



Psychological Empowerment and Organizational Commitment among Higher Education Lecturers in Central and Eastern European Countries

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Abstract

Background: Lecturers play a critical role in shaping the academic environment, and understanding their psychological well-being and commitment is essential for effective organizational management. **Objectives:** The primary objective is to investigate the relationship between psychological empowerment dimensions (competence, self-determination, impact, and meaning) and different forms of organizational commitment (affective, continuance, and normative) within the context of higher education. **Methods/Approach:** Data were collected through an online survey. The Psychological Empowerment Questionnaire (PEQ) assessed psychological empowerment, while the Organizational Commitment Questionnaire (OCQ) measured organizational commitment. IBM SPSS Statistics 24 facilitated data processing and analysis. **Results:** Findings reveal significant associations between psychological empowerment dimensions and organizational commitment. Some relationships are positive, while others exhibit nuances across Central and Eastern European countries. **Conclusions:** This research contributes valuable insights for organizational psychology and human resource management.

Keywords: Higher education; human resource management; organizational commitment; psychological empowerment; structural equation modelling.

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Introduction

Lecturers in higher education institutions play a crucial role in shaping the academic environment and influencing their students' learning experience (Coleman & Tuck, 2021). Understanding lecturers' psychological well-being and commitment is essential for effective organizational management and creating a conducive learning environment (Nurtjahjani & Puspita, 2022). Psychological empowerment, encompassing dimensions such as competence, self-determination, impact, and meaning, significantly affects employee satisfaction and commitment across various organizational settings (Ibrahim, 2020).

Conger & Kanungo (1988) and Likar et al. (2015) defined empowerment as strengthening individuals' feelings of effectiveness among their peers within the organization. Psychological empowerment, the psychological aspect of empowerment, refers to the psychological state of subordinates that results from empowering working practices (Spreitzer, 1995). Its essential role in making companies more effective has been acknowledged (Ergeneli et al., 2007; Jose & Mampilly, 2014), and it can be used as a new approach to motivating employees. Therefore, it is no surprise that the concept of psychological empowerment has made considerable headway among managers (Edalatian Shahriari et al., 2013).

Recent literature has underscored the strategic importance of higher education institutions in addressing global societal shifts, particularly in the context of the Great Reset (Pejić Bach et al., 2024). Understanding the psychological dynamics of academic staff is essential in this transformative landscape. In the context of evolving demands on academic staff in the post-pandemic era, especially within the Slovenian higher education system, recent studies emphasize the importance of adapting institutional strategies and roles (Qureshi et al., 2024). Higher education institutions in Central and Eastern Europe face increasing expectations to respond to evolving labor market conditions, not only through curricula but also by fostering academic environments that support the development of both students and staff. As studies show structural shifts in youth employment patterns (Korotaj et al., 2024), academic staff are expected to take on expanded roles, making their psychological empowerment and organizational commitment even more critical. These transformations highlight the increasing importance of understanding how psychological empowerment influences lecturers' organizational commitment, both of which are critical for institutional resilience and responsiveness. In this context, lifelong learning has become a cornerstone of the modern knowledge economy, further reinforcing the transformative role of higher education institutions and the evolving responsibilities of their academic staff (Vrdoljak, 2024).

The relationship between employees and their employing organizations has been a research topic for several decades (Stinglhamber et al., 2015). This interest persists because employees undoubtedly play a pivotal role in driving organizational success (Jordan et al., 2016; Jordan et al., 2017). Employees' organizational commitment has recently become a key organizational behavioral issue facing many organizations because employees are less committed than they once were (Lo et al., 2010). Allen and Meyer (1990a) first formulated two fundamental dimensions of organizational commitment. Subsequently, they introduced a third component, resulting in a three-dimensional model that includes affective, normative, and continuance organizational commitment (Allen & Meyer, 1990b).

Organizational commitment should be among the most important goals of organizations seeking to exist and survive (Hanaysha, 2016), and higher education institutions are no exception. The greater the organizational commitment, the more

productive, responsible, happy, and in harmony with the organization its employees will be (Karim & Rehman, 2012). The knowledge and work of higher education lecturers play an essential role in the educational process and are key factors influencing the performance of higher education institutions (Cheasakul & Varma, 2016). This research examines the effects of organizational factors on employee performance in sales forecasting, with a specific focus on the CEE region, which is typically underrepresented in prominent forecasting management studies (Diamantidis & Chatzoglou, 2019).

Structural equation modeling was applied to 409 lecturers to examine the relationship between four psychological empowerment sub-dimensions and three organizational commitment sub-dimensions.

The paper begins with an overview of the literature on psychological empowerment and organizational commitment, which informed the formulation of the four research questions and the methodological approach. The results are presented, and implications for theory and managers are discussed. In the final part of the paper, the authors present conclusions.

Literature review

Psychological empowerment

Psychological empowerment refers to an individual's intrinsic motivation and perceived effectiveness in the workplace. Researchers have extensively explored this concept, recognizing its impact on employee performance, well-being, and attitudes. According to Conger et al. (2000), psychological empowerment involves formal and informal procedures to promote effectiveness. Boudrias, Morin, and Lajoie (2014) propose that it represents an active motivational orientation related to an individual's sense of control and role at work. Unlike fixed personality traits, psychological empowerment is shaped by the work environment (Stander & Rothmann, 2010). The psychological approach defines empowerment as a state resulting from workplace practices. Spreitzer (1995a) identifies four dimensions that contribute to this state, i.e., meaning: Employees perceive their work as meaningful, aligning it with their personal beliefs and values; competence: Confidence in their abilities allows employees to perform tasks effectively; self-determination: Empowered individuals have the freedom to choose how they approach their tasks and impact: They believe their work directly influences the effectiveness of the larger system. These dimensions interact, reflecting an active orientation toward work. Researchers continue to investigate the factors that influence psychological empowerment and its consequences in organizational contexts. Effective leadership plays a pivotal role in promoting psychological empowerment. Transformational leaders who inspire and empower their followers contribute significantly to creating an empowering work climate (Spreitzer, 1995a; Avolio & Bass, 1995). Research indicates that psychological empowerment positively correlates with job satisfaction, organizational commitment, and overall well-being (Pierce et al., 2001; Seibert et al., 2011; Jordan et al., 2017). Encouraging employees' sense of control and impact can lead to better outcomes for individuals and organizations.

Organizational commitment

Organizational commitment is a critical factor in an organization's success (Saputra & Ariyanto, 2019). It refers to the extent to which employees identify with, are involved in, and are loyal to their organization (Khan et al., 2014). Some workers desire to remain members of the organization. Organizational commitment is a crucial factor in

determining whether an employee remains with the organization or pursues other job opportunities. Highly educated workers are expected to require less supervision due to their strong organizational commitment. This concept is especially relevant in managing knowledge workers, as their engagement and dedication are key to effectively utilizing their specialized expertise. Organizational commitment has gained increasing attention recently, especially in competitive environments such as higher education institutions. Organizational commitment in higher education institutions is particularly significant, as academicians' commitment greatly influences the success and retention of these institutions. Moreover, organizational commitment extends beyond external stakeholders, such as customers and prospects, to internal stakeholders, including employees. Organizations have recognized the importance of fostering employee commitment, leading to higher job satisfaction, increased productivity, and lower turnover (Saputra & Ariyanto, 2019).

The link between psychological empowerment and organizational commitment

Studies have revealed a positive link between psychological empowerment and organizational commitment (Avolio et al., 2004; Chang et al., 2010; Seibert et al., 2011). Lee and Nie (2014) investigated the relationship between the four sub-dimensions of psychological empowerment and organizational commitment. Joo and Shim (2010) have also investigated the link between psychological empowerment on a dimensional level and organizational commitment. Research has shown that psychological empowerment and organizational commitment are closely linked in academia. Psychological empowerment, which encompasses employee perceptions of autonomy, competence, and impact, has positively influenced organizational commitment among university lecturers (Sinha et al., 2016; Judeh et al., 2022.) Existing studies have examined the relationship between the four subdimensions of psychological empowerment (meaning, competence, self-determination, and impact) and the three subdimensions of organizational commitment, but further research is needed to understand this dynamic complex fully.

Based on prior research, psychological empowerment is a precursor to organizational commitment. However, research has not yet examined the links between the four subdimensions of psychological empowerment and the three subdimensions of organizational commitment. With this in mind, the four research questions were formulated to examine the relationships between the subdimensions of psychological empowerment, on the one hand, and organizational commitment, on the other. The research explores the relationships between psychological empowerment and different types of organizational commitment. The proposed first research question is as follows:

- RQ1: How is Meaning related to Affective, Continuance, and Normative Organizational Commitment?

The study examines how the sense of meaning in one's work influences one's emotional attachment (Affective Commitment), perceived costs of leaving (Continuance Commitment), and sense of obligation (Normative Commitment) to the organization. Meaning refers to the value and significance that individuals perceive in their work, which can influence their emotional attachment and commitment to the organization, leading to the second research question:

- RQ2: How is Competence Related to Affective, Continuance, and Normative Organizational Commitment?

It explores how perceived competence affects employees' Affective, Continuance, and Normative Organizational Commitment, as defined in the third research question:

- RQ3: How is Self-determination Related to Affective, Continuance, and Normative Organizational Commitment?

Finally, the research investigates the relationship between Self-determination and the three types of organizational commitment: Affective, Continuance, and Normative, leading to the fourth research question:

- RQ4: How is Impact Related to Affective, Continuance, and Normative Organizational Commitment?

It analyses how the perceived impact of one's work is related to their Affective, Continuance, and Normative Organizational Commitment. Impact refers to the degree to which individuals believe they can influence organizational outcomes through their work, thereby affecting their sense of empowerment and commitment.

Methodology

Participants and sampling

This research study involved participants from several European countries, including Austria, Croatia, Serbia, the Czech Republic, Germany, and Slovenia. A total of 409 lecturers completed the questionnaire, of whom 195 (47.7%) were male, and 214 (52.3%) were female. Among the respondents, 84 (20.5%) were from Slovenia, 107 (26.2%) from Croatia, 71 (17.4%) from Serbia, 34 (8.3%) from Austria, 39 (9.5%) from the Czech Republic, and 74 (18.1%) from Germany. These lecturers were affiliated with institutions specializing in either social sciences (55.5%) or natural sciences (44.5%). On average, the respondents were 41.3 years old and had been in their current positions for approximately 14.6 years. Of the 409 respondents, 227 (55.5%) held the professor position, while 182 (44.5%) were other pedagogical staff. The academic ranks varied, with 54 (13.2%) being full professors, 71 (17.4%) associate professors, 102 (24.9%) assistant professors, 21 (5.1%) senior lecturers, 18 (4.4%) lecturers, 11 (2.7%) language instructors, 3 (0.7%) senior research fellows, 27 (6.6%) research fellows, 36 (8.8%) teaching assistants with a PhD, and 66 (16.1%) assistants. The respondents were sampled using stratified random sampling to ensure representation from diverse European sectors and countries. The survey was conducted over three months in 2016. Participants were invited to complete an online questionnaire that included measures of psychological empowerment and organizational commitment. The survey was distributed via email and professional social media platforms to reach a broad audience. After completing the survey, the responses were carefully reviewed and edited for consistency and completeness. Any incomplete or inconsistent responses were excluded from the final analysis. Additionally, responses were checked for potential biases or errors, and necessary adjustments were made to ensure the data's accuracy and reliability.

Instruments

In this study, the Psychological Empowerment Questionnaire (PEQ) developed by Spreitzer (1995a) was used to assess psychological empowerment among lecturers. The PEQ consists of 12 items across four dimensions: competence, self-determination, impact, and meaning. This research included four meaning-related items (e.g., "My job activities are personally meaningful to me"). Respondents rated their agreement on a 7-point Likert scale, with higher scores indicating greater psychological

empowerment. Previous studies have reported good internal consistency for the PEQ (Faulkner & Laschinger, 2008; Seibert et al., 2004; Spreitzer, 1995b).

Additionally, the Organizational Commitment Questionnaire (OCQ), developed by Allen and Meyer (1990b), was used to measure organizational commitment. The OCQ comprises 24 items across three dimensions: Affective Organizational Commitment (AOC), Normative Organizational Commitment (NOC), and Continuance Organizational Commitment (COC). AOC reflects an emotional attachment to the organization; NOC reflects perceived obligations; and COC considers the costs of leaving the organization. Higher OCQ scores indicate greater organizational commitment. The three-component model of organizational commitment has been extensively tested across various contexts, with minor differences observed between North America and other countries, allowing for generalizability (Meyer et al., 2002).

Data analysis

After collecting the responses, the primary data underwent quality control and editing. The analysis was conducted using the LISREL 8.80 software package, which is well-suited for SEM due to its robust capabilities in handling complex models (Prajogo & McDermott, 2005). IBM SPSS Statistics 24 was used for initial data processing and for generating descriptive statistics. Standardized solutions are SEM coefficients that have been standardized to allow comparison across variables. These solutions and t-values help assess the significance and strength of the relationships between constructs.

Structural equation modelling (SEM) was employed to examine the relationships among the model's constructs. SEM combines confirmatory factor analysis with graphical modelling, visually representing the model (Tabachnick & Fidell, 2007). This method was chosen because it simultaneously tests multiple structural relationships, providing a comprehensive understanding of the hypothesized cause-and-effect relationships among variables.

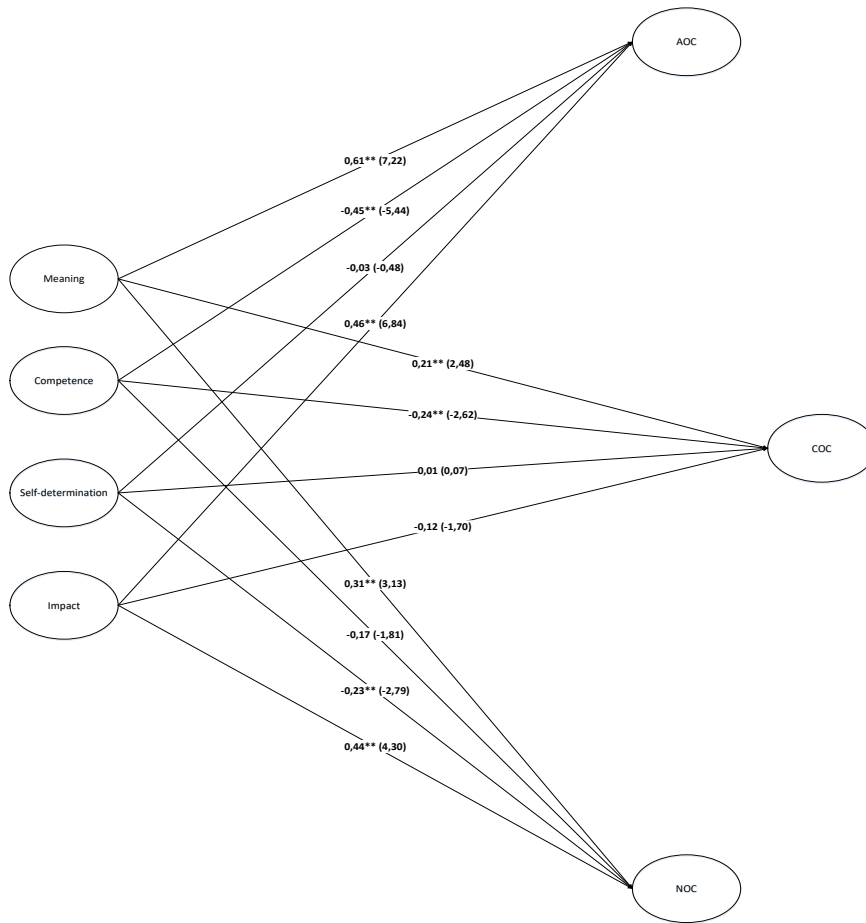
Results

Structural equation modeling (SEM) was employed to examine the relationships among the model's constructs. SEM combines confirmatory factor analysis with graphical modeling, visually representing the model (Tabachnick & Fidell, 2007).

The analysis was conducted using the LISREL 8.80 software package, which allows simultaneous testing of multiple structural relations (Prajogo & McDermott, 2005). By integrating factor and regression analysis, SEM evaluates the significance of the hypothesized cause-and-effect relationships among variables (Diamantopoulos & Siguaw, 2000). The standardized solutions and t-values for the tested relations are presented in Figure 1 and Table 1.

Structural equation modeling can be used to answer research questions about the constructs under investigation. Standardized solution weights for the dimensions of Psychological Empowerment and Organizational Commitment among higher education lecturers ranged from -0.45 to 0.61 (statistically significant) in the model, as presented in Figure 1 and Table 1.

Figure 1. Conceptual model with the standardized solutions (and t-test) for the research questions



Source: Authors' work

Table 1
Standardized solutions (and t-test) for the research questions

Research Question	Standardized solution	t-test
RQ1a: How is Meaning related to Affective Organizational Commitment?	0.61	7.22
RQ1b: How is Meaning related to Continuance Organizational Commitment?	0.21	2.48
RQ1c: How is Meaning related to Normative Organizational Commitment?	0.31	3.13
RQ2a: How is Competence related to Affective Organizational Commitment?	-0.45	-5.44
RQ2b: How is Competence related to Continuance Organizational Commitment?	-0.24	-2.62
RQ2c: How is Competence Related to Normative Organizational Commitment?	-0.17	-1.81
RQ3a: How is Self-determination Related to Affective Organizational Commitment?	-0.03	-0.48
RQ3b: How is Self-determination Related to Continuance Organizational Commitment?	0.01	0.07
RQ3c: How is Self-determination related to Normative Organizational Commitment?	-0.23	-2.79

RQ4a: How is Impact related to Affective Organizational Commitment?	0.46	6.84
RQ4b: How is Impact Related to Continuance Organizational Commitment?	-0.12	-1.70
RQ4c: How is Impact related to Normative Organizational Commitment?	0.44	4.30

Source: Authors' work

The standardized solutions provided a basis for answering the research questions, revealing how psychological empowerment dimensions relate to organizational commitment. Table 2 presents model fit indices, reference values, and model fit for the research model's individual indices.

Table 2
Model fit indices

Fit indices	Value for the model	Reference value	Model fit according to individual indices
χ^2/df	3.084	≤ 2 or ≤ 5	Good fit
RMSEA	0.071	< 0.08	Good fit
NFI	0.865	≥ 0.80	Acceptable fit
NNFI	0.899	≥ 0.90	Acceptable fit
CFI	0.908	≥ 0.90	Good fit
IFI	0.908	≥ 0.90	Acceptable fit
SRMR	0.089	< 0.10	Acceptable fit

Source: Authors' work

Discussion

The relationship between psychological empowerment and organizational commitment has been a topic of interest for decades, particularly within the higher education sector. This study delves into the intricate connections between these two constructs among lecturers in six Central and Eastern European (CEE) countries. By examining the dimensions of psychological empowerment – namely, competence, self-determination, and impact – we aim to shed light on how these factors influence organizational commitment, specifically affective, continuance, and normative commitment. Our findings contribute valuable insights for organizational psychology and human resource management, guiding leaders seeking to enhance commitment and well-being within educational institutions.

This dimension of psychological empowerment positively relates to all three dimensions of organizational commitment: affective, continuance, and normative. The relations with all three dimensions are positive and statistically significant, ranging from 0.61 for affective organizational commitment to 0.31 for normative organizational commitment and 0.21 for continuance organizational commitment. The intensity of these relations was expected, as a career in higher education – lecturing, teaching, researching, and assisting students – can also be described as one's "calling" in life. Thus, the results were strongest for affective organizational commitment, followed by normative commitment (a sense of loyalty or duty, the feeling that one is needed). The third type of commitment, continuance organizational commitment, can also be found among lecturers. That is, lecturers understand which alternatives to work in higher education are (not) available.

On the other hand, the competence dimension of psychological empowerment negatively relates to all three dimensions of organizational commitment. All three relations to these dimensions are hostile, but only two are statistically significant: -0.45

for competence and affective organizational commitment, and -0.24 for continuing organizational commitment. A result of -0.17 for normative organizational commitment is not statistically significant. These findings suggest that higher education lecturers who consider themselves highly competent tend to feel less attached to their institutions and are less likely to stay due to a lack of affective commitment. Furthermore, the more competent they feel, the weaker their continuance organizational commitment will be – the nature of the work in question leads to a desire for continuous advancement and personal improvement to become a great researcher.

Self-determination, as a dimension of psychological empowerment, has only one statistically significant relation: a negative one (-0.23) with normative organizational commitment. This suggests that higher education lecturers who see themselves as self-efficient are less committed to remaining at their current higher education institutions.

The final dimension of psychological empowerment, impact, relates positively and significantly to both affective organizational commitment (0.46) and normative organizational commitment (0.44). The relation to the continuance of organizational commitment is not statistically significant. This means that when higher education lecturers feel they have a tremendous influence over their work and surroundings, they become an integral part of their institutions and feel a sense of duty or commitment to remain and contribute to their continued success.

Psychological empowerment as a construct is still evolving, and new findings are crucial for establishing its theoretical basis alongside empirical confirmation. The research presented here was the first to connect the constructs of psychological empowerment and organizational commitment on the dimensional level in a research model. It would also be helpful to cross-check the effects of the constructs and the theoretical model against the organizational cultures of individual countries, organizational structures, and individuals' personality traits.

The primary limitation of this research is the reliance on self-reporting surveys, which can introduce a general bias into the method. However, Spector (1994) argues that self-reporting is legitimate for collecting data on employee perceptions, provided that the tools used reflect a comprehensive review of the relevant literature. Potential limitations include the need for a uniform definition of the constructs, which allows for multiple definitions and dimensions. Sample size could also be a limitation, as the sample used here did not represent any participating countries. A potential reluctance to complete online surveys should also be noted, as lecturers in higher education are bombarded with such surveys almost daily. Some potential respondents were unable to reply to or forward the survey due to internal rules.

Recent debate has focused on declining job satisfaction in higher education, primarily in response to a more managerial culture and often micromanaged performance management. Higher education has been subject to substantial reforms as new performance management forms become a key strategic HRM issue for European universities (van den Brink et al., 2013). However, in many cases, performance management systems have disrupted academic life. For most scholars, adopting performance management is perceived as a violation of academic freedom and the traditional collegial values of the university (Kallio et al., 2015). Additionally, it often pits colleagues against each other, or, on the other hand, they compete for a handful of permanent positions. However, while academics complain about the collapse of collegiality, they often fail to appreciate that their actions and behavior simultaneously accentuate what they decry (Kalfa et al., 2018). However, this research highlights the importance of collegiality and psychological empowerment for higher education lecturers, suggesting that HR professionals may

want to consider whether performance management is the most suitable approach or whether other, more effective human resources management strategies would be more appropriate.

Psychological empowerment, the degree to which individuals feel competent, influential, and self-determined in their work, has attracted significant attention in organizational psychology and human resource management. This study examined the relationship between psychological empowerment and organizational commitment among higher education lecturers in Central and Eastern European countries. The findings of this study reveal significant associations between psychological empowerment dimensions and organizational commitment among higher education lecturers in CEE countries, which contribute valuable insights into the field. A critical finding of this study is the positive relationship between psychological empowerment and organizational commitment. This suggests that when lecturers feel empowered in their work, they are more likely to exhibit a more substantial commitment to the organization. Furthermore, the study also found nuances in these relationships across CEE countries.

For example, some countries may exhibit stronger positive associations between psychological empowerment and organizational commitment, while others may show weaker or more complex relationships. These findings have important implications for leaders and managers in higher education institutions. Leaders can use these findings to enhance organizational commitment and well-being among higher education lecturers by focusing on fostering psychological empowerment.

This could be done through initiatives that promote the development of lecturers' competence, provide opportunities for increased influence and autonomy in decision-making, and support their sense of self-determination in their work. Moreover, this study adds to the existing literature on psychological empowerment and organizational commitment by highlighting the role of cross-cultural differences in these relationships. Future studies should further explore cross-industry comparisons and broader organizational contexts to understand how psychological empowerment and organizational commitment vary across different sectors and organizations.

Conclusion

Research into the construct of psychological empowerment is still in its infancy, and further investigation is crucial to a deeper understanding. On the other hand, the construct of organizational commitment has been extensively researched, and its three components have several standard definitions. This article makes several contributions. The empirical contribution of the research presented here is reflected in the conceptual model. This proves that the constructs are related and should be treated as such, especially in human resource management.

By testing linear relationships between the constructs and conducting extensive research in six European countries, the importance of these relationships was demonstrated as both a complement to existing theory and a point of departure for further research. This study is the first to examine the relations between these constructs at a dimensional level and combine them in a conceptual model. The findings contribute to the development of organizational psychology and human resource management.

The proposed conceptual model suggests that the constructs are undoubtedly interconnected and should play a crucial role in human resource management at any organization, not only in the field of higher education discussed here. The practical application of the research would enable leaders to understand their

employees better and psychologically empower them to achieve the desired level of organizational commitment. Further research could involve collecting data from different industries and environments, which could enable complete generalization and a wealth of comparisons.

One final limitation is reflected in the interpretation of the results, which focused solely on the variables or constructs included in the survey and did not consider additional effects. For future research, comparing results from various states and career stages (from professor to assistant) is suggested. Also, psychological empowerment can be researched in an organizational context. Leaders must understand the levels of psychological empowerment and organizational commitment among employees. This information provides guidelines for effectively managing employees and motivating them to feel comfortable and highly productive at work.

At the same time, it offers the potential to reveal and ultimately eliminate factors that directly or indirectly affect employees. The authors of the research presented above were still seeking examples of prior research on how these two constructs relate to each other at the dimensional level and within a conceptual framework. The constructs were shown to be mutually related on a dimensional level and to intertwine in their effects on and representations of organizational vision, attitudes towards work, and employee well-being.

These findings are crucial for individuals and leaders, serving as a valuable tool for effectively managing human resources. People, working methods, and technology change over time. Therefore, it is essential to learn from human resource management lessons and apply them in the workplace, rather than adhering to established but outdated practices.

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