Understanding the Role of Employee Empowerment in Shaping Workplace Relationships. "A Study on NTPC Odisha

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ARTICLE INFO	ABSTRACT
	Employee empowerment plays a crucial role in fostering positive employee relations within an organization. It involves giving employees the authority, confidence, and resources they need to make decisions and take ownership of their work. This approach can lead to numerous benefits, both for the employees and the organization as a whole. One significant impact of employee empowerment is increased job satisfaction. When employees feel that their opinions are valued and that they can contribute meaningfully to their roles, they tend to be more motivated and engaged. This satisfaction often translates to better performance and a stronger commitment to the organization. Moreover, empowered employees are more likely to develop strong relationships with their colleagues and supervisors. This sense of autonomy and trust fosters a collaborative work environment where individuals feel comfortable sharing ideas and feedback. As a result, conflict resolution becomes more effective, and communication flows more freely, all of which contribute to healthier employee relations The population of this study was employees of NTPC Talcher-Kaniha Plant, a power-generating organization in Odisha, India. A structured questionnaire was administered to collect data from the employees. During the study, 311 valid responses were processed for data analysis. The results of the analysis were presented through structural equation modeling (SEM). The findings revealed six major factors such as self-managed teams, interpersonal trust, work culture, job design, information sharing, and employee involvement are the drivers of employee empowerment which significantly influences employee relations in the organization. Further, the findings reflected the fact that empowered employees tend to display stronger interpersonal relationships, increased trust, and increased levels of job satisfaction, which in turn, positively impacts improved employee relations, thereby contributing to overall organizational effectiveness. **Keywords:** Employee empowerment, Employee relations, Self-managed team, Job design, Work culture, Information sharing, Interpersonal trust, Employee involvement

INTRODUCTION

Employee empowerment is a positive approach where an organization trusts its employees with the authority, responsibility, and autonomy to make decisions and solve problems effectively. This empowering process thrives when the organization believes in its employees' capabilities to handle decision-making tasks. By providing the essential resources and support, the organization enables employees to act confidently on their decisions. With this level of independence, employees can operate without excessive oversight from supervisors or management. As a result, empowered employees are more likely to take ownership of their roles, demonstrate greater accountability, and put in the effort needed to achieve their goals. The primary goal of empowerment is to motivate employees to give their best, utilize their skills effectively, and realize their full potential. It involves managers relinquishing some control and entrusting capable employees with decision-making, goal-setting, and achieving positive outcomes. Organizations can empower employees through various methods: 1Decision-making empowerment: Equipping employees with authority and tools to make informed decisions.2. Financial empowerment: Providing budgetary controls to enhance responsibility and trust. 3. Time management empowerment: Allowing flexibility in managing time for optimal productivity. 4 Shared information empowerment: Sharing essential business information to promote transparency and a sense of belonging. These methods foster a motivated and engaged workforce aligned with the organization's objectives. In recent years, the concept of employee empowerment has garnered considerable

attention as a pivotal strategy for enhancing organizational performance and fostering healthier employee relations. Employee empowerment refers to the process of granting individuals increased independence, authority, and responsibility within their roles, which aims to cultivate a strong sense of citizenship, accountability, and active participation in decision-making processes (Seibert, Wang, & Courtright, 2011). This empowering approach not only enhances employees' job satisfaction and motivation but also significantly influences the quality of interpersonal relationships that flourish within organizations. The intricate relationship between employee empowerment and employee relations has become a focal point for many businesses, particularly as they seek to enrich their organizational culture, diminish conflicts, and create more collaborative work environments. When employees feel empowered, they are more likely to perceive themselves as valued and respected by their organizations, which fosters robust communication, trust, and cooperation among colleagues. Furthermore, as organizations contend with rapid changes in market conditions, technological advancements, and an increasingly diverse workforce, the demand for effective employee engagement and constructive employee relations is more pressing than ever (Guzzo & Dickson, 1996). The advent of flexible work arrangements, the growing presence of diverse teams, and the dynamics of remote work further complicate traditional management methods, highlighting the critical role of empowerment in nurturing positive relations among employees. Research consistently indicates that when employees are empowered, they tend to take greater initiative and demonstrate increased job satisfaction while contributing positively to the overall work environment (Spreitzer, 1995; Laschinger et al., 2001). Empowerment also emerges as an effective strategy for alleviating workplace stress, preventing employee burnout, and boosting retention rates (Thomas & Velthouse, 1990). However, the full extent of how empowerment translates to enhanced employee relations remains an area ripe for exploration, with varied findings regarding its influence on communication, trust, and teamwork in diverse organizational contexts (Lee & Peccei, 2015). By delving deeper into this relationship, organizations can better understand the nuances of empowerment and its potential for cultivating a thriving workplace culture. This study attempts to find out the factors that drive employee empowerment in the organization and also explores how employee empowerment influences the quality of employee relations, particularly in terms of trust, cooperation, and conflict resolution. Drawing upon recent literature and organizational case studies, the research investigates whether empowered employees are more likely to foster positive relationships with colleagues and management and how such relationships contribute to overall organizational success.

LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 EMPLOYEE EMPOWERMENT

Employee empowerment is specifically explained as the process of giving employees the autonomy, resources, and inspiration to take initiative and make decisions on their work (Spreitzer, 1995). However, recent studies have expanded this understanding to include psychological empowerment, which gives more importance to intrinsic motivation and self-determination (Gagné & Deci, 2005). Researchers now differentiate between "structural empowerment" (the provision of resources and authority) and "psychological empowerment" (an internal experience of control, competence, and impact) (Laschinger et al., 2021). Several recent papers have combined these models into their research, particularly in healthcare and service industries, recognizing that empowerment is not a one-size-fits-all concept but varies across different organizational setups (Bargagliotti, 2020).

Many studies have put more stress on the fact that employee empowerment is directly related to organizational outcomes such as productivity, innovation, and profitability. For instance, a study by Shao et al. (2022) revealed that empowered employees are more likely to display more dynamic behaviors and contribute to innovation. Empowerment also facilitates decision-making and problem-solving at lower levels of the organizational hierarchy, which can make better operational efficiency and responsiveness (Jiang & Ng, 2023).

2.2 FACTORS OF EMPLOYEE EMPOWERMENT

The factors that drive employee empowerment in the organization are mentioned below.

1 Self-managed team

Employee empowerment and self-managed teams (SMTs) are the two main concepts in modern organizational set-up, both of which combinely intend to increase employee autonomy, motivation, and performance. Employee empowerment is stated as the procedure of granting employees greater control over their work, including decision-making authority, responsibility, and access to resources. Self-managed teams, alternatively, are groups of employees with the independence to manage their tasks, make decisions collectively, and take responsibility for team performance outcomes. The relationship between employee empowerment and self-managed teams is of particular interest to researchers and practitioners, as empowerment is seen as both a catalyst for and a result of effective SMTs.

This literature review synthesizes recent studies (primarily from 2020 onwards) on the impact of employee empowerment on SMTs, focusing on key benefits, challenges, and the mechanisms that mediate this relationship. Empowered employees in self-managed teams tend to exhibit higher performance levels. Research by García-Cabrera & García-Soto (2020) found that SMTs who were empowered to make decisions had higher levels of innovation, productivity, and quality outcomes. Empowerment provides team members with the authority and responsibility to make decisions that directly impact their work, which increases motivation and accountability. Empowered SMTs are often more agile and responsive to change, leading to improved team performance.

Similarly, Hoch & Kozlowski (2014) emphasized that empowerment improves team members' problem-solving abilities and decision-making speed, resulting in better overall performance. When teams feel empowered, they take ownership of their tasks and are more likely to strive for excellence, leading to higher levels of productivity. Hence, this study has developed the following hypothesis:

H1. Perception of being empowered is better among the members of self-managed teams

2.3 Interpersonal trust

Interpersonal trust is explained as the faith that coworkers, managers, and organizational members will take initiative in ways that are fair, honest, and reliable, even in the absence of direct supervision. In the workplace, trust stimulates open communication, collaboration, and mental safety, which is very important for employee well-being and performance. Several studies (e.g., Mayer, Davis, & Schoorman, 1995; Dirks & Ferrin, 2002) have contemplated interpersonal trust as a multi-dimensional setup that involves competence-based trust, integrity-based trust, and kindness-based trust. Recent literature discloses a strong relationship between interpersonal trust and employee empowerment. Trust lessens perceived risks in sharing ideas, feedback, and concerns with others. When employees trust their leaders and peers, they are more likely to engage in open communication, which in turn results in developing greater autonomy and involvement in decision-making (Kahn, 1990; Podsakoff et al., 2000). Studies by Liden et al. (2000) and Rego et al. (2012) have explained that trust between managers and subordinates causes increased empowerment through assigned decision-making and reduced supervision.

Hence:

H2: Interpersonal trust significantly facilitates employee empowerment.

2.4 Work culture

Work culture includes the norms, values, practices, and behaviors that are highly encouraged within an organization. It has a positive impact on communication patterns, leadership styles, decision-making processes, and employee empowerment. Common proportions of work culture include hierarchical versus flat structures, openness to innovation, collaboration versus individualism, and the degree of employee participation in decision-making. A study by Zhao et al. (2023) revealed that organizations with a culture of trust, transparency, and support dispense employees with greater autonomy, which, in succession, increases their sense of empowerment. The authors proclaim that a positive work culture, where leaders motivate open communication and collaboration, develops an environment where employees feel comfortable while taking initiative and contributing to innovative ideas.

Hence:

H3: Work Culture influences employee empowerment.

2.5 Job design

Job design is explained as the process of constructing work tasks and responsibilities to line up with organizational goals while keeping an eye on employee needs and well-being. It includes decisions about task variety, skill requirements, autonomy, feedback, and the degree of decision-making authority delegated to the employees. Most accepted job design models include the Job Characteristics Model (JCM) by Hackman and Oldham (1976), which recognizes five core job dimensions—skill variety, task identity, task significance, autonomy, and feedback—that impact employee motivation and job satisfaction. Recent studies such as, Zhang et al. (2023) revealed that autonomy—the capability to make decisions regarding how and when to complete tasks, is one of the most important factors of empowerment. Autonomy permits employees to feel a sense of control over their work, which improves their confidence and sense of expertise. In this study, employees with higher levels of autonomy were more prone to take initiative and make decisions, resulting in a higher sense of empowerment. Thus, this study has the hypothesis:

H4: Job design is a major key driver for employee empowerment.

2.6 Information sharing

The relationship between information sharing and employee empowerment has gained noteworthy attention in recent management research. Information sharing within organizations involves the exchange of pertinent and prompt knowledge across various levels and functions. Recent studies reflect several important ways in which information sharing has a strong impact on employee empowerment. A study by Lee et al. (2023) revealed that clear communication of organizational goals, challenges, and performance data permits employees at all levels to contribute more effectively to decision-making processes, thus improving their sense of empowerment and ownership. Sharma and Kiran (2022) expressed that in knowledge-intensive sectors, the free flow of information results in higher levels of employee engagement and job satisfaction, which in turn contributes to a more empowered workforce.

Hence:

H5: Information Sharing significantly facilitates the empowerment process.

2.7 Employee involvement

The conceptualization of employee involvement (EI) is widely acknowledged as a pivotal element of modern organizational management, especially in its relationship with employee empowerment (EE). Employee involvement indicates the implementation and initiatives that motivate employees to furnish various ideas, participate in decision-making processes, and be involved in activities that affect the organization's environment and culture. Employee empowerment, alternatively, is the strategy through which employees are given the authority, resources, and support to make decisions, implement control over their work, and take initiative. A recent study reflects that employee involvement can be a key component of employee empowerment, as it creates a more bias-free organizational culture, develops trust, and enhances employees' sense of ownership and responsibility. Bhatti et al. (2023) expressed that organizations with a higher degree of employee involvement in decision-making processes were more likely to have employees who felt empowered. According to Gulzar and Rehman (2024), when employees are regularly counseled and involved in the communication group, they have a better knowledge of organizational goals, performance criteria, and challenges. Rahman et al. (2023) proclaimed that when employees are involved in composite, challenging tasks, they acquire new skills and knowledge. Therefore:

H6: Employee involvement significantly influences employee empowerment.

2.8 EMPLOYEE EMPOWERMENT AND EMPLOYEE RELATIONS

Employee empowerment, which is defined as giving employees more autonomy, control, and decision-making authority in their roles, has become a primary theme in organizational management. Its capability to enhance various organizational outcomes, including employee relations, has been a matter of significant research. Empowerment stimulates a mutual relationship where employees feel valued, which in turn results in higher levels of commitment and trust between them and the organization (Zhao et al., 2022). Empowered employees are supposed to be more inherently motivated, leading to higher engagement and satisfaction (Deci & Ryan, 2020). This enhanced motivation is associated with improved interpersonal relationships because motivated employees are believed to be more synergetic and supportive. Empowerment can avoid conflicts by equipping employees with the tools and authority to convey issues before they expand. The research by Yoon et al. (2022) revealed that when employees are given greater autonomy, they are more dynamic in solving problems and far-fetched to depend on hierarchical interventions. This proactive attitude contributes to a more collaborative and less adverse workplace.

Hence,

H7: Employee empowerment leads to better employer-employee relations

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

In the present study, both descriptive as well as exploratory research designs were considered the most appropriate method (Tarus et al., 2015). For the study, the NTPC Talcher-Kaniha plant (Talcher Super Thermal Power Station) located in the state of Odisha, India was selected. NTPC Limited (National Thermal Power Corporation) is India's largest state-owned power generation company, primarily engaged in the production of electricity through coal, gas, hydro, and renewable energy sources. Established in 1975, NTPC plays a key role in meeting the nation's growing energy needs while focusing on sustainability and energy efficiency.

A structured questionnaire was administered to collect data from the employees of NTPC, Talcher-Kaniha plant. The items included in the questionnaire were derived from the literature review. Respondents were asked to give their opinion on the 5-point Likert scale ranging from 1 to 5 (Strongly disagree = 1, Disagree = 2, Undecided = 3, Agree =4, Strongly Agree = 1). Finally, 311 valid responses were collected using a simple random sampling technique during the

study. Besides demographic information, the questionnaire used for collecting data consists of questions covering self-managed teams, information sharing, work culture, job design, interpersonal trust, employee involvement, and employee relations. The responses were well recorded and systematically analyzed to draw a clear picture of the study.

DATA ANALYSIS AND INTERPRETATION

The analysis of data for this research was rigorously conducted using SPSS version 23.0. We employed robust statistical tools, including descriptive statistics, reliability analysis, and structural equation modeling (SEM), to ensure comprehensive insights. **Demographic Profile of the Respondents** Our sample comprises employees from NTPC, categorized by gender into male, female, and other. Notably, 85 percent of the respondents are male, 14 percent are female, and just 1 percent fall into other categories. When examining marital status, we find that 63 percent of respondents are married, while 37 percent are unmarried. In terms of experience, we classified NTPC employees into five distinct groups: less than 10 years, 11 to 20 years, 21 to 30 years, 31 to 40 years, and 41 years or more. A significant 59 percent of the respondents have less than 10 years of experience, and 34 percent have between 11 to 20 years of experience. Given NTPC's role as a power-generating organization, it is noteworthy that a majority of employees—39 percent—hold B.Tech degrees. This is followed by 18 percent with postgraduate qualifications, 15 percent holding diplomas, and 12 percent with intermediate qualifications. This demographic distribution underscores the educational foundation that supports NTPC's operations and effectiveness.

Reliability analysis

Cronbach's Alpha was computed to know how much the items are positively correlated to one another and to check the reliability of the items included in the questionnaire. It was observed that the reliability coefficient (Cronbach's α) values for all the attributes are above 0.80. It infers that the attributes taken in the questionnaire are homogenous internally and have good consistency among them.

Model Fit measures

Structured Equation Modeling (SEM) technique was used to examine complex relationships among multiple variables simultaneously (Figure 1). In the context of studying the impact of employee empowerment on employee relations, SEM can help identify and quantify the relationships between observed and latent variables, test the hypothesized model, and evaluate how empowerment influences different aspects of employee relations.
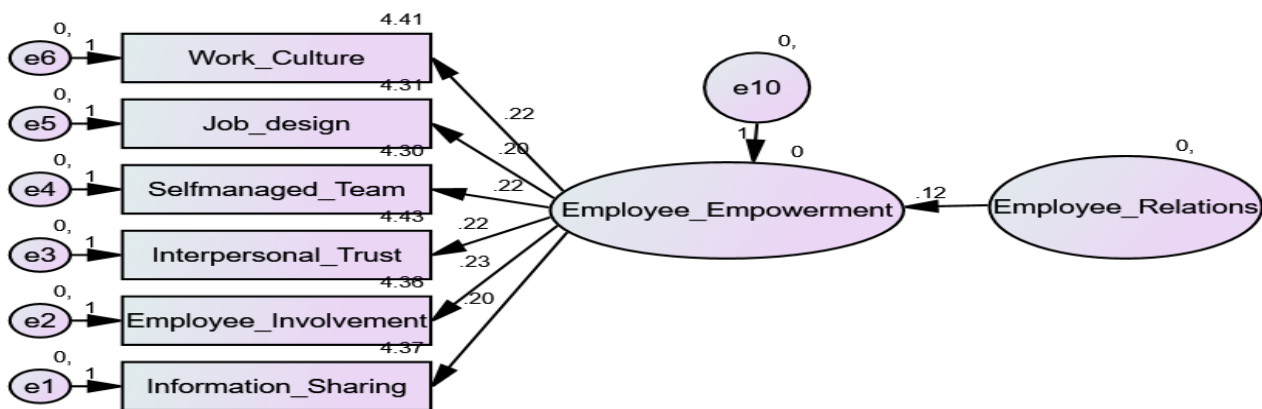

Figure 1: SEM Path Diagram

Table 1: SEM results of Employee empowerment and employee relations

Particulars	CFI	RMSEA	GFI	NFI
Chi-square = 23.32	0.967	0.078	0.969	0.965
Degrees of freedom = 28		**RFI**		
Probability level = 0.000		0.966		

Source: compiled from the survey data

CFI: Comparative fit index, RMSEA: Root Mean Square Error of Approximation, NFI: Normed fit index, GFI: goodness–-of–fit, RFI: Relative fit index

The fitness of the structured model concerning the interrelationship between employee empowerment and employee relations in NTPC was tested. It was observed that all the measures were associated with their respective constructs. The fit of the model was examined and verified. It was found that each indicator was loaded significantly with its intended construct. In the model, Chi-square = 28.32, df = 28, p = 0.000 (p< 0.001), CFI=0.967, GFI=0.969, NFI= 0.965, RFI = 0.966, RMSEA= 0.078, provided a good fit to the data (Browne and Cudek, 1993; Hu and Bentler, 1999).

Table 2: Path Analysis of SEM

Particulars			Estimate	S.E.	C.R.	P Label
Employee Empowerment	<-	Employee Relations	0.120	4.654	3.359	***
Information Sharing	<-	Employee Empowerment	0.196	0.017	11.229	***
Employee Involvement	<-	Employee Empowerment	0.230	0.085	8.825	***
Interpersonal Trust	<-	Employee Empowerment	0.220	0.019	11.796	***
Selfmanaged_Team	<-	Employee Empowerment	0.217	0.016	13.186	***
Job design	<-	Employee Empowerment	0.201	0.017	12.06	***
Work Culture	<-	Employee Empowerment	0.217	0.018	12.228	***

Source: compiled from the field study data

The regression coefficients derived from the path analysis are presented in Table 2, which elucidates the relationships among the various sub-constructs of employee empowerment. Each sub-construct exhibits a probability value of 0.000 (***), which serves as a definitive indicator of statistical significance. This implies that the examined relationships are substantively meaningful and not attributable to random variation. Each item associated with these constructs demonstrates a robust loading, with a p-value of less than 0.01 (0.000). These findings highlight the critical importance of factors such as information sharing, employee involvement, interpersonal trust, self-managed teams, job design, and organizational work culture, all of which significantly contribute to the construct of employee empowerment. Furthermore, the path analysis indicates a noteworthy significance value of 0.000 (***), which pertains to the impact of employee empowerment on employee relations within NTPC. This substantial evidence affirms the hypothesis that employee empowerment is vital for enhancing the employer-employee relationship dynamics. Consequently, the analysis necessitates the rejection of all null hypotheses in favor of their corresponding alternative hypotheses. The support for these hypotheses is compelling, confirming several key assertions: H1: The perception of empowerment is significantly stronger among members of self-managed teams, suggesting that such teams cultivate an environment that enhances autonomy and agency. Interpersonal trust is a significant facilitator of employee empowerment, underscoring the necessity of trusting relationships among staff for empowerment.H3: A supportive work culture positively influences employee empowerment, emphasizing the importance of a nurturing organizational environment. The design of jobs serves as a critical driver of employee empowerment, reinforcing that the structuring of roles significantly impacts empowerment levels.H5: Effective information sharing substantially enhances the empowerment process, highlighting the importance of communication in fostering an empowered

workforce.H6:Active employee involvement significantly influences individual empowerment, indicating that engagement in decision-making is essential. -The analysis confirms that employee empowerment is a key factor leading to improved employer-employee relations, suggesting that empowered employees are likely to engage more positively with their organizations. These findings collectively underscore the necessity for organizations to create and sustain an environment that actively promotes employee empowerment. By fostering such an environment, organizations can enhance their employee relations, thus leading to improved effectiveness and overall success.

FINDINGS

The results of this study reveal that employee empowerment plays an important role in developing positive employee relations. By providing employees more autonomy and responsibility, organizations can increase interpersonal trust, improve information sharing, develop a better work culture, and enhance job satisfaction—all of which are key components of healthy employee relations. These findings are consistent with previous research by Spreitzer (1995), who found that employee empowerment leads to increased job satisfaction and organizational commitment. Organizations must consider their unique cultural context when designing empowerment strategies. In hierarchical settings, empowerment initiatives may need to be introduced gradually and with careful attention to organizational norms.

CONCLUSION

This study highlights the significant impact of employee empowerment on employee relations. Empowerment leads to enhanced trust, communication, and job satisfaction, which collectively contribute to improved employee relations. However, the effectiveness of empowerment depends on finding the right balance between autonomy and support. Organizations should implement empowerment initiatives carefully, ensuring that employees have the resources and guidance needed to navigate their increased responsibilities.

The findings underscore the importance of a supportive and conducive organizational culture in fostering the positive effects of empowerment on employee relations. As such, organizations seeking to improve employee relations should prioritize empowerment strategies that are structured, supported, and aligned with organizational values and goals. This study will contribute to the ongoing discourse on the integration of empowerment strategies in human resource management and provide practical insights for organizations aiming to enhance their internal dynamics and workforce engagement.

In conclusion, employee empowerment has a profound impact on employee relations, leading to increased job satisfaction, improved collaboration, and a culture of inclusivity and respect. As organizations continue to navigate the complexities of the modern workplace, prioritizing employee empowerment can be a strategic approach to enhancing overall employee relations and driving success.

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