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EMPLOYEE DIRECT PARTICIPATION – THE ESSENCE AND ADVANTAGES

Employee direct participation is their individual and group participation in the decision-making process concerning the organization, as well as employees and the terms and conditions of their functioning in the life of the organization. It provides numerous and diverse advantages which are the subject of research presented in writings. The aim of this study is to analyze the essence and advantages of employee direct participation. The research method used to achieve it is the analysis of domestic and foreign literature.

Keywords: *employee direct participation (EDP), advantages of EDP, management methods and techniques conducive to employee direct participation*

INTRODUCTION

Every organization strives for success. One of the ways to achieve it is employee direct participation – their participation in the decision-making process (of management of the organization) [3, 48].

Employee direct participation integrates the members of the organization around its objectives and improving internal processes, contributing to the increase in the operational efficiency [25]. Staff executing the organizational tasks best know and understand the course of these processes [52]. They identify both the reserves inherent in these processes and the areas for improvement [25]. On the other hand, while working with the customers, they get to know their opinions (praising and critical) regarding the products offered, unfulfilled expectations, as well as the ideas what the competing enterprises are doing better. They acquire the necessary knowledge to improve (optimize) internal and external processes both at the source of problems [25, 31], as well as at market opportunities. Therefore, their opinions, objections, and ideas should be taken into account in the decision-making process concerning both working position, and the strategic, key decisions for the organization [21, 42].

With the direct participation in the organization management the employees gain subjectivity [27, 47], they become co-responsible for the results of their work, more involved in their work. They constitute genuine participants in the

organization, because their concerns, opinions, experiences and ideas for improvement are taken into account, bringing tangible, positive effects. The effects – the advantages associated with employee direct participation – can be manifold. They are broadly presented in the literature on the subject based on research results.

Employee direct participation is growing, gaining in importance. This is believed in by both employees and managers who are increasingly willing to more and more often invite employees to participate in the management of the organization [49]. This state of affairs is also true in Poland [39].

However, critical opinions also occur frequently, indicating the following risks associated with employee participation: lack of knowledge and motivation of employees for participation, lack of responsibility, time-consuming duration of the process of participation, shortsightedness of employees when looking at matters of the organization [38].

In this paper the author focuses only on the analysis of the essence of employee direct participation and the advantages of its use. The research method applied in the study is the analysis of domestic and foreign literature.

1. THE ESSENCE OF EMPLOYEE DIRECT PARTICIPATION

„Participation has been defined as a process which allows employees to exert some influence over their work and the conditions under which they work, or alternatively a process in which the influence on decision making is shared between hierarchical superiors and their subordinates. These two definitions encompass a broad range of activities through which employees can affect decision making, from consultative or communication (*employee involvement*) mechanism where individual workers' input is asked for and considered by managers who retain responsibility for the final decision, to participation mechanism involving representative structures where workers are major parties to these decisions” [22]. Hence, the forms of employee participation most commonly presented in the literature are: indirect participation, direct participation, and financial participation¹.

Indirect participation represents the participation of workers' representatives in the decision-making organs of the enterprise, i.e. the supervisory boards, managing board, boards and committees and in the form of trade unions (the so-called union participation) [4, 6, 32]. It is implemented by information, consultation, and co-decisions and refers to the common interests of all the employees in the

¹ FP denotes various forms of participation of employees in the income or assets of the company. It connects financial incentives with employee ownership and affects the growth of satisfaction with the work performed and high motivation for achievement of the results by integrating the company's goals with individual goals of employees [5].

enterprise, even though the decision-making process involves only their elected representatives. It can be based on statutory regulations, collective agreements or decisions taken unilaterally by the employer [44].

Direct participation may occur in the strict sense (*sensu stricto*) or in the broad sense (*sensu largo*). The strict sense, the so-called "democracy at work", applies for the personal participation of all employees in decisions relating primarily to shaping the workplace and work process [28]. It is consulting (individually or with a group) the way to perform tasks, and even the transfer of authorization and responsibilities onto executive employees, due to which they become co-deciding entities in the work organization [18, 19, 55].

Employee direct participation in more general terms (the basis for further discussion) is the individual and collective participation of employees in all stages of the decision-making process concerning the operation of the enterprise at different levels of its organizational hierarchy, as well as the employees as participants and implementers of processes and the terms and conditions of their functioning in the life of the organization.

Individual participation of employees manifests itself, among others, in the influence on the choice of the management style by a superior. Group participation as well as individual participation have been applied in a variety of management methods and techniques. They are presented in Table 1.

Table 1. Methods and techniques of management conducive to participation of individual and group employees and improving the organization [26,50]

Name of the technique / method	Essence of the technique / method, its impact on a given form of direct participation and related advantages
Individual participation	
Job rotation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - moving individual employees to different jobs within the department or the entire company - it promotes the development of qualifications and the subjectivity of employees, getting to know the enterprise, growth of their participatory and creative potential thanks to gaining new information, and expanding interpersonal contacts
Job enlargement	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - allocating more complex tasks (e.g. integration of several tasks previously performed in various positions), giving the possibility of choice of the means to perform them which leads to participation at the operational level and improves the operations, because it requires the use of all employees' skills and enables fuller participation in the organization
Job enrichment and its design	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - empowering employees in the planning of the work (joining manufacturing, ancillary-servicing and administrative operations), in decision-making regarding the choice of working methods, means of implementation and control (self-control), simultaneously influencing the team work and being responsible for its and one's own results - it favours expanding the qualifications of employees, strengthens their participation, willingness to explore innovative ways of organizing work and its design - it creates the opportunity of direct participation in decisions by organizing one's own work-place, principles of cooperation with others, setting up schedules and working methods

Name of the technique / method	Essence of the technique / method, its impact on a given form of direct participation and related advantages
Flexible working hours	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - co-deciding of the employees about the starting and ending hours of work, distribution of the required number of hours on fewer days of the week, sharing the work between different positions, determining the time on the basis of the tasks - this technique allows to adjust the organization of work to the private and professional needs of an employee, leads to increased autonomy, professional maturity, creativity and improvement, as well as commitment and loyalty towards the employer; lowers company's costs - it gives the employees the possibility of direct decision-making on the matters concerning them
Tele-commuting	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - the ability to perform work outside the enterprise, e.g. at home - it helps to improve the organization of work, increases employee autonomy and intensity of participation, leading to increased job satisfaction and improvement of work - employees gain subjectivity due to the possibility of influencing the organization of work
Cafeteria plans	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - it allows to select non-material benefits as a reward for efficient work - the possibility of selection increases the autonomy of employees, their participation in decisions (active participation), improves motivation, encourages to seek new, more efficient ways to implement the tasks as well as to involve in the issues of the organization
Group participation	
Temporary teams	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - appointed periodically for consultation in relation to the emerging problems, e.g. in the organization of work, introduction of new technologies; after proposing a satisfactory solution they finish work - they can take the form of briefings, meetings, conferences, conventions and congresses; they mainly serve to convey information to employees about the situation of the company or its part, and (to a lesser extent) to obtain workers' opinions; final decisions related to the proposals of employees belong to management - the varieties: method of meetings or special meetings, use the techniques of creative problem solving
Method of meetings	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - direct participation of entry-level employees in the exchange of information on various aspects of the functioning of the enterprise - apart from informing the employees about the most important events in the organization, the managers also consult their decisions with subordinates, which affects significantly the increase of their participation and is associated with feedback – the employees, by participating in the discussion, asking questions, sharing their opinions and ideas, actually have a considerable influence on decisions being made
Problem solving teams	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - co-operation of team members to identify general or departmental problems and to search for solutions; assessment of solutions and the final decisions on the selection and implementation of solutions are made by management - interdisciplinary, permanent, voluntary, they ensure the subjectivity of employees, and their participation in decisions - an important methodical approach to problem solving, hence it involves the use of professional training and practice
MAPS method	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Multivariate Analysis, Participation and Structure – is to bring to the desired formalization of informal actions with regard to the actions which employees want to do and who they will be happy to cooperate with - particularly useful in view of the flexibility of employment

Name of the technique / method	Essence of the technique / method, its impact on a given form of direct participation and related advantages
Management by objectives	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - employees co-decide about the individual objectives of their work and ways of achieving them - it leads to the subjectivity of employees, taking into account their extending competence, increasing participation in management, and thus affects the way of achieving team and organizational goals in an innovative way
Management by informing	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - informing the employees about the most significant events in the organization: intentions of the management, occurring problems, market position of the organization (current and target), as well as the most important kinds of risk accompanying the activity - the increase in employees' knowledge about the most important matters concerning the organization affects the growth of their identification with the organization, the reduction of the resistance to organizational changes, better coping with threats from the environment
Management by delegation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - non-managerial employees become entitled to make specifically defined decisions (most commonly concerning the occupied workplace) - it promotes the development of the employees' skills, prepares them to making increasingly difficult decisions and occupying more responsible positions - it contributes to meeting the higher needs of employees and increases the level of their motivation to work
Quality circles	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - employees directly influence the improvement of the quality of products, participate in the decision-making process, they have the opportunity to fulfil their subjectivity and creative potential by proposing definite and innovative solutions; therefore they contribute to improving the innovativeness of the organization
Kaizen	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - the so-called suggestion schemes, or rationalization proposals based on the involvement of employees in the organization's problem solving by presenting their own proposals - submitted ideas for improvement are verified by the relevant departments; their positive assessment results in implementation - it requires an effective flow of information between management and employees
Autonomous groups	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - through co-decision, a wide range of autonomy – independent performing of managerial functions (planning one's own work, setting qualitative and quantitative tasks, determining their order, implementation methods, selecting group members and the rhythm of work, sharing due remuneration between group members), subjectivity, acquisition of new skills, and self-fulfilment, employees engage in solving specific organizational problems - this technique directly affects the decrease in absenteeism, increased productivity, flexibility and quality of work, as well as customer satisfaction

The above-mentioned methods and techniques indicate the need to develop teamwork, to transfer decision-making authorization to the lower levels of management and to select a proper management style, supporting participation and specific organizational conditions. Their characteristic feature is various intensity of employee participation in decision-making processes. The intensity has become a criterion of selection of direct participation in the passive and active form by W. Tegtmeier. The first of them – cooperation – gives employees the right to information, to be heard (complaints, demands), to speak and to advise. The second one – co-decision – denotes the employees' right of objection, of expressing consent, of settling problems together and the right to exclusive deciding [13].

Information is the weakest form of employee participation in decisions. The participation increases with the transition from cooperation to co-decision. Its highest form is independent deciding [14, 19].

As S. Rudolf and K. Skorupińska state [38], the employee direct participation in decision-making is mainly based on consultations (encouraging employees to present comments, suggestions, and ideas on specific issues both individually and as groups), and delegation of authorization (co-deciding and bearing responsibility for the consequences of actions taken) [9]. Least commonly it is associated with the expression of opinions through surveys.

To distinguish other forms of employee direct participation different criteria are applicable. Due to the content of the decision (cases in which employees have been involved), participation concerning the following can be singled out: the organization of work and working conditions (including social and living conditions, and health and safety), human resources management, production technology, organizational structure, and matters of strategic importance, as mergers or restructuring. Due to the location in the organizational hierarchy employee direct participation can occur at the entry-level position, middle management, chief executives, and even the bodies of corporate governance. Therefore, it can have an operating range (working position), a tactical range and a strategic range (key decisions for the entire organization). When employees are involved in all stages of the decision-making process, i.e.: recognizing the problem, gathering information related to the problematic situation, finding solutions, their assessment and selection, implementation and execution of one of them, full participation takes place. When employee participation is limited to only selected stages of the decision-making process, there is a partial participation. Seeming participation (pseudo-participation) occurs when employees only imagine their participation in decisions. When this participation is actual (real) there is real participation. It can be formal (*de iure*) – when it is regulated by law or regulations within the organization – or informal, when it is unregulated, voluntary, takes place mostly in the form of oral agreements [50].

The interest in employee direct participation stems from the ongoing socio-economic changes, including increasing demand for knowledge in the modern globalized economy [7, 14]. More and more of this knowledge is at entry-level employees' disposal [54]. "The so far untapped huge intellectual potential" [38] of employees can be activated through direct participation in decisions. As a result, employees will gain subjectivity, the ability to realize their needs of participation, self-fulfillment, and aspirations, whereas the enterprises will gain the knowledge needed to succeed.

2. THE ADVANTAGES ASSOCIATED WITH EMPLOYEE DIRECT PARTICIPATION

Employee participation is not a new phenomenon². The history of its development indicates periods of intense progress and periods of stagnation (weak economic situation) [38]. The research on the process involved primarily the effects of employee participation to decisions made, the impact and shaping a management style favorable to participation, then the scope, and forms of participation, and the advantages associated with it. The research in the last mentioned area was conducted, among others, by H.T. Graham and R. Bennett, W.P. Anthony, D.P. Schultz, S.E. Schultz, Ch. Doucouliagos, D.J. Levine and L.A. Tyson, as well as J. Mączyński, S. Rudolf, K. Skorupińska, J. Piwowarczyk, M. Moczulska, A. Cierniak-Emerych, M. Czerska, R. Rutka [51].

The literature presents various advantages of employee direct participation. They can apply to both employees and the organization. First, the advantages for the organisation will be analysed. They are divided into the following groups:

- The advantages connected with employees' knowledge, i.e.:
 - The ability to use the full knowledge of individuals and teams, overt and covert knowledge of employees and to develop this knowledge for the needs of the organization [23, 38].
 - Increase in employees' knowledge and interest in the enterprise, which causes the improvement of their morale and integration with the organization, as well as commitment and loyalty towards the organization [1, 14, 24, 25, 30, 33, 38, 45].
 - Expanding employees' knowledge and their information about the enterprise causes them to note the significance of the performed tasks, increases their sense of safety and sense of exercising control, the rationality of decisions made, causes remission of conflicts [32].
 - The development of employees' knowledge translates into creation of human capital as well as the mechanism of its effective use, leading to the realisation of the organizational processes [30, 49, 50, 51].
- The advantages connected with entrepreneurship, i.e.:
 - Employee participation in decision making encourages their entrepreneurship (resourcefulness, ability to identify market opportunities), creativity and innovation of employees, leading to the development of innovativeness of the organization [14, 38, 40, 45, 46].
 - It also results in the increase of responsibility of employees for the organization [10].

² The first agreements between guild masters and journeymen took place in the Middle Ages. Intensive development of participation occurred in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. The first manifestation of employee participation in Poland was founding an employee stock ownership Gazolina S.A. in Lviv in 1912 whose employees owned 46% of stock capital and had 61.4% votes at their disposal [19].

- Increased resistance of the organization in crisis situations [38, 26].
- Relieving the managers from operational activities (which are dealt with to a larger extent and more responsibly by employees) and giving them the opportunity to focus on strategic activities [35].
- The advantages connected with other social effects for the organization, as:
 - More effective integration of social partners [38], improvement of interpersonal relations, especially between managers and subordinates and between managers and trade unions, creating social peace, reduction in the number of conflicts [31, 37].
 - Better understanding of organizational changes by employees and a reduction in resistance to them [15, 25, 31, 56].
 - Strengthening the bonds between employees and the organization, identifying with its objectives, increase of trust in the method of management by senior management, improvement of the processes of managing the employees [51].
 - Improved internal and external communication (with the environment) [8, 49, 36,].
 - Consolidation of teamwork on such a level of performance (synergy) that could not be achieved individually or through a combination of individual results [41].
- With the improvement of:
 - The quality of products (goods and services) [14, 24, 34, 53].
 - The quality of decisions made [10, 30] and
 - The quality of customer service and increase of the customers' satisfaction due to sharing information among employees [10, 30].
- With economic effects, such as:
 - Reduction of the costs of the organization (including labor costs), waste, morbidity, absenteeism and turnover of staff [2, 14, 32, 49, 53].
 - Increase of total production [14, 24, 34, 53].
 - Improved effectiveness (understood as the relation of the effects to outlays) [11, 14, 17, 26, 33, 38, 45].
 - Increased efficiency (productivity, that is the ratio of production to the amount of resources used to produce it) [9, 10, 12, 16, 24, 32, 45, 49, 52, 53, 54, 57, 58].
- And hence, improvement in functioning of the organization [24, 45, 53], its competitiveness [11, 14, 17, 33, 38, 45] and creating value for customers [11, 50].

The last group of the organisation's economic advantages of direct employee participation seems to be the most important. These effects are the most frequently studied and presented in the literature. They are the easiest to measure and determine their influence on the development of the organization. However, they are also strongly affected by the remaining groups of advantages. Without the development of the employees' knowledge, their entrepreneurship, commitment in the organisation's matters, understanding of its processes, the improvement of the quality of products and decisions made, there will be no increase in the

effectiveness of the organisation, no creation of its value and a competitive position in the market. And these are possible, among other things, thanks to employee direct participation.

Employee direct participation provides advantages also to employees themselves. These are:

- Increase in the autonomy of employees [9].
- Improving safety in the workplace [53]
- Improving employee motivation [10, 30, 45, 53], through the realization of their higher-order needs (sense of responsibility, self-fulfillment, respect and sense of importance, independence, satisfaction of creating one's own work environment, etc.) [25, 38, 39, 52].
- Improving the organizational atmosphere (trust, tolerance and cooperation) and employee satisfaction [2, 10, 24, 33, 43, 49, 50, 52, 53,].
- Perfecting employees' competence, their ability to solve problems independently, development of unique skills, shaping the human capital in the organization and mechanisms of its efficient use for the realization of organizational processes [30, 50, 49].
- Reducing stress at work [14, 49], positive impact on mental and physical health of employees [14].
- Building trust and social dialogue [19].

To gain the above-mentioned benefits from employee direct participation, particular conditions need to be fulfilled resulting from the proper shaping of the internal and external determinants. The first ones can be effectively moderated by the organisation. The latter ones (legal, economic, social, cultural and technological determinants) have to be adopted by the organisation. Among the internal factors, the most important is the strategy. The adoption of specific objectives and ways of achieving them by the organization is directly linked to defining the role and principles of employee participation in their implementation. It therefore represents the primary condition of the realization of employee direct participation. The global strategy should correspond to the personnel strategy and the tools of Human Resource Management aimed at shaping the organisation's human capital, especially the knowledge of employees essential for their effective participation in the decision-making process. The strategy should also be supported by organizational culture, shaping the organizational and financial conditions, and superiors' management style (participative or consultative) which would be conducive to participation. Proper attitudes, mutual trust, motivation and involvement of the organisation's members – both managers at all levels and regular employees – are the basis for the existence of employee direct participation. If the organization consciously influences the shaping of internal conditions, it will minimize the possible negative impact of external factors and create conditions for the occurrence of the benefits described in the study, resulting from employee direct participation.

Employee participation in decision-making [31] facilitates solving the increasingly complex problems of contemporary organizations, hence, participation corresponds most to the challenges of the future.

Therefore, each organisation should seriously consider the implementation of employee direct participation.

CONCLUSIONS

Employee direct participation represents individual and group participation of employees in the decision-making process in an organization. It may take the form of cooperation and co-decision, relate to various matters, levels of the organizational hierarchy (from operating to strategic one), stages of the decision-making cycle. It can be formalized or non-formalized. It leads to activating the potential of employees, integrates them around the goals and tasks of the organization and improvement of its internal and external processes. The advantages introduced in this research indicate multidimensionality and diversity of application of employee direct participation. They convince and encourage to more willingly and frequently engage employees in the management process of the organization, to create (formal or informal) mechanisms of such participation. The people – employees – have an enormous potential. Among other things, through direct participation it can be effectively activated and used for the benefit of the organization and the employees themselves.

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