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# Empowerment in Business: The Current State of Knowledge and Future Directions of Research

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## ABSTRACT

**Objective:** The main aim of the article was to identify the current directions of research and the current state of knowledge on empowerment in business, as well as to define potential future directions of research on empowerment which have been indicated by research.

**Research Design & Methods:** Systematic literature review of publications from the period 2014–2022; 29 full-text publications from the Scopus database were analysed.

**Findings:** Previous research on empowerment in business has been compiled and organised based on the conducted literature review. The relationships between empowerment and the results of its implementation, together with the intermediary and moderating mechanisms have been presented. The authors collectively depicted future potential directions of research on empowerment put forward by researchers.

**Implications/Recommendations:** The arrangement of the current research directions on empowerment allows the authors to understand its diversity and complexity. The research results also confirmed many directions in which empowerment is beneficial from the human

resource management point of view. The analysis sheds light on future directions for research of empowerment. It paves the way for a new pathway for future work.

**Contribution:** Arranging current research directions on empowerment in business and their outcomes from the perspective of management and quality science. Organising and presenting in a collective way the current state of knowledge on empowerment.

**Article type:** original article.

**Keywords:** empowerment, empowerment in business, systematic literature review, future empowerment research.

**JEL Classification:** J24, M12.

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## 1. Introduction

Human resources have been recognised as an essential factor for the survival of firms, making it important for companies to ensure employees are engaged properly for higher productivity, which is essential to support organisational performance and growth (Arefin *et al.*, 2018).

A particularly important area of human activity is the industry in which simple and monotonous processes are being automated, while other processes become more complex and intertwined (Hecklau *et al.*, 2016). For this reason, organisations need human resources committed to their duties, taking up challenges, solving problems, as well as making prompt decisions (Permana *et al.*, 2015).

Empowerment gives a person freedom and control over their environment (Lassoued, Awad & Guirat, 2020) and improves an organisation's ability to enhance, develop, and utilise their talents (Abualoush *et al.*, 2018). Empowered employees are engaged with their work (Sun & Bunchapattanasakda, 2019).

The main purpose of this study is to find the answers to the following research questions:

1. What directions of research on empowerment have been carried out so far in industry?

2. What were the results of the research carried out and what directions for future research on empowerment in industry are recommended by researchers?

The uniqueness and importance of this research lie in the contribution to the development of management science, in the juxtaposition of the research on empowerment in industry carried out so far, and in the indication of future potential directions of research on empowerment in the industrial sector, the results of which may contribute to the development of management science.

## 2. Research Method

To find answers to the research questions, the methodology of a systematic literature review was used. Systematic literature review is defined as a systematic process of identification, evaluation, and interpretation of existing literature. The review procedure was carried out in four phases (Czakon, 2011). Figure 1 depicts these stages in chronological order.

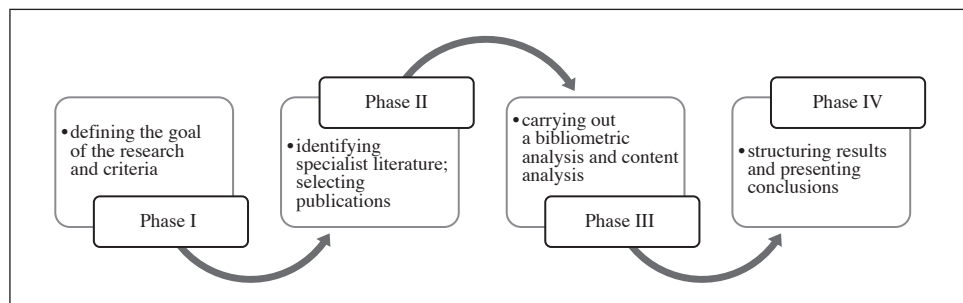


Fig. 1. Procedure of a Systematic Literature Review

Source: the authors, based on Czakon (2013, p. 124).

The purpose of the first stage of the conducted analysis is to define the objectives of the research. Our main research objectives included: 1) determining directions of research on empowerment and selecting research samples and 2) identifying the results of the research carried out and directions for future research on empowerment in industry recommended by researchers.

In the second phase, we adopted several criteria, which we believe are sufficient to identify specialist literature and select publications for further consideration. The criteria adopted are listed in Figure 2.

The Scopus database was used as a data source as we believe it provides a sufficient source of literature resources for our research. Moreover, Scopus is one of the most comprehensive databases of journals in social sciences. Due to our research interests, we applied our research to open-access texts. We conducted our search through Scopus using “empowerment” as the search word.

In the third stage, the aim was to carry out a bibliometric analysis and an analysis of the content of the articles. Selected articles were analysed in two categories: the definition of empowerment and the method of researching empowerment. The fourth phase led us to the results and the presentation of the conclusions. Figure 3 presents a flow chart visualising the selection process for articles to be included in this review.

The search was conducted over the period between 2014 and 2022, yielding 548 literature items. Our choice of starting date, 2014, coincided with the publication of Frederic Laloux’s (2014) book *Reinventing Organisations*, which outlines a vision for a new organisational model that seemed to be emerging, heralding a spiritual revolution in the workplace.

<b>Adopted criteria</b>	articles written in English
	articles located in the Scopus digital database in three categories: Business, Management and Accounting
	articles published in the time period 2014–2022
	articles containing the keyword “empowerment”
	articles published based on empirical work
	articles in open-access indexed Scopus journals
	articles covering research in industry

Fig. 2. Criteria Adopted to Identify and Select Literature

Source: the authors.

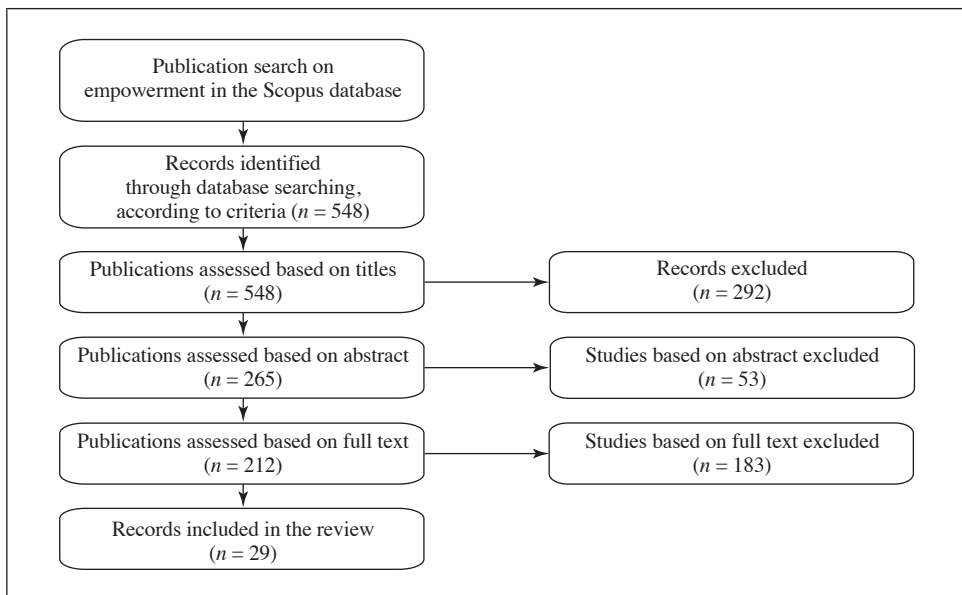


Fig. 3. Selection Process for the Articles under Analysis

Source: the authors.

In 2014, the number of publications reached 37. In 2015, the number of articles decreased to 25. In 2016 and 2017, the number of publications on empowerment increased to 43 and 65 publications, respectively. However, there was a slight decrease to 63 items in 2018. Then, over the next three years, we saw a gradual increase in the number of publications from 71 in 2019 to 87 in 2021. In 2022 the number fell to 82.

Next, we refined the sample of 548 articles by setting the boundaries for the literature review. First, we included articles that were open-access publications. We refined the sample of articles by reading the abstract, titles, and keywords of all the articles. If the abstract confirmed relevance to the review, we reviewed the full-text articles in open access. We decided to include full-text articles exploring the characteristics of employee empowerment. After an initial assessment of titles, 292 articles were rejected. This brought the total number down to 265. In the next stage, we undertook to evaluate the articles based on abstracts. At this stage, we rejected 53 items, which further reduced the area of consideration to 212 texts. In the last stage of selection, based on the analysis of full-text articles, we eliminated 183 items. This stage led us to select 29 articles for in-depth analysis (all listed in the references). The final selection rejected: conceptual texts that did not present the results of their research, were published in a language other than English and to which access was limited. In phase III, which involved in-depth analysis, two categories were analysed: the scope of conducted research and indicated directions of future research.

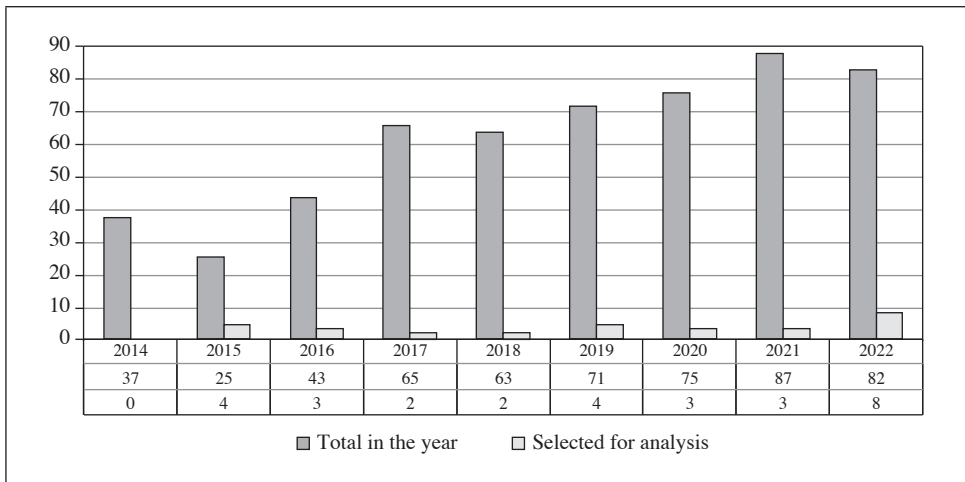


Fig. 4. Number of Publications on Empowerment by Year and Number of Publications Selected for Analysis

Source: the authors, based on research results.

Finally, we focused on discussing the implications of our study and directions for future research. Figure 4 shows the distribution of the number of publications containing the keyword “empowerment” in the title, abstract, or keywords, published in the period 2015–2022, and the number of publications selected for analysis from particular years under consideration. No text published in 2014 was selected for further analysis.

### 3. Analysis

#### 3.1. Literature Review

Ángeles López-Cabarcos, Vázquez-Rodríguez and Quiñoá-Piñeiro (2022) conducted research to examine how the combined effects of five different antecedents related to the work environment (task significance, social support from co-workers and supervisors) and leadership behaviours (transformational leadership and empowerment) lead to the presence of employee job performance in industry in Galicia, Spain. The results revealed that the most important variables are transformational leadership and social support. Employee empowerment and task significance seem to play a secondary role in leading to improved employee job performance.

Analysis of the impact of psychological empowerment and technology as predictors of safety in mining companies in Ecuador also was examined (Ochoa Pacheco, Cunha & Abrantes, 2022). The results indicated high levels of empowerment on safety behaviour and medium levels of technology’s promotion and prevention factors.

The Chilean textile industry was examined to determine the mediating role of work engagement in the relationship between psychological empowerment and task performance and to explore the moderating role of age in this relationship (Juyumaya, 2022). The results indicate that psychological empowerment increases work engagement, which in turn leads to higher task performance by the employees. Additionally, an employee’s age moderates the mediation effect of work engagement in the studied relationship, especially for young workers. Similar results stating that employee empowerment results in both intellectual and affective engagement were obtained from research on industry in Ghana (Nwachukwu *et al.*, 2021).

Another study was carried out to attempt to highlight the concept of employee-based brand equity (EBBE) and try to shed further light on the importance of EBBE for organisations in the manufacturing industry in Pakistan (Li, 2022). This study proposed that psychological attachment, internal communication, and employee-organisation fit are the three determinants of EBBE. The results of the above-mentioned studies showed that physical attachment, internal communication,

and employee-organisation fit enable a positive change in employee attitudes and contribute to the promotion of employee brand equity.

Kumar, Liu and Jin (2022) examined the boundary effect of perceived organisational support on employee empowerment to sustain the taking charge behaviour of employees Chinese industry. As a result, employee empowerment demonstrated a positive relationship with taking charge behaviour under the boundary condition of perceived organisational support but under low perceived organisational support. Moreover, employee empowerment, accelerated by perceptions of low organisational support, demonstrates a positive impact on the development of taking charge behaviour.

An investigation into how empowering leadership through psychological empowerment encourages employee empowerment was conducted by Khatoon *et al.* (2024). This study further explored the moderating role of learning goal orientation between psychological empowerment and knowledge-sharing behaviour in the manufacturing industry in Pakistan. The results showed that empowering leadership helps modify employees' knowledge-sharing behaviour both directly and indirectly in the presence of psychological empowerment.

In their work, Özbağ and Çekmecelioğlu (2022) analysed the mutual relationships between an empowerment climate, psychological empowerment, corporate reputation, and firm performance in the Turkish manufacturing industry. There is a positive impact of an empowerment climate on psychological empowerment and empowerment climate appears to be a variable that strongly increases both corporate reputation and company performance. Similar results were obtained in the manufacturing sector in India (Jena, Bhattacharyya & Pradhan, 2019). The findings of this study confirmed a significant moderating role of perceived flexibility in the association between meaningful work and psychological empowerment. Moreover, the process of empowerment takes place in an atmosphere of trust and open communication between management and employees.

Employees' strengths can reduce turnover, increase productivity, and improve job satisfaction. This thesis was emphasised by Hajizadeh, Makvandi and Amirnejad (2022). Their study investigated the effective coaching factors in operational managers of the Persian Gulf Petrochemical Company in the motivation of human resources. The results showed that there are a wide range of factors contributing to employee motivation. The authors include empowerment among several indicated factors.

Ekowati *et al.* (2021) studied the relationship between empowerment toward organisational performance, to determine the role of information and communication technology as a mediator of empowerment toward organisational performance in the Drinking Water Company in Indonesia. Their research results emphasise that empowerment has a direct effect on employee performance. In addition, information

and communication technology mediate the effect of empowerment on employee performance.

The Pakistani textile industry was examined to define and investigate the mediating effect of psychological empowerment in the relationship between transformational leadership and two employee outcomes: organisational citizenship behaviour and turnover intention (Saira, Mansoor & Ali, 2021). It was established that empowerment mediates the relationship between transformational leadership and both employee outcomes of organisational citizenship behaviour and turnover intention.

The relationship and the effect of employee empowerment on continuance commitment in Nigerian industry was studied by Okolie and Ochei (2020). There is a significant relationship between employee empowerment and continuance commitment. Additionally, employee empowerment exerts a positive and statistically significant effect on continuance commitment. Findings are similar to the results of Okechukwu, Nnamani and Jude (2015). They examined employee empowerment and teamwork in the management of change in selected Nigerian manufacturing organisations. Moreover, their results revealed that the technique for the empowerment of teams includes changing management roles from supervisory to coaching, delegation, and setting realisable goals. By allowing employees to suggest and implement procedural changes that make their work more efficient companies benefit from savings.

Obi, Leggett and Harris (2020) investigated empowerment approaches and advanced manufacturing technology utilisation in Nigeria and New Zealand. The observed differences in advanced manufacturing technology – empowerment interface are attributable to different national values. Furthermore, during advanced manufacturing technology adoption, New Zealand's liberal culture encourages managers to empower employees more than Nigerian authoritarian culture does. Similarly, Fatahi-Bayat, Goudarzi and Goudarzi (2016) investigate the variables affecting employee empowerment in Iranian industry. Personal, structural, managerial, and environmental factors, in that order, have a maximum correlation with employee empowerment.

Research by Baird, Tung and Su (2020) explored the mediating role of the quality of performance appraisal systems, rated using four quality measurements, which are: trust, clarity, communication, and fairness, on the connection between the level of employee empowerment and their performance, measured against the background of their departments' results. While employee empowerment is positively associated with all four dimensions of the quality of the performance appraisal system, one specific dimension: trust, is found to mediate the effect of employee empowerment on both financial and non-financial business unit performance.



Dedahanov, Bozorov and Sung (2019) have studied the impact of empowerment on the relationship between paternalistic leadership styles, namely: benevolent, moral, and authoritarian and employee innovative behaviour. To achieve the assumed goals, a survey was designed, which covered 390 employees from the manufacturing sector in the Republic of Korea. Based on the results, empowerment was identified as a mediating factor between moral and authoritative leadership styles and innovative behaviour. At the same time, the authors showed that behaviour is not a mediating factor between the servant leadership style and the behaviour of innovative employees.

Fatahi-Bayat, Goudarzi and Goudarzi (2016) also reported that employee empowerment is the managers' key attempt at innovation, decentralisation, and reduction of bureaucracy in organisations. Participants in the cement industry in India were examined to determine the impact of team building and employee empowerment on employee competencies and to test the moderating role of organisational learning culture between these relationships (Potnuru, Sahoo & Sharma, 2019).

Tukiman Hendrawijaya (2019) analysed the influence of demographic factors (age, gender, education, years of service, and the number of family dependents) on employee empowerment both directly and indirectly through employee performance in the cigar industry in Indonesia. The findings stated that age, sex, education, years of service, and number of family dependents have a significant positive effect on employee performance and employee empowerment. Employee performance mediates the effect of age, sex, education, years of service, and number of family dependents on employee empowerment.

Alias *et al.* (2018) undertook research to determine the impact of payment, recognition, empowerment, and work-life balance on job satisfaction in the oil and gas industry in Malaysia. All examined variables significantly influenced job satisfaction. A very strong relationship between empowerment and job satisfaction has been demonstrated. This is achieved by implementing a culture of empowerment at all levels of the organisation, in which management staff trusts subordinates and grants them certain rights related to the need to solve various types of problems.

In another study, the cement industry in Upper Egypt was selected to examine the relationship between perceived empowering leadership behaviour and work engagement (Rayan, Sabaie & Ahmed, 2018) as well as the mediating role of psychological empowerment in the aforementioned relations. The results did not support the direct relationship between leadership-empowered behaviour and work engagement. However, psychological empowerment was found to be mediating the relationship between the two variables.

The effect of transformational leadership and organisational support on employee empowerment was investigated in the Turkish industry by Yildirim and

Naktiyok (2017). The authors claim that transformational leadership and organisational support have positive effects on employee empowerment. Although organisational support plays a mediator role in the relationship between transformational leadership and employee empowerment, this role is not significant.

Rhee *et al.* (2017) studied the mediating role of empowerment in the associations among centralisation, formalisation, and employee innovative behaviour in the manufacturing industry in the Republic of Korea. The findings demonstrated that both centralisation and formalisation were negatively related to empowerment. Empowerment was positively associated with employee innovative behaviour and played a mediating role among centralisation, formalisation, and innovative behaviour.

In another study (Yusoff *et al.*, 2016), Malaysian industry was surveyed to determine the relationship between employee empowerment and sustainable manufacturing performance. The results of the study highlighted that providing empowerment to employees can affect social, environmental, and economic performance.

The IT industry in India was studied to determine the relationship between employee empowerment and job satisfaction as well as the influence of demographic factors on empowerment and job satisfaction (Rana & Singh, 2016). A strong relationship between empowerment and job satisfaction has been demonstrated. The results also confirm a significant difference in empowerment and job satisfaction based on demographic factors: gender, age, marital status, education, position, income, and experience. Among all demographic variables, age, education, and experience had a significant impact on the sense of empowerment. The remaining variables turned out to have no significant impact on the examined relationships.

Nel, Stander and Latif (2015) surveyed 322 employees from the chemical industry in South Africa to discover whether there is a relationship between leadership behaviours and predicting psychological empowerment, work commitment, and life satisfaction. It was also considered whether psychological empowerment conditioned by leadership behaviour can indirectly affect employees' commitment to work and life satisfaction. The results showed significant relationships between leadership behaviours and the considered variables. It was further stated that positive leadership through psychological empowerment determines commitment to work and satisfaction with life.

Permana *et al.* (2015) developed employee excellence through the constructs of the three factors to which they belong: engagement, enablement, and empowerment in the Indonesian industry. The research showed that employees felt empowered when their superiors were willing to delegate responsibilities. The clarity of roles and responsibilities was much higher among functional employees. The research results highlighted the need for superiors to make greater efforts to extend the roles and responsibilities of subordinates.

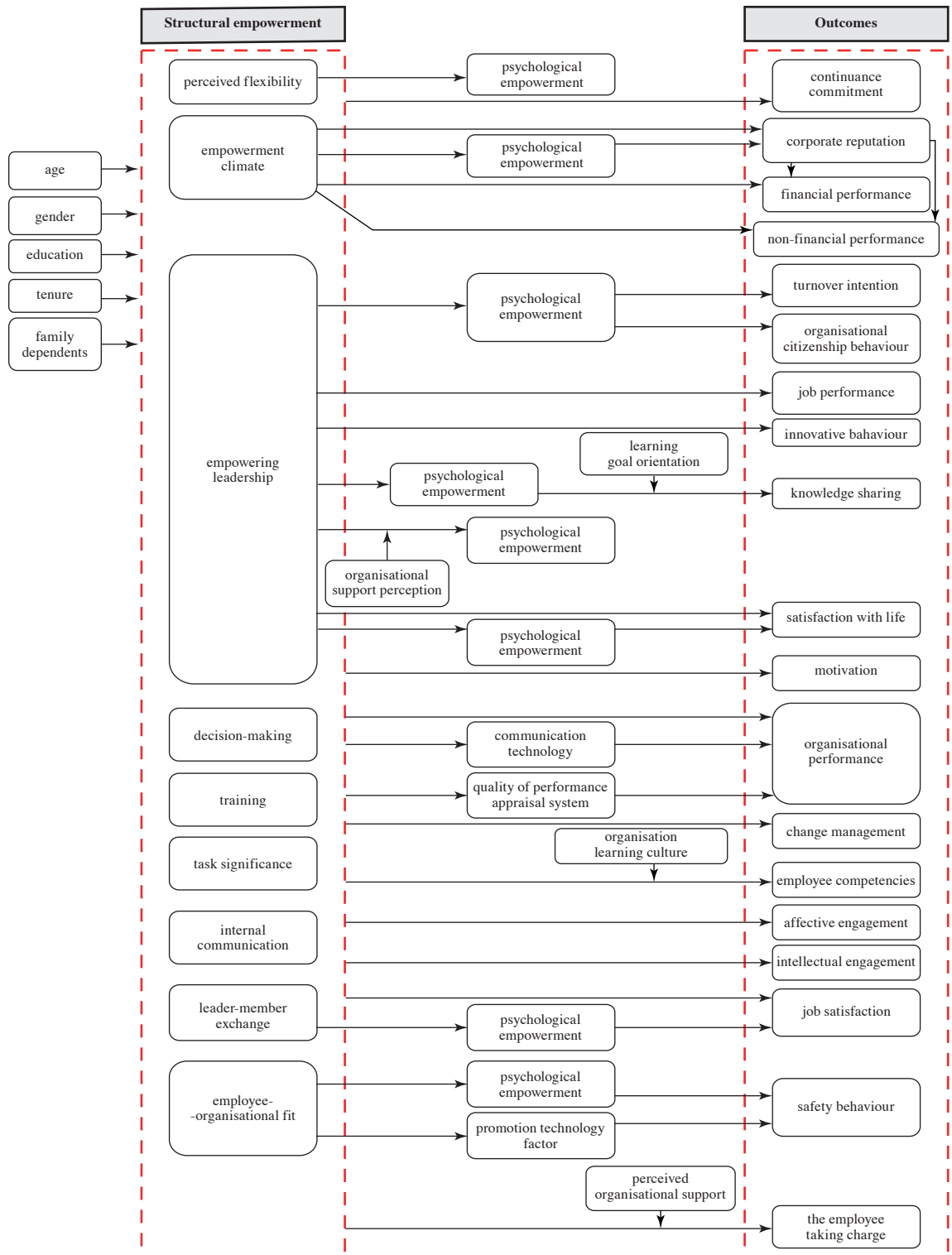


Fig. 5. Summary of the Presentation of the Undertaken Research Directions and Moderating Variables of Empowerment in Industry  
 Source: the authors.

Quantitative research was conducted by Macinga *et al.* (2015) in three organisations, including an industrial organisation, to explore the relations between personality factors (i.e., extraversion and conscientiousness) and positive work outcomes (i.e., work engagement, affective organisational commitment, and organisational citizenship behaviour), and to determine the incremental effect of psychological empowerment on these outcomes. As a result, personality and psychological empowerment explain a significant amount of the variance in positive organisational outcomes, and psychological empowerment has a significant incremental value over demographics and personality for the studied outcomes.

A summary of the presentation of the undertaken research directions and moderating variables of empowerment in industry is shown in Figure 5. The diagram demonstrates that empowerment is a complex and multi-dimensional issue, which consists of management actions introduced and applied by the organisation when managers share their power by showing their trust and providing opportunities for employees to make decisions, contributing to giving employees a certain freedom of action and creating an employer-employee partnership relationship, which all contributes to creating a psychological sense of motivation in employees. Organisational and managerial actions called structural empowerment induce a psychological state called psychological empowerment which involves an individual's cognitions and perceptions that constitute feelings of behavioural and psychological investment in his or her work. Empowerment creates extensive beneficial consequences. For instance, it instils greater trust in leadership, encourages employee motivation, leads to greater creativity, and improves employee retention.

### 3.2. Recommended Future Directions of Research

The second objective of our research was to present the directions of future research recommended by the authors of the publications analysed in this study.

According to the researchers, results of longitudinal studies conducted at certain intervals would be more efficient and can provide deep insights into the phenomenon (Khatoon *et al.*, 2024; Ángeles López-Cabarcos, Vázquez-Rodríguez & Quiñoá-Piñeiro, 2022; Kumar, Liu & Jin, 2022; Nwachukwu *et al.*, 2021; Baird, Tung & Su, 2020; Potnuru, Sahoo & Sharma, 2019; Rayan, Sabaie & Ahmed, 2018; Yildirim & Naktiyok, 2017; Nel, Stander & Latif, 2015). Future studies can make an effort to solve the problem of the risk of common method variance due to using self-reported data (Juyumaya, 2022; Kumar, Liu & Jin, 2022; Nel, Stander & Latif, 2015).

In the future, researchers should consider other research designs in their studies. Future qualitative studies should allow for a greater analysis of the subject (Li, 2022; Baird, Tung & Su, 2020). To fill the gaps, it is recommended to reproduce conducted

studies in different types of organisations, levels, or industries to investigate the influence of cross-border cultural differences (Permana *et al.*, 2015).

Further research should be conducted at different levels, with larger sample sizes and across a wider demographic range (Rana & Singh, 2016). It is suggested that further studies be conducted in other countries with ethnic, perceptual, and cultural differences as well as different characteristics (Hajizadeh, Makvandi & Amirnejad, 2022). Future studies should also use employee-supervisor dyads to determine the differences in the perception of empowerment at different levels of the organisation (Khatoun *et al.*, 2024).

It is necessary to identify the variables that may determine the effects of leader behaviour. Variables that may relate to subordinates – skills, experience, or need for independence – will be relevant to subordinates. The level of formalisation and social support could be variables relating to the organisation (Ángeles López-Cabarcos, Vázquez-Rodríguez & Quiñoá-Piñeiro, 2022).

It turns out that transformational leadership dimmed the direct relationships between empowerment, social support, and work performance. Future research should therefore explore the mediating or moderating effects of the variables on the relationship between transformational leadership and job performance (Ángeles López-Cabarcos, Vázquez-Rodríguez & Quiñoá-Piñeiro, 2022).

Considering variables such as satisfaction with rewards (internal or external) and perception of fairness in future research may also provide very interesting results contributing to an even deeper understanding of the essence of empowerment (Li, 2022). Researchers may consider other factors, i.e., organisational learning culture, emotional intelligence, leader-member exchange, and focus on regulations (Kumar, Liu & Jin, 2022).

Future studies could examine whether dimensions of psychological empowerment have different effects on corporate reputation and how the dimensions of corporate reputation affect company performance (Özbağ & Çekmecelioğlu, 2022). Researchers can account for other leadership styles and their influence on employee empowerment (Saira, Mansoor & Ali, 2021). It is recommended to investigate the mediating role of psychological empowerment in the relationship between employee benefits and continuance commitment (Okolie & Ochei, 2020).

A comparison of the empowerment level in organisations would reveal the role of psychological empowerment on the group and organisational performance. Qualitative and longitudinal studies are required to study the different career stages of an employee to understand the role of perceived flexibility *vis-à-vis* psychological empowerment (Jena, Bhattacharyya & Pradhan, 2019). From the perspective of time, structural empowerment should be considered in order to explain the relationship between leadership style and innovative behaviour through the prism of organi-

sational features, which can include access to information, resources, and support (Dedahanov, Bozorov & Sung, 2019).

Future studies should include other elements of organisational structure, such as departmentalisation and work specialisation, and the impact of these on employee innovative behaviour via empowerment should be investigated (Rhee *et al.*, 2017).

We would also like to make some of our recommendations for future research. In future research, it is necessary to take into account the achievements of researchers representing the most industrialised countries, with particular attention to actual trends including industrial revolutions 3.0, 4.0 and 5.0. Future research could demonstrate the differences between the understanding and implementation of empowerment in countries with various degrees of industrialisation, and potentially determine the impact of the benefits resulting from the empowerment on the possibilities of industrial development in the context of the 3.0, 4.0 and 5.0 revolutions.

In our opinion, it should take into account literature sources from various databases. In addition, works from a wider period should be analysed, as the analysis of earlier studies can provide valuable information and solutions. Future research could be extended to literature published in languages other than English and accessible through a different access formula, which would allow for a deeper understanding of the problem. Future research on empowerment should take into account all the above-mentioned recommendations for future research directions put forward by researchers. An examination of the recommended research threads will significantly contribute to a deeper exploration of the issue of empowerment and will greatly contribute to the development of management science.

#### **4. Conclusions**

The main aims of this study were to examine what directions of research on empowerment have been carried out so far in business, what the results of the conducted research were, as well as what directions for future research on empowerment in the industry are recommended by researchers. All of the goals have been achieved.

The literature selected based on the adopted research assumptions was used to review the existing research on empowerment in business. A list of future directions of empowerment research postulated by the authors of the analysed articles has been presented. It seems particularly important to examine empowerment in the most industrialised countries, taking into account trends that include industrial revolutions 3.0, 4.0 and 5.0.

Recommendations for future research, compiled in the course of the analysis, pave the way for researchers. Research on empowerment in business appears to be particularly beneficial. Empowerment leads to increased ability of an organisation

to deal with issues and problems (especially in the VUCA world) and an increase in productivity, which is the main goal of business. Moreover, empowerment reduces the outflow of qualified staff with competencies acquired through many years of practice.

The last element of our deliberations was to define the limitations of our research. Bearing in mind the adopted research procedure based on the assumptions we made underlying our considerations, we can point out several limitations of our research. The first one is the use of only one database (Scopus). The second is the analysis of literature published within a specific period, while the third is the inclusion of only English-language literature. In addition, the research procedure included articles only available in the open-access format and covering only countries with specific industrialisation.

### Authors' Contribution

The authors' individual contribution is as follows: Marcin Marchwiany 60%, Justyna Bugaj 40%.

### Conflict of Interest

The authors declare no conflict of interest.

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