



LEADERSHIP THROUGH EMPOWERMENT OF HUMAN RESOURCES DURING THE PANDEMICS

Jurgita Martinkienė, Asta Valackienė, Modestas Vaikšnoras

Lithuania Business University of Applied Sciences

Abstract

The world has never before experienced such a dramatic impact on human capital; and the consequences of the COVID-19 on economic, social and political indicators – although still not fully known and difficult to forecast, but according to many authors and international organisations will certainly be dramatic (Tawil, 2020; UNESCO, 2020). The COVID-19 pandemic has created a particularly challenging environment for human resource management (HRM) – with managers having to quickly venture into the “unknown unknowns” as they strive to help their workforce adapt to and cope with radical changes occurring in the work and social environment. According to D. Gudelis (2020) the COVID-19 pandemics that has spread all over the world since the beginning of 2020 has posed a grand challenge to the governments of all countries around the world, including Lithuania – they were forced to make decisions on the measures that would help to slow the spread of the virus as well as to take actions to alleviate the negative effects of the enforced restrictions on the economy and people. In Lithuania, having declared a state-level emergency situation on 26 February, 2020, the governance of the pandemics was based on the Law on Civil Protection of the Republic of Lithuania and the State Emergency Situation Management Plan approved in 2010. After a couple of weeks, the decision on announcement of a national quarantine on the entire territory of the Republic of Lithuania was made on the grounds of the Law on the Prevention and Control of Communicable Diseases in Humans of the Republic of Lithuania. In the light of the above, the article analyses the leadership through empowerment of human resources and underpins the effectiveness of management. The initial theoretical framework provides the rationale for the concept of leadership during the pandemics; it also includes an analysis of the dimensions and typology of the concept of empowerment and COVID-19: management, policy, remote work and management processes. The article focuses both on the changes in leader’s management styles and decision-making options in the organization where leadership through empowerment of employees during the pandemics plays an important role. Quantitative research on leadership through empowerment in organizations during the pandemics was conducted. The research findings have shown that leaders were fairly well prepared for management of human resources during the pandemics as well as disclosed the trends that the leaders in organizations provide their employees with a possibility to perform challenging work tasks, to make decisions autonomously, to develop their competences, they share information and apply incentive measures that during the challenging times are relevant for workforce. The research has revealed that little attention has been paid to career development opportunities in organizations when working in remote mode. Practical implication of the research findings allows maintaining that the COVID-19 pandemics will have profound social, psychological, physical and technical implications for human resources as they attempt to adjust to their drastically altered work environments. Some of these challenges, undoubtedly, have never been experienced before, i.e., they are unique, and therefore, will require new methods of analysis and new theoretical constructs, however, some other issues employees are currently facing resemble their usual daily work experience.

KEY WORDS: human resources, leadership, empowerment; pandemics, COVID-19.

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Introduction

The world has never before experienced such a dramatic impact on human capital; and the consequences of the COVID-19 on economic, social and political indicators – although still not fully known and difficult to forecast, but according to many authors and international organisations will certainly be dramatic (Tawil, 2020; UNESCO, 2020). Therefore, ability of the leader and an employee to understand each other and to successfully work together as a team as well as to be able to work remotely is crucial for every successful organization. Today, in an exceptional period of the pandemics that has affected all the world, the role of leadership in companies and organizations has become increasingly important. Recently, a new managerial competence – empowerment has become increasingly emphasised and analysed, i.e., the leader’s actions in respect of employee in order to ensure successful implementation of organizational goals.

According to R. Jeyakumar, at al. (2020) some of the most relevant problems around the world require an understanding and acceptance of science by the general public, which includes understanding and responding

accordingly to a pandemic such as the recent COVID-19 novel coronavirus.

Coronavirus (COVID-19) infection is a viral respiratory disease caused by acute respiratory syndrome coronavirus 2, SARS-CoV-2 and is transmitted via airborne particles and droplets or by direct contact with infected people. Since its first outbreak in the Wuhan province in China in December, 2019, the infection had spread around the world and after the number of cases exceeded 118000 on 11 of March, the World Health Organization (herein further – the WHO) announced the COVID-19 pandemics that has affected over 110 countries all over the world (Mitkutė et al., 2020, p. 176-184).

According to N. K. Steffensa and others, (2021) that for leaders to be seen as authentic and garner support, they need to be seen as aware not only of who they are as individuals, but also of who they are as members of the collective they seek to lead.

An increasing number of workers participate in online labor markets. In contrast to traditional employment relationships within firms, the interaction between online workers and their employers are short and impersonal,

which makes motivating online workers more challenging.

The article formulates the problem: how leadership manifests itself through empowerment of human resources during pandemics? COVID-19 pandemics provides a unique opportunity to analyse both the changes in the leader's role, management style and in the decision-taking options.

The research methods included a systematic analysis of research literature, an anonymous written survey conducted to disclose the importance of leadership in empowerment of human resources during the pandemics. Research instrument (questionnaire) comprises 7 closed-ended questions; statistical methods were applied to analyse the data: a statistical data analysis was performed using the descriptive statistics method, calculating the mean arithmetical scores, of the respondents' opinions, percentage, standard deviation. To process the data, SPSS 21 (Statistical Package for Social Sciences) software package was used (Festa and others, 2021)

Management concept during the pandemics

To successfully implement the aims and objectives of organization it shall be led by the leader, who possesses relevant competences, which were critically needed for empowerment of employees during the pandemics.

According to Carnevale et al., (2020), Mansoor, A., Abdul Wahab, S., & Jahan, S. (2021) today's organizations have to remain alert and adaptive to unforeseen events, such as external crises, which create increased uncertainty among their workforce and pose immediate threats to the organizations' performance and viability. However, with the recent COVID-19 pandemics, organizations suddenly have to navigate the unprecedented and thereby find new solutions to challenges arising across many areas of their operations.

Organizations are faced with increasing uncertainty as they navigate today's "grand challenges", or highly significant problems not typically confined to national, economic or societal borders (Eisenhardt, Graebner & Soneshin, 2016; Ferraro, Etzion & Gehman, 2015). Today's grand challenges are wide-ranging, comprising multiple complicated issues, such as climate change, severe economic downturns and political instability (George, Howard-Grenville, Joshi & Tihanyi, 2016). In our interrelated world these serious issues may pose a direct threat to viability and survival of organizations, urging them to continue to respond and adjust by respectively organizing and managing their workforce. But with the recent outbreak of COVID-19 ("Coronavirus (COVID-19)", 2020), organizations face a grand challenge of unparalleled proportions, one that forces them to dive into and directly manage unprecedented territory as they alter their workforce in technical, physical and socio-psychological ways not seen before (Carnevale et al., 2020 p. 183-187).

According to Carnevale et al. (2020), the COVID-19 pandemic has created a particularly challenging environment for human resource management (HRM) – with managers having to quickly venture into the "unknown unknowns" as they strive to help their workforce adapt to and cope with radical changes occurring in

the work and social environment. In this case, leadership through empowerment of human resources during the pandemic plays a significant role. For example, employees who formerly spent all or most of their time working inside their organization's physical boundaries now have to quickly adjust to remote work environments. Even those who might be well adjusted to remote working conditions are now faced with their own unique challenges due to an inability to seek alternative workspaces (e.g., cafés, libraries, coworking-spaces) outside of the home itself. This has likely further limited the segmentation between work and private spheres leading to greater difficulties in "unplugging" from work demands (Chawla, MacGowan, Gabriel & Podsakoff, 2020). Aside from the increased inability to separate work and private life, the closure of schools and child-care services has increased parental demands for employees, further blurring the lines between work and family spheres. While these work-family interconnections seem particularly demanding for employees with children, single and childless workers are not immune to the negative consequences of such altered working conditions, as they may be at greatest risk of loneliness, a felt lack of purpose, and associated negative effects on well-being (Achor, Kellerman, Reece & Robichaux, 2018). Valackienė et al. (2021) analysed the safety of employees through implementation of changes in the organization during the pandemics and presented new theoretical paradigms as well as made an empirical assessment of opportunities for employee involvement.

According to Carnevale et al., (2020), looking across disciplines might offer further solutions on how organizations can adapt their human resource practices in such a way that can alleviate the above referred problems and enhance ability of employees to thrive during such dynamic and uncertain times. In particular, the field of entrepreneurship, which focuses on the discovery, evaluation, and exploitation of opportunities occurring in inherently ambiguous and dynamic environments, is likely to offer some valuable insights.

The COVID-19 pandemics is likely having profound social, psychological, physical and technical implications for employees as they attempt to adjust to their drastically altered work environments. Although some of these challenges are, undoubtedly, unique and therefore, new methods and theories will be required to address them, however, some of the issues employees are currently facing resemble entrepreneurs' daily work experience. After all, entrepreneurs are often confronted with demanding work conditions including high levels of uncertainty and responsibility (McMullen & Shepherd, 2006), a need to flexibly and continuously adjust to new situations (Rauch et al., 2018) and a strong interrelatedness of the work and family spheres (Aldrich & Cliff, 2003; Jennings & McDougald, 2007) (Carnevale et al., 2020 p. 183-187).

Concept and typology of empowerment

Analysis of research publications (Spencer, 1993; Mintzberg, 2004; Rajadhaksha, 2005; Bakanauskienė, 2006; Gupta, 2006; Golemant ir kt. 2007; Baležentis, 2008; Boyatzis, 2008; Pacevičius, 2008; Anwar, 2015; Jokubauskienė, 2015; Petrulis, 2016; Martinkienė,

Vaikšnoras, 2019), allows noticing that on the background of new changes in organizations and in the human resource management process, use of a term of managerial competence – *empowerment* has become increasingly common. For the first time the term „to empower” was used by a British writer Herbert L’Estrange. In fiction it meant “to authorise”. In social sciences this concept is used in particularly broad sense and across various disciplines: sociology, economics, educology, management, political sciences, gender studies, minority studies (Hur, 2006). Each of the above subjects interprets the term „empowerment” in its own way. In everyday language, the term „to empower” is often used as a synonym of the sayings “to authorise” or „to confer responsibility” (TvariJonavičius, 2014).

According to M. TvariJonavičius (2015), the terms “empowerment”, “empowered” have already found their place in the vocabulary of managers and consultants of Lithuanian organizations. The problem is that people imply a lot of different things under the term “empowerment”. Sometimes empowerment is used to describe actions aimed at encouraging the employees to assume more responsibility; in some other cases, empowerment is used as a synonym of “authorisation”, while sometimes – as a synonym of „motivation“. Having read a lot of publications, communicated with the USA and European researchers, worked with managers and human resource specialists, it may be maintained that empowerment may be defined in a lot of very different ways (TvariJonavičius, 2015). According to M. TvariJonavičius (2015), empowerment is presented from a dyadic approach. The first component is the state of employee – state of *psychological empowerment*. The second one means various tools of empowerment to enhance this state (empowering management, empowering character of work, empowering organizational environment). The concept of empowerment is often identified with employee motivation or their promotion; however empowerment is a much broader concept than motivation.

Analysis of the concept of empowerment explicitly shows that human resources in the organization are empowered by the leader; empowerment depends on management style, character of impact on employees and style of behaviour. Employee empowerment in the organization should be a continuous process depending on the management traits and qualities of the leader and through various tools provided by the leader to employees: required information, various trainings, employee promotion and motivation would develop an empowered employee, who is able to address various encountered problems much more promptly in a self-directed way, to offer various problem solving methods and to strive for the aims and objectives set by the organization. Human resources empowerment may be understood as a dyadic phenomenon: as a management practice aimed at increasing autonomy and responsibility of employees, and as a proactive individual attitude to the job. Empowered persons find meaningfulness in the work they perform, feel competent to perform their role, are able to make decisions facilitating the achievement of the set goals, think that they may have real impact on achievement of the organizational objectives (Boudrias et

al., 2009 p. 625-638). According to Peterson et al. (2005), empowerment is a social-action process, whereby people acquire more control, efficacy and social justice.

Empowering leader behaviour – leader’s actions enhancing employee empowerment: enhancing the meaningfulness of work perceived by an employee, encouraging participation in decision making, allowing employees to act autonomously, expressing confidence in employees and their capability to perform a job (Ahearne et al., 2005) (TvariJonavičius, 2014).

Empowering leader behaviour manifests itself through four major dimensions, i.e., enhancing the meaningfulness of work of the organization’s human resources, fostering participation in decision making, the leader’s confidence in high performance of employees and provision of autonomy to employees.

Table 1. Dimensions of leader’s empowering behaviour

Leader’s behaviour	
<i>Enhancing the meaningfulness of work</i>	How much the leader helps an employee to understand how the objectives, performance and performance results of the latter correlate with the organization’s aims, performance and results; how much the leader helps an employee in other ways to see higher meaningfulness at work.
<i>Fostering participation in decision making</i>	How much the leader makes decisions together with his/her subordinates.
<i>Expressing confidence in high performance</i>	How much the leader is assured that his subordinates will be capable to meet the requirements of job tasks. How much the leader, by his own behaviour, demonstrates confidence and trust in high performance of subordinates.
<i>Providing autonomy from bureaucratic constraints</i>	How much the leader allows employees to act autonomously, in their own way, without restricting them by bureaucratic constraints.

Source: Valiulė, V., Vaikšnoras, M. 2018

Referring to the characteristics of the leader’s empowering behaviour, empowerment may be defined through the following dimensions: delegation, accountability for outcomes, encouragement of employee self-directed decision making, information sharing by the leader with employees, employee skill development and coaching for innovative performance.

Table 2. Characteristics of leader’s empowering behaviour

Leader’s behaviour	
<i>Delegation</i>	The leader’s behaviour, whereby he/she delegates authority to his/her subordinates.
<i>Accountability for outcomes</i>	Responsibility for outcomes of the actions delegated by the leader to subordinates.
<i>Self-directed decision making</i>	The leader’s behaviour encouraging the employees to make decisions independently from the leader, on their own initiative and within their competence.
<i>Information sharing</i>	Sharing experience or other information by the leader with employees, which allows them to perform according to the organization’s standards.
<i>Skill development</i>	The leader’s actions promoting employee development. It means that development required for the employees is ensured through facilitation of the development process rather than through orders or control
<i>Coaching for</i>	The leader’s behaviour, which encourages

<i>innovative performance</i>	reasonable risk taking by subordinates, their new ideas and ensures feedback on their performance, when mistakes and failures of subordinates are treated as opportunities to learn.
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Source: prepared by the authors, according to M. TvariJonavičius, 2014

Analysis of the characteristics and dimensions of leader’s empowering behaviour and their comparison with traditional and modern management styles allows maintaining that no characteristics and dimensions of employee empowering behaviour have been observed in the autocratic and bureaucratic management styles; while in the charismatic, cooperative and liberal management styles they have been noticeable (Vaikšnoras, 2018).

COVID-19: governance and management processes, policy, remote work

According to D. Gudelis (2020), the COVID-19 pandemics that has spread all over the world since the beginning of 2020 has become a grand challenge to the governments of all countries around the world, including Lithuania – they were forced to make decisions on the measures that would help to slow the spread of the virus as well as to take actions to alleviate the negative effects of the enforced restrictions on the economy and people. In Lithuania, having declared a state-level emergency situation on 26 February, 2020, governance of the pandemics was based on the Law on Civil Protection of the Republic of Lithuania and the State Emergency Situation Management Plan approved in 2010. After a couple of weeks, the decision on announcement of a national quarantine on the entire territory of the Republic of Lithuania was made on the grounds of the Law on the Prevention and Control of Communicable Diseases in Humans of the Republic of Lithuania.

In response to the dynamic pandemic situation, the key government authorities responsible for the COVID-19 management in Lithuania (the Government, the Head of the National Emergency Operations, etc.) were making decisions on the enforcement of various measures required to contain the pandemics. Although most of the measures were taken without any pre-planning, since April 2020 preparation of planning documents has been started – the Action Plan for Economic Stimulus, the COVID-19 Management Strategy, Lithuania's Plan for the DNA of the Future Economy were approved. Although the most decisions on the COVID-19 pandemics management were necessary, timely and appropriate, the process of the pandemics governance during this period has also attracted a lot of criticism (Gudelis, 2020; Mitkutė ir kt., 2020).

Table 3. Types of policy instruments and examples of their application in the policy of Lithuania’s response to the COVID-19

	Material	Procedural
Organizational	hospitalization of sick persons; personal testing (tests, rapid tests); purchase of reagents; purchase of rapid tests;	Formation of the COVID-19 Management Committee, Emergency Situation

	purchase of personal protection equipment (masks, disinfection liquid); purchase of ICU ventilators; transportation of sick persons and those in mandatory isolation; equipping and operation of the premises for mandatory isolation; equipping of hospitals;	Management Commissions and Operations Centres (on the national level and in municipalities); Formation of decision support groups and approval of their composition; Granting of authority to various relevant bodies;
Regulatory	Restrictions on travel, event delivery, service provision, etc.; Requirements for mandatory isolation;	-
Financial	loans (loans to providers of catering and hospitality services, loans to travel agencies, loans to cover accounts payable ASAP, loans to businesses most affected by the COVID-19, crowdfunding loans); guarantees (guarantees for performance of obligations of travel agencies and tour operators, loan portfolio guarantees); compensations (for interests, rental payments, idle-time allowances); subsidies (of marketplace charge, to micro-companies); allowances (unemployment, for pensioners, etc.); deferral of income tax returns; deferrals of tax payment; deferrals of fine payment;	Mobilisation of support from the public, businesses, NGOs (management of networks);
Informational	Informing the public about the use of personal protection equipment and physical distancing requirements; gathering, analysis and publication of statistical data on COVID-19;	Development of algorithms on how authorities have to exchange information, how municipalities have to provide information to the public;

Source: prepared by the authors, according to D. Gudelis, 2020

Remote work can become one of the key solutions when striving to find a balance between optimization of business costs, increase of competitive advantage and employee satisfaction. Although remote work is not a novelty in the labour market, it’s recommended to introduce this work arrangement in a company after a thorough preparation; however early spring of 2020 became the time of challenges for many companies, which until that had not even thought about introducing the remote work arrangement or preparation for it. After companies have in urgency shifted to remote working, the process often revealed the need for guidelines for

improvement of remote work in a company (Aničas et al., 2020, p. 296-300).

According to Balsys, A. Aničas, I., Labanauskaitė, D. (2020), *Remote work* term can be understood as a working arrangement where job functions are performed outside the company's office with the aid of modern digital technologies instead of being physically present at the office location. Remote working arrangements are used all over the world not only by business companies, but by national and regional governmental authorities, other public sector enterprises as well. Therefore, performance-oriented culture in remote working is of crucial importance, since it becomes a key factor in increasing the effectiveness of remote work and furthering innovations in the public administration.

In order to successfully implement remote work programmes, the leaders, managers and other specialists in companies and organisations should provide consistent and comprehensive support to remote workers; for example, they can prepare relevant legal and organizational guidelines, implement various IT tools facilitating the collaboration and virtual communication with remotely working staff. It's absolutely necessary to promote communication between on-site and remote workers, as the latter might feel isolated due to lack of communication with colleagues. To that effect, various technologies, additional sessions of virtual communication, etc. may be used (Balsys, Aničas, Labanauskaitė, 2020, p. 296-300).

With the beginning of the COVID-19 quarantine in Lithuania, companies hastily "sent" their employees to work from home and had no enough time to prepare themselves nor their employees for the new challenges. During this period the remote work has become an advantage for all employees who were able to perform their job functions from home, thereby avoiding idle time or even worse – losing of a job (Šimanskienė, Ruginė, Župerkienė et al. 2020, p. 296-300).

Data security is another important issue to be addressed: protocols of access to confidential information to certain groups of employees, protocols for data backup have to be established; a single policy on acceptable IT use and the terms of use of the employer's information, available communication means and software have to be prepared. Such a policy has to be introduced to the staff – it's not enough just to have it, it needs to be applied in order to prevent problems in future. The change in the situation due to remote working may require reviewing the processes in an organization and looking for new prospects in the process management (Research study, 2020, p. 296-300).

The conducted analysis of the typology of empowerment explicitly shows that human resources in the organization during the pandemics are empowered by the leader and this process depends on various management styles and qualities of the leader. Empowerment is a process initiated by the leader; it starts with understanding of the objectives, comprises of certain activities and ends with successful performance results in the organization. Empowerment of human resources in the organization should be a continuous process, which – depending on the management styles and qualities of the leader and through various tools provided by the leader to

employees (human resources of the organization), i.e. through provided resources, required information, various trainings, autonomy provided for employees in decision-making and responsibility for their decision, fostering of employee innovativeness, employee promotion and motivation, develops an empowered employee, who is able much more promptly to address various encountered problems in a self-directed way, to offer various problem solving methods and to strive for the aims and objectives set by the organization.

Results of the research on leadership through improvement of human resources in organisations during the pandemics

As an accurately and correctly defined research sample is very important for research, our research sample included 89 employees of 4 business and public organizations with 95% confidence level and 5% acceptable sampling error. Validity of the respondents' response to the questionnaire survey – 85%. The research covered the Western Lithuania region. The research instrument comprises 7 closed-ended questions indicating the interaction between empowering leadership and employee involvement. In accordance with research ethics, the respondents were assured of anonymity and confidentiality of the gathered information. To in-depth analyse the formulated problem and to make a statistical assessment of the obtained results, a Likert scale (also called a rating scale) was used to validate the questions – it's probably the most common method for data grouping. This scale is particularly suitable for measuring the attitudes, beliefs and opinions of the respondents where all answers are strictly ranked in ascending or descending order. Women accounted for 83%, men - 17 % of the respondents; 55 % of them had a master's degree.

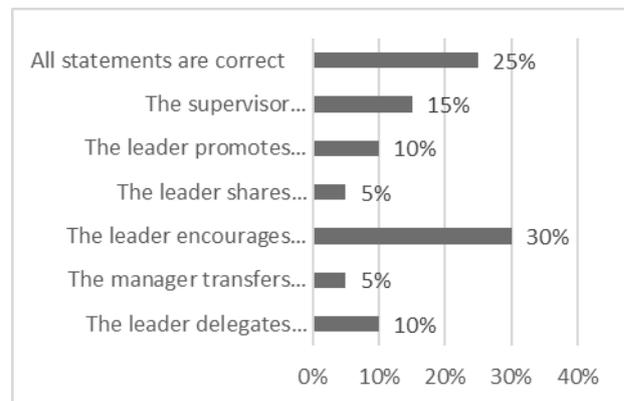


Fig. 1 Respondents' perception of the concept, "leadership through empowerment"

Respondents noted that leadership through empowerment manifests itself when the leader encourages employees to make decisions independently – more than 30% of the respondents agreed to this statement. Fig.1 shows that other respondents (about 22%) agree to the provided statements that empowerment can be recognized when the leader delegates authority to his subordinates; it's very important for the respondents that the leader encourages the process of employee development (10%), when empowerment is ensured

through relevant facilitation of the employee development process rather than through the function of control; also, when the leader encourages reasonable risk taking by subordinates, their new ideas, welcomes feedback from them; when mistakes and failures are admitted and treated as opportunities to learn (15%).

Table 4. Respondents' views on how they felt empowered during the pandemic

Criteria	Mean	Std. Deviation
Make decisions independently	2,85	1,461
Take personal responsibility	3,75	1,552
Feel the commitment	3,95	1,468
Feel the meaning of work	3,90	1,483
Feel having power	2,75	1,552
Feel competent to do specific job tasks	3,55	1,669
Feel willing and able to do the job	3,90	1,483
Strengthen your professional skills	3,90	1,586
Perform challenging work	3,80	1,473
Have access to all necessary information	3,55	1,468
Get the support and advice from other employees	3,70	1,593
Feel the inner motivation	3,70	1,625
Implement their own ideas	3,50	1,638
Feel the enthusiasm while working	3,45	1,572
Feel the meaningfulness of work	3,60	1,635
Be autonomous (independent)	2,80	1,642

The researchers attempted to analyse how employees felt during the pandemics while engaging into various activities. The respondents noted that they had more opportunities to take personal responsibility ($\bar{x} = 3,75; s = 1,552$), always were able to feel the meaningfulness of work ($\bar{x} = 3,90; s = 1,483$), had competences to perform specific work tasks ($\bar{x} = 3,55; s = 1,669$), to strengthen their professional skills ($\bar{x} = 3,90; s = 1,586$), quite well coped with the challenge to get timely access to required information ($\bar{x} = 3,55; s = 1,468$) to have the inner motivation ($\bar{x} = 3,70; s = 1,625$); they less often could make decisions independently than when working on-site ($\bar{x} = 2,85; s = 1,461$). However, the research findings have disclosed that the respondents felt bad about having no power to implement ideas ($\bar{x} = 3,50; s = 1,638$), since there was a lack of enthusiasm for work, employees didn't feel sufficient support from the leader ($\bar{x} = 3,45; s = 1,572$) because of disturbed communication with the leader when working remotely.

Table 5. Respondents' opinions whether empowerment as an incentive measure was applied by the leader of their organization during the pandemic

Criteria	Mean	Std. Deviation
Plan their working time	4,55	,605
Take personal responsibility	4,40	,821
Feel the commitment	4,55	,605
Feel the meaningfulness of work	4,30	,801
Feel empowered	3,35	1,424
Feel competent to do the job	4,25	,967
Feel willing and able to do the job	4,15	,988
Strengthen their skills	4,35	,933
Perform challenging work	4,55	,686
Have access to all necessary information	4,20	,951
Feel the support and advice from other employees	4,20	1,005
Make decisions independently	3,55	1,395

Implement their own ideas	3,90	1,119
Have career opportunities	3,50	1,235

Analysis of the respondents' empowerment status in the analysed organization, i.e., whether the leader, in employees' opinion, applied empowerment as an incentive measure during the pandemics, showed that the leaders of the organizations fairly well applied the following tools of empowerment: most notable one, in the respondents' opinion, was the possibility to plan one's own worktime during the pandemics, since the work was being performed from home, and the respondents saw that as one of the remarkable incentive measures ($\bar{x} = 4,55; s = 0,605$); also, they felt that they could develop commitment to perform the planned work tasks ($\bar{x} = 4,55; s = 0,605$), perform challenging work (and the scope of new work tasks had considerably increased during the pandemics) ($\bar{x} = 4,55; s = 0,686$); could feel the meaningfulness of work ($\bar{x} = 4,30; s = 0,801$) so that employees are not frustrated when working remotely; the respondents noted that they were able to strengthen their skills ($\bar{x} = 4,35; s = 0,933$); the answers distributed equally between the following two statements: the possibility to get access to necessary information, i.e. that the leader shares the required information, does not keep employees guessing, unaware as to the situation; that the employees get support, advice from co-workers ($\bar{x} = 4,20; s = 1,005$). Minority of the respondents expressed the view that self-directed decision-making was not an incentive measure as well as the concerns that little attention was paid to career development during the pandemics ($\bar{x} = 3,50; s = 1,235$).

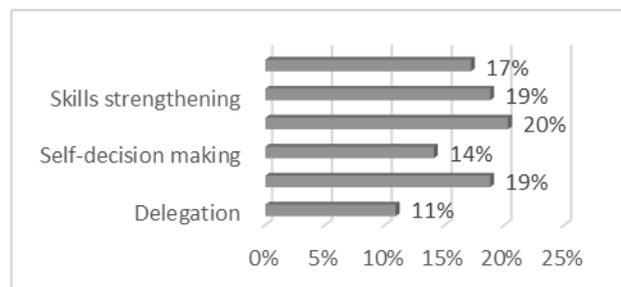


Fig. 2 The characteristics of empowering behaviour applied by the leader in the respondents' organization during the pandemic

The respondents noted that the characteristics of empowering behaviour (Fig. 2) applied by the leader during the pandemics are commendable, since the leaders were successfully sharing information (20%), it was mentioned that an employee himself/herself has to be able to take responsibility for the outcomes of his/her actions; the possibility to strengthen skills and to foster innovativeness was also pointed out (19%), however, the leaders avoided delegation of functions to their subordinates in the organizations during the pandemic (11%).

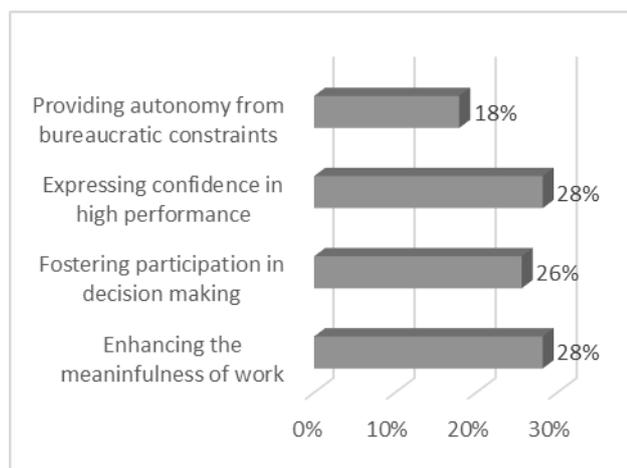


Fig. 3 The dimensions of empowering behaviour applied by the leader in the respondents' organization during the pandemic

The respondents noted that the dimensions of empowering behaviour applied by the leader during the pandemics were commendable, since the leaders were successfully enhancing the meaningfulness of work perceived by the employees, encouraged the staff to take part in decision-making (26%), provided the employees with autonomy and encouraged confidence in high performance (28%).

Conclusions

To summarize the insights, it can be maintained that the global spread of the COVID-19 pandemics has posed a grand challenge both to organizations and their leaders. Today's organizations have to remain alert and adaptive to various unforeseen events, and the leaders of organisations have to pay special attention to the leadership through empowerment of human resources.

Analysis of research literature allowed to substantiate that *Empowerment* is a process initiated by the leader; it starts with understanding of the objectives, comprises of certain activities and ends with successful performance results in the organization.

Empirical analysis of the characteristics and dimensions of leader's empowering behaviour and their comparison with traditional and modern management styles allows maintaining that no characteristics and dimensions of employee empowering behaviour have been observed in the autocratic and bureaucratic management styles; while in the charismatic, cooperative and liberal management styles they have been noticeable.

The period of the COVID-19 pandemics has proved that remote work has become one of the key solutions for organisations in order to successfully continue their business. Also, shifting to remote work resulted in various challenges to be tackled by leaders of organisations. To successfully implement the remote work programmes, leaders had to consistently provide support to remote workers and to empower them to make decisions.

The research results have shown that leadership through empowerment of human resources is understood as the leader's behaviour whereby he/she: delegates authority to his/her subordinates; delegates responsibility

for outcomes of their actions; encourages the employees to make decisions independently from the leader, on their own initiative and within their competence; shares experience or other information with employees, which allows them to perform according to the organization's standards; encourage reasonable risk taking by subordinates, their new ideas and ensures feedback on their performance, where mistakes and failures are treated as opportunities to learn.

The respondents stated that they felt fairly well while working remotely during the pandemics, because they could plan their own worktime; also, could take personal responsibility, strengthen and develop their skills and competences, felt support and got advice from their colleagues, the leader empowered the workforce to address new, job-related challenges; information-sharing process was going rather smoothly. The employees saw little shortcomings – for them, the remote working did not cause much stress, or feeling of monotony; perhaps, one of the points to some extent noted by the respondents was that there were no career development opportunities during the pandemics.

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Jurgita Martinkienė. Doctoral degree in Social sciences, Director of Lithuania Business University of Applied Sciences. Research Interests: application of managerial competencies in business companies. Turgaus Street 21, Klaipėda, tel. 8-46 311099, jurgita.martinkiene@ltvk.lt

Asta Valackienė is professor at Lithuania Business University of Applied Sciences of Vilnius Branch. Research interests: Methodology of Science and Research; Change Management; Responsible Research and Innovation. A Member of Management Committee of COST ACTION 17127 Programme. National representative from Lithuania. A Member of UNESCO Unitwin Network Baltic and Black Seas Circle Consortium in Education Research (BBCC) Association. Author of Research studies, Books, Handbooks. Has published over 80 scientific papers indexed in the international data bases with co-authors and single-authored. Address: Str. 70, LT-09124, Vilnius. Phone: +37068694121. E-mail: asta.valackiene@gmail.com

Modestas Vaikšnoras. Lithuania Business University of Applied Sciences Head of Strategic Development and Communication Department Modestas Vaišnoras modestas.vaiksnoras@gmail.com. Research Interests: Social Sciences.

