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# DYNAMICS OF EMPOWERMENT IN PROJECTS

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## ABSTRACT

Empowerment varies depending on the targeted population, the targeted setting and also fluctuates across time. These perspectives have rarely been examined simultaneously and no theoretical framework has as yet articulated such an integrative perspective in any specific setting. The complex and dynamic nature of the project environment and the project life cycle in particular have significant implications for understanding how empowerment manifests in projects. To better understand the implications of empowerment's multifaceted nature in a complex setting such as the project environment, we invoke complexity paradigm as a theoretical lens that is well positioned to help capture the essence of empowerment. From this theoretical framework, the true nature of how empowerment can intertwine with the complex and uncertain project context can be captured and described from the perspective of the workforce or actors engaged in the creation, execution, and closure of the project. Three preeminent questions that can aid this line of enquiry emerge from this review; how can organisations empower employees at different levels simultaneously within the same project team and still achieve goal congruence?; how does the changing nature of the project life cycle impact on employee empowerment experiences?; and what does the multidimensional perspective on empowerment add to our knowledge of empowerment in organisations?

**Keywords:** Empowerment, complexity theory, project life cycle

## INTRODUCTION

A dynamic perspective of empowerment with specific reference to the project lifecycle is explored in this paper. It presents the multifaceted features of empowerment including, its contextual embeddedness, its shifting nature across time and levels and its multiple forms across people. The paper extends the sparse body of knowledge on the reality of empowerment as experienced by those working within construction organisations and hence helps explain and clarify trends of empowerment experiences under conditions of uncertainty and relationship dynamics. Complexity theory is mobilised as a perspective that can help advance the study of the complex and dynamic manifestation of empowerment in project. This perspective is illuminating as it affords sense making of how different actors respond to, and cope with, the complex nature and dynamic character of project life cycle.

## BACKGROUND

Empowerment as a concept exhibits three critical features with implications on how it is implemented and how it could manifest in organisations but which have received little attention in previous academic and practitioner discourse. Empowerment takes on divergent

forms across people; is contextually embedded and; shifts across time (Foster-Fishman et al., 1998; Rappaport, 1984; Zimmerman, 1995). Although most empowerment researchers acknowledge these features little attention has been given to the impact they have on our capacity to understand and implement this complex phenomenon (Cloete et al., 2002; Zimmerman, 1995; Fawcett et al., 1994). There are therefore some concerns regarding significant lack of knowledge on empowerment in organisation both at the conceptual level and in practice (Huq, 2010; Logan & Ganster, 2007; Seibert et al., 2004) and the construction industry is no exemption. Greasley et al. (2004) argue that, many of the inherent challenges and flexibilities required of construction companies could be directly or indirectly managed by the appropriate use of the empowerment concept. The temporary nature of construction projects however represent a significant element that makes research on the industry of special interest, so that although others have examined empowerment from vantage point of employees (Rosenthal et al., 1997), the specific operating environment of construction warrants further examination of the complex issues surrounding empowerment.

Theoretical and empirical developments in the field of organisational culture suggest that any one setting may consist of multiple environmental paradigms (Martin, 1992; Sackman, 1992), each presenting its own contingencies for member behaviour (Mayerson & Martin, 1987). The typical nature of construction projects comprising multi-organisations with numerous highly skilled specialists present varied environmental and procedural norms that influence employee' empowerment experiences. Central to the empowerment process is a person-environment interaction (Rappaport, 1981; Zimmerman, 1995), a dynamic interplay between people's desires and contextual opportunities (Foster-Fishman & Kays, 1997). It is not simply the presence of empowering contextual elements or the presence of motivated, capable individuals that fosters the empowerment process. Zimmerman (1995) points out that, it is also the dynamic interplay between person and environment that creates the infrastructure for empowerment. When individual capabilities meet environmental demands, when supports and opportunities for control fit with individual desires, then the empowerment process is likely to succeed (Maton & Salem, 1995). Craig & Steinhoff (1990) also highlight that 'individuals or groups that do not perceive that real power has been delegated are not empowered'. It is important, therefore to understand how different contexts impact on the empowerment experiences within project setting.

While the individual facets of the empowerment features have been well presented in the literature through the investigation of context-specific questions in understanding empowerment processes and outcomes such as community organising (Kieffer, 1984), corporate work settings (Spreitzer, 1995), and human service delivery systems (Foster-Fishman & Kays, 1997), the range of empowerment experiences within a particular setting and across time have not been fully explored. The linkages of the multifaceted aspects of empowerment have therefore been implicit at best.

## **EMPOWERMENT AS A DYNAMIC, CONTEXTUALLY EMBEDDED AND MULTILEVEL CONSTRUCT**

The multifaceted nature of empowerment and the varying needs of people across time imply that, the desires for pathway towards, and manifestation of empowerment will vary significantly depending upon the population we target, the setting we examine, and the point of time we witness (Cloete, et al., 2002; Foster-Fishman et al., 1998). This perspective has rarely been examined and no theoretical framework has invoked/articulated such a perspective to understanding the meaning of empowerment in organisations. The features

have largely been examined in the management literature as independent constructs. No studies have yet revealed the multifaceted nature of empowerment in any specific context. Within the construction industry context in particular, empowerment research is still piecemeal and fragmented (Tuuli & Rowlinson, 2007). Here, the multifaceted features of empowerment are simultaneously examined in order to provide clearer explanation of empowerment's dynamism within a specific context, more precisely, the construction project context. A clear knowledge of these will enable management to focus efforts in creating the conditions that enhance, and avoiding those that inhibit the prospect of the desired manifestation of empowerment.

### *Contextual Embeddedness of Empowerment Across Space*

Employee empowerment, whether it is gaining skills, developing consciousness, or making decisions, takes place within the structural constraints of institutions and discursive practices (Rai, Parpart, & Staudt, 2007). Individuals are empowered through collective action within their organisational context, but that action is enabled or constrained by the structures and processes that manifest in those organisations across time. Thus to understand empowerment, closer attention must be paid to the specific organisational setting in order to capture the broader structures, discourses, notions, as well as laws and practices inherent in regulating the empowering experiences within that organisation. Also, empowerment is dynamic, thus, shifting organisational and environmental demands affect the empowerment experiences of employees. In the construction context for example, working under tight programme or a demanding client or significant shift in weather conditions could greatly alter daily demands and priorities placed upon employees, so that in construction organisations where time and schedule bring different constraints to the project process, empowerment is particularly bound to fluctuate over time.

Empowerment also takes on multiple forms across people. Although empowerment takes place within an organisation, it does so through the perception of individuals (Lin, 2002). As a result, personal traits such as education, gender, class, and social backgrounds exert varying degrees of influence on the way in which empowerment is perceived, thus the range of empowerment experiences within a particular setting differs across individuals. For example, in their quest to explore the multiple meanings of empowerment in a service organisation, Foster-Fishman et al. (1998) found that, the multiple forms empowerment manifest in organisations keeps changing from one individual to another. One employee for example, emphasised the importance of being creative, gaining knowledge, receiving respect, and experiencing the fulfilment of doing a job well while another employee described how having autonomy, trust and respect, and knowledge were important to feeling empowered.

### *Dynamics of Empowerment Across Levels*

Empowerment programmes often fail as a result of lack of recognition that, empowerment is continuous variable. Spreitzer (1995) argues that, empowerment is not a global construct generalisable across different life situations and roles but rather, specific to the work domain. Indeed, empowerment is not generalisable across individuals, due to the fact that the understanding of empowerment is influenced by the individual's social-historical context (e.g. race, class, gender, age or ability), position in the organisation and the particular concerns and interests that result from his position (Foster-Fishman 1998). For example, empowerment will mean different things for a site labourer and a project manager on the same project, and the difference in understanding will reflect their individual and contextualised day to day concerns and levels of responsibility. Thus, the question that

remains to be answered is, how do organisations empower employees at different levels simultaneously within the same project team or how does empowerment manifest at different levels of employees within the same organisation?

Bowen and Lawler (1992) identify three levels of empowerment across people. From least empowering, 'controlled oriented', to most empowering, or 'involvement oriented'. Empowerment across levels requires individuals to pursue new directions and to acquire new knowledge and abilities. Individual empowerment involves increased control in work domains employees deem important. Such control involves having greater access to resources and or more discretionary choice in the conduct of one's work (Spreitzer, 1995). These changes in power structure may not only redistribute control but also increase the overall amount of autonomy and influence exerted, because restructuring requires significant system and individual change. Thus, empowerment of individuals across hierarchical structures is a gradual and systematic process in which responsibilities for self-management and decision making are turned over to employees on as-ready basis (Fox, 1998). This is because, the level of empowerment that employees believe is appropriate is dependent on their perception of its use (Greasley et al., 2007). Thus, empowerment level should be appropriate to employees' positions or responsibilities within the team. This suggests that opportunities made available for employee empowerment must fit the individual's desire for control and influence. The assessment of employee desire for control may serve as an excellent first step in determining both the feasibility and the nature of an empowerment initiative.

Indeed, empirical research (e.g., Foster-Fishman 1997) has found that, the levels of control/power and trust/inclusion in organisations can influence the success of an empowerment endeavour. When power differences are substantial and are sustained by the organisational culture, then it is unlikely that a disempowered group will be empowered. However, when power differences are modest (e.g., between project managers, site members and site operatives in a project team) and a participatory organisational culture exists, then employee empowerment becomes more feasible (e.g., Foster-Fishman, 1997). Flexible organisations are then in a position to constantly assess the needs of the individual employees across levels of responsibilities and devise strategies to meet those needs.

#### *Dynamics of Empowerment Across Time*

Empowerment experiences fluctuate overtime and within the project context, the project lifecycle provides a convenient basis for examining the dynamics of empowerment over time. Throughout the lifespan of the construction project, various changes occur which have the potency to fluctuate employees' empowerment experiences. At the inception stage for example, very little is known about the project (Wheelwright & Clarke, 1992). As the project progresses and flows through time, it passes through transitional phases and the character changes (Winch, 1994) and uncertainty levels diminish with time (Hobday, 1998). As Winch et al., (1998) describe, "in the upstream phase the issue is to maximise the exploration of options; in the intermediate phase, the problem is to choose clearly and decisively, thereby freezing the project; and in the realisation phase, the objective is to mobilise as quickly as possible the project due to the heavy financial investment which takes place during this phase". The question that emerges therefore is; how does the project life cycle impact on employees' empowerment experiences? The conceptualisation of the different phases of the construction project process highlights the modulations on the overall information flow which are screened from one another by key decision points. It also shows how upstream and downstream activities are mutually dependent and the different levels are linked and affect one another in a synergistic manner. The project lifecycle also presents critical milestones for swift decision making and challenging management tasks and how uncertainty is replaced

with certainty as the project progresses. (Bryman et al., (1988, cited by Dainty et al., 2002) noted that, at certain times in the course of a project's life cycle, the workforce can be under intense pressure as a result of the need to coordinate key phases often in the face of supply and weather problems. This is exacerbated when the project is closed to completion and time is very tight. These transitional, yet, interconnected processes of the project raise the question of how empowerment manifest across the phases of the project.

In the construction project context, empowerment could be seen as a complex iterative process which can change, grow, or diminish based on unfolding events throughout the transitional phases of a project. The multifaceted dynamic nature of empowerment presented so far is often embedded within complex and dynamic project delivery arrangements, associated with increasingly demanding and ambiguous objectives due to environmental, economic and technological pressures on projects. The multiple-temporary organisation settings and site production nature are naturally uncertain. Projects are also extremely complex from an organisational and technical point of view with regards to variability and in the intensity of relationships between human-environment interactions (Mecca, 1999). The challenge therefore is to enact an integrative perspective of empowerment that explicitly blends the three empowerment characteristics to construction organisational change and development within the context of the complex, dynamic and uncertain operational realities of projects. Understanding the multifaceted nature of empowerment in project settings demands a theoretical position which illuminates the complex and interwoven set of perspectives and constraints which characterise the project environment.

To understand the complexity of empowerment and its manifestations in projects, a single disciplinary base or a certain perspective alone seems inadequate. A weakness of previous empowerment studies and the reasons for the unsatisfactory outcomes from empowerment implementations also appear to be the lack of mobilisation of a strong and credible theoretical base or lens to inform enquiry and implementation of empowerment strategies (Tuuli, 2009). In the sections that follow, a complexity paradigm is invoked as a theoretical lens that is well suited to capturing the essence of the multifaceted nature of empowerment and how it intertwines with the complex and transitional phases of the project process. Applying complexity theory as a theoretical lens could help in gaining a more realistic understanding of how the empowerment process unfolds in the complex and uncertain project environment.

### **COMPLEXITY PARADIGM AS A THEORETICAL LENS**

The emergence of complexity theory from the natural sciences particularly biology, computer simulation, mathematics, and physics (Kauffman, 2000; Holland, 1998), has brought fresh insight into the nature and working of complex systems. Some have argued that applying this theory to social systems, albeit necessarily in adapted form, could be equally revealing and useful (Hendrick, 2009). Complexity theory serves as appropriate metaphors for understanding the nature of complex systems such as project organisations. It offers a clearer perspective that describes complex systems and how the agents within the system interact and evolve. It recognises that the world is composed of both linear and nonlinear dynamics, it does not seek prediction but understanding of the various elements of the environment and the actors involved (Yerger, 2006). The appeal of such a theoretical lens for understanding organisation concepts emerges from the ability to illuminate how order, structure, patterns, and novelty arise from extremely sophisticated, apparently chaotic systems, and conversely, how complex behaviour and structure emerges from simple underlying rules (Cook-davies et al., 2007). Here this theory is used to help us think conceptually and pragmatically about the

functioning of the project environment and how the features of empowerment presented previously could be efficaciously applied in the project context.

Within a system, many independent actors interact with each other in many ways. The systemic interactions can lead to spontaneous self-organisation (Stacey, 2004). The system could represent nation states, industries, organisations, or even project teams. Projects are systems and should be addressed systemically (Remington & Pollack, 2007). They exhibit attributes of interactions, perturbation, nonlinearity, emergence, and sensitivity to initial condition, attributes which are generally useful in describing systems (Weaver, 2007) and which could well be understood through reference to complexity theory. Thus it is not out of place in adapting this theme to understanding empowerment in projects. The actors in the project sense are made up of both individual team members and any nonhuman actors (objects) required to ensuring the successful delivery of the project. The ties between the actors may be based on kinship, power structure, authority, information exchange, expertise services, or anything else that forms the basis of a relationship within the project.

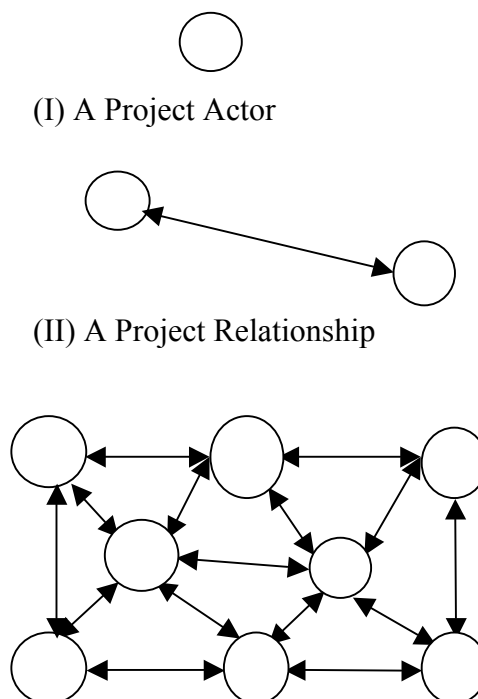
The multiple nature of empowerment in projects can be likened to the various independent actors within the project team. Each have their own unique minds – differenced in identity, character and expertise from one another. As noted by Lopes (2010), ‘complex system consists of a large number of actors differenced from one another’. Thus their needs, expectations and contribution into the broader complex system vary. One therefore has to have adequate knowledge base of the divergent forms of needs across these actors before setting out empowerment strategies to meet those diverse needs. The actors within the system are in constant interactive mode. The system is always evolving and never in a fixed state (Masterpasqua & Perna, 1997), thus, emergent states are always occurring. This is congruous to the dynamic reality of empowerment. Human notion is organised not by an internalised stock of fixed reality as humans are not instinctually provided with a fixed and stable sense of social order but by the moment to moment creation and re-creation of the social world in interaction with others (Bartunek et al., 1997). In that instance, individuals attitudes then become jointly created world of meanings and reality that are shared. Attitudes are very much the creation of the socially contextualised moment, but at the same time are on a constant move. Within the system, interactions between the actors (both humans and objects), which might contain an advice, information, friendship, career or emotional support, motivation, and cooperation, can lead to very important emergent states. Emergence is a feature of complex systems. It manifests as the actors within the system feed through new knowledge as they evolve and change. Stacey (2003) defines it as a bottom-up process arising when the collective behaviour of interactive actors result in a system or part of a system adapting and creating new ordered state.

Complex systems are sensitive to initial conditions resulting in an unpredictable response to any minute initial differences or perturbation, the respond to perturbation results in self-organisation into emergent forms that cannot be predicted from an understanding of its constituent parts (Reitsma, 2001). Initial conditions may include adoption of new technology, unusual weather pattern during construction, or change in project scope. Small exogenous disturbance to complex systems can cause unexpectedly large changes (McBride, 2005). This, perhaps to a large extent, explains why two projects designed to serve a similar purpose or in the same location and size can never be achieved with the same resources. As an example, the same team delivering the same project in a different environment with different initial conditions may achieve radically different levels of performance (Remington & Pollack, 2007). The famous Lorenz’s butterfly effect describes the situation where tiny differences in input can manifest as an overwhelming difference in output (Bloom, 2000). Thus, no two complex systems can be viewed to be the same because of differences in initial

conditions. This concept is compatible with the contextual embedded nature of empowerment, thus, any empowerment initiatives designed to suit a particular context or system might not be effective for a different setting because at any particular point in time, the empowerment needs will be defined by the system's emergent state which is influenced by initial conditions.

Murphy (1996) noted that, the principle of unpredictable response to initial conditions defines the very nature of nonlinearity in that, minute change in a system's initial conditions may amplify exponentially as their effects unfolds so that the end result bears little resemblance to the beginning. Borrowing from the concept of GIGO, which is the acronym for the almost ancient information technology concept of garbage-in-garbage-out, the input/initial condition – output/emergence relationship amongst the actors within a complex system embraces the popular belief in GIGO, which indicates a strong positive link between input accuracy and overwhelming output accuracy. As human thoughts create reality, then, if the actors in the system are fed with discordant and destructive thought, discord and destruction will manifoldly emerge as the reality. Conversely, if the inner thoughts of the actors are full of knowledge, beauty, training, etc, that too will be reflected in reality. In this regard, the actors' disposition toward empowerment creates and is created by the pattern of interactions in which they are routinely involved. Empowerment must therefore not be treated as an abstract phenomenon, but rather as an experience that is produced in relationship to other actors in a complex system, so that if for example, the individuals' training needs are met, it will lead to a corresponding contribution back into the organisation in a more beneficial manner to the organisation.

A complex system holds a large number of actors, differentiated from one another but each of which behaves to the same rules of interaction, sensitive dependence on initial condition, nonlinearity, and emergence. The combined output of the actors in the project context as a result of the interaction, is held in a resource bank described here as project network (Waver, 2007). This combined output is nonlinear because, complex systems are characterised by the whole being more than the sum of its constituent parts (Reitsma, 2001). The whole also shows emergent behaviour which cannot be predicted by studying the elements within the system. These ideas apply in the natural sciences such as shoals of fish, ant colonies and flock of birds. For example, the individual bird does not tell us much about the behaviour of the flock. The concept also applies to human social groups (Weaver, 2007). This network is encapsulated by the concept of project social network as elaborated below:





### (III) A Project Social Network

*Fig. 1. A framework for project social network (Adapted from Brookes et al., 2006)*

Fig 1 (I). A project actor is an individual participating in activities that enables the project to be executed. Each individual is an actor in a complex system; members of the project team are project actors.

Fig 1 (II) A project relationship – Each actor interact with one another to form a relationship. Each relationship can conduct information, ideas and knowledge to influence project objectives. The relationship has directional attributes (e.g. levels of trust, respect associated with it).

Fig 1 (III) A Project Social Network – The combination of many relationships forms the social network around the project and within the project. The project network can be considered as being both independent from the larger organisational network and an integral part of it.

The project network can be considered to hold social capital – the knowledge, desire, and capability needed to achieve the project outcome. The social capital contains the resources of the project actors (their knowledge and willingness to expend effort) combine through their relationships to make the achievement of the project outcomes possible (Weaver, 2007; Brookes et al., 2006). The project capital is nonlinear and can be enhanced or inhibited by the information that are fed to the individual actors within the system. The actors interact to simultaneously transfer information and ideas, negotiate social status and develop power relationships. Their intentions, choices and reactions are influenced during the interactive processes. In essence, it is people who create the project, who work on the project and close the project. Their combined knowledge becomes part of the social capital. The consequence is therefore to create a process for communicating with and influencing the actors to encourage and guide their involvement in the project and to create a jointly held objective for the team to work towards achieving.

The essence of this theoretical lens in understanding the multifaceted nature of empowerment stem from its ability to illuminate the several important aspects to be addressed when considering the conceptualisation or implementation of empowerment or any other construct in a complex environment. In particular, it suggests how people actively understand their experience of the world as individuals who are situated in specific social-historical contexts. Their understanding of empowerment is therefore contextually embedded. The various people within the complex project setting are all different in every way. Their subjective positions become lenses through which all understanding passes. These subjective positions include their demographic characteristics such as race, gender, knowledge, experience, position in the organisation etc. These characteristics temper with the divergent form empowerment will manifest across the various actors in the complex system. The continuous interaction amongst the actors and the ability to feed on and actively integrate new information from the system causes individuals within the system or the project setting to spontaneously self-organise and adapt a new emergent form. They consistently evolve into

new form through interaction, learning and adaptation. This concept is consistent with the dynamic nature of empowerment, as it explains why empowerment is on a constant shift based on unfolding events in line with the dynamic state of the project setting as opposed to a fixed state of being. The realities seen or understood at one point in time may shift within the next setting and across time. This view was reemphasised by Arthur (1999) when he stated that, complex systems are “systems that constantly evolve and unfold over time”. The collective output of the individual actors is nonlinear because it cannot be understood by summing up the individual components, as demonstrated by the framework of the project social network. Any initiative fed through the actors will manifest exponentially as the reality unfolds. Thus organisational process should provide broad, meaningful direction and structure suitable to the interactive nature of the complex system – retaining adaptability and flexibility by directing actions to favourably alter the environment rather than trying to control it (Schmitt, 2007). Empowering individuals or groups that self-organise may be thought to attract certain recurrent patterns of behaviour (Dooley, Johnston, & Bush, 1995). These recurrent patterns can represent unpredictable innovation. Kreiner (1992) proposed that, project organisations should provide a way for project teams to release the creative forces within themselves rather than to plan; a way to enhance participation rather than to control. Key words like “learning”, “participation”, “renewal”, and “innovation” ought to become as common in project management terminology as they operate in complex and uncertain environment.

## DISCUSSION

The empowerment concept is very subjective. The wide range of disciplines that apply it bring differing interpretations to it (Spreitzer & Doneson, 2005; Bartunek & Spreitzer, 1999). It is thus a multidimensional concept and yet, the common connotation in most of the definitions appear to be the positive link between employee participation and job satisfaction, motivation and performance, personal commitment and corporate achievement. Changes in managerial practices perceived as empowering should therefore be seen as an antecedent of employees’ feelings of self efficacy (Tuuli, 2009). Empowerment influences and reinforces the cognitive state of employees and eventually affects outcomes, providing justification for continual reinforcement of organisational practices (Tuuli & Rowlinson, 2007). Although several management scholars have discussed empowerment in various forms and currently seen as part of the lexicon of organisational practice, researchers are also concerned about the lack of published research finding of its implementation and consequences in practice at organisational level. Thus empowerment as management practice is mainly considered as rhetoric rather than reality. Again, empowerment is considered as a contested construct and subject to different interpretation in different context.

We argue here that, the lack of clarity in conceptualisation and implementation is attributable to the lack of or weaknesses in the theoretical lenses invoked previously to studying and understanding the empowerment concept. The adoption of complexity theory as a lens to understanding empowerment in the project context suggests *inter alia* that, the creation of a successful project outcome will always be an uncertain journey but the path to success or failure can be influenced by the actions and attitudes of the actors within the complex system of the project. It is the actors who create the project, manage the project and ultimately close the project in a complex environment. The key therefore is how effective the project organisation creates a jointly held objective for the actors or mobilises the project social

network to optimise the social capital (combined knowledge, expertise, effort etc of the actors in the system through interaction) needed to creating the project success. Social capital is optimised by effectively managing the multifaceted dynamics of the actors' empowerment needs in alignment with what is reasonable and feasible for the project to achieve. Managing the divergent needs of the actors takes place in a dynamic and uncertain environment and is complex because the actors are actively adapting and spontaneously self-organising into new forms through the integration of new information.

While most researchers acknowledge the dynamic and multifaceted features of empowerment, there remain a conspicuous lack of concerted research efforts to unravel a coherent perspective of the manifestation of empowerment in organisations and construction project organisation for that matter. While Tuuli (2009) and Greasley et al. (2007) examined antecedents and consequences of empowerment in project from a multilevel perspective, and employee perceptions of empowerment respectively, there is as yet no study empirically examining the dynamic manifestation of empowerment in projects across time, space and levels. The unique nature of the project setting and the spontaneous dynamism that manifest across the transitional processes of a project have the tendency to fluctuate employees empowerment experiences. Therefore, any effort aimed at capturing this phenomenon in projects is worthwhile. From the conceptual review above, three focal questions arise that have not heretofore been addressed in the empowerment literature but warrant further investigation: 1) How does the combined study of the multiplicity, dynamism and the context-specific nature of empowerment add to our knowledge of empowerment in organisations; 2) How does the fluctuation in project life cycle impact empowerment experiences? 3) How do organisations empower employees at different levels simultaneously within the same project team and still achieve goal congruence? A research agenda that cuts across these issues and aimed at capturing the dynamic and multifaceted perspectives of empowerment through the lens of complexity theory is of both theoretical and practical importance.

## **CONCLUSION**

Empowerment is an elastic concept that takes on multiple forms across people, is contextually embedded and shifts over time. A rationale for examining this multifaceted nature of empowerment across the project life cycle from a complexity perspective is provided. Each facet provides a different lens for understanding empowerment in the workplace. The contextually embedded perspective focuses on the organisational state. The multiple nature drills down to the individual and their experiences, and the dynamic perspective focuses on the changing state of the organisation and the fluctuating individual experiences across time. Looking across these three perspectives, while each one provides different insight on empowerment, there is apparent complementarity. The integrative perspective provides the much needed clarity to understanding empowerment, its implementation, and how it manifests in organisations. But no theoretical framework has yet invoked this line of enquiry in defining empowerment in any specific setting. This paper therefore represents a fresh departure from much of the literature on empowerment which take generalised and unitarised orientations without cognisance to its multiplicity, dynamism and contextual embeddedness. Future research will seek to empirically explore this multidimensional phenomenon of empowerment as it manifest through the transitional stages of projects.

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