

# The Empowered Project Manager | Employee Perception of Empowerment

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## Summary

- Research question:** What factors of empowerment are required from the project manager's perspective?
- Methods:** Interviews with 17 project managers at a multi-national technology organisation were conducted, as well as a survey to explore their current empowerment status. Both existing factors in empowerment literature (deductive) and possible additional factors (inductive) were analysed.
- Results:** The major findings of this study's qualitative analysis are that the factors of socio-structural empowerment, access to opportunity, formal power sources, informal power sources, information, support, and resources, were confirmed as required empowerment factors for project managers. Also, three of the four factors of psychological empowerment – competence, self-determination, and impact – are confirmed as required factors. However, the factor meaningfulness needs to be further investigated regarding its effect on project manager empowerment.
- Further identified factors are role ambiguity, collaborative project team culture, and intrinsic motivational factors: affiliation, acknowledgment, growth, and achievement motivation. A deeper understanding of the required factors of empowerment from the project manager's perspective is developed.
- Furthermore, the quantitative analysis revealed that project managers currently have a below-average level of socio-structural and psychological empowerment, except for the factors access to support, meaningfulness, and competence.
- Structure of the article:** Introduction; Literature Review; Research Questions & Methods; Empirical Results; Conclusions; About the Author; Bibliography

## Introduction

Business environments are increasingly competitive and dynamic (Lee et al., 2017; Schwalbe, 2015, p. 2). Technologies are evolving rapidly (Lee et al., 2017; PMI, 2017). Organisations and their workforces are increasingly operating globally (Frame, 2002, pp. 7–8; Lee et al., 2017). All these challenges demand a reconsideration of the nature of work for organisations to stay successful (Spreitzer & Doneson, 2005). Additionally, the number of projects is increasing (Gemünden, 2013; Wagner, 2021), and project managers are required to possess an increasingly comprehensive skill set (Loufrani-Fedida & Missonier, 2015). Employee empowerment has the potential to benefit both employees and organisations via better job performance and higher motivation (Greasley et al., 2005; Liu et al., 2007; Maynard et al., 2012). It is vital to empower project managers to successfully execute their projects (Spreitzer & Doneson, 2005). However, the implementation of empowerment often fails to achieve its potential (Argyris, 1998; Quinn & Spreitzer, 1997).

Empowerment stems from subjective contexts and depends on the work environment; thus, a deeper understanding of empowerment from the employees' perspective needs to be developed to design empowerment measures successfully (Foster-Fishman et al., 1998; Greasley et al., 2005; Seibert et al., 2011). However, the empowerment factors required from the project manager's view remain mostly unexplored.

This study aims to explore the required empowerment factors from the perspective of project managers; asking, what factors of empowerment are required from the project manager's perspective? The answer to this question will enable a deeper understanding of empowerment from this perspective.

## Literature Review

### Employee Empowerment

Even though the interest in employee empowerment has been growing in past decades, it is still a loosely defined concept (Maynard et al., 2012; Yukl & Becker, 2006). The following definition of empowerment will be used in this study: Employee empowerment is the delegation of power from leaders to their subordinates through increased participation in

decision-making and by providing them with a socio-structural environment that employees perceive as enabling, which motivates them to perform. This definition is based on the works of several researchers (Forrester, 2000; Greasley et al., 2005; Greasley et al., 2008; Kanter, 1977; Spreitzer, 1995b; Tuuli, 2009).

Since the concept of empowerment is closely related to autonomy, the two concepts need to be differentiated. Autonomy is defined as the need for independence, fulfilled by a sense of choice and self-initiative (Deci et al., 1989; Deci & Ryan, 1987; McClelland, 1961). Socio-structural empowerment provides a work environment where employees can actualise this intrinsic need for autonomy, for example, by leaders providing access to the necessary resources or information (Kanter, 1977). Additionally, autonomy is a factor of psychological empowerment, known as self-determination (Spreitzer, 1995b; Thomas & Velthouse, 1990). In conclusion, autonomy is a vital part of employee empowerment.

Kanter (1977) laid the foundation of workplace empowerment, highlighting socio-structural aspects of empowerment, especially the decentralisation of power through adapted organisational structures, policies, and practices that gave power to lower organisational levels (Kanter, 1977). By granting authority via access to information, support, resources, and opportunity, Kanter (1977) argues that employees' self-determination is strengthened. Conger and Kanungo (1988) argued that employee empowerment goes beyond participative managerial techniques. They divided empowerment into two aspects: sharing of the leader's power with their subordinates via relinquished authority or control over resources (socio-structural empowerment) and enabling intrinsic motivation by increasing the belief in their abilities to execute their desired behaviours successfully (psychological empowerment). Thomas and Velthouse (1990) expanded on the psychological empowerment concept by creating a multi-dimensional model, in which empowerment is defined as intrinsic task motivation, identifying four subjective cognitions: sense of impact, competence, meaningfulness, and choice. For them, intrinsic task motivation involves positive experiences and cognitions that individuals derive directly from a task that produces satisfaction. Spreitzer (1995b) validated the cognitive dimensions of psychological empowerment identified by Thomas and Velthouse (1990), renaming choice to self-determination, thereby creating a measurement instrument operationalising the four-dimensional concept (Spreitzer, 1995a, 1995b).

In summary, Kanter created the foundation for employee empowerment consisting of socio-structural empowerment and its factors; Conger and Kanungo added the perspective of psychological empowerment, which Thomas and Velthouse expanded to identify the four cognitions that Spreitzer validated. The socio-structural and psychological factors provide the basis for this study's examination of the factors needed to empower project managers.

### **Socio-Structural Empowerment**

Socio-structural empowerment signifies that employees are empowered via the external environment, such as organisational policies, practices, and structures of distributing decision-making authority and responsibility to employees, while also being provided the necessary framework, such as access to resources and support (Hendrikus Pedro et al., 2020; Kanter, 1993; Lawler, 1992; Liden & Arad, 1996; Spreitzer & Doneson, 2005). This distribution of power creates a work climate of employee involvement, in which they perceive a greater sense of choice and influence in their roles (Greasley et al., 2008; Spreitzer et al., 1997). Kanter (1977, pp. 245–264) identified six factors of socio-structural empowerment, which enable empowering work environments.

Access to opportunity alludes to an employee's opportunities to develop and grow their skills and knowledge (Kanter, 1977, pp. 246–248). Opportunity presents itself as promotion potential within the career path and increasing skills through overcoming challenges (Kanter, 1977, pp. 246–251).

Access to formal power sources refers to the visibility of the function and work role and the position's relevance to current organisational problems (Kanter, 1977, p. 248). Access to informal power sources includes the social connections and effective relationships with peers, subordinates, and leaders, creating a socio-political support environment or network (Kanter, 1977, p. 248). By accessing formal and informal power sources, employees gain access to information, support, and resources (Kanter, 1977, 1993, p. 293).

Access to information is gaining the knowledge needed to complete work tasks and to understand organisational decisions (Kanter, 1977). This could include information about the external environment, the corporate strategy, and project-specific information.

Access to support means that feedback and guidance are available from peers, subordinates, members of the work group, and leaders (Kanter, 1977).

Access to resources such as time, financial budgets, human resources, material, and equipment need to be given to complete the work (Kanter, 1977). An empowering environment grants employees the authority to allocate resources (Spreitzer, 1996; Walton, 1985), making them feel responsible for and take ownership in their role (Conger & Kanungo, 1988).

The empowerment level depends on the extent to which employees perceive they have access to these factors in their work setting (Kanter, 1993). These six factors will be used in this study's empirical analysis to examine the socio-structural empowerment factors of project managers.

### **Psychological Empowerment**

Since the socio-structural approach is a view of the organisation, employee perceptions of empowerment are not considered, which gave rise to the development of the psychological empowerment perspective (Seibert et al., 2011; Spreitzer & Doneson, 2005). Psychological empowerment is defined as intrinsic task motivation based on the employees' perception, reflecting their sense of self-control and active involvement in their work role (Seibert et al., 2011; Spreitzer, 1995b; Thomas & Velthouse, 1990). It is based on the cognitions within the employees and can, therefore, only be experienced by each employee individually (Greasley et al., 2005; Thomas & Velthouse, 1990). When persons are intrinsically motivated, they perform an activity because they feel innately satisfied by the activity, not because of external triggers (Ryan & Deci, 2000). Psychological empowerment comprises four components: meaningfulness, competence, self-determination, and impact (Thomas & Velthouse, 1990).

Meaningfulness is based on the perceived value of a task or work role aligned with the employees' beliefs and ideals (Hackman & Oldham, 1980; Thomas & Velthouse, 1990). Meaningfulness is recognised as a motivating factor independent of the empowerment concept (Chalofsky & Krishna, 2009; Pratt & Ashforth, 2003). In the project management context, project affinity results in motivation (Dainty et al., 2005).

Competence is the belief of an individual in being capable of performing tasks to the required performance level, also called self-efficacy (Bandura, 1994; Thomas & Velthouse, 1990). This belief in one's competence influences how obstacles are approached, how choices are made, and how much effort is spent on a task (Bandura, 1994; Tuuli, 2009). For a project

manager, competence involves the belief in their ability to execute projects successfully.

Self-determination is the perceived sense of choice related to selecting desired outcomes and how to achieve them through intentional behaviour (Deci et al., 1989, p. 580; Deci & Ryan, 1987). A sense of choice is felt when persons feel causally responsible for their actions (DeCharms, 1968; Deci et al., 1989; Thomas & Velthouse, 1990). Essential for self-determination is the need for independence, also known as autonomy (Kirkman & Rosen, 1999; McClelland, 1961). Project managers with self-determination feel independent to define their own way of work (Yu et al., 2018).

Impact refers to the perceived degree of influence a person has on work outcomes (Ashforth, 1989; Spreitzer, 1995b). The perceived impact may vary, from making a difference in the organisation to at least impacting an assigned task (Ashforth, 1989; Rotter, 1966; Thomas & Velthouse, 1990). A project manager's impact corresponds to their perceived influence on the direction and results of their projects (Yu et al., 2018).

In summary, employees are motivated to perform to the best of their ability if they feel that they have the self-determination and competence to carry out meaningful work that positively impacts the organisation (Chen et al., 2007, p. 332). Empowerment should be understood as a continuous variable, which can be more or less fulfilled, instead of just feeling or not feeling empowered (Moye & Henkin, 2006; Spreitzer, 1995b).

### **Relation between Psychological and Socio-Structural Empowerment**

To get a holistic picture of empowerment, it is essential to understand the interplay between socio-structural and psychological empowerment. Socio-structural empowerment gives the macro-perspective, while psychological empowerment provides the micro-perspective for employee empowerment (Liden & Arad, 1996; Tuuli, 2009). This study assumes that socio-structural and psychological empowerment are bi-directional (Spreitzer, 1996, 2008; Thomas & Velthouse, 1990) because it is expected that empowered project managers can shape their work environments. Through their actions as psychologically empowered employees, they can shape their socio-structural environments, creating a feedback loop between behaviours and context (Bandura, 1994; Thomas & Velthouse, 1990). Therefore, both socio-structural and psychological empowerment and their factors have to be examined, as previous

research has indicated (Menon, 2001; Spreitzer, 2008; Tuuli, 2009).

### **Effects of and Barriers to Empowerment**

Empowerment has many positive effects and is beneficial for both employees and organisations. Regarding behaviour, empowerment is linked to improved individual performance (Liu et al., 2007; Seibert et al., 2011; Tuuli & Rowlinson, 2009b), effectiveness (Liu et al., 2007; Spreitzer, 1995b), and productivity (Koberg et al., 1999; Lawler et al., 2001) of employees, resulting in an increase in the overall organisational effectiveness (Moye & Henkin, 2006). Regarding attitude, empowerment leads to greater job satisfaction (Liden et al., 2000; Spreitzer et al., 1997), higher organisational commitment, and employee retention rates (Lawler et al., 2001; Liu et al., 2007; Zaraket et al., 2018). Regarding project managers, feeling empowered improves their performance (Chan et al., 2013; Tuuli & Rowlinson, 2009a) and leads to increased project success (Khan, Javed, et al., 2020; Khan, Malik, & Saleem, 2020).

A lack of empowerment at work causes feelings of frustration, helplessness, and anxiety because of unmet desires for control and a lack of authority (Ashforth, 1989; Greasley et al., 2005), leading to decreased motivation and estrangement from the organisation and position (Abramson et al., 1978; Ashforth, 1989).

The considerable effects of empowerment show that it should be embraced to benefit the organisation. But barriers such as the fear of managers to relinquish their power leading to a loss of status and control (Cunningham et al., 1996; Greasley et al., 2005; Mills & Ungson, 2003) or employees' fear of increased responsibility and accountability, leading to job-related strain or mistakes (Johnson, 1994; Spreitzer et al., 1997), inhibit empowerment. These barriers show that empowerment is not easily achieved, and further study of the empowerment of employees is needed.

### **Employee Perspective of Empowerment**

Employees' needs regarding empowerment can best be analysed by asking the employees themselves (Greasley et al., 2005). The employee view has so far been neglected, as previous empowerment research mainly focused on managers (Cunningham et al., 1996; Johnson, 1994; Kanter, 1977; Spreitzer, 1995b; Wallace et al., 2011). The research was, thus, limited to managers' sense of empowerment and suppressed the personal

experiences of employees, who feel misrepresented (Foster-Fishman et al., 1998; Greasley et al., 2005).

Another reason to look at the employee perspective is that, as Foster-Fishman et al. (1998) stated, empowerment is highly individualistic and subjective. Experiences of empowerment depend on the context of the individuals' perceived reality (Spreitzer, 1995a; Thomas & Velthouse, 1990; Tuuli & Rowlinson, 2010). This individual view needs to be taken into account since empowerment will only be successful when employees actually feel that they have been empowered (Greasley et al., 2005; Menon, 2001).

### **Efficient Project Management and the Project Manager Role**

A project is a temporary, organised endeavour that involves complex and connected activities working towards a unique purpose by realising deliverables to fulfil its objectives (IPMA, 2015, p. 36; PMI, 2017; Wysocki, 2014, p. 3). The deliverables must be produced according to requirements and within typical project constraints such as time, cost, resources, scope, and quality standards (IPMA, 2015, p. 36; PMI, 2017; Schwalbe, 2015, p. 6). A project is successfully completed when stakeholders are satisfied and the project objectives are achieved within the constraints (GAPPS, 2007; Schwalbe, 2015, p. 13).

Project management is the application of knowledge, skills, methods, competencies, and tools to project activities and processes to achieve the project goals (IPMA, 2015, p. 36; PMI, 2017). These need to be appropriately integrated into the project phases to manage projects efficiently and effectively (PMI, 2017). The project phases are initiating, planning, executing, monitoring, controlling, and closing activities (PMI, 2017; Schwalbe, 2015, p. 10). Common stakeholders are the project sponsor, project manager, project team, and the internal or external customer (IPMA, 2015, p. 145; Krog & Govender, 2015). The project team is a collective of individuals, who have clearly defined roles and responsibilities with the shared goal of achieving the project's objectives (PMI, 2017). Effective project management provides organisational benefits by increasing the likelihood of accomplishing the project and business objectives and satisfying the stakeholders (IPMA, 2015, p. 36; PMI, 2017).

To achieve the benefits of effective project management, organisations need to enable the project manager role. Project managers are responsible for completing the project's objectives within the constraints

and satisfying the stakeholders' expectations (PMI, 2017; Wysocki, 2014, p. 175). This requires project managers to be involved for the complete duration of the project process and have a holistic project view (PMI, 2017). Additionally, project managers act as representatives towards internal and external stakeholders, balancing their expectations to find a consensus (PMI, 2017; Wysocki, 2014, p. 175). Therefore, project managers should understand their organisation, its products, services, and internal and external politics (PMI, 2017; Schwalbe, 2015, p. 17). Another aspect of the project manager's role is leading the project team by providing direction and motivation to the team, uniting them as an effective group (PMI, 2017; Schwalbe, 2015, p. 17).

Project managers are expected to perform a wide variety of tasks requiring diverse knowledge, competencies, and skills, such as leadership skills (Brill et al., 2006; Wysocki, 2014, p. 176), communication skills (Brill et al., 2006), problem-solving capabilities (Schwalbe, 2015, p. 18), and stakeholder management abilities (GAPPS, 2007); also required are project management skills such as creating project plans, project controlling, and risk management (GAPPS, 2007; Schwalbe, 2015, p. 12). Project managers are sometimes seen as heroes who are solely responsible for the project's success or failure (Loufrani-Fedida & Missonier, 2015). High expectations are placed on project managers, as seen by the diverse skills required and the perceived high impact of project managers on project success (Loufrani-Fedida & Missonier, 2015). Therefore, project managers need to be empowered to meet these high expectations (Tuuli & Rowlinson, 2010).

### **Empowerment of Project Managers**

Not only is the role of the project manager complex; the project environment in which they operate is also challenging. A term that has become more prominent to describe the business world is VUCA, which stands for volatility, uncertainty, complexity, and ambiguity (Bennett & Lemoine, 2014). A VUCA business world makes predictions difficult, complicating strategic planning (Bennett & Lemoine, 2014). This has effects on project planning, as frequent and unpredictable changes (volatility), unclear impacts of events (uncertainty), convoluted networks of information (complexity), and misunderstood cause and effect (ambiguity) lead to increased project complexity and frequent changes of project objectives (Bennett & Lemoine, 2014; Fridgeirsson et al., 2021).

The current era is focused on accelerated economic growth, which is achieved through projects,

making project success the ultimate goal of many organisations (Khan, Malik, & Saleem, 2020). The increased number of complex projects (Gemünden, 2013; Wagner, 2021) has brought traditional project management to its limits (Fridgeirsson et al., 2021; O. Mack & Jungen, 2016, pp. 42–43). This has caused project management styles to move away from command and control towards a collaborative approach, for which employee empowerment is the foundation (Spreitzer & Doneson, 2005; Wysocki, 2014, p. xxi). In summary, with the increasing importance of project management, it seems essential for companies to empower their project managers, enabling them to execute their projects successfully, despite a VUCA project environment.

## Research Questions & Methods

It is necessary to understand how to empower project managers. This topic has already been researched in the broader concept of employee empowerment, divided into the two aspects of socio-structural and psychological empowerment; each aspect has its own previously described factors. These factors have been discussed in empowerment research (Liden et al., 2000; Seibert et al., 2011; Spreitzer, 1995b, 1996).

Regarding project management specifically, previous research consists of quantitative studies focused on empowerment effects, such as job performance (Chan et al., 2013; Chen et al., 2007; Tuuli & Rowlinson, 2009a), project success (Khan, Malik, & Saleem, 2020), commitment to the organisation (Krog & Govender, 2015), and project management effectiveness (Nauman et al., 2010). Additionally, the relationship between leadership and empowerment in a project context has been analysed (Chen et al., 2007; Krog & Govender, 2015; Nauman et al., 2010; Tuuli et al., 2012). The underlying empowerment factors need to be viewed from the project manager's perspective (Tuuli et al., 2012). However, the existing research on empowerment factors focuses on the construction sector and not on the project manager role (Greasley et al., 2005; Greasley et al., 2008; Tuuli & Rowlinson, 2010). The studies mentioned above are based on theoretical constructs from existing empowerment research and do not first explore the project management context. Due to missing context, these studies are at risk of misrepresenting the empowerment factors needed by project managers (Foster-Fishman et al., 1998). Thus, the project

managers' view on empowerment and which factors of empowerment are actually needed currently remain mostly unexplored.

This study will address this knowledge gap by developing a deeper understanding of the required factors that lead to employee empowerment from the unexplored perspective of the project manager role. The central research question is: What factors of empowerment are required from the project manager's perspective? To look at empowerment from such a fundamental viewpoint, a qualitative research approach is needed.

Additionally, it is assumed that the interviewed project managers are currently not fully socio-structurally or psychologically empowered, intensifying the need to define effective empowerment measures. This assumption leads to the following hypotheses:

*Hypothesis 0:*

Project managers have an above-average level of socio-structural and psychological empowerment.

*Hypothesis 1:*

Project managers have a below-average level of socio-structural and psychological empowerment.

Thus, a survey will be conducted to record the participants' current status of empowerment.

## Methodology & Data Collection

A qualitative research approach was chosen to gain further insight into project managers' empowerment. The qualitative analysis process adopted involved data collection and transcription of interviews, data reduction (grouping of meanings into codes), and conclusion-finding, based on Miles and Huberman (1994), and described by Saunders et al. (2009, pp. 490–491). The selection of participants was based on purposive sampling to ensure a diverse sample group. Non-probability sampling means selecting individuals for the target group using non-random, pre-selected criteria (N. Mack & Woodson, 2005, p. 5; Saunders et al., 2009, p. 233). Therefore, the sample group consists of project managers with varying characteristics such as different levels of project management experience, diverse cultural backgrounds, different age groups, and genders. The study's setting within a project-oriented, multi-national technology organisation allows for selecting such a multi-faceted group. The organisation

develops products for worldwide business customers in the automotive sector with a variety of project types.

The sample size was 17 persons. Among them, 47% are male, and 53% are female; 41% are German nationals, and 59% of participants are not from Germany (e.g., Mexico, the U.S., China, Romania). Regarding age, 47% of the participants are less than 45 years old, with the youngest being 33 and the oldest being 61 years old. While 53% have the rank of project manager, 47% are on senior project manager level or higher. This level influences the size and complexity of the assigned projects. With 47% having more than 15 years of experience in project management, 25 years was the highest and two years the lowest number of years.

In-depth interviews with project managers were conducted to collect the qualitative data. These interviews were semi-structured using an interview guide while letting the conversation progress naturally. All interviews were conducted one-on-one, online, in English, and took approximately one hour. The interviews were audio-recorded and transcribed by paraphrasing and summarising. The qualitative data analysis of the transcripts was conducted using the software MAXQDA (Kuckartz & Rädiker, 2019).

The interview guide was divided into two categories based on the empowerment aspects socio-structural and psychological empowerment. The category socio-structural empowerment was divided into access to opportunity, formal and informal power sources, information, support, and resources. The psychological empowerment category was split into meaningfulness, competence, self-determination, and impact. Each sub-category included open-ended questions aimed at identifying the needed empowerment factors. Also included were questions concerning current challenges and the future vision regarding empowerment.

In this study, a combination of deductive and inductive approaches was used for the data coding. Starting with a deductive approach based on existing research, the transcripts were reviewed, and text segments were assigned to defined codes (as described by Saunders et al. (2009, p. 489)). The codes are defined based on the empowerment factors previously described. Possible additional codes were then identified via inductive data analysis, based on themes that were not covered by the previously defined codes, as recommended by Saunders et al. (2009, p. 489).

Additionally, a survey was conducted to determine the current socio-structural and psychological empowerment levels for each participant, which were assessed using an adapted version of the Conditions of Work Effectiveness Question-II (CWEQ-II) developed by Laschinger and her colleagues (2001). The CWEQ-II uses six sub-scales based on Kanter's (1977) dimensions: access to opportunity, information, resources, support, formal power, and informal power. Additionally, one item explores the individual's global empowerment. In total, 22 items were used to assess socio-structural empowerment. Laschinger et al. (2001) developed the CWEQ-II in the context of nursing, in which it is a well-established tool (Ta'an et al., 2021). Thus, the instrument had to be adapted to fit the project management context. The items for access to information, support, and resources are taken from Spreitzer (1996) as they are designed for an organisational context (Tuuli, 2009). Based on Tuuli and Rowlinson (2010), the following adjustments are made: An item is added to the factor access to information ("Information about the project performance regarding quality, time, and cost"). For access to formal power sources, one item is added: "Amount of visibility of your work-related activities to other team members." For access to informal power sources, one item is adapted: "Seeking out ideas from professionals other than your peers." The items were assessed on a five-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (none), 3 (some) to 5 (a lot), so higher scores indicate higher levels of socio-structural empowerment.

To measure each participant's level of psychological empowerment, Spreitzer's (1995a) instrument, based on the dimensions meaning, competence, self-determination, and impact, was used. The instrument is comprised of 12 items, three for each dimension (Spreitzer, 1995a). The questions for the dimension impact were slightly adapted to fit the study's context ("project" instead of "department"). The items were assessed on a five-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (strongly disagree), 3 (neutral) to 5 (strongly agree), so higher scores indicate higher levels of psychological empowerment.

## Empirical Results

### Description of Data

The survey results, investigating the current status of socio-structural and psychological empowerment of the questioned participants, are shown

in Table 1. This table contains the sample size (*n*), the category means (*M*), and the standard deviations (*SD*). The column Number of values 1-3 (*VI-3*) shows the number of participants that entered a combined mean value of three or less, indicating they do not feel empowered in these factors. Conversely, the column Number of values above 3 (*V>3*) indicates the

participants feel at least somewhat empowered. The column One-Sample t-test shows the *p*-value comparing *M* to the overall empowerment mean. The survey was filled in by 16 of the 17 participants, but not all questions were always answered, as seen by *n*.

**Table 1**

*Results of the Empowerment Survey (n, # of values 1-3, # values above 3, mean, standard deviation, and p-value), N = 16*

	n	# of Values 1-3 ( <i>VI-3</i> )	# of Values above 3 ( <i>V&gt;3</i> )	Mean ( <i>M</i> )	Standard Deviation ( <i>SD</i> )	One Sample t-test ( <i>p</i> )
<i>Socio-Structural Empowerment</i>						
Access to Opportunity	16	2	14	3.75	0.68	.176
Access to Formal Power Sources	16	9	7	3.21	0.60	.079
Access to Informal Power Sources	16	7	9	3.33	0.87	.456
Access to Information	16	4	12	3.58	0.62	.634
Access to Support	16	1	15	4.03	0.59	.003**
Access to Resources	16	13	3	2.73	0.57	<.001***
<i>Psychological Empowerment</i>						
Meaningfulness	16	0	16	4.42	0.51	<.001***
Competence	16	0	16	4.27	0.53	<.001***
Self-Determination	15	3	12	3.80	0.70	.130
Impact	15	5	10	3.76	0.85	.278
<i>Overall Empowerment</i>						
	16	7	9	3.50	0.61	

Note. \*\* indicates  $p < 0.01$ , \*\*\* indicates  $p < 0.001$ ; socio-structural empowerment: five-point scale from 1 (none), 3 (some) to 5 (a lot); psychological and overall empowerment: five-point scale from 1 (strongly disagree), 3 (neutral) to 5 (strongly agree).

**Figure 1**

*Codes used in the Empirical Analysis of the Interview Data*

Codes identified through literature | Deductive Approach



Codes identified through interview data | Inductive Approach



The mean *M* for all factors, except access to resources, was above three, indicating that most empowerment factors were somewhat fulfilled. The highest mean was registered for the factor meaningfulness ( $M = 4.42$ ), while the lowest mean was recorded for the factor access to resources ( $M = 2.73$ ).

This factor was also the least likely to receive a score of more than three ( $VI-3 = 13$  participants). Thus, most participants feel that they have less than “some” access to resources. According to *VI-3* and *V>3*, the results for the factors access to formal and informal power sources are more diverse. The participants’ answers are most



spread out concerning access to informal power sources ( $SD = 0.87$ ), while meaningfulness is most consistent ( $SD = 0.51$ ).

A one-sample t-test was performed to test the significance of the category means ( $M$ ) compared to a hypothetical mean. The chosen hypothetical mean value is 3.5 since this is the mean value of overall empowerment ( $M = 3.5$ ). It was tested if the observed discrepancy between the sample mean of one category and the hypothetical mean is larger than would be expected by coincidence; as such, the null hypothesis is that the sample mean equals the specified hypothetical mean. This null hypothesis is rejected for access to support and resources and the factors meaningfulness and competence. For the other factors, the  $p$ -value is not considered statistically significant. However, since the sample size is small ( $N = 16$ ), the informative value of this test is limited.

In conclusion, the interviewed participants feel most empowered in the factors of meaningfulness ( $M = 4.42$ ), competence ( $M = 4.27$ ), and access to support ( $M = 4.03$ ). They feel least empowered regarding access to resources ( $M = 2.73$ ), access to formal power sources ( $M = 3.21$ ), and informal power sources ( $M = 3.33$ ). The overall empowerment was rated as somewhat fulfilled ( $M = 3.5$ ,  $V > 3 = 9$ ).

### Interview Analysis Codes

The codes used in the empirical analysis of the interview transcripts are shown in Figure 1. A hybrid approach of deductive and inductive data analysis was used. First, the interviewees' statements were assigned to codes identified in the literature. These codes were split into socio-structural and psychological empowerment. Socio-structural empowerment includes the codes access to opportunity, formal and informal power sources, information, support, and resources. Psychological empowerment comprises meaningfulness, competence, self-determination, and impact. These codes are based on the factors defined in this study's theoretical part.

During the inductive data analysis, additional codes were identified, which are now introduced. Role ambiguity is understood as a sense of confusion about the work role or environment caused by unclear goals and responsibilities (Spreitzer, 1996). Collaborative project team culture describes a project environment based on trust and respect, where the whole project team works towards accomplishing the project goals in collaboration. This factor defines the interaction and attitude between the project manager and team (exchange) and is therefore

differentiated from access to support, which focuses on feedback and guidance provided by the team (one-sided).

Furthermore, additional codes are identified regarding project managers' intrinsic motivation. The interviewees mentioned several motivational factors not covered by the psychological empowerment factors. Affiliation motivation describes the inherent need to relate to and work with other people in a group (McClelland, 1961). Acknowledgment motivation describes the need for approval to enhance our positive self-image and raise our self-esteem (Herzberg, 1966; Maslow, 1954; Rogers, 1961). Growth motivation is differentiated from the factor competence since it does not refer to the belief in one's abilities but instead to the need for self-development and self-actualisation (Maslow, 1954; Rogers, 1961). Achievement motivation is different from the factor impact since impact describes the perceived degree of influence on work outcomes, while achievement represents the need to achieve goals even without receiving a reward (Porter & Lawler, 1968).

### Analysis & Interpretation

The defined codes' influence on project managers' feelings of empowerment will now be analysed to determine if it is an empowerment factor. This analysis is based on the following definition of feeling empowered: Empowered individuals feel enabled to perform to the best of their ability without any hindrances, feel that they have greater opportunity to perform, and feel motivated to perform (Chen et al., 2007; Greasley et al., 2005; Tuuli, 2009). Empowered employees feel that their work environment is liberating, can be shaped by them, and provides them with opportunities for individual behaviour (Deci et al., 1989; Spreitzer, 1995a, 2008).

The factors are analysed according to the following process. First, the opinions of the interviewed project managers regarding the importance of a factor will be stated. Their statements will be examined for actual relation to achieving project goals effectively. Moreover, to create insight into the work context, the interviewees' current status and future vision will be discussed. The interviewees are expected to emphasise factors that are not satisfied; therefore, their work context needs to be explored to highlight these biases. Finally, these results will be analysed based on the above definition of feeling empowered to decide if a factor is actually influencing project managers' empowerment.

### Factors of Socio-Structural Empowerment

Access to opportunity, as defined by Kanter (1977, pp. 246–251), has two aspects: opportunity for growth of skills and career opportunity. Overall, the interviewees stated that they had at least some access to opportunity ( $M = 3.75$ ,  $V > 3 = 14$ ). The interviewed project managers view continuous learning and development of skills, competencies, and knowledge as “extremely important.” Many mentioned the evolving business environment and the increasing project complexity, making it necessary to have a mindset of staying flexible and open-minded. Thereby, project managers need to be adaptable in order to solve problems to achieve the project goals. These statements highlight that project managers seem invested in continuous skill development. Regarding career opportunities, the interviewees seem reluctant to advance in their careers due to increased responsibility and continually having to prove oneself. As a caveat, the interviewees have been in their positions for more than five years on average, indicating a tendency for staying in their positions. In conclusion, access to growth opportunities is vital to lead complex projects successfully, while access to career opportunities provides limited motivation.

Access to formal power sources is explored via the visibility of the project manager’s role. All interviewees agreed that visibility was beneficial to making faster decisions and improving collaboration between the project team and project manager. The interviewed project managers feel they do not receive this visibility ( $M = 3.21$ ,  $V > 3 = 9$ ), resulting in inadequate legitimacy. Two different opinions emerged on how to attain visibility: via a higher hierarchical position or increased recognition by stakeholders of the project manager’s role. Some argued that only through a higher hierarchical position do they receive more decision-making power, resulting in a greater ability to influence projects with a more accountable project team. The shorter distance to senior management would increase the role’s visibility. Overall, they assume that this will lead to better project performance. On the other hand, many interviewees argued that it is unnecessary to be on a higher hierarchical level to be visible: “Power is not given, it is assumed. So, if you lead effectively, influence effectively, collaborate effectively, you can be as powerful and as result-effective as someone who has a higher level.” To improve their role’s recognition, the interviewees wished for a platform to discuss issues with senior management, where their voices are respected. The project manager should be the project leader, accepted by the team. The role’s importance should be

communicated top-down. In short, by receiving recognition from vital stakeholders, hierarchical power would not be necessary since project managers are already respected. Independent of the interviewees’ two opinions, it appears essential that the project manager’s voice is respected. In conclusion, access to formal power sources through visibility is necessary to execute projects effectively with the project team.

Access to informal power sources is explored via effective relationships with stakeholders. Many interviewees described access to networks as “crucial and invaluable” for executing projects. The interviewees explained that they benefit from these networks because it allows them to communicate effectively by receiving advice and guidance, learning from others, or exchanging ideas. Currently, all interviewees have tried to build networks across departments and levels, and some have done so with success ( $M = 3.33$ ,  $V > 3 = 9$ ). From their view, networks give them access to the expertise and resources needed to solve “blocking points” and execute their projects on time. Without a network, the interviewed project managers felt lost and had difficulty managing projects effectively. According to the interviewees, relationships should be built on trust, indicating that high-quality, trusting relationships are beneficial to empowerment. In conclusion, access to informal power sources in the form of networks is vital for project managers to manage projects effectively.

Access to information is assessed via the information required to complete work tasks. The interviewed project managers profit from easily accessible information, which provides transparency on the project environment, enabling them to oversee the entire project. Available information should include organisational strategy, products, processes, and, especially important, project-specific information, such as customer and project history. From the interviewees’ view, relevant information enables the essential stakeholders to realise the project’s importance and task priority, thereby enabling the achievement of the project goals. Another important aspect to the interviewees is having clearly defined and aligned goals to give the project team direction. The project managers feel that they and the project team should be well-informed about the organisational strategy and its connection to the project, giving meaning to the project. Currently, the interviewees feel that they have sufficient access to project-related data and other information ( $V > 3 = 12$ ,  $M = 3.58$ ). However, some interviewees feel that there is an ever-growing, massive amount of data, which can be overwhelming, with the constantly changing

environment complicating their work. Overall, the interviewed project managers need access to information to have an overview of their project, share information with stakeholders, and make better decisions to accomplish the project goals.

Access to support is examined via feedback and guidance by leaders, the project team, peers, and senior management. The interviewees want feedback and guidance, especially in case of unexpected topics and critical problems. Regarding support by their leader, the interviewed project managers see this as “critical.” They expect a permanent exchange with their supervisor providing constructive, honest feedback and appreciation. In their view, leaders should be approachable regarding any topic for the purposes of feedback, coaching, and guidance to help employees develop. These expectations show that project managers deem their leader’s support as essential. Regarding support by their project team, the interviewed project managers see this as vital, expecting collaboration and transparent communication. Feedback from the project team is expected by completing their assigned tasks and speaking up when encountering problems, while guidance is provided by offering new ideas and implementing their knowledge to solve problems. However, project team support goes beyond the empowerment factor access to support, which only encompasses feedback and guidance. Therefore, the empowerment factor collaborative project team culture is added and will later be explained in more detail. Regarding support by their peers, in the interviewees’ view, peers should give advice, share knowledge from past experiences, and exchange ideas and solutions. Regarding support by senior management, this is deemed critical by the interviewees when facing issues and reaching the limits of their authority to decide on counter-measures. Additionally, they should guide by communicating the strategy and making decisions based on strategic value. The interviewees feel that support is currently available ( $M = 4.03$ ,  $V > 3 = 15$ ), but they wish for an environment where they receive support on time, are not blamed for problems, and are praised. In conclusion, access to support seems especially important from leaders, senior management, and the project team to “clear roadblocks” and achieve the project goals.

Access to resources and resource availability are concerns of the interviewed project managers ( $M = 2.73$ ,  $V I - 3 = 13$ ), and many named missing resources as their biggest challenge: “Resources are immensely important. You cannot do without it.” In their view, when resources are unavailable in the required quantity and quality, work

packages cannot be completed. The interviewees specified four resources: human resources, budget, time, and software tools. Regarding human resources, the interviewees deem them as essential for the teams to create the product and accomplish the project milestones. Missing human resources seem to be the most common reason why milestones cannot be met. The interviewees’ vision is to have human resources available with the necessary experience and knowledge. Regarding budget, based on the interviews, the financial limitations are defined at the beginning of the project according to customer requirements. The project manager may plan the budget, but the final decision is made by management. Regarding time, the project needs to stay within the timeframe specified by the customer. One interviewee mentioned that timing is “always tight” and calculated assuming full availability of human resources, which is seldom the case. Regarding software tools, the interviewees regard it as important to have state-of-the-art tools, which provide the proper infrastructure to accommodate complex projects and worldwide communication. In conclusion, access to human resources and the respective budget are some of the biggest issues the interviewed project managers face. Therefore, access to resources seems essential for project managers to work on projects effectively.

### Factors of Psychological Empowerment

Meaningfulness is examined via the alignment of the project managers’ work with their values. Interviewees had difficulty in answering the question regarding the meaning they see in their work. During further dialogue, some interviewees mentioned aspects such as sustainability, bringing benefits to others, and creating innovative products. However, the interviewees see value in their work because of what motivates them, such as working with others or achieving milestones. These additional intrinsic motivational factors are described later in this study. It is assumed that this is why the interviewees’ current status reflects a fulfilment of the factor meaningfulness ( $M = 4.42$ ,  $V > 3 = 16$ ). Most interviewees found it challenging to connect the company strategy to their own sense of meaning and deemed that the organisational vision has limited importance for daily work. Even though interviewees had difficulty expressing their source of meaning, the survey results show that they feel satisfied with this factor. Therefore, it is difficult to determine a clear connection between personal meaning in their work and motivation.

Competence, also called self-efficacy, is investigated via the interviewed project managers’ belief

in having the necessary abilities to execute projects successfully. The interviewees stated that a project manager needs to be adaptable and capable of managing challenges. Overall, the interviewed project managers believe in their capabilities ( $M = 4.27$ ,  $V > 3 = 16$ ). Some interviewees believe in their abilities to adapt and handle any challenge. In their view, overcoming these challenges leads to growth and development, which motivates them and “keeps the job interesting.” The attitude that complex tasks are challenges that can be mastered indicates high levels of self-efficacy (Bandura, 1994). The interviewees stated that problem-solving is a required competency for project managers. However, some interviewees said it is de-motivating having to deal with something new every day, which can be overwhelming as they are afraid to make mistakes. Thus, challenges can be either positively inspiring or de-motivating. In conclusion, the belief in their capabilities to execute projects successfully influences the motivation of the interviewed project managers.

Self-determination is assessed via the project managers' feeling that they are the origin of their actions. In the interviewees' view, having more freedom in this respect enables flexible and innovative decision-making, challenging the status quo. Currently, the interviewees are mostly satisfied with their sense of choice ( $M = 3.80$ ,  $V > 3 = 12$ ). They perceive flexibility in how to arrive at the project goals. But this flexibility is limited by the project constraints and boundaries of the defined processes. Where these seem too complex, the effort to fulfil them does not correspond to the perceived benefit. Some feel this gives them security, while others are depressed by the limited possibilities to act in a self-determined manner. There is a conflict between following the processes and defining one's own way of work to feel self-determined. Often, the interviewed project managers try to find a sense of choice in how they organise themselves, even when the project process itself is strictly defined. Thus, the interviewed project managers want to balance their freedom to act with the rigidity of the framework. These attempts to create decision-freedom show that self-determination is important to the interviewees. Having self-determination within their projects motivates them.

Impact is examined via the perceived sense of influence project managers have on their projects and organisation. The interviewees feel that their projects have effects on the overall business, resulting in a feeling of impact ( $M = 3.76$ ,  $V > 3 = 10$ ). However, they often do not seem to have enough decision-power to efficiently manage their projects, as they cannot make decisions

without convincing others or getting permission from their leader or senior managers. The interviewed project managers perceive that their projects affect the organisation, but they do not have enough impact on their projects, which is de-motivating. Therefore, they wish for more decision-power and their voice to be respected. Having strategic impact seems motivating for them, and they want to take ownership and responsibility for their projects. In conclusion, having an impact motivates the interviewed project managers.

### **Additionally Identified Factors**

The established empowerment factors do not cover the full range of empowerment feelings of project managers. Hence, additional factors emerged, which will now be introduced as possible empowerment factors.

Role ambiguity describes a sense of confusion about a role because of unclear responsibilities and goals (Spreitzer, 1996). Some of the interviewees mentioned that the expectations go beyond the defined responsibilities of project managers. Also mentioned is confusion by the organisation and project team about the role of the project manager, leading to responsibility conflicts in the project. From the interviewees' view, this role ambiguity causes customers to be confused about their contact persons, creating a loss of trust in the organisation, project, and project manager. This also has negative consequences on the project performance. The interviewees wish for a project manager role with clearly defined responsibilities and competencies, accepted by everyone and well-known in the organisation. Spreitzer (1996) already identified role ambiguity as having a strong relationship to empowerment, recommending clear lines of authority and defined goals to empower employees. In conclusion, the interviewed project managers deem it important to have an unambiguous definition of the project manager's role in order to fulfil the project objectives effectively.

A collaborative project team culture describes a trusting and respectful project environment, where the whole team collaborates to accomplish the project goals. The interviewed project managers wish for a project team culture based on trust, which is respectful, flexible, collaborative, judgment-free, with open communication, and pro-active problem-solving. In their view, everyone should feel accepted, recognised, and appreciated in order to thrive together as one team. The team members should be committed and motivated to work on the project, taking ownership of their tasks. Based on the interviews, the team should work together effectively towards creating deliverables but should also work

independently without micro-managing through the project manager. By jointly finding solutions to issues, making decisions, and standing up for failures, the interviewees expect a better project performance. In conclusion, a collaborative project team culture seems to result in more efficient and successful project execution.

Yukl and Becker (2006) discussed a lack of clarity regarding the number of factors that comprise psychological empowerment. When questioned regarding their motivation at work, the interviewees named aspects that are not covered by the already examined factors of psychological empowerment (meaningfulness, competence, self-determination, and impact). These additional factors are now described as possible empowerment factors for project managers: affiliation, acknowledgment, growth, and achievement motivation. Some interviewees said that working with a team and social interactions are deeply motivating for them. They want to work in a positive atmosphere in a group and cultivate their relationships. This type of motivation attained through team collaboration could be explained by affiliation motivation as described by McClelland (1961), which was defined as the need to relate to others and be part of a group. Other interviewed project managers mentioned that acknowledgment from the team, management, and customer through positive feedback is motivating. When the project's success is acknowledged, or they are praised for the work results, they feel motivated. This type of intrinsic motivation may be related to acknowledgment motivation, which describes the individual's need for approval to improve their sense of self-esteem (Maslow, 1954; Rogers, 1961). Other interviewees feel motivated when they are able to develop themselves, overcome challenges, and continually grow their skills and competencies. Tasks that make them grow professionally and personally are seen as positive. This need for self-development may be connected to growth motivation, as described by Maslow (1954) and Herzberg (1966). Also, some interviewees mentioned that achieving a project goal is motivating even without a reward or praise. These project managers feel motivated when seeing progress in their project, such as completing milestones. This need for achievement could be related to achievement motivation, which has been described by McClelland (1961), Porter and Lawler (1968), and Herzberg (1966).

### **Empirical Results**

Now, the conclusions of the central research question are discussed. The previous analysis is interpreted to reach conclusions as to whether the factors

enable, give greater opportunity to, or motivate the project managers to perform, thereby making them required empowerment factors.

Access to opportunity in the form of continuous growth enables project managers to be adaptable and flexible, which gives them greater opportunity to manage complex projects successfully. Therefore, access to opportunity is an empowering factor for project managers for the aspect of continuous growth.

Access to formal power sources via visibility in the organisation is important to be effective as a project leader. Project managers feel motivated and enabled to perform when they have visibility in their role, thus giving them greater opportunity to shape their work environments through participation in decision-making. Access to formal power sources is therefore a factor of empowerment needed by project managers.

Access to informal power sources and effective relationships with stakeholders give project managers greater opportunity to perform and influence their work environment. Informal networks provide access to the necessary expertise, enabling project managers to execute their projects successfully. Hence, access to informal power sources is a needed empowerment factor for project managers.

Access to information, especially project-specific information, is crucial for managing projects. Having access to information and clearly defined goals enables project managers to participate in informed decision-making. An overview of their project environment gives them a greater opportunity to shape this environment. Therefore, access to information is an empowerment factor for project managers.

Access to support, specifically from their leader, team, and senior management, is essential for successful project execution. Support from these stakeholders enables project managers to influence decision-making and achieve the project goals. Hence, access to support is a necessary factor of project manager empowerment.

Access to resources is vital for the interviewed project managers. Without the necessary resources, project managers cannot achieve the project's goals. Access to resources enables project managers to perform to the best of their ability. Thus, access to resources is a needed factor of empowerment from the view of project managers.

Meaningfulness is seen as an intrinsic motivational factor in empowerment literature. The ambiguity of the interview answers compared to the survey results makes it difficult to determine whether

finding personal meaning in their work is actually motivating for project managers. Therefore, further investigation is needed to confirm or refute that meaningfulness contributes to the empowerment of project managers.

Competence and adaptability are important to handle challenges. Complex, new tasks can either be positively challenging or de-motivating. Believing in their abilities and feeling capable of overcoming challenges motivates project managers to perform well. Hence, competence is an empowering factor for project managers.

Self-determination requires decision-freedom within the framework for project managers to feel enabled. By defining their own way of work within the guidelines, project managers can fulfil their need for autonomy, motivating them. Thus, self-determination is also an empowerment factor for project managers.

Impact in the form of decision-power motivates and enables project managers to take ownership of their projects. Without decision-making power, project managers do not have the opportunity to perform to the best of their ability. Therefore, impact is another factor of empowerment for project managers.

Role ambiguity hinders the project manager's role acceptance in the organisation, resulting in demotivation and complicating the management of projects. The project manager is less able to perform and fulfil the project objectives. Hence, role ambiguity is identified as a factor of project manager empowerment.

Collaborative project team culture is beneficial for successful project execution. When working in a culture based on trust and respect, project managers feel that their work environment enables them to perform. They are motivated to achieve the project goals together with the team. Thus, a collaborative project team culture is identified as a factor of empowerment needed by project managers.

Affiliation, acknowledgment, growth, and achievement motivation are identified as additional factors of intrinsic motivation. They do not fit into the defined psychological empowerment factors but are still consistently experienced by the interviewed project managers. These factors give them motivation and the drive to work on their projects. Therefore, these factors are identified as empowerment factors by project managers.

Regarding the analysis of the quantitative results of the survey, the formed hypothesis will now be tested. An above-average level of empowerment is

defined as a mean value of 3.5 or higher for a factor, as previously described. H0 can be partially confirmed for the factors access to support, meaningfulness, and competence, since only these factors have  $M > 3.5$ , while additionally having a  $p$ -value in the one-sample t-test below .05. All other factors either have  $M < 3.5$  or are not considered statistically significant. Therefore, H0 is partially rejected to support H1 for most factors, meaning project managers have a below-average level of socio-structural and psychological empowerment.

## Conclusions

To empower project managers, the factors required to empower them need to be known. However, to the best of the author's knowledge, this has not been done in past research in the specific case of the project manager's role. Instead, previous empowerment research focused on project management was based on research into established factors of employee empowerment.

This study works toward improving the fundamental empowerment research of the project manager's role via the central research question: What factors of empowerment are required from the project manager's perspective? The answer to this question enables a deeper understanding of the empowerment of project managers.

Regarding the central research question, this study confirms that the established factors of socio-structural empowerment – access to opportunity, formal power sources, informal power sources, information, support, and resources – are necessary factors of empowerment for project managers. Furthermore, three factors of psychological empowerment – competence, self-determination, and impact – are confirmed as empowerment factors for project managers; thereby confirming that most of the established factors of employee empowerment also apply to project managers. The only factor that could not be confirmed as an empowerment factor and needs to be investigated further was meaningfulness, due to the incongruity of the interviewees' answers and the survey results.

Moreover, additional factors of empowerment for project managers are identified based on emerging themes of the interview responses. These factors are role ambiguity, collaborative project team culture, and the additional intrinsic motivational factors affiliation, acknowledgment, growth, and achievement motivation,

thus providing this study's main contribution to fundamental employee empowerment research. According to this analysis, these factors impact project manager empowerment, but this is an initial discovery and requires further research.

Regarding the quantitative statistical analysis, H0 can be partially rejected, leading to support of H1 for most factors of empowerment. Thus, project managers currently have a below-average level of socio-structural and psychological empowerment, except for the factors access to support, meaningfulness, and competence.

The empirical analysis consisted of qualitative interviews to explore the required empowerment factors and a quantitative survey to collect the current status of empowerment. The interview data was analysed via a hybrid approach, both deductively and inductively, to examine existing factors, while also allowing for the discovery of additional factors of empowerment. The interview guide questions and coding categories were based on existing empowerment literature, and the interviewees were chosen using purposive sampling to ensure diversity. Additionally, the results were cross-validated across all interviews. These steps were taken to ensure the validity and reliability of the research.

One limitation of this approach is its small sample size of 17 participants employed in only one company. The project manager role may vary between organisations since it is tailored to fit the organisational needs (PMI, 2017; Schwalbe, 2015, p. 17). Another limitation is that one person conducted the data collection and analysis, possibly leading to a biased interpretation. Also, each step in the qualitative analysis and the summarising and paraphrasing of the transcripts can lead to a loss of information.

Not considered in this study were personal characteristics and backgrounds, such as self-esteem, gender, or locus of control, and their effects on empowerment. The context of national culture was not further regarded in this study, except for the inclusion of different cultures in the sample group. National culture and the resulting values vary greatly depending on the country and may, therefore, play a role in the perceptions of empowerment as a moderator (Hofstede, 2011; Tuuli et al., 2012). However, findings by Tuuli and Rowlinson (2009a) suggest that empowerment appears to have positive effects regardless of cultural background. The

development and implementation of empowerment measures are not discussed, nor their relationship with leadership styles. Furthermore, project managers are not the only ones responsible for a project's success or achieving the organisational goals, since they are working in collaboration with the project team.

Finally, it can be said that the empowerment construct of project managers deserves further attention in order to prioritise and confirm the required factors of empowerment in a more diverse environment. This study contributes to empowerment research by analysing the required factors of project manager empowerment, including additional, previously unidentified factors. A deeper understanding of how to empower project managers is developed. These findings can be used to develop empowerment measures, which project managers actually perceive as empowering. Possible future research areas include the analysis of the identified factors in diverse business sectors and the development and implementation of effective empowerment measures in various contexts. An additional future research area is the study of empowerment in the project environment, going further than focusing on the project manager's perspective to include the project team as a major contributor to project success.

Employee and project manager empowerment still have many unexplored aspects, but this study has contributed to gaining a deeper understanding of the empowerment of project managers. By further developing this understanding, organisations can prepare their project managers for the challenges of the future.

### **About the Author**

Katharina Goerz has many years of experience in supporting and leading complex projects. She takes a keen interest in exploring the project manager role and project management in an international context. To further develop her skills, in 2021 she obtained an MBA degree majoring in International Business Management and Leadership at the Professional School of Business and Technology, Kempten University of Applied Sciences, Germany.

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