

The Role of Goal Orientation on the Structural-Psychological Empowerment Link in the Public Sector

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Abstract : The aim of this article is to conduct a theoretical and empirical study in order to examine how the goal orientation (GO) of public employees affects the relationship between the structural and psychological empowerment that they experience at their workplaces. In doing so, we follow structural empowerment (SE) and psychological empowerment (PE) conceptualizations, and relate them to the public administration framework. Moreover, we review arguments from GO theories, and previous related contributions. Empowerment has emerged as an important issue in the public sector organization setting in the wake of mainstream New Public Management (NPM), the new orientation in the public sector that aims to provide a better service for citizens. It is closely linked to the drive to improve organizational effectiveness through the wise use of human resources. Nevertheless, it is necessary to combine structural (managerial) and psychological (individual) approaches in an integrative study of empowerment. SE refers to a set of initiatives that aim the transference of power from managerial positions to the rest of employees. PE is defined as psychological state of competence, self-determination, impact, and meaning that an employee feels at work. Linking these two perspectives will lead to arrive at a broader understanding of the empowerment process. Specifically in the public sector, empirical contributions on this relationship are therefore important, particularly as empowerment is a very useful tool with which to face the challenges of the new public context. There is also a need to examine the moderating variables involved in this relationship, as well as to extend research on work motivation in public management. It is proposed the study of the effect of individual orientations, such as GO. GO concept refers to the individual disposition toward developing or confirming one's capacity in achievement situations. Employees' GO may be a key factor at work and in workforce selection processes, since it explains the differences in personal work interests, and in receptiveness to and interpretations of professional development activities. SE practices could affect PE feelings in different ways, depending on employees' GO, since they perceive and respond differently to such practices, which is likely to yield distinct PE results. The model is tested on a sample of 521 Spanish local authority employees. Hierarchical regression analysis was conducted to test the research hypotheses using SPSS 22 computer software. The results do not confirm the direct link between SE and PE, but show that learning goal orientation has considerable moderating power in this relationship, and its interaction with SE affects employees' PE levels. Therefore, the combination of SE practices and employees' high levels of LGO are important factors for creating psychologically empowered staff in public organizations.

Keywords : goal orientation, moderating effect, psychological empowerment, structural empowerment

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