrates, a key issue is for managers to be clear and explicit about what they mean by empowerment.

Third, some managers lack the courage to genuinely empower their people. These managers are afraid they will lose control if they genuinely empower employees. They worry about loose cannons who are not aligned with the goals of the unit. They worry that employees will make mistakes. They assume that they alone are the source of the best ideas. These concerns are especially strong for managers who have spent significant time in command-and-control bureaucracies. Starting with small initial steps at sharing power, setting clear limits for empowerment, and building trusting relationships have been found to be effective mechanisms for reducing these concerns.

And fourth, some empowerment efforts fail because employees resist efforts at empowerment. A very small percentage of employees value the simplicity of following directions and being told what to do. Some employees have been trained and conditioned to follow orders for much of their work lives. Taking initiative will feel countercultural to them, and it takes time for them to learn to be more proactive. To empower them, managers can set up small initiative steps to build comfort and confidence. Training and development programs can also bolster their confidence to act in more empowered ways.

—Gretchen M. Spreitzer

See also Leadership Development; Organizational Culture; Training

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ENGINEERING PSYCHOLOGY

Ergonomics and human factors seek to enhance the fit between individuals and their work environments by applying knowledge of human abilities and limitations to the design of operational processes, system interfaces, training, and performance aids. Developed along similar lines as industrial and organizational psychology, the career field owes much of its early success to applications in support of military efforts in World War II. Of these early success stories, one of the most notable involved redesigning pilot controls on military aircraft in response to a large number of pilots flying their airplanes into the ground. Despite extensive training, the pilots were not able to control their aircraft under stressful emergencies, primarily because system design was in contrast to pilot expectations of how things should work. A lack of standardization between different aircraft models was improved by modifying the handles of the landing gear control into the shape of a wheel and the handles of the aileron control to resemble a wing, and these changes eliminated “belly landings” almost overnight.

What may seem trivial 60 years after the fact is actually an exemplar for the profession. Real-world operational problems (i.e., belly landings) led to an investigation of work processes (i.e., analysis of pilot tasks during landing) that served to identify a set of constraints that affected performance (i.e., pilots had to rapidly discriminate between two identical controls) and led to design modifications (i.e., alternative handles). This principled approach to the assessment and design of complex sociotechnical systems (e.g., an aircraft cockpit) is the cornerstone of the field.

In the ensuing 60 years, the field has expanded, and *human factors* is often presented as a catchall label for a discipline that encompasses tasks familiar

to engineering psychology, industrial engineering, ergonomics, systems engineering, human–computer interface design, and software usability. Most recently, human factors, along with much of psychology, has been greatly influenced by the advancement of cognitive science. A variety of theories and approaches, including naturalistic decision making, shared mental models theory, and metacognition, have markedly influenced current approaches. The result is a greater focus on the information-processing and decision-making aspects of job performance. Furthermore, the many recent advances within cognitive engineering and cognitive psychology provide human factors professionals with additional tools for knowledge elicitation and measurement of knowledge structures.

This broader context, leveraging interdisciplinary methods to enhance the relationship or fit between humans and work environments, can be thought of as a method of human-centered engineering (HCE). The objectives of HCE, therefore, are to understand human skills and knowledge, study and analyze work environments, design better interactions between humans and technology, and engineer better teams and organizations. The underlying intention is to prepare and enable humans to excel at their work. The use of models within HCE, both descriptive and executable, provides a framework to analyze work processes and identify opportunities and means for performance enhancement. Within this context there remains a focus on design that harks back to landing gear controls and views the work environment as changeable and a source of constraints on human performance. There are several defining characteristics of the HCE approach.

SYSTEMS APPROACH

Within HCE, the human operator is the central figure within a complex sociotechnical system composed of the operator, the technology (i.e., tools, computers, etc.) necessary to complete the required tasks, and the work environment (i.e., organization, physical setting, task requirements). These systems are characterized by common purpose, shared information networks, interactions between components, and imposed constraints that influence behaviors. Because of system complexity a structured, systematic approach to design and evaluation is required, simultaneously considering all components across the sociotechnical system.