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# EMPOWERMENT



# profile

SECOND EDITION

John E. Jones, PhD and William L. Bearley, EdD

**THEORETICAL BACKGROUND**

**John E. Jones, PhD**  
**William L. Bearley, EdD**

**EMPOWERMENT  
PROFILE**

**FACILITATOR GUIDE EXCERPT**

**HRDQ<sup>®</sup>**

## **BACKGROUND OVERVIEW**

The Leader Version of the *Empowerment Profile* provides leaders (executives, managers, and supervisors) with an instrument for measuring the extent to which they feel empowered at work. More specifically, the instrument measures the eight dimensions of empowerment that research in behavioral psychology demonstrates to be significant. By studying their scores for each of these dimensions, leaders can obtain a clear picture of their empowerment at work and decide whether they need to make some adjustments. But that is only half of the picture. To obtain a full picture, leaders may opt to elicit information from those they lead. By administering the Employee Version of the *Empowerment Profile*, leaders can determine how empowered their employees perceive themselves to be. Research demonstrates a positive correlation between leaders' sense of their own empowerment and their tendency to empower their people. That is, the more power leaders perceive themselves to have, the more they are likely to give power to those they lead.

But giving away power may seem scary. To give away power, leaders need to trust themselves and those they lead. The payoffs can be both substantial and dramatic. Leaders are models for their employees. Leaders need to affirm themselves and let their people know that the organization is concerned about helping them to feel influential. Involving their people too much is far less risky than involving them too little. When leaders feel doubtful, they should get the active participation of their people in all matters of importance. Of course, leaders could involve their people for manipulative purposes. If employees lack information or skills, their participation may cause them actually to lose power because they would be opening themselves to undue influence. It is important not to make them more vulnerable. Leaders should be prepared to train their people in working through problems and plans and look for ways to keep them informed. Finally, it is important not to forget to celebrate their growing sense of responsibility for their future.

### **The Need for a Measure**

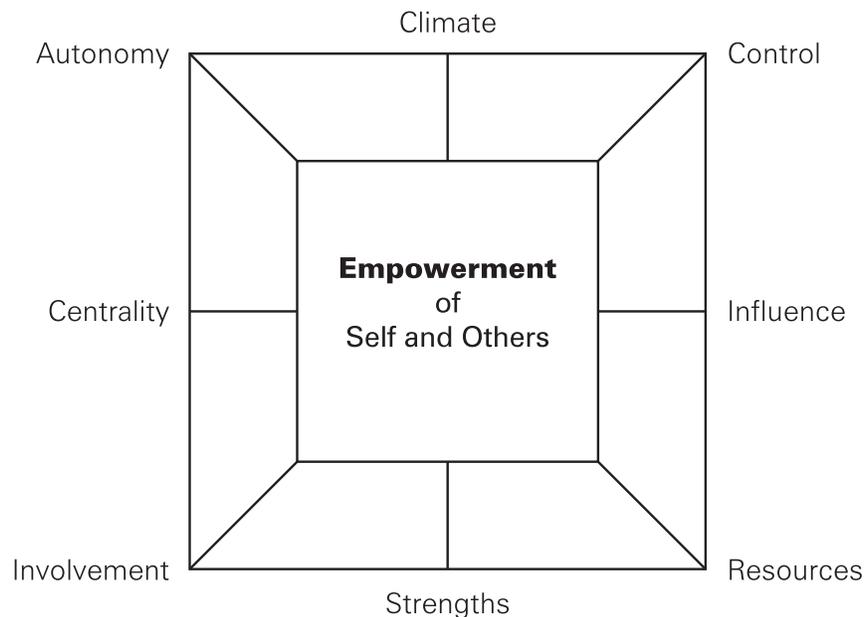
So much has been written and said on the subject of empowerment that the need arose for ways of organizing this concept. There was a lot of “smoke” and “warmed-over” discussion of participative management. Leaders needed concrete ways of analyzing their situations and making plans for improvement. A self-assessment instrument offered a means by which people in management-development programs could look at themselves honestly through a model that integrated available research and theoretical opinion.

The *Empowerment Profile* provides a solution to this need. The instrument generates a clear picture of the respondent's entire situation regarding the subject. Used in tandem with the Employee Version, the Profile comprehensively assesses the whole picture regarding a manager and his or her people.

## Development of the Items

The content of the *Empowerment Profile* reflects what is known about power in organizations and the practices of empowerment that have characterized experimentation in recent years. The authors surveyed the available literature, interviewed numerous leaders and consultants, and developed questions that tap the salient behaviors, perceptions, beliefs, and practices regarding the subject. In an attempt to control response bias, several items were worded in the negative direction.

It quickly became apparent that the subject of empowerment is complex; that there are numerous facets to the phenomena that collectively constitute empowerment in organizations. Accordingly, the authors sorted the questions into categories for conceptual clarity. This led to the development of a model. The intent was not to explain the *process* of empowerment but to account for the *dimensions* of the subject. The Dimensional Empowerment Model, then, depicts the eight major parts of the general concept of empowerment. Shown in figure 1, the model indicates that these dimensions are not independent of each other. They are all subsumed under the overall concept of the Empowerment of Self and Others. The three dimensions on the left (Autonomy, Centrality, and Involvement) show *role-oriented* aspects of the concept. The dimensions on the right (Control, Influence, and Resources) indicate to some degree the *results* of exercising power. The bottom dimension, Strengths, represents the foundation of self-empowerment, and the top dimension, Climate, shows the conditions under which a person exercises power.



**Figure 1.** The Dimensional Empowerment Model.

The items come from a study of the literature and interview data, and they were carefully constructed to meet the exacting validity criteria outlined by Jones and Bearley (1988). The model comes from an integrative study of the content of the items.

## Experimental Versions

The authors developed several experimental forms of the *Empowerment Profile* for use with training groups and in team-building situations. Also a brief version formed the basis for several self-assessment activities associated with large-audience presentations at national conferences in the United States and Canada. In addition, early versions of the instrument were tried out with several hundred practicing school administrators in a doctoral program in school management. Finally, early versions of the instrument formed the basis for one-on-one coaching sessions with several key organizational leaders who carefully critiqued both the tool and the process. These tryouts resulted in the elimination of a number of items, minor editorial improvements on the wording of specific items, and simplification of the language used in describing the Dimensional Empowerment Model. Also, the early applications sharpened the instructions on the personal action planning guide that is included in the instrument booklet.

## The Second Edition

In creating a second edition, our overriding goal has been to increase the instrument's usability, while, at the same time, maintaining its theoretical integrity. To that end, we have streamlined the instrument by selecting and including only those items that most clearly tap into the dimension under consideration, and by eliminating items that are redundant with other items, difficult for respondents to interpret, or open to a variety of interpretations. As a result, we have eliminated a large number of items, but we have also ensured that each dimension is represented by a sufficient number of items to yield meaningful results.

Not only have we streamlined content, but we have also streamlined the scoring process. By ensuring that each of the eight dimensions is represented by the same number of items, we have eliminated the need for respondents to convert their raw scores.

We have also made the descriptions of each dimension sharper and more concise so that trainers will be able to present the information easily and participants will be able to grasp it quickly.

Finally, at the request of many customers, we have developed a separate instrument for employees to assess their own sense of empowerment at work. In the first edition, leaders assessed their own sense of empowerment, then responded to the instrument a second time to assess the degree to which they believed their employees felt empowered at work. In the second edition, we have removed the guesswork. Leaders can now learn firsthand from their employees exactly how empowered employees perceive themselves to be.

## ABOUT HRDQ

HRDQ is a trusted developer of soft-skills learning solutions that help to improve the performance of individuals, teams, and organizations. We offer a wide range of resources and services, from ready-to-train assessments and hands-on games, to facilitator certification, custom development, and more. Our primary audience includes corporate trainers, human resource professionals, educational institutions, and independent consultants who look to us for research-based solutions to develop key skills such as leadership, communication, coaching, and team building.

At HRDQ, we believe an experiential approach is the best catalyst for adult learning. Our unique Experiential Learning Model has been the core of what we do for more than 30 years. Combining the best of organizational learning theory and proven facilitation methods with an appreciation for adult learning styles, our philosophy initiates and inspires lasting change.

For additional information about this publication, contact the HRDQ Client Solutions Team at:

Phone: 800.633.4533  
610.279.2002

Fax: 800.633.3683  
610.279.0524

Online: [www.HRDQ.com](http://www.HRDQ.com)