

The Need for Empowerment to Ensure Organizational Sustainability: Leading International Experiences and Models

ENNOUNI DJILALI ¹, REGGANI LALLA FATMA ²

¹ UFC (ALGERIA), ennouni.djilali@ufc.dz
<https://orcid.org/009-0007-1020-8365>

² TAMANGHASEET UNIVERSITY, regganilalafatma@univ-tam.dz
<https://orcid.org/0009-0006-7932-1844>

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Abstract

This study investigates the theoretical and practical aspects of empowerment as a significant transition in contemporary management ideology, shifting from 20th-century conventional approaches to a knowledge-focused organizational model. The study begins by developing a conceptual framework, defining empowerment as not just the assignment of authority but as a complex cognitive state that encourages self-assurance and independent decision-making at lower tiers of the organization.

The research highlights several essential success factors for empowerment, such as the shift from manual skills to knowledge-based abilities, the unrestricted exchange of information, the establishment of mutual trust between leaders and their teams, and effective incentive mechanisms. Moreover, the study synthesizes and assesses five leading empowerment models—Conge & Kanungo, Gradual Empowerment, Three-Step, Tom Peters, and Spritzer—explaining how these frameworks tackle psychological preparedness and the removal of bureaucratic obstacles. Ultimately, the research contests the myths of the "Great Idea" and the "Great Man" by examining the evolutionary paths of trailblazing international companies like Sony, Walmart, and Nordstrom. The results indicate that enduring organizational excellence stems not from a singular innovative idea or an inspiring leader, but from a cultivated culture of empowerment that prioritizes human capital, promotes experimentation, and enables organizational adaptability in an increasingly complex global landscape.

Keywords: Empowerment, organizations, business environment, innovative ideas, knowledge, participation.

1. INTRODUCTION:

Organizations strive to address various internal and external challenges, and this is achieved through a set of measures primarily linked to the human element within the organization and its ability to keep pace with modern management systems and their expectations, as well as the impact of this on the organization's human resources to maintain its competitive advantage. The past few years have witnessed tremendous development in this field, with the term "empowerment" emerging as a concept through which organizations seek to develop the skills and increase the competence of their workforce.



Contemporary management reinforces this concept of empowerment, believing that the human element is the foundation of mental and intellectual energy and the core component of an organization's capital. For this reason, it is essential to provide a suitable work environment that encourages creativity and fosters trust between management and human resources, and to work as a team by participating in setting and achieving goals and making decisions. This contributes significantly to creating a creative atmosphere where innovative ideas align with the organization's objectives.

It is against this backdrop that this study examines empowerment and the extent to which it contributes to the organization's sustainability and the achievement of its objectives.

The Question: What impact does empowerment have on the sustainability of an economic institution?

To address this issue, we break it down into the following sub-questions:

- What is empowerment, and what are its key determinants?
- What are the most widely adopted models of empowerment?
- What are the most significant international best practices and models?

Objectives of the Study: Through this study, we aim to highlight the following objectives:

- The importance of empowerment and unleashing the latent potential of human resources.
- Highlighting the role of empowerment in economic organizations.
- Identifying the mechanisms for achieving the goals of economic institutions.

Research Methodology: To achieve the study's objectives, we adopted a descriptive-analytical approach, which is appropriate for this type of study. Through this approach, we clarify the most important definitions and scientific approaches related to empowerment, as well as the leading international models, and we conduct an analytical examination of the results and their evaluation.

Structure of the Study: To provide an overview of the study, we can divide it into three main sections.

Section 1: The Conceptual and Theoretical Framework of Empowerment.

Section 2: Models of Empowerment.

Section 3: Pioneering Experiences and Models in the Field of Empowerment.

Section 1: The Conceptual and Theoretical Framework of Empowerment.

First: The Nature of Empowerment.

Developments in management thought have led to the emergence of modern management concepts and terms, including empowerment, organizational trust, and quality of life. These have had a significant impact on the business environment and international organizations, and have become essential elements that must be addressed in order to benefit both individuals and organizations.

Definition of Empowerment:

The concept of empowerment is defined according to specific connotations derived from the perspectives of researchers, theorists, and decision-makers, Most of which fall within the same context but may differ in their approach. These include the following:

- Empowerment is the process of delegating decision-making responsibility and autonomy to lower levels of the



organizational hierarchy¹.

-Empowerment is a process of delegating decision-making to the operational level, which gives workers greater freedom to choose alternatives regarding production scheduling.

- Empowerment is also defined as the process of giving individuals greater authority to exercise oversight and take responsibility for how they use their abilities; this empowerment is a management approach that allows team members to make decisions regarding their day-to-day affairs².

-It is also defined as granting decision-making authority to workers at the lower levels of the organizational hierarchy. The aim is to create a participatory system in which different levels of the organization jointly determine how work is carried out³.

-Empowerment is not an inherent trait that can be generalized to all situations; rather, it represents a set of cognitive states that all take shape within the work environment. Therefore, empowerment reflects the differences in how individuals adapt to the work environment and the organizational climate⁴.

From the above, we can derive a definition of empowerment that encompasses various aspects, describing it as a state of mind and a cognitive context that requires the individual to harness their abilities, based on their knowledge and organizational culture, which gives them the self-confidence to assert their approach in the workplace and to make decisions and choose the outcomes they wish to achieve.

Second: The Elements of Empowerment

It is clear from the above that empowerment is based on the distribution of authority, freedom of action, and control from the top down within the organization, and on granting subordinates the right to actively participate and assume responsibility⁵. This concept is at odds with a situation where centralized authority remains in control of every minor and major aspect of the organization. For empowerment to succeed, the following elements are essential:

1 Knowledge and Skills :

People in the 21st century are characterized by a vast accumulation of knowledge. Numerous events have had a significant impact, including technological, intellectual, and scientific advancements that necessitate changes in traditional management styles, shifts in human resource management, and a shift in the nature of relationships among the various stakeholders in an organization's economic cycle—including managers, shareholders,

¹ Lasching, H, K, S, Finegan, J, E, Shamian, J, Wilik, P (2004), A longitudinal analysis of the impact of work place empowerment on work satisfaction. *Journal of Organizational behaviors*, vol (24), pp527-545.

² Ivana Veličkovska(2017), organizational citizenship behavior- definition, determinants and effects, *Engineering management* 3 (1), P 41.

³ Yu Hsing-Yi and al(2018), Organizational citizenship behaviour of men in nursing professions: Career stage perspectives, *Collegian* 25, P 20.

⁴ John Fox, Employee Empowerment: An Apprenticeship Model, thesis of doctorat, School of Business University of Hartford, Barney, 1998, P: 25.

⁵ Jay .A Conger & Rabindra N. Kanungo, The Empowerment Process: Integrating Theory And Practice *Academy Of Management Review*,3(13),1988, P: 473.

employees, customers, and society as a whole. Among the most important contemporary concepts is knowledge management, which signifies a clear shift toward the use and management of knowledge within organizations⁶.

Therefore, this knowledge and these gains must be supported by a flexible management structure and the willingness of subordinates to help transform future management and administrative practices and put these gains into practice to facilitate the work of managers and the administration in general. The most important changes can be summarized as shown in the table below.

Table No:(01) Transition from Traditional Administrative Practices to Contemporary Practices:

Indicator	Traditional practice	Contemporary Practice
Monitoring	Carried out by the manager	Engaging and collaborating with employees
Work	Hierarchical organization	A shift toward teamwork and small groups within the organization
Skill	Based entirely on manual processes	Knowledge-based
Performance Evaluation	Quantitative and often based on observation	Qualitative and focused on knowledge-based achievements
Culture	Reliance on formal systems and a restrictive culture	Contributing to cultural and intellectual development through knowledge acquisition
Bureaucracy	Consolidation and reinforcement	Overcoming and neutralizing them
Indicator	Traditional practice	Contemporary Practice
Monitoring	Carried out by the manager	Engaging and collaborating with employees

Source: Compiled by the researcher based on available data.

The table illustrates the extent of the shifts taking shape in managers' practices and

⁶ Lee Mushin & Koh Joon, Is Empowerment Really A New Concept?

International Journal of Human Resource Management, 12(4), 2001, p: 685.



orientations within contemporary organizations toward building an organizational climate conducive to knowledge, and to nurture human capital within the organization. These shifts represent a departure from the traditional management styles that prevailed in the 20th century and have begun to fade, giving way to modern approaches that align with contemporary environmental changes.

Since knowledge workers prefer to work independently and autonomously, without direct supervision, management's role must focus on empowering them to share and coordinate knowledge and skills, as knowledge workers may not have sufficient time to collaborate and share knowledge. This is where management plays a role in assisting knowledge workers by relieving them of routine tasks so they can devote themselves to collaboration and knowledge sharing among themselves.

As noted in the table above regarding knowledge and skills, their importance lies in their role as a fundamental component of empowering employees and granting them the freedom to act and participate. This is natural: the more experience an individual gains, and the more their skills and knowledge grow, the greater their ability to perform their job duties with high efficiency. However, knowledge and skills alone are not sufficient to empower employees in business organizations; therefore, other essential elements are combined with the

knowledge component to empower employees.

2 Communication and the Flow of Information:

Communication, the flow of information, its circulation, and active engagement with it across all levels of the organization are essential. Information is a vital tool that employees rely on in the decision-making process and in resolving workplace and customer issues. Without accurate or up-to-date information, employees cannot act freely and effectively; simply put, they lack the information that gives them the confidence to act correctly without fear or hesitation that their actions might be wrong. Effective communication in successful organizations fosters creativity⁷.

3. Trust between leaders and subordinates: Mutual trust between employees on the one hand and between leaders and employees on the other is considered one of the most important pillars of an organization. This is known as a productive exchange of energy, which embodies collaboration and the sharing of responsibility within the organization⁸.

4. Financial and Non-Financial Incentives: There must be an incentive system in place that encourages employees to fulfill their responsibilities properly, and these incentives should be tied to employee performance.

5. Appreciation and Respect: The empowerment process itself inherently involves a sense of appreciation and respect; management grants authority to employees only if they possess

⁷ Anukool Manish Hyde al,(2012),A Study of Quality of Work Life and Organizational Commitment amongst Academicians, Pacific Business Review International, 4(4), p: 133.

⁸ David Horth, (2009), Innovation Leadership:How to use innovation to lead effectively, work collaboratively and drive results,Center for Creative Leadership.



the ability to carry out the duties associated with that authority. This motivates employees to strive to gain experience in order to assume responsibility.

6. Fairness and impartiality: In order for empowerment to achieve its objectives, these two qualities must be present, as they ensure that every employee is given their due rights and status within the organization.

7. Delegation of Authority: This means granting another person (the delegatee) the right to act and make decisions within a specific framework and to the extent necessary to accomplish a particular task. A competent manager is one who delegates authority to his or her subordinates to handle specific details while devoting himself or herself to core functions, such as planning, policy-making, organizing, and supervising. Delegation does not mean that the delegator loses his or her authority; rather, he or she retains it and can reclaim it according to his or her judgment and the organization's vision in line with its objectives.

Third: Principles of Empowerment

1 Employee Training: Training individuals within an organization leads to increased effectiveness, which has a positive impact on both the organization and the individual; empowerment cannot be effective without training.

2. Motivation: Management must plan how to encourage employees to embrace the concept of empowerment and recognize their vital role in the organization's success through various mentoring and awareness programs, in order to build a cohesive team based on a policy of open dialogue with all levels of management⁹.

3. Clarity of Purpose: Empowerment cannot be realized, nor its success assessed, unless every individual in the organization has a full understanding, clarity, and a clear vision of the organization's philosophy, mission, and goals. Therefore, there must be a comprehensive plan designed to harness the creativity of individuals to achieve these various goals.

4. The Desire for Change: Individuals' desire for change can lead an organization to adopt modern approaches to task performance, as it has become essential in modern management to keep pace with developments¹⁰ and provide opportunities for experimentation in order to bridge the gap, thereby reducing costs and achieving the greatest possible return.

5. Respect: This is considered the cornerstone of the empowerment process within the organization. Respect is a broad concept that involves treating all employees equally, providing opportunities for everyone, and encouraging and rewarding high-performing and creative individuals who have a positive impact on the organization¹¹.

The Second Axis: Empowerment Models

⁹ Susan M. Sasiadek, (2006), Individual Influence Factors That Impact Employee Empowerment: A Multi Case Study, Capella University, Usa .

¹⁰ Manuela, Bruce, (2003), "Measuring Empowerment", Leadership & Organization Development Journal, Vol.24, Issue: 2.

¹¹ Schnake, Mel. E., & Dumler, Michael. P. (2003), "Levels of measurement and analysis issues in organizational citizenship behavior research", Journal of Occupational and Organizational Psychology, Vol. 76, pp 284-285.



To achieve this goal, every organization must understand empowerment in light of its internal and external environment, as well as its circumstances, capacity, capabilities, and competitiveness. The most important models include the following:

First: The Conge & Kanungo Model

The authors argue that empowerment is a model that necessarily begins with motivating the individual; it is a process of enhancing employees' sense of self-efficacy by identifying the factors that hinder the empowerment process and undermine work performance, and by overcoming and eliminating them through effective organizational practices across five stages, as outlined below:

- Identify the organizational factors that contribute to employees feeling powerless.
- The use of management techniques such as participatory management and its requirements, including goal setting, job enrichment, and performance-based rewards¹².
- Provide information on employees' self-efficacy based on several sources: past experiences, verbal persuasion, and emotional factors.
- A sense of empowerment through one's own efforts, as subordinates receive positive feedback regarding performance expectations and believe in their own effectiveness.
- Behavioral change through the commitment of subordinates and support in achieving goals in accordance with the established program.

In this model, Conge and Kanungo focus on the factors that hinder the empowerment process; once these factors are eliminated, the process can be effectively implemented¹³, These factors are as follows:

- Factors related to the organizational structure, such as bureaucracy.
- Factors related to the compensation system.
- Factors related to senior management and the supervisory mechanisms in place.
- Factors related to job design and role ambiguity.
- Poor communication, training, and technological support.
- An abundance of rules and regulations from multiple sources.
- Unrealistic goal setting.
- Low participation in actual decision-making.

2. The Gradual Empowerment Model:

This model is based on the premise that empowerment is a gradual process that requires a specific amount of time, following incremental steps; it is not possible to make an abrupt transition from a non-empowered organization to an empowered one. Spector presented his model through the "take charge and let go" principle in the application of empowerment, as he explains: The "take charge" principle means that management assumes its strategic responsibility, while employees take charge of setting the goals assigned to them, thereby fostering a shared sense of purpose and a unified vision of the goal; The principle of

¹² Conger, J.A. and Kanungo, R.B. (1988), The Empowerment Process: Integrating Theory and Practice, *Academy of Management Review*, 13 (3), 471-482.

¹³ Conger, J.A. and Kanungo, *Op cit*.



delegation means that management relinquishes concern for details, trusting in the employees' expertise¹⁴, and provides them with the necessary resources, information, and capabilities that give them a sense of confidence and the ability to rely on themselves. Accordingly, it is clear that management must empower employees by equipping them with skills such as conflict resolution, leadership, and trust-building. This highlights the importance of managerial empowerment, which facilitates team dynamics and enhances organizational performance¹⁵.

3. The Three-Step Model:

This model highlights the ease of implementing the empowerment approach by identifying three fundamental steps:

- Building trust between management and employees by providing opportunities for the workforce to actively participate in shaping the organizational structure in line with the organization's goals, exchanging information through open channels, and offering effective training opportunities to employees.
- Overcoming difficulties in the actual implementation and application of empowerment, as well as striving to embrace the greater freedom imposed by the empowerment mechanism, and eliminating the lengthy stages of delegating authority and shared leadership in decision-making¹⁶.
- Focus on education as the cornerstone of empowerment success; the logic of education requires employees to have a scientific background that helps and supports their efforts to absorb training.

4. Tom Peters' Model:

This model is based on two main elements:

- Involving individuals in all leadership matters, which helps foster employee engagement and increase team effectiveness. Tom Peters recommends providing the following supporting factors:

Recognizing individuals' efforts, prioritizing the recruitment process and ensuring it is of high quality, focusing on training and retraining, implementing an incentive-based compensation system, and most importantly, ensuring that management is committed and transparent with employees¹⁷.

- Creating an environment that fosters the emergence of innovative ideas, encouraging employees to take initiative and not fear failure, as well as preparing managers to listen to employees and give them time to explain their ideas, and allowing a healthy degree of freedom of opinion. In addition, it is necessary to eliminate complex organizational structures, bureaucratic rules, and the lack of clarity regarding the role of middle management.

¹⁴ Moreland, L. (2000), Call Centres: How Can Service Quality Be Managed?, *Irish Marketing Review*, 13 (1), 3-11.

¹⁵ Rucci, A. Kirn, S. and Quinn, R., (1998) Profit Chain At Sears, *Harvard Business Review*, 76 (1), 83-97.

¹⁶ Rucci, A. Kirn, S. and Quinn, R, (1998) , Op cit.

¹⁷ Peters, T and Nancy Austin (1985), *A Passion for Excellence: The Leadership Difference*, New York: Random House.



5. The Spritzer Model:

This model requires two fundamental steps for implementation: psychological empowerment followed by managerial empowerment. The goal of psychological empowerment is to instill a conviction among management and employees regarding the importance of empowerment¹⁸. Once this conviction is sufficiently established, managerial empowerment is implemented within an appropriate environment. The following key factors must be present:

- Personal factors, which are factors specific to the individual, meaning determining the locus of control in an individual's thinking based on a set of interrelated factors.
- Functional factors, which involve organizational flexibility in providing employees with information and empowerment systems to foster competence and creativity, provided that employees have the desire to achieve excellence¹⁹.

The success of an organization depends on its human resources being highly stable, as this is considered a means of development and its ability to compete, and thus to survive and sustain itself. However, this model overlooks the role of individuals in developing their skills and abilities, as well as the scientific and knowledge-based competencies necessary to improve performance and, consequently, their capacity to tackle challenges and overcome problems.

The Third Theme: Pioneering Experiences and Models in the Field of Empowerment

There are numerous experiences and stories that demonstrate the practical application of the concept of empowerment in various forms, through pioneering initiatives and case studies in implementing this concept, as well as corresponding companies that may have reached the pinnacle at a certain stage but failed to maintain that position. This does not mean that all successes stem from great ideas; rather, many have gone through numerous failures.

First: The Myth of Great Ideas

Sony was founded in 1945. At the time, Masaru Ibuka, the founder, had no specific idea about the nature of the product the company would offer. The company's first venture was in the kitchenware industry, where it failed miserably. It then moved into the production of audio tapes, but that venture also failed. None of these setbacks deterred the company's founder²⁰. After several attempts, the company succeeded and found its niche in electronics and children's toys, eventually becoming known as Sony Group Corporation²¹.

Sam Walton, the founder of Wal-Mart, also started out without a grand vision; he had nothing but a desire to be an independent entrepreneur, some knowledge of retail, and a passion for the business. In an interview with **The New York Times**, Sam Walton said:

¹⁸ Spreitzer, G.M. (1996), Social Structural Characteristics of Psychological Empowerment, *Academy of Management Journal*, 39 (2), 483-504.

¹⁹ Spreitzer, (1996), Op cit.

²⁰ Spreitzer, (1996), Op cit.

²¹ Bennis, Warren (2001) , *The Future Has no Shelf Life, the Future of Leadership: Today's Top Leadership Thinkers Speak to Tomorrow's Leaders*, Chapter in A book, Jossey-Bass, San Francisco, pp. 5.



"I didn't have any specific goal or objective, but I had great confidence that by working hard and doing our best, there would be no limits to restrict us or obstacles standing in our way." We see that Walton started step by step from a simple store until the company built a great vision.

These legendary companies—such as HP, Sony, and Walmart—have challenged the prevailing belief that dominates many people's thinking about the origin and formation of giant, enduring, or successful companies, namely that they must necessarily begin with a great idea. Consequently, many novice entrepreneurs or those contemplating starting a business believe they cannot succeed without a great idea. This belief may cause many people to shy away from building their own ventures and deter them from entrepreneurial endeavors and small businesses that could contribute to the growth of major national economies.

This is not meant to discourage the pursuit of great ideas at the outset of any project, but rather to underscore an important truth:

that great ideas may not be everything and may not be an end in themselves. Many companies started with great ideas and ended in failure; no one knows anything about the fate of these companies, and no one remembers them anymore. For example,

J. Willard Marriott seemed to have the desire to start his own business without a grand idea and without even a clear idea of what that business would entail.

Nordstrom started a small business with a tiny shoe store in downtown Seattle, and Procter and Gamble began with a simple soap and candle factory competing against 18 rival companies in Cincinnati in 1837. Motorola began as a battery repair shop in another company, and Philip Morris started as a small retailer in the tobacco and cigarette industry in one of London's back alleys²².

Second: The Great Man Myth

This is linked to the "Great Man" myth associated with charismatic leaders, who attempt to highlight their power and greatness through grand ideas. Empirical studies, such as Peters and Waterman's 1989 study in **In Search of Excellence** and Collins and Porras's study in **Built to Last**, that the myth of the great man, like the myth of great ideas, is not a valid indicator for building a great organization. In other words, there is no direct correlation between the presence of a great man and a charismatic leader on the one hand, and a strong organization²³ with a sustainable competitive advantage on the other.

James Stillman, former president of Citicorp and later president of Citibank, served from 1891 to 1909 and as chairman of the board until 1918. During this period, he worked to develop the

organization and build a great national bank; he transformed the bank from a narrow-minded company into a modern organization in every sense of the word. From its inception, he nurtured and developed the bank into a decentralized organizational structure, established a

²² B. Spesctor, 1991, *Taking Change and Letting Go*, New York, The Free Press, p23.

²³ Badaracco, Jr. Joseph (1991) *The Knowledge Link: How Firms Compete Through Strategic Alliances*, Harvard Business School, U.S.A., 189 pages.



strong board of directors composed of leading executives, and founded training and development programs at a time when his competitors had not even considered such programs for another three decades²⁴.

Third: A Model of Leadership

Motorola founder Paul Galvin's vision was to build a great and sustainable company, even though he had no background in engineering. Yet this renowned company, founded in 1928, is one of the most successful technology companies in history, as James Collins and Jerry Porras confirm in their book **Built to Last**; Galvin's lack of expertise in technology or electronic engineering did not prevent him from achieving his dream. He hired the best engineers and encouraged everyone to think, engage in dialogue, debate, and voice opposing views, telling them, "Opposing and contrary opinions are better than others." He gave individuals the freedom to propose ideas they could implement on their own. Anyone with an innovation or a new idea had the right to invite others to present their idea to them and discuss it in order to develop and adopt it²⁵.

He set challenges and tasks that required intellectual effort, and he gave employees full responsibility, sufficient scope, and the right environment to motivate everyone to learn and grow; he encouraged learning through failure and mistakes; Galvan was not an inventor, but he was a constructive leader, and his most

important assets lay in the strength and durability of that structure and the strength of the people who built it alongside him. The construction continued because everyone participated in building it and continuously fortifying it.

CONCLUSION:

Through what we have discussed, the meaning of empowerment has become clear to us from multiple perspectives and viewpoints, as have the developments this concept has undergone, stemming from the evolution and flourishing of humanity and the environment to which it belongs. Its importance to the organization—as an evolving entity striving to maintain its competitive edge—has become evident to us; and for the individual, who seeks to develop and thrive, bring ideas to life, and open up creative horizons that reflect on both the individual and the organization, potentially making them a leading entrepreneur and immortalizing their name in history. We also addressed models of empowerment and their implementation mechanisms, and how they impact the organization and its operations in light of rapid developments, and we touched upon the most significant difficulties and obstacles in this regard.

Empowerment can only succeed with the presence of a set of elements interacting in a new way, an environment that fosters this, and exemplary leadership that learns from its own mistakes and those of others—just as we have seen in many companies that have been established and developed. and how significant the impact of this has been on the confidence of individuals and leaders, as well as the motivation to achieve success at all

²⁴ Badaracco, Jr. Joseph (1991), Op cit.

²⁵ Collins, J and Porras, J.(1994), *Built To Last: Successful Habits of Visionary Companies*, USA.



levels—much like many global companies whose success stories are marked by creativity, determination, and numerous challenges, all in the name of ensuring their continuity.

We can highlight the following recommendations:

- Empowerment is an essential mechanism in an economic organization and cannot be dispensed with in light of rapid developments.
- The need to provide space for the human element to foster creativity and generate new ideas.
- Participation in the organization's vision, mission, and decision-making is mandatory.
- Support competition among individuals and groups, and encourage initiative.
- Create an environment conducive to the emergence of creativity.

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