

AUTONOMY IN HRM – EMPIRICAL EVIDENCE FROM POLISH AND GERMAN SERVICE SECTOR

Introduction

Economic changes and more innovative approach towards organizational systems create the need to focus on the effective human capital management in the service sector entities. Human resources significantly influence the innovative ability of modern enterprises, mainly through the competence level of employed staff, their creativity or imagination [14, pp. 312–340]. Their involvement is necessary in the process of creating innovations and implementation them [26, pp. 94–102]. When analyzing functioning practices of organizations it may be noticed that modern management focuses on development and autonomy of employed staff [2, pp. 265–269]. L. Dorenbosch, M. Engen, and M. Verhagen raise the issue of employees autonomy as an important determinant that increases the level of innovativeness in all spheres of companies functioning [5, pp. 125–130]. Autonomy is a major factor in functioning of every party whose status depends on various issues such as: importance of duties (tasks) assigned to a worker, level of their competence, self-confidence or employees motivation. When describing the factors, which may significantly increase the level of autonomy in the management process, one cannot forget about the management style, which is typical for particular managers and sets the supervisor-subordinate relations. Implementation of the management style where the employee is perceived more as a partner and not a subordinate is becoming the vision of future for companies in service sector that currently exist on the market. In such thinking giving orders more often makes room for leadership where personal qualities of manager are recognized by the organization's members, while his position is the result of his

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competence and taken responsibility. Managers are expected to allow employees to decide [18, pp. 206–210], share the power and create the proper atmosphere in the communication process. All of these determinants are to raise the employees' creativity and motivate them to greater independence.

1. The role of manager in human resources management in the catering sector

The present image of leadership implicates the fact that a leader should possess i.e., abilities to connect current values and beliefs with needs, qualities, goals and beliefs of present and future members of the organization [6, p. 54]. Literature notices that the role of managers and the management process is to influence workers through motivation and coordination so they head to set objectives [24, p. 76]. According to Z. Ścibiorek the role of manager is not limited to people management only but he should focus on providing the conditions for reaching goals set by the company effectively. These conditions include: organization of work, people motivation, leadership, informing, evaluation of subordinates' work as well as controlling activities aimed at defining the level of completion of the set goals [22, pp. 29–31]. All of the elements of manager's work may be divided into groups and subgroups of different complexity. Each of them requires involvement of proper resources of knowledge and competence. The first sphere (goals defining), the second sphere (work organization) and the fourth sphere (controlling the progress) enable managers to present their analytical skills. Third sphere (motivating and informing) requires from managers socio-interpersonal skills that are revealed through ability to co-operate, communicate with other team members, make contacts, understand their subordinates or raise workers' involvement in completing their tasks. To identify human motivation properly the key is i.e., to analyze factors that determine workers to possess a particular wire [3, pp. 3–5]. The fifth sphere (planning of workers development) requires from managers in particular conceptional skills, creativity and proper diagnosis of their workers' training needs. Undertaking efficient activities to plan career paths as a potential source of new competences becomes a determinant of effective functioning of modern entities [1, p. 256]. According to G. Drożdziel main goal of modern managers is to build a team of employees which are a group of strongly motivated individuals who permanently strive to raise their skills, have clear goals and are always ready to complete even the most challenging tasks and feel satisfied afterwards [7, p. 28]. The importance of team work as a determinant of building entities' competitive advantage is highlighted in studies by K. Laursen and N. Foss [13, pp. 242–262]. D. Goleman among the most important abilities of present managers, next to strictly technical and cognitive skills, mentions the third category of

abilities reflecting emotional intelligence [17, pp. 195–204]. Capability to analyze market processes that take place in the environment of the managed organization, capacity to overcome structural barriers in the organization or ability to identify and understand own or other members' emotions should be the cornerstone of present manager's work [10, pp. 67–77].

According to Dragolea L., Cotîrlea D. majority of effective leaders, here managers, possess various competencies that match the following fields: personal competencies (motivation toward success, self-confidence, dynamism, personal efficiency) social competencies (ability to influence, political judgement, empathy), cognitive competencies such as conceptual thinking or "bird's eye picture" [6, p. 54]. Concluding the above, it may be stated that the manager's fundamental role in the personal function area of catering sector is creating, motivating and permanent team shaping in the atmosphere of mutual trust and tolerance so they are able to reach the expected goals. The roles of manager should align with the rules of diversified development and their current actions should take into account fundamental rules of ethics.

2. Workforce independence in human resources management

Carrying out dialog with catering sector managers on what type of employees they would like to welcome in their structures, I very often hear that the most desired workers are these who most of all are able to think independently, not just following dutifully tasks given by their supervisors. The argument that supports this attitude is an observation that nowadays it is really challenging to forecast customers' current needs, which results in search for such employees who are able to co-create value with clients and at the same time constantly develop their professional activity. Individual independence is defined very frequently by: attitude, habit, sense of subjectivity or gaining life experience. Taking into consideration the goal criterion, from the management perspective, one may divide employees on dependent, partly independent and independent.

Keeping in mind the above classification that involves the level of workers' independence it should be considered what factors may influence significantly their autonomy in the workplace. According to the author the most important elements are: **personal qualities of an individual**, when independence (or lack of it) depends on their particular qualifications, abilities, habits in completing particular tasks; **level of competence**, which is associated with knowledge, specific skills or experience and allows an employee to reach company's goals independently; **professional activity (involvement)**, where effectiveness is measured by level of worker's motivation to complete a particular task; **diversification of company's resources**, which create

a set of proper tools, workplace conditions and are necessary to complete a particular task and decide on an employee's independence level; **level of competencies on a particular position** is a set of formal and informal competencies necessary to perform certain activities which decide on employees' level of independence or dependence, **level of trust from manager's side**, where the factor that decides about employee's independence level is a subjectively perceived level of employee's reliability which is assessed on the basis of the effectiveness in realization of previously assigned tasks, **management style** which determines level of decisive participation of particular workers in realization of entities' mission.

According to one of the authors modern human resources managers should give back autonomy to their employees and start noticing their personal qualities, talents and search there for the main determinants of productivity and economic efficiency of companies [21, p. 148]. However, to start this complex process they should begin with asking particular employees the following set of questions and make their best to achieve the most reliable answers: what do workers want for themselves? What are their expectations and aspirations in current workplace? As well as what they may actually get considering reality of entities' functioning? [15, p. 10]. There are many methods allowing workforce for greater autonomy which are becoming a tool in managers' hands. To the most important the following are considered: allowing employees to make independent decisions, inspire to explore and resist help [20].

To conclude the above considerations, it has to be highlighted that contemporary employees increasingly value autonomy and independence. Even the lowest level of independence that a supervisor may offer them creates in their consciousness the level of trust of their supervisor towards their competencies and values they present. Partnership relations and clear goals build proper atmosphere at work which allows to create their identity in company [8, p. 27].

3. Autonomy in HRM and its influence on the efficiency of work – discussion of results

The author in second half of 2016 ran empiric research concerning the essence of autonomy in human resources management and its influence on service effectiveness among catering sector's workers in hospitality industry. For a case study the author selected one of the biggest Austrian hotel chains, which includes 32 hotels located in eight countries. As a result of final decision, the author chose for research hotels in Poland and Germany. The survey was of diagnostic-expert character and comprised three stages: study of literature, diagnosis of present state (analysis of internal documents, direct questionnaire interview) and preparation of report with

recommendation. The research with questionnaires was conducted on 200 employees sample employed in Food & Beverage, both in Poland and Germany. We obtained 195 filled questionnaires from Poland and 189 from Germany. Within this range the author formulated the following hypotheses: 1. Workers properly identify the essence of autonomy at work; 2. Managers of catering sector create autonomy of their subordinates particularly by restraining from help, motivating to solve current problems on their own and create new challenges; 3. Autonomy in human resources management in the catering sector influences positively raising work efficiency and services. The evaluated workers perceived the essence of autonomy in various way, differently in Poland and in Germany. Due to limited space I have presented only chosen, detailed results of my empirical research, which allow to verify presented research hypothesis.

The evaluated respondents were primarily asked whether they agree with the statement that autonomy in the work process equals to worker's ability to do particular tasks given by manager in certain period of time, in particular situation without any help from outside? Both Polish and German hotel staff answered positively. To make it more precise 92.3% of Polish staff answered 'definitely yes' and the rest of the workers stated 'rather yes' – 7.7%. Considering Germany, 95.2% answered 'definitely yes' and 4.8% 'rather yes'. No respondents (both in Poland and Germany) chose the other two options, which were 'rather not' and 'definitely not'.

Another analyzed issue was to point out the tools used by manager to increase autonomy in tasks completed by their subservient staff. Polish employees indicated that their supervisor (manager) requires first of all problem-solving suggestions (34.4% of answers) and in some situations (mainly considering the basics tasks) restrains from help which is to stimulate workers to greater independence. The third answer was the most frequently pointed by respondents (17.8%). Respondents indicated that manager notices their workers' effort in work process and rewards it accordingly, which translates into greater work motivation and involvement in assigned tasks. Workers employed in Germany gave completely different meaning to the answer options, namely it is most crucial for this group of respondents to have autonomy in choosing way of solving current work problems, (51.3% of responses), then refraining of supervisors from help (21.7%) and expecting suggestions from workers who identify this factor with high employees' creativity and professional competencies. The detailed summary of obtained results is presented in Table 1.

In the next question respondents were asked to express how autonomy influences their independence in the workplace. Both Polish and German workers claim that autonomy in fulfilling tasks definitely motivates towards better, more efficient work. Such an answer was given by 66.7% of Polish and 74.1% of German respondents. Some differences can be observed when analyzing the rest of answers. Independence stresses 17.9% of Polish employees and the answers that autonomy is demotivating or

does not have any influence on them were chosen by the same number of staff, that is 7.7%. No other answers were provided as to the researched issue.

Table 1. Methods of increasing workers' autonomy in human resources management (in %)

What methods are used by manager to increase workers' autonomy in human resources management process?	Poland N = 195	Germany N = 189
Restrain from help	26.2	21.7
Expect suggestions (creativity)	34.4	10.6
Possibility to choose	11.8	51.3
Notice worker's effort	17.8	1.6
Reduction of manager's unnecessary questions	0	0
Motivate to search for solutions	6.2	9
Give workers new challenges	3.6	5.8
Other (what?)	0	0

Source: own study.

In case of German employees answers were as follow: workers' independence does not influence me in any way – such an answer was given by 19.6% of respondents, it influences me in demotivating way – 3.7% and independence at work stresses me – 2.6%. As in case of Polish employees, German respondents didn't point out different options. Of great importance for the researched issue was to find out whether respondents think that high independence influences in a positive way development of an individual. On the basis of gathered answers it may be stated that in case of Polish staff 46.1% of respondents consider that high independence rather positively influences development of the company they work in. Despite this 30.8% of respondents claim that high independence rather does not positively influence hotel's development. There are workers who state that high independence greatly influences company's expansion – 21.5%, and definitely does not influence positively development of a company they work for (1.5%). Analyzing the answers provided by German workers we may conclude that the vast majority states that greater autonomy in human resources management definitely influences hotel's development in a positive way (88.4% of answers). Despite this 9% indicates that autonomy rather does not influence company's expansion (9%), 2.6% of respondents state that workers' independence influences positively hotel's development, however none of respondents chose fringe answers denying the researched issue, which was 'definitely not' – 0% of responses. The last issue that the author verifies in this article on the basis of the studies is whether workers' independence in their opinion influences significantly work efficiency. On the basis of gathered material it may be concluded that majority

of respondents in Poland (44.7%) considers that independence rather increases work efficiency. Moreover, 13.1% of respondents claim that independence definitely raises work efficiency of particular employees. There is also a group of respondents (24.2%) that considers independence as not positively influential on work efficiency. The answer that workers' independence definitely has no influence on work efficiency was chosen by 1% of respondents. The statement that independence in fulfilling worker's duties definitely increases work efficiency was supported by 83.1% of German respondents. Among other answer options, 9% of employees state that independence in their workplace has rather no positive effect on work efficiency, 7% claim that it rather increases it. None of evaluated chose the option that independence definitely does not increase level of their involvement in the scope of their tasks.

Conclusions

The research program that was carried out aimed at verifying the essence of autonomy within human resources management and identifying its influence on work efficiency and services offered by catering sector in hotel industry. The obtained results confirmed i.e., that the evaluated employees in vast majority (92.3% of Polish and 95.2% of German respondents) properly identify the essence of autonomy in workplace. As much as 100% of evaluated German staff pointed that independence in fulfilling their duties is of great importance and gives the feeling of appreciation and trust from their supervisors for their competencies.

Polish respondents were not so much compatible. Only 87.2% of the surveyed group signalizes that independence in performing their tasks was significant.

According to the author such a situation may result from low self-esteem or fear against individual responsibility for possible mistakes while completing duties. Analyzing the gathered results it may be concluded that both in Poland and Germany a catering sector manager in the analyzed entities definitely motivates their employees to independent work. Scrutinizing this aspect, it has to be highlighted that respondents being consensual about strengthening workers' independence varied when mentioning the tools how managers create their autonomy. Among Polish staff the most frequently chosen answers were: expect suggestions from subordinates which respondents associate with great level of creativity (34.4%) and restrain from help by management (26,2%). Analyzing the German results most frequently mentioned answers were: giving employees opportunity to choose methods and ways of completing tasks which were assigned to them (51.3%) and restrain from help by manager (21.7%). The obtained research results allow to draw conclusion that the majority of evaluated (both the ones employed in Poland and Germany) claim that making independent decisions accelerates completing particular tasks and that they do their

tasks definitely better when they decide how to complete them on their own (66.7% of Polish and 74.1% of German employees). Moreover, according to respondents, greater autonomy in working process definitely influences in a positive way the whole hotel development (46.1% – Polish respondents, 88.4% – German respondents) and significantly increases work efficiency (44.5% – Polish workers, 83.1% – German workers). Summarizing the above, service sector entities should be aware that even the greatest financial or material potential will do nothing without the proper workforce. However, having the best qualified group of employees will not ensure automatically the company's market success. In order to reach that goal they should organize work of certain workers properly in order to have a right person in a role of supervisor who will be able to efficiently motivate employees in management process so they will fully achieve company's goals and find personal satisfaction in them, which is usually characterized by three features: subjectivity, relativity and variability [4, p. 4].

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Abstract

Personnel management in modern service sector has an increasingly important role, which in its execution requires interdisciplinary knowledge, not only from managers, but also employees, becoming with time the motivator to increase their decision-making participation in the process of offering services. The purpose of this article is to define the essence of autonomy in human resources management and its impact on work efficiency and services in the opinion of catering sector in hotel industry workers. The paper presents the basic role of managers in managing the human capital and brings closer the essence of autonomy of personnel in the human resources management. The author verified the hypothesis about the importance of autonomy in human resource management and its impact on the efficiency of the work of individual employees. The results confirm the main hypothesis leading to the conclusion that the increase of the decision participation of individual members of the organization in their duties can significantly contribute to rising the efficiency of the services provided.

KEYWORDS: AUTONOMY IN MANAGEMENT, MANAGER, MANAGER'S PROFILE, EFFECTIVE MANAGEMENT, THE CATERING SECTOR

JEL CLASSIFICATION CODES: L20, L22, M12, M16, O15

AUTONOMIA W ZARZĄDZANIU ZASOBAMI LUDZKIMI – DOŚWIADCZENIA EMPIRYCZNE Z POLSKIEGO I NIEMIECKIEGO SEKTORA USŁUG

Streszczenie

Współczesne podmioty sektora usług coraz większą rolę przypisują kierowaniu personelem, które wymaga zarówno od menedżerów, jak i od pracowników interdyscyplinarnej wiedzy oraz zwiększenia partycypacji decyzyjnej w procesie świadczonych usług. Celem artykułu jest określenie istoty autonomii w zarządzaniu zasobami ludzkimi oraz jej wpływu na efektywność pracy i świadczonych usług w opinii pracowników sektora gastronomii pionu hotelarstwa. Zaprezentowano w nim podstawowe role menedżerów w zarządzaniu kapitałem ludzkim oraz przybliżono istotę samodzielności kadry pracowniczej w procesie zarządzania

zasobami ludzkimi. Autorka zweryfikowała hipotezę o istotności autonomii w zarządzaniu zasobami ludzkimi i jej wpływie na efektywność świadczonej pracy przez poszczególnych pracowników. Uzyskane wyniki potwierdzają przyjętą hipotezę i prowadzą do konkluzji, że zwiększenie partycypacji decyzyjnej poszczególnych członków organizacji, może w znaczący sposób przyczynić się do zwiększenia efektywności świadczonych przez tę organizację usług.

SŁOWA KLUCZOWE: AUTONOMIA W ZARZĄDZANIU, MENEDŻER, SYLWETKA MENEDŻERA, EFEKTYWNE ZARZĄDZANIE, SEKTOR GASTRONOMII

KODY KLASYFIKACJI JEL: L20, L22, M12, M16, O15