Workplace Empowerment as a Determinant of Productivity Among Administrative Personnel at the University of Pamplona

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Abstract

This article aims to analyze workplace empowerment as a factor associated with the productivity of administrative staff at the University of Pamplona. The study derives from a master's research project developed under a quantitative approach, with a descriptive scope, cross-sectional design, and exploratory character. Data were collected through a structured 12-item survey administered to 50 employees linked to administrative positions, complemented by documentary review. The analytical categories were empowerment, leadership, motivation, work climate, and proactivity. The results show favorable conditions regarding decisión-making autonomy, access to resources, leadership support, workplace climate, and inclusión within work teams. However, improvement opportunities were also identified, mainly related to the consolidation of recognition programs, continuous participation in leadership spaces, and the reduction of neutral or low perceptions of empowerment. It is concluded that workplace empowerment is a relevant strategy for strengthening administrative productivity, provided that it is managed as a sustained institutional practice rather than as an isolated action. Its contribution is reflected in autonomy, motivation, shared responsibility, initiative, and staff alignment with institutional goals

Keywords: workplace empowerment; administrative productivity; human talent; leadership; workplace climate; proactivity.

INTRODUCTION

Workplace empowerment has established itself as a central category for understanding how organizations strengthen the capabilities of their human talent and foster conditions for more autonomous, responsible, and achievement-oriented performance. From an organizational perspective, empowering employees extends beyond the mere delegation of tasks; it entails transferring

trust, information, resources, participatory opportunities, and decision-making authority to those managing key processes. Through this lens, empowerment is closely tied to employees' perceptions of competence, meaning, self-determination, and impact in the execution of their duties [4]. It is likewise associated with enabling individuals to act with initiative, grasp the significance of their responsibilities, and actively engage in the enhancement of institutional processes [1].

In higher education institutions, productivity cannot be reduced to a mechanical measurement of task volume. University management coordinates academic, administrative, financial, documentary, technological, and community service processes; thus, administrative staff performance directly influences service quality, operational continuity, and institutional capacity to respond to internal and external demands. Within this context, administrative productivity must be understood as an interplay between efficiency, effectiveness, timeliness, service quality, and commitment to the institutional mission. Hence, examining empowerment allows for an understanding not only of total output, but also of the human and organizational conditions under which work is performed.

The University of Pamplona, as a public higher education institution located in Norte de Santander, carries out educational, research, outreach, and administrative management functions that require a robust operational structure capable of sustaining daily operations and supporting the attainment of its institutional goals. The dynamic nature of the university environment demands staff with functional clarity, resource mastery, service orientation, learning capacity, and a readiness to adapt to changing circumstances. When administrative personnel perceive that they possess autonomy, leadership support, recognition, a positive work climate, and opportunities to propose improvements, the likelihood of delivering timely responses and contributing to institutional advancement increases. Conversely, when these conditions deteriorate, motivation may decline, giving rise to over-reliance on hierarchical structures, low participation, and a diminished sense of belonging.

Organizational literature highlights that empowerment operates on two complementary levels. The first is structural, concerning access to information, resources, support, and opportunities; the second is psychological, linked to the subjective perception of competence, autonomy, meaning, and impact [3] [4]. This dual dimension is particularly relevant to analyzing administrative work in higher education, as an employee may have designated duties without necessarily feeling empowered to make decisions or introduce improvements. Similarly, an individual may display personal initiative yet find themselves constrained by overly centralized processes, inadequate communication, or a lack of resources.

The central problem guiding this article is synthesized in the following question: how workplace empowerment becomes a factor of productivity among the administrative staff at the University of Pamplona. This question is of paramount importance as it allows for a shift from an exclusively operational interpretation of productivity toward a comprehensive reading of the working conditions that make it possible. In other words, the study does not intend to establish strict statistical causality, but rather to analyze a descriptive association between empowerment categories and factors linked to perceived administrative performance.

The rationale for this study rests upon three key dimensions. First, a theoretical dimension, as it contributes to the discourse on workplace empowerment in

university contexts, where human talent management does not always receive the same level of analysis as academic processes. Second, an institutional dimension, as the findings provide actionable insights to strengthen policies regarding well-being, leadership, communication, recognition, and capacity building. Third, a social dimension, given that an empowered administrative staff can enhance the quality of service provided to students, faculty, alumni, and external users, thereby indirectly impacting the educational experience.

El objetivo del artículo es analizar el empoderamiento laboral como factor asociado a la productividad del personal administrativo de la Universidad de Pamplona. Para ello, se abordan los fundamentos conceptuales del empoderamiento, la productividad administrativa, el liderazgo, la motivación, el clima laboral y la proactividad; posteriormente, se describe el método utilizado y se presentan los principales resultados de la encuesta aplicada. La estructura del texto responde al formato de artículo académico: resumen, introducción, marco teórico, metodología, resultados y discusión, conclusiones y referencias.

Theoretical Framework

Workplace empowerment can be defined as a process through which organizational members acquire greater capacity to make decisions, assume responsibilities, and actively engage in the achievement of institutional goals. From the perspective of Conger and Kanungo, empowerment is understood as a motivational process aimed at enhancing self-efficacy, reducing feelings of helplessness, and fostering more proactive work behaviors [1]. Thomas and Velthouse complement this view by noting that empowerment encompasses cognitive components related to task meaning, perceived competence, self-determination, and impact [2]. Together, these theoretical approaches demonstrate that empowerment is not confined to an administrative decision; rather, it involves perceptions, structural conditions, and management practices.

Spreitzer operationalized psychological empowerment through four dimensions: meaning, competence, self-determination, and impact [4]. Meaning refers to the extent to which employees perceive their duties as valuable; competence reflects confidence in their ability to perform their work; self-determination pertains to autonomy in deciding how tasks are executed; and impact indicates the perceived influence over outcomes within one's department or the broader organization. Within a university setting, these dimensions manifest when administrative staff grasp the importance of their role, master their operational procedures, participate in problem-solving, and observe how their work contributes to overall institutional functioning.

Structural empowerment, for its part, is linked to the objective conditions that enable action. Kanter posits that access to information, support, resources, and opportunities constitutes a decisive factor for individuals to exercise productive power within the organization [3]. In the case of administrative staff, these elements are manifested through the availability of technological tools, regulatory clarity, supervisory guidance, training, communication channels, and recognition. The absence of these conditions constrains genuine autonomy and can lead to over-reliance on hierarchical decision-making.

The relationship between empowerment and productivity has been widely discussed in organizational behavior literature. A meta-analytic review

demonstrates that both psychological empowerment and team empowerment are positively associated with job satisfaction, organizational commitment, performance, and organizational citizenship behaviors [5]. This indicates that empowerment not only fosters favorable perceptions but can also translate into observable behaviors such as initiative, collaboration, problem-solving, and a willingness to assume responsibility. In university administration, these behaviors are particularly critical because numerous processes rely on cross-departmental coordination and staff responsiveness.

Motivation constitutes another essential category. According to self-determination theory, individuals tend to demonstrate greater commitment when their basic psychological needs for autonomy, competence, and relatedness are satisfied [6]. These needs connect directly to empowerment: autonomy strengthens decision-making capacity; competence reinforces confidence to act; and relatedness fosters a sense of belonging within work teams. Consequently, productivity strategies should not focus exclusively on control and oversight, but also on fostering conditions that unleash staff intrinsic motivation.

Leadership acts as a mediator between institutional policies and the daily workplace experience of employees. Leaders can foster empowerment by communicating clearly, delegating responsibly, providing feedback, recognizing achievements, and promoting participation in decision-making. Conversely, overly centralized leadership can restrict initiative, foster dependency, and diminish the sense of belonging. Organizational behavior literature emphasizes that leadership significantly influences workplace climate, motivation, and performance readiness [7]. Therefore, empowerment requires leadership capable of balancing institutional control with operational trust.

Organizational climate is likewise fundamentally linked to administrative productivity. A work climate characterized by respect, inclusion, transparent communication, and collaboration facilitates coordination across staff and departments. Conversely, environments marked by distrust, exclusion, or poor communication can impede operational processes, even when technical capabilities are fully adequate. Organizational climate is not an ancillary element; rather, it represents a foundational condition that directly impacts the quality of working relationships and employees' willingness to contribute beyond the minimum fulfillment of their prescribed duties [13].

Finally, proactivity represents a visible expression of empowerment. A proactive employee identifies problems, proposes alternatives, anticipates needs, and participates in continuous improvement processes. Contemporary human talent management recognizes that organizations require individuals who are capable of adapting, learning, and driving innovation within their respective areas [8]. In public institutions, where procedures are typically governed by strict regulations and hierarchies, proactivity must be understood as an institutionally aligned capability: it does not imply acting outside established rules, but rather utilizing autonomy and expertise to enhance operational processes within the existing regulatory framework.

Methodology

The study was conducted using a quantitative approach, featuring a descriptive

scope, a cross-sectional design, and an exploratory nature. It is considered descriptive because it aimed to characterize the perceptions of administrative staff regarding workplace empowerment and its relationship with productivity. It is cross-sectional as data were collected at a single, specific point in time during the study period, providing a contextualized snapshot of perceived working conditions. The exploratory nature is justified by the analysis of the phenomenon within a specific institutional context, with the purpose of identifying trends, strengths, and areas for improvement that can inform future research or organizational interventions [9].

The reference population comprised the administrative staff at the main campus of the University of Pamplona. The study sample consisted of 50 administrative personnel, selected to capture a diverse range of perceptions concerning autonomy, leadership, recognition, organizational climate, and proactivity. Although the sample size does not allow for absolute generalizations across all university staff, it provides a highly relevant descriptive approximation for understanding the workplace dynamics linked to empowerment and productivity.
The primary data collection technique was a structured survey. The instrument comprised 12 closed-ended items, categorized across five analytical dimensions: empowerment, leadership, motivation, organizational climate, and proactivity. The items evaluated perceptions of workplace empowerment, decision-making autonomy, resource availability, leadership impact, supervisory support, recognition, participation in incentive programs, departmental climate, team inclusion, organizational culture, opportunities to lead process improvements, and the impact of proactivity on professional development. The measurement scale combined Likert-type options and categorical response choices, facilitating percentage-based data processing.

The data analysis procedure was descriptive. Responses were organized into percentage frequencies and interpreted in light of the study's theoretical categories. This analytical approach makes it possible to identify perceptual patterns and establish interpretative relationships between empowerment and perceived administrative productivity. Additionally, a document review was conducted to contextualize the phenomenon and triangulate the empirical results with theoretical literature on human talent management, organizational behavior, and productivity.

Regarding ethical considerations, participation was entirely voluntary, and all collected data were treated with strict confidentiality. Results are presented in an aggregated format, ensuring that individual participants, specific job titles, or departments remain unidentifiable. The study strictly adhered to the principle of academic use of information, ensuring that participant responses were employed exclusively for research purposes.

Results and Discussion

The results reveal a generally favorable trend toward workplace empowerment, albeit one not devoid of areas for improvement. Regarding the overall perception of empowerment, 40% of participants offered a neutral rating, whereas 20% rated their empowerment as high and another 20% as very high. Conversely, 10%

perceived it as low and another 10% as very low. This finding is particularly salient because it demonstrates that while a significant proportion of responses are positive, the neutral category represents the largest single concentration. Interpretatively, this suggests that empowerment is not yet fully consolidated across all participants, but rather manifests as a partially developed condition.

Decision-making autonomy regarding daily work tasks emerges as a key strength. Seventy percent (70%) of respondents reported having autonomy, 20% indicated that they possess it 'sometimes,' and 10% responded negatively. These data allow for the inference that the majority of staff perceive a degree of decision-making latitude in their duties, an aspect aligned with the self-determination dimension of psychological empowerment [4]. Nevertheless, the proportion responding 'sometimes' or 'no' suggests that autonomy may be contingent upon the specific department, the immediate supervisor, the nature of the role, or procedural clarity.

Access to resources and workplace tools was likewise evaluated favorably. Thirty percent (30%) of respondents rated it as excellent and 50% as good, whereas 10% considered it fair and another 10% poor. From a structural empowerment perspective, this finding is significant, as autonomy yields no tangible effects unless accompanied by adequate resources [3]. In this case, the combined 80% of favorable ratings (excellent and good) indicates a solid institutional foundation, although the remaining 20% cautions that unequal conditions or specific areas requiring upgrades in equipment, tools, or support still persist.

In the leadership category, 60% of participants considered that the leadership of their immediate supervisor positively affects administrative staff empowerment; 20% maintained a neutral position, 10% perceived it negatively, and 10% were uncertain. This result confirms that leadership is a decisive variable in translating empowerment into daily operational practices. Furthermore, regarding support and guidance for skill development, 20% responded 'always,' 40% 'frequently,' 20% 'occasionally,' 10% 'rarely,' and 10% 'never.' Although 60% receive support on a constant or frequent basis, the remaining 40% do not experience it with the same regularity, representing a clear area for institutional strengthening.

Motivation was analyzed through the lenses of recognition and participation in incentive programs. Twenty percent (20%) of respondents rated recognition as very satisfying, 40% as satisfying, 30% as neutral, and 10% as unsatisfying. While the absence of 'very unsatisfying' responses is encouraging, the 30% neutral rate suggests that recognition may be perceived as insufficiently systematic or lacking visibility. Regarding participation in recognition or incentive programs, 60% confirmed their involvement, whereas 40% indicated non-participation. This data point is critical for human talent management, as motivation relies on transparent, inclusive, and sustained mechanisms that effectively connect performance, professional development, and organizational belonging [6] [8].

Regarding organizational climate, the results are overwhelmingly favorable. Sixty percent (60%) of respondents rated the climate in their department as

satisfying and 20% as excellent; only 10% considered it unsatisfying, with another 10% remaining neutral. Complementarily, 80% reported feeling included and valued within their work team, whereas 10% responded negatively and a further 10% indicated that they felt this way only 'sometimes.' These findings demonstrate that the work environment constitutes a significant strength for empowerment, as inclusion and feeling valued foster cooperation, communication, and a willingness to accept shared responsibilities [13].

Proactivity stands out as one of the strongest dimensions of the study. Seventy percent (70%) of respondents considered that the organizational culture encourages proactivity and initiative-taking; 10% responded negatively, and 20% were uncertain. Additionally, 28% affirmed that they are 'always' provided with opportunities to propose and lead projects or improvements in their functions, 48% stated 'frequently,' 10% 'occasionally,' 10% 'rarely,' and 4% 'never.' Overall, 76% perceive constant or frequent opportunities to lead process improvements, revealing substantial institutional potential to catalyze administrative innovation and continuous improvement.

The most compelling finding is observed in the item evaluating the impact of proactivity on recognition and career advancement opportunities: 90% of participants considered that it has a positive impact, while 10% remained neutral. Notably, no participants reported a negative impact or uncertainty. This result supports the claim that, from the perspective of respondents, proactivity is recognized as a valuable workplace behavior explicitly associated with professional growth opportunities. Theoretically, this finding converges with the premise that empowerment manifests through active behaviors, individual initiative, and the capacity to influence organizational outcomes [5].

The findings make it possible to identify four core analytical axes for discussion. First, administrative empowerment exists as a perceived condition but requires further consolidation. The prevalence of neutral responses indicates that empowerment is not experienced with equal intensity across all staff members. Second, leadership serves a crucial articulating function: when immediate supervisors provide support, guidance, and recognition, employee confidence to make decisions and propose initiatives is strengthened. Third, organizational climate and inclusion act as foundational conditions for productivity, as a favorable work environment facilitates collaboration and reduces interpersonal barriers. Fourth, proactivity emerges as a key driver of administrative productivity, in so far as it is linked with initiative, recognition, professional development, and continuous improvement.

From a master's level perspective, the core contribution does not lie in claiming that empowerment automatically yields higher productivity, but rather in demonstrating that the analyzed categories constitute a system of enabling conditions for performance. Autonomies granted without resources can devolve into operational overload; leadership exercised without participation can turn into control; recognition distributed without equity can foster perceptions of exclusion; and proactivity nurtured without genuine opportunities can transform into frustration. Consequently, empowerment must be managed comprehensively

by articulating institutional policies, leadership practices, workplace conditions, and personal development mechanisms.

In synthesis, the findings highlight significant strengths in autonomy, resource availability, supervisory leadership, organizational climate, inclusion, and proactivity. Simultaneously, they point to clear opportunities for improvement in reducing neutral perceptions, broadening recognition programs, and ensuring equitable opportunities to propose and lead process enhancements. For the University of Pamplona, these results serve as valuable inputs for designing human talent management strategies aimed at enhancing administrative productivity thrsough a human-centered, participative, and sustainable approach.

Table 1. Descriptive Summary of Survey Results

Category	Evaluated Aspect	Main Result
Empowerment	Overall perception of the administrative role	40 % neutral; 20 % high; 20 % very high; 10 % low; 10 % very low.
Empowerment	Decision-making autonomy	70 % yes; 20 % sometimes; 10 % no.
Empowerment	Access to resources and workplace tools	30 % excellent; 50 % good; 10 % moderate; 10 % bad; 0 % very bad.
leadership	Influence of the immediate supervisor	60 % positive; 20 % neutral; 10 % negative; 10 % not sure..
leadership	Support for skill development	20 % always; 40 % often; 20 % occasionally; 10 % rarely; 10 % never.
leadership	Performance recognition	20 % very satisfied; 40 % satisfied; 30 % neutral; 10 % dissatisfied ; 0 % very dissatisfied.
Work Motivation	Recognition or incentive programs	60 % participates; 40 % does not participates; 0 % is not sure.
Organizational climate	Rating of departmental work climate	60 % satisfying; 20 % excellent; 10 % moderate; 10 % unsatisfying; 0 % deficient.
Organizational climate	Inclusion and feeling valued within the team	80 % yes; 10 % no; 10 % sometimes.
Proactive workplace behavior	Culture encouraging proactive initiatives	70 % yes; 10 % no; 20 % is not sure..
Proactive workplace behavior	Opportunities to propose and lead improvements	28 % always; 48 % frequently; 10 % occasionally; 10 % rarely; 4 % never.
Proactive workplace behavior	Impact of proactivity on recognition and career	90 % positive; 10 % moderate; 0 % negative; 0 % is not sure..

	advancement	

Source: Prepared by the author(s) based on the survey results administered to administrative staff.

Conclusions

Workplace empowerment functions as a key factor associated with administrative staff productivity at the University of Pamplona, insofar as it strengthens autonomy, motivation, leadership, organizational climate, and proactivity. The results demonstrate that administrative productivity does not rely solely on the technical execution of tasks, but also on organizational conditions that enable employees to feel capable, supported, valued, and aligned with institutional objectives.

The research highlights significant strengths within the institution. The majority of participants report decision-making autonomy, favorable access to resources, positive supervisory influence, satisfying performance recognition, a healthy organizational climate, strong team inclusion, and active opportunities to propose improvements. Notably, proactivity emerges as a highly valued dimension, with 90% of respondents considering that it positively impacts both recognition and career growth opportunities.

Despite these advances, the study also identifies key vulnerabilities. The presence of neutral responses regarding the general perception of empowerment, recognition, and leadership indicates that a segment of administrative staff does not fully experience empowerment conditions. Likewise, the 40% non-participation rate in recognition or incentive programs highlights the need to re-examine the coverage, communication, and equity of these mechanisms.

From an institutional perspective, empowerment must be approached as a comprehensive talent management strategy rather than an isolated action. This requires strengthening responsible delegation, expanding training opportunities, improving communication channels, recognizing performance, fostering participatory leadership, and establishing conditions that allow employee initiatives to translate into process improvements.

As a limitation, this study relies on a descriptive survey administered to 50 participants; therefore, its findings should be interpreted as a contextual approximation rather than generalizable causal evidence. Future research could expand the sample size, psychometrically validate the instrument, incorporate qualitative methods such as interviews or focus groups, and compare results across academic and administrative departments. Nevertheless, the findings provide a sufficient baseline to guide institutional decision-making aimed at enhancing administrative well-being, participation, and productivity.

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