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Kristin B. Backhaus

State University of New York at New Paltz

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CURRENT EMPIRICAL RESEARCH

Understanding Individual Differences in Employee Empowerment

Kristin B. Backhaus¹

Co-Editor

¹*Department of Management, School of Business, State University of New York at New Paltz, New Paltz, New York, USA*

Employee empowerment is essential for organizational success. Managers have increasingly heavy workloads as organizations seek to maintain a lean workforce, so the ability for lower level employees to think creatively and make important decisions is vital. But empowerment can be scary, both for supervisors and for employees. Supervisors can fear losing control when ceding responsibility to their subordinates. On the other side, empowered employees might fear exercising autonomy when they aren't completely clear about their role and their scope of authority.

Edward R. Kemery, W. Alan Randolph, and Lisa T. Stickney explore employee empowerment in their empirical study entitled "Preference for Managerial Boundary Setting in Relation to Empowerment: Adding Clarity to the Role of Boundaries." The authors explore managers' empowerment practices and feelings of psychological empowerment among employees. In particular, they look at preferences for boundary setting and the way

in which those preferences relate to actual empowerment practices and employee perceptions. The findings of the study have important implications for the workplace. The authors found that managers' preference for boundary setting related to the degree to which they used empowerment practices, but the relationship was nonlinear. Further, they found that employee preference for managerial boundary setting was positively related to employee sense of psychological empowerment. The authors also had interesting, unexpected results, like the finding that there was similarity between managers and subordinates in their preferences for managerial boundary setting.

The article by Kemery and colleagues reminds us that individual differences play a role in empowering employees. There is no "one best way" to empower all employees, and these differences must be taken into account when designing management systems.

Address correspondence to Kristin B. Backhaus, Department of Management, School of Business, State University of New York at New Paltz, 1 Hawk Dr., New Paltz, NY 12561, USA. E-mail: backhaus@newpaltz.edu