

## EMPLOYEE AUTONOMY AS ONE OF THE ELEMENTS OF ENTREPRENEURIAL ORIENTATION IN THE PRIVATE HEALTHCARE SECTOR

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**Purpose:** To analyze employee autonomy as one of the key components of entrepreneurial orientation in private healthcare organizations. The paper will examine how employee autonomy, as one of the five central elements of entrepreneurial orientation, shapes the innovative, risk taking and proactive capacities of healthcare providers and enhances their ability to adapt to a competitive environment.

**Design/methodology/approach:** A systematic literature review based on academic studies from 2014–2024, focusing on employee autonomy's relationship with innovation, proactiveness, risk-taking, and competitive aggressiveness.

**Findings:** Employee autonomy strengthens the innovative and proactive capacities of healthcare organizations and enhances their ability to adapt to a competitive environment.

**Research limitations/implications:** Limited empirical studies specific to private healthcare in Poland require further investigation. Future research should explore the mediating and moderating effects of employee autonomy on the components of entrepreneurial orientation.

**Practical implications:** Recommendations for healthcare managers to implement policies fostering autonomy as part of entrepreneurial orientation.

**Originality/value:** Highlights the role of employee autonomy in shaping entrepreneurial behaviors in a critical and evolving sector.

**Keywords:** Employee autonomy, entrepreneurial orientation, private healthcare, healthcare workers.

**Category of the paper:** Literature review.

### 1. Introduction

Apart from the legal changes, technological advancements and changes in consumer preferences have contributed to the stiff competition in Poland's private healthcare sector. Also, a set of measures targeted at modernizing the Polish healthcare sector, which were carried out, has further contributed to the spread and development of the Polish private healthcare system (Nieszporska, 2016). Against the backdrop of these developments, entrepreneurial

orientation has been identified as a crucial managerial perspective for healthcare organizations to become more flexible and reactive (Skica et al., 2018). EO includes main components which include innovation, proactivity, risk taking, competitive aggressiveness and employee autonomy that can assist the healthcare organisations to address the issues and prospects that are offered by the current environment (Alolayyan, Alyahya, 2023).

### **1.1. Problem Statement**

Research in the area of autonomy of health care workers as part of the concept of entrepreneurial orientation is insufficient (Vecchiarini, Mussolino, 2013). The available literature is devoid of an in-depth appreciation of the role that employee autonomy, as a significant dimension of EO, plays in shaping the innovative, proactive and risk taking capacities of private health care sector. While previous research has analyzed the relationship between EO and various factors, the extent to which employee autonomy serves to promote this strategic orientation in the context of private healthcare has not been sufficiently explored. The objective of this paper is to fill this gap by examining the avenues whereby employee autonomy. The purpose of this article is to fill this gap by exploring the ways in which employee autonomy, can strengthen the EO of private healthcare institutions to help them cope up with competition. Specifically, the study will examine how employee autonomy relates to and shapes the innovative, proactive, risk-taking, capacities of healthcare organizations.

This research identifies ‘autonomy’ as an important element within the EO framework which is anticipated to enhance the adaptive and responsive capacity of private providers in the fiercely competitive private healthcare sector (Alolayyan, Alyahya, 2023).

The paper will be organized into the following sections. The Methodology section explains the techniques adopted for the systematic review of literature and the guidelines to be utilized in selecting and analyzing relevant academic articles published between the years 2014 to 2024. This section will elaborate on the strategy of searching for and screening studies that explored the relationship between employee autonomy and components of EO. The Results section will review the literature selected in the previous step, offering an overview of the role of employee autonomy in determining the innovative, proactive, and also risk taking capabilities of private healthcare organizations. The Discussion section will interpret what the findings of this research mean in the context of theory as well as practice. Lastly, the Conclusion will reiterate the most relevant points made by this research and present suggestions for further studies on the topic and how to best tackle the issues at hand in healthcare management.

## 2. Methodology

This study will use a systematic literature review approach whereby the author will conduct an extensive review of current literature in order to examine the relationship between employee autonomy and the entrepreneurial orientation in private healthcare organizations in detail. The review will concentrate on reviewing articles in reputed journals in the time frame of 2014 to 2024 with the help of databases like Scopus, PubMed, and Google Scholar. The comprehensive search criteria will include a diverse set of keywords, such as "employee autonomy", "entrepreneurial orientation", "private healthcare", „health care workers". Search has been limited to Polish and English articles. The primary objective of this research is to review and evaluate the current literature on the relationship between employee empowerment and the innovative, proactive, and risk taking of firms in the private healthcare sector. In light of these central themes, the study intends to offer a deeper insight into the role of autonomy within the entrepreneurial orientation framework and the consequences for the improvement of the adaptive and responsive capacities of healthcare organizations in the private sector. The first process in the literature review will be to identify the most appropriate articles that will be used in this study then the selected articles will be analysed critically with regards to the findings, and theoretical frameworks. Moreover, the analysis will focus on how much and which ways employee autonomy affects the different aspects of entrepreneurial orientation and also the conditions that may influence these relationships in the private healthcare industry.

## 3. Results and Implications

Entrepreneurial orientation largely shapes the financial performance of companies, making it crucial in economies (Akkaya et al., 2024).

In the face of increasing competition and dynamic changes in the sector, entrepreneurial orientation is becoming crucial for effective management (Lisowska, 2018). Empirical research, which is based on the analysis of data collected from the managers of small and medium-sized enterprises, confirms this thesis. The findings indicate that the organizations that are more entrepreneurial have higher levels of innovative behavior, organizational flexibility, and market orientation which in turn enhance the organizational financial and market performance (Wójcik-Karpacz, 2017).

Entrepreneurial development in the private healthcare sector has been too slow. Government regulations and internal organizational rules are often obstacles to entrepreneurial initiatives. In turn, what motivates such efforts can come from the market environment, competitive pressures, financial incentives, as well as technological and social advances.

The autonomy of the facilities involved, as well as the entrepreneurial and cooperative mindset of healthcare leaders, decision-makers and employees, also play an important role. Entrepreneurial activities undertaken are usually aimed at improving the quality and efficiency of healthcare services provided. Therefore, it is crucial to create a favorable environment for entrepreneurship, which will enable innovative development of the sector (Brandt et al., 2021).

At the organizational level, autonomy means the ability of the organization to exercise judgment and to act, without regard to the structures that define the organization. It enables the company to act promptly to shifts in the market condition, assess the potential and seize it as well as come up with new strategies. At the individual level, autonomy is the ability of employees to work and make decisions and to act on their own initiative. It promotes innovation, engagement and ownership that helps in the recognition and development of new business strategies (Karpacz, 2016).

There is a considerable amount of research that supports the notion that autonomy increases innovation in employees of healthcare organizations. The literature indicates that when healthcare professionals are allowed to make more decisions and work in an environment that allows for flexibility, they are likely to come up with creative solutions and innovative ways of working (Ferraz et al., 2021).

In a similar manner, we can say that when the employees are allowed to own their work and try new things, it is possible to foster an innovative health care culture that is capable of adapting to the changing needs of the patients (Cheraghi et al., 2021).

The basis of this relationship can be grounded through the use of the self-determination theory which asserts that autonomous motivation enhances intrinsic interest and personal volition which results to creativity and innovation (Feri et al., 2016). When the healthcare professionals are allowed to make their own decisions in the workplace they feel more motivated, involved and are likely to come up with out of the box ideas. In turn, this may lead to creation of an environment that is conducive to testing and improvement thus allowing the organization to be relevant in the ever evolving health care system (KIM, 2021).

Empowerment can enhance knowledge sharing, ideas, and best practices among the healthcare teams which in turn fosters innovation (Apostolopoulos et al., 2022).

Through giving employees the ability to manage their work and share information, organizations can tap into the collective wisdom and diverse thoughts of their employees to come up with new and improved ways of working (Trifunović, 2024).

Thus, the current research findings provide a strong evidence that employee autonomy is crucial to support innovation in healthcare environment. Through giving the power to decide, the opportunity to try out new ideas and the ability to work together, organizations can allow their employees to be more innovative and productive in their work thereby enhancing their ability to deliver quality and responsive services (Timmins, Adams, 2014).

The relationship between employee autonomy and proactivity has been extensively researched in healthcare organizations (Waddimba et al., 2020).

When healthcare professionals are allowed to make decisions and work in an environment that is flexible, they tend to actively identify the problems and come up with solutions to improve the quality of service delivery (Alolayyan, Alyahya, 2023).

When the healthcare employees are provided with autonomy in their working environment, they are able to develop the ability of anticipating the needs of the patients instead of just being able to respond to them (Elahi et al., 2020). Autonomy at work can enhance the transfer of knowledge, ideas and practices within the healthcare teams which in turns enhance proactive behaviors (Türk et al., 2022).

By giving employees the freedom to manage their work and express themselves, organizations can tap into the employees' innovation and unique viewpoints to help solve issues. In turn, this can help to encourage a culture of improvement and resilience, which will allow healthcare organizations to meet the challenges that are present in the ever-changing environment (Andersson et al., 2023). Previous research has indicated that employee autonomy helps create a culture where risk taking is not only allowed but encouraged in private healthcare organizations. Through giving the healthcare practitioners the chance to make decisions and try out new ideas, managers can create a culture that is based on trust and safety where employees are able to go for new ideas (Øygarden et al., 2023). It has been demonstrated that the workers within the healthcare sector have an increased tendency to engage in activities that aim to step out of their usual practices. This self-determination means that they are more likely to be willing to carry out new activities (Goyal, Kaur, 2023). The organization factors in the trust on the employee which enhances the proficiency of the employee as the employee is willing to take in tasks with risk (Anfajaya, Rahayu, 2020).

**Table 1.**

*Overview of the impact of employee autonomy on innovation, proactivity and risk-taking*

EO dimensions	Autonomy impact	Examples from the health sector
Innovativeness	Employees in an environment where there is a high level of autonomy are more likely to introduce creative and innovative solutions.	Creating new medical procedures that improve the quality of patient care.
Proactiveness	Autonomy allows employees to anticipate patient needs and proactively respond to changes.	Develop initiatives to improve the quality of care in response to patient needs.
Risk taking	Fostering autonomy increases the organization's willingness to take on new challenges and risks.	Experimenting with new treatments or workflows in response to market challenges.

Source: own study.

Therefore, it can be concluded that based on the current literature review, it is clear that employee autonomy is a major decision-making force, a factor in implementing new ideas, increasing risk taking and challenging traditional private approaches to healthcare in organizations (Slåtten et al., 2020).

#### 4. Discussion and recommendation

In The main findings show that autonomy is a very important component of entrepreneurial orientation in the private healthcare sector and have major impact on innovativeness, proactiveness and risk taking. Independence makes the healthcare practitioners to feel that they are in a position to predict and meet the patients' current and future needs instead of just being responsive (Vecchiarini, Mussolino, 2013). This proactive, entrepreneurial thinking enhances the willingness to adopt risk-taking approaches and envisions change (Rastoka, 2023). In addition, autonomy fosters exchange of knowledge, creativity and other resources between healthcare workers thus enhancing the search for solutions. Thus, through giving employees the opportunity to work with greater levels of autonomy and freedom to innovate and contribute to decision-making, private healthcare organizations can tap into the collective intelligence of their employees to navigate the dynamic environment solve and the problems that are likely to arise in the future (Trifunović, 2024). The combination of autonomy and other EO factors like risk-taking and competitive aggressiveness make private healthcare organizations to be prepared to tackle the challenges that are likely to occur in the evolving environment (Kearney et al., 2020).

The following are some of the practical recommendations for managerial practices in the private healthcare based on the findings of this study. First, healthcare managers should work towards the creation of organizational culture that will support empowerment of employees where they are allowed to make more decisions on their own. This can include enabling the healthcare workers to be allowed to try out new ideas, question existing practices and try out new ways of delivering services. Thus, by creating trustworthy environment and feeling that everyone is safe in the organization, it is possible to unleash the creative potential and enterprising attitude of employees.

Further, the private healthcare organizations should encourage the transfer of knowledge, information and ideas with the help of cross functional teams. Stimulation of communication and collaborative approach to the problem solving may contribute to generation of the creative and viable strategies which could become the source of competitive advantage for the organization and ensure its flexibility. It is recommended that managers should design knowledge management systems and create forums that will bring together people with different points of view.

Last, healthcare leaders should understand that the role of employee autonomy is crucial in supporting measured risk-taking. This means that organizations should allow their professionals to make decisions, innovate and adapt to changes in the market to be ready for future challenges in the ever evolving health care environment. The implementation of performance management systems that encourage risk taking and creativity should also be introduced to enhance this entrepreneurial spirit in the organization.

**Table 2.***Compilation of practical recommendations for managers*

Area of activity	Recommendation	Expected result
Organizational culture	Introduce a culture of trust and psychological safety, where employees can make decisions and test new ideas.	Increase creativity and employee engagement, leading to innovation.
Knowledge management	Establish knowledge management systems and platforms for sharing experiences between departments.	Better exchange of information and ideas, which supports organizational development.
Risk taking	Implement performance appraisal systems that reward innovation and responsible risk-taking.	Building a culture of entrepreneurship and readiness to take on new challenges.
Innovativeness	Encourage employees to share their own ideas and implement systems to support innovative initiatives.	More innovations implemented, improved competitiveness of the organization.

Source: own study.

Due to a rather limited focus of research works that correlate to this specific sector, any conclusions that can be drawn on the presented research remain inconclusive. This serves as a dire case of the general research focus as an analysis of the local environment is required for the core concepts applied in the analysis to be put into practice. More research is needed in order to test how well the current theories can be applied and whether there are any differences or conditions that could affect the link between autonomy, risk-taking, innovativeness and proactiveness in this particular context.

#### 4.1. Future Research Directions

The present study also points out the necessity to conduct more research in order to explore the connection between employee autonomy and entrepreneurial orientation more deeply and to the specific context of the private healthcare sector with the example of Poland. Moreover, comparative research on an international level would be very useful in order to understand the mechanisms of these concepts' interaction and their manifestations in various analyses contexts. Hence, this the kind that would involve a number of countries could help explain the effects of cultural, regulatory and economic variables on the relationship between autonomy, risk-taking, innovativeness and proactiveness in private healthcare organizations. This will make the understanding of the phenomenon more systemic and will allow to determine the effective strategies that may be applied in the private healthcare organizations to promote entrepreneurial orientation in the conditions of the global competition.

## 5. Conclusion

The autonomy provided to healthcare practitioners considerably complements the other features of entrepreneurial posture, and consequently, has an influence on the medical facility growth potential and adaptability (Lopes et al., 2018). Autonomy makes the healthcare practitioners to feel that they are in a position to be able to predict and adapt to the changes in the needs of the patients rather than being in a position to only respond to them (Zhu et al., 2020). This entrepreneurial thinking makes the person concerned willing to assume certain risk, albeit controlled, and to question traditional approaches, which in turn fosters innovation and competitive edge of the organization. Through giving employees more decision making power and creating a culture of trust, private healthcare organizations can tap into the collective wisdom and variety of their employees' ideas which will help the organizations thrive in the future (Ntwiga et al., 2021).

From a practical perspective the paper provides relevant findings and suggestions to help managers of healthcare organizations to enhance the entrepreneurial orientation. Findings of the study reveal that healthcare managers should encourage the culture of trust and safety, give employees more decision making power and encourage cross functional cooperation. Such managerial practices will enable private healthcare providers to tap into the collective intelligence of their employees, diverse opinions that are crucial in the current environment of fast changes and competition. The outcomes offer a guide for healthcare organizations to build the required entrepreneurial attitude and actions to foster innovation and improve flexibility.

The following are the strategies that healthcare managers should employ to ensure that they support employee autonomy as a key factor to entrepreneurial orientation in private healthcare: First, they should create a culture of trust and psychological safety where health care professionals are allowed to think innovatively, initiate, and adapt to the changes in the market. Therefore, through giving employees more decision-making power, organizations can allow them to bring their ideas, which can help them to address patients' needs early and efficiently.

In addition, managers should also put in place performance management systems that recognise and reward risk management and innovation. This will also enhance the entrepreneurial thinking culture within the organization and hence encourage the healthcare professionals to think out of the box and come up with new and unique strategies that can be used to compete within the market. The managers should also ensure that there is the flow of information, knowledge, and innovation and the best practices across the departments and between different teams. Such exchange of diverse perspectives can lead to generation of innovative ideas that help organizations to grow and transform in the current ever-changing environment.



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