Stucknation of employee empowerment research in pandemic situations

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Abstract This study aims to establish if there was a research stitch during the COVID-19 epidemic in terms of the notion and development of employee empowerment in the previous five years. In discovering, we combined hundreds of journals on employee empowerment published between 2018 and 2022. By examining past research, this study employs qualitative methodologies—selected sources from the Scopus data repository released in the last five years, from 2018 to 2022. The chosen article is a publication on the subject of employee empowerment. The number of publications based on keywords initially appeared to be 3,717 articles; however, after filtering, the final findings showed the number of publications to be 391. The study’s findings were gathered through data analysis with VOSviewer. According to the results, 86 concepts in employee empowerment research could be classified into six groups. The finding of mapping the notion of employee empowerment is significant since it may aid in establishing a conceptual framework in subsequent studies and can lead to innovation in subsequent research. The COVID-19 pandemic has not caused publications about employee empowerment to decrease; in contrast, the level of publication has always increased and has never reduced from 2018 to 2022, even during the COVID-19 crisis.

Keywords: COVID-19, employee empowerment, pandemic, research, stucknation

1. Introduction

The spread of the virus devastated the world during the COVID-19 pandemic, defined by the development of a lethal new disease/virus. The virus's influence also impacts the existence of human resources in an organization; human resources play an essential role because human resources play a large part in carrying out organizational operations during the COVID-19 pandemic. The effective and efficient use of human resources can impact an organization's survival and growth during the COVID-19 pandemic and in the future. Principally, organizations do not only demand human resources who are capable, proficient, and skilled. However, there is also a drive to work hard to attain ideal job outcomes and prevent the virus from spreading (Adamy 2016). Furthermore, human resources in a company are part of the capital and assets that help run a company to achieve company goals (Halisa 2020). Thus, precision in the use of human resources makes it simpler for the company to operate its business and achieve its goals because one of the things that are the major key to attaining corporate success is the human resources in it who manage the firm (Iskandar 1998).

Human resources are critical to a company's success. Practices of human resource empowerment are critical in deciding strategic rivalry, corporate continuity, and acute worldwide concerns. Companies that practice strong human capital management will compete and win in an increasingly intense trade war (Goklas et al 2021). To maximize the potential of employees, it is necessary to empower employees. Increasing employee skill empowerment can improve employee performance due to the influence of autonomous participation and employee commitment related to their work activities (Kim and Jeong 2021).

When a company completely supports employee empowerment, employees’ abilities will develop and continue to improve in their performance outcomes, resulting in increased employee satisfaction. This empowerment not only awakens employee skills but also has the potential to affect employee psychology in terms of job satisfaction and increasing employee commitment to the company, owing to a sense of gratitude towards the company for being empowered and trained so that it has the necessary skills (Liu and Ren 2022). This empowerment stems from the company’s commitment to produce high-performing human resources through training and skill development. The argument is that investing in human resources in terms of empowerment is the most important thing a company can do to increase its quality (Sankar et al 2021). This is because employee empowerment is critical to the company’s success via collaboration and individuality, which leads to employee satisfaction (Sankar et al 2021).

Empowerment to employees is a mandate given by the company to employees in terms of authority, commitment, and supporting employees in completing job responsibilities that have been given (Chasanah 2008). Thus, companies must improve
employee skills according to the times and technology, and empowerment may assist workers in attaining goals with the authority that employees must have in defining the decision-making process. Furthermore, the increase in COVID-19 instances has caused the new work system to react to work in these conditions, causing employees to work from home, requiring high work flexibility. Then, firms must go above and above in describing how to accomplish jobs, such as performance expectations when working from home (Zanhour and Sumpter 2022).

Under these circumstances, companies must consider effective employee planning and empowerment to support employees’ flexible work. Online training, a more innovative work style, and encouraging the full creativity of employees in terms of completing work are all things that can empower employees during the COVID-19 pandemic (Gellert et al. 2022). The relationship between employee empowerment and welfare during the COVID-19 period is an important value in maintaining employee productivity, which inspires employees to work so that the contribution of development and commitment to the company can increase (Nong et al. 2022). Therefore, establishing a good work environment and decent workplace conditions, attaching importance to occupational health and safety and empowering appropriate employees can create sustainable growth for the company (Awan et al. 2018). Through the empowerment carried out, it is hoped that it will be able to stimulate employees to think about their own job responsibilities and find and determine solutions to problems related to their work (Seibert et al. 2001).

Empowering employees to face a new work culture as a result of COVID-19, such as working creatively, is capable of combating employee stress levels. High empowerment at the same time is capable of combating employee emotional exhaustion at work, so empowerment can assist companies in better managing employee stress levels to boost employee productivity levels at work (Alrige et al. 2022). Increasing employee commitment to companies during COVID-19 is critical to retain the best employees; hence, employee empowerment methods, policies, and welfare levels must be properly measured to enhance employee commitment in moments of such a crisis (Nong et al. 2022).

Furthermore, employee empowerment can bring ease and authority to upper management by representing the decision-making process, and this is something that employees must understand when doing everyday activities in the workplace. This empowerment also has the potential to enhance employee abilities by providing a variety of various jobs and duty requirements in decision making that lead to beneficial results for the organization (Kadiresan et al. 2019). The purpose of this research is to investigate the development of employee empowerment in the company. Mapping studies on a topic have been conducted in a variety of fields. It is known that COVID-19 instances peaked in 2020 and 2021, forcing businesses to recruit personnel to work from home. During the COVID-19 phase, employees have complete authority over decision-making tasks that have been assigned to employees at a level that is not too high to obtain the best results (Gupta et al. 2022). Given the aforementioned background, researchers are interested in investigating empowerment, motivation and performance improvement during the COVID-19 pandemic. To achieve this goal, a research survey will be conducted in the city of Yogyakarta, Indonesia, in 2022.

2. Materials and Methods

The purpose of this study is to investigate various scientific publications published on Scopus that are connected to the growth of employee empowerment. Furthermore, the review article in this study is focused on the notion of employee empowerment surveys, as described by the following questions: (1) What topics are related to employee empowerment? (2) What type of mapping is used in employee empowerment topics? (3) What concepts are used in employee empowerment learning? These questions are described based on the study topic, framework, and previous research findings indexed in the Scopus database.

Moreover, the articles reviewed in this study went through stages from (1) searching for items, (2) mapping topics, (3) analysing problems, and (4) creating employee empowerment concepts. Articles are searched through the following stages. First, identify the theme. This was done using the Scopus database. Furthermore, at this stage, the keyword “employee empowerment” was included in the article search field on Scopus, and the publication year was limited to between 2018 and 2022. The search returned 391 views. Accessible publications, visualizations, and bibliometric mappings were performed using VOSviewer and bibliometric software. The study analysed data collected through VOSviewer. This process was carried out to obtain data clusters and visualize the network of the research theme.

3. Results and Discussion

3.1. Publication by year

After searching for keywords and filters, a total of 391 documents were found. The highest number of articles discovered in 2022 was 91, whereas the lowest number of documents discovered in 2018 was 50. In Figure 2, an increase in the number of released articles is observed in 2019. In 2018, there were 50 documents, and in 2019, there were 80 documents, indicating that the globe is currently facing a crisis due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Despite the ongoing occurrence of the pandemic between 2019 and 2021, the number of released documents continues to increase each year. These findings align with research conducted by Sukoco (2020), which suggests that employee empowerment during COVID-19 serves as a strategic measure for
companies to foster employees who possess adequate loyalty and skills to navigate through a crisis. Hence, it is not surprising to witness an escalation in employee empowerment by companies during the COVID-19 crisis.

3.2. Publication by base sources

Based on the analysis in the Scopus database related to "Employee Empowerment" with the range of 2018 to 2022, it can be seen in Figure 3 that there are top five sources of documents based on the most sources. It can be seen that some have experienced an increase, such as from Frontiers in Psychology, and there are also those who have experienced a decline, such as Business Theory and Practice. The top five results of the analysis carried out are Frontiers in Psychology, Sustainability Switzerland, International Journal Of Environmental Research And Public Health, Sage Open, and Business Theory And Practice. The most published was Frontiers in Psychology, 31. The least published is Business Theory and Practice, with a total of 7.
3.3. Publication by country

As can be observed in the Figure 4, extensive research on "Employee Empowerment" has been conducted by numerous countries. This is attributed to the profound structural changes brought about by the COVID-19 pandemic, particularly within the economic sector. Consequently, there is a pressing need for appropriate policies to fortify and sustain the economic framework in the medium and long term (Pangestika 2020).

By utilizing the Scopus database and analyzing search results spanning from 2018 to 2022, it was determined that the top 10 countries have published research pertaining to "Employee Empowerment," as depicted in the aforementioned chart. China emerged as the country with the highest number of publications, with 51 documents being published. Subsequently, the United States contributed 37 publications, followed by the United Kingdom with 34 publications, Malaysia with 31 publications, Australia with 30 publications, Pakistan with 26 publications, India with 22 publications, Indonesia with 20 publications, and Spain with 19 publications. Finally, the country with the lowest number of publications was the Netherlands, with a total of 17 publications being published.
3.4. Publication by affiliation

The Figure 5 is the result of an analysis from a search in the Scopus database. It is known that the number of documents published about "Employee Empowerment" from 2018 to 2022 is the most published by Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam, with as many as eight publications, followed by the University Of Lahore, with as many as six publications, followed by the Queensland University of Technology, the University of Surrey, the University of Exeter, and Jadara University, with as many as five publications. In addition, the least University Sains Malaysia, Universitat de Valencia, Monash University and Universiti Malaysia Terengganu as many as four publications.

The various documents published above prove that empowerment in managing human resources during the COVID-19 pandemic is an attempt to determine what kind of empowerment is appropriate to conditions during the COVID-19 pandemic (Reza Nurul Ichsan, 2020).

3.5. Publication by author

In the Figure 6, it can be observed that each author has a published document that does not exhibit significant variation throughout the period from 2018 to 2022. The two highest rankings were achieved by Gillet and Lee, with three publications each. Aljawarneh, Beehr, Blomme, Bonavia, Demerouti, Ekowati, Escrig-Tena, and Falola each contributed two publications.
3.6. Network Visualization Based on Employee Empowerment Keywords

This section explains the development of studies related to employee empowerment with 391 documents. Bibliometric analysis was carried out to create a network visualization on the basis of keywords, titles, abstracts, and countries using VOSviewer software to determine the bibliometric network. The findings from this research are essential in presenting novelty in employee empowerment research. The figure below shows the progress of employee empowerment based on searches in the Scopus database from 2018 to 2022.

The Figure 7 shows the names, concepts, or ideas generated from the cluster density display. Each color was used to see the concepts that stand out from each cluster, which aimed to make it easier to identify themes that were often discussed in previous studies and that would be used in subsequent research studies. The color difference indicates the cluster density of the existing clusters.

![Network visualization of co-occurrence based on keywords](image)

**Figure 7** Network visualization of co-occurrence based on keywords

The results of the identification in the picture above can help researchers who wanted to start their research as reference material in research. When researchers find an interesting theme or topic, they can read articles that are continuous with the theme or topic that are helpful for this research as a reference for their research. Research developments related to the theme of employee empowerment with the VOSviewer image linkage can be divided into 6 clusters. Cluster 1 consists of 21 concept names, cluster 2 consists of 18 concept names, cluster 3 consists of 15, cluster 4 consists of 12, cluster 5 consists of 11 concept names, and cluster 6 consists of 9 concept names. Cluster details can be seen in Table 1.

3.7. Network Visualization by Country

From the processing of 391 documents obtained from the Scopus database, to determine the country of origin of each author in "Employee Empowerment" from 2018 to 2022, 9 items from 3 clusters can be found (Figure 8). Cluster 1 consists of Australia, the Netherlands, the United Kingdom and the United States. Cluster 2 consists of India, Indonesia and Malaysia. Finally, cluster 3 consists of only two countries: China and Pakistan.

![Network Visualization by Country](image)

**Figure 8** Network Visualization by Country.
Table 1 The Employee Empowerment Development Theory.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Cluster</th>
<th>Concept Name</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Cluster 1</td>
<td>Covid-19, customer satisfaction, employee empowerment, employee engagement, employee motivation, employee performance, innovative work behavior, job satisfaction, organizational citizenship, organizational commitment, organizational culture, psychological empowerment, servant leadership, structural empowerment, structural equation modelling, task performance, transformational leadership, trust, turnover intention, work engagement, working conditions</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cluster 2</td>
<td>Awareness, controlled study, creativity, education, employee, health care, health promotion, human experiment, major clinical study, manager, mental health, occupational health, physician, public health, social support, wellbeing, work environment, workplace</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cluster 3</td>
<td>Attitude, conceptual framework, decision making, government employee, health care planning, health education, human, human resource management, learning, organizational change, outcome assessment, patient care, priority journal, semi structured interview, total quality management</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cluster 4</td>
<td>Affective commitment, employment, green human resource management, human resource, innovation, innovative behavior, public sector, resource management, service quality, sustainability, theoretical study, training.</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cluster 5</td>
<td>Behavior, communication, cross-sectional studies, employee satisfaction, entrepreneurship, motivation, organization, organization and management, perception, personnel, power (psychology)</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cluster 6</td>
<td>Emotional intelligence, empowering leadership, empowerment, engagement, job stress, leadership, management, performance, psychology</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

3.8. Visualization density of 391 employee empowerment development documents

In Figure 9, the level of saturation is displayed in relation to the frequency of commonly used keywords. The yellow color surrounds keywords like "empowerment", "human", and "psychological empowerment", indicating that this topic has been extensively researched. On the other hand, topics such as "work engagement", "working conditions", and "employee performance" are not dominant in yellow, suggesting that they have not been widely researched. This reveals that there is still a vast opportunity to conduct research on these topics.
Figure 10 shows that between mid-2019 to 2020, topics such as job stress, health promotion, and health care planning were discussed frequently, as indicated by the purplish blue nodes. On the other hand, Covid-19, government employee, and structural empowerment were less frequently discussed, as shown by the yellow nodes. This visualization, known as density, helps identify the most prominent topics studied. Nodes that are more flushed indicate more research on a given topic, while greener nodes represent less research.

4. Final considerations

Research on the development of employee empowerment is still an interesting topic. This could be seen from developments over the past 5 years, and the number of publications on this topic has continued to increase. The COVID-19 pandemic has not caused publications about employee empowerment to decrease. This proves that publications related to employee empowerment remain a separate urgency for companies even though they are being hit by the COVID-19 crisis.

Subsequent research topics could examine topics that discussed specifically how to empower employees during COVID-19 considering that the recent COVID-19 pandemic has caused many companies to shake their existence due to the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic.

The limitation of this research is that the articles reviewed are only sourced from the Scopus database, so they do not have comparative data. Therefore, further research needs to use a comparative analysis approach involving the Scopus database and the Web of Science (WoS).

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Ethical Considerations

Not Applicable.

Conflict of Interest

The authors declare no potential conflict of interest regarding the publication of this work. In addition, ethical issues including plagiarism, informed consent, misconduct, data fabrication and/or falsification, double publication and/or submission, and redundancy have been completely witnessed by the authors.

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