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Psychological empowerment for the future of work: Evidence from Portugal

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Abstract

In the competitive global marketplace, it is becoming important for organizations to empower employees for productivity reasons. One of the organizational empowerment models with greater support and consistency in the various studies in which it has been used is Spreitzer's Model of Psychological Empowerment in the Workplace, published in 1995. The model is composed of four dimensions that allow the measurement of the components of meaning, competence, self-determination and the impact of work on individual empowerment. The present study aims to evaluate the psychometric properties, in the Portuguese context, of the referred model. After the translation and adaptation of the psychological empowerment scale, the questionnaire was applied to a sample of 545 workers from Portuguese industrial organizations. The results of the application of structural equation modeling allow identifying the same components defined by the Spreitzer model, so it can be considered a reliable and valid instrument to measure organizational empowerment in the Portuguese context. However, we consider that complementary studies are necessary to analyze the psychometric properties of the scale and to further advance the research. The results obtained allow us to affirm that empowerment will be a basic strategy to improve the organizational transformations that companies constantly face. It is therefore important for Portuguese organizations to analyze the level of psychological empowerment of their employees, in order to find solutions to problems such as turnover, talent attraction, performance, work demotivation and improve human resource management practices. This is particularly important following the COVID-19 pandemic in which the psychology of employees was tested due to working from home and social distancing requirements.

KEYWORDS
comparative studies, competence, empowerment, impact, meaning, psychological empowerment, Portugal, self-determination, work/life balance

1 | INTRODUCTION

In a world in strong transition, where competitiveness is the fundamental basis of success, contemporary organizations are required to continually change internally and innovate in order to remain on the uneasy "waves" of a market of rapid and successive transformations (Dubey, 2016; Saleh et al., 2022). Organizations must permanently know how to reinvent themselves in the search for differentiating competitive advantages, using all their means and resources in a holistic and integrated manner (Herrera et al., 2012). This view highlights that financial capital is no longer the most relevant resource, giving way to knowledge and human capital, which become essential resources for any organization (Armstrong & Taylor, 2014; Chiavenato, 2005; Rego et al., 2015; Safar, 2016) and the main key to the growth, development and differentiation of a company in the market (Chiavenato, 2005; Forrester, 2000; Thomas, 2000). Human capital must be increasingly involved in decision-making processes linked to business strategies as a measure of organizational competitiveness (Kimble, 2011). It is, therefore, important to understand the contribution of empowerment in the management of organizations, as a tool that promotes speed, flexibility, and decision-making capacity of the organization (Daft, 2015) through the sharing of power, information and autonomy for decision-making and active participation of all its members.

Empowerment has attracted more and more critical attention and relevance in several and multiple types of organizations due to the implementation of a new paradigm that drives the commitment of employees to contribute to strategic decisions, autonomy, and the incentive to generate positive changes in the performance of their organizations, functions, and functional areas that stimulate organizational effectiveness (Boudrias et al., 2014; Macário et al., 2020). This new paradigm breaks with the traditional pattern of organizational management, focusing on reducing bureaucracy, decentralization, flexibility and innovation (Fernadez & Moldogaziev, 2012), enabling employees to act as if they were the "owners" of the business (Spreitzer, 2008).

In most organizations, the amount of time that is wasted with movements and requests such as messages, emails, requests, and authorizations between employees and managers to request permission or authority to continue with their work is considerable (Lagoarde-Segot, 2011). Empowerment as a management tool helps in these matters, aiming at the delegation of power, allowing the reduction of hierarchical levels and bureaucratic procedures, and being increasingly seen as a strategy that gives employees the decision and responsibility for the management of their work (Kumar & Kumar, 2017; Nzuve & Bakari, 2012). Excessively controlled employees—"micromanaged"—with no space to work on their own, easily lose interest in their jobs (Csikszentmihalyi, 2003). It is in this context that psychological empowerment in the workplace arises, which is defined as the extent to which an individual has the feeling of being in control of their work (Boudrias et al., 2014; Spreitzer, 1995). It is the worker's experience of feeling empowered in their tasks within the organization, being achieved only when psychological states result in worker's having perception of empowerment (Baird & Wang, 2010). This is a participatory management approach for people, involving them in decision-making, which aims at delegating authority, making them feel part of the organization and contributing to its growth (Rubel et al., 2017). In this way, it is easily understood that this is a dynamic, situational and contingency concept. It is a construct that presents different forms in different contexts, populations, and stages of development, and cannot be adequately captured through a single operationalization that does not address situational conditions (Rashed & Fekry, 2015; Zimmerman & Perkins, 1995). The development of a global and universal measure of psychological empowerment does not appear to be feasible. Therefore, this is where the interest of the present study lies.

The literature review carried out allows us to verify the existence of studies that adapted the psychological empowerment scale to the Turkish context (Uner & Turan, 2010) and to the Spanish context (Albar et al., 2012) and analyzed the psychometric properties of the scale, confirming the existence of the four dimensions defined by Spreitzer (1995). However, it did not allow the identification of validation studies of instruments in Portuguese that allow the correct assessment of the psychometric properties of empowerment. Thus, it was considered relevant to carry out the cultural adaptation for the Portuguese population of Spreitzer's "Model of Psychological Empowerment in the Workplace" (1995). This is, therefore, the aim of this study. In this sense, it is important to understand how different contexts influence and condition the empowerment experiences of individuals, namely in the Portuguese organizational context.

The usefulness of this scale seems to be of particular interest to enhance the development of empowerment as a business practice with clear benefits evidenced in the literature, namely its significant role in maximizing the potential of employees (Maynard et al., 2014), promoting greater organizational commitment (Arciniega & Menon, 2013; Macário et al., 2020), intrinsic motivation (Zhang & Bartol, 2010), job satisfaction (Gregory et al., 2010), and performance (Boudrias et al., 2014; Li et al., 2015). Furthermore, the relative incipience of empowerment in Portugal, particularly in the business sector, is also an

additional reason that justifies the relevance of this study (Andrade et al., 2017).

To this end, after this introduction, a literature review on the concept of organizational empowerment and its study perspectives follows, giving particular emphasis to the psychological perspective and its underlying cognitive dimensions. Next, the methodology is presented, where the population and the sample are described in addition to the data collection instruments. The procedures used throughout the investigation are also stated and explained

In the results and discussion section, a statistical analysis is carried out accompanied by a discussion considering the literature review explained. Finally, the conclusions, limitations, implications and suggestions for future investigations are presented.

2 | ORGANIZATIONAL EMPOWERMENT

2.1 | Concept and evolution

Empowerment is a difficult concept to define clearly and consistently. It has created general and specific meanings and various interpretations and, consequently, a diversity of definitions and approaches. Thus, the definition of empowerment has used different descriptors includinginternal motivation, perception, commitment, job structure, delegation of authority or sharing of resources and information (Robbins, 2003).

Historically, empowerment underlies the ideology of social action, participatory democracy, and autonomous social movements of the 1960s and the self-help perspective of the 1970s. The concept was introduced by Rappaport in 1981, based on the development that leads to the promotion and enhancing the growth and potential of individuals, families, and communities (Rappaport, 1984). According to this author, empowerment can be defined as a construct that links individual strengths and competencies, natural aid systems and proactive behaviors with policies and social changes, and as a set of mechanisms through which people, organizations, and communities acquire mastery over others, their lives allowing their analysis on an individual, organizational, and community level.

Greasly et al. (2008) argue that empowerment has to be used as the sharing of power between workers and top managers, Randolph (1995) as the "transfer of power" between employers and their subordinates. Rodrigues and Santos (2004) also mention that it is a work project approach that focusing ondelegating decision-making autonomy, autonomy and participation of employees in the management of companies. Complementing, Daft (2005)

adds that it is the delegation of power or authority to subordinates in a company, seeking to give greater autonomy and motivation to employees in the performance of their duties and responsibilities, in addition to involving them in the delegation of power or of authority. In this way, empowerment makes employees feel that they are part of the organization and that they are contributing to its growth.

As can be seen, empowerment has been defined in several ways, and most authors agree that the central element of empowerment involves delegating authority to employees, that is, giving people the power, freedom and information to make decisions and actively participate in the organization (Chiavenato, 2005; Daft, 2005; Klagge, 1998; Randolph, 1995; Skår, 2010; Spreitzer, 1995; Thomas & Velthouse, 1990). Thus, it can be said that there is a consensus on the concept of empowerment, that it promotes the power of employees in relation to their lives and the organizations to which they belong, to achieve the objectives proposed to them (Adams, 2003; Daft, 2005; Greasly et al., 2008; Kumar & Kumar, 2017; Nzuve & Bakari, 2012; Rodrigues & Santos, 2004).

Empowerment is, therefore, an organizational strategy that aims to decentralize power by ceding it to employees at lower hierarchical levels. Top management seeks to share the decision-making process with employees in the hierarchy, as well as the possibilities, consequences, and responsibilities attached to it (Malamud & Sousa, 2005; Orgambídez-Ramos et al., 2017). The underlying principle is that sharing power with others expands power itself. People who have greater opportunities for growth and mobility in their work are more likely to have high aspirations and be more committed to the organization. Empowerment therefore, incorporates an important management tool, indicated to increase autonomy and, consequently, positive organizational performance (Macário et al., 2020; Orgambídez-Ramos et al., 2017; Wall et al., 2005). The concept has been seen as a strategy and philosophy of active employee participation that organizations increasingly value, as a tool that improves the performance of their employees and the company's competitive advantage. In this sense, it is equally important to highlight the evolution of empowerment over the years and the continuous interest of the organizations and their managers (Nzuve & Bakari, 2012), which is explained by the fact that the most successful companies are finding better ways to make the most of their employees' intellectual resources, in fact their real capital, associating empowerment with human resource management, as a solution to strengthening the participation of people and groups and to fostering a good working environment and creativity (Rodrigues & Santos, 2004). In addition to these, there are many positive impacts associated with it in organizations, namely, in terms

of autonomy, involvement in decision-making, proactivity and professional development of employees, which consequently drives the development of new products, methods of management and, therefore, organizational performance and agility (Rua & Rodrigues, 2018).

2.2 | Empowerment in organizational practice

The use of empowerment in organizations is complex and requires planning, demanding time, and financial investment, since knowledge and skills need to be developed or built in the team, relationships formed, information passed, technologies adapted, the organizational environment reformulated, practices and modified systems in order to meet the needs of each employee and, especially, the needs of the organization (Sampaio, 2013).

For the successful implementation of this management tool, it is essential that the top management is aligned and committed from the beginning, as well as that the leadership and delegation of powers are structured correctly, allowing to benefit from all the resources that empowerment makes available and to enjoy the results obtained (Souza & Silva, 2017).

The implementation of Empowerment in an organization must encompass workers from different hierarchical levels and from all functional areas of the company, always with the orientation of actions with a single purpose and in a single direction, the achievement of goals and the overall success of the organization (Gomes, 2003).

Managers must be aware that the process of implementing empowerment is gradual and will produce positive results in the medium and long term. In addition, it involves different factors such as, for example, changing management methods, approaches, behaviors, customs, and especially and more difficult, changing the organizational culture. Therefore, it is necessary that those responsible for the implementation have patience and persistence, and that they know how to deal with the resistance of some employees, otherwise the results may not be achieved or not turn out as expected (Peinado & Graeml, 2014). Therefore, if managers know how to properly promote empowerment, they encourage workers to change behaviors and assume responsibilities, making their intellectual capital develop in the work environment. This makes employees feel responsible for achieving the company's goals and success, encouraging productivity and a bond of commitment (Gomes, 2003; Greasley et al., 2008; Macário et al., 2020). In this sense, correctly practicing empowerment and opting for a power delegation strategy is, therefore, a major challenge for organizations.

2.3 | The psychological empowerment

Studies on empowerment incorporate two perspectives: the structural and the psychological. Despite being different concepts, there is a positive relationship between them and, both of them, influence the demand, satisfaction, and permanence of professionals in their work context (Stewart et al., 2010). The literature gathers consensus and shows that no perspective is necessarily better than the other, in line with Quinn and Spreitzer (1997). Both provide elements for the implementation of an empowerment program (Kazlauskaite et al., 2012), since, while structural empowerment is the presence or absence of conditions that provide empowerment at work, psychological empowerment is the psychological interpretation of employees or the reaction to these conditions. Therefore, the structural perspective relates to organizational policies, flexible hierarchy, practices, and structures that grant employees autonomy to make decisions and exert influence over their work, which reflects the power-sharing relationship (Sampaio, 2013). The concept is related to the notion of Greasley et al. (2008), of power sharing between employees and managers, arguing that the redistribution of power promotes employee trust and collaboration. This perspective suggests that the employees will be empowered through the implementation of new processes. Empowerment normally occurs when higher position levels within the hierarchy share power with lower levels in a top-down process (Orgambídez-Ramos et al., 2017; Siegall & Gardner, 2000; Spreitzer, 1997). Therefore, employees work competently, causing structural changes. Knol and Linge (2009) argue that structured empowerment is an opportunity related to self-determination, growth, the feeling of challenge, and the opportunity to learn on the part of employees. It is considered as a structure that influences the behavior and attitude of employees in an organization.

The psychological perspective focuses on the worker's perception of empowerment which is important in an organizational context (Spreitzer, 1995, 1997; Thomas & Velthouse, 1990). It is related to levels of intrinsic motivation, employees' feelings, and individual perspective. This perspective can be achieved only when psychological states result in a change in the perception of empowerment within the worker, in line with what Menon (2001) argues that empowerment is a cognitive state characterized by the perception of control, competence and internalization of goals. In this way, psychological empowerment is defined as the individual's experience of motivation based on cognitions about himself and his relationship with his work role (Spreitzer, 1995). It also translates into an individual process that consolidates feelings about their own effectiveness among the other members of an organization

(Conger et al., 2000), and an active motivational orientation in relation to the subject's perception of control over their work (Boudrias et al., 2014). In this perspective, the concept differs from other general intrinsic motivations because it is considered an active intrinsic motivation as opposed to other general intrinsic motivations which are passive (Deci et al., 1989). This individual process can be internal or external and is related to the way in which an extensive set of elements, such as the individual's commitment and feeling of satisfaction with the organization, their personal well-being or the various management practices, which includes the delegation of authority or responsibility, appear associated with their psychological states (Jordan et al., 2017). It emerges as a mechanism that can be associated with innovative work processes, teamwork, and the development of an organizational culture focused on the customer or the enrichment of tasks.

Despite the diversity of explanatory approaches to the concept that the literature has presented, based on a line of research initiated by Conger et al. (2000) and Spreitzer (1995), Thomas and Velthouse (1990) focused on the psychological perspective of empowerment in the workplace, materializing one of the models of organizational empowerment with greater support and consistency in the various studies in which it has been used (e.g., Arciniega & Menon, 2013; Boudrias et al., 2014; Jose & Mampilly, 2014; Li et al., 2015; Menon, 2001; Saleh et al., 2022; Stewart et al., 2010; Uner & Turan, 2010). The author conceptualized psychological empowerment as a motivational construction involving four basic cognitive dimensions: meaning, competence, self-determination, and the impact on individual empowerment. The "meaning" dimension is defined as the feeling of commitment to the goals of the work (Spreitzer, 1995). It refers to the achievement of an objective according to an intrinsic evaluation made by the individual. The company has to make sure that the purpose of the work tasks is compatible with the value system of its employees so that they feel that their tasks are meaningful, which leads them to maintain organizational motivation and commitment (Choong et al. al., 2011). According to Spreitzer (1995), the tasks performed by the worker are significant when he is concerned with them and considers them important for his function. This perspective of empowerment is what gives energy to an organization's human capital to work with common goals (Rua & Rodrigues, 2018). The "competence" dimension concerns the belief that the individual has in relation to their ability to perform their tasks with skill and success (Spreitzer, 1995). Individuals must not only believe that they have the necessary skills and abilities to perform their work, but they must also try to perform their work to the best of their ability. Their skills reflect a sense of self-efficacy, reflected in the way the individual deals effectively with different situations at work (Jordan

et al., 2017). "Self-determination" refers to the autonomy that an individual has to decide how to carry out their tasks (Zhang & Bartol, 2010) and is related to the feeling of freedom and autonomy in carrying out the work. It is a characteristic of determined people, capable of great feats of change. Self-determination exists when the employee has some control over what they do, how much effort has to be put into the job, and the power to start or stop their task (Choong et al., 2011). Finally, the "impact" dimension exposes the intensity with which an individual feels that he can influence the place where he is involved in terms of the strategic, administrative, or operational results of his tasks (Ro & Chen, 2011). In this perspective, managers should give their subordinates the opportunity to give opinions and/or suggestions about the workplace (Meng & Han, 2014).

These four dimensions are considered sufficient to understand psychological empowerment (Spreitzer, 1995; Thomas & Velhouse, 1990), and have been used in several studies that show that psychological empowerment is related to positive work outcomes (Arciniega & Menon, 2013; Dewettinck et al., 2003; Saif & Saleh, 2013; Zhang & Bartol, 2010), improving teamwork, motivating experiences in work performance, satisfaction, and proactive and innovative behavior of individuals in the organization. Together, these four dimensions strengthen the relationship and increase the individual's commitment to the organization (Macário et al., 2020; Saleem et al., 2019). Therefore, they reflect an active orientation on the role of work that indicates how the individual wants to adapt to the work context (Choong et al., 2011).

Psychological empowerment is thus a multifaceted concept (Indradevi, 2012; Spreitzer, 1995). This means that it comprises dimensions that create a sense of personal control and competence, which can include an understanding of the work environment that is embodied in social actions (Menon, 2001). It is, therefore, a complex concept dependent on personal interpretations and the areas to which it refers to. It is not a static concept and evolves according to the experiences of people and organizations that put it into practice (Adams, 2003; Rashed & Fekry, 2015; Thompson et al., 2007). Psychological empowerment is an open construct that presents different forms in different contexts, populations, and stages of development and cannot, therefore, be adequately captured through a single operationalization that does not address situational conditions. As a process of thought and action, empowerment is dynamic and constantly evolving. It implies a continuous development that involves many changes and it is through it that an individual or group is able to strengthen and exercise their ability to act to gain control and mastery over themselves and their work. Contexts are constantly changing, dynamic and sometimes fluctuating. Consequently,

empowerment is particularly prone to fluctuations over time. According to Hermansson and Martensson (2011) the elements involved in the empowerment process are all necessary and are closely interconnected, but not in a hierarchical or linear way. It is here that this study gains a strong justification and contribution, as it materializes the cultural adaptation for the Portuguese population of Spreitzer's (1995) model of Psychological Empowerment in the Workplace. Since this is a situational and contingent phenomenon, it is essential to understand the experiences of empowerment in the Portuguese business context, where no such contribution is found in the literature to date. The usefulness of this scale is of particular interest to grasp the assumptions of multiplicity and dynamism in the operationalization and evolution of the theory of psychological empowerment and to enhance it as a business practice in the management of Portuguese organizations. The dissemination of this management strategy is beneficial for the business community, in order to obtain the significant positive results that it incorporates, duly evidenced in the literature review explained.

3 | METHODOLOGY

3.1 | Population and sample

The target population of the present study are workers from Portuguese organizations in the industry, with a sample of 545 workers. Most workers are female ($n = 309$; 56.7%), aged between 18 and 68 years, with an average of 37 years ($SD = 11.35$). Concerning seniority in the organization, 42.9% ($n = 234$) have worked in the organization for less than 5 years, 19.3% ($n = 105$) have worked in the organization for between 5 and 10 years and 37.8% ($n = 206$) have worked in the organization for more than 10 years. Regarding educational qualifications: 13.0% ($n = 71$) have basic education, 56.7% ($n = 309$) have secondary education and 30.3% ($n = 165$) have higher education. This fact is justified given that the sector studied is that of industry, where most participants have lower education by nature, that is, secondary education. Regarding the type of staff, 69.2% ($n = 377$) of the workers belong to technical staff and 30.8% ($n = 168$) are part of administrative staff.

3.2 | Data collection instrument

The instrument used for data collection is a closed-ended questionnaire survey, consisting of two parts. The first part comprises sociodemographic data (gender, age, educational attainment, types of staff and length of service in the organization). The second part consists of 12 items (see

Table 1) and was prepared according to the psychological empowerment at work scale, developed and validated by Spreitzer (1995). This scale is formed by the dimensions: Meaning (Items E1, E2, and E3), Competence (Items E4, E5, and E6), Self-determination (Items E7, E8, and E9), and Impact (Items E10, E11, and E12). To measure psychological empowerment, a five-point Likert scale was used (1- *strongly disagree* to 5- *strongly agree*).

In Spreitzer's (1995) scale of psychological empowerment, the value of Cronbach's alpha obtained in the sample of workers from companies in the industrial area was .72. This scale has been systematically used in several studies (e.g., Baird & Wang, 2010; Col, 2008; Hancer et al., 2005; Jose & Mampilly, 2014; Saleh et al., 2022; Uner & Turan, 2010). There are several studies where the value of Cronbach's alpha is above .80 (e.g., Jordan et al., 2017; Jose & Mampilly, 2014; Uner & Turan, 2010), and more recently, in the study by Saleh et al. (2022), applied to nurses in public hospitals in Pakistan, the Cronbach's alphas of the factors ranged from .85 to .88 and the Cronbach's alpha of the total scale was .96.

3.3 | Procedures

Spreitzer's (1995) psychological empowerment scale was translated from English into Portuguese and a pre-test was subsequently carried out with the collaboration of 12 workers from the industry sector and three individuals from the Human Resources Management area, in order to assess the clarity of issues. After carrying out the pre-test, small adjustments were made in terms of semantics in order to make the issues more perceptible in linguistic terms.

The survey was prepared on the Google Docs platform and subsequently applied from February to May 2019. The choice of this tool made it possible to speed up the data collection process, ensuring anonymity and data confidentiality.

To proceed with the application of the questionnaires, an email was sent to those responsible for the organizations asking for permission to carry out the study. After the organizations accepted to participate in the study, those responsible for the organizations sent all participants an email with the objectives of the study and the access link to the questionnaire.

Data were analyzed using IBM SPSS Statistics 28 and AMOS 21 software. Descriptive measures were used to characterize the sample. According to Kline (2015), the existence of omitted cases and outliers was initially analyzed and the sensitivity of the items was studied using the coefficients of asymmetry ($|Sk| \leq 3$) and flatness ($|Ku| \leq 7$). In the confirmatory factor analysis, the maximum likelihood estimation method was used and the following

TABLE 1 Estimation of the measurement model parameters

Factor/Items	M (SD)	λ
Meaning (α = .906, CR = .907, AVE = .764)	**3.89 (0.78)**	
E1. The work I do is very important to me.	3.95 (0.86)	.857
E2. My job activities are personally meaningful to me.	3.83 (0.87)	.875
E3. The work I do is meaningful to me.	3.89 (0.82)	.890
Competence (α = .873, CR = .878, AVE = .707)	**4.17 (0.63)**	
E4. I am confident about my ability to do my job.	4.18 (0.69)	.859
E5. I am self-assured about my capabilities to perform my work activities.	4.20 (0.68)	.892
E6. I have mastered the skills necessary for my job.	4.14 (0.75)	.766
Self-determination (α = .860, CR = .864, AVE = .681)	**3.69 (0.86)**	
E7. I have significant autonomy in determining how I do my work.	3.84 (0.92)	.742
E8. I can decide on my own how to go about doing my work.	3.62 (0.99)	.891
E9. I have considerable opportunity for independence and freedom in how I do my job.	3.60 (1.00)	.836
Impact (α = .877, CR = .882, AVE = .716)	**3.34 (0.93)**	
E10. My impact on what happens in my department is large.	3.61 (0.92)	.722
E11. I have a great deal of control over what happens in my department.	3.18 (1.09)	.887
E12. I have significant influence over what happens in my department.	3.23 (1.09)	.917

Source: Own elaboration.

goodness of fit indices were used: the ratio of the Chi-square Statistic to the degrees of freedom (χ^2/df) less than 3 (Kline, 2015), GFI (Goodness of Fit Index) and CFI (Comparative Fit Index) above 0.95 are indicators of a very good fit (Hair et al., 2014), RMSEA (Root Mean Square Error of Approximation) is considered good for values in the interval [0.05, 0.08[and PCLOSE (comparative fit index) greater than or equal to 0.05 (Arbuckle, 2014).

Factor reliabilities were evaluated with Cronbach's alpha and composite reliability, where values greater than .7 are considered acceptable. Convergent validity was estimated by the AVE value (Average variance extracted), which must present values greater than .5, and to analyze the discriminant validity, it was verified whether the AVE values are greater than the square of the correlation between the factors (Hair et al., 2014).

4 | RESULTS

4.1 | Confirmatory factor analysis

To assess the quality of adjustment of Spreitzer's (1995) theoretical measurement model of psychological empowerment, confirmatory factor analysis was applied to the correlational structure observed among the 12 manifest variables. This application resulted in a good fit, that is, the model with four factors of psychological empowerment, adjusted to a sample of 545 Portuguese individuals working in the industry sector, showed good quality adjust-

ment indices ($\chi^2 = 120,201$, $df = 48$, $\chi^2/df = 2.504$, $p < .001$, GFI = 0.965, CFI = 0.982, RMSEA = 0.053, PCLOSE = 0.342). The structure of the psychological empowerment measurement model (Table 1) is composed of four factors: Meaning, Competence, Self-determination, and Impact. This structure is in agreement with the original model by Spreitzer (1995) and with the study by Uner and Turan (2010) who used first-order confirmatory factor analysis.

Table 1 also shows that the standardized loadings are all greater than .5 (minimum value is .722) and are also significant ($p < .001$), indicating that each item produces important information for the empowerment construct. This result is in line with what is evidenced in the literature that these four dimensions together are sufficient to measure psychological empowerment relating it to better results in work performance by individuals in the organization (Arciniega & Menon, 2013; Dewettinck et al., 2003; Saif & Saleh, 2013; Zhang & Bartol, 2010).

The Meaning factor manifests itself with greater intensity in item E3 "The work I do is meaningful to me" ($\beta_{E3} = .890$), the Competence factor manifests itself with greater intensity in the item that refers to the security in the ability to perform the functions of the task ($\beta_{E5} = .892$), the Self-determination factor is in item E8 "I can decide for myself how to perform my work" ($\beta_{E8} = .891$) which manifests itself with a higher intensity and the Impact factor manifests itself with greater intensity in the item that refers to the influence on what happens in the department where they work ($\beta_{E12} = .917$).

The Cronbach's alpha value of the 12 items on the psychological empowerment scale is .871. In the original study by Spreitzer (1995), the value of Cronbach's alpha obtained in the sample of workers from companies in the industrial sector was lower than the present study (.72), but, for example, in the studies by Jordan et al. (2017) and Saleh et al. (2022), Jose and Mampilly (2014), Uner and Turan (2010) were higher than .8.

Table 1 shows that the factors on the psychological empowerment scale have Cronbach's alpha and composite reliability values greater than .7 (ranging from .860 to .906). Thus, it is concluded that it is an indicator that the scale consistently and reproducibly measures the factors of interest in the sample under study (Hair et al., 2014). Also, in the study by Saleh et al. (2022), the Cronbach alphas of the factors ranged from .85 to .88.

The AVE values in the four factors of the scale present values greater than 0.5 (minimum value 0.681 in the Self-determination factor), which is an indicator of adequate convergent validity (Hair et al., 2014). In the original scale of Spreitzer (1995) the values of the AVE were not presented, but taking into account that the loadings are presented, the calculation of the values of the AVE was carried out and it was found that the Self-determination factor has a value lower than 0.5 (0.42). A gap in the literature is that most studies do not analyze the measurement model (they do not present indices of model adjustment, loadings, convergent, and discriminant validity) they only analyze reliability through Cronbach's alpha.

The data in Table 1 also show that the dimension with the highest average value is competence ($M = 4.17$, $SD = 0.63$), followed by the meaning dimension ($M = 3.89$, $SD = 0.78$), self-determination ($M = 3.69$, $SD = 0.68$) and, with a lower value in the impact dimension ($M = 3.34$, $SD = 0.93$). Thus, it can be said that employees value more the competence dimension, thus demonstrating confidence in their skills to perform their work. These results corroborate those obtained by Menon (2001), as this author states that employees are more involved in tasks when they feel they have the power or skills to perform them. Employees' skills reflect their self-efficacy in dealing effectively with the different work situations that arise (Jordan et al., 2017). When individuals feel efficient, they will present better results and also produce a high level of effort, initiative and persistence in the face of obstacles. It is noteworthy that in the studies by Spreitzer (1995) and Saif and Saleh (2013) there are also higher average levels in the Meaning and Competence dimensions, with the Meaning dimension obtaining the highest average value. However, in this study, the highest average value is obtained in the Competence dimension.

In all factors, it appears that the square root of the AVE parameter value (in bold in Table 2) is always higher than the inter-factor correlations, so there is evidence of convergent and discriminant validity (Hair et al., 2014).

It is noteworthy that the correlations between the various factors of the psychological empowerment scale (Table 2) are statistically positive and significant ($p < .001$). Note that the highest correlations occur between the factors Self-determination and Impact ($r = 0.511$) and between Meaning and Competence ($r = 0.441$). The results of significant correlations are in agreement with different studies, where the four factors were also correlated with each other (Albar et al., 2012; Jose & Mampilly, 2014; Spreitzer, 1995; Uner & Turan, 2010), which justifies the existence of a second-order hierarchical factor, called psychological empowerment, whose model is represented in Figure 1. The adjustment indices of the second-order factor model are considered to be of good quality ($\chi^2 = 144,721$, $df = 50$, $\chi^2/df = 2.894$, $p < .001$, GFI = 0.957, CFI = 0.977, RMSEA = 0.059, PCLOSE = 0.089). Psychological empowerment is manifested with greater intensity in the Self-determination ($\beta = .68$, $R^2 = 0.46$) and Impact ($\beta = .66$, $R^2 = 0.43$) factors. These results are in line with the results of the sample of workers in the industry sector presented by Spreitzer (1995) and also with the sample of nurses in the study by Uner and Turan (2010) and by Albar et al. (2012).

The level of empowerment of the present study can be considered satisfactory, given that on a 5-point scale, the mean value is above the midpoint of the scale ($M = 3.77$, $SD = 0.58$). This fact is very important, as it shows that workers see themselves as competent to do their jobs. In the study by Jordan et al. (2017) also found satisfactory empowerment values for a sample of teachers from several countries (Slovenia, Croatia, Serbia, Austria, Germany, and Czech Republic).

5 | CONCLUSIONS

5.1 | Theoretical implications

It is known that different contexts influence and condition individuals' experiences of empowerment. Empowerment is a dynamic and situational construct and cannot be adequately captured through a single operationalization that does not address situational conditions. Thus, this study aimed to evaluate the psychometric properties, in the Portuguese context, of the psychological empowerment model published in 1995 by Spreitzer. After translation and adaptation, the questionnaire was applied to a sample of 545 workers from Portuguese organizations in the industry. The results allowed us to identify four dimensions: Meaning, Competence, Self-determination and Impact. The instrument, when applied to the Portuguese industry context, is considered a reliable and valid instrument
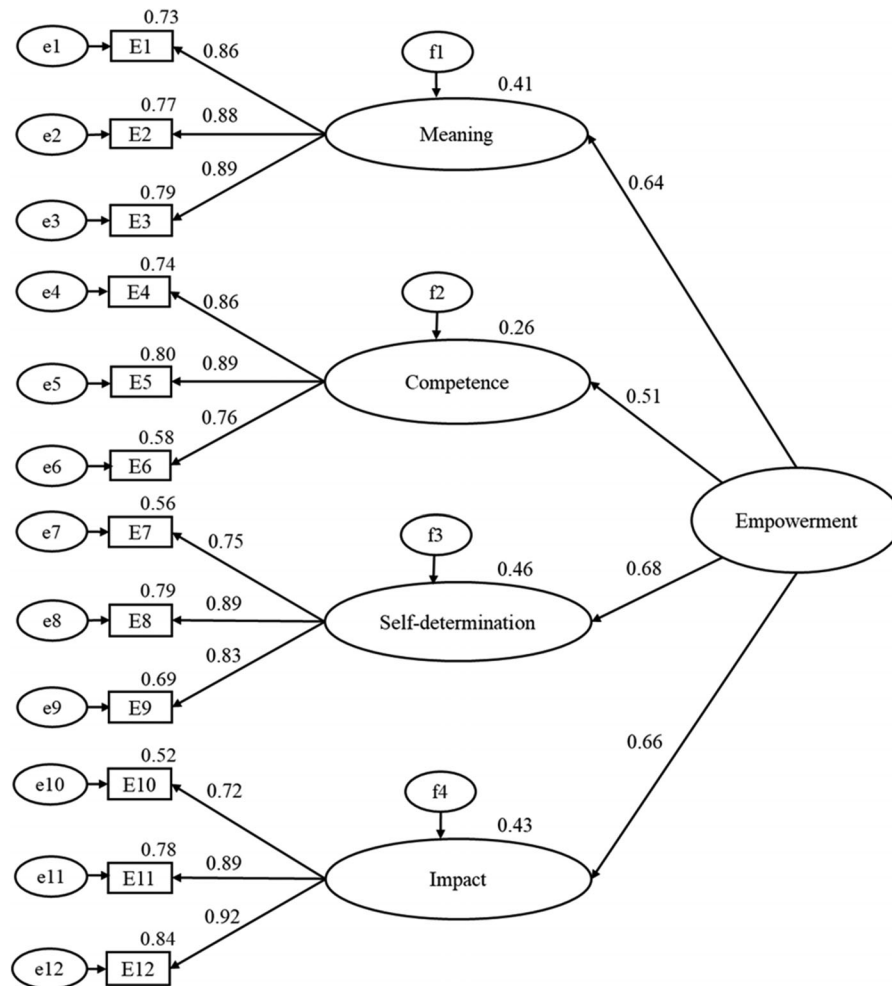
TABLE 2 Matrix of correlations between the factors of the empowerment scale

| | Correlations | | | |
	Meaning	Competence	Self-determination	Impact
Meaning	**.874**			
Competence	.441***	**.841**		
Self-determination	.399***	.291***	**.825**	
Impact	.385***	.274***	.511***	**.846**

***p < .001.
Source: Own elaboration.

FIGURE 1 Structural model of psychological empowerment. *Source*: Own elaboration

to measure psychological empowerment. Of course, it does not, however, dispense with complementary studies in which the psychometric properties of the scale in different sectors of Portuguese organizations are again analyzed. The study also allowed us to conclude that the level of empowerment is considered satisfactory, with the average levels of empowerment being higher in the Competence and Meaning dimensions. Table 3 below states some key takeaways from our student for educators and industry professionals regarding psychological empower-

ment dimensions and ways to improve performance in the post COVID-19 environment.

5.2 | Practical implications

Currently, organizations have to continually reinvent themselves in order to differentiate and develop in an increasingly competitive global market. Therefore, all possible and applicable strategies to promote performance

TABLE 3 Study takeaways for educators and industry professionals

Psychological empowerment dimension	Ways to improve performance in the post COVID-19 environment
Meaning	Add a value proposition when assigning new tasks. Take more time to engage with employees about work/life balance.
Competence	Offer continual education and training programs. Encourage peer learning and engagement practices.
Self-determination	Offer incentives to update skill competencies. Encourage continual learning practices.
Impact	Publish comparative data about best practice standards. Monitor and review performance outcomes.

are crucial. As the people that make up organizations are the key to their growth, then empowered employees, who are aligned with the organization's goals, feeling confident in the performance of their tasks, improving the quality of customer service and, consequently, committed with the organization is a powerful organizational strategy. Empowerment is based on the maxim that employees are a resource with knowledge and experience, capable of diagnosing, analyzing, and proposing solutions to everyday problems. This involvement is beneficial both for employees, increasing their motivation and job satisfaction, and for the company, by increasing organizational performance. Empowerment, therefore, triggers "*win-win*" situations, that is, it creates advantages for employees and for the company.

Psychological empowerment, corresponds to a set of psychological states reflected by its dimensions (meaning, competence, self-determination, and impact) that are necessary for individuals to obtain a sense of control in relation to their work. By analyzing the results obtained with the present investigation, it was possible to reach some conclusions regarding the organizational context under analysis. The most valued dimension of psychological empowerment was competence, which reveals that employees are more involved in tasks when they feel they have the power or skills to perform them, followed by meaning, self-determination, and finally, impact. Thus, empowerment will be a basic strategy to improve the organizational transformations that companies are constantly facing. The results also suggest that the employees of these companies

see psychological empowerment as a state of the soul in which they experience feelings of control in their work. Employees are aware of the tasks they are performing, have responsibility for the outcome of their work and overall organizational progress.

In this sense, it is important that Portuguese organizations analyze the level of psychological empowerment of their employees, in its different dimensions. It is through this analysis that organizations will present solutions to some problems, such as absenteeism, turnover, performance, work demotivation, and improve human resources management practices, motivating employees, and attracting other talents, which are so important today. This is especially relevant due to the work-related changes that resulted from the COVID-19 pandemic. Research by Atshan et al. (2022) recognizes that there are increased levels of job dissatisfaction in the current economic environment. Thus, this research contributes to the discussion about how increased psychological empowerment can lead to better levels of job satisfaction. Kumar (2022) discussed the role of job satisfaction and suggested that it has an important influence on talent management practices in terms of employee turnover. In the post-pandemic work environment it is important that individuals have a sense of psychological empowerment in terms of person-organization fit affecting employee performance (Rahman et al., 2022). This means organizations need to assess the perceived risk and sensitivity on employee performance as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic (Sahoo et al., 2022). In addition, other global events such as the Ukraine and Russia conflict are influencing the level of psychological empowerment in the workplace due to environmental stressors such as likelihood of war influencing individual performance.

5.3 | Limitations and future research suggestions

The limitations of this research include being based on a one country sample that might influence the results. However, as the results suggest employees in Portugal seem to act the same as compared to those in other countries. More research might be helpful in differentiating urban and rural Portuguese employees to see if there are regional differences in behavior. Furthermore, another limitation is that cultural and historical influences on Portuguese employees behavior were not tested. Therefore, new studies could use additional existing measures such as that from the Global Entrepreneurship Monitor to further supplement the findings of this study. This would help triangulate the findings in a more helpful way.

In the future, it would be interesting to study a model that integrates the two perspectives of empowerment, the structural and the psychological in the Portuguese context, in order to obtain integrative results for the implementation of empowerment programs. This would help further differentiate different ways employees are empowered in the workplace. Furthermore, due to the effects of the recent COVID-19 pandemic more research is needed on crisis management and its influence on psychological empowerment. This could involve testing psychological resilience during, before and after a crisis to see if it changes. This would be helpful in understanding in more detail how people deal with stress and the way behavioral changes influence empowerment.

AUTHOR CONTRIBUTIONS

Margarida Oliveira, José Ricardo Andrade and Vanessa Ratten are responsible for conceptualization, project administration, investigation, literature review, data collection and writing. Eulalia Santos is responsible for methodology and data analysis and processing. After the article was finished all the authors participated in its reading and improvement.

CONFLICT OF INTEREST

There is no conflict of interest to declare.

DATA AVAILABILITY STATEMENT

Research data are not shared.

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APPENDIX

Spreitzer's Psychological Empowerment Scale (Portuguese version)

Items
E1. O trabalho que eu executo é muito importante para mim.
E2. As minhas atividades de trabalho são pessoalmente significativas para mim.
E3. O trabalho que eu faço é significativo para mim.
E4. Sinto-me confiante acerca da minha capacidade de executar o meu trabalho.
E5. Sinto-me seguro acerca das minhas capacidades de desempenhar as minhas funções.
E6. Desenvolvo as minhas competências para desempenhar o meu trabalho.
E7. Tenho autonomia significativa para definir como devo executar o meu trabalho.
E8. Posso decidir por mim mesmo como executar o meu trabalho.
E9. Tenho independência e liberdade suficiente em como executar o meu trabalho.
E10. O impacto do que eu faço no meu departamento é grande.
E11. Tenho um grande controlo sobre o que acontece no meu departamento.
E12. Tenho uma influência significativa sobre o que acontece no meu departamento.