



MOTIVATING SUCCESS: A STUDY OF EMPLOYEE EMPOWERMENT'S LINK TO CUSTOMER SATISFACTION AND SALES PERFORMANCE

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Abstract:

Empowering employees is a key factor in organizational success, as it boosts motivation and improves individual performance. The aim of this paper is to determine the link between employee empowerment and customer satisfaction as well as sales performance. Sixty (N = 60) employees of a renowned insurance company in Serbia completed two surveys. Data were collected through the use of surveys digitally delivered to participants. The data were analyzed using SPSS 21.0. The findings of this study show a positive relationship between employee empowerment and customer satisfaction. Empowered employees demonstrate a greater sense of ownership and responsibility, leading to improved customer interactions and increased satisfaction levels. The results highlight the key role of employee empowerment in achieving customer satisfaction and sales performance. This study provides valuable insights for managers and decision-makers who want to implement effective empowerment strategies that bring positive results for both employees and the organization as a whole.

Keywords:

Employee empowerment, motivation, customer satisfaction, sales performance.

JEL Classification:

D23, J54, L25

INTRODUCTION

In the competitive realm of modern business, the link between employee motivation/empowerment and customer satisfaction, alongside company sales performance stands as a crucial determinant of an organization's success. Employee empowerment, equated with motivation, involves enabling employees to take initiative, make decisions, and actively contribute to organizational goals (Baird & Wang, 2010; Chen & Mau, 2009). Customer satisfaction, on the other hand, remains at the core of every business's pursuit (Davis, 2008). Consequently, organizations strive relentlessly to enhance customer satisfaction as a strategic imperative. This research delves into the complex interaction between employee empowerment, and motivation, and its profound consequences on customer satisfaction levels and sales performance,

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offering potentially critical insights into the core of organizational success. Employees possess valuable knowledge and expertise, and their willingness to engage can be cultivated through opportunities facilitated by management, aligning with the principle of empowerment. (Baird & Wang, 2010). Despite the abundance of literature on empowerment, Dimitriadis (2005) claims that there hasn't been much empirical investigation into this topic. In industries like insurance, empowerment strategies may enhance employee well-being and mitigate negative outcomes. Empowerment is viewed from two perspectives: the structural approach, which involves organizational practices granting decision-making autonomy (Spreitzer, 1995; Greasley *et al.*, 2008; Baird & Wang, 2010; Kazlauskaitė, Buciuniene & Turauskas, 2011; Abu Kassim, Yusoff & Fong, 2012), and the psychological approach, focusing on employees' perceived control over their actions (Bandura, 1989; Spreitzer, 1996). Both approaches underscore the importance of continuous research on empowerment and motivation to keep pace with business evolution. Consequently, employees' perceptions of their work surroundings take precedence as the main factors influencing empowerment, surpassing the objective and tangible aspects related to the context of the work itself (Spreitzer, 1996). Based on the abovementioned research and the overall importance of the motivation/empowerment of employee's research on the topic must be continuously performed, to follow the pace of changes in the business landscape. In this regard, this study aimed to determine the association between employee empowerment with customer satisfaction and sales performance.

LITERATURE REVIEW

In the contemporary business arena, the critical importance of customer satisfaction and sales performance within a dynamic market environment is undeniable (Evanschitzky, Sharma, & Prykop, 2012). It acknowledges the increasing sophistication of customers' choices and the growing competition among companies. Sales, as a cornerstone of the market, has been extensively studied, with attention given to the nuances and complexities it entails (Roman & Ruiz, 2005; Chen & Mau, 2009; Alrubaiee, 2012). The performance of sales has historical roots, with early studies by Williams (1910) and Strong (1925) focusing on sales rules and the psychology of sales representatives (Kennedy *et al.*, 2001; Roman and Ruiz, 2005). The interaction between salesperson and customer is highlighted as a critical determinant of sales outcomes, underscoring the importance of mutual understanding and adaptability (Davis, 2008). Additionally, acknowledgement of the growing significance of customer satisfaction in today's business landscape is now often regarded as a key indicator of organizational quality (Divsalar *et al.*, 2007; Shariatpanahi *et al.*, 2001). Ghafuri (2010), as well as research conducted by Mahmudian (2002), touches upon the relationship between sales strategies and financial performance, particularly in industries like food and insurance. To conclude, the importance of adapting sales strategies to changing market demands and customer preferences is also of crucial matter (Nikolaos *et al.*, 2010). Evidently, in the contemporary landscape of the business, the paramount significance of sales performance and satisfaction of customers stands as the key indicator for sustained success and market prominence, which is further explained throughout this study.

The comprehensive studies conducted by Isimoya and Bakarey (2013), Rawal (2015), and Abuzaid (2018) meticulously delineate the pivotal linkage between employee motivation, synonymous with empowerment, customer satisfaction, and the ensuing sales performance specifically within the insurance sector. Isimoya and Bakarey's research, concentrated within the Nigerian insurance landscape, brought to light the significant positive correlation between the empowerment of employees and the enhanced levels of customer satisfaction, underpinning a vital foundation for business triumph.



This revelation is paramount, as it not only illuminates the beneficial outcomes of empowering employees but also sets a precedent for the critical nature of this approach in fostering customer satisfaction and loyalty. Rawal's (2015) investigation further augmented this understanding by pinpointing the predictors of employee engagement, thereby elucidating the essential factors that fuel a workforce's motivation. This exploration is crucial as it provides a roadmap for organizations aiming to cultivate an engaged and motivated workforce, ultimately leading to superior organizational performance. Furthermore, Abuzaid's (2018) exploration into Jordanian insurance companies showcased the concrete effects of employee empowerment on achieving strategic success, thereby reinforcing the indispensable role of empowerment in steering companies towards their strategic goals.

Furthermore, several studies in different countries, that is, in different markets, have confirmed the existence of relationships between employee motivation and sales performance. The mentioned studies were conducted in Jordan (Hebah, Asaad, Alsakarneh, Eneizan, Ngah, 2022; Abuzaid, 2018), Turkey (Özbağ, Çekmecelioğlu, 2022), Nigeria (Isimoya & Bakarey, 2013) and Sweden (Peters, Mazdarani, 2008). In addition to sales performance, the aforementioned studies have shown that motivation additionally affects service quality (Peters, Mazdarani, 2008), corporate reputation (Özbağ & Çekmecelioğlu, 2022) and self-satisfaction with the job (Hebah *et al.*, 2022).

Building upon these foundational insights, the present scientific paper aims to underscore the persistent relevance of this subject matter. As the business environment undergoes continuous evolution, it becomes increasingly critical to perpetuate research and refine our comprehension regarding the direct impact of employee empowerment on customer satisfaction and, consequently, sales performance. This endeavor offers invaluable perspectives for both industry practitioners and academic scholars, seeking to navigate the intricacies of this dynamic relationship. Specifically, the study endeavors to exhaustively explore the relationship between employee empowerment (motivation) and its dual impact on both customer satisfaction and sales performance, leveraging additional empirical evidence from recent studies such as Rania, Rahmanb, and Yusakc (2021) who investigated the effect of psychological empowerment on employee performance, revealing a substantial influence on the overall productivity and effectiveness of the workforce. Moreover, Baird, Tung, and Su (2020) delved into the interconnections between employee empowerment, the quality of performance appraisals, and their consequent impact on performance, further enriching the existing body of knowledge with their findings. The incorporation of findings from Nitin Liladhar Rane *et al.* (2023) about enhancing customer loyalty through quality service, which outlines effective strategies to improve customer satisfaction, experience, relationship, and engagement, adds a contemporary layer to understanding the dynamics of customer-oriented business strategies. Additionally, insights from Mishra and Singh (2023) regarding the nuanced role of customer empowerment and its direct and mediated impacts on firm performance and customer satisfaction in the banking sector, provide a fresh perspective on the interplay between empowerment and satisfaction, emphasizing the evolving nature of these constructs in modern business practices. These findings contribute to a more nuanced understanding of the multifaceted relationship between employee empowerment and its significant outcomes, thereby enhancing the depth and breadth of this research study.



METHODS

Sample

Sixty male and female ($n = 60$) employees of a renowned insurance company in Serbia completed two surveys. Approaching frontline staff at a well-known insurance company in Serbia was done with the understanding that they operate as a connection between clients and organizations, which enhances the process of service delivery (Chow, Lo, Sha, & Hong, 2006; Liang & Jung, 2010). To specify what the frontline employee positions mean, Melhem (2003) identifies several positions as frontline jobs in the insurance industry, including managers, mentors, sales representatives, insurance consultants and agents and other employees who perform responsibilities directly related to customers.

Procedures and Measurements

Data were collected through the use of digital surveys delivered to participants. Surveys were answered by participants and returned through the mail. For this research, two questionnaires were used. The first survey on "employee empowerment" consisted of four statements, while the second survey focused on "sales performance and customer satisfaction" and consisted of 12 statements. Both surveys were based on a Likert scale, where the value 1 indicates the statement "completely disagree", while the value 5 indicates the statement "strongly agree". This methodology aligns with the approach described by Aithal and Aithal (2020), emphasizing the significance of developing and validating questionnaires to collect data and interrelate variables in empirical research within social sciences, business management, and health sciences. The meticulous design, development, and psychometric validation process underscore the relevance of such instruments in explaining real-world phenomena through empirical research methodologies. Similarly, Pradhan and Hati (2019) demonstrated the use of surveys for the development and validation of a multidimensional scale of employee well-being, employing exploratory and confirmatory factor analysis to ensure the reliability and validity of the questionnaire. Their work further validates the use of survey questionnaires in capturing complex constructs such as employee well-being, which is crucial for understanding of employee empowerment and its impact on sales performance and customer satisfaction.

The first survey, which was focused on employee empowerment, as mentioned above consisted of four statements: 1) I feel empowered to make decisions in my role (E1); 2) I have the authority to resolve customer issues without seeking approval from a supervisor (E2); 3) I feel that what I do belongs to me and therefore I feel responsible (E3); 4) My initiative in improving work processes is encouraged (E4).

Second survey consisted of the following statements: 1) The response of our organization to the needs of clients (Q1); 2) Quality of communication with clients (Q2); 3) Overall customer service satisfaction (Q3); 4) Clients are satisfied with our products/services (Q4); 5) Users regularly provide feedback (Q5); 6) I believe more training and development opportunities are needed (Q6); 7) I feel supported by my superiors in my daily tasks (Q7); 8) There is room for improvement in our communication with clients (Q8); 9) Our organization should invest more in collecting customer feedback (Q9); 10) I have witnessed positive changes in customer satisfaction during my time here (Q10); 11) I have suggestions for improving our sales strategies (Q11); 12) I feel motivated by the level of empowerment the company provides (Q12).



Statistical analysis

The information was analyzed using IBM SPSS 21.0. Descriptive statistics were calculated (mean values and standard deviation) for all the variables. The normality of the distribution of data was assessed using the Kolmogorov-Smirnov test and Pearson's correlation analysis was used to determine the correlation between customer empowerment and sales performance.

RESULTS

The baseline characteristics of the sample, in total, are presented below, in Table 1.

Table 1. Descriptive statistics of the sample

Variables	Mean ± Std. Dev.
N=60	
Age (years)	41.4 ± 10.4 y
Length of employment (years)	4.6 ± 4.1 y

Table 2. Results of correlation analysis (Pearson's correlation coefficient)

	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4	Q5	Q6	Q7	Q8	Q9	Q10	Q11	Q12
E1	.001	.007	.006	.001	.017	.970	.034	.221	.617	.007	.722	.007
E2	.075	.138	.005	.006	.023	.423	.615	.465	.622	.269	.258	.391
E3	.001	.074	.032	.136	.403	.533	.018	.007	.071	.007	.238	.015
E4	.074	.032	.136	.403	.533	.018	.007	.071	.007	.238	.015	.005

Legend: E1: I feel empowered to make decisions in my role; E2: I have the authority to resolve customer issues without seeking approval from a supervisor; E3: I feel that what I do belongs to me and therefore I feel responsible; E4: My initiative in improving work processes is encouraged. Q1: The response of our organization to the needs of clients; Q2: Quality of communication with clients; Q3: Overall customer service satisfaction; Q4: Clients are satisfied with our products/services; Q5: Users regularly provide feedback; Q6: I believe more training and development opportunities are needed; Q7: I feel supported by my superiors in my daily tasks; Q8: There is room for improvement in our communication with clients; Q9: Our organization should invest more in collecting customer feedback; Q10: I have witnessed positive changes in customer satisfaction during my time here; Q11: I have suggestions for improving our sales strategies; Q12: I feel motivated by the level of empowerment the company provides.

Table 2 shows the values of Pearson's correlation on the relationship between employee empowerment, customer satisfaction and sales performance. The main findings of this study show that there is a positive correlation between many variables. Firstly, positive correlation was shown between E1 and Q1, Q2, Q3, Q4, Q5, Q10, Q12 (p= .001; .007; .006; .001; .017; .007; .007, respectively). Furthermore, a positive correlation has been found between E2 Q3, and Q4 (p= .005; .006, respectively). Additionally, there was a positive correlation between variable E3 and variables Q1, Q3, Q7, Q8, Q10, Q12 (p= .001; 0.32; .018; .007; .007; .015, respectively). At last there was a positive correlation between variable E4 and variables Q2, Q6, Q7, Q9, Q11, Q12 (p= .032; .018; .007; .007; .015; .005, respectively).



DISCUSSION

The aim of this study was to analyze the relations of employee empowerment (motivation) on customer satisfaction and sales performance. The main findings of this study show the correlation between variables was statistically significant. As mentioned, the results of this study show that there is a significant positive correlation between the importance of employee motivation (empowerment) and its effect on customer satisfaction, as well as sales performance, closely related to the previous.

Research on employee empowerment and its effect on sales performance and customer satisfaction has started quite recently, in the last few decades as many of the scientific papers indicate implied correlations (Rawal, 2015; Abuzaid, 2018). In this regard, several studies have reached results that are in line with the results of our study. Additionally, the results of those studies have been recorded in the markets of various countries, starting from Jordan (Hebah *et al.*, 2022; Abuzaid, 2018), Turkey (Özbağ, Çekmecelioğlu, 2022), Nigeria (Isimoya & Bakarey, 2013) and Sweden (Peters, Mazdarani, 2008). Observing the mentioned facts about the connection between employee motivation (empowerment) and its effect on customer satisfaction as well as sales performance, based on all the data presented, it can be concluded that this psychosocial variable, which in this case is an independent variable, has the same effect on customer satisfaction and sales performance on the market, regardless of area. As stated by (Vo, Tuliao, and Chen, 2022, 49) „Work motivation plays a vital role in the development of organizations, as it increases employee productivity and effectiveness.“ Also, work motivation is regarded as an important catalyst for the development of organizations since it increases employees' effective performance (Wiley, 1997). Based on the above, it can be seen that the independent variable of motivation also has the role of a moderating variable that affects all the others. In this regard, the strength of this study is precisely the use of motivation as an independent variable, because practice has shown that it is an excellent variable for correlation studies (Grant, 2007; Guo *et al.*, 2021; Manzoor, Wei, Asif, 2021).

As opposed to this study, in the Pakistani commercial banking sector, Nareem and Sait (2010) identified no discernible link between employee empowerment and customer satisfaction. However, similarly to the results of this study, the research from Isimoya and Bakarey (2013), has shown similar results on the impact of employee empowerment and satisfaction of customers as well as the quality of customer service. Furthermore, the study revealed that when employees possessed a significant degree of influence and autonomy in their roles, they were better positioned to take into account the unique preferences of customers, enabling them to provide a personalized level of service. The resemblance between the two studies investigating the impact of employee empowerment on customer satisfaction and sales performance can be attributed to their shared focus on evaluating the interconnectedness of these variables within their respective contexts.

This study had certain limitations that were worth highlighting. First, we applied a cross-sectional study design, which cannot determine causal relationships between variables. In future studies, we suggest applying a longitudinal design to verify our and other cross-sectional findings. Second, the variable measurement used the self-reporting method in an electronic setting, which may result in a method effect. Therefore, we recommend a third-party evaluation of customer satisfaction and sales performance. Furthermore, considering that the field of motivation includes both intrinsic and extrinsic motivation, future research could propose categorizing it into the aforementioned categories. Additionally, only one renowned insurance company was sampled. This could influence the reliability of our results, and generalizing these findings to other parts of Serbia requires validation.



Therefore, future research should include other insurance companies. At last, insurance companies are subject to change. Management structures, policies, and strategies may evolve, potentially influencing the validity and applicability of research findings for implementing results in future organizations.

CONCLUSION

The study's findings indicate a positive association between employee empowerment and customer satisfaction. Empowered employees demonstrate a heightened sense of ownership and accountability, resulting in improved customer interactions and heightened levels of satisfaction. Furthermore, the findings show an important relationship between employee empowerment and sales performance, demonstrating that engaged and empowered individuals contribute to higher sales results and revenue production. The findings emphasize the critical significance of staff empowerment in improving customer satisfaction and sales performance. This study gives significant insights for managers and decision-makers who want to implement effective empowerment measures that benefit both people and the company as a whole.

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MOTIVACIONI USPEH: STUDIJA POVEZANOSTI OSNAŽIVANJA ZAPOSLENIH SA ZADOVOLJSTVOM KUPACA I PRODAJNIM UČINKOM

Rezime:

Osnaživanje zaposlenih je ključni faktor za uspeh organizacije, jer podstiče motivaciju i poboljšava individualni učinak. Cilj ovog rada je da se utvrdi veza između osnaživanja zaposlenih i zadovoljstva kupaca, kao i performansi prodaje. Šezdeset (N = 60) zaposlenih u jednoj renomiranoj osiguravajućoj kući u Srbiji popunilo je dve ankete. Podaci su prikupljeni korišćenjem anketnih upitnika koje su digitalno dostavljene učesnicima. Podaci su analizirani pomoću SPSS 21.0. Rezultati ove studije pokazuju pozitivnu vezu između osnaživanja zaposlenih i zadovoljstva kupaca. Osnaženi zaposleni pokazuju veći osećaj vlasništva i odgovornosti, što dovodi do poboljšane interakcije sa klijentima i povećanog nivoa zadovoljstva. Rezultati ističu ključnu ulogu osnaživanja zaposlenih u postizanju zadovoljstva kupaca i performansi prodaje. Ova studija pruža korisne uvide za menadžere i donosiocce odluka koji žele da primene efikasne strategije osnaživanja zaposlenih koje donose pozitivne rezultate i za zaposlene i za organizaciju u celini.

Ključne reči:

osnaživanje zaposlenih,
motivacija,
zadovoljstvo kupaca,
prodajni učinak.

JEL klasifikacija:

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