EMPOWERMENT AND ORGANISATIONAL VALUES

Katarzyna Wiktoria SYRYTCZYK[1*], Izabela STAŃCZYK[2]

[1] Jagiellonian University, Faculty of Management and Social Communication, Institute of Economics,
Finance and Management; katarzyna.syrytczyk@uj.edu.pl, ORCID: 0009-0004-0371-7311
[2] Jagiellonian University, Faculty of Management and Social Communication, Institute of Economics,
Finance and Management; izabela.stanczyk@uj.edu.pl, ORCID: 0000-0002-1496-130X
* Correspondence author

Purpose: The main purpose of this paper is to present the relationships between empowerment and organisational values.

Design/methodology/approach: The paper comprises both a theoretical part, which includes a critical analysis of the literature, and a research part. The research is based on a survey questionnaire originally designed by the researchers, with questions developed from a literature review.

Findings: The results of a study verify respondents' understanding of the concept of empowerment within the realm of management. The study looked into practices indicating the existence of empowerment in work teams and aimed to identify relationships between empowerment and organisational values.

Research limitations/implications: Future research could be conducted with a larger sample across various industries. It is also recommended to pursue further in-depth qualitative research.

Practical implications: The practical implication of this study is to assist organisations in developing employee motivation systems that are closely aligned with organisational values.

Originality/value: The paper reveals new aspects, providing a foundation for the development of a synthetic tool to support future research in this field. Additionally, this paper has a cognitive value for managers.

Keywords: Empowerment, organisational values, human resource management.

Category of the paper: Research paper.

1. Introduction

Nowadays, when organisations are in pursuit of a competitive edge, human resource management is based on values rooted in the social systems of organisations (Bugdol, 2006). An increasing number of organisations encourage their managers and work teams to engage in decision-making processes and to take responsibility for their actions (Włudarczyk, 2023). The unpredictability and complexity of the environments in which organisations operate,

as well the dynamics of working environments, the use of modern technologies and artificial intelligence, together with digitalisation, require employees to demonstrate an ability to take action independently in an effort to predict changes to their work processes and to respond to the opportunities that the future may bring instead of passively waiting to see what is happening around them (Coun, Peters, Blomme, Schaveling, 2022; Binyamin, Brender-Ilan, 2018; Crant, 2000). In the realm of management, a concept that allows employees to become independent thinkers and organisations to create a climate in which the knowledge, experience and motivation of their people will be unlocked and utilised by organisations to achieve their goals is the concept of empowerment.

The aim of the article is to explore the relationships between empowerment and organisational values. It presents the results of a study that verifies respondents' understanding of empowerment in management, demonstrates practices indicating the existence of empowerment in work teams, and identifies connections between empowerment and organisational values.

2. The essence of empowerment

According to K. Blanchard (Blanchard, 2021), the most efficient organisations rely on individuals who respond to an issue within the organisation when the issues arises and take the initiative to look into it, make decisions and find a solution. Organisations should take action to unlock the potential that lives in their people and to encourage them to take the initiative and to show more commitment.

In a culture of empowerment, employees are enthusiastic about the organisation's vision and are motivated to deliver customer service according to higher standards. However, for such a culture to be created within an organisation, structural changes alone are insufficient unless they are accompanied by an all-encompassing change to the leader's attitude and mentality (Blanchard, 2021). The delegation of powers is a process that happens on the level of organisation and mentality, with managers actually abandoning their habit of controlling the *empowered* employees.

The concept of empowerment is known to various branches of research. The management science literature offers many definitions of this concept (Bartunek, Spreitzer, 2006). In management science, empowerment is a process whereby employees are encouraged to engage in making decisions within the organisation and to take responsibility for their actions and their part of the work for the organisation as if they themselves were the owners (Włudarczyk, 2023). The concept of empowerment is usually studied in the following two aspects:

    – *structural or organisational empowerment*, where research is focused around the organisation as a whole, its policies and the changes to its structure and work organisation, and around the steps that managers take to delegate power and control to employees;

    – *psychological or personal empowerment*, with the focus on the employee as an individual and their internal motivation, and on the preparation of managers to surrender power and influence.

M. Bugdol (2006) proposes to consider empowerment as an aspect of the organisation's culture and which manifests itself in managers' belief that delegating power and authority and empowering employees have an impact on operational effectiveness and efficiency. Empowerment is understood as a human resource management strategy, or even as a management philosophy that encompasses the structural and psychological aspects of delegating power and authority, eradicating fear and bureaucracy in decision-making and encouraging employee commitment.

Other definitions of empowerment understand the concept as (cf. Syrytczyk, 2009):

    – a process by which the self-efficacy among the organisation's members is strengthened and by which factors are identified which contribute to a sense of powerlessness and removing these factors, both formally on the part of the organisation and through the use of informal techniques of providing employees with information on their efficacy (Conger, Kanungo, 1988);

    – increased intrinsic task motivation, i.e. positive experiences derived directly from the task, bringing with it motivation and satisfaction, influenced by four cognitive variables that reflect employee' attitudes to work: 1) a sense of impact: the degree to which behaviour is seen as 'making a difference' in terms of accomplishing the purpose of the task; 2) competence: the degree to which the employee feels that he or she is able to skilfully perform the work involved in the task that he or she has undertaken; 3) meaningfulness: the value of the goal of the task, assessed in relation to the employee's ideals, standards and values; 4) choice: causal responsibility for the employee's actions, autonomy in taking the initiative (Thomas, Velthouse, 1990; Spreitzer, 1995);

    – encouraging people to make decisions and take actions, while reducing the control and guidance directed at them by their managers; also removing fear: fear of ridicule, humiliation, fear of blame or criticism (Hand, 1994);

    – the employee's mental, or psychological, state, which is influenced by the behaviour of the manager who delegates power to his or her subordinates; this state functions in four dimensions: meaningfulness of the task, competence (or the self-efficacy relating to the task), self-determination or choice and impact (Lee, Koh, 2001);

- support for creating a culture of cooperation, not only within the organisation, but also with business partners and customers and between customers (Hochman, 2005);
- a dynamic process that happens in the organisation continuously; it involves constantly eliciting enthusiasm and commitment from employees by giving them the right to autonomy and control over their actions (Zeffane, Al Zarooni, 2012);
- a humanistic tool which when used helps to improve the quality of life of average employees; it is an idea based on lofty goals and it is farther-reaching than other management concepts (Lincoln, Travers, Ackers, Wilkinson, 2002).

It is emphasised in the literature that what reinforces empowerment is, above all, a culture based on trust (Krawczyk-Bryłka, 2012). Czubasiewicz and Grajewski note that empowerment is a concept that changes with the passage of time and the evolution of how empowerment is understood depends on factors such as the growing potential of employees, the implementation of new technological, systemic and organisational solutions, as well as changes in the realm of human resource management (Czubasiewicz, Grajewski, 2018). Nowadays, researchers studying the concept of empowerment emphasise and show a direction that serves to reinforce the innovation and creativity of the empowered employees (Malara, Kroik, 2020).

3. Organisational values

The definition of organisational values is proposed by A. Giddens, who defines values as ideas held by individuals or groups about what is desirable, proper, good, and bad. What individuals value is strongly influenced by the specific culture in which they happen to live (Giddens, 2008). Values common to people within an organisation are a set of values that the employees that work in that organisation accept, approve and want to follow together. It is often the case that the underlying values of an organisation are defined by its founders. The values of the organisation reflect the founders' individual hierarchy of values, their ideals and dreams, and their desire to bring their own *portion* of good into the organisation and its world. Organisational values are known by different names, including corporate values, shared values, universal values, company values or *our values*, business values, or the values of a particular organisation identified by its name (Herman, Oleksyn, Stańczyk, 2015). What is important is that the values of an organisation should be consistent with the values of its people (Diskiene, Gostautas, 2013). There are values held by individuals and by the organisation for which they work, and these values are reflected in the day-to-day activities undertaken by the individuals (Vveinhardt, Gulbovaitė, 2018). Employees are guided by values in their decision-making and their actions, while the organisation's system of values serves as a set of norms that inform the organisation's members about how they should behave and how they should use different resources (Wright, Christensen, 2010). A review of studies into

organisational values and their consistency with the values held by employees shows that employees, when seeking employment, pay greater attention to the consistency of an organisation's values with their own values rather than to the organisation's pay levels (Diskiene, Gostautas, 2013). An increasingly important value for employees is to work for an organisation that is responsible, particularly in the context of sustainability development and eco-friendly operations, and jobseekers are more likely to apply for work to such organisations. This helps to increase and promote innovation by, for example, organisations becoming what is known as green workplaces. This *green workplace* policy encompasses the location, equipment and interior design, as well as pro-environmental behaviour of organisations (Bugdol, Stańczyk, 2021). A similar approach is adopted to evaluating the performance and efficiency of employees at work, which is reflected in their commitment to their roles and their continuing professional development. When the key values of an organisation are rooted in its HR management processes, employees performance is increased, as work is done (and employees behave) in accordance with the values held by the organisation.

To achieve their strategic goals and to ensure operational consistency, *catalogues of values* are prepared. A catalogue of values helps organisations to choose the values that matter to them. It also explains what the different values mean and how they should be understood. A well-prepared catalogue of values may be useful in a few ways (Herman, Oleksyn, Stańczyk, 2016).

- It makes it easier for an organisation to choose values to be shared internally (values which are expected and which, at the same time, keep the organisation's people together) and helps to strike a balance between not enough and too many organisational values, as too many would make the management of the organisational dysfunctional);
- It fosters a common understanding of the organisation's values, particularly those which are expected to keep people together and to facilitate communication and joint efforts within the organisation;
- It serves as a signpost for the organisation and promotes a management culture that respects and promotes the organisation's values;
- It fosters the social and professional development of the organisation's people by improving their soft skills;
- It can be used as guidance in the preparation of job profiles;
- It sets the direction for building the organisation's culture;
- It is part of the organisation's incentive scheme(s).

Organisational values are the basic beliefs and principles that guide an organisation. These values shape the organisation's culture and promote consistency and cooperation within work teams. They also help explain why an organisation does what it does and make its brand different from those of its competitors. One example is the set, or catalogue, of organisational values proposed by Forsey (2023): Integrity, Boldness, Honesty, Trust, Accountability,

Commitment to Customers, Passion, Fun, Humility, Continuous Learning, Ownership, Constant Improvement, Leadership, Diversity, Innovation, Quality, Teamwork, Simplicity.

This list was included in the research survey (questionnaire) as a link between organisational values and empowerment, and the results are presented later in this paper.

4. Research methodology

To conduct the research study, a survey questionnaire was designed with questions prepared on the basis of a literature review. The questions were asked to identify respondents' understanding of the concept of empowerment, to identify the behaviour of work teams which indicates that the teams are guided by empowerment, and to determine relationships between empowerment and organisational values.

The survey was conducted in the second half of January 2024. The questions were asked to 213 respondents, with women accounting for 75% and men for 25%. The respondents worked in organisations owned by Polish persons (45%) and companies with foreign owners (42%). The remaining 13% was employees working for public administration institutions. In terms of the size of the organisations, respondents worked in micro-organisations (14%), small enterprises (25%), medium-size enterprises (18%) and large organisations (43%, *large* means a headcount of more than 250). The positions held by respondents are summarised in Table 1.

Table 1.
Positions held by respondents

No.	Position	Percentage (%)
1.	Manager/Leader	15%
2.	Senior Specialist	10%
3.	Specialist	40%
4.	Junior Specialist	+35%

Source: own elaboration based on the research.

The largest number of respondents were specialists and junior specialists (75%). The business sectors represented by the largest numbers of respondents were: IT, HR, banking, finance, accounting, e-commerce, automotive, pharmaceuticals, hotels, trade, real estate, insurance, the military, the police, and publishing. The total number of years in employment ranged from 1 year to 17 years, although the length of service in their workplaces at the time when they answered the questions ranged from a few months to 2 years, and only some respondents had been working in their workplaces for longer periods. This may indicate that employees change workplaces extensively. The size of the teams in which respondents worked was also an interesting finding.

Table 2.
Size of teams in which respondents worked

No.	Team size	Percentage (%)
1.	1-5 members	30%
2.	6-10 members	33%
3.	11-15 members	13%
4.	More than 15 members	24%

Source: own elaboration based on the research.

Respondents said they worked mainly in small teams (63%), and 37% said they worked in teams of more than 10 members. Small teams may encourage a sense of team spirit, trust and teamwork with a focus on finding innovative ways of working through the tasks assigned to the team.

5. Analysis of the results of the study

Respondents were asked to specify what words or expressions they associated empowerment with. This question was based on a review of relevant literature with regard to different definitions of empowerment (Table 3).

Table 3.
Respondents' answers to the question about words or expressions they associated empowerment with (1 = the weakest association, 5 = the strongest association)

No.	Empowerment means/is:	1 (%)	2 (%)	3 (%)	4 (%)	5 (%)
1	an aspect of organisational culture.	5.2	13.1	34.7	27.2	19.7
2	an organisational climate that unlocks the knowledge, experience and motivation of employees.	1.4	7.5	20.2	42.3	28.6
3	a method of HR management.	7.5	17.8	23.0	31.9	19.7
4	a management philosophy covering structural and psychological aspects of the delegation of power by managers.	6.6	21.6	29.6	30.5	11.7
5	giving employees the right to autonomy and control over their actions.	2.8	10.3	22.1	32.4	29.1
6	eradicating fear and bureaucracy in decision-making.	11.3	18.8	24.4	31.0	14.6
7	a workplace with a climate of trust.	6.1	10.3	22.1	32.4	29.1
8	a motivational framework in an organisation.	2.8	13.1	23.9	34.3	25.8
9	an expression of employees' proactive mindsets.	4.7	14.6	26.3	28.9	25.8
10	keeping communication between management and staff open and transparent.	5.6	7.5	30.5	37.1	19.2
11	promoting a culture of teamwork, where employees support each other and work together to achieve the organisation's goals.	1.4	16.4	19.7	32.9	29.6
12	creating a work environment where employees feel secure, supported and where they can trust their managers.	2.8	8.0	26.3	34.3	28.6

Source: own elaboration based on the research.

Respondents' answers indicate an average-level association (3) of empowerment with organisational culture and a strong association (4) and a very strong association (5) of empowerment with giving employees the right to autonomy and control over their actions,

encouraging a climate of trust in the workplace, and promoting a culture of teamwork, where employees support each other and work together to achieve the organisation's goals.

Respondents were also free to explain their own understanding of empowerment and said they associated empowerment with positive feedback, obtaining new rights, and decision-making powers when dealing with customers.

An interesting finding is what situations at work reflect empowerment-related practices (Table 4).

Table 4.
Respondents' answers to the question about the degree to which specific situations or practices happen in the team (1 = no presence of empowerment-related practices, 5 = a high presence of empowerment-related practices)

No.	Practice	1 (%)	2 (%)	3 (%)	4 (%)	5 (%)
1	I feel empowered by my manager to make decisions on my own.	2.3	1.8	23.9	30.5	32.4
2	I am making a difference in terms of accomplishing the purpose of the task.	0.5	3.8	13.1	34.7	47.9
3	I can decide myself how to do my job.	3.8	8.5	24.9	28.6	34.3
4	I have a lot of control over what happens in my department.	8.0	21.1	24.4	20.7	25.8
5	I can make decisions for myself (the employee is free to choose which tasks he or she is to perform).	12.7	20.7	23.5	24.4	18.8
6	When I am doing my part of the work, my manager is not trying to control my work.	4.7	10.3	19.2	29.6	36.2
7	The manager clearly and openly allows employees to take the initiative when they identify a problem.	7.0	8.0	22.1	31.9	31.0
8	My workplace is free from a sense of fear caused by the manager not being happy with staff performance.	29.6	26.3	26.3	10.8	7.0
9	I feel very stressed out in my workplace.	23.9	33.8	18.8	12.2	11.3
10	Together as a team, we share the work that has to be done.	7.5	10.3	23.9	36.2	22.1
11	I have the opportunity to assess decision-making situations.	5.6	12.7	34.3	33.3	14.1
12	I decide how I plan and organise my work.	3.8	9.9	22.1	28.6	35.7
13	I am free to express my opinions, and I do it frequently.	2.8	8.0	22.1	34.7	32.4
14	My opinions are considered and affect the way that work is done.	4.2	14.6	23.9	38.5	18.8
15	I perceive my manager's control of my work as a form of support and interest in the progress of work.	8.0	11.7	22.5	32.9	24.9
16	My team is free from destructive practices (envy, lack of approval, competition).	48.8	21.1	14.6	10.3	5.2
17	Subject-matter support is available to resolve issues within the team.	7.5	13.1	19.7	27.7	31.9

Source: own elaboration based on the research.

The results of the survey indicate that respondents enjoy a high level of autonomy in the workplace. The majority of respondents feel empowered by their managers to make decisions independently (62.9%). When issues occur within the organisation, managers allow employees to take the initiative (60.9%), which encourages a culture of trust and motivates people to be more innovative and creative at work. The results of the survey also show that respondents cooperate within their teams, with opportunities for subject-matter support and discussions when issues occur and solutions are needed (59.6%).

Respondents were also asked about which of the following organisational values are associated with empowerment. Their answers were as follows:

- Integrity: 8.0%.
- Boldness: 7.5%.
- Honesty: 3.5%.
- Trust: **11.6%.**
- Accountability: **12.0%.**
- Commitment to work: **12.0%**.
- Passion: 3.9%.
- Fun: 1.2%.
- Humility: 0.2%.
- Continuous learning: 4.2%.
- Ownership: 1.6%.
- Constant improvement: 8.2%.
- Leadership: 6.1%.
- Diversity: 2.4%.
- Innovation: 7.9%.
- Quality: 4.4%.
- Teamwork: 6.7%.
- Simplicity: 0.6%.

The highest-scoring values were accountability (12.0%) and commitment to work (12.0%), followed by trust (11.6%) and integrity (8.0%). These values are followed in the teams in which the respondents work.

6. Conclusion

It can be concluded from our considerations of relationships between empowerment and organisational values and from the research study described in this paper that the concept of empowerment is strongly linked with giving employees the right to autonomy and control over their actions, encouraging a climate of trust in the workplace, and promoting a culture of teamwork, where employees support each other and work together to achieve the organisation's goals. The strongest links between empowerment and organisational values have been identified for the values of: accountability, commitment to work, trust, and integrity. A more extensive study, with a larger number of respondents, may be worth undertaking in the future, as these values will be increasingly important in HR management at a time of fast-changing working conditions and variability.

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