

The Influence of Job Autonomy, Trust in Management, and Work Meaningfulness on Psychological Empowerment in Digital Startups

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Abstrak

Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk menyelidiki pengaruh otonomi kerja, kepercayaan pada manajemen, dan kebermaknaan kerja terhadap pemberdayaan psikologis karyawan yang bekerja di perusahaan rintisan digital. Alasan penelitian ini adalah sektor perusahaan rintisan digital memiliki ekspektasi yang sangat tinggi terkait kemampuan beradaptasi dan menghasilkan ide, yang berarti karyawan harus memiliki pemberdayaan psikologis secara maksimal. Penelitian ini mengadopsi pendekatan kuantitatif eksploratif, dan kuesioner adalah alat yang digunakan untuk mengumpulkan data dari 150 karyawan perusahaan rintisan digital yang dipilih dengan metode purposive sampling. Data dianalisis dengan regresi linier berganda setelah divalidasi, diperiksa reliabilitasnya, dan diuji asumsi klasik untuk data. Hasil menunjukkan bahwa otonomi kerja, kepercayaan pada manajemen, dan kebermaknaan kerja berhubungan positif dengan pemberdayaan psikologis dan hubungan ini signifikan. Penelitian ini memberikan kontribusi yang signifikan terhadap literatur perilaku organisasi secara teoritis, karena mengungkapkan faktor-faktor yang membentuk pemberdayaan psikologis dalam konteks perusahaan rintisan digital. Melalui implikasi praktis dari penelitian ini, para manajer akan memiliki panduan yang diperlukan untuk membangun iklim kerja yang memfasilitasi pemberdayaan psikologis karyawan, sehingga mengarah pada peningkatan kinerja dan keberlanjutan organisasi.

Kata Kunci: Otonomi Kerja; Kepercayaan pada Manajemen; Kebermaknaan Kerja; Pemberdayaan Psikologis.

Abstract

The present research aims to investigate the influence of job autonomy, trust in management and work meaningfulness on psychological empowerment of the employees working in digital startups. The rationale for this research is that the digital startup sector has very high expectations regarding ability to adapt and generate ideas, which means that the employee should have the empowerment of the psychological empowerment factor to the fullest extent. The research adopts a quantitative explanatory approach, and a questionnaire is the tool used to collect data from the 150 digital startup employees who are selected by purposive sampling. Data are analyzed by multiple linear regression after validating, checking reliability, and testing classical assumptions for data. The results show that job autonomy, trust in management and work meaningfulness are positively related to psychological empowerment and this relationship is significant. The present research offers a significant contribution to the literature on organizational behavior in a theoretical sense, as it reveals the factors that shape psychological empowerment within the digital startups context. Through the practical implications of the study, managers will have the necessary guidance to establish a work climate that facilitates employee psychological empowerment, thereby leading to enhanced performance and sustainability of the organization.

Keyword: Job Autonomy; Trust in Management; Work Meaningfulness; Psychological Empowerment.

RESEARCH ARTICLE

1. Introduction

The digital startups already pointed out have to face a constantly changing, uncertain and competitive scenario, thus, they will have to patronize personnel who are flexible, creative and the ones that are giving in to the situation (Mahrani *et al.*, 2024). In such instances, psychological empowerment rises to be one of the major factors influencing the quality of employee contributions towards organizational objectives. It is a prerequisite for the existence of psychological empowerment that an individual's mental condition is marked by the sentiments of meaning, capability, independence, and having an impact on his/her work (Karyono *et al.*, 2024). When employees perceive themselves as being psychologically empowered, they invariably exhibit high initiative, strong loyalty, and are more engaged in their work. At the same time, a digital startup with a relatively flat organizational structure and a flexible work culture should be able to help employees reach the psychological empowerment level (Djunaedi *et al.*, 2025). However, the aforementioned factors, such as a heavy workload, fast changes, and role ambiguity, if not handled properly, can lead to disempowerment among the employees. As a result, the psychological empowerment process is a strategic necessity for the digital startups to completely conquer the trifecta of organizational performance, innovation, and sustainability and not just survive (Djunaedi *et al.*, 2024; Setyawati *et al.*, 2023).

Job autonomy means the extent of independence and freedom of actions that an employee is allowed to make concerning their job, such as the time of work, the way it is done and even the methods used (Mulyadi *et al.*, 2024). For digital startups, job autonomy is given as one of the most important features that create the working atmosphere as the market requires rapid decision making and flexibility (Sutrisno *et al.*, 2023). By offering a high level of job autonomy, the employee feels he has control over his work and in this case might be encouraged to step into the self-determination aspect of psychological empowerment. In case employees can make decisions regarding the what and how of their tasks, then they are likely to feel responsible and hence, also be motivated (Karyadi, 2009). Moreover, a high trust in management can establish an environment of psychological safety wherein open communication is encouraged. Such employees will perceive their contribution as valuable and will feel like actively participating in the decision-making process, thus, making the empowerment dimensions of impact and meaning stronger (Sabilalo *et al.*, 2020). Lack of trust, on the other hand, may result in a scenario where workers always remain on the alert, feel demotivated and eventually lose their power in the organization. Therefore, trust in management is perceived as a relational factor that is vital in the psychological empowerment process in the digital startup environment (Rafiun *et al.*, 2022). Work meaningfulness is a concept that reflects the degree to which workers see their jobs as important, meaningful, and congruent with their personal aspirations. Workers in the digital startup sector are usually keen on the companies' beliefs, missions, and possible social or innovative impacts, which is why they are frequently drawn to the companies (Mufassir *et al.*, 2024). It is on the basis of this that the employees who perceive their work as a vital and substantial part of the company's success will have a higher emotional engagement level, thus a higher productivity level (Murad *et al.*, 2024). Work meaningfulness is for the purpose of empowering the psychological aspect of meaning and thus motivating people to perform their work with personal dedication (Menhard *et al.*, 2023).

The research mainly aims at evaluating the effects of job autonomy, management trust, and work meaning on psychological empowerment in the case of digital startups. From a theoretical standpoint, the research's part in the domains of organizational behavior and human resources management is to offer an empirical analysis of the digital startups industry's factors that either facilitate or restrict psychological empowerment. Furthermore, the researcher adopts a multi-layered technique by introducing a trio of structural, relational, and psychological dimensions in the elucidation of the working conditions for employees' empowerment. On the flipside, one of the ramifications of the study is that management in digital startups will tend to rely on the research outcomes in creating work policies that not only allow autonomy but also, through trust, render employees' work more significant. One of the study's implications is that improving employees' psychological empowerment will, in turn, result in organizations benefiting indirectly in terms of engagement, performance, and sustainability, among others.

2. Literatur Review

Research on psychological empowerment has grown significantly within organizational contexts, especially in the digital startup sector, which operates under different dynamics compared to traditional organizations. Psychological empowerment refers to the psychological state of an individual influenced by factors such as work meaningfulness, autonomy, and trust in management (Sabilalo *et al.*, 2020). Job autonomy, which refers to the degree of freedom employees have in determining the way, timing, and methods of their work, has been shown to have a significant relationship with psychological empowerment (Mulyadi *et al.*, 2024). When employees are given the freedom to make decisions regarding their tasks, they tend to feel more responsible, which in turn strengthens their motivation and performance (Karyadi, 2009). Trust in management also plays a crucial role in psychological empowerment. This trust creates an environment that supports open communication and enhances psychological safety for employees (Sabilalo *et al.*, 2020). Employees who feel valued by management are more likely to engage in decision-making processes and feel that their contributions have an impact on the organization. On the other hand, a lack of trust can lead to anxiety and demotivation, which negatively affects performance and empowerment (Rafiun *et al.*, 2022). Moreover, work meaningfulness is a key factor in psychological empowerment. Employees who perceive their work as meaningful and aligned with their personal aspirations tend to exhibit higher emotional engagement and better productivity (Murad *et al.*, 2024). In the digital startup sector, where innovation and rapid change are crucial, the perceived meaningfulness of work can strengthen the psychological empowerment dimensions, particularly in terms of meaning and impact (Menhard *et al.*, 2023). This research aims to delve deeper into the relationship between job autonomy, trust in management, and work meaningfulness in fostering psychological empowerment in digital startups, offering new insights for managerial policy development in this sector.

3. Research Methodology

This research is of quantitative and explanatory nature. The research aims to verify the hypotheses regarding the positive roles of job autonomy, trust in management and work meaning in the psychological empowerment of employees in digital start-up companies. Data for the research were collected through a survey that was conducted using a structured questionnaire with a five-point Likert scale among the employees of the digital start-up companies in the main cities of Indonesia. The method that was used to select the sample of the research was purposive sampling, where the respondents who were the digital start-up companies' permanent or contractual employees, had been working for at least six months, and were engaged directly in either operational activities or digital product development were chosen. The sample size 150 respondents that was used, was considered to be enough for the execution of multiple linear regression analysis. The quality of the measuring instruments was determined by a validity test using item-total correlation, the coefficient being above 0.30 and the significance below 0.05; a reliability test using Cronbach's Alpha to determine the value being over 0.70 was done also. The data was then tested for classical assumption; the tests for normality, multicollinearity, and heteroscedasticity were performed to validate the regression model. The examination of the main effect was performed through multiple linear regression which assessed the partial and total impacts of the independent variables on psychological empowerment.

4. Results and Discussion

4.1 Results

The results of the multipliers linear regression analysis have shown that the research model is significant altogether and this is backed by the large F-test value at the 0.000 significance level. Besides,

RESEARCH ARTICLE

this denotes that the combination of job autonomy, trust in management, and work meaning has a mighty positive influence on the psychological empowerment of employees in the case of digital startups. The coefficient of determination (R^2) of 0.70 for the model indicates that 70% of the total variation in psychological empowerment is accounted for by the three independent variables of the research model while the remaining part is due to other factors not covered by the model. The t-test outcomes show that each independent variable has a positive regression coefficient and a significance level below 0.05, hence, all the research hypotheses are supported. The analysis clearly suggests that job autonomy is a very important factor contributing to the psychological empowerment of employees in digital start-ups, and it is a good factor. The dominant reason is that the employees' opinion about their control over the management of work procedures and methods forms the basis of their psychological empowerment feelings. Autonomy in a job gives the workers the impression of being the ones controlling their work which subsequently, strengthens the self-determination and competence parts of psychological empowerment. This is especially true in the case of digital start-ups where speed and creativity are crucial, thus, job autonomy becomes a plus for the employees as they are allowed to explore and come up with new concepts. Empowered workers are those who, owing to the nature of their job, are given the power to make decisions and accordingly feel more accountable and thus more energetic. On the other hand, the curtailment of freedom will result in low self-esteem and consequently, the empowerment feeling will be weaker. It can, thus, be said that job autonomy is one of the major structural factors in the psychological empowerment process in digital start-ups. The research findings have pointed out that the trust of management is one of the main factors affecting the psychological empowerment of employees at digital startups. The main reason for empowerment feeling that employees have is their trust in the management's honesty, skills, and goodwill. When workers trust their superiors, they become more by thinking and thus more willing to share their ideas and opinions with the company.

This mutual trust makes the employees feel that their contributions are appreciated and that they are important to the organization. The trust in the management in digital startups which are often experiencing rapid changes will not only reduce the level of uncertainty but also improve the level of employee participation. On the flip side, lack of trust may cause fear and therefore diminish the motivation to work. Therefore, trust in management comes out to be a crucial interpersonal factor in the process of psychological empowerment of employees. The research outcomes affirm that the work meaningfulness is one of the main factors affecting digital startup employees' psychological empowerment positively. It reveals that the employees' belief in the significance and worth of their work is the primary source of their psychological empowerment. Those employees who are engaged in meaningful jobs are frequently emotionally connected to their work and consider the organization as very important for their input. Work meaningfulness combines with the psychological empowerment's dimensions of meaning and impact, thus leading the employees to work with passion rather than for money. Digital startups, which usually have a high turnover rate because of their innovative ideas and transformative missions, acknowledge that the chief reason for their employees' motivation is the meaningful work. On the contrary, if the worker perceives the job as boring, he may slowly become unenthusiastic about it and lose the feeling of being empowered. Therefore, meaningful work is a strong psychological factor in the process of building the psychological empowerment of employees in a digital startup.

4.2 Discussion

The findings of this study underscore the significant role that job autonomy, trust in management, and work meaningfulness play in fostering psychological empowerment among employees in digital startups. Job autonomy, which allows employees the freedom to make decisions regarding their work tasks and methods, is a strong predictor of psychological empowerment. This aligns with the research by Mulyadi *et al.* (2024), who found that job autonomy positively influences employees' sense of competence and self-determination, key components of psychological empowerment. By granting employees the ability to control how they perform their tasks, organizations can foster a sense of ownership and responsibility, thus enhancing their psychological empowerment (Karyadi, 2009). Similarly, trust in management has been identified as another critical factor that influences psychological empowerment. The results of this

RESEARCH ARTICLE

study corroborate the findings of Sabilalo *et al.* (2020), who highlighted that trust between employees and management cultivates an environment of psychological safety, encouraging open communication and a sense of value among employees. When employees trust their management, they are more likely to feel confident in their contributions and see their involvement as impactful to the organization. On the contrary, a lack of trust may lead to disengagement, which diminishes psychological empowerment, as suggested by Rafiun *et al.* (2022). Furthermore, the concept of work meaningfulness emerged as a strong driver of psychological empowerment. Employees who perceive their work as meaningful are more emotionally engaged and committed, leading to higher productivity, as confirmed by Murad *et al.* (2024). This finding aligns with Menhard *et al.* (2023), who argued that employees working in environments where they feel their work contributes to the broader goals of the organization are more likely to experience greater psychological empowerment. In digital startups, where rapid innovation and change are paramount, creating a work environment that emphasizes meaningfulness can enhance employee commitment and performance, ultimately fostering a culture of empowerment. In conclusion, the study confirms that job autonomy, trust in management, and work meaningfulness are interrelated factors that significantly contribute to psychological empowerment in digital startups. These findings provide valuable insights for managers in digital startups, suggesting that empowering employees through autonomy, trust, and meaningful work can enhance organizational performance, innovation, and sustainability.

5. Conclusion

The study uncovers that the psychological empowerment of digital startup employees is positively and significantly influenced by job empowerment, management trust, and the usefulness of their jobs. It cannot be entirely attributed to the employee and must also be seen as a combination of the job design, the nature of the relationships with the management, and the employees' belief that their work is important. Workers are allowed to take control of their own work and to be independent through job autonomy. Trust in management creates psychological safety and a worker's conviction that his/her contribution has a direct effect on the organization. On the other hand, work meaningfulness operates as an internal motivator that is conducive to the development of emotional bonds and loyalty to the job. To sum up, these three elements account for a big portion of the psychological empowerment, thus it is important to manage both structural and psychological aspects in digital startups. It is the responsibility of digital startup management to set up work systems that enable a fair level of job autonomy whereby the employees can take the lead and come up with creative ideas. In addition, the management should establish a trust in management that will be maintained through open communication, having the same policies, and involving staff in decision-making. Moreover, it would be highly advantageous for the firms to continually remind their workers of the Vision, Mission, and the significance of their contribution to the overall success of the organization so as to increase work meaningfulness.

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RESEARCH ARTICLE

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