

EMPOWERMENT IN ACADEMIA: NON-ACADEMIC PROFESSIONAL STAFF'S
PERSPECTIVES ON EMPLOYEE EMPOWERMENT

A Thesis
presented to
the Faculty of the Graduate School
at the University of Missouri-Columbia

In Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree
Master of Arts

by
SALOME CHITORELIDZE
Dr. Pilar Mendoza, Thesis Supervisor

July 2017

The undersigned, appointed by the Dean of the Graduate School, have the thesis entitled

EMPOWERMENT IN ACADEMIA: NON-ACADEMIC PROFESSIONAL STAFF'S
PERSPECTIVES ON EMPLOYEE EMPOWERMENT

presented by Salome Chitorelidze a candidate for the degree of Master of Arts and hereby certify that in their opinion it is worthy of acceptance.

Associate Professor Pilar Mendoza

Associate Professor Jeni Hart

Visiting Assistant Teaching Professor Carrie M. Duncan

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I would like to express my profound appreciation to Dr. Pilar Mendoza my academic adviser who supervised this Master's thesis. I value your guidance, support, encouragement, patience, and flexibility that made it possible for me to complete this research project. I am sincerely grateful to the members of my thesis committee Dr. Jeni Hart and Dr. Carrie M. Duncan. Your comments on this thesis were invaluable because they helped me delve deeper, challenge myself further as a novice researcher, improve my skills, and refine my thoughts by steering me in the right direction. David Currey at the University of Missouri's International Center also deserves special recognition. Your valuable advice and support assisted me as an international student throughout my graduate study, allowed me to navigate through the complex research process, and to carry out this study successfully.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS.....	ii
LIST OF FIGURES.....	v
INTRODUCTION.....	1
Employee Empowerment.....	1
LITERATURE REVIEW.....	4
Employee Empowerment in Higher Education.....	12
Race, Gender, and Empowerment.....	19
Purpose of the Study.....	27
RESEARCH METHODOLOGY.....	28
Epistemology and Theoretical Framework.....	29
Research Design.....	36
Research Participants.....	37
Research Sites.....	39
Data Collection.....	40
Data Analysis.....	42
Transferability.....	49
Reflexivity.....	51
RESULTS: DIMENSIONS OF EMPLOYEE EMPOWERMENT.....	55
Involvement in Decision-Making.....	55
Autonomy.....	58
Initiative.....	60

Impact.....	63
Specialized Knowledge.....	65
Resources.....	69
Rewards.....	71
Summary of Dimensions.....	74
Race, Gender, and Empowerment.....	75
DISCUSSION.....	79
Limitations of the Study.....	88
Directions for Future Research.....	89
REFERENCES.....	92
APPENDIX A.....	102
Recruitment Email to a Potential Participant.....	102
APPENDIX B.....	103
Informed Consent Letter.....	103
APPENDIX C.....	105
Interview Protocol.....	105

LIST OF FIGURES

Figure 1. Initial Dimensions of Employee Empowerment.....	48
---	----

Employee Empowerment

Employee empowerment, a concept with a historical left-wing lineage, has become an integral part of the contemporary management discourse and governmental reforms (Peters & Pierre, 2000; Pitts, 2005). Broad shift in values affecting societies and their social subsystems prioritize participation, empowerment, democratization and humanization of workplace (Wise, 2002). Progressive organizations are expected to empower their employees because of its positive outcomes like ultimate competitive advantage, enhanced performance, organizational commitment, job satisfaction, and innovativeness. Leaders are reminded that employees' skills are vital resources and therefore, they should be allowed to use their skills instead of being tightly controlled (Bolman & Deal, 2013; Fernandez & Moldogaziev, 2011, 2013; Maynar, Gilson, & Mathieu, 2012).

Likewise, the concept of employee empowerment also figures in higher education literature. Although studies on empowerment are still sparse, some scholars in higher education emphasize that it is utterly important for leaders to empower campus constituents at various levels because it can help them deal with pressing issues that academic institutions face in today's highly competitive world (Kezar, Carducci, & Contreras-McGavin, 2006; Lambert, 2006; Lau, 2010; Tsai, 2012).

Moreover, scholars call for a move beyond the groups traditionally well-considered in the academic literature like administrators and faculty and for more focus on those who are absent from discussions like non-academic professional staff members. Non-academic professional employees play a critical role in the overall successful operation of higher education institutions. Also, the number of non-academic professional

staff is growing and a separate professional conscience is being formed on college campuses. However, few existing studies demonstrate that the current environment oftentimes fails to motivate them and help them believe that they, too, make a valuable contribution towards the achievement of institutional goals (Lau, 2010; Liebmann, 1986; Pitman, 2000; Szekeres, 2011,). Therefore, some higher education scholars stress that the concept of employee empowerment should be applied to this important group of employees as well (Lau, 2010).

Despite the thoughtfulness of the scholars' argument research on non-academic professional employees' empowerment is even sparser. Lau (2010) attempted to expand the knowledge base in his doctoral study. Utilizing the definition of employee empowerment as a motivational construct, Lau (2010) found that organizational characteristics like support for innovativeness and organizational trust can significantly facilitate the process of empowerment among non-academic professional staff members.

Although Lau's (2010) study provides useful initial insight into the idea of employee empowerment in higher education setting, it does not take into consideration the concept's ambiguous meaning. Employee empowerment has long been heralded as advantageous to employees and organizations, however, the fact remains that there is little consensus among scholars on how it should be defined (Honold, 1997; Maynard et al., 2012). Thus, focusing on empowerment as a motivational construct implies that ambiguity is resolved when in actuality it is only part of a more complex picture. More importantly, a prevalent approach to research on employee empowerment assumes that employees value what is offered as empowerment, therefore, the relatively large body of research tends to overlook employees' views about empowerment. Research focusing on

non-academic professional staff's views about the concept of empowerment is even scarcer. Besides, such approach assumes that employees always seek empowerment, whereas some scholars question such assumptions and argue that employees are ambivalent about it or prefer authority structures and following rules (Argyris, 1998; Petter, Byrnes, Choi, Fegan, & Miller, 2002). Hence, considering non-academic professional employees' important roles, uncertainty about employee empowerment itself, and a dearth of research focusing on employees' views, the purpose of this study is to explore non-academic professional personnel's perspectives on the value and definition of employee empowerment. My goal is to fill some of the existing gaps in the literature that I discussed above. I hope that the findings of this study will have important theoretical implications for the concept of empowerment itself and useful practical implications for institutional leaders to stay informed about how important employee empowerment is for their campuses or what to expect in response to empowerment initiatives and how to approximate their goal.

Literature Review

The concept of employee empowerment has become a vital component of contemporary management trends in the private and public sectors. The concept is far from new and has its intellectual roots in early research on employee participation or employee involvement. The concern about employee participation can be traced back to Elton Mayo and the Hawthorne studies conducted in the 1920s (Fernandez & Moldogaziev, 2013; Herrenkohl, Judson, & Heffner, 1999; Maynard et al., 2012). Although they originally were funded to study how physical conditions such as light and temperature could improve workers' productivity, the Hawthorne studies focused on interactions and found that social factors such as supervisory attention, relations with supervisors, and informal groups influenced production positively and not physical conditions (Fernandez & Moldogaziev, 2013; Muldoon, 2012; Zhong & House, 2012).

Later, other pioneers like McGregor and Argyris, too, criticized traditional management techniques emphasizing hierarchy and rigidity. They reminded managers that employees' skills and attitudes were vital resources and that they had to allow their subordinates to use them instead of controlling them (Bolman & Deal, 2013; Pitts, 2005). However, from the 1940s to the 1970s the ideas about employee participation "were treated at best as interesting fodder for academic debates or at worse as socialism, democracy gone wild, or worse yet, a form of communism" (Fernandez & Moldogaziev, 2013, p. 490).

Interest towards employee empowerment started to grow during the 1980s when global competition challenged many firms and they turned to it as a remedy for problems like poor customer service and low productivity. The concept has acquired "a born again

religious fervor” and by the early 1990s Federal Express became one of the pioneers that flattened its organizational hierarchy and encouraged employees to move beyond a rulebook (Bowen & Lawler, 1992, p. 31; Fernandez & Moldogaziev, 2013; Spreitzer, 1995).

Employee empowerment started to gain currency in public administration as well in response to economic, social, political, and ideological changes of the 1960s and the 1970s. Broad shifts towards postmodern values prioritizing empowerment, humanization of workplace, and greater social equity affected societies globally and their subsystems including public administration (Kezar, Carducci, & Contreras-McGavin, 2006; Wise, 2002). Empowerment became one of the drivers of governmental reforms to counterbalance the dominance of more rational values emphasizing efficiency and market-based solutions that were seen as a threat to democracy, a guiding principle of public administration. It sought devolution of power, less reliance on hierarchical management practices, and more openness to the influence of organizational constituents at various levels (Peters & Pierre, 2000; Pitts, 2005;). Cutting red tape and empowering employees were among the Clinton administration’s agenda as well intending to cope with performance deficit (Fernandez & Moldogaziev, 2011, 2013; Pitts, 2005).

Higher education institutions do not exist in a vacuum and the concept of employee empowerment has become a focus of scholars’ attention. Higher education scholars argue that presidents who do not encourage participation are less effective and have less influence on their own campuses (Kezar, Carducci, & Contreras-McGavin, 2006). Emphasis on empowerment in higher education is manifested in the growth of research not only on presidents or provosts but also on deans, directors, department

chairs, and on grassroots leaders (Kezar, 2012; Kezar et al., 2006). Moreover, in his doctoral study, Tsai (2012) focused on faculty empowerment. He maintained that in challenging times academic institutions need to attract faculty for the excellence of their work and in order to retain them, they also need to consider the factors that influence faculty job satisfaction, organizational commitment, and turnover intention. The findings of his study demonstrated that empowerment was one of those factors that had a positive effect on job satisfaction and turnover intentions among faculty. Lau (2010) moved further and focused on employee empowerment among non-academic professional staff. He emphasized that at a time when higher education institutions try to deal with a myriad of pressing issues empowering campus constituents at various levels can contribute positively to such efforts.

Several scholars have been touting employee empowerment because of its potential benefits and emphasize that progressive organizations give power to their employees (Bolman & Deal, 2013). A growing body of literature indicates that empowerment is positively related to significant gains in performance and that it promotes innovativeness because empowering employees unleashes their creative talent stifled by rigid systems (Fernandez & Moldogaziev, 2011, 2013; Spreitzer, 1995). It is considered as a strong predictor of job involvement, organizational commitment, and job satisfaction that allows managers to cope with performance deficit, low productivity, or high turnover (Fernandez & Moldogaziev, 2013; Kim & Fernandez, 2015; Maynard et al., 2012; Tsai, 2012). Employee empowerment, by and large, is considered as beneficial or “fab” according to which organizations should be designed in today’s dynamic

environment and not as fad, the latest management practice that will fade soon (Maynard et al., 2012).

Although employee empowerment has become the integral part of the management discourse and has been heralded as advantageous to organizations, there is still no settled idea about what it exactly means. There is a lack of an agreed-on definition of empowerment (Herrenkohl et al., 1999; Honold, 1997; Maynard et al., 2012).

“Employee empowerment as a term is frequently used in management circles. In practice, however, it is a daunting effort to find an exact definition of it” (Honold, 1997, p. 1). Two opposing directions appear in the academic literature: On the one hand, some researchers are concerned about conceptual redundancy and seek its uniform definition and on the other hand, there are researchers who argue that employee empowerment is a complex concept and it should be defined individually and contextually (Honold, 1997; Petter et al., 2002; Quinn & Spreitzer, 1997).

In sum, the academic literature on empowerment reveals two dominant perspectives: The *structural perspective* and the *psychological perspective* (Fernandez & Moldogaziev, 2011, 2013; Francescato & Aber, 2015; Maynard et al., 2012). The *structural perspective* or the *relational perspective* views empowerment as a set of structures, job parameters, and procedures by which decision-making, responsibility, or control over vital resources are distributed from upper management to employees. In this view, empowerment occurs when senior managers delegate authority to those traditionally with less power within organizations. Thus, empowerment is something that managers do to their subordinates (Francescato & Aber, 2015; Maynard et al., 2012; Quinn & Spreitzer, 1997).

The structural theory of empowerment was developed by Kanter (1979). She defined power in organizations as the ability to mobilize resources, human or material, to achieve organizational goals and identified three major sources of power: (1) *lines of supply*, access to essential resources in an external environment; (2) *lines of information* like task-related information or information about what is going on within or without an organization; and (3) *lines of support* including management's tacit approval or job parameters allowing employees to take innovative actions without going through a multilayered approval process. Kanter (1979) argued that the possession of power was often determined by individuals' position within organizations and that those at lower positions were usually devoid of access to it. In order to eliminate powerlessness and let employees be productive, she urged managers to restructure organizations, to remove the barriers to these sources of power, and thus, empower employees (Fernandez & Moldogaziev, 2013; Kanter, 1979).

Since that time, different scholars have been identifying different dimensions to be shared with employees. Bowen and Lawler (1992, 1995) expanded on Kanter's (1979) model based on various empowerment practices in the private sector and developed one of the widely-used definitions. They argued that employees would not feel empowered because management told them empowerment was part of the organizational culture. Neither a charismatic leader's speech would be sufficient for empowerment. The scholars stressed that organizations must change structural components and share with employees the following four organizational ingredients in order to create and sustain empowerment: (1) *power* to make decisions that influence organizational direction and performance and also, decisions about how to perform daily tasks and deal with unforeseen problems;

(2) *Information* about an organization's performance; (3) *knowledge* that enables employees to understand and contribute to an organization's performance; and (4) *rewards* based on how effectively they use the above-mentioned ingredients and also, based on an organization's financial performance (Bowen & Lawler, 1992, 1995; Fernandez & Modlogaziev, 2011, 2013).

Thus, "empowerment = power x information x knowledge x rewards" (Bowen & Lawler, 1995, p. 74). Such formulation means that if any of these four elements is zero, empowerment will be zero too, and it reminds managers to redistribute information, knowledge, and rewards along with power to ensure that employees exercise increased discretion wisely (Bowen & Lawler, 1995; Fernandez & Moldogaziev, 2011). The above-mentioned conceptualizations of employee empowerment have attracted scholars' attention across various fields: Bowen and Lawler's (1995) model was tested in the studies on federal government employees and on issues related to job satisfaction, low productivity, and high turnover in federal governmental bodies (Fernandez & Moldogaziev, 2011, 2013). The relationship among Kanter's (1979) conceptualization of empowerment, increased job satisfaction, and decreased job stress has also been studied extensively among nurses (Hayes, Douglas, & Bonner, 2014; Laschinger, Finegan, Shamian, & Wilk, 2004).

Since the late 1980s, *the psychological perspective* has gained currency. Under this conceptualization, empowerment is a *motivational construct*, namely, it is an internal cognitive state characterized by certain dimensions. The psychological perspective is less concerned about the delegation of authority. It shifts its focus from managers' activities

and concentrates exclusively on employees' cognitive state (Fernandez & Moldogaziev, 2011; Francescato & Aber, 2015; Maynard et al., 2012).

Conger and Kanungo's (1988) work is often cited as a starting point on psychological empowerment who defined it as "a process of enhancing feelings of *self-efficacy* among organizational members through identification of conditions that foster powerlessness and through their removal by both formal organizational practices [structural empowerment] and informal techniques of providing efficacy information" (Maynard et al., 2012, p. 1235). Thomas and Velthouse (1990) developed further the general approach taken by Conger and Kanungo (1988) and constructed a multifaceted model because they considered that *self-efficacy* solely could not capture the essence of empowerment. They defined empowerment as an *intrinsic task motivation*. According to this model, individuals make personal assessments of four aspects of a task: *impact*, *competence*, *meaningfulness*, and *choice*. If individuals make positive assessment of these four aspects they will feel a heightened level of intrinsic motivation and thus, will feel empowered. These task assessments are viewed as interpretations rather than the simple recordings of objective facts. The scholars emphasized that employees may also increase their motivation by envisioning and not necessarily by reflecting on reality. Hence, interventions like delegation are one of the variables that may or may not be perceived as empowering by employees (Fernandez & Moldogaziev, 2011; Thomas & Velthouse, 1990).

Spreitzer (1995) further refined the model of empowerment developed by Thomas and Velthouse (1990). She defined employee empowerment as an intrinsic task motivation composed of four cognitions: 1) *Meaning* defined as a fit between job

requirements and personal beliefs and values; (2) *Competence* or self-efficacy defined as the belief individuals hold regarding their ability to perform their work activities skillfully; (3) *Self-determination* defined as an individual's sense of autonomy or control over immediate work behaviors and perceived choice in initiating and regulating their actions; and (4) *Impact* defined as individuals' belief that their behaviors have influence on strategic, administrative, and operating outcomes at work (Maynard et al., 2012; Spreitzer, 1995).

The dimensions described above are viewed as a nearly complete set of cognitions that additively creates an overall construct of empowerment and “the lack of any single dimension will deflate, though not completely eliminate the overall degree of felt empowerment” (Spreitzer, 1995, p. 1444). Employee empowerment as the set of cognitions is shaped by a work environment and structural components like sharing information or power serve as antecedents to psychological empowerment (Spreitzer, 1995). Like in case of the structural perspective of employee empowerment, a considerable number of studies has examined the effects of psychological empowerment across different fields including nurses, accountants, and employees in healthcare and insurance sectors to name a few (Boudrias, Morin, & Brodeur, 2012; Jose & Mampilly, 2014; Pitts, 2005).

To empower means to give power to. Power is a root word of empowerment. However, power has several meanings and it is inherently ambiguous and slippery (Bolman & Deal, 2013; Thomas & Velthouse, 1990). Accordingly, scholars argue that the origins of the different conceptualizations of employee empowerment go back to the

fact there is also little consensus on what power is and how it operates (Bolman & Deal, 2013; Menon, 2001).

Sociological approaches, treats power as potential influence in social interactions and the ability to influence the behavior of others. Power arises when one's performance outcomes are contingent upon not his or her behavior but how others respond and what others do. There can be the various wellsprings of power like positional power, control of rewards, information, knowledge, agenda, resources, or ideological power (Bolman & Deal, 2013; Conger & Kanungo, 1988; Menon, 2001). Thus, to empower means to share such control with subordinates. By contrast, psychological perspectives treat power as a motivational state internal to individuals. In this view, power is an intrinsic need for self-determination and self-efficacy and thus, to empower means to enable. Enabling implies creating conditions for enhanced motivation for task accomplishment through the development of a strong sense of personal efficacy. Sharing resources or rewards is regarded only as one set of conditions that may or may not enable subordinates (Conger & Kanungo, 1988; Menon, 2001).

Employee Empowerment in Higher Education

Although still sparsely examined, the concept of employee empowerment has been gaining currency in a higher education setting as well. Tsai (2012) focused on empowerment among faculty and examined the relation among organizational justice, empowerment, organizational commitment, and turnover intention. Based on the psychological perspective (Spreitzer, 1995), he defined empowerment as the motivational construct and demonstrated that organizational justice served as its antecedent, ultimately, leading to increased organizational commitment among faculty and

influencing their intention to stay at an institution (Tsai, 2012). Defining empowerment as the motivational construct, Lambert (2006) also focused on faculty and found that the more empowered they felt, the higher level of job satisfaction and organizational commitment they demonstrated. Gregory, Albritton and Osmonbekov (2010) utilized employee empowerment as a mediator to explain how personal value congruence with that of an organization, defined as person-organization fit (P-O fit), affected job satisfaction and in-role performance among faculty and staff at a public institution. The scholars found that P-O fit led to job satisfaction and better in-role performance because it allowed employees to develop the perceptions of *self-determination* and *impact* over their work outcomes. Given that these are the dimensions of employee empowerment defined as the motivational construct, the findings of the study imply that faculty and staff felt greater job satisfaction because they felt empowered (Gregory, Albritton, & Osmonbekov, 2010).

The concept of employee empowerment was also applied to non-academic professional staff at a public institution. Emphasizing a dearth of research on non-academic professional personnel and the importance of their empowerment for the successful operation of academic institutions, Lau (2010) empirically attested Spreitzer's (1995) model and showed that organizational support for innovation and organizational trust could serve as its antecedents. In other words, the study demonstrated that non-academic professional staff felt empowered when they experienced all four cognitive states: meaning, competence, self-determination, and impact and organizational support for innovation and organizational trust were predictors of perceived empowerment among them.

However, such approach to employee empowerment and its definition has the following problematic implications: First, it implies that employees always value empowerment. The concept has been touted because it can give organizations competitive advantage, because managers agree that empowerment is desirable, and it is a set of levers they can pull to influence employees' behavior to organizations' advantage. Meanwhile, it assumes that employees, too, seek empowerment.

Second, whether it is conceptualized as the relational construct or the motivational one employee empowerment is defined *for* employees *by* others and that obviously overlooks their perspectives. The multiplicative effect of Bowen & Lawler's (1992, 1995) four-dimensional model or the additive effect of the four cognitions in Spreitzer's (1995) conceptualization of employee empowerment leave little room for interpretation and suggest to employees what their needs are and what they should aspire to. Indeed, both constructs offer invaluable insight into the concept and the expertise of the scholars who developed them is not underestimated but they also may not represent employees' experiences, perspectives, and expectations with regard to their empowerment. The fact that there are two well-documented constructs in the academic literature may not be the issue of conceptual redundancy but rather highlight the complex nature of empowerment itself. In addition, studies on employee empowerment in an academic setting view it predominantly as that motivational construct assuming that we already know what the concept means. In consequence, they do not take into consideration a lack of consensus on what constitutes employee empowerment.

Third, the generalizability of the constructs is a common concern as well. Bowen and Lawler (1995) maintained that within different organizations contingencies may

favor different approaches. However, the latter includes either a production-line approach or empowerment, which they defined as a four-dimensional relational construct. Spreitzer (1995), too, called for future researchers to address the generalizability of employee empowerment defined as the motivational construct in her seminal work. The recent studies have been conducted predominantly in response to such calls and they have been testing the models in various organizations. However, assuming uniformity across various settings says little about differences in contextual variables and their potential impact. Bolman and Deal (2013), for instance, emphasized that an approach that may work for machine bureaucracies like McDonald's would not work for professional bureaucracies like higher education institutions because of the inherent differences between the two. Furthermore, Lambert (2006) found that the level of perceived empowerment among the faculty working at private universities was different from the level of perceived empowerment among the faculty working at a public institution with the former feeling more empowered. She attributed such differences in perception to the differences between these two types of institutions. Clearly, her findings suggest that different contingencies within these institutions most likely would favor different approaches to faculty empowerment. Hence, the application of the employee empowerment models that were originally developed based on the practices in the private sector and for private firms adhering to a production-line approach implies that higher education institutions and professionals working there have similar issues, values, and aspirations.

Some scholars, on the other hand, argue that employee empowerment is a complex concept and that it should be defined variably and not uniformly (Foster-

Fishman, Salem, Chibnall, Legler, & Yapchai, 1998; Petter et al., 2002). They emphasize that the reason why empowerment initiatives oftentimes prove elusive despite their potential benefits is the standardized approach that ignores the multiplicity of perspectives: “When it comes to empowerment executives and employees are engaged in shadowboxing. Management says it wants employees who participate more; employees say they want to be more involved. But it is difficult to know who means what” (Argyris, 1998, p. 103). Emphasizing the need for more qualitative research, these scholars underscore that the universal definition of empowerment is inappropriate because it may take different forms for different individuals in different settings or it may vary across individuals even in the same setting. (Foster-Fishman et al., 1998; Petter et al., 2002; Quinn & Spreitzer, 1997). “A complicating factor in defining employee empowerment is that by its very nature, in order for empowerment to be successful, each organization must create and define it for itself. Empowerment must address the needs and culture of each unique entity” (Honold, 1997, p. 1).

Foster-Fishman, Salem, Chibnall, Legler, and Yapchai (1998) adopted a similar approach and pointed out that limiting the definition of empowerment to the ones offered by researchers risks silencing the unique perspectives and experiences of employees who are usually influenced by a whole host of factors such as their background, gender, interpretive capacities, and work context. In their qualitative study, the scholars identified six major pathways allowing employees to feel empowered such as *having opportunity for job autonomy; having the freedom to be creative; gaining job relevant knowledge; feeling trusted and respected; experiencing job fulfillment; and participating in decision-making*. These pathways are well-documented in various studies, however,

the combination of the pathways turned out to be uniquely personal. For instance, for some employees empowerment was solely autonomy or the freedom to be creative while for others it was either a combination of job autonomy and trust or the one of autonomy, trust, respect, and knowledge (Foster-Fishman et al., 1998).

Petter, Byrnes, Choi, Fegan, and Miller (2002), too, provided useful insight into the complex nature of the construct. The scholars found that for one group of street-level bureaucrats at a social service agency classic empowerment worked. Employees in this group considered that dimensions like *power, decision making, information, autonomy, initiative* and *creativity, knowledge and skills, and responsibility* were essential for them to feel empowered. However, the scholars also identified three different groups who defined empowerment differently and valued it as long as it met their own definitions. The group referred to as *mission-driven employees*, for example, valued having information, job autonomy, creativity but did not want to participate in decision-making. For another group defined as *reliable employees* empowerment was the combination of three dimensions: knowledge, autonomy, and responsibility and did not seek information, creativity, or participation in decision-making (Petter et al., 2002).

Moreover, the studies revealed that not only the combinations of dimensions were individual but also their definitions. For some employees, autonomy, for instance, meant the freedom to work at their own pace but for others it meant the freedom to make independent decisions regarding the content of their work (Petter et al., 2002). Also, participation in decision-making is the core component of almost every empowerment model, however, Fishman et al. (1998) showed that employees differentiated between job-related decision-making and the one at the organizational level and they, mostly,

preferred the former. Such idiosyncrasy demonstrated by these studies clearly runs counter to the additive or the multiplicative effect of the four-dimensional models of employee empowerment described above.

These two opposing viewpoints on the definition of employee empowerment, however, share a common assumption: They assume that employees necessarily value empowerment. Yet, a question about such assumption was raised by Argyris (1998): “Employees are often ambivalent about empowerment – it is great as long as they are not held personally accountable” (p. 98). Argyris explained that in bureaucratic organizations where management typically single-handedly makes decisions and defines conditions employees develop external commitment, a kind of contractual compliance, that allows them to do the minimum of what is required of them and not to feel responsible for the way the situation itself is. Learning to define performance as doing what is expected of employees, in its part, makes empowerment unlikely because “a sense of empowerment is not innate. It is something that must be learned, developed, and honed” (Argyris, 1998, p. 103). Similarly, one of the groups in Petter et al.’s (2002) study referred to as *organizational bureaucrats* valued empowerment little because they preferred following the rules and being responsible for job-specific goals instead of creativity or participation in organizational decision-making.

Race, Gender, and Empowerment

As mentioned earlier, new approaches to running organizations that also included the concept of employee empowerment have emerged partly as a response to social, political, and ideological changes of the 1960s and the 1970s (Kezar et al., 2006; Peters & Pierre, 2000; Pitts, 2005; Wise, 2002). The civil rights movement in America, the uprisings in France, or massive participation in antiauthoritarian politics in Asia and Africa opposing racism, segregation, and oppression challenged the existing authorities (Rojas, 2012). Another important source for such changes was feminism that started to question a patriarchal world and its masculinist culture. Feminists focused on women's lived experiences that they believed would provide fuller insight into society as a whole. Black feminists took it even further by focusing on the life stories of Black women. They believed that while navigating through a White world, Black females were in marginalized positions based on gender, race, and class and it presented a unique challenge for them (Crotty, 1998; Hesse-Biber, 2007).

The social movements gave rise to institutional reforms as well. The movements not only challenged racial segregation in college admissions but they also inspired new academic programs studying women or ethnic minorities and introduced new approaches to research. As a result, scholars started to observe how racialized and gendered organizations were and that much of social and economic inequality was created within and perpetuated by organizations including higher education institutions (Acker, 2006; Madden, 2005; Rojas, 2012; Smith, 2012;). New insights started to question bureaucratic organizational structures, traditional notions of leadership reinforcing dominance and subordination, and distinctions among people. Since that time, scholars have been

arguing that traditional bureaucratic organizations have steep hierarchies, that top hierarchical positions have been occupied by White men, and that a successful leader has been characterized by strength, aggressiveness, competitiveness, self-promotion, and reliance on formal authority. These, in their turn, have had implications for people of color and for women in organizations (Acker, 2006; Kezar et al., 2006; Onyx, 1999).

Race in the United States has long been a determinant of one's political rights, one's position in the labor market, and the basis for the division of labor within organizations. Affirmative action programs have altered recruitment and hiring policies because they required selection criteria that were gender-and race-neutral. However, judgment about competence has not changed easily. Traditionally, White men have been considered as more competent and suitable for particular positions and therefore, women and people of color have been disadvantaged (Acker, 2006; Henry & Glenn, 2009; Nkomo, 1992). Moreover, Nkomo (1992) argues that historically the idea of racial inferiority did not precede the use of minority groups as servile labor but it was developed to maintain African and other minorities as servile labor and this is how organizations have become racially constructed that still perpetuate racial divisions. Scholars have argued that such bias explains the absence of diversity in organizations, in certain disciplines, the diversity of faculty and of the top of organizational hierarchies because the existing stereotypical judgement weakens the opportunities for the advancement of racial minorities. Changes have been made but scholars also emphasize that minorities either serve in racialized positions such as equal employment opportunity or serve as tokens visible as the representatives of the group but not as individuals with real influence over processes (Acker, 2006; Henry and Glenn, 2009; Smith, 2012;

Thomas, 2001). In his study, Thomas (2001) found that whereas White professionals tend to get promoted faster, minority professionals climb the corporate ladder rather slowly. The context within organizations require from them more focus on professional development than from their White counterparts in order to gain confidence, competence, and credibility. They also need mentors who will invest in their professional development and send positive messages to the rest of the organization that these people are high performers. In other words, while promising White professionals are promoted faster, high-potential minority professionals are granted opportunities for mentoring relationships and advance more slowly.

Some scholars also focused on race and ethnicity in terms of employee empowerment. Cox, Lobel, and McLeod (1991) observed differences in work-related behaviors of different ethnic groups and found that because of their collectivist culture African Americans relied on and valued cooperation more than European Americans who had roots in the Euro-Anglo tradition of individualism. Given that the main principal of employee empowerment is collaboration in decision-making, based on Cox et al. (1991), Pitts (2005) hypothesized that African Americans would be more inclined to favor empowerment than European Americans. However, he found something opposite: Managers of color empowered their subordinates less than their White counterparts. Yet, he also emphasized the potential impact of the reality within organizations: Pitts (2005) pointed out that because managers of color were still minority in leadership positions they felt less secure and did not want to let go of important decisions and policy making, whereas White managers felt less pressure and thus, had more freedom to empower their employees. Peterson, Hamme, and Speer (2002), too, observed some differences between

African Americans and European Americans in terms of empowerment. They found that the African American participants of their study demonstrated greater understanding of sociopolitical forces and power in the environment (i.e. cognitive empowerment) than the European American participants. However, the scholars also noticed that the level of perceived control over one's life, self-efficacy, and perceived competence (i.e. emotional empowerment) was relatively lower among the African American participants. Based on these findings, Peterson et al (2002) suggested that African Americans' historically disenfranchised status required them to develop an understanding of power dynamics around them. However, having more realistic understanding of the reality could have affected negatively their sense of control over their lives and self-efficacy, whereas European Americans' historically elevated status did not require of them familiarity with sociopolitical forces and power dynamics and yet, they still could feel more emotionally empowered.

On the other hand, the women's movement of the 1970s and intellectual shifts also called attention to the prevalent masculine context within organizations including higher education institutions. They described such context as the one that was characterized by dependence on hierarchy, formal authority, the command-and-control style, self-promotion, and competitive behavior. Psychologists argued that agency that is typical of men manifests itself in the urge for self-assertion and mastery over environment, therefore, men have been seeking and building hierarchical relations (Eagly & Carli, 2003; Madden, 2005; Pitts, 2005; Riger, 1993; Rosener, 1990).

A discourse that emerged from studying women's experiences rejected such hierarchical relations and focused on collaboration, empowerment, and the principles of

participatory democracy (Kezar et al., 2006; Onyx, 1999). It is not to overgeneralize and strictly formalize differences between men and women, however, scholars argue that women mostly strive to achieve communion, they rely more on participatory style, and they tend to view masculinist context and its hierarchical relations negatively (Eagly & Carli, 2003; Madden, 2005; Riger, 1993; Rosener, 1990). Therefore, scholars emphasize that while men rely on hierarchies and authority, women focus more on collaborative relationships, they expect their leaders to be collaborative, and seek to be empowered (Madden, 2005; Pitts, 2005).

Likewise, women's approach to leadership is also based on empowerment, collaboration, equity, sharing power and information: "I noted that women tended to put themselves at the center of their organizations rather than at the top, thus emphasizing both accessibility and equality, and that they labored constantly to include people in their decision-making" (Bolman & Deal, 2013, p. 83; Eagly & Carli, 2003; Kezar et al., 2006; Rosener, 1990). Again, scholars emphasize that the way women lead organizations is inextricably linked to being female (Eagly & Carli, 2003; Madden, 2005). According to Rosener (1990), the participatory style comes rather naturally and female leaders do not always consciously adopt it for its business value. One of the participants in her study pointed out: "I can't come up with a plan and then ask those who manage the accounts to give me their reactions. They're the ones who really know the accounts. They have information I don't have. Without their input I'd be operating in an ivory tower" (p. 122).

Such collaborative approach, on the other hand, implies the presence of diverse people in decision-making groups and valuing the diversity of viewpoints. However, scholars also call attention to existing stereotypical judgements about women. Within

traditional masculinist context of organizations, including higher education institutions, people expect men to be more competent than women especially when it comes to areas that are highly important for organizational planning and success and that traditionally have been considered as masculine strengths (Madden, 2005). Although discriminatory practices are less overt than in the past, women still have to demonstrate greater ability than their male counterparts and expect less tolerance for their mistakes (Eagly & Carli, 2003; Madden, 2005). In case of ethnic and racial minority it is even more complicated. Black women usually have to deal with “the tripartite-layered veil of persecution that is the result of their race, gender, and class” (Henry & Glenn, 2009, p. 3). They are disadvantaged still during a recruitment process and afterwards, they have to grapple with a lack of support and respect towards their opinions and accomplishments that causes exhaustion, discouragement, and detachment to name a few (Henry & Glenn, 2009; Madden, 2005).

In sum, unresolved questions about the concept of employee empowerment do exist. The idiosyncratic nature of employee empowerment influenced by individual perceptions and life experiences is largely unexamined in higher education. This is particularly true about non-academic professional employees whose empowerment has received scant attention in the literature (Gregory, Albritton, & Osmonbekov, 2010; Lau, 2010).

Non-academic professional employees are one of the key components of academic institutions who are equally responsible for their organizational success. When university presidents like Charles Eliot at Harvard and Andrew White at Cornell University created first offices and staff positions in the 1860s to meet various

institutional needs, the number of non-academic personnel started to grow, soon to be followed by dramatic increases in higher education on all fronts after World War 1 (Liebmann, 1986). Such increase has continued and currently, institutions employ 816,166 non-academic professionals compared to 516, 582 in 2003 (Knapp, Kelly-Reid, & Ginder, 2012; Lau, 2010). These are professionals responsible for student advising, admission, recruitment, budget and finance, public affairs, fundraising, campus life activities to name a few all jointly contributing to the overall successful operation of any academic institution. “Higher education is, after all, an enterprise of human beings, so it would be surprising to see any serious reduction in its dependence on that very important source to keep it functioning” (Liebmann, 1986, p. 14).

Despite their important roles and increasing number, however, research on non-academic professional staff is still scarce (Lau, 2010; Liebmann, 1986; Pitman, 2000; Rosser, 2000). “Most of what has been written is done so by academics, who focus on the areas that concern them the most” (Pitman, 2000, p. 166). However, few existing studies show that issues related to non-academic professional employees do exist. According to these studies, there is still an uneasy relation between academic and non-academic professionals with the latter feeling as second-class citizens and ‘invisible workers’ whether they are actually treated this way or not. Moreover, for some even the terms like “non-academic or “support,” are the sources of frustration (Jo, 2008; Pitman, 2000; Szekeres, 2011). This happens in addition to limited advancement opportunities, relatively lower salaries, and inefficient rewards system (Jo, 2008; Szekeres, 2011). Concomitantly, there are the elements of resignation among non-academic professionals that affect their job satisfaction, efficiency, the quality of performance, and retention

adversely (Jo, 2008; Lau, 2010; Pitman, 2000). Thus, some scholars argue that employee empowerment should be applied to non-academic professionals as well in order to create a proper work environment that motivates them and to ensure the organizational success of academic institutions (Lau, 2010). However, what does such application of the concept say about non-academic professional staff's own views, experiences, or expectations with regard to employee empowerment?

Besides, as described above, the idea of employee empowerment is rooted in classic management theory (Bowen & Lawler, 1992, 1995; Fernandez & Moldogaziev, 2013; Pitts, 2005). Its definitions proposed by Kanter (1979), Bowen and Lawler (1992, 1995), or Spreitzer (1995) were informed by the scholars' experience in working with industrial organizations, which were assembly lines seeking profit maximization. If so, what do these definitions of employee empowerment imply for the context of academic institutions?

The organization of higher education institutions is inherently complex. Based on vertically oriented structures various units across campuses are loosely connected with one another while they still retain their own identities and separateness. Life within universities has been based on the concepts of free inquiry, creativity, individual autonomy, collegiality, egalitarianism, and these norms were derivative to institutional structures. Indeed, institutions have significant hierarchical features like administrators and governing boards vested with decision-making authority but power still exists in decentralized fashion and central administration can affect certain core decisions, especially, regarding faculty, teaching, or research only at a margin (Hammond, 2004; Keeling, Underhile, & Wall, 2007; Lohmann, 2004). Institutions concurrently have more

horizontal, centralized components like student services with their traditionally framed organizational structures. Although the dimensions of vertical and horizontal structural elements vary across institutions, they are integral parts of postsecondary infrastructure (Keeling et al., 2007). Thus, the organization of higher education institutions is complex but it is not an assembly line. In addition, academic institutions are not profit maximizers. Neither their relationship with students is similar to a typical customer-employee or customer-company relation. Also, individuals working in academia tend to take student-centered approaches which cannot be easily drawn from other industries (Jo, 2008; Pitman, 2000; Szekeres, 2011). These characteristics as a whole create a distinct environment within academic institutions.

Purpose of the Study

Reviewing the literature on employee empowerment revealed a few existing gaps: The relatively large body of research has neglected to seek employees' views about employee empowerment. The idiosyncratic and complex nature of the concept demonstrated by the limited number of studies is largely unexamined in higher education. Research concerning non-academic professional staff and their views on empowerment is even sparser. Hence, considering the important roles that non-academic professional employees have within academic institutions, ambiguity over the concept of employee empowerment, and a dearth of research focusing on employees' views, the purpose of this study is to explore non-academic professional staff's perspectives on employee empowerment. The goal of this research project is to fill some existing gaps by inquiring how non-academic professional staff members value and define the concept of employee empowerment.

Research Methodology

Since the 1980s employee empowerment has become an important component of the management trends in the private and public sectors including higher education (Fernandez & Moldogaziev, 2013; Kezar et al., 2006; Lambert, 2006; Lau, 2010; Tsai, 2012). Some higher education scholars have been attempting to move beyond administrators and faculty, who usually receive due consideration in the academic literature, and focus on the empowerment of non-academic professional employees as well who are mostly overlooked in the existing body of research (Gregory et al., 2010; Lau, 2010). However, ambiguity around the definition of the concept does exist and employees' perspectives about their empowerment are still largely unexamined across various disciplines (Honold, 1997; Petter et al., 2002). The same holds true about research on employee empowerment within higher education institutions. Thus, the purpose of this study is to explore non-academic professional staff's views about employee empowerment. Specifically, the current research project attempts to answer the following research questions: What are non-academic professional staff's perspectives on employee empowerment? (a) How non-academic professional employees define the concept? (b) How non-academic professional staff members value employee empowerment? The following chapter will serve as a guide for the methodological approach taken in this study to find answers to its research questions.

Epistemology and Theoretical Framework

The study is informed by social constructionism. The latter has emerged to challenge the centuries-old belief that objective truth exists, it is identifiable and apprehensible, that appropriate scientific methods of inquiry can discover the meaning of that truth that, in its turn, should map reality in a direct manner (Crotty, 1998; Denzin & Lincoln, 2011; Gergen, 1985). In the constructionist view, by contrast, meaning is not inherent in the object to be identified. It is constructed: “The world and objects in the world are indeterminate. They may be pregnant with potential meaning, but actual meaning emerges only when consciousness engages with them” (Crotty, 1998, p. 43). Stanley Fish (1980) who noticed that an assignment on a blackboard for one group of students was interpreted as a religious poem by another group concluded that “all objects are made and not found and that they are made by the interpretive strategies we set in motion” (p. 331). In this respect, social constructionism challenges the objective basis of conventional knowledge. Philosophers such as Kant and Nietzsche argued that humans harbor inherent tendencies to think, to process information, to categorize, and therefore, knowledge derives from such cognitive processes and not from mirroring the actualities of the world (Gergen, 1985). Fish (1976), too, pointed out that “the ability to interpret is not acquired; it is constitutive of being human” and therefore, meanings are not ready-made to be extracted but made by interpretive strategies that are always being deployed (p. 1991).

Social constructionism implies the variety of interpretation and argues that it is possible to attach different meanings to the same circumstances and find diverse understandings of the same phenomenon. “Tree is likely to bear quite different

connotations in a logging town, an artists' settlement and a treeless slum" (Crotty, 1998, p. 43). Fish's (1980) well-known essay *How To Recognize a Poem When You See One?* where he describes how some of his students conceived a list of names as a religious poem illustrates the point vividly. Fish wrote on the blackboard a list of linguists and literary critics that was an assignment for the students who studied the relationship between linguistics and literary criticism. However, the students in the second course about English religious poetry, which Fish was teaching, identified biblical names and symbols within the individual words and turned the very same list into the religious poem. "In Fish's story, we find human beings engaging with a reality and making sense of it. Obviously, it is possible to make sense of the same reality in quite different ways" (Crotty, 1998, p. 47).

Social constructionism, however, does not imply interpretations where anything goes. In the constructionist view, meaning is not created but it is constructed which means that an object itself plays an important role in the generation of meaning (Crotty, 1998). For instance, the students in Fish's (1980) essay offered their interpretive understanding of what seemed as the list of names but they still had the names as objects to engage and work with. "Imagination is required, to be sure. There is a call for creativity. Yet we are not talking about imagination running wild or untrammelled creativity" (Crotty, 1998, p. 48).

Also, terms in which the world is understood and meaning is constructed are context-specific (Crotty, 1998; Gergen, 1985). Social constructionism takes context and culture very seriously as the source of human thought and not as its outcome: "Our culture brings things into view for us and endows them with meaning and by the same

token, leads us to ignore other things” (Crotty, 1998, p. 54). Given that cultures vary and people inhabit different worlds, interpretations of the same phenomenon and its meaning also vary from one culture to another. Fish’s (1980) essay, mentioned above, serves as a good example of it: The list of scholars he provided as the assigned reading for the students who studied the relationship between linguistics and literary criticism was interpreted as a religious poem within the context of the class that focused on Christian symbols and their poetic intentions in religious poetry. Thus, from the social constructionist perspective, scientific inquiry looks for the different contextually derived interpretations of the social-life world, however, it holds these interpretations lightly and tentatively and not dogmatically as an eternal truth of some kind (Crotty, 1998; Gergen, 1985).

Qualitative research seeks to understand situations in their uniqueness and make sense of phenomena in terms of meanings people bring to them. Through interpretive practice, constructionist qualitative researchers attempt to gain understanding of how people construct their experiences and their world (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011; Merriam, 2009). However, it does not imply that “a researcher has a blank mind bereft of any thoughts about the phenomenon under study” (Merriam, 2009; p. 16). Conversely, informed by the existing concepts, their strengths and shortcomings researchers may narrow down to some initial categories to focus their inquiry (Merriam, 2009). According to Miles and Huberman (as cited in Ravitch & Riggan, 2012) it is important, particularly, for novice researchers to be selective and to identify the initial components of conceptual framework in order to organize their work. However, it is vital that variables remain malleable and open to reinterpretation based on ideas emerging from data (Merriam,

2009; Ravitch & Riggan, 2012). Social constructionism, on the other hand, is precisely an invitation to reinterpretation not to “remain straitjacketed by the conventional meanings we have been taught to associate with the object” (Crotty, 1998, p. 51).

In the same vein, the following broadly defined dimensions of employee empowerment, identified in the literature, will serve as the initial categories to explore non-academic professional staff’s views about the concept. The dimensions that informed the theoretical framework of this research project is a compilation of dimensions found in different definitions of employee empowerment developed and proposed by different scholars (Bowen & Lawler, 1995; Kanter, 1979; Spreitzer, 1995). The reason is the following: Whether it is conceptualized as the relational construct or the motivational one, four-dimensional definitions of employee empowerment and their multiplicative or additive effect render the concept strictly prescriptive leaving little room for flexibility and interpretation. Neither the meanings of the selected dimensions nor their quantity or order is ready-made and fixed. By contrast, they are malleable and open to reinterpretation based on participants’ perspectives.

Decision-making – The most common dimension of employee empowerment mentioned in the literature is decision-making authority. It is one of the components of Bowen and Lawler’s (1995) definition of the concept and it emerged as one of the most influential criteria in Herrenkohl, Judson, and Heffner’s (1999) study as well. For one group of employees in Quinn and Spreitzer’s (1997) study “empowerment was about delegating decision making” (p. 38). Similarly, Foster-Fishman et al. (1998) and Petter et al. (2002) found that some of their respondents sought participation in decision-making actively.

Information – Kanter stressed that “in order to be empowering, organizations must make more information more available to more people at more levels through more devices” (as cited in Spreitzer, 1996, p. 488). Information is also one of the dimensions of Bowen and Lawler’s (1995) multidimensional model of employee empowerment. Although it was not identified as one of the pathways to empowerment in Foster-Fishman et al.’s (1998) study, information was listed as an important dimension by the majority of the participants in Petter et al.’s (2002) study.

Resources – Access to resources is one of the key components of Kanter’s (1979) conceptualization of employee empowerment. Also, one group of participants in Quinn and Spreitzer’s (1997) study considered it as important as decision-making authority.

Autonomy – Thomas and Velthouse (1990) referred to it as *choice* and pointed out that “perceiving oneself as the locus of causality for one’s behavior is the fundamental requirement for intrinsic motivation” (p. 673). Spreitzer (1995) used a more abstract term and described it as a sense of *self-determination*. Having opportunity for job autonomy was listed often by the majority of the participants in Foster-Fishman et al. (1998) and Petter et al.’s (2002) studies.

Knowledge – Bowen and Lawler (1995) suggested that knowledge is central to empowerment as it allows employees to use discretion wisely. Referred to either as *self-efficacy* or as *competence*, according to Thomas and Velthouse (1990) and Spreitzer (1995), it is one of the cognitions constituting employee empowerment. According to Conger and Kanungo (1988), “empowerment refers to a process whereby an individual’s belief in his or her self-efficacy is enhanced” (p. 474). Knowledge and skills emerged as

an important dimension in the qualitative studies conducted by Foster-Fishman et al. (1998) and Petter et al. (2002).

Initiative – Kanter (1979) stressed that either job parameters or leaders' tacit support should allow employees to assume non-ordinary and innovative behaviors “without going through the stifling multilayered approval process” (p. 66). The participants of Quinn and Spreitzer's (1997) study underscored that empowered employees are the ones who can be entrepreneurs without needing permission. Foster-Fishman et al. (1998) and Petter et al. (2002), too, found that freedom to take the initiative and to be creative was one of the pathways to empowerment for their participants.

Impact – Thomas and Velthouse (1990) and Spreitzer (1995) maintained that making a difference and producing intended effects on workplace forces is central to empowerment because it prevents helplessness among employees. Foster-Fishman and Keys (1997) found that many employees especially tenured ones were rather skeptical and avoided participation in empowerment initiatives because they had never seen significant changes brought by such initiatives in the past.

Rewards – Bowen and Lawler (1995) stressed that employees should be rewarded based on their and an organization's performance. Herrenkohl et al. (1999), too, found that the recognition of employees' accomplishments and knowing that organizations reward them was one of the influential dimensions along with decision-making authority. However, other studies demonstrated only mixed support for this particular dimension (Fernandez & Moldogaziev, 2011, 2013).

The dimensions described above are defined broadly and they should remain so because each may have different meaning for different individuals. Autonomy, for instance, for some employees may mean less micro-management, whereas for others it may mean less teamwork (Petter et al., 2002). Similarly, Bowen and Lawler (1995) defined rewards as pay tied to service quality and an organization's financial performance. However, does reward necessarily have to be monetary? Neither an order in which the dimensions are arranged nor their number is fixed. Conversely, they serve as the initial categories and they are subject to change and reinterpretation.

Another feature of the existing definitions of employee empowerment is the assumption that employees necessarily value it and aspire to be empowered. Thus, in order to understand non-academic professional staff's perspectives on employee empowerment one should ask an additional question: Do employees necessarily want to be empowered? Argyris (1998), for instance, noticed the following: "Employees are often ambivalent about empowerment – it is great as long as they are not held personally accountable" (p. 98). He maintained that in bureaucratic organizations employees develop external commitment, a kind of contractual compliance, they learn how to survive by such commitment, and empowerment seems to them just too much work (Argyris, 1998). Similarly, one of the groups in Petter et al.'s (2002) study referred to as *organizational bureaucrats* valued empowerment little because they preferred following the rules and being responsible for job-specific goals instead of creativity or participation in organizational decision-making.

In summary, the dimensions constituting employee empowerment are several. They are defined, clustered, and supported in the literature differently rendering the

concept ambiguous and complex. Neither support for the commonly-held assumption that employees always want to be empowered is unanimous. Taking these broad and somewhat conflicting perspectives into consideration, jointly, might help to explore non-academic professional staff's views on the value and definition of employee empowerment.

Research Design

I chose qualitative research as a mode of inquiry because of its interest in participants' perspectives as knowing subjects, who make sense of themselves and the world in unique ways and its commitment to the interpretive understanding of human experience. Qualitative research locates researchers in natural settings and allows them to get close to subjects' perspectives to study how social experience is created, to make sense of or interpret phenomena in terms of the meanings subjects bring to them (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011; Luttrell, 2010; Merriam, 2009). "Qualitative research is defined by an effort to highlight the meanings people make and the actions they take, and to offer interpretations for how and why" (Luttrell, 2010, p. 1). Specifically, the current research project is what Merriam (2009) defined as a *basic qualitative study*. Researchers conducting the basic qualitative study seek to understand how people construct their worlds, how they interpret and what meaning they attach to their lives and experiences. In other words, the primary objective of the basic qualitative study is to uncover and interpret these meanings (Merriam, 2009). Given that the purpose of this study is to gain understanding of non-academic professional staff's perspectives on employee empowerment that are largely missing in the existing conceptualizations of the concept, the basic qualitative study seems a valuable avenue for inquiry.

Research Participants

Employee empowerment originally was proposed for frontline employees, who have direct interactions with citizens or customers, because they have traditionally been devoid of power within organizations (Bowen & Lawler, 1995; Kanter, 1979; Petter et al., 2002). Hence, purposeful sampling, which allows researchers to select a sample from whom they want to learn, was a sampling strategy. The original purpose of the concept itself, mentioned above, served as a general selection criterion (Merriam, 2009).

Non-academic professional staff is a large group of employees working in different areas such as *student services*, *academic support*, *business and administrative services*, and *external affairs*. Each area also includes several sub-areas. For instance, student services include student advising, counseling, and international student affairs to name a few, while external affairs include alumni affairs, fundraising, and public affairs (Rosser, 2000). According to Rosser (2000), individuals who work in these areas are “unsung professionals” (p. 5). They are professionals because of their training, expertise, and commitment but they are unsung because these professionals oftentimes lack visibility and their contribution is not always recognized. For this study, I focused on non-academic professional employees who worked in *student services*. These professionals have their fair share in students’ personal growth and development. They provide academic or career advising, offer different programs, and activities that have a significant effect on students’ motivation, involvement, retention, or excellence and help students feel connected to campus life. Also, at a time when institutions are keenly interested in internationalizing campuses non-academic professionals ensure students’ smooth transition, academic or cultural adjustment, and provide important services

related to visa regulations. (Pitman, 2000; Wood & Kia, 2000). “A faculty cannot by itself accomplish the [university’s] objectives for a student’s intellectual and personal development; it needs the cooperation of others who work with students where students spend the majority of their time” (Pitman, 2000, p. 166). Thus, considering a significant contribution they make, this study sought out non-academic professional staff working in different sub-areas of *student services*, specifically, those non-academic professional employees who worked directly with students and who had no senior leadership positions.

Maximum variation was another criterion that guided the sample selection process (Merriam, 2009). I identified and selected non-academic professional employees with some variation in characteristics in terms of gender, race, and ethnicity. My goal was to ensure that the findings of this study would reflect various perspectives influenced by different life experiences.

I began the recruitment process, first, with contacting directors to gain access to research sites. I introduced my research project to them and asked for their permission to contact non-academic professional staff who worked in their offices. After I gained entrée to research sites and the Institutional Review Board of the University of Missouri (IRB) approved the study and all study materials, I sent out a recruitment email to participants at these sites (See Appendix A). I also visited some of them in their offices to introduce my study in person and to answer their questions about it. As a result, six non-academic professional staff members accepted invitation to participate in this research project. Once participants were recruited, I sent an informed consent to provide them with pertinent information regarding the purpose and procedures of the study,

confidentiality, the rights of participants, and potential risks and benefits of participation (See Appendix B). All six non-academic professional staff members agreed to participate in the study. Mike, Jim, Alex, Kate, Helen, and Ella were non-academic professional employees who worked in *student services*, their core job responsibilities included working with students on a day-to-day basis to provide important support and services, and who had no senior leadership positions. In terms of racial and ethnic makeup, the sample was relatively diverse as well: One African American male, one African American female, one European American female, one Indian American female, and two European American males. In order to protect the participants' confidentiality, I use pseudonyms throughout this research report and I also removed other direct identifiers.

Research Sites

The current research study was conducted at a large public research institution in the Midwestern region of the United States. As mentioned earlier, non-academic professionals work in several areas on campuses (Rosser, 2000). This study focused on one specific area *student services*. According to Rosser (2000), *student services* is the broad area that includes several sub-areas like admissions, registration, financial aid, counseling, international student affairs, advising, retention, and other aspects of student life. Two administrative units of *student services* were selected as the research sites. In order to maintain data confidentiality, the names of these units and other direct identifiers are not used in this report.

The selected administrative units provided important services for the different groups of underrepresented student population on campus, thus, working with students on a day-to-day basis was their core responsibility. Non-academic professionals working in

these units reported to their immediate supervisors like directors and assistant directors. Within the overall internal structure of the institution, the units worked on the academic side of the house and both reported first, to vice provosts and ultimately, to the executive vice chancellor for academic affairs.

Data Collection

The data for this study was collected through interviews. At the root of interviewing is an interest in understanding the lived experience of other people and the meaning they make of that experience. Thus, the purpose of interviewing is to enter into other people's perspective (Merriam, 2009; Seidman, 2006). "Interviewing provides access to the context of people's behavior and thereby provides a way for researchers to understand the meaning of that behavior" (Seidman, 2006, p. 10). Moreover, interviewing may elicit interesting insights that may not be voiced frequently under any other circumstances (Quinn, 2010). Given that the purpose of this study is to uncover non-academic professional employees' understanding of empowerment, which are still largely unexplored and not voiced frequently, I decided to use interviewing as the primary tool for data collection.

Specifically, I conducted six semi-structured, person-to-person interviews. The semi-structured interview is a mix of more and less structured questions. It means that specific information is desired from participants but less structured format still allows the researcher to remain open to emerging worldviews (Merriam, 2009). Similarly, the theoretical framework of this research project that was informed by the initial dimensions of employee empowerment required specific information from the participants. At the same time, the definition and value of each dimension and the concept of employee

empowerment itself was expected to emerge from the participant's responses and thus, it also required openness and the less structured format. Thus, based on the conceptual approach to the study's design, I chose semi-structured interviews as the primary data collection tool (See Appendix C).

The data collection process for this study took five months and it was carried out in two phases with a three-month interval between the two: I conducted interviews with three participants during the first phase and other participants were interviewed three months later due to delays and difficulties I encountered during the recruitment process. After some of the selected non-academic professional staff members agreed to participate in this study, the interviews were scheduled at mutually convenient time and places. The interviews lasted from 35 minutes to 60 minutes depending on how much the participants wanted to discuss the topic. The interview protocol was revised during the data collection to incorporate reflections on the process. Some follow-up questions were designed during the interviews based on topics and themes emphasized by the participants.

All interviews were audio recorded. I transcribed the interviews verbatim using an open-source web application OTranscribe. In order to maintain accuracy, partial words and incomplete sentences were also included in the interview transcripts. In addition, positive interaction was one of the major focuses during the interviews. I intended to remain nonjudgmental and non-threatening and rely more on a conversational style as much as possible in order to let the participants feel comfortable enough to discuss their perspectives and personal experiences.

Data Analysis

The data set for this study consisted of six recorded interviews that I transcribed verbatim. Given that the data set was not extensive, no special system was used to organize it. I only assigned numbers to the interview transcripts to arrange them chronologically.

One of the defining characteristics of qualitative research is that data analysis process is primarily inductive. It means that qualitative researchers uncover interpretive understanding, build new concepts, or even theories based on bits and pieces of information from data rather than deductively testing and validating existing ones. The objective is to convey the meanings of events or phenomena as perceived by participants (Emerson, Fretz, & Shaw, 2011; Merriam, 2009). In a similar vein, the data for this study was analyzed inductively. Given that the purpose of the study was to generate the definition of employee empowerment as perceived by non-academic professional employees, I drew on the inductive approach.

Also, the data analysis process was comparative. This analytical procedure is used in various ways and implies comparing different people and their views, situations, and experiences, comparing data from the same individuals with themselves at different times, comparing data with category, or comparing category with other categories (Charmaz, 2010; Wertz et al., 2011). The objective of data analysis is to identify recurring patterns that cut across data and the identification of multiple examples of phenomena and recurrent patterns require comparison (Emerson et al., 2011; Merriam, 2009; Wertz et al., 2011). Therefore, the data analysis for this research study also involved the comparison of the different participants' perspectives on the dimensions of

employee empowerment and also, comparison within the data of each participant in order to discern recurring ideas.

I began the process with reading the interview transcripts and assigning codes to the segments of data that seemed relevant to the purpose of this study. For the coding process, I adapted a word processing program that allowed me to create margin notes. Conducting the inductive data analysis implies that the researcher should remain as open as possible to what is going in data at hand (Emerson et al., 2011; Merriam, 2009). Therefore, I started the process with *open coding* only with some vague ideas that crossed my mind while transcribing the interviews, however, without much regard for how they would be used ultimately.

As noted earlier, based on Miles and Huberman's approach (as cited in Ravitch & Riggan, 2012), the theoretical framework of the study was informed by various dimensions of employee empowerment found in the literature that serve as the initial categories. According to Merriam (2009), this is the case when categories were borrowed from sources outside the study and thus, some may argue that they may hinder the generation of new perspectives. Moreover, some may point out that "since in the long run they may not be relevant and are not exactly designed for the purpose, they must be re-specified" (p. 185). However, the very objective of this study and the data analysis was to see if these dimensions would be re-specified and reinterpreted. In other words, the dimensions of employee empowerment that informed the theoretical framework were not fixed and did not control the process of analysis. Conversely, the definition and value of each dimension and interpretive understanding of the concept of employee empowerment was expected to emerge from the data, therefore, I decided to be as open as possible.

Such approach to the data analysis, for example, revealed that the codes assigned to dimensions like *rewards* and *resources* varied implying that their definitions varied among the participants. Also, the margin notes about the dimension *initiative* highlighted an overall sense of caution towards initiatives implying that the participants of this study were not seeking it actively, although in the academic literature on employee empowerment *initiative* is one of important dimensions.

The next step in the process of data analysis was *analytical coding*, grouping those open codes that seemed I could combine based on reflection on their meanings (Emerson et al., 2011; Merriam, 2009). As I finished coding the first interview transcript and started comparing the data, I noticed that codes from three different interview questions could be merged with the initial category *knowledge* and could re-specify it. For instance, the margin notes assigned to the introductory interview question asking about the participant's definition of *power* showed that for the respondent power equaled his "specialized knowledge." It seemed to be related to the codes showing that the respondent experienced a lack of knowledge when dealing with situations beyond his expertise that he found frustrating and defined as other offices' responsibility. These codes were clustered together as "*specialized knowledge*" which tentatively meant that such knowledge was valued, it was perceived as a source of power but the participant did not seek knowledge beyond it, at least in his workplace.

According to Merriam (2009), in qualitative research various levels of analysis are possible ranging from the basic level when data is organized topically or chronologically and presented as a narrative to the level where data is analyzed to generate a theory. Between these two levels there is a moderately abstract level of

analysis where the researcher moves beyond description and to a certain degree, interprets data to classify it into categories. This particular level of analysis seemed congruent with the theoretical framework of this study that was informed by the initial dimensions of employee empowerment, however, they did not control the process of interpretation.

The above-mentioned *specialized knowledge*, for instance, was the product of such moderate level of abstraction and its freedom for the control of the theoretical framework. Moreover, as a result, one of the initial categories *information* merged with the dimension *specialized knowledge*. Specifically, the question if the respondents were interested in having more information beyond their specific jobs had the following codes assigned: “knowledge,” “background,” “they’ve given us literature,” “knowledge is power,” or “it could negatively affect what he needs to know.” In other words, information seemed to equal knowledge and thus, information beyond one’s specific job equaled something the participants needed *to know* or *to do* in addition to their “core duties.” Besides, the majority of respondents did not express much interest in such information like in case of *specialized knowledge*. Hence, based on intensive reflection and interpretation of the participants’ perspectives, I decided to combine these two initially separate dimension of employee empowerment.

One of the criteria that categories should meet is that they should be sensitizing. It means that the naming of the category should reflect what is in the data as closely as possible (Merriam, 2009). Based on that criterion, the initial category *knowledge*, for instance, became *specialized knowledge* because the participants considered it as the source of power and those who lacked it when they were new-comers sought it but they

did not express much interest in knowledge beyond the scope of their immediate jobs. The name itself was suggested by one of the participants who used the term “specialized knowledge” often during the interview.

Also, the other initial category *decision-making* changed into *involvement in decision-making*. The participants’ responses revealed that they primarily wanted to have input in decisions and an opportunity to contribute to a decision-making process. This way the naming of the category narrowed down rather broad *decision-making* and made it more responsive to the data in it.

Finally, Miles and Huberman (1994) and Merriam (2009) suggested that data display can serve as an aid in analyzing it. Given that extended texts can overwhelm humans’ information-processing capabilities, compressing and organizing data into display facilitate thorough analysis. Hence, I decided to use what Miles and Huberman (1994) referred to as a *checklist matrix* so, it would serve as the visual aid for me throughout the analysis process and for readers as well to draw some conclusions.

The checklist matrix is a format used to analyze data about one major variable that includes several components, though it does not necessarily order them (Miles & Huberman, 1994). The checklist matrix seemed suitable for this study because the latter focuses on one major variable like employee empowerment that includes several dimensions. In order to create the checklist matrix, the researcher pulls relevant quotes from the data, forms general judgement about components, and keeps them together in the cell. An ultimate objective is to make comparisons and note patterns (Miles & Huberman, 1994). Similarly, as shown in Figure 1, based on the participants’ responses, I formed general judgment about the value of each dimension, located relevant quotes in

the interview transcripts, and organized them in the matrix along with the participants' names.

In sum, the process of data analysis for this study was primarily inductive, comparative, and the theoretical framework of the study did not control it. Conversely, the definition and value of each dimension of employee empowerment was expected to emerge from the data at hand. As a result, some initial dimensions were redefined, some were defined variably, some did not garner much support from the participants, and some initially separate dimensions merged.

Figure 1: Initial Dimensions of Employee Empowerment

	<u>Decision-making</u>	<u>Autonomy</u>	<u>Initiative</u>	<u>Impact</u>	<u>Knowledge</u>	<u>Resources</u>	<u>Rewards</u>
Jim	Valued "it just makes common sense to be involved in"	Valued "I think I am blessed in a sense that I have that autonomy"	Cautious "maybe not in a formal sense but informal discretion"	Valued no impact: "damn frustrating"	Valued "have power in a sense of I have specialized knowledge"	Valued "I am thankful that I have the tools and resources"	Valued "maybe there is a monetary reward"
Kate	Valued "giving staff chance to voice their opinions"	Valued "feel very fortunate to have the ability to do whatever I want"	Cautious "it's O.K. for to initiate but not always"	Valued Having no impact: "disheartening"	Value power in my position... is knowledge"	Valued "We need to have access to it"	Valued "it's just nice to be acknowledged"
Alex	Not valued "I don't feel like...it is something I am looking forward to."	Not valued "following office policies is what I am comfortable with"	Not Valued "I don't feel as though I am looking to change things"	Moderately valued "beyond my students' appreciation I am not really looking for adulation"	Valued "Power? Competency, I would say."	Valued "access to a manual which is helping us..."	Valued "hopefully, you are able to get a raise"
Helen	Valued "I don't think we were involved in decision-making so, then you get frustrated"	Valued "having autonomy feels great"	Cautious "no one takes initiative because everyone's plate is already full"	Valued Having no impact: "that stinks"	Valued "when I was in that period of what does our office do I felt pretty dumb"	Valued "I have a good amount of resources..."	Valued "that probably needs improvement"
Ella	Valued "Bring everyone to the table...and just brainstorm."	Valued "It's effective, it's proven"	Cautious "I think that goes back to autonomy"	Valued No impact: "I got frustrated about it"	Valued "let's learn together"	Valued "We don't have enough staff, I don't know who can fix that"	Valued "Staff is celebrated"
Mike	Valued "I feel like our input would help them"	Valued "cannot stand, you know, micromanaging"	Cautious "encouragement when it comes to taking initiative ...would help."	Valued No impact "have you question a little bit of your value"	Valued "I would describe power as having skills"	Valued "the biggest thing is that there is more access."	Valued "want to ask for more money"

Source: Miles & Huberman (1994)

Transferability

External validity or generalizability of findings is another important component that I intend to address in this research project, however, it is essential to understand generalizability in a way that is congruent with the philosophical underpinnings of qualitative research itself (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Merriam, 2009).

The basic assumption behind generalizability as it is understood traditionally is that there a single reality, some basic rules do exist that govern situations under all circumstances, and thus, findings can be applied uniformly to other people, settings, and times. However, qualitative researchers rarely try to find out what is true generally of many because of their belief in multiple realities and multiple meanings that are local and context-specific (Lincoln, Lynham, & Guba, 2011; Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Merriam, 2009). “We then move from a question of generalizability to a question of *transferability*” where findings are applied to similar contexts based on empirical evidence (Lincoln & Guba, 1985, p. 297). The current research project is a qualitative study informed by social constructionism that believes in multiple interpretive understandings of the phenomenon under study, therefore, its findings are not generalizable in the statistical sense but rather transferable.

According to Lincoln and Guba (1985), the transferability of research findings is contingent upon a contextual similarity, which implies a similarity between sending and receiving contexts. However, given that qualitative researchers only know the contexts where they conduct studies, sending contexts, it is up to readers to decide whether transferability is possible or not: “the burden of proof lies less with the original investigator than with the person seeking to make an application elsewhere” (p. 298).

However, it is qualitative researchers' responsibility to provide a sufficient amount of data that will help readers consider the transferability as a possibility (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Merriam, 2009).

Strategies employed to enhance transferability include: (a) a *detailed description* of the setting, participants, and findings supported with evidence from data and (b) *maximum variation* in a sample, selecting participants with some variation in characteristics (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Merriam, 2009). In a similar vein, it is up to the readers of this research study to decide whether its findings about the definition and value of employee empowerment can be applied to the context where they operate and whether the findings are similar to their own understanding of the concept. However, in order to allow readers to assess the possibility of transferability I provided as detailed description of the research sites and the participants as possible, as well as the detailed description of the findings supported by the data at hand. Also, maximum variation was used as a sampling strategy: I selected the participants with some variation in characteristics to ensure that the findings of this research study would reflect the perspectives affected by different backgrounds and life experiences.

Reflexivity

Reflexivity has become the defining feature of qualitative research because an investigator is a central figure in data collection and its analysis (Berger, 2015; Luttrell, 2010). Qualitative researchers are encouraged “to increasingly focus on self-knowledge and sensitivity; better understand the role of the self in the creation of knowledge; carefully self-monitor the impact of their biases, beliefs, and personal experience on their research, and maintain balance between the personal and the universal” (Berger, 2015, p. 220). The primary goal of reflexivity is to lend qualitative research credibility. It challenges the idea that knowledge production is free from the researcher’s biases and assumptions, however, by monitoring their impact reflexivity enhances the trustworthiness of qualitative research (Berger, 2015; Luttrell, 2010). Thus, I also intended to account for some aspects of my positioning and their potential effect on the research process.

According to Berger (2015), the researcher’s positionality can affect the research process in three major ways: First, it can affect access to a research site. Second, it can shape the nature of researcher-participant relationships and determine what type of information participants will share. Third, the researcher’s own background and values can serve as the lens for filtering data and therefore, influence conclusions drawn from it.

I am a female international graduate student conducting the research study on the empowerment of non-academic professional employees in the academia. These multiple components of my background affected the research process in different and fairly, complex ways. First, gaining access to research sites and recruiting participants turned out to be a long and laborious process. As a graduate student at this university I was

viewed as an “insider,” to a certain degree, that helped me to secure access to the research sites eventually because some senior leaders were willing to assist me. The same holds true about those non-academic professional staff members who agreed to participate in this study. However, employee empowerment as the topic complicated the recruitment process further. Being unfamiliar with the concept of employee empowerment and therefore, feeling unsure whether they would be able to provide valuable information concerned even those staff members who agreed to participate in the study. Also, according to these participants, it was one of the reasons why their colleagues decided not to participate in this research project. Such confusion about the concept that the participants experienced confirmed the need for semi-structured interviews and asking the participants for specific information.

Second, from the very beginning, I found myself in a hierarchical researcher-participant relationship where I was the one who had authority. The respondent’s frequent questions about whether their responses made sense and their doubts whether they were responding the questions correctly shed some light on power dynamics between us. Clearly, I was viewed as the one who had “right” answers and from whom the participants were seeking confirmation. In addition, I was an outsider because I was not their co-worker or the individual they knew before. Such dynamics, in its turn, could determine how much and what type of information the respondents would share with me. While it is challenging to overcome all these barriers and guarantee trust between individuals during a one-hour interview, I attempted to make it clear that the participants were the ones who had rights answers about employee empowerment and not me and to let them talk with minimal interference.

Third, I was conducting this study as the international graduate student. It means that my knowledge of the work environment within the different parts of institutions is still tenuous. Besides, I have only recently been introduced to the concept of employee empowerment that itself is still highly ambiguous. In short, I was studying unfamiliar or something that was familiar only to a limited degree. According to Berger (2015), one of the traps in studying unfamiliar is that it is challenging to formulate good research questions, to secure language sensitivity, or to identify implied meanings. However, one of the advantages of studying unfamiliar is that it places participants in the expert position, helps researchers avoid preoccupation with their experiences, and allows fuller engagement with participants' perspectives. Being aware of the limitation and the advantage of studying unfamiliar was essential in order to be as careful as possible towards implied meanings, the language I used, and to rely more freely on the participants' perspectives to benefit the study and its purpose.

However, there was also another conflict that I had to alert myself to during the interviews and I had to continually reflect on during the data analysis. This was a potential judgmental stance (Berger, 2015). Some scholars argue that the idea of hierarchy is primarily male-driven and that women mostly tend to prefer more organic and diffuse structures where leaders put themselves at the center rather than at the top (Bolman & Deal, 2014; Eagly & Carli, 2003; Madden, 2005). This is something that I growingly believe in and value as the female student. In addition, as the international student, I am from the country that was the part of very close and hyper-centralized system of the Soviet Union for many decades where every aspect of daily life was controlled and dictated from the top of the hierarchy. Thus, my view about hierarchies

and power balance inside those hierarchies is rather negative and skeptical. By reflecting on my values and biases, I wanted to avoid potential conflicting reactions to participants who viewed hierarchies less negatively and thus, not to disregard or misinterpret their perspectives.

Results: Dimensions of Employee Empowerment

The purpose of the current research study was to explore non-academic professional staff's views about employee empowerment. Specifically, based on various broadly defined initial dimensions of employee empowerment identified in the literature, this study sought to uncover what the concept of employee empowerment meant for non-academic professional employees and how they valued it. The participants of the study discussed each initial dimension in detail and thereby, answered the main research questions in an explicit or implicit manner. Thus, the results presented in this section reflect the participants' perspectives on what constitutes employee empowerment for them and how valuable it is.

Involvement in Decision-Making

Involvement in decision-making has emerged as the dimension that was supported by the great majority of participants. These non-academic professional staff members looked forward to having input in decisions that affected their jobs and an opportunity to share their opinions about them. Kate recommended "giving staff chance to voice their opinions." She criticized the practice of having one staff member from one specific area on campus committees especially when there were so many staff members on campus working in several different areas. She also expressed regret over their office policy that prevented them from contacting upper-level administrators or faculty without permission: "I think a lot of times we feel stifled." Kate said she wanted to see more staff members on committees and to have more opportunities for direct communication with individuals who could make decisions. Ella, too, made the following comment:

"Bring everyone to the table with an idea and just brainstorm. I am not gonna goey but this is what I think. So, you get everybody's perspective, you pull from

that pool. No matter what an intended goal is but I think brainstorming, getting everybody's ideas, and not just two or three."

One of the common rationales that the participants provided for more inclusion in decision-making was that, ultimately, they were affected by some decisions made by administrators and that they were the ones who had to implement those decisions. Helen felt frustrated when the administrators didn't seek their input for the decision about how to record hours on a timesheet: "I feel they just kind of made a lot of decisions about our time usage, how we wanted to record it, and things like this. Things that involve us they made decisions without us." Jim, too, pointed out that

"...it just makes common sense to be involved in some way in those decision-making processes. If we are affected by them and our students are affected by them than I think, we should have an input into whatever policy or rule changes or anything from above."

Another rationale for more inclusion in decision-making offered by the participants was their experience. Given that these non-academic professionals worked with students on day-to-day basis and that administrators did not have such opportunities because of their formal position, they felt that sharing their experience could improve the overall quality of decisions. Ella was rather straightforward: "I think that some staff members need to be involved with that because how can you make something that you don't know anything about based on the seat you are sitting in but you are not in the trenches?!" Another participant Mike discussed in detail his recommendations for the administration about how insufficient 15-minute window was for proper academic advising and also, how to reduce the number of scholarships offered to minority students to ensure that those who got them wouldn't lose them. His rationale, too, for more inclusion was the following:

“I think it would be better considering that we work with students on a day-to-day basis, so, we know the reasons why they kept with requirements or why did not keep with requirements...Considering that they [administrators] don't have that much access to students I feel like, our input would help...”

But involvement in what type of decisions? Given that the participants talked about involvement in decisions that affected them and in decisions they could contribute to with their daily experience means that these non-academic professional staff wanted to have input in decisions directly related to them and to their immediate jobs. Jim clarified it further:

“I mean there are some things that are above my pay grade: Agreements or connections with other universities or government offices or you know, other schools. That's not my job, so, I don't need to be involved in it.”

However, these non-academic professional staff also had a clear understanding of a hierarchy and ultimate power held by superiors. Some comments like “ultimately, they don't have to listen to us” and “so, we try our best to make group decisions, however, we all have an understanding that the ultimate decision is the actual director and supervisor” made it evident. Besides, the respondents largely used the phrases like “having an input,” “soliciting information and advice from us,” “chance to voice opinions,” “being consulted,” “ask for feedback,” “getting everybody's ideas,” “being involved,” to name a few. All these taken together mean that the participants did not necessarily look for decision-making authority or the delegation of decision-making power but rather for opportunities to get involved in the process and to voice their opinions about decisions that they would have to implement.

In sum, involvement in decision-making process was important for these non-academic professional staff members. The great majority of participants wanted to have

input in decisions that would affect them, that they would have to implement, and to which they could contribute with their daily experience that administrators did not have.

Autonomy

Having freedom to do what they needed to do and not being micro-managed was the valuable aspect of their jobs for non-academic professional staff. The great majority of respondents reported feeling nice, motivated, and being trusted because of the amount of job autonomy they had and its absence was viewed as something negative.

“It feels nice. I feel a little more trusted. I personally cannot stand, you now, micro-managing. So, it gives me a little bit more freedom to be expressive, it gives me freedom to go beyond when it comes to helping student, and it also helps with that individualized attention that we try to show to the students.”
(Mike)

Helen remembered the times when she felt she did not have autonomy and talked about the office policy she found “restrictive” and “annoying.” According to this policy, if a staff member wanted to leave the office he or she had to email a co-worker to let him or her know about it beforehand. So, after a while, Helen just decided not to follow it:

“When there is anything slightly restrictive or micro-managing that’s when it feels annoying. So, having autonomy feels great and it’s motivating. If I didn’t have autonomy I don’t think I would be as motivated to do work.”

Kate emphasized her immediate supervisor’s hands-off approach. “He is amazing” she added. She appreciated the fact that she could come to work and hardly see her supervisor sometimes even for weeks and felt fortunate because of that:

“I know people who have been in situations where they work for someone who is a micro-manager and they have virtually no freedom to do their jobs, and they are so unhappy. I feel very fortunate to have ability to do whatever I want to do, for the most part.”

Thomas and Velthouse (1990) called it “perceiving oneself as the locus of causality for one’s behavior” and it turned out to be essential for these non-academic

professional employees (p. 673). However, “the locus of causality” for what type of behavior? For the participants, job autonomy meant knowing ones’ job responsibilities and having freedom in terms of timing, style, or content to fulfill them on a day-to-day basis. Jim brought up the following point:

“I think right now I have a lot of job autonomy. Basically, they say: Hey, you have to know this information, you have to give it to students, and you have to make sure that students are doing these things, you decide how the works... and I think I am blessed in that sense that I have that autonomy to do. I have a personal style to do. I was a teacher before, so, I bring teacher attitude and teaching style to working with students.”

Similarly, Mike also talked about his freedom to decide how to help student and thus, do his job. He explained that one of the things his office tried to do was to show individualized attention to students in order to help them more. So, he told the story how he once left his office, walked with the students who had changed their major to their college and introduced them to individuals from whom these students could learn about requirements for graduation:

“So, with the autonomy that I have here I took it upon myself, you know, I asked them: Hey, would you like me to walk you over there with you, so, I can show you and they were like, oh, most definitely. I thought that was really awesome... I was able to actually leave like not just leave the department but leave the building and go across campus and show the student where the office was. I do know that there are some offices or departments that are not able to do that...”

Helen described her autonomy as her ability to decide what event to arrange, how to arrange it, and who to work with. She clarified that she had to follow certain guidelines, introduce the event and its goals to administrators, and request for budget but for the most part, it was up to her to decide how to make it work. However, she also talked about having freedom to plan her own day:

“If I need to come or go, like if I have to go, walk out of a meeting, schedule different meetings like I don’t have my manager looking over my schedule...I don’t get asked.”

Ella, too, felt she had a lot of autonomy because her schedule was not a regular from 8 a.m. to 5 p.m., from Monday to Friday and she could come to work on Sunday if students needed her assistance: “So, we are allowed to assist with students and their success regardless of what it looks like” only without crossing boundaries.

In sum, having autonomy was important for the participants and it was the valuable aspect of their jobs. Also, autonomy did not mean one specific thing for them but rather freedom or flexibility in several aspects that let them do what they had to do based on their job responsibilities.

Initiative

The data analysis revealed that *initiative* is not the dimension that the participants sought out. For some it was mostly related to job autonomy that they had and did not want to move far beyond, whereas, those who saw its value focused more on different structural obstacles that they were seeing in their way. In short, these non-academic professional staff members were rather cautious when it came to initiatives.

Alex explained that he was not the type of individual who was looking for opportunities to initiate things. Conversely, he said he felt comfortable to have supervisors who made decisions, distributed tasks, and then allowed him to do whatever he thought he needed to do in order to implement these decisions effectively:

“I consider myself the worker bee, I am not the queen bee, I am not the one who set an important policy. I think it’s important to have individuals in power or in positions that allow them to set a policy. Those individuals are informed and can then effectively distribute tasks to their workforce and that workforce being effective in terms of processing of what the directive is...I don’t feel as though I

am looking to change things. I am looking to effectively process what's given to me..."

Ella pointed out that taking initiative primarily "goes back to autonomy that the rules allow to have" and added that she would not change anything about it. For Jim, too, it was related to autonomy that he had. It meant knowing responsibilities, goals, or even being given a project and then having flexibility to do what he needed to do to finish it.

"To outline what those goals are we are more comfortable with taking initiative" or "our relationship [*with supervisors*] is good enough that they can say: This is a project for you, do what you have to do to finish the project." (Jim)

On the other hand, the participants who felt relatively comfortable with taking an initiative or saw its value talked about different structural obstacles. Kate remembered that when she worked as an advisor she did not feel she could raise questions: "I didn't feel that was the place because of how our office is structured." Instead, if she felt she needed to say that something was not working she felt more comfortable to go first to her supervisor who would either let her move forward or would inform Kate that she needed to discuss it with others. "So, it was essentially getting their blessing to be able to move forward." As she became a coordinator it was "O.K." for her to take initiatives, however, not always: "Again, depends of the circumstances and what it is."

Mike emphasized the positive effect of initiatives because it helped with productivity. However, he also talked about the importance of being encouraged and reminded by directors and supervisors "every now and then" that taking initiative was "O.K." Jim also focused on his supervisor's role and added that if something "popped up" in his head, he wanted to do that without going through any formal procedures:

"So, maybe not in a formal sense but informal discretion with my immediate supervisor that lets me take initiative. I don't have to get anything signed or I

don't have to go to someone's office to ask for permission but just give me informal yes or no."

Helen said initiatives were important because it was as an opportunity to grow, to improve, and to get promoted. However, she did not express enthusiasm about taking initiatives because of some structural issues her office was experiencing such as the lack of staff members, distribution of job responsibilities among them, and work overload. Because of that, Helen and her co-workers were mostly given tasks instead of taking initiatives.

"We have a lot of programming, a lot of students, a lot of tasks, a lot of responsibilities that are split between five people... So, because of that I think it's hard to take an initiative. Because we have some many projects already nobody wants to jump on a new idea."

She did not express much optimism either about the possibility of taking initiatives at least in near future because the prospect of finding solutions to the problems she talked about seemed rather slim to her.

"They need to take some stuff out of our plate but that's not possible. I think there are solutions but they aren't gonna happen because the solution would be to hire another staff member, we don't have money for that, budgets are always getting cut. Another solution would be to take a little bit out of everyone's plate but we can't do that because how we're gonna have effective programming."

In summary, the participants seemed more cautious about taking initiatives than eager to seek opportunities for it. For some it was related to job autonomy that they had and that was sufficient, while other participants emphasized various structural barriers. It is difficult to identify a causal relationship between these structural obstacles and the participants' willingness to take initiatives and assume that if not these structural barriers they would necessarily want to take initiatives. But at that point some participants saw these barriers in their workplace and they hindered them. The initial dimension *initiative*

as a whole did not garner much support from these non-academic professional employees.

Impact

Being able to see the impact of their behavior on workplace forces was one of the most important dimensions for the participants. The respondents' positive attitude towards situations where they could see they were making a difference showed that having impact mattered for these non-academic professional staff. For Helen, it felt nice every time she heard a student saying: "Thank you" or "Meeting with you, really, helped me" and her supervisors saying that she was very valuable for their office: "If they didn't do that than I definitely would feel like what the heck." For Alex, too, hearing thank you from his students meant that he was doing his job and it made a difference:

"On a frequent basis, I hear it from my students and I hear from my supervisor that the way I process things again...[*smiling*]. I am not initiating things but I quickly and effectively process my students' documents and to me that's important. When I have my student respond back to me like "Thank you" I feel that I am doing my job and beyond my students' appreciation I am not really looking for adulation outside of that."

On the other hand, being unable to see that their behaviors made a difference led to frustration among these non-academic professional employees. The participants' initial reactions to the interview question about how it felt when they could not see impact were the following: "Damn frustrating," "horrible," "it is disheartening," or "oh, that stinks." They talked about the situations when they felt that they simply were not taken into consideration and that led to frustration, feeling devalued, and even to detachment. Kate and her colleagues had been asking for a new staff member for a long time because the student population they served was growing and they found it difficult to support them. Because of their growing number and a lot of work staff members were exhausted,

burnout became real, and they either were leaving or had their attitude towards their work completely changed. However, Kate said that the administrators kept turning down their request because they did not see the need for the new staff member:

“It is disheartening to see a lot of things that we need to run an operation smoothly for someone who does not do what we do, who does not take a time to see what we do, to just turn something down...All they see is a request and they say: Oh, I don’t feel like it’s necessary but they don’t see hurt emotion, the exhaustion, the stress that some of our team experience.”

Helen and Jim, too, felt frustrated when they saw that the administration just did not understand what they were doing, what their work day looked like, and eventually, did not take that into consideration while making decisions or adopting new policies.

“...oftentimes you may get frustrated because you might be given tasks, responsibilities, or projects within a certain time window and it’s like do you forget we work with students? That takes up so much time, they are so unpredictable...” (Helen)

For Jim, the fact that administrators did not understand what his job looked like and did not try to understand it in order to inform their decisions just “devalued” and “trivialized” his work. He wanted to see the administrators taking time and an interest in staff’s daily work prior to making decisions:

“Yeah, take some time off and say: What do you do on an average day? How many students do you have in your portfolio? Oh, that many? What do you do with students and how long does it take? Is that challenging? Why is that challenging? What slows you down? Oh, all these paperwork and processing? Oh, I was just about to enact a policy that involved more paperwork and processing, maybe, I should think twice before I enact that policy because apparently, you have lots of paperwork and lots of things to do. Yeah, understand what we do.”

Ella’s previous experience with not being taken into consideration ultimately resulted in detachment from her workplace. She remembered that in her previous job superiors did not value or even did not want to listen to what she had to say. She felt that

the main reason was her identity as an African American female, although she had all the credentials proving her qualifications. So, oftentimes she just had to defy her superiors in order to finish her tasks. This time, because of that experience and because of some of her friends' experiences she decided not to attach herself too much to the institution:

“I’ve been there before... You can just see the mentality of them, so, I would not put myself in that predicament to go over there, to introduce myself, anything like that just to be disrespected.”

To put it briefly, having impact on workplace forces for the majority of participants meant students being satisfied and grateful for their service and administrators taking their routine, difficulties, and opinions into consideration prior to making decisions. It was essential for them and its absence was the source of frustration for these non-academic professional staff.

Specialized Knowledge

The data analysis showed that the initial dimension *knowledge* was valued highly by the participants. Those non-academic professional employees who were novice in their jobs talked about a sense of frustration caused by a lack of knowledge to deal with their job responsibilities. More seasoned staff members viewed knowledge as a source of power and a lack of knowledge to effectively deal with the particular cases that were beyond their expertise caused a sense of discomfort among them.

Mike told about the time when he was a new staff member in his office. At first, he worked at front desk and he felt comfortable because that was an area he was familiar with: “I’ve always worked in customer service, so, that’s definitely an alright thing with me.” Then he got promoted and became a marketing supervisor. His new job responsibilities included working on social media to promote their programs and engage

with students. At that time, he found his new job challenging because he had never been “big on social media at all:”

“So, when I was doing marketing it was very challenging for me because I barely got on social media. So, I had to learn how to go about increasing our followers, increasing our likes on our page for Facebook. So yeah, it got frustrating at times because there was just something I never had to do before but then I started to learn.”

Helen also had a similar story to tell. When she was a new-comer in her office she did not have a clear understanding of programs that her office was offering because she did not get much training. It was the time when she felt “pretty dumb” and found it frustrating:

“So, when I was in that period of what does our office do I felt pretty dumb because if students had a question or if somebody was like hey, you work in... I didn’t have an answer. So, I feel like I felt out of place and why I don’t know that stuff, should I...I felt very behind, very overwhelmed, I think, by not knowing stuff.”

Other participants who seemed rather experienced or at least, experienced enough not to focus on the time when they were new-comers viewed knowledge as an asset. One of the interview questions was asking the participants what was power for them in their jobs and how they defined it. Their responses showed that for the majority of these non-academic professional staff members power meant knowledge.

“To me power in my position or the job that I do is knowledge...It’s just: Do I know this? And to me that’s powerful. Because our jobs are very confusing, there is a lot of trainings that enable to do our job and so, for me when I know it, when I know the answer and how to do it and do it well to me that’s power.” (Kate)

Jim talked about three different types of power that he thought different groups of individuals at the university had: administrators having power because of their position

on a ladder, students having power because they were the ones who paid money, and he himself having his own share of power that was his specialized knowledge:

“And I guess third is: I myself have power in a sense of I have specialized knowledge that students don’t have or that my supervisors don’t have, that’s not their job to know. But I am paid, my duties are to know this knowledge about students’ situation, by that, you know, having only that knowledge, only maybe three or four of us have that knowledge, I guess that’s power in itself.”

For Alex, too, power equaled competency. For him powerful was an individual who could do his or her job sufficiently and not where she or he stood in terms of hierarchy: “It just means that they are in a position where they are able to dictate rules and regulations and processes for a particular office. But to me competency is probably how it determines whether somebody is powerful in a workplace.”

For these non-academic professional employees, a lack of knowledge was associated with those cases that were not their expertise or did not have control over. Jim and Kate mentioned that oftentimes some students were sent to their office with questions and concerns they were not trained for or supposed to know and that made them feel “pretty inadequate.”

“...often students come to us first and that presents a challenge, that’s high-stress situation and I do my best as a human, an adviser, and an adult and a former teacher to deal with a student’s situation but ultimately, that is not my expertise and that’s kind of a scary thing that we are the first persons students go to...”

For Alex, the source of frustration was vague federal regulations and the government not following procedures. He explained that their job was to advise students what procedures to follow and help them with processing documents. However, he said that the government did not always operate the way it was supposed to and therefore, students could not always get what they expected:

“Sometimes, I don’t want to say that it blows up in your face but it makes you lose faith especially if the advice you gave to a student and how the government operates in relation to that advice is not the same.”

However, although such situations produced the sense of discomfort among them, these non-academic professionals did not necessarily seek knowledge that was beyond their expertise and core duties. Jim pointed out that the more he was expected to know, the more it would distract him and the more negatively it would affect his ability to provide quality service:

“So, the more information I have the more responsibilities it could have negatively affect my core duties that require specialized knowledge, professional knowledge of these specific things. So, the more information I am expected to know or I am told I have access to might negatively affect what I really need to know.”

Although Helen felt frustrated when she did not know how programs in her office worked, she also made it clear that she was not interested in information that was not related to her job: “So, if it has nothing to do with benefiting me and my students or my job then I think that’s pointless.”

Kate and Alex talked about the importance of having broader experience and knowledge to better help their students and direct them to right places if they needed some type of support that was not their office’s duty:

“So, maybe knowing where to send students for referrals is a part of our job description but we should know how to help them. So, we are not just sending them to the next door to say: I don’t know try someone else. We want to reduce the number of times they are going from office to office looking for help. So, I think it is good to know more beyond the scope of what our job description says.”

However, broader knowledge was valued as long as it let them help students and direct them to proper places but did not put additional responsibilities on their shoulders. Kate specified that: “no one needs anything added to our plates or seeing things that are

maybe not our responsibility...that's not fair either because it's something perhaps another office should be doing.”

In sum, the participants valued knowledge. It was either viewed as power or its lack caused frustration among them. However, their responses also demonstrated that what they valued was knowledge related to their core duties or as Jim often referred to it “specialized knowledge” and did not seek knowledge that was beyond the scope of their immediate jobs, at least in their workplace.

Resources

Access to resources whether in an internal or external environment was essential for these non-academic professional staff. The participants talked about the necessity and the positive effect of resources and felt fortunate to have access to them:

“I think I have the tools and I am thankful that I have the tools and resources. That's not the case elsewhere. We go to professional organizations and we talk to other advisers at other schools, and they don't have the money or they don't have the leadership or the will to provide a lot of that stuff and that could negatively affect the services they provide for students.” (Jim).

Having resources was the commonly valued dimension, however, it was also defined differently. Based on the participants' responses, two different types of resources have emerged that these non-academic professional employees needed to function effectively. First, for some, resources meant *tools* like a manual, database, or a handbook that they need to refer to. Jim, Alex, and Kate talked about a manual that was developed by their professional organization. Kate explained that the manual outlined all the federal regulations they needed to do their job and thus, relied on it as the important tool:

“So, our professional organization, they have what's called an adviser's manual and it is essentially: These are the government regulations, this is an interpretation of it. But we have to pay to have access to that manual, so, because that's

something that as an adviser we refer to daily we all have access to it. There is no other one that exists in the world, it's the only one. We need to have access to it to effectively do our jobs.”

Jim felt grateful that institutional leaders were willing to pay \$400 per advisor to provide he and his co-workers with individual access to that manual: “that’s a lot of money. Some schools just don’t have that money and so, they don’t have access to those but I can log on every day, look and research answers to students’ questions.” Like for Kate and Alex it was essential for him as well: “that database is invaluable information. Ultimately, it’s up to me to interpret it but without that reference I could not do my job.”

On the other hand, for some non-academic professional staff members, resources meant *human capital* and access to resources meant having supervisors, administrators, peers, co-workers, staff members they could ask for assistance or talk to. For Alex, in addition to the professional manual, his supervisor and his peers were important resources as well:

“I feel like I have sufficient resources. One, my supervisor has an open door policy, so, any time there is questions.... The same goes for my peers. If I have any questions I definitely can talk to them and discuss what I need and what we should do...”

Ella lamented that they did not enough staff members to help students effectively who “fell through the cracks” because of that: “We don’t have enough. I don’t know who can fix that. I don’t know who can fix that.” Helen, on the other hand, considered herself as well-supported because she knew she had co-workers and supervisors she could talk to. She added that she would also want to see administrators making themselves available and ready to provide support if staff members needed it:

“...reminders from administrators of like if there is anything you ever need you can come to me because... Maybe, reiteration of like if you feel like you need

something, and we don't have something that would be helpful to you, let me know.”

For Mike, too, “the biggest thing” was to have people around he could contact and work with in order to help students effectively. Having access to the individuals who worked at the College of Business and the opportunity to connect with them helped him considerably to provide better support for students with a business major who went to his office seeking their assistance. Mike also believed that he and his co-workers were valuable resources for one another:

“So, if there is a particular thing that I don't know I can go to the individuals within this office and they will either be able to tell me where I can go or connect me to someone who knows more information or they can be the resource and they let me know what I need to know. I mean we all are kind of resources for each other.”

In sum, these non-academic professional employees believed that resources were utterly important. Thus, it was the commonly valued dimension. However, what these participants considered as resources varied among them and it meant different things for them.

Rewards

In order to feel valued and appreciated the participants believed that rewards could be beneficial. “That's really a good question” said Kate and started talking about how nice her supervisor was who usually brought breakfast to the office after important events. She also talked about the importance of generic messages that she attached to emails like “P.S. You all are amazing and you work really hard and I love being able to spend five days a week with all of you.” That was something her supervisor used to do and because it had positive effect on employees she tried to do the same: “even though

it's a generic message, it was still really nice to know that she appreciated what people were doing.”

Helen focused mostly on the lack of recognition at the institution. She mentioned that there is not much reward in her office other than verbal and that's why she thought this was an area that needed improvement:

“...I think most offices. I think, in general, there is a lack of recognition. It is kind of like...Yes, obviously, we all are paid to be here and to do things but there should be recognition and reward for good work, otherwise, everyone can just do their bare minimum.”

Mike started laughing when he heard the question and mentioned that they could get people saying that they did a great job. He added that he wanted to see more in terms of rewards:

“Do I feel like there could be more when it comes to rewarding or recognizing that accomplishment? Yes...Recognizing and rewarding accomplishments, I feel like, is what keeps the train rolling along when it comes to keeping up the morale, keeping up the empowerment when it comes to a workplace.”

While the participants agreed on the positive effect of rewarding their accomplishments and hard work, their perspectives on what constituted a reward varied. Majority of these non-academic professional staff members pointed out that a raise or a bonus would be nice. Some of them also understood that institutions, in general, were limited in terms of funding but monetary reward was something they would like to get. “I definitely want to ask for more money but right now, that's not the thing with the university as a whole” was Mike's response. Jim admitted that he did not like parties, potlucks, field trips or anything like this because they took extra time from his schedule and extra effort especially when his job was already stressful. He pointed out that monetary reward would be helpful to feel appreciated:

“It seems I am a victim of modern age. Money is an indicator of one’s value in a workplace. If I have all these...working hard, I am feeling stressed what is one way you can feel appreciated: Oh, that was a really tough season, we know that, so, you qualify for another hundred dollars in your paycheck next month or something because we formally recognize this.”

However, Kate emphasized that she would not want prize or financial compensation and she preferred one-on-one recognition. “I’d rather just have like one-on-one recognition of you did a really good job...I think it’s just nice to be acknowledged on occasion.” The same holds true about Alex for whom verbal recognition like supervisors being willing to say that they did a good job would be enough to feel appreciated: “I don’t need awards, banquets, and ceremonies [*smiling*] which is just a bit silly.”

On the other hand, verbal recognition was the reason for Helen and Mike why they thought their office needed improvement. Other than monetary reward, they also mentioned that gift cards or “bringing treats, even small things like that” would feel nice. In sum, the participants valued reward because it felt nice for them, it helped them feel appreciated, and do more than their “bare minimum.” However, no single definition of reward could emerge from their responses. Various definitions of reward found in their responses showed that these non-academic professional staff valued reward commonly but defined it differently.

Summary of Dimensions

To put it briefly, out of the initial dimensions of employee empowerment, the participants agreed on the importance of *decision-making, autonomy, impact, knowledge, resources and reward*. The data showed that these non-academic professional staff valued the above-mentioned dimensions, however, they defined them personally that in some cases, varied even from participant to participant. For instance, the non-academic professional staff members valued *decision-making* that they commonly defined as having input in decisions related to their jobs. However, the participants also commonly valued the dimensions like *resources* and *rewards* only they meant different things for them. That finding, in its turn, has the following implication: The dimensions of employee empowerment mentioned above were valued if they met the participants' own definitions.

Furthermore, this particular cluster of the dimensions that emerged from the data has the implication for the definition and value of employee empowerment itself: The participants appeared to value employee empowerment if it meant: having *input in decisions* affecting their immediate jobs, having *autonomy* to decide how to implement things on a day-to-day basis, having the *specialized knowledge* of specific things related to their core duties, being able to see the *impact* of their efforts on workplace forces, having access to what they considered as necessary *resources*, and being *rewarded* for their accomplishments with whatever they viewed as the rewards.

Race, Gender, and Empowerment

The majority of the non-academic professional employees who participated in this study appeared to value the concept of employee empowerment. They defined it differently and to a certain degree, individually but they agreed on the importance of empowerment. However, in terms of their interaction with the organizational hierarchy and power within it, the data analysis also revealed some disparities across gender and race. The female participants appeared to be much more unanimously critical towards the organizational practices that prevented them from more participation and collaboration than the male participants. The impact of those practices on the female non-academic professional staff members seemed profound, it appeared to be even more profound on the African American female staff member and therefore, they seemed to feel strongly about certain dimensions of employee empowerment.

Specifically, the data showed that Alex, the European American male participant, did not express much interest in most of the initial dimensions of employee empowerment. He seemed rather comfortable with hierarchical relations, with power being concentrated at the top, with decisions being “dictated,” and did not seek any impact on workplace forces other than his students being satisfied. On the other hand, Jim, the European American male participant, and Mike, the African American male staff member, looked forward to having input in decisions because they were the ones who had to implement decisions and because they knew more about students they worked with daily. However, both participants also seemed to acknowledge that ultimate decision-making power belong to administrators, directors, or supervisors. Mike commented: “So, we try our best to make group decisions, however, we all have an

understanding that the ultimate decision is the actual director and supervisor.” Jim also pointed out that: “Ultimately, they [administrators] don’t have to listen to us but I would like and it just makes common sense to be involved in some way in those decision-making processes.” Whereas Jim and Mike had a similar understanding of hierarchy, power dynamics within it, and wanted to contribute to that dynamic, in terms of impact on workplace forces, they had slightly different perspectives. For Jim, the administrators adopting policies without taking into consideration his workload “trivialized” his work and made him feel that he had no impact on his workplace. He found it frustrating and expected the administrators to take their time to explore what staff’s everyday routine looked like before making decisions. For Mike, too, having no impact within his office was “bothersome,” he said he had to learn how to be “OK,” and not to be too affected by that. But unlike Jim he also felt some responsibilities for himself. He explained that he was “big on development” and believed that with his professional and personal development he would be able to increase his “value” and thus, would have bigger impact.

On the other hand, the female participants of the study appeared to be unanimously more outspoken in their criticism. Kate, the European American female participant, criticized the institutional practice of including only one staff member on campus committees because she thought it did not let them voice their concerns effectively. Also, the office policy that prevented them from contacting upper-level administrators and faculty without asking for permission seemed “stifling” for her. Therefore, Kate looked forward to seeing more staff members on committees across campus and having more direct communication with those who had power to make

ultimate decisions because she felt by doing so she would make a difference. Seeing their request for the new staff member turned down by the administrators who simply did not share their perspectives was also “disheartening” for her: “All they see is a request and they say: Oh, I don’t feel like it’s necessary but they don’t see hurt emotion, the exhaustion, the stress that some of our team experience.”

Helen, the Indian American female staff member, too, seemed rather critical of decision-making process in her job. She pointed out that administrators either did not ask for their input until decisions were made or did find reasons not to take it into consideration. Thus, she recommended the administrators, directors, and supervisors to involve her and her colleagues in decision-making process early on but also to actually incorporate their perspectives in final decisions.

Ella’s criticism of the hierarchy and her reaction to power dynamics within the hierarchy were even stronger because their impact on her as an African American female seemed more adversely profound. Like Helen and Kate, she also emphasized the importance of bringing those individuals who were “in the trenches” to the table and involving them in decision-making. In terms of impact, however, her response to power dynamics moved beyond criticism and suggestions. She mentioned in her previous job she felt that she was not even listened to because she was the African American female. In response to having no impact on her workplace forces, she defied the rules in order to accomplish mission and save people she was responsible for. In her current position, she chose not to attach herself too much to the institution and not to get too involved beyond her job because of her previous experience and because of having seen how African American faculty or staff members felt. However, in term of her immediate job, in order

to help her students, she expected to be involved in decision-making and to have autonomy to defy the rulebook if needed to help them effectively, only without crossing any boundaries.

Discussion

The findings of this study highlight the complex and idiosyncratic nature of employee empowerment. Whether informed by the *structural perspective* or the *psychological perspective*, rather prescriptive nature of the prevalent conceptualizations of employee empowerment does not lend itself well to the subjects' understanding of the concept. The participants' responses demonstrated that defining employee empowerment for employees by others can easily overlook employees' perspectives, it can suggest to them what their needs are, and what they should perceive as empowering. Some scholars militate against the universal definition of employee empowerment and argue that it should be defined contextually and variably (Foster-Fishman et al., 1998; Petter et al., 2002). Honold (1997) believes that "in order for empowerment to be successful, each organization must create and define it for itself. Empowerment must address the needs and culture of each unique entity" (p. 1). Likewise, this research project is one of those studies that, based on its findings, argues that employee empowerment is the complex concept, its definition may vary across settings and even across people within the same setting, and therefore, it should be defined contextually. In addition, this study expands the knowledge base regarding employee empowerment in academic institutions and provides initial but rather useful insight into non-academic professional employees' views and expectations with regard to empowerment.

The concept of employee empowerment that emerged in this study consists of the following dimensions: (a) *involvement in decision-making* defined as having input in organizational decisions that affect non-academic professional staff's core duties;

b) *autonomy* defined as wide-ranging flexibility or freedom in several aspects that allows staff to do what needs to be done to perform job-related duties; (c) *impact* defined as students being satisfied with services provided by non-academic professionals and administrators taking staff's opinions and concerns into consideration prior to making decisions related to an institution and its operation; (d) *specialized knowledge* defined as having knowledge related to ones' primary job responsibilities; (e) *resources* defined variably: (1) as *tools* or having access to a handbook, a manual or database and (2) as *human capital* or having supervisors, administrators, and peers to seek support and assistance; and (f) *rewards* defined variably: (1) as *money* either in the form of raise or a bonus; (2) as *verbal recognition*, and (3) as *gifts*. In other words, the non-academic professional staff who participated in this research study defined employee empowerment as the six-dimensional concept and it meant: Having input in decisions, autonomy to decide how to perform daily tasks, having specialized knowledge necessary for their core job responsibilities, having impact on workplace forces, access to what they defined as vital resources, and being rewarded for their hard work with what they considered as rewards.

The idiosyncratic nature of this definition of employee empowerment lies in its contrast with other widely utilized definitions found in the academic literature. Kanter (1979), for instance, urged organizational leaders to share with their employees: (a) access to essential *resources* in an external environment, (b) task-related *information* or the one related to an overall situation within or without an organization, and (c) *support* that would free employees from a multilayered approval process and allow them to take innovative actions without going through it. Bowen and Lawler (1992, 1995), proposed

the four-dimensional definition of employee empowerment that includes: (a) *power* to make decisions, (b) *Information* about an organization's performance, (3) *knowledge* to understand and contribute to an organization's performance, and (4) *rewards* based on the effectiveness of employees' work and an organization's financial performance.

On other hand, Spreitzer (1995) defined employee empowerment as an intrinsic task motivation that consists of four cognitive states: (a) *Meaning*: a fit between job requirements and personal beliefs and values, (b) *Competence*: employees' belief regarding their ability to perform their work activities skillfully, (c) *Self-determination*: employees' sense of autonomy to regulate their actions, and (c) *Impact*: employees' belief that their behaviors have influence on administrative or operating outcomes at work. Clearly, the definition of employee empowerment that emerged in this study does not match neatly with any specific definition mentioned here but rather is a mix of various dimensions. This, in its turn, runs counter to the prescriptive nature of the above-mentioned four-dimensional models and more so, to the multiplicative effect of Bowen and Lawler's (1992, 995) four-dimensional construct or the additive quality of Spreitzer's (1995) conceptualization of employee empowerment.

Furthermore, the participants of this study defined each dimension of employee empowerment variably that in some cases varied even within this sample. Kanter (1979), for example, urged managers to share access to vital resources in the external environment with employees. The definition of the concept that Kanter developed was based on her experience working as a business consultant at a large chemical company that relied on resources in the external environment to continue operation. However, this study found that the non-academic professional staff relied on

resources not only in the external but also in the internal environment. Furthermore, the way they defined resources was far from uniform. For some participants, they meant *tools* like manuals, handbooks, or database, whereas for other participants resources equaled *human capital*. The latter itself could be the impact of the context within academic institutions: “Higher education is, after all, an enterprise of human beings, so it would be surprising to see any serious reduction in its dependence on that very important source to keep it functioning” (Liebmann, 1986, p. 14). Likewise, Bowen and Lawler (1992, 1995) defined *reward* as pay tied to service quality and an organization’s financial performance. However, the participants’ responses demonstrated that reward does not necessarily have to be monetary because some of them defined verbal recognition or small gifts as rewards. Even the dimensions that were defined similarly seemed to vary according to their importance for these non-academic professional staff members. For instance, while the majority of participants emphasized the importance of *involvement in decision-making* and *having impact on workplace forces*, the female participants appeared to feel more strongly about them compared to the male participants of the study. Moreover, the degree of frustration caused by having no impact on workplace forces and having her voice unheard seemed to be higher in case of the African American female participant implying that the value of these specific dimensions for her was higher too. Such variance, on the other hand, illuminates the complex nature of employee empowerment and how important it is to adapt the concept to local contexts within organizations and even to individual employees.

In addition, the data revealed that for these non-academic professional staff members employee empowerment is the participative concept. Pitts (2005) pointed out

that some scholars view empowerment more as participative management that allows employees to participate in decision-making and contribute to organizational success, while other scholars define empowerment more as a delegation of power from the upper to the lower echelons of organizational hierarchies. The concept of empowerment that emerged in this study illustrates that for the participants employee empowerment is more about participation, it is rather moderate in its scope, and it does not place too much pressure or too many new responsibilities on them. As mentioned above, delegating *decision-making power* or *authority* from managers or administrators to employees is considered as one of the key components of employee empowerment (Bowen & Lawler, 1995; Herrenkohl et al., 1999; Pitts, 2005; Quinn & Spreitzer, 1997). However, the participants of this study did not appear to look for any decision-making authority per se but rather opportunities to have input in and to contribute to decisions related to their primary jobs responsibilities.

Also, Kanter stressed that “in order to be empowering, organizations must make more information more available to more people at more levels through more devices” (as cited in Spreitzer, 1996, p. 488). Contrary to her argument, the non-academic professional staff members in this study did not express such interest. For them, more information was related to more responsibilities that could negatively affect the quality of their service and thus, it was viewed as problematic. Furthermore, some studies tout freedom to take initiatives and argue that empowered employees are the ones who take non-ordinary actions and can be entrepreneurs without asking for permission (Kanter, 1979; Foster-Fishman et al., 1998; Quinn & Spreitzer, 1997; Petter et al., 2002). However, this research project found something quite opposite: The participants remained rather

cautious about it. Instead of seeking opportunities for non-ordinary behaviors or entrepreneurship, some participants of this study did not want to move far beyond job autonomy that they had, while others focused more on structural barriers in their way. Thus, employee empowerment that these non-academic professional staff members value seems to be less ambitious in its scope and does not challenge employees to take many risks.

The discussion above, on the other hand, has another equally important implication: The participants of this study valued employee empowerment. It was defined variably, however, the majority of non-academic professional staff commonly reaffirmed the value of empowerment. Moreover, the concept of employee empowerment appeared to be more valuable for the female staff members and even more so for the African American female participant.

Some higher education scholars have been arguing that non-academic professional staff oftentimes feel as second-class citizens on campuses and that the current environment fails to help staff members feel that they also contribute to the overall success of their institutions. Therefore, scholars argue that the principles of employee empowerment should be applied to this very important group of employees as well (Lau, 2010; Liebmann, 1986; Pitman, 2000; Szekeres, 2011). Similarly, the participants of this study found it frustrating every time they saw that their concerns and opinions were not taken into consideration and their efforts had no impact on ultimate outcomes. These non-academic professional staff sought out opportunities to get involved in the decisions that they would have to implement and that they could contribute to with their experience. Furthermore, compared to the male participants, the female non-

academic professional staff members seemed more outspoken in their criticism and the African American female participant felt even more adversely affected by certain organizational practices. Some scholars have argued that women mostly have rather negative view about hierarchical relationships within organizations that reinforce dominance, subordination, and exclusion of certain groups and that they mostly prioritize the participative style and inclusion of diverse people in decision-making. Scholars also have underscored that oftentimes women have to deal with the stereotypical view about the inferiority of their competence and that this is particularly true about racial and ethnic minority females who are more marginalized because of their gender and race (Acker, 2006; Eagly & Carli, 2003; Henry & Glenn, 2009; Madden, 2005; Rosener, 1990). Likewise, the female participants of the study appeared to feel “stifled,” “stupid,” and “disrespected.” They looked forward to having opportunities to voice their opinions, to be involved in decision-making, and to see their input valued. Moreover, superiors’ disregard towards her opinions led the African American female staff member to defy the existing norms in her previous job in order to do what she thought was necessary to finish her tasks. In her current job, unlike other female participants of the study she chose not to engage with the administrators at the institutional level too actively because of having been discriminated against based on her identity. However, in terms of her immediate job responsibilities and within her office she sought active participation in decision-making and flexibility to move beyond the rulebook whenever it was needed to better assist her students. On the other hand, the participants felt “blessed,” “fortunate,” “trusted,” and “motivated” because of having freedom to regulate their own daily tasks, because of

having access to necessary resources, and felt “nice” to see their hard work and accomplishment recognized.

In the academic literature on the racialized nature of bureaucratic organizations the stereotypical judgment about the competence of racial and ethnic minorities is discussed often. Scholars emphasize that racial and ethnic minorities have to focus more on their professional development in order to gain confidence and credibility within the context of traditional bureaucracies that are usually biased against them (Acker, 2006; Thomas, 2001). Also, in their study on empowerment Peterson et al. (2002) pointed out that because of their historically disenfranchised status the greater understanding of power dynamics in the environment may cause decrease in self-efficacy and perceived competence among African Americans, whereas European Americans develop the higher level of self-efficacy with less understanding of the power structure. The data of this study provided another initial and yet, useful insight in that regard: Contrary to Peterson et al. (2002), Jim the European American staff member and Mike the African American male participant appeared to have a rather similar understanding of the hierarchical structure of the institution, how ultimate decision-making power was concentrated at the top, and they also shared similar desire to contribute to that power. However, whereas Jim openly held the administrators responsible for “trivializing” his work and for the lack of opportunities to have impact, Mike had to learn not to be too affected by that and felt some responsibilities for his personal and professional development to increase his “value” and thus, the chances for bigger impact. Although it could not affect differently their understanding of power dynamics and their desire for more contribution to that dynamics, the context within the institution or perhaps more broadly, within the society

appears to have impacted the African American male participant's sense of perceived competence and self-efficacy more.

Finally, the findings of this study also highlight the role of the institution's structural components and its organizational architecture. The following common theme could be identified in the data: Authorities like upper-level administrators and directors, institutional policies, practices, and procedures were credited for what the participants valued highly in terms of empowerment and the same components were the sources of frustration causing the staff members to feel stifled or disrespected. For example, the participants felt fortunate because of autonomy that allowed them freedom from micro-management and from standardized procedures to complete their tasks. Also, they felt grateful that the institutional leaders were willing to make an effort to provide them with access to the resources that the staff members needed. On the other hand, the office policy requiring permission to contact upper-level administrators and faculty felt stifling. In addition, these non-academic professional employees felt disheartened to see administrators leaving their opinions, concerns, or requests unattended. Therefore, these findings have another useful implication about the important role of the organizational architecture and practices in creating employee empowerment.

Limitations of the Study

The design of this study has two major limitations. First, Miles and Huberman (as cited in Ravitch & Riggan, 2012) emphasized the importance of developing initial categories, particularly, for novice researchers to focus and organize their studies. Although they should remain malleable and open to reinterpretation, such approach still forces the researcher to be selective and to prioritize certain variables, (Ravitch & Riggan, 2012). In the same vein, I selected the several broadly defined dimensions of employee empowerment in order to uncover non-academic professional staff's perspectives about the concept. However, although the dimensions served only as the initial categories and their definitions and value primarily emerged from the data at hand, such selection of variables could still impede the emergence of new ideas about what else the participants perceived as empowering beyond these selected dimensions.

Second, one of the markers of high-quality qualitative study is how congruent research findings are with reality that is participants' understanding of a phenomenon and how richly described these understandings are in the study (Merriam, 2009; Tracy, 2010). One of the strategies to get as close as possible to participants' perspectives and thus, achieve high quality is to collect a sufficient amount of data so that "descriptions and explanations are bountifully supplied, generous and unstinting" (Tracy, 2010, p. 841). Although it is difficult, particularly for novice researchers, to know in advance what amount of data will produce such bountiful descriptions, more time in the field, the bigger sample size, and more data would provide more in-depth insight into non-academic professional staff's views regarding employee empowerment. However, Tracy (2010) also pointed out that when data about a phenomenon is new or rare a

valuable contribution can be achieved even with a relatively little amount of data. Thus, given the ambiguity of employee empowerment and a dearth of qualitative research focusing on employees' perspectives across various fields including higher education, the current research study provides initial but useful insight into non-academic professional employees' perspectives about the concept of empowerment.

Direction for Future Research

The findings of the current study also provide some directions for future research. The pattern of employee empowerment that emerged from the data largely reflects the perspectives of the majority of participants. However, the data analysis also revealed that one of the participants Alex clearly stood apart from other non-academic professional staff members. He did not seek involvement in decision-making. Moreover, he thought that participation in *decision-making* slowed down processes and created "lost in translation" situations. Thus, he preferred administrators to make decisions, "to dictate" those decision, and distribute them among employees. When it came to *autonomy*, he pointed out that the one he had was "fine" but he would feel more comfortable if he had more clearly defined procedures, if he were given tasks to do, and had his work day defined. Alex did not seek out opportunities for initiatives because he considered himself as "the worker bee" and not "the queen bee," and in terms of *impact*, he did not need much beyond his students' satisfaction. However, he considered *knowledge* and *resources* as very important and valued *rewards* we well.

Alex's perspective goes back to the earlier studies that argue that not every employee necessarily wants to be empowered because they take comfort in old authority structures and know to survive there (Argyris, 1998). Petter et al. (2002), too, found a

group of employees in their study, referred to as *organizational bureaucrats*, who preferred following the rules and did not seek participation in decision-making. Thus, future studies on non-academic professional employees and more data could show if this is the case in higher education institutions as well and how common employees like Alex are.

In addition, the data of this study also highlighted some disparities due to race and gender that needs more empirical evidence. At the one end of continuum there was Alex, the European American male, who appeared to be rather comfortable with the hierarchy and power concentrated at the top of it and at the other end, there was Ella, the African American female, who sought active participation in decision-making and who could defy the rules in order to accomplish tasks if she felt that her voice was not heard. Along the continuum of employee empowerment, the female participants of this study appeared to be more critical of barriers that prevented participation in decision-making than the male participants. However, the female staff members' experiences and expectations differed further from each other due to race. Whereas Kate, the European American female, sought direct communication with upper-level administrators and faculty across campus because she felt she could make a difference, Ella remained focused on her office and on her students and avoided too much campus-wide involvement as the African American female among predominately White male administrators. Thus, future qualitative studies with a bigger and more diverse sample, with more data, and with more focus on these specific aspects could address how prevalent this pattern is, how perspectives and expectations about employee empowerment vary due to race, gender, or ethnicity and what the underlying reasons are for such differences.

Further research focusing on the above-mentioned areas would have, on the one hand, important theoretical implications for the concept of employee empowerment and on the other hand, practical implications for institutional leaders to be realistic about what to expect in response to empowerment initiatives or how important empowerment is for their campuses.

References

- Acker, J. (2006). Inequality regimes: Gender, class, and race in organizations. *Gender and Society, 20*(4), 441-464.
- Argyris, C. (1998). Empowerment: The emperor's new clothes. *Harvard Business Review, 76*(3), 98-105.
- Berger, R. (2015). Now I see it, now I don't: researcher's position and reflexivity in qualitative research. *Qualitative Research, 15*(2), 219-234.
- Bolman, L. G., & Deal, T. E. (2013). *Reframing organizations: Artistry, choice, and leadership*. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass Publishers
- Bowen, D. E., & Lawler, E. E. (1992). The empowerment of service workers: What, why, how, and when. *Sloan Management Review, 33*(3), 31-39.
- Bowen, D. E., & Lawler, E. E. (1995). Empowering service employees. *Sloan Management Review, 36*(4), 73-84.
- Boudrias, J. S., Morin, A. J. S., & Brodeur, M. M. (2012). Role of psychological empowerment in the reduction of burnout in Canadian healthcare workers. *Nursing and Health Sciences, 14*, 8-17.
- Charmaz, K. (2010). Grounded theory: Objectivist and constructivist methods. In W. Luttrell (Eds.), *Qualitative educational research: Readings in reflexive methodology and transformative practice* (pp. 183-207). New York, NY: Routledge.
- Conger, J. A., & Kanungo, R. N. (1988). The empowerment process: Integrating theory and practice. *Academy of Management Review, 13*(3), 471-482.

- Cox, T. H., Lobel, S. A., & McLeod, P. L. (1991). Effects of ethnic group cultural differences on cooperative and competitive behavior on a group task. *The Academy of Management Journal*, 34(4), 827-847.
- Crotty, M. (1998). *The foundations of social research. Meaning and perspective in the research process*. London: Sage Publications.
- Denzin, N. K., & Lincoln, Y. S. (2011). Introduction. In N. K. Denzin & Y. S. Lincoln (Eds.), *The SAGE handbook of qualitative research* (pp. 1-19). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications.
- Eagly, A. H., & Carli, L. L. (2003). The female leadership advantage: An evaluation of the evidence. *The Leadership Quarterly*, 14, 807-834. Thousand Oaks, CA:
- Emerson, R. M., Fretz, R. I., & Shaw, L. L. (2011). *Writing ethnographic fieldnotes*. Chicago, IL: Chicago University Press.
- Fernandez, S., & Moldogaziev, T. (2011). Empowering public sector employees to improve performance: Does it work? *The American Review of Public Administration*, 41(1), 23-47
- Fernandez, S., & Moldogaziev, T. (2013). Employee empowerment, employee attitudes, and performance: Testing a causal model. *Public Administration Review*, 73(3), 490-506.
- Fish, S. E. (1976). Interpreting the variorum. In V. B. Leitch, W. E. Cain, L. A. Finke, B. A. Johnson, J. McGowan, T. D. Sharpley-Whiting, & J. J. Williams (Eds.), *The Norton anthology of theory and criticism* (pp. 1974-1992). New York, NY: W.W. Norton & Company.

- Fish, S. E. (1980). *Is there a text in this class? The authority of interpretive communities*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.
- Foster-Fishman, P. G., & Keys, C. B. (1997). The person/environment dynamics of employee empowerment: An organizational culture analysis. *American Journal of Community Psychology, 25*(3), 345-369.
- Foster-Fishman, P. G., Salem, D. A., Chibnall, S., Legler, R., & Yapchai, C. (1998). Empirical support for the critical assumptions of empowerment theory. *American Journal of Community Psychology, 26*(4), 507-536
- Francescato, D., & Aber, M. S. (2015). Learning from organizational theory to build organizational empowerment. *Journal of Community Psychology, 43*(6), 717-738.
- Gergen, K. J. (1985). The social constructionist movement in modern psychology. *American Psychologist, 40*(3), 266-275.
- Hammond, T. H. (2004). Herding cats in university hierarchies: Formal structure and policy choice in American research universities. In R. G. Ehrenberg (Eds.), *Governing academia. Who is in charge at the modern university?* (pp. 91-138). Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press.
- Hayes, B., Douglas, C., & Bonner, A. (2014). Predicting emotional exhaustion among haemodialysis nurses: a structural equation model using Kanter's structural empowerment theory. *Journal of Advanced Nursing, 70*(12), 2897-2909.
- Henry, W. J., & Glenn, N. M. (2009). Black women employed in the ivory tower: Connecting for success. *Advancing Women in Leadership, 29*(1), 2-18.
- Herrenkohl, R. C., Judson, G. T., & Heffner, J. A. (1999). Defining and measuring empowerment. *The Journal of Applied Behavioral Science, 35*(3), 373-389.

- Hesse-Biber, S. N. (2007). *Handbook of feminist research: Theory and praxis*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications.
- Honold, L. (1997). A review of the literature on employee empowerment. *Empowerment in Organizations*, 5(4), 202-212.
- Jo, V. H. (2008). Voluntary turnover and women administrators in higher education. *Higher Education*, 56, 565-582.
- Jose, G., & Mampilly, S. R. (2014). Psychological empowerment as a predictor of employee engagement. An empirical attestation. *Global Business Review*, 15(1), 93-104.
- Kanter, R. M. (1979). Power failure in management circuits. *Harvard Business Review*, 57(4), 65-75.
- Keeling, R. P., Underhile, R., & Wall, A. F. (2007). Horizontal and vertical structures: The dynamics of organization in higher education. *Liberal Education*, 93(4), 22-31.
- Kezar, A. (2012). Bottom-up/top-down leadership: Contradiction or hidden phenomenon. *The Journal of Higher Education*, 83(5), 725-758.
- Kezar, A. J., Carducci, R., & Contreras-McGavin, M. (2006). *Rethinking "L" word in higher education: The revolution of research on leadership*. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass

- Knapp, L.G., Kelly-Reid, J. E., & Ginder, S. A. (2012). *Employees in postsecondary institutions, Fall 2011 and student financial aid, academic year 2010-11: First look (Provisional data)* (NCEC 2012-156rev). U. S. Department of Education. Washington, DC: National Center Center for Education Statistics. Retrieved from <http://nces.ed.gov/pubs2012/2012156rev.pdf>
- Lambert, P. A. (2006). Faculty perceptions of empowerment, job satisfaction, and commitment to organization in three mid-west universities (Doctoral dissertation). Retrieved from <http://search.proquest.com.proxy.mul.missouri.edu/pqdtglobal/docview/30531699/1/previewPDF/E6A7027307644019PQ/1?accountid=14576v>
- Laschinger, H. K., Finegan, J. E., Shamian, J., & Wilk, P. (2004). A longitudinal analysis of the impact of workplace empowerment on work satisfaction. *Journal of Organizational Behavior*, 25(4), 527-545.
- Lau, W. K. J. (2010). *Empowerment of non-academic personnel in higher education: Exploring associations with perceived organizational support for innovation and organizational trust* (Doctoral dissertation). Retrieved from <http://ir.uiowa.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=2028&context=etd>
- Liebmann, J. D. (1986, June). *Non-academic employees in higher education: A historical overview*. Paper presented at the Twenty-Sixth Annual Forum of the Association for Institutional Research, Orlando, FL. Retrieved from <http://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/ED280397.pdf>
- Lincoln, Y. S., & Guba, E. G. (1985). *Naturalistic Inquiry*. Newbury Park, CA: Sage Publications.

- Lincoln, Y. S., Lynham, S. A., & Guba, E. G. (2011). Paradigmatic controversies, contradictions, and emerging confluences, revisited. In N. K. Denzin & Y. S. Lincoln (Eds.), *The SAGE handbook of qualitative research* (pp. 97-128). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications.
- Lohmann, S. (2004). Darwinian medicine for the university. In R. G. Ehrenberg (Eds.), *Governing academia. Who is in charge at the modern university?* (pp. 71-90). Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press.
- Luttrell, W. (2010). Introduction. In W. Luttrell (Eds.), *Qualitative educational research: Readings in reflexive methodology and transformative practice* (pp. 1-17). New York, NY: Routledge
- Madden, M. E. (2005). 2004 division 35 presidential address: Gender and leadership in higher education. *Psychology of Women Quarterly*, 29, 3-14.
- Manon, S. T. (2001). Employee empowerment: An integrative psychological approach. *Applied Psychology: An international Review*, 50(1), 153-180.
- Maynard, M. T., Gilson, L. L., & Mathieu, J. E. (2012). Empowerment – fad or fab? A multilevel review of the past two decades of research. *Journal of Management*, 38(4), 1231-1281
- Merriam, S. B. (2009). *Qualitative research. A guide to design and implementation*. San-Francisco: CA: Jossey-Bass.
- Miles, M. B., & Huberman, A. M. (1994). *Qualitative data analysis: An expanded sourcebook*. Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE Publications.

- Muldoon, J. (2012). The Hawthorne legacy: A reassessment of the impact of the Hawthorne studies on management scholarship, 1930-1958. *Journal of Management History, 18*(1), 105-119.
- Nkomo, S. M. (1992). The emperor has no clothes: Rewriting "race in organizations." *The Academy of Management Review, 17*(3), 487-513.
- Onyx, J. (1999). Power between women in organizations. *Feminism & Psychology, 9*(4), 417-421.
- Peterson, N. A., Hamme, Ch. L., & Speer, P. W. (2002). Cognitive empowerment of African Americans and Caucasians: Differences in understanding of power, political functioning, and shaping ideology. *Journal of Black Studies, 32*(3), 336-351.
- Peters, B. G., & Pierre, J. (2000). Citizens versus the new public manager. The problem of mutual empowerment. *Administration & Society, 32*(1), 9-28.
- Petter, J., Byrnes, P., Choi, D.-L., Fegan, F., & Miller, R. (2002). Dimensions and patterns in employee empowerment: Assessing what matters to street-level bureaucrats. *Journal of Public Administration Research and Theory, 12*(3), 377-400.
- Pitman, T. (2000). Perceptions of academics and students as customers: A survey of administrative staff in higher education. *Journal of Higher Education Policy and Management, 22*(2), 165-175.
- Pitts, D. W. (2005). Leadership, empowerment, and public organizations. *Review of Public Personnel Administration, 25*(1), 5-28.

- Quinn, N. (2010). The cultural analysis of discourse. In W. Luttrell (Eds.), *Qualitative educational research: Reading in reflexive methodology and transformative practice* (pp. 237-257). New York, NY: Routledge.
- Quinn, R. E., & Spreitzer, G. M. (1997). The road to empowerment: Seven questions every leader should consider. *Organizational Dynamics*, 26(2), 37-49.
- Ravitch, S. M., & Riggan, M. (2012). *Reason & Rigor. How conceptual frameworks guide research*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications.
- Riger, S. (1993). What's wrong with empowerment. *American Journal of Community Psychology*, 21(3), 279-292.
- Rojas, F. (2012). Social movements and the university. In M. N. Bastedo (Eds.), *The organization of higher education: Managing colleges for a new era* (pp. 256-277). Baltimore, MD: The John Hopkins University Press.
- Rosener, J. B. (1990). Ways women lead. *Harvard Business Review*, 68(6), 119-125.
- Rosser, V. J. (2000). Midlevel administrators: What we know. *New Directions for Higher Education*, 111, 5-13.
- Seidman, I. (2006). *Interviewing as qualitative research. A guide for researchers in education and social sciences*. New York, NY: Teachers College Press.
- Smith, D. G. (2012). Diversity: A bridge to the future? In M. N. Bastedo (Eds.), *The organization of higher education: Managing colleges for a new era* (pp. 225-255). Baltimore, MD: The John Hopkins University Press.
- Spreitzer, G. M. (1995). Psychological empowerment in the workplace: Dimensions, measurement, and validation. *The Academy of Management Journal*, 38(5), 1442-1465.

Spreitzer, G. M. (1996). Social structural characteristics of psychological empowerment.

The Academy of Management Journal, 39(2), 483-504.

Szekeres, J. (2011). Professional staff carve out a new space. *Journal of Higher*

Education Policy and Management, 33(6), 679-691.

Thomas, D. A. (2001). The truth about mentoring minorities: Race matters.

Harvard Business Review, 79(4), 99-107.

Thomas, K. W., & Velthouse, B. A. (1990). Cognitive elements of empowerment:

An “interpretive” model of intrinsic task motivation. *The Academy of*

Management Review 15(4), 666-681.

Tracy, S. J. (2010). Qualitative quality: Eight “big-tent” criteria for excellent qualitative

research. *Qualitative Inquiry*, 16(10), 837-851.

Tsai, M. C-H. (2012). An empirical study of the conceptualization of overall

organizational justice and its relationship with psychological empowerment,

organizational commitment and turnover intention in higher education (Doctoral

dissertation). Retrieved from

https://digital.lib.washington.edu/researchworks/bitstream/handle/1773/20840/Tsai_washington_0250E_10683.pdf?sequence=1

Wertz, F. J., Charmaz, K., McMullen, L. M., Josselson, R., Anderson, R., &

McSpadden, E. (2011). *Five ways of doing qualitative analysis:*

Phenomenological psychology, grounded theory, discourse analysis, narrative

research, and intuitive inquiry. New York, NY: Guilford.

Wise, L. R. (2002). Public management reform: Competing drivers of change. *Public*

Administration Review, 62(5), 555-567.

Wood, M., & Kia, P. (2000). International student affairs. *New Directions for Higher Education, 111*, 55-64.

Zhong, C. -B., & House, J. (2012). Hawthorne revisited: Organizational implications of the physical work environment. *Research in Organizational Behavior, 32*, 3-22.

Appendix A

Recruitment Email to a potential participant

From: scpp5@mail.missouri.edu

Subject: Seeking participants for a research study

Dear [Mr./Ms. Name],

I am Salome Chitorelidze a graduate student at the University of Missouri and I am looking for participants for a research study. I received permission to contact you along with your contact information from David Currey, Director of International Scholars and Student Services, and his team members.

This research study is about employee empowerment in academia. Nowadays progressive organizations including higher education institutions are increasingly expected to empower their employees. However, there is still no settled idea about what employee empowerment actually means. Also, higher education research on empowerment focuses more on administrators and faculty but research on non-academic professional employees is still sparse. Thus, the purpose of this research study is to explore non-academic professional staff's perspectives on employee empowerment.

Specifically, the study is interested in non-academic professionals with no senior leadership positions. Also, in order to ensure that the findings reflect a wide range of perspectives and experiences the study is interested in participants with diverse backgrounds. Participants will be asked to be interviewed once and it will take 60 minutes to complete.

If you have any questions or need additional information about the study, I will be happy to answer your questions. Your participation would be greatly appreciated. However, it is strictly voluntary. If you are interested in this research opportunity, please, email Salome Chitorelidze scpp5@mail.missouri.edu. You do not have to respond if you are not interested in this study. If you do not respond but still receive an additional email you may simply disregard it.

Thank you for your time and consideration,

Sincerely,

Salome

Appendix B

Informed Consent Letter

Please, read this consent document carefully. It is important that you read and understand the purpose of this research study as well as its implications before you decide to participate.

What is the purpose of the study? The purpose of the study is to explore non-academic professional employees' views on employee empowerment. Employee empowerment has become an important part of the contemporary management practices in various sectors including higher education. However, there is still no consensus on what employee empowerment actually means and how it should be defined. Given that non-academic professional employees play an important role in the operation of higher education institutions, this study is interested in your perspectives on employee empowerment.

What will be asked of participants? Eight non-academic professional employees with no senior leadership positions will be selected for this study. Each selected participant will be interviewed once about his or her perspective on employee empowerment. Semi-structured person-to-person interviews will take 60 minutes to complete and will be conducted at mutually agreed upon places.

Are there any risks? Although there are no foreseeable risks in this study, you may find some questions difficult, uncomfortable, or intrusive to answer. You can decide not to answer any questions that you feel uncomfortable about providing an answer.

What are some benefits? There are no direct and immediate benefits for participating in this research. However, the results will have practical application that may eventually have benefits for non-academic professional employees, their work environment, for academic institutions, and the way they operate as organizations.

Is the study confidential? The data collected for this study will be confidential. Your interviews will be tape recorded and later transcribed. Access to records will be strictly limited. Any direct or indirect identifiers linking you to this research will be removed from the data. Your name will not appear in any research report nor will the names of your institution and your unit. When the study is completed, the list of participants and recruitment material will be deleted. All data collected for this study will be stored safely in a computer protected by a password.

Is participation voluntary? Your participation is strictly voluntary. Your decision not to participate in the study or to discontinue participation at any time will not prejudice or effect your relations with the institution and will involve no penalty or loss of benefits to which you are otherwise entitled.

Whom to contact for answers to your questions? If you have any questions about the study, please, feel free to contact me. I can be reached at (573)-639-0153 or scpp5@mail.missouri.edu

If you have questions regarding the rights and safety of research participants, please, contact the MU Institutional Review Board (IRB), 190 Galena Hall, DC074, University of Missouri, Columbia, MO, 65212, (573)-882-3181, irb@missouri.edu.

Appendix C

Interview Protocol

- (1) How would you define power when it comes to your job?
 - a) Some people would say that employees prefer following a rulebook telling them what to do and they do not want power beyond it. How would you respond to them?
- (2) Suppose an administration asks for recommendations about how to improve participation in decision-making. What would be your recommendation(s)?
- (3) How much job autonomy would you like to have, if at all?
- (4) What is your opinion about employees like you taking the initiatives?
- (5) What it is like for you when you see that your efforts have no influence on strategic or operating outcomes at work?
- (6) Tell me about a time, if you had the one, when you felt that your knowledge was not enough to deal with certain job responsibilities.
- (7) What is your opinion about the resources you have access to currently to perform effectively?
- (8) Some people argue that employees do not want information more than they need for their specific jobs. What would be your response to them?
- (9) How employees' accomplishments should be rewarded, if at all?