A Sociology of Empowerment
The Relevance of Communicative Contexts for Workplace Change

Linda Weidenstedt

Abstract

Empowerment has been a popular concept in management and leadership practice and research for more than forty years. The intentions behind empowerment at the workplace are positive: empowered employees should experience a greater degree of influence, decision-making latitude, and meaningfulness. This is achieved through transfers of power, such as increases in autonomy and responsibility. Although empowerment efforts have often been shown to successfully result in empowered and highly involved employees, there has also been research that shows the opposite: the so-called *paradox of empowerment* is a well-known problem that refers to failed empowerment efforts through which beneficiaries feel disempowered rather than empowered.

This thesis comprises three papers intended to contribute to empowerment research and practice within a sociological framework that offers a better understanding of implicit assumptions between employer and employee and the unintended consequences these can have on the outcome of empowerment change efforts. The analyses utilize a communicative approach in line with sociological and social-psychological theories of communication and interaction.

The first two papers are theoretical analyses, one examining the general concept of empowerment (Paper I), the other focusing more specifically on empowerment in workplace contexts (Paper II). Paper III is an empirical analysis that investigates some of the theoretical assumptions made in Papers I and II.

The first paper analyzes empowerment from a sociological point of view and identifies possible mechanisms behind the paradox of empowerment. It is argued that such paradoxes may evolve from discrepancies between approaching empowerment from a purely economic and structural perspective versus a communicative and relational one. It concludes with the observation that, although their agency may be increased on a structural level, empowerees may experience a parallel decrease of agential options on a communicative level.

The second paper deals with empowerment at the workplace as a management or leadership technique. Focusing on relational aspects, a "basic communicative structure" is identified. This is analyzed as comprising a contractual and a communicative context that should be taken into consideration by empowerers in order to avoid misunderstandings in the recipients' sensemaking processes. Paper II concludes by arguing that the way recipients make sense of their roles and situations as defined by employment and/or psychological contracts might not necessarily be in line with the communicative meanings they ascribe to the change agents' actions, and vice versa.

The third paper analyzes employees' orientations and attitudes toward empowerment and the relevance of their attitudes for the success of empowerment efforts. These issues are explored by means of survey data from 268 employees in the Swedish retail sector. Results indicate that age and work intensity (part-time vs. full-time), as well as cohabitation status may have significant impacts on how empowerment efforts are approached and received by employees.

The thesis as a whole provides insights into sociological issues of empowerment, both generally and particularly in management and leadership contexts and concludes that the communicative context of empowerment interactions plays a significant role in employees' empowerment orientations.

Keywords: *empowerment, disempowerment, paradox of empowerment, empowerment orientation, human resource management, organizational behavior, psychological contract, sociological theory, communication, interaction, quantitative survey study.*

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A SOCIOLOGY OF EMPOWERMENT

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To Anna and Emelie,
and to the memory of
my grandfather,
Friedrich Birnbaum

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Abbreviations

CEO	Chief executive officer
DCM	Demand-control model
ERI	Effort-reward imbalance model
HR	Human resources
HRD	Human resource development
HRM	Human resource management
JDR	Job demands-resources model
QWL	Quality of work life
WVS	World values survey

List of Papers

Paper I: **Empowerment Gone Bad: Communicative Consequences of Power Transfers**

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Paper II: **It Takes Two to Empower: The Communicative Context of Empowerment Change in the Workplace**

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Manuscript

Paper III: **Does One Size Fit All? Investigating Different Empowerment Orientations in the Heterogeneous Workforce of the Swedish Retail Sector**

Linda Weidenstedt

Under review

Acknowledgments

No individual has a mind which operates simply in itself, in isolation from the social life-process in which it has arisen or out of which it has emerged, and in which the pattern of organized social behavior has consequently been basically impressed upon it.

George Herbert Mead ([1934] 1967:222)

During the past eight years, my mind has, without a doubt, been thoroughly impressed with the—more or less organized—social behavior of academia and doctoral student life. Yet the starting point of my social life-process in which my mind has arisen and from which it has emerged are my most significant others, my family. It is them who equipped me with everything I could possibly have wished for on embarking this journey: my paternal grandfather, Carl Otto Hamann, passed on the joy of writing to me; my paternal grandmother, Elfie Hamann, the gift of creativity. My maternal grandfather, Friedrich Birnbaum, liked to probe the curious, questioning, debating, and discussing side in me, and my maternal grandmother, Josefine Birnbaum, leading by example, showed me how courage, strong will, and hard work can get you far in life.

My parents, Oliver and Christine Hamann, did not hesitate to fight early on for my path and the possibility for me to enter and stay on it through somewhat challenging and difficult school days, to say the least. From you, Dad, I learned that visions can—and should—become reality, and that there always is a way to achieve what you dream about. I am immensely grateful that you let me take part in and contribute to your own business, and, through that, showed me what it means to be a good leader. To you, Mum, I am extremely grateful for sharing your joy in philosophizing about the world, your curiosity for, interest in, and wisdom about social interaction and communication. As long as I can remember, we have loved to talk about interaction, debate behavior, and discuss communication. Thank you both from the bottom of my heart for always having my back and giving me all the opportunities in the world to follow where my heart went. Above all, thank you for your endless love and support!

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against all odds, in making me extend my comfort zone drastically by getting me to join a choir. Thank you for being such a reliable part of my life and for challenging and expanding my world views on more than the choir occasion.

The choir experience was fun (thankfully, for everyone involved, however, it was short-lived) yet it had—very unexpectedly—the most significance in terms of my career path, since it led to my meeting two *sociologists*: Wendelin Reich and Werner Schirmer (no worries, they were *not* singing!).

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Werner, we both know that at times I might have drowned without your help. I am incredibly grateful and happy to have such a humorous, intelligent, and loyal friend in you—despite the geographical distance, small kids, and everything. I will never forget our mind-bending theorizing sessions that could last for days and more often than not seemed to lead us only to the insight of what does *not* work and how *not* to do it. At least we had some fun and good meals to go with it. Rest assured I will not give up hope of future collaborations.

My social life-process and academic socialization continued in the Sociology Department at Stockholm University, where Barbara Hobson became my main thesis advisor. When I decided to change my thesis topic rather drastically after the first year, Barbara and I agreed on a change of advisor that would fit the topic better. Thank you, Barbara, for the time you invested in me, your kind-heartedness, and interest in my work ever since. At this point I also want to thank Patrik Aspers and Magnus Bygren, who encouraged and supported me in some of these difficult decisions. Special thanks to Kieron Barclay, Petter Bengtsson, Brita Backlund Rambaree, and Alejandro Leiva Wenger for always having an ear or two for my troubles, doubts, and other stories, in those—and all other—days.

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Heartfelt thanks are also in place for significant people in my private life. Désirée Reng, your genuine and relentless interest for my complex work environment, your engagement in my regular academic headaches, and your sincere suggestions of how to solve them is more than anyone could ask from a friend: thank you for your compassion and wisdom.

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Linda Weidenstedt
Storvreta and Stockholm, October 2017

Sammanfattning

I mer än fyrtio år har *empowerment* haft en självklar plats inom management och ledarskapspraktiken så väl som inom forskningen. Intentionerna bakom empowerment som management strategi ter sig positiva: meningen är att anställda ska uppleva en ökad meningsfullhet samt påverkansmöjligheter. Detta ska ske genom en omfördelning av makt. Anställda ska få mer autonomi att ta egna beslut, vara mer delaktiga i större processer och få mer ansvar. Utfallet av sådana empowerment förändringar är dock inte alltid positivt. Fenomenet *paradoxal empowerment* är känt inom berörda fält och betecknar just misslyckade empowerment försök där mottagarna av empowerment känner "disempowerment" snarare än empowerment.

Syftet med denna avhandling är att – från ett sociologiskt perspektiv – gå till botten av paradox-problematiken och att bidra med ökad förståelse för överföringen av makt, som ligger i centrum av empowerment förändring på arbetsplatsen. Analyserna bygger på och inspireras av sociologiska samt social-psykologiska teorier om kommunikation, interaktion och meningsskapande.

Avhandlingen består av en introduktion (kappa) och tre fristående papper. Introduktionen skapar en större kontext till de tre pappren och berör frågor så som hur empowerment definieras, vilken roll empowerment spelar i Sverige, betydelsen av psykologiska kontrakt samt ger mer ingående information om metod och data. De första två pappren är teoretiska diskussioner som utvecklar antaganden om tillkomsten av paradoxala empowerment situationer. Det tredje pappret undersöker dessa teoretiska antaganden empiriskt med hjälp av en kvantitativ studie.

Papper I analyserar begreppet empowerment med avsikten att hitta konceptets sociologiska bakgrund. Med hjälp av en kommunikativ ansats diskuteras betydelsen och konsekvenserna av maktskiften. Diskussionen knyts till koncept så som agency (handlingsfrihet), social exchange (socialt utbyte), reciprocitet och paternalism. Den kommunikativa analysen bidrar med att belysa hur makt som "gåva" påverkar relationen mellan givare och tagare, vilket gör empowerment processen kommunikativt komplex.

Papper II studerar empowerment som human resource management strategi och diskuterar varför, hur och när empowerment processer hotar att misslyckas. Idén om en så kallad *"basic communicative structure" (grundläggande kommunikativ struktur)* utvecklas. Denna grundläggande struktur utgörs av en kontraktuell samt en kommunikativ kontext mellan arbetsgivare

och arbetstagare. Analysen mynnar i slutsatsen att hänsyn till anställdas tolkningar av dessa kontexter kan gynna en mer tillitsful medarbetarrelation och empowerment process.

Papper III undersöker de teoretiska antaganden utvecklade i Papper I och II empiriskt med hjälp av en enkätundersökning bland anställda inom den svenska detaljhandeln. Den huvudsakliga forskningsfrågan fokuserar på huruvida anställdas generella inställning till klassiska "strukturella och psykologiska empowerment" förändringar skiljer sig åt beroende på deras demografiska, socio-ekonomiska eller hälso-relaterade förutsättningar, samt vilka konsekvenser sådana skillnader kan leda till i termer av framgångsrik empowerment förändring.

Resultaten av den tredje studien tyder på att det i synnerhet finns två oberoende variabler som verkar ha inflytande på hur anställda tänker kring empowerment: ålder och deltidsarbete. Ju yngre de anställda är, desto högre sannolikt är det att de uppskattar empowerment förändring. I samband med deltidsarbete visar resultaten att anställda som jobbar 75% eller mer är mer benägna att uppskatta empowerment förändring.

I sin helhet ämnar denna avhandling till att bidra med sociologiska analyser till diskussionen om misslyckad, paradoxal empowerment – både mer generellt men också specifikt på arbetsplatsen som management och ledarskaps teknik. Avhandlingens tillvägagångssätt utmärker sig genom en genomgående *kommunikativ* ansats som fokuserar på relationella aspekter i interaktionen mellan arbetsgivare eller manager och anställda. Resultaten kan bidra till att öka förståelsen för viktigheten av implicita antaganden mellan empowerment givare och tagare och nödvändigheten av att inta ett bredare perspektiv än ett enbart ekonomiskt gynnsamt empowerment utfall.

1 Introduction

Whispered, shouted, hushed, or screamed; chanted, sung, or preached: "Just do it!", "Yes we can!", "Power to the people!", the sound of *empowerment* is alluring. Who would not want to become empowered? Who would not appreciate a position that entailed the power to empower others?

The concept of empowerment has attracted attention for more than four decades (Bartunek and Spreitzer 2006), and its importance for enabling and strengthening people's psychological wellness, as well as their general living conditions, seems undisputed. Whenever power is experienced as being unevenly distributed or downright abused, hopes and striving for empowerment are ubiquitous. Migrants, women, lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender communities; ethnic groups, welfare recipients, social workers, and the elderly; community members, patients, nurses; and employers, managers, and employees, to name but a few, can all be considered groups with a considerable interest in empowerment.

After all, empowerment aims at initiating "the process of becoming stronger and more confident, especially in controlling one's life and claiming one's rights" (Oxford Dictionary of English 2015). This includes a "democratic participation" in social life (Rappaport 1987:121) through the command of one's own destiny as well as the possibility, knowledge, and capability to "influence the decisions that affect [one's life]" (Zimmerman 1995:583; see also Adams 2008). In light of this power behind empowerment, it is no surprise that applied research on empowerment continues to attract international attention.

Distinctions and Approaches

Although at first sight, empowerment might appear to be a simple concept, involving the transfer of power from someone with more power to someone with less power, a thorough analysis reveals *distinctions* within the concept as well as a variety of different *approaches* to it. Bartunek and Spreitzer (2006) trace the evolution of empowerment back to the 1960s and the field of religious studies. Due to its gradual dispersion to a variety of disciplines, such as education, sociology, psychology, social work, and management, the concept's meaning started to adapt to each of these fields, thus creating several new strands of empowerment meanings. Given this variety, Bartunek

and Spreitzer suggest a categorization of these different strands into three groups: "sharing real power, fostering human welfare, and fostering productivity" (ibid.:259). As also noted by Bartunek and Spreitzer (ibid.:264), empowerment within the field of sociology was frequently associated with social movements (McAdam, McCarthy, and Zald 1996) and thus with empowerment as "sharing real power."

Paper I in this thesis follows this logic of categorizing empowerment meanings or types, but it uses two, rather than three, categories, collapsing human welfare and productivity intentions into one category called "life/performance enhancement." From a sociological and communicative point of view, this makes sense, since both welfare and productivity empowerment operate based on the idea of *improving* the individual's circumstances—either to be able to lead a better private life or to be able to perform better in working life.

The rarely discussed distinction between fundamentally different meanings of empowerment—power sharing and life/performance enhancement—can be regarded as decisive for interdisciplinary empowerment discourse for several reasons. In terms of social movements, it is suggested here that empowerment can be envisioned as a circular process: one or several individuals or groups intend to empower themselves as well as others in the same situation by bringing about change in hierarchically superior entities, such as society at large, communities, organizations, or groups (see Figure 1.1 below).

By reinforcing this change, initiators as well as those in similar situations can be said to gain empowerment through "self-empowerment." With reference to social movements, empowerment can thus be characterized by the empowerees' desire and initiative to become empowered. Therefore, it could be argued that this type of empowerment is a *bottom-up* or grassroots process of empowerment, which can be found, for instance, among women's and minorities' emancipation, liberation, and participation movements, as well as among religious communities.

In contrast, empowerment as life/performance enhancement can be seen as one-directional. While initiators of grassroots empowerment usually establish *themselves* that they want to become empowered, life/performance-enhancing empowerment is initiated by hierarchically superior entities or individuals who act as chosen or self-appointed empowerers bearing "gifts." In this case, empowerees can be argued to represent *receivers* of empowerment rather than the main driving force behind empowerment efforts. This is due to the fact that, frequently, empowerers are the ones who determine who is to be empowered, why, and how. Also, it is usually they who are in possession of the needed power to actually and ultimately be able to transfer power to others, that is, to *em*-power (on this argument, see Paper I). This kind of *top-down* empowerment is predominantly encountered in fields such as development aid, counseling, mentoring, and health care, as well as in

education, social work, and workplace management and leadership. Just as with other kinds of gifts, receivers of empowerment might or might not appreciate this enhancement and might experience an empowerment process for their benefit either as "bestowing" or "imposing" power on them—depending on their personal situation.
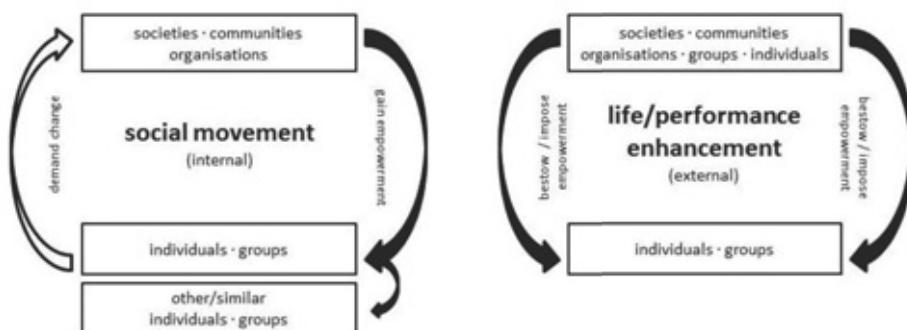
Figure 1.1: Empowerment as social movement vs. empowerment as life/performance enhancement.

The process of "self-empowerment" through a social movement presents a different situation than empowerment achieved through a change promoted by hierarchically superior entities. Since the empowerees not only achieved empowerment for themselves but also for individuals and groups in similar situations, they are now being empowered, thanks to this initiative. However, it could be argued that the empowerment they promoted for those in similar situations could, in some cases, be experienced as resembling empowerment as a top-down process, similar to empowerment as life/performance enhancement rather than a social movement (see Figure 1.2). Since social movement organizations, despite being typically composed of many members, will not include *all* affected individuals (not least due to competition with other organizations within the same movement; see Stern 1999a, 1999b), chances are high that not all individuals will experience empowerment as what it is meant to achieve. Rather, some might find that it is imposed upon them and that they neither wished for nor agreed to a power transfer as negotiated by a particular organization.

Distinguishing between these two types of empowerment might help to clarify the point of departure, subject, and aim of research on empowerment. After all, these two empowerment types present rather different contexts for empowerers and empowerees, their self-conceptions, and the outcomes of empowerment efforts.

Figure 1.2: Empowerment as life/performance enhancement.

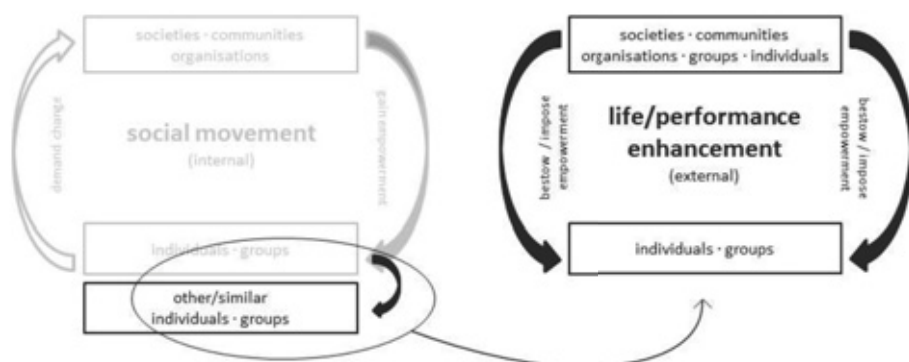In terms of *approaches* to empowerment, scholarly debates are rather varied as well. According to Bartunek and Spreitzer's analysis, this variety developed naturally once "empowerment was adopted into new disciplines," since such a "process of translation across disciplines may foster the ongoing diffusion of constructs' meanings" (2006:262).

Despite the great variety in terms of interpretations and applications of empowerment, however, theoretical reflections are less common. For several decades, this gap in empowerment research has caused a certain amount of uneasiness and dissatisfaction among scholars (Aujoulat, d'Hoore, and Deccache 2007; Conger and Kanungo 1988; Hardy and Leiba-O'Sullivan 1998; Lee and Koh 2001). Zimmerman (1990:169), for instance, states that "empowerment theory is an enigma," and Ward and Mullender (1991:21) criticize that "the term lacks specificity and glosses over significant differences. It acts as a 'social aerosol', covering up the disturbing smell of conflict and conceptual division."

One of the "smelly issues" that is only too easily covered up by the overall approving attitude toward the concept is the fact that there does not seem to be agreement as to how exactly empowerment should be defined and put into practice effectively. In social work, for instance, focus typically lies on creating positive outcomes while simultaneously eliminating negative aspects. On the one hand, empowerment aims to enliven stigmatized groups by unleashing human potential and giving them the power to obtain material and internal resources as well as knowledge and know-how (Lee 2013:30f.). On the other, empowerment is described as developing and implementing strategies to reduce powerlessness, such as focusing on the "effects from indirect power blocks or the reduction of the operations of direct power blocks" (Bryant Solomon 1976:19).

The field of community psychology takes empowerment one step further by introducing different levels of empowerment. Gaining mastery over one's life (Rappaport 1984:3) should happen on both the individual and the psy-

chological level; while the individual level disregards contextual influences, the psychological level "embraces the reciprocal influences and confluence of macro- and micro-level forces that impact the emotional, cognitive, and behavioral aspects of individuals" (Speer 2000:51f.).

Empowerment is defined in even more detail in studies of health care, in which notions of empowering patients are aimed at optimizing health care outcomes. According to Johnson (2011:265f.), "the notion of health care empowerment can be described as the process and state of participation in health care that is characterized as (1) engaged, (2) informed, (3) collaborative, (4) committed, and (5) tolerant of uncertainty."

The fields of community psychology, management, and leadership studies typically approach empowerment from both a micro and a macro level. The micro level is often referred to as the motivational or psychological level and the macro level as the social-structural level (Lashley 2001; Potterfield 1999; Spreitzer 2008). Similar to the way health care studies approach empowerment, studies in management and leadership also refer to a variety of components that seem necessary in order to empower or become empowered, such as sharing "accurate information with everyone," "creating autonomy through boundaries," and replacing "hierarchical thinking with self-managed teams" (Blanchard, Carlos, and Randolph 2001:vii).

Following from these examples, it can be concluded that approaches to empowerment are frequently divided into empowerment on the micro and/or macro level. In order to achieve empowerment on these two levels, some empowerers may have the advantage of consulting a "check list" of necessary components and conditions to be fulfilled. Although it might seem as if this kind of procedure is relatively uniform across disciplines, the definitions of micro and macro levels, as well as the choice of components and contents for "check lists," vary considerably—not only between but also within fields.

This plethora of definitions and implementation techniques could be regarded as simply reflecting different fields' contrasting points of departure, methods, and requirements resulting from a "typically" dispersed construct, as analyzed by Bartunek and Spreitzer (2006). Given this diversity, it is intriguing that the research has converged on identifying a particular problem: despite the undoubtedly positive purpose of empowerment efforts, their effectiveness and successful implementation cannot be taken for granted. The term *paradox of empowerment* (Botchway 2001) is a well-known problem in various fields that refers to the evidence that efforts intended to empower individuals can sometimes lead to feelings of indignation, disappointment, resentment, and disempowerment on the side of the empowerees.

Since the 1980s, research in various areas has acknowledged this problem. Fraser (1989:145) observes how social welfare programs, initiated to empower, often upset their recipients. Botchway (2001:147) recounts a similar problem in a different context: while the intentions behind development

aid are to empower individuals and organizations, such supposedly helpful actions can turn out to be counterproductive and lead to the failure of entire empowerment projects. Within the field of mentoring, counseling, and health care, empowerment can turn out to be unsatisfactory for the empoweree despite supposedly good intentions by the empowerer, as Lindner (2006:93) shows (see also Gilbert 1995; Kettunen, Poskiparta, and Liimatainen 2001; Labonte 1994; McWhirter 1991).

In the context of management and leadership, Langfred (2004, 2007) has studied effects of typical empowerment strategies such as self-management, teamwork, and autonomy. He concludes that all of these efforts can easily be stifled by conflicts within the team as well as by a high level of individual autonomy at times when trust levels within the team are high and, therefore, the level of monitoring each other is low. On a more general note, critical and postmodern scholars of management and leadership tend to argue, slightly sarcastically, that empowerment efforts are rather passive processes that are "*bestowed* upon employees by progressive, enlightened managers" (Alvesson and Willmott 1996:162, emphasis in the original). This implies a power relation between empowerer and empoweree that, in effective, underscores the power distance rather than diminishes it (Spreitzer 2008).

Although various paradoxical outcomes of empowerment efforts, such as those mentioned here, have been widely recognized (see Danso 2009; Eylon 1998; Gruber and Trickett 1987; Hardy and Leiba-O'Sullivan 1998; Pease 2002; Rappaport 1981), what has so far not been investigated is whether underlying commonalities to paradoxes of empowerment can be found and, if so, what they consist of, how they work, and how they can be avoided.

Aim of the Thesis

Throughout the present work, the focus is on the life/performance enhancement type of empowerment and the paradoxical outcomes such empowerment can have on empowerees. The general *scope* of this thesis is related to the concept of empowerment as such (Paper I), while the particular scope addresses *workplace empowerment* (Papers II and III), that is, empowerment as organizational change in the workplace and as a managerial or leadership technique.

The *aim* of this thesis is to contribute to the discourse on empowerment within a sociological framework that provides insights into implicit, micro-level assumptions of empowerer–empoweree (or agent–recipient) relations. The sociological framework developed here comprises sociological and social-psychological theories of communication and interaction, which render a relational view on empowerment possible, whereas research in the fields of management and leadership is frequently outcome-oriented.

Questions addressed by the three papers focus on how paradoxical empowerment can generally be theorized from a sociological point of view (Paper I); in which way and why empowerment change efforts at the workplace can paradoxically lead to disempowerment (Paper II); and, more specifically, whether there exist differences in how different groups of employees evaluate the importance of workplace empowerment for their well-being at work and to what extent these differences might lead to paradoxical empowerment (Paper III).

In the following chapters, an outline of the concept of empowerment in the context of management and leadership initiatives will be given (Chapter 2), followed by a discussion of research on and application of empowerment in Sweden, as well as Sweden's intriguing position as an object of study (Chapter 3). Furthermore, the concept of psychological contracts will be discussed, as well as their interconnectedness with aspects such as job strain and exchange relations (Chapter 4). Following this, the fifth chapter provides information on the theoretical frame of reference for this thesis. In Chapter 6, detailed information on the method, data, and limitations for Paper III will be given, followed by short abstracts for each paper (Chapter 7) and some concluding remarks (Chapter 8).

2 Empowerment at the Workplace

Ever since Frederick Taylor's ([1911] 1998) provocative and controversial concept of "scientific management" was introduced, ideas and theories about how to motivate workers to work more efficiently have developed and shaped the way practitioners and researchers observe workplace relations. Aimed at "a complete change in the mental attitude of all the men in the shop" (ibid.:51), Taylorism strove to promote an improved work ethic among workers, from one that was primarily concerned with "soldiering" (deliberately underperforming) to one in which workers were motivated to work efficiently. Taylor assumed that such a motivated state could be achieved, first, through scientifically analyzed work routines and, second, by giving "the workman what he most wants—high wages" (ibid.:1).

This austere approach was mirrored by people such as Herbert A. Simon ([1916] 1997:111), who was convinced that, in order to be able to make rational, profit-maximizing decisions, individuals must be organized and institutionalized: insecurities or lack of knowledge must be prevented by supplying employees with frameworks, guidelines, and goal expectations (ibid.:19, 24–25).

Not surprisingly, Taylor's somewhat "dehumanized" and at times rather condescending and paternalistic view of workers and Simon's strict rational-choice approach were soon countered by workplace and management research emphasizing the *psychological* and *social* well-being of workers as the crucial foundation for improved work ethics and increased performance. Reporting results from the Hawthorne experiment, Mayo (1930, 1933, 1949), for instance, highlights the value of recognizing workers' needs for social relationships rather than increased wages (Mayo 1933:181). Roethlisberger and Dickson (1947:551) support this argument, speaking of organizations as *social* rather than technical systems. They, too, question the assumption of complete rationality and purely economic thinking by individuals (ibid.:564) and suggest instead a management of employees according to their individual social needs (ibid.:553).

In a sense, one could argue that, while Taylor and similar thinkers shaped the idea of workers as "human *resources*," scholars such as Mayo, Roethlisberger, and Dickson laid the foundation for a strand in management research that was more concerned with "human *relations*" between organizations and workers (see Bartell 1976; Kaufman 2008; Wilkinson 1997). From the 1940s on, there was a growing focus on relational aspects and the *interaction* of

organizations both internally with employees and externally with society at large (DiMaggio and Powell 1983), and ideas departing from strict Taylorism began to become ever more prominent. Selznick (1984:16), for instance, argued for the infusion of organizations with values rather than rigid structures in order to free social forces and pave the way for inspiration and development.

This development toward greater attention to workers' well-being on the job and the requirements for better performance was not a purely academic invention, however. Giving rise to this new direction and sustaining it were organizational movements in the United States during the 1960s and 1970s that affected worker morale (Bartunek and Spreitzer 2006). In 1973, a report called "Work in America" was published, written by a special task force to the U.S. Secretary of Health, Education, and Welfare. The report claimed that the work ethic among Americans was declining, stating that "significant numbers of American workers are dissatisfied with the quality of their working lives. Dull, repetitive, seemingly meaningless tasks, offering little challenge or autonomy, are causing discontent among workers at all occupational levels" (W. E. Upjohn Institute 1973:xv; Lipset 1990).

The emerging emphasis on workers' psychological and social welfare attracted scholarly attention to concerns regarding workers' possible "alienation" (Blauner 1964; Braverman 1998; Wilkinson 1997): feelings of powerlessness (as Marx already argued), meaningless, normlessness, isolation, and self-estrangement (Seeman 1959). Reactions to these concerns led to concepts such as industrial democracy (Cressey and MacInnes 1980; Poole, Lansbury, and Wailes 2001), participative management (Lawler 1986; Sashkin 1984), and job enrichment (Hackman et al. 1975; Hackman and Oldham 1980; Orpen 1979)—all of which dealt with varying degrees and types of employee involvement, engagement, and participative decision making (Eccles 1993). Inspired by Scandinavian initiatives during the 1960s (Bartunek and Spreitzer 2006), programs such as the quality of work life (QWL) project were introduced in the U.S. during the 1970s and 1980s, which aimed at actively involving unionized employees "with management in designing and implementing work innovations in their organizations" (Lawler and Ozley 1979:21; Lawler 1982).

Thus, perspectives on how to handle employees evolved from the model of a hierarchically run organization with strictly rational approaches to one of a more interaction-oriented, flattened organization with a focus on exchanges between an open organizational environment and engaged, participating employees. In the late 1980s, Peter Block (1987) and William Byham (1997) each published books on empowered managers and employees, entering an arena that, it could be argued, was prepared for the next step (see Bartunek and Spreitzer 2006): to flatten organizations even more, to encourage employees to take on responsibility, and to let them take part in decision-making processes, thereby tapping into employees' true potential. *Em-*

powerment, representing the core of participative management, was instantly embraced by management scholars and practitioners.

Defining Workplace Empowerment

It seems safe to say that empowerment quickly became an immensely popular concept in the field of management (on popular concepts, see Bartunek and Spreitzer 2006; Røvik 2002; Sahlin-Andersson and Engwall 2002). As suggested by theories on the evolution of popular concepts or umbrella constructs, evolution processes tend to follow a certain "life-cycle" pattern (Hirsch and Levin 1999): during an initial phase of excitement, interpretations and analyses of the construct's meaning multiply in an uncontrolled manner, leading to a wide variety of different meanings. Following this dispersion, the constructs' different meanings are challenged in terms of their validity—leading to a "tidier" and narrower group of meanings, see Figure 2.1 below (Hirsch and Levin 1999).
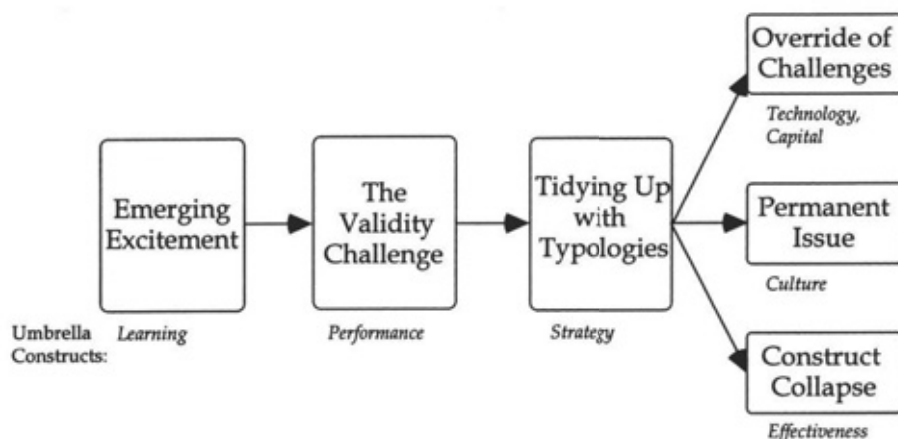
Figure 2.1: Proposed Umbrella Construct Process (Hirsch and Levin 1999:205).

As Bartunek and Spreitzer's (2006) analysis of the "career" of the notion of empowerment shows, empowerment can be described as having undergone the evolutionary process as analyzed by Hirsch and Levin. Initially, interpretations, approaches, and applications of empowerment in the workplace mushroomed. Practitioners, educators, consultants, advisors, and scholars alike contributed to an impressive, although slightly messy, amount of interpretations, approaches, views, and theories on empowerment. Gradually, researchers within the fields of (social) psychology, sociology, business, organizational behavior, management, and leadership started the process of

critically evaluating the validity of different empowerment constructs, thereby tidying up and structuring knowledge on empowerment.

The Popular Concept

One aspect that all literature on empowerment struggles with is the question of what empowerment is and how to define it. During empowerment's phase of "emerging excitement" (Hirsch and Levin 1999:205)—and the related sense of confusion—authors seemed to agree on one fundamental aspect, namely, that the concept suffered from a lack of precision: "Despite its apparent popularity and influence, empowerment remains a problematic concept that lacks precise definition" (Potterfield 1999:8; see also Clutterbuck 1994; Cooney 2004; Spreitzer 1995; Zimmerman 1990). Considering the amount of literature produced on empowerment over the past four decades, this lack of precision is hardly surprising.

In its entirety, the literature on workplace empowerment ranges from textbooks for students of human resource management, development, and leadership (Arnold and Randall 2010; Bratton and Gold 2008; Johansson et al. 2005; Yukl 2009) and how-to guides for managers (for example, Blanchard et al. 2001; Clutterbuck 1994; Foy 1994; Kinlaw 1995; Lashley 2001; Sagie and Koslowski 2000; Scott and Jaffe 1991) to academic research from a variety of different work- and management-related areas (see Conger and Kanungo 1988; Eylon 1983; Hardy and Leiba-O'Sullivan 1998; Mathieu, Gilson, and Ruddy 2006; Maynard, Gilson, and Mathieu 2012; Spreitzer 2008; Thomas and Velthouse 1990; Zimmerman 1990).

The diversity of literature on empowerment mirrors the classic divide between theory and practice, scholars and practitioners (Rynes, Bartunek, and Daft 2001). While academic literature strives after precise conceptual definitions, less academic, simplified, and popular literature in the form of textbooks, management guides, and how-to manuals does not demand the same degree of academic attention to detail. This discrepancy leads to different types of definitions, conceptualizations, approaches and, thus, ideas as to what empowerment should or could look like in practice. Managers' and other practitioners' empowerment competence depends heavily, therefore, on the type of knowledge source they prefer as well as the type of literature they encountered during education, which may have set the baseline for their knowledge on empowerment. This, in turn, has consequences in terms of what and how they *communicate* empowerment to employees (see Paper I): do they mean empowerment as "real shared power or welfare" or, rather, as "fostering productivity"?

Generally, it is no secret that the field of management quickly departed from ideas of empowerment as "sharing real power" and "fostering human welfare" to focusing instead on "fostering productivity" (Bartunek and Spreitzer 2006). However, this is not reflected in all types of literature. Es-

pecially educational textbooks on work psychology, organizational behavior, human resource management, and leadership present rather different definitions of empowerment. Some emphasize the aspect of increased productivity, while others clothe it in more "noble" goals. Arnold and Randall's definition of empowerment states, for instance, that empowerment "encourages employees to learn a wide range of skills to ensure their capacity *to make an effective contribution to organisational performance*" (2010:700, emphasis added). Similarly, Rollinson describes the purpose of empowerment as "[mobilising] the skills, energies and commitment of employees to *enhance operational effectiveness and efficiency*" (2008:522, emphasis added). Others, however, focus on aspects not immediately connected with productivity. For instance, Cole argues that the term empowerment includes "*a genuine attempt to grant increased authority and responsibility* to people at every level" (1995:ix, emphasis added). In a similar fashion, empowerment is presented as an advantage or improvement for the employee in Bratton and Gold's (2008:581) definition ("[l]imited power sharing: the delegation of power or authority to subordinates") as well as in Yukl's: "Empowerment involves autonomy, shared responsibility, and influence in making important decisions" (2009:487).

As with textbooks, there exists considerable variety in definitions and meanings of empowerment in the genre of how-to manuals and guidebooks. As would be expected in this genre, each new guide tries to distinguish itself from all others by proposing a newer, better, and more efficient way of doing things. Unsurprisingly, guidebooks seem to be more unanimous in their definitions of empowerment as enhancing the employees' performance. As Nancy Foy puts it, "Empowerment is simply gaining the power to make your voice heard, to *contribute* to plans and decisions that affect you, to use your expertise at the work to *improve your performance*—and with it the performance of your whole organisation" (1994:5, emphasis added). A similar idea can be found in Kinlaw, whose book on empowerment bears the subtitle *Making the Most of Human Competence* and who talks about "payoffs" of empowerment in relation to work environment, output, and customer satisfaction (1995:69ff.).

No matter whether management guides addressing empowerment deal with the topic by suggesting a concrete series of steps (see Kinlaw 1995; Scott and Jaffe 1991) or by approaching the concept from a broader perspective and discussing a variety of empowerment measures and ideas (see Clutterbuck 1994; Sagie and Koslowski 2000), recommendations seem to revolve around themes such as sharing information, autonomy, self-managed teams (Blanchard et al. 2001), participation, involvement, commitment, and delayering (Lashley 2001).

Social-Structural and Psychological Empowerment

In contrast to textbooks for students or popular literature, academic literature is more concerned with an in-depth *conceptualization* of empowerment as well as questions relating to how and why certain measures lead to an empowering effect. However, even the academic community has struggled with defining empowerment consistently (see Menon 2001).

Therefore, Gretchen Spreitzer's (1995b, 1996, 2008) work on synthesizing and validating some of the approaches in empowerment research was a significant step forward for the research community interested in management, leadership, and empowerment. Spreitzer came to the conclusion that most research on workplace empowerment approaches the topic either from a macro-oriented point of view (*social-structural*) or a micro-oriented one (*psychological* or motivational) (Lashley 2001; Maynard et al. 2012; Potterfield 1999; Spreitzer 2008). While social-structural research focuses on "conditions that enable empowerment in the workplace, [that is,] empowering structures, policies, and practices" (Spreitzer 2008:54f.), research on psychological empowerment deals with the empowerees' psychological experience and perception of empowerment (ibid.).

Research departing from a social-structural point of view aims at identifying what organizations have to do structurally in order to empower their employees. Usually, the idea behind social-structural research is the sharing of power within organizations, that is, a top-down process in which higher levels of managers and employees are expected to give some of their power to lower-level employees in order to empower them and create a more productive working environment (Kanter 1977; Mills and Ungson 2003; Spreitzer 2008).

As a forerunner in identifying structural aspects of empowerment, Kanter (1977:245ff.) recognized the need for making employees part of larger processes by giving them access to resources as well as authority and control over those resources (see also Conger and Kanungo 1988).Therefore, employees are enabled and encouraged to get involved, to take on responsibility, and to self-manage (Bowen and Lawler 1995). Spreitzer (2008:58) argues that this type of high involvement management has been shown to generate positive outcomes on performances (see Guthrie 2001; Lawler 1986; but cf. Staw and Epstein 2000, who provide evidence that empowerment efforts only seldom lead to an increase in performance) and that high-involvement practices provide employees with the necessary tools to become empowered. Spreitzer subsumes structural empowerment measures into five categories: (1) skill- or knowledge-based pay, (2) participative decision making, (3) flat organizational structures, (4) open flow of information, and (5) training.

Skill- or knowledge-based pay rewards employees for improving their work-related competence and skills and broadening their knowledge. *Partic-*

ipative decision making aims at including employees in decision-making processes, allowing them to influence decisions related to their own work tasks on different organizational levels. *Flat organizational structures* refer to decentralization and to having fewer management levels taking care of more employees. The flat structure supports employees' independence and provides them with opportunities for taking on responsibility as well as being part in decision making. An *open flow of information* is meant to create transparency all the way from top levels of management to lower-level employees and vice versa in order to encourage greater understanding of organizational reality. This might lead to informed decisions, behavior, and contributions. *Trainings* provide employees with education relevant to their jobs and with facts about the organization at large, creating a skilled and knowledgeable workforce (Spreitzer 2008:56).

This organization-oriented perspective can, however, only be considered as one side of the coin. Empowerment on the social-structural level by no means guarantees the actual empowerment of employees, as it does not take into consideration how empowerment measures are effectively experienced by employees (Spreitzer 2008:56). Rather, structural empowerment should be considered as part of a larger empowerment effort, including what is called psychological empowerment. Psychological empowerment focuses, in contrast, on how empowerees can be empowered on a more individual and personal level, and, more importantly, on the effects of empowerment on employees' self-image, their feelings of motivation, experiences, and sense of self-efficacy.

Conger and Kanungo (1988) were first to claim the importance of the psychological aspects of empowerment, arguing that empowerment in terms of motivation "refers to a process whereby an individual's belief in his or her self-efficacy is enhanced. To empower means either to strengthen this belief or to weaken one's belief in personal powerlessness" (Conger and Kanungo 1988:474). They base their notion of self-efficacy on Bandura's (1977) work, as do Thomas and Velthouse (1990:671ff.), who argue that empowerment fosters "intrinsic task motivation." Thomas and Velthouse introduce a model that identifies four cognitive elements (sense of impact, competence, meaningfulness, and choice) as the prerequisite for empowerment, contending that, in case of fulfillment, this cognitive mind-set will lead to motivation and satisfaction and, ultimately, more active employees.

Spreitzer's work on empowerment (Spreitzer 1995b, 1996, 2008; Spreitzer, Kizilos, and Nason 1997) comprises an analysis of definitions and characterizations of psychological empowerment. Based on Thomas and Velthouse's ideas of psychological empowerment, she found support for their cognitive dimensions across disciplines and summarized the variety of psychological empowerment elements as follows: (1) meaning, (2) competence, (3) self-determination, and (4) impact.

Meaning refers to the value employees ascribe to their work in relation to their own values, beliefs, ideals, behavior, and standards. *Competence* describes employees' sense of self-efficacy and belief in their ability to accomplish certain work goals. *Self-determination* means for employees to feel that they have a choice and the possibility to autonomously act regarding work-related decisions, methods, and so on. *Impact* refers to employees' feelings of making a difference and of having the opportunity to influence work-related outcomes in connection with, for example, strategic or administrative issues (Spreitzer 1995b:1443f.; Spreitzer 2008:57).

As Conger and Kanungo put it, psychological empowerment can be regarded as "a motivational construct" (1988:474): employers try to shift employees' attitudes toward their jobs from a passive to a more active and self-determined orientation (Spreitzer 1995b:1444) by means of enhancing the employees' feelings of actually being an important and valued part of the company.

The categorization and validation of empowerment into social-structural and psychological empowerment has not only "tidied" but also decidedly elevated research on the topic and brought it to a more analytical, theoretical level. It shows that, while the social-structural side of empowerment often conveys a rather normative standpoint, advising managers exactly "what empowerment *'should be like'*" (Lashley 2001:15, emphasis in the original) and what to do to empower employees, this approach falls short by failing to consider the micro level of personal experience. Psychological empowerment, in contrast, tries to capture these personal experiences and how to empower employees on more than just a structural level.

The two types of empowerment are separate analytical categories, but it is not clear whether they can be implemented completely independently of each other. In many cases, psychological empowerment will be dependent on social-structural conditions and vice versa: social-structural empowerment measures might not be successful if emp owerees do not feel empowered. In a parallel fashion, all structural empowerment measures most likely also have some kind of (positive or negative) effect on the psychological well-being of employees and, thus, influence outcomes in terms of psychological empowerment. Social-structural and psychological empowerment can, therefore, be regarded as interdependent, possibly with a clearer influence of social-structural empowerment on psychological empowerment than the other way round.

In order to create a more unified conceptualization of how the two forms of empowerment relate to each other, Menon (2001:173f.) suggests a more comprehensive perspective on empowerment by

> (…) defining empowerment as a cognitive state. (…) An empowered employee is one who 'possesses the attribute of empowerment', that is, he or she is in a state of empowerment. (…) When the word 'empowerment' is used to de-

note an act, then it is referring to those actions (e.g. delegation) that lead to the empowered state.

In other words, social-structural empowerment may be seen "as a necessary, but not sufficient, antecedent to psychological empowerment" (Maynard et al. 2012:1234, emphasis omitted). This is also the position taken throughout the thesis.

Contextualizing Empowerment at the Workplace

Initially, research on empowerment frequently assumed that employee empowerment could be implemented along the idea of a universalistic approach or "best practice" (on best practice vs. best fit, see, for example, Delery and Doty 1996; Huselid 1995)—at least if applied *within* certain contexts such as culture (Clinton and Guest 2013; Spreitzer 2008). However, as soon as differences *across* cultural boundaries were investigated, it became apparent that cultural values, for instance, can have a significant effect on empowerment outcomes (Humborstad and Perry 2011).

Thus, empowerment researchers started to adopt a "best fit" or "contingency" approach, arguing for the necessity of conducting research on "the individual and organizational boundary conditions of when and under what conditions empowerment has potency" (Spreitzer 2008:68). This resulted in a multitude of studies that paid closer attention to mediating and moderating effects on the success of empowerment efforts, as well as antecedents and consequences of empowerment measures.

The researched effects include *macro* level mechanisms such as cultural values (Eylon and Au 1999; Kirkman and Shapiro 2001; Robert et al. 2000; Zhang and Begley 2011). They also include *meso*-level mechanisms, such as organizational culture, strategy, and structure, as well as aspects like the age and size of organizations and the power of trade unions (Cook 1994; Honeycutt Sigler and Pearson 2000; Jiang, Sun, and Law 2011; Vazquez-Bustelo and Avella 2017). Lastly, they include *micro*-level aspects such as individual and psychological characteristics, attitudes, behaviors, and expectations, as well as individual experiences of job satisfaction, engagement, motivation, decision-making latitude, and so on (Avery et al. 2013; Houghton and Yoho 2005; Humborstad and Kuvaas 2013; Zhang and Bartol 2010).

This thesis can be considered to be part of the contingency approach insofar as it investigates under which circumstances and in which contexts empowerment might be experienced by empowerees as not empowering.

3 Empowerment in Sweden

Despite the fact that empowerment has been researched for more than four decades, the concept still attracts considerable international attention. While a decisive amount of studies on empowerment can be traced back to the U.S. context, academics from countries outside Europe and North America have caught on and seem eager to investigate in how far structural and psychological empowerment is feasible and successful in their country's context (see for instance Bhatnagar 2012; Karim and Rehman 2012; Mehrjoo and Noursina 2013; Meng et al. 2015). In Sweden, research on workplace empowerment is not particularly prominent, at least not in terms of using the notion of "empowerment." However, this does not mean that empowerment in theory and practice is nonexistent or not of interest in Sweden. Rather, it seems to be a matter of differing theoretical contexts: empowerment as a mere technique for managing people at work (as often encountered in Anglo-Saxon contexts) versus empowerment as an inherent element of particular politically and judicially supported power and industrial relations (as often represented by the Scandinavian countries) (see Humborstad 2012).

As will be discussed in this chapter, the development of these differing theoretical contexts might be due to different starting points in terms of labor relations: Sweden's particular prerequisites and point of departure for the study of empowering workplace management can be considered special in light of the country's cultural value profile as well as its history concerning employment and industrial relations. Although it should be clear that the latter aspect, that is, the societal and institutional macro structures shaping Swedish working life, have played (and still do) a considerably more direct role for labor relations, the argument here is that cultural values can be considered to present background information about Swedish citizens' typical attitudes to certain work-related issues. Therefore, the following paragraphs present, first, a brief summary of research on Swedish values, and second, a historical perspective on industrial democracy in Sweden, a topic that is especially relevant to this thesis.

Cultural Values and Cultural Dimensions

In many respects, Sweden is a compelling country to study. This is illustrated in graphic form in the World Values Survey's (WVS) cultural map (see Figure 3.1 below). Measuring *traditional versus secular-rational* values and *survival versus self-expression* values, Sweden is positioned at quite an outstanding place on the map as one of the countries with the highest level of secular-rational and self-expression values (see Inglehart and Baker 2000). Traditional values reflect a society's religious orientation in terms of their "deference to the authority of God" (Inglehart and Welzel 2005:52). Deference to the nation as well as to the family is also tightly interwoven in this traditional value orientation and thus contributes to a high level of respect and deference for authority in general (ibid.). In contrast, secular-rational societies favor the opposite and—in the case of Sweden—put considerably less emphasis on traditional family values or (religious) authority.
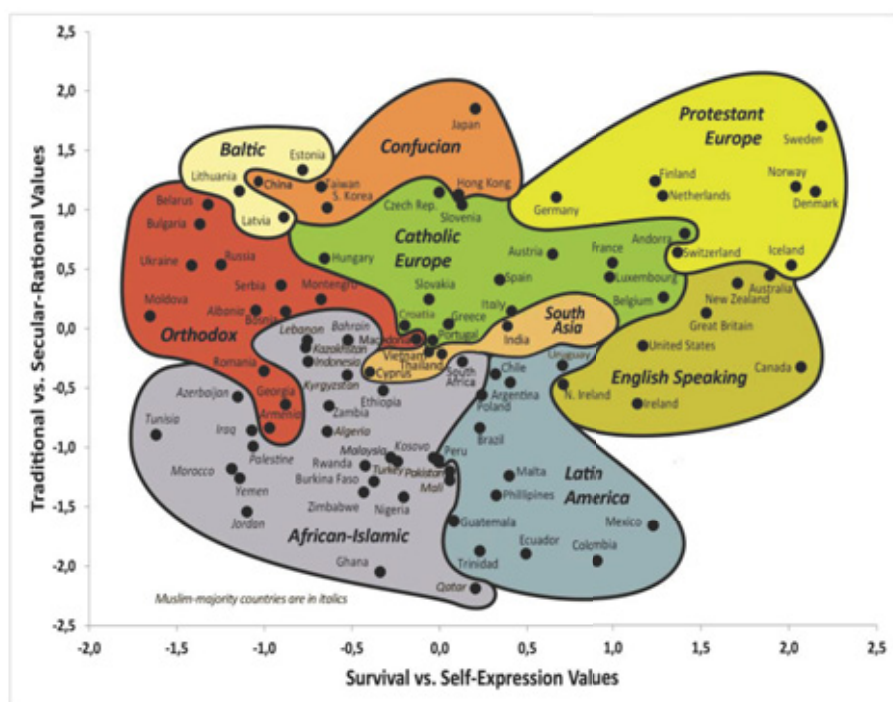

Figure 3.1: Cultural map of values, WVS wave 6 (2010–2014) (Inglehart and Welzel 2015).

The survival value dimension captures aspects relating to economic and physical (in)security. Societies oriented toward survival "feel threatened by foreigners, ethnic diversity, and cultural change" (ibid.) and thus show lesser degrees of trust and tolerance. On the opposite end of the scale, societies like Sweden, having a high level of self-expression values, exhibit high levels of trust and tolerance, collective action, a focus on the quality of life, as well as "rising demands for participation in decision-making in economic and political life" (Inglehart and Welzel 2015:1).

According to the cultural map, Sweden can thus be described as a society that is not particularly impressed by religious, familial, economic, or political authority, as trusting and tolerant, oriented toward collective action, and as demanding in terms of participatory decision making in economic and political contexts. The map in Figure 3.1 shows the results of the sixth WVS wave conducted between 2010 and 2014. However, a look at the general development of Sweden's position since 1981 reveals that these values are not new to Swedes. Although a development toward an ever more prominent position on the map since the 1990s can be observed, Sweden's position has—since the beginning of the WVS—always been in the upper right hand corner (Inglehart and Welzel 2015). This indicates a rather stable system of values with no overly dramatic societal value changes since the 1980s.

A similar analysis of countries' values systems has been conducted by Geert Hofstede (Hofstede 2001, 2011). Hofstede's emphasis on different nations' cultural dimensions is, however, particularly oriented toward work-related values (Hofstede 1980) and is therefore of interest here. There are five dimensions in Hofstede's model along which countries' values and behaviors concerning work are measured: power distance, uncertainty avoidance, individualism and collectivism, masculinity and femininity, and long- vs. short-term orientation. Although the analyses of all five dimensions provide thought-provoking results, the dimension of power distance is of greatest interest for understanding empowerment, since Sweden occupies a special position.

Power distance is described by Hofstede as the "extent to which the less powerful members of organizations and institutions (like the family) accept and expect that power is distributed unequally" (Hofstede 2011:9). As his results show, Sweden ranks rather low on the power dimension: out of fifty countries and three regions, Sweden has rank 47/48, meaning Sweden shows low power distance values (Hofstede 2001:87). On average, Swedes tend to be in favor of an equal distribution of power in society, be it in terms of rights, roles, or income (Hofstede 2001:98; Hofstede 2011:9). His results for Sweden thus complement the results of the WVS and indicate that Swedes generally tend to think that power should be legitimate, that hierarchy incorporates an intrinsic inequality of roles, that subordinates expect to be consulted, and that the income distribution in society should be rather even (Hofstede 2011:9).

The WVS's results are also mirrored in Sweden's ranking on Hofstede's *uncertainty avoidance* and *individualism/collectivism* value dimensions. In terms of uncertainty avoidance, Sweden ranks 49/50th out of 53 (Hofstede 2001:151), indicating that, overall, Sweden has weak uncertainty avoidance. This means it scores high on subjective health and well-being, tolerance, the dislike of both written and unwritten rules, and not having scruples about leaving a job one is dissatisfied with (Hofstede 2011:10). Additionally, Sweden ranks comparatively high on individualism (10/11th out of 53) (Hofstede 2001:215), meaning that Swedes, on average, support the idea of speaking one's mind, having personal opinions, and being able to voice them (Hofstede 2011:11).

In relation to empowerment, Swedish values and characteristics as studied by Inglehart, Welzel, Baker and Hofstede present a favorable foundation for empowerment: attitudes toward power as something that should be distributed equally, as well as the belief in participatory rather than authoritative (work) relations, go hand in hand with the intention of empowerment efforts to provide employees with more autonomy, decision-making latitude, and responsibility. Additionally, Sweden's high level of trust and tolerance, as observed through the WVS, may facilitate empowerment change due to trust in employees' reliability, competence, and capability, as well as tolerance for preferences in terms of work structure, flexibility, and willingness to work collectively. As such, low power distance paired with high self-expression values may serve as a beneficial prerequisite for successful empowerment.

Industrial Democracy and Empowerment

The cultural value dimensions discussed above could be argued to foster the success of empowerment change efforts on the micro level through a rather direct effect in workplace interactions. However, since arguments referring to generalized cultural values can involve problems in terms of causality and idiosyncrasies if applied to the micro level (see Movitz and Sandberg 2013:52, 62), it is argued here that a macro-oriented approach referring to structural prerequisites (including the reciprocal influence of political decisions and industrial relations) may give a more concrete picture of the influence that such measured value orientations can have on broad work-related developments. These, in turn, may prepare the ground for constructive employer–employee relations and orientations toward empowerment on the micro level. The industrial democracy movement of the 1960s and early 1970s in the Scandinavian countries is a movement that is said to have paved the way for empowerment.

As Humborstad (2012:2225) argues, "the empowerment discourse in the Anglo-Saxon countries is mainly derived from participative management, whereas empowerment movements in the Scandinavian countries are based

on industrial democracy." What arose from the developments in Scandinavia was the awareness and understanding of the positive effects a good quality of working life could have on organizations. As a consequence, so-called quality circles and quality of work life (QWL) practices were initiated in the late 1970s and 1980s in the United States, focusing on "improvement in the work environment and productivity through participation in decisions about job design and problem solving. QWL programs explicitly focused on advancing human welfare and fostering productivity" (Bartunek and Spreitzer 2006:268). As such, these programs can be considered antecedents of empowerment efforts—and as initially having been inspired by Scandinavian developments toward industrial democracy (see also Humborstad 2012, Wilkinson 1997).

Scandinavian, and particularly Swedish, history in relation to industrial democracy is rather remarkable (Humborstad 2012; Sandberg 2013b). As Sandberg and Movitz (2013:14) note, "The Swedish and Scandinavian variants of working life are of significance, since they have historically represented, and in some cases still do represent, alternative institutional arrangements and ways of organizing work and the economy." So what, then, is "the Swedish model" (also called Scandinavian or Nordic model), how did it come about, and what does it entail?

According to Movitz and Sandberg (2013:46ff.), the development of the Swedish way of crafting industrial relations can be traced back to the post-Depression period of the 1930s, when the two sides of labor and capital were forced to cooperate "in the context of a general international recovery" (Korpi 1978:81) to rebuild and foster a working economic system with decreased unemployment and an improved economic situation for the country (Korpi 1972, 1978). Cooperation and collective agreements were the foundation of this historic compromise, as captured in the *Saltsjöbaden agreement* of 1938 (see Korpi 1978). The results of this agreement have been visible ever since: rather than being grounded in judicial law, individual rights, or government regulations, much of Swedish labor legislation still rests on collective agreements (Movitz and Sandberg 2013:47).

The high level of unionization at the time, Swedish trade unions' remarkable strength, and their close cooperation with employer organizations (Sandberg et al. 1992:38ff.) continued to influence the development of Sweden's overall labor market as well as its welfare regime, creating the framework for a work environment where working conditions were made to conform to the workers rather than the other way round (Allvin and Aronsson 2003:100). In 1946, for instance, the *Agreement on Works Councils and Works Representatives* (Företagsnämndsavtalet) was signed by both the Swedish Employers' Confederation (SAF) and the Confederation of Swedish Trade Unions (LO), agreeing on the establishment of works councils to ensure a continuous exchange of information and collaboration between employers and employees regarding economic, technical, and financial issues as

well as matters of security, safety, health, and well-being on the job (de Schweinitz 1960:1040; Peterson 1968). Following this agreement, the *Act on Co-Determination at Work* (lag om medbestämmande i arbetslivet / Medbestämmandelagen) was signed in 1976, controlling employer–employee relations by, among other things, ensuring the unions' right to information from employers and by establishing the right to collective agreements (SFS 1976).

This kind of industrial democracy is of a *structural* character compared to the more *behaviorally* oriented participative management as practiced by some Anglo-Saxon countries (Bass and Shackleton 1979; Humborstad 2012): industrial democracy encourages and supports "formal, usually legally sanctioned arrangement of worker representation at various levels of management decision making" (Bass and Shackleton 1979:393; see also Emery and Thorsrud 1969). Participative decision making, however, operates on the meso level of organizational structures and routines or on the micro level in terms of relationships between managers and employees (see Humborstad 2012:2224).

Opinions as to whether the Swedish model is the cause of what is called the *Swedish or Scandinavian management style* are divergent, and Movitz and Sandberg (2013:52) urge caution in claiming causal links between these two. However, in light of the historic developments and the unusually high degree of cooperation between employer and employee organizations, it seems reasonable to assume that the structural environment created through industrial democracy, cooperation, and participation may have had some influence on individuals' general sense of entitlement to an engaged workplace role, their attitude toward labor relations, and thus on orientations toward and development of a management style that supports these aspects.

Characteristics of the Swedish management style are, according to Movitz and Sandberg (2013:53), the following aspects:

> 1) change and innovation; 2) participation and union influence; 3) informality, consensus and open dialogue between levels and parties; 4) autonomous work groups; and 5) value based and visionary management coexisting with 'matter-of-fact' based creativity and participation in long processes of implementation (…). The approach is decentralistic and in a way experimental.

This definition of the Swedish management style bears a resemblance to the definitions of workplace empowerment as described in Chapter 2, which promote participative decision making, flat hierarchical structures, autonomous team work, an open flow of information, and competency development. However, although the Swedish management style appears as desirable and advantageous for employees as does empowerment, Sandberg also draws attention to intricacies following upon change measures that aim to improve both working conditions and performance outcome. Among other

things, he mentions that the illusion of having more freedom and being subjected to less control by the employer—or as he puts it "working smarter, not harder" (2003:50)—is just that: an illusion. Despite the fact that a workplace managed according to the Swedish model may promise and sincerely attempt to increase the employees' competence and responsibility, broaden their work tasks, and widen their agency, autonomy, and decision-making latitude, this newfound freedom may quickly turn into the opposite. For instance, a common method to ensure the desired improvement in terms of performance outcome and, thus, matching the market's demands despite granting employees greater leeway, is skill- or knowledge-based pay (also a common part of workplace empowerment; see Chapter 2). Hence, gaining these freedoms may at the same time result in increased pressure for the individual to perform well and to avoid causing dissatisfaction among their team members (Sandberg 2003:49ff.), as also argued in Paper II of this thesis.

An example of Swedish organizations' innovative culture and striving for employee participation in close cooperation with unions is the case of Volvo. Volvo's modification of work organization in their Uddevalla (as well as Kalmar and Skövde) assembly plant during the 1970s and 1980s attracted considerable national and international attention. In close cooperation with the metalworkers' union, Volvo's CEO Pehr G. Gyllenhammar took the decision to break up the assembly-line model of work organization (Movitz and Sandberg 2013:55) and introduced a new way of producing cars that arose from the idea of a "Reflective Production System" (Ellegård 1995:57): a system that puts emphasis on competence that is "based on holistic learning in combination with a production technology adjusted to the ways in which individuals think, learn and act in industrial work." Later, Gyllenhammar stated that his vision at the time was to develop work, increase the quality of the products and of working life by improving the organization of work, as well as the way the company supported people in showing and using their full potential (Öberg 2006).

This sociotechnically inspired approach meant a radical change in terms of self-determination and democratization of working life (Allvin et al. 2011:36): work organization was transformed from typical assembly lines to autonomous work groups that built whole cars cooperatively in long-cycle assembly work. In contrast to short work cycles, long work cycles and parallel work flows demand greater competence and responsibility from employees, as well as "extended technical and administrative autonomy, both at individual and group levels" (Engström and Medbo 1995:69; see also Berggren 1992:238). To achieve this type of engagement, the idea of organic, holistic, or "natural" work was introduced, referring to criteria such as workers being in control of their work in both the short term and long term, and workers experiencing their work as meaningful (Nilsson 1995:77).

Thus, focus was on improving and increasing innovation, development, cooperation, worker influence, and democracy (Movitz and Sandberg 2013; Sandberg 2013b). Despite the general belief at the time that assembly lines were simply more efficient, the Uddevalla plant proved that it could reach "the productivity level of the assembly lines in Volvo's main Swedish operation" (Berggren 1992:164; see also Appelbaum and Batt 1994:31).

The plants' long-term potential in terms of revolutionizing work organization could never be evaluated due to its closing in the 1990s.[1] Nevertheless, by the time Volvo had collected their first experiences with an anthropocentric production system, these ideas had already begun to disperse, both inspired by Volvo's innovative changes as well as fueled from other directions, particularly researchers. For instance, following sociologists Robert Blauner's (1964) account of factory workers' alienation and, in Scandinavia, Sverre Lysgaard's ([1961] 2001) qualitative study of Norwegian factory workers' struggles with the opposition between the technical-economic and the human system in organizations,[2] Harry Braverman's (1998) book on *Labor and Monopoly Capital. The Degradation of Work in the Twentieth Century*, first published in 1974, had a significant impact in Scandinavia, particularly on research communities dealing with workplace relations during the 1980s and 1990s. Although criticized for being anecdotal in his description of exploiting work organizations and of missing important details that would provide a more nuanced picture than he drew (Friedman 1977; Sandberg 2003), Braverman's work inspired the ever-growing strand of *labor process studies*. Labor process research critically examines consequences of new types of organization and control (a particularly Anglo-Saxon focus) and searches for alternatives to Taylorism (particularly focused on by Swedish and Scandinavian research) (Sandberg 2016:51). Thus, it can be argued that Volvo's organizational change was exemplary of the (academic) Zeitgeist and contributed to new ways of thinking—both nationally and internationally, and in academic as well as in practical contexts.

Under Gyllenhammar, Volvo developed along the lines of Swedish management, but it was superseded by a management style that, under Ford's ownership, moved back to "a more hierarchical direction" (Sandberg 2013a:6) and, under Chinese ownership since 2010, used "a kind of modified lean production" (ibid.). Volvo's experience suggests that the *Swedish* man-

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[1] The reasons for the shutdown of the Uddevalla plant are varied and complicated. It is argued that it was due to a series of political, economic, and logistical reasons as well as others related to product development (Forslin 1990; Sandberg 2013a). Furthermore, some individuals seemed to struggle with the demand of flexibility (Nilsson 1995:7): as employees dealt with their newfound autonomy, "issues of power emerged as more important than was first envisaged" (Sandberg 2013a:28).

[2] According to Lysgaard, the demands made by the technical-economic system threaten the employees' dignity as human beings. Since all employees are human beings at the same time as they have to adhere to the demands of the technical-economic system, they cannot escape these threats (Karlsson 2015:8; Lysgaard [1961] 2001).

agement style incorporates particular care about employer–employee relations and the improvement of employees' work situations.

Considering this prominent development of industrial relations in Scandinavia, and Sweden in particular, it could be argued that, while empowerment in terms of a pure managerial style focuses on giving employees some autonomy within controlled boundaries (see Allvin et al. 2011:35; Wilkinson 1997), industrial democracy movements, being highly influenced by trade unions, seek to empower employees through demanding much more far-reaching codetermination, participation, and democratization (Sandberg 2016:48ff.), but without referring to the term and concept of empowerment itself. To a certain extent, then, empowering ideas can be regarded as having been ingrained as self-evident aspects in Swedish culture and society for generations.

As a result of these circumstances, Swedish employees may already be more empowered than employees in other countries (which, however, does not automatically mean that they also *feel* more empowered: due to a culturally inherited feeling of entitlement and democratic participation, Swedish employees might have even greater demands in terms of empowerment). This assumption can be supported by the fact that research has provided insights into Scandinavian employees' high commitment to employment regardless of financial motives—a factor frequently mentioned as a positive outcome of empowerment: "Except for Finland, the Nordic family of nations shows high levels of non-financial employment commitment" (Furåker 2012:83), particularly compared to New Zealand, the U.S., and Britain (Hult and Svallfors 2002), and revealed by both men and women (Esser 2009). In sum, and against the backdrop of Swedish culture and industrial relations history, Swedish employees may consider power sharing at the workplace as a much more natural part of organizational culture and feel a greater entitlement to democratic and participative decision-making processes compared to other nations.

Empowerment Research in Sweden

Swedish research on empowerment as a general concept is dispersed over a variety of fields, often related to the empowerment of patients, clients, or victims, less advantaged, or minority groups. Thus, empowerment is a popular concept in health care (Hansson and Björkman 2005; Hermansson and Mårtensson 2011; Leksell et al. 2007; Pålsson et al. 2017; Strandmark 2016; Wåhlin, Samuelsson, and Ågren 2017), welfare (Helmersson and Jönson 2015; Sjöberg, Rambaree, and Jojo 2014; Trädgårdh and Svedberg 2013), and migration contexts (Blight 2006; Gustafsson, Fioretos, and Norström 2012).

Despite—or maybe rather because of—Sweden's longstanding history of industrial democracy, Swedish research into empowerment at the *workplace* has, so far, not been extensive, at least not as undertaken by post-graduated academics (although an internet search shows that undergraduate students of management in Sweden seem intrigued with the concept). Nevertheless, it can be observed that even organization studies researchers have started to take up on the concept in recent years.

Swedish research on workplace empowerment covers, by and large, similar topics as empowerment research in other countries, such as the practical implementation of empowerment (Johansson et al. 2005), its measurement (Arneson and Ekberg 2006; Hochwälder and Brucefors 2005), reports of case studies (Chhotray, Sivertsson, and Tell 2017; Randle and Svensson 2007; Tomas and Nordin 2012), or the effects of (missing) empowerment on employees (Grill et al. 2017; Hagerman et al. 2013; Hildingsson et al. 2016). However, Swedish empowerment research appears to revolve, to a considerable extent, as well as much more clearly, around questions relating to *workplace health* and the effect of empowerment on employees' physical and mental well-being (Arneson and Ekberg 2005; Hochwälder 2007; Millet and Sandberg 2005; Svensson, Müssener, and Alexanderson 2006; Wåhlin, Ek, and Idvall 2010).

In light of Sweden's development regarding workplace democracy, participation, and cooperation between employers' federations and unions, this might not be surprising. Although research measuring mediating and moderating effects of empowerment on aspects such as job satisfaction, meaningfulness, participative decision making, and so on has shown that an increase of these aspects generates happier employees, the underlying assumption of such research is often focused around better, more efficient, and increased commitment, performance, and productivity as the ultimate empowerment outcome (see Bartunek and Spreitzer 2006; Staw and Epstein 2000). However, Swedish empowerment research represents a true concern for employees' physical and mental well-being and welfare for the sake of health itself.

In relation to Swedish researchers' focus on employee well-being, another factor may contribute to the modest interest in the concept of empowerment: the well-known job demand-control model by Robert Karasek and Töres Theorell (1990) has a strong focus on workplace health—and is therefore rather popular among Swedish working life researchers (Bergman et al. 2012; Blom et al. 2016; Lornudd et al. 2015). As will be shown in the next chapter, the basic idea of the demand-control model mirrors the structural-psychological dualism of the empowerment concept and thus, to a certain extent, can be considered to work as an alternative way of looking at the same phenomenon: how to change structural prerequisites in order to gain psychological (health) benefits.

In sum, studying empowerment orientations among Swedish employees may have the potential to contribute new insights into how and for whom

empowerment works, or when, why, and for whom empowerment might not yield the hoped-for results. After all, the question arises whether employees who are accustomed to a considerably high level of workplace democracy and participation react to empowerment efforts in a similar manner as do employees who work in culturally differing workplaces with a relatively low level of empowering practices.

4 Exchange Relationships, Job Strain, and the Psychological Contract

In their analysis of management literature on empowerment, Bartunek and Spreitzer (2006:268) conclude that the meaning of empowerment in management literature has undergone a shift from being predominantly oriented toward human welfare during the 1970s to being considerably oriented toward performance and production since the 1990s. However, the unified conceptualization of empowerment by Menon (2001), as applied in this thesis, argues for the necessity of structural empowerment as an antecedent to psychological empowerment. In a parallel fashion, it could be argued that even managerial empowerment must include a human welfare component if it intends to be truly empowering: the logical condition of a performance-oriented empowerment approach should be that, in order to increase performance, employees need to fare well and thrive at their workplace. Seen from this perspective, empowerment can be regarded as a strategy of action for solving different kinds of *job-strain* problems and, by doing so, to increase employees' well-being.

Job-strain models are primarily concerned with aspects of exchange and reciprocity between employers and employees. Therefore, the logic of such models is highly related to both empowerment in general and issues concerning *psychological contracts*, including the expectations that employers and employees have in terms of each other's obligations. In Paper II of this thesis, it is argued that the communicative messages entailed in structural empowerment efforts may be interpreted by employees as undermining the intended empowerment outcomes on a psychological level: instead of experiencing structural empowerment efforts as empowering, empowerers risk evoking feelings of indignation and resentment in employees if empowerment efforts are experienced as effectively breaching psychological contracts—thereby diminishing employees' well-being.

Since all three of these concepts—job strain, empowerment, and psychological contracts—are intertwined, the purpose of this chapter is to provide a brief overview of the most popular job-strain models, discuss their relevance for exchange relationships at the workplace and the psychological contract, and to tie the discussion to the practice of empowerment.

Job-Strain Models

The *demand-control model* (DCM, sometimes also referred to as demand-control-support [DCS] model), was developed by Robert Karasek (1979, 1990; Karasek et al. 1981; Karasek and Theorell 1990) and can be said to have built the foundation for later models of job strain. It arises from the assumption that the central problem with high job strain is not so much the work load (demands) per se but, rather, a lack of decision latitude (that is, control) to deal with the demands in a way that suits the employee: "It would appear that job strain can be ameliorated by increasing decision latitude, independently of changes in work load demands" (Karasek 1979:303). Decision latitude consists, according to Karasek (Karasek 1979; Karasek et al. 1981), of altered administrative structures that would enable employees to decide how to structure their tasks, to influence organizational decision making, and to be allowed high intellectual discretion and personal schedule freedom. These "more humane and productive forms of work organization" (ibid.:304) reduce job strain and create more satisfied and, in particular, healthier employees (Karasek 1990; Karasek et al. 1981).

Another influential job-strain model, the "effort-reward imbalance" model (ERI) proposed by Siegrist (1996), focuses on reciprocity and exchange rather than *controlling* workplace structures. It is based on the assumption that a lack of *rewards* (such as salary, esteem, status control, job security, and others) is the central cause for job strain. Siegrist argues that the imbalance creating strain stems from a "lack of reciprocity between costs [or efforts, that is, extrinsic demands and intrinsic motivations] and gains" (1996:30), which generates a state of emotional distress in employees. Studies have shown that high levels of effort (such as high work intensity) in combination with low rewards (such as low job security or salary) can indeed lead to serious health problems (see Van Vegchel 2005).

Both the DCM and ERI model occupy significant roles in research and literature on personnel issues and have been shown to point to valuable insights regarding psychological strain, stress, and illness (Bakker and Demerouti 2007). However, it has also been argued that the empirical results for the models are inconclusive (Bakker, Veldhoven, and Xanthopoulou 2010; de Jonge and Kompier 1997; Van der Doef and Maes 2010) and that the models, among other things, are too simplistic, focusing on only a few variables and thus leaving out other significant job characteristics (de Jonge and Kompier 1997). Therefore, some critics argue they fail "to capture the complexity of work environments" (Bakker et al. 2010:4).

Resulting from this, an extended and broader job-strain model was developed by Bakker and colleagues (Bakker and Demerouti 2007; Bakker, Demerouti, and Schaufeli 2003a; Bakker et al. 2003b; Bakker et al. 2010; Demerouti et al. 2001), which, they argue, "can be applied to a wide range of occupations, and can be used to improve employee well being and perfor-

mance" (Bakker and Demerouti 2007:310). Their "job demands–resources" model (JDR) assumes two general categories that can lead to job stress if provided in an imbalanced proportion: job demands and job resources. Job *demands* refer to efforts or skills that incur a certain physiological or psychological cost, while job *resources* refer to physical, psychological, social, or organizational aspects that support the accomplishment of work goals by reducing costs and stimulate personal development (ibid.).

To summarize, all three of these models highlight the significance of a balance between the demands put on employees by the organization and the resources these employees have in order to fulfill their tasks, to avoid or reduce strain and stress, or to recover from unavoidable strain and stress. The more resources employees have at their disposal to manage these issues autonomously, the better they fare in terms of motivation and health. Consequently, the tie to empowerment and its striving for more autonomous employees is strong: the argument behind empowerment as management technique aims at, and has been shown to succeed in, improving the "resources" side of the equation through giving employees increased decision latitude, among other things, through education and an improved flow of information. Equipped with these assets, employees will be better equipped to tackle their employer's daily demands. So how, then, is this related to psychological contracts?

Psychological (or "Invisible") Contracts

The idea of psychological contracts builds on the foundation of social and reciprocal exchange theory as proposed by the works of Blau ([1964] 2008), Gouldner (1960), and Homans (1958). Although the introduction of the concept into the research community can be traced back to the late 1950s and early 1960s, with a renewed interest from 1989 onwards (Coyle-Shapiro and Parzefall 2008), it can be argued that, from a sociological point of view Durkheim had already picked up on the shared social understanding that has to accompany contractual agreements. In *The Division of Labour in Society* (Durkheim [1893] 1997:162), he argues that written contracts can only be regarded as binding if certain conditions have been defined. These conditions are of *social origin* and refer to aspects that "go beyond the limits of the contract itself" (ibid.:161): situations, circumstances, consequences, and regulations that create implicit social obligations and expectations. In short, all parties involved in a contractual agreement need to be able to understand the social meaning of this agreement and they need to agree to the obligations and expectations, which are primarily only indirectly communicated, that go with it.

Inherent in this understanding of contracts and represented by such obligations and expectations is, thus, the idea of a reciprocal exchange between

employer and employee: organizational equilibrium can be achieved if inducements (wages, benefits) and contributions (labor, commitment, engagement) are balanced (March and Simon 1958:103–12). If both parties agree to these terms, they are headed in the same direction, as Rousseau (2001:512) argues:

> A contract is promise-based and, over time, takes the form of a mental model or schema, which, like most other schemas, is relatively stable and durable. A major feature of psychological contracts is the individual's belief that an agreement is mutual, that is, a common understanding exists that binds the parties involved to a particular course of action.

This particular course of action is highly dependent on the fulfillment of each party's obligations: "Shared understandings and reciprocal contributions for mutual benefit are the core of functional exchange relationships and constructive psychological contracts between workers and employers" (Dabos and Rousseau 2004:52).

However, as Isaksson et al. (2010) point out, the psychological contract does not only encompass obligations in terms of pay vs. performance. Often, these two elements can be assumed to be covered, to some extent, by a written employment contract that has the advantage (in terms of communicative unambiguity) of being enforceable by law. In contrast, the psychological—or, in more sociological terms, "invisible"—contract is just that, invisible and "assumed" in a sense that it is built on the different parties' beliefs in and assumptions about certain obligations. As such, the psychological contract is susceptible to dynamic and socioemotional changes (Isaksson et al. 2010:698). Thus, raising wages as the sole inducement for increased performance might not always be in agreement with what employees perceive as appropriate inducement—or worse: if employees have an idea in mind about their employers' obligations, they might feel that the psychological contract has been breached if these obligations are, in their eyes, not fulfilled (de Jong et al. 2015).

In relation to job strain, and the model of job demands–resources in particular, psychological contracts are highly relevant insofar as they contain expectations as to which resources employers should provide for their employees so they will be able to handle their employers' demands. Bakker, Demerouti, and Verbeke (2004:86) define resources as being located on four different levels: organization, interpersonal and social relations, organization of work, and the level of the task. These resources refer "to those physical, psychological, social, or organizational aspects of the job that are (1) functional in achieving work goals; (2) reduce job demands and the associated physiological and psychological costs; or (3) stimulate personal growth and development" (ibid.). In terms of empowerment, structural empowerment efforts can be considered to operate on different levels: the organizational

level, the level of work organization, and task levels—yet not with the primary goal of reducing costs (job demands) but, rather, of contributing with resources in terms of functionality in achieving work goals, as well as stimulating personal development. Psychological empowerment can be argued to operate on the level of interpersonal and social relations, again, not primarily and actively as a means to reduce strain through a decrease in demands but, rather, through the strengthening and stimulation of personal growth and development.

Although the majority of employees, as shown by research, seems to appreciate and expect resources along the lines of empowerment, the main point made in this thesis concerns the intriguing question of whether some employees might, in fact, have *differing* expectations and assumptions in relation to their own and their employers' obligations—as represented in their ideas of psychological contracts. This question is justified considering that empowerment efforts provide resources rather than reduce demands and considering the fact that even the provision of resources may turn into feelings of breached psychological contracts when an increase of resources indirectly also involves an increase in demands. As Van De Voorde, Veld, and Veldhoven (2016:193) point out, human resources practices intended to empower "also have the capacity to make work more challenging and intense (increasing demands)" and "that high productivity levels may result in higher work intensity, which is related to *lower* levels of work engagement" (ibid.:205, emphasis added).

This unintended process of, on the one hand, providing resources to cope with job-related demands and, on the other hand, to produce even greater demands and control by introducing these resources, has, for example, been documented by Mikael Holmqvist and Christian Maravelias in their studies on health promotion as management technique. Although health promotion claims to focus on helping employees to manage stress (among other things), self-managing one's health according to a corporate health management program produces increased demands on employees' behavior (Holmqvist 2009; Holmqvist and Maravelias 2011). This leads back to the point of departure here: that such paradoxical empowerment might not be experienced as empowering by all employees and that, therefore, employees' empowerment orientations might differ.

5 Theoretical Frame of Reference

The title of this thesis, *A Sociology of Empowerment: The Relevance of Communicative Contexts for Workplace Change*, hints at its main contribution: a perspective on empowerment change that is inspired by theories on communication and contextual ascriptions of meaning. To analyze a concept such as empowerment in a communicative and context-sensitive way, it makes sense to be theoretically flexible. Therefore, the theoretical framework of this thesis integrates elements from two quite different sociological traditions. On the one hand, the discussion of power rests on a rational/utilitarian, macro-, and conflict-oriented view. On the other hand, a structural individualist framework is applied for understanding social (inter)action, used in combination with consensus-oriented micro theories, such as role theory. The result of such an eclectic approach can best be judged by reading Paper I. What follows here is a presentation of the sensibilities, judgments, and decisions that led to the development of the approach to empowerment presented in the three papers included in this dissertation.

The term *em*-powerment indicates a *transfer* of power and thus suggests a shift in relative power from a powerless position to a more powerful one. From a sociological point of view, a concept such as power cannot be ignored. In choosing the frame of reference for a discussion of power, a conflict-oriented frame was deliberately selected. This choice has to do with the nature and application of empowerment: although empowerment is eventually directed at individuals, it is often implemented *by* organizations or institutions (in the case of top-down or performance-enhancing empowerment), or else it is aimed at empowering individuals in their *encounter with* organizations or institutions (as in the case of bottom-up or social-movement empowerment). Thus, it could be argued that the mere existence of a concept like empowerment already characterizes empowerment relations as involving conflicts and struggles over power between organizations or between organizations and individuals.

Therefore, power is here defined in line with Max Weber's ([1922] 1978:53) definition as "the probability that one actor within a social relationship will be in a position to carry out his own will despite resistance, regardless of the basis on which this probability rests." Power, it is argued in Paper I, implies the limitation of agency in the less powerful person, which, in turn, supports the assumption that power can be analytically understood as zero sum (Blau [1964] 2008; Dahl 1957; Emerson 1976; Homans 1958; Mills

1956), in contrast to a variable sum (Giddens 1984; Parsons 1957, 1963). Such zero-sum understanding is, of course, a simplification: in the present case, however, it pinpoints the notion that power is scarce, and that if one actor gains power, another actor loses or gives up power.

From the reasoning above, it should be clear that this thesis aligns itself with most modern sociologists who frequently tend to refrain from trying to contextualize such conditions in terms of *grand* theories. Rather, the basis for the thesis is the belief that *middle-range* theories are more suitable for the analyses of power imbalances in concrete contexts. Therefore, what this thesis is dealing with are questions concerning who has and who does not have power, who does or does not want to give or receive power and why, and what kind of meaning a transfer of power may or may not have for the people involved.

Providing an analysis of empowerment from a communicative and relational point of view may seem to concur with postmodern and poststructuralist theories, such as that proposed by the influential sociologist Michel Foucault, who argues that power has a "strictly relational character" (Foucault 1990:95). However, his argument that "power is not something that is acquired, seized, or shared, something that one holds on to or allows to slip away" (Foucault 1990:94), as well as his assumption that "power exists only as exercised by some on others, only when it is put into action, even though, of course, it is inscribed in a field of sparse available possibilities underpinned by permanent structures" (Foucault 2000:340), appears less fruitful in the context of empowerment, especially since the workplace is constructed around rather rigid beliefs in accumulated and hierarchically distributed power. These power structures may have an effect on employees and their behavior even at times when power is *not* specifically exercised by individuals (but see Townley 1993 for a contrary argument).

One example could be situations where employees' performance is negatively influenced by a perception of low job security (Cheng and Chan 2008; Sverke, Hellgren, and Näswall 2002). However, low job security does not necessarily have to result from superiors' direct power *exertion* in the form of short-term contracts, employment probation periods, or staff cutbacks in connection with slimming organizations to achieve greater efficiency. Low job security may also be due to more overarching market changes where greater forces are at work than "some" exercising power "over others."

More specifically, while Foucault argues that "relations of power are not in superstructural positions, with merely a role of prohibition or accompaniment" (Foucault 1990:94), the opposite argument is rather decisive for the development of the present studies: it is argued in all three studies that a transfer of power in the context of empowerment needs to be seen from a micro perspective, that is, from the point of view of empowerees, in order to detect mechanisms that might influence the effect of empowerment negatively. Included in this argument is the assumption that the necessity for empow-

erment derives from more or less superstructural elements that hinder or enable certain actions by their mere *capacity* to exercise power. In other words, a systematic structure of norms and values is assumed that creates both the need and the possibility for empowerment change on the micro-level.

Verstehen through "Middle-Range" Structural Individualism

Although the sociology of Max Weber is not oriented to the micro level in terms of classical micro-interactionist sociology, it is the Weberian notion of *verstehen* that constitutes the underlying motivation of the present analyses. "Verstehen" refers to the "interpretive understanding of social action" (Weber [1922] 1978:4). Weber defines action as "'social' insofar as its sub-jective meaning takes account of the behavior of others and is thereby ori-ented in its course" (ibid.). Understanding is further defined by Weber in terms of observational and explanatory understanding, of which the latter "is rational understanding of motivation, which consists in placing the act in an intelligible and more inclusive context of meaning" (ibid.:8).

What this thesis aims to understand is how communicative aspects of em-powerment change can influence empowerees' attitudes and orientations toward empowerment. Thus, it is the "Sinnzusammenhang" that matters, the "plurality of elements which form a coherent whole on the level of meaning" (Weber [1922] 1978:8, 58), thereby trying to unite "Erklären *und* Verstehen" (Müller 2007:54, emphasis in the original).

In this process of understanding employees' orientations to empower-ment, the workplace is approached for what it is: a meeting point for both common and diverging interests. Thus, no assumption is made that employ-ees are generally unwilling, unmotivated, dissatisfied, or lazy. Neither is the workplace assumed to be merely exploiting the workforce in a Marxian sense or as (more or less deliberately) creating and fostering particular iden-tities and subjectivities in a Foucauldian sense. Rather, the analyses strive for a consolidation of different concerns: the employers' interests in a well-functioning, efficient, profitable work process and the employees' concerns for a workplace that respects their interests, vocations, doubts, and opinions.

As such, the analyses are in line with structural individualism,

(…) emphasizing the explanatory importance of social structures. (…) we have social structures constraining individuals' action and cultural environ-ments shaping their desires and beliefs (…), and we have individuals choosing their preferred courses of action among the feasible alternatives (…), and var-ious intended and unintended outcomes of these actions (…). (Hedström and Udehn 2009:68)

In contrast to methodological individualism, structural individualism thus "unites" structure and individual (Udehn 2001:199). In regard to workplace empowerment, the structural aspect refers to larger contexts of particular cultural environments (see Chapter 3) and organizational frameworks, both of which shape and constrain employees' actions, desires, and beliefs on the individual level. In terms of individual aspects, it is assumed by structural individualists that "all social facts, their structure and change, are in principle explicable in terms of individuals, their properties, actions, and relations to one another." Structural individualism emphasizes, thus, "the explanatory importance of relations and relational structures" (Hedström and Bearman 2009:34).

Frequently, the point of departure for research on empowerment is the concept's documented and generally positive contributions in terms of increased employee motivation and engagement. However, particularly Robert K. Merton (1996:74) criticizes the approach to a social phenomenon as uniformly functional for an entire social or cultural system:

> The theoretic framework of functional analysis must expressly require that there be specification of the units for which a given social or cultural item is functional. It must expressly allow for a given item having diverse consequences, functional and dysfunctional, for individuals, for subgroups, and for the more inclusive social structure and culture.

In line with Merton's argument for middle-range approaches rather than "general and all-inclusive" (Hedström and Udehn 2009:61) grand theories, this thesis therefore seeks to understand empowerment from a more skeptical and nuanced point of view, that is, in terms of its potential *dysfunctions* and more or less hidden mechanisms. As mentioned previously, one of the acknowledged dysfunctions of empowerment is the so-called "paradox of empowerment." In Merton's (1936) terms, this paradox could be described as the *unanticipated consequences of purposive social action*, meaning that, despite its good intentions, empowerment may not be appreciated equally by all employees.

According to Merton (1936:895), purposive social action "involves motives and consequently a choice between alternatives." His reference to alternative choices raises questions of knowledge, belief, and rationality: in order to implement empowerment change successfully, that is, according to the "*expectations* of future consequences, these expectations being based upon known empirical relationships, and upon information about the existing situation" (Simon [1916] 1997:78, emphasis in the original), empowerers have to rely on their knowledge, belief, and information about the present situation before taking rational decisions. This can prove to be a difficult task, since the risk of relying on, for instance, belief "in a false or incomplete

model of causality" (March and Olsen 1989:57) could lead to just those un-anticipated consequences that are supposed to be avoided:

> A stimulus may have unanticipated consequences because it evokes a *larger* [psychological] set than was expected, or because the set evoked is *different* from that expected. At the extreme, the evoked set may not even include the reaction to the stimulus that was intended. (…)
>
> [T]he stimulus itself may include elements not intended by the organization hierarchy when providing it. As a simple example [the participant] may respond to the tone of voice in which an order is given as well as to its content.
>
> A third difficulty arises because the individual who is supposed to respond to a stimulus mistakes it for another—because he discriminates inadequately between them—or simply does not respond at all because the stimulus does not define the situation for him completely. In these cases, (…) the set evoked by a stimulus is actually smaller than that desired. (March and Simon 1993: 54, emphasis in the original)

Merton, March, and Simon assume mostly consensual relations within organizations. In their view, consensus does not imply that organizational contexts are characterized by smooth cooperation and effortless social relations. Rather, what they teach us is that achieving the outcomes of purposive actions (within the context of an organization) that were, in fact, anticipated, relies to a great extent on shared understandings of situations as conveyed by language. Such shared understandings are by no means simple to bring about, especially when dealing with organizational change.

Therefore, the main focus of this thesis is to acknowledge the relevance of communicative processes between organizations and individuals, in particular, individuals' sensemaking of being given empowerment—in combination with their private and professional identities (see Edling and Rydgren 2014:12 on the necessity of considering "people's social background in order to assess the beliefs and desires they have")—and to identify when, how, and why unanticipated and unintended consequences of empowering action may turn into dysfunctional empowerment. As such, this thesis aims at analyzing mechanisms of empowerment by means of a Mertonian middle-range approach "in which empirical research and theoretical focus merge" (Edling and Rydgren 2016:1136). To further the understanding of communicative processes involved in empowerment change, the main theoretical approach applied in all three studies is a micro-interactionist approach.

Verstehen through Micro-Interactionism

So far, it has been argued that the power in empowerment lies in its zero-sum character and, resulting from this, holds potential for conflict. This problematic characteristic of empowerment is dealt with in Paper I, which centers attention on understanding why empowerment efforts sometimes lead to perceptions of powerlessness rather than to empowerment (which, as noted, is called "paradoxical empowerment" in the literature). Regarding the handling of such potential power conflicts, the theoretical points of departure are consensus- and action-oriented approaches as reflected in Papers II and III. All three papers share a common sensibility concerning communication as understood by micro-interactionism in sociology. In this section, micro-interactionist insights as represented by George Herbert Mead, Herbert Blumer, Erving Goffman, and Randall Collins are delineated, thereby focusing on employees' attitudes and orientations toward empowerment change efforts.

As argued in Papers II and III, a communicative and relational approach to empowerment has the potential of contributing to understanding the effects that the communication of empowerment may have on employees. This communication inevitably entails language as a vehicle for conveying meaning. According to Mead, human interaction can only be considered "language" once it entails what he calls *significant symbols*. Those symbols are made up of social acts that Mead calls "gestures." Gestures arise from a certain motivation, meaning actors need to have "an idea in [their] experience" (Mead [1934] 1967:45) that exceeds physical information provided by mere gestures. An actor A, who performs a gesture, does so not only for him- or herself but aims at getting a message across. This implies that A also has an image or idea of an appropriate response in mind—a response that A expects B to have as well (see Mead [1964] 1981:244f.). For instance, only when a desperate cry is associated *by both A and B* with the possibility of distress and, therefore, a need for help can one talk about a consciousness of meaning (ibid.:111). Mead argues that if "that gesture means this idea behind it and it arouses that idea in the other individual, then we have a significant symbol" (Mead [1934] 1967:45). Once this state of common knowledge and understanding is reached, gestures, i.e., social acts, can be considered as "language" and as having some sort of meaning (ibid.:46).

Consequently, understanding each other through communication requires constant reflection in terms of interpretation, definition, adjustment, and redefinition (see Blumer 1966; Reich 2003). Blumer (1969:79) develops this thought further and argues:

> The peculiarity consists in the fact that human beings interpret or "define" each other's actions instead of merely reacting to each other's actions. Their "response" is not made directly to the actions of one another but instead is

based on the meaning which they attach to such actions. Thus, human interaction is mediated by the use of symbols, by interpretation, or by ascertaining the meaning of one another's actions.

Actions, then, become meaningful through the interactants' congruent ascriptions of roles and functions to these actions: the meaning of actions is socially produced in interaction (Blumer 1966:540). This interpretation or production of meaning is, in turn, dependent on the social setting or context in which the interaction takes place (Goffman 1981:53). The terms "definition of the situation" or "dynamics of situations" (see particularly Collins 2004) are frequently used by micro-sociologists and aim at capturing the characteristics of any given interactive situation in terms of, for instance, location (front/backstage), identity, roles, role expectations, and shared knowledge. As Goffman (1959:9f.) puts it:

> Together the participants contribute to a single over-all definition of the situation which involves not so much a real agreement as to what exists but rather a real agreement as to whose claims concerning what issues will be temporarily honored.

Based on the definition of the situation, interactants engage in what Goffman calls *performance*, that is, any activity "which serves to influence in any way any of the other participants" (Goffman 1959:15). Phrased in these terms, any social act can thus be considered a performance of one's role in interactions with other people. As such, even the act of taking decisions is "performed" based on a specific set of necessary skills. In the context of organizational change, March and Simon (1993:175) include the following aspects in the skill set of performing the act of decision making: "knowledge or assumptions about future events; knowledge of sets of alternatives available for action; knowledge of consequences attached to alternatives; [and] goals and values."

Being able to assess future events, available alternatives, and consequences as well as which manner would be appropriate for conveying a certain message is thus a vital competence of any interactant: "In smoothly running situations, one's own ability to use symbols in thinking and talking depends upon anticipating the other's reactions (…)" (Collins 2004:121ff.).

Not succeeding in anticipating another participant's reactions adequately might lead to unanticipated consequences and/or misunderstandings (Goffman 1967:17). A second dimension to the anticipation of reactions is the level of information possessed by all participants. Goffman stresses that those participants currently *performing* their acts have the advantage of having full information about their own motives and goals while the *audience* only gets to know "what they have been allowed to perceive" (Goffman 1959:144). Consequently, the performer has the advantage of only communicating selected information while at the same time having the disad-

vantage of not having complete knowledge of the audience's possible reactions. This aspect of interaction as observed from a micro perspective is highly relevant for workplace contexts. Although both superiors and employees juggle these advantages and disadvantages, superiors have the additional advantage of a privileged position within a hierarchically defined distribution of power while the employees have the additional disadvantage of being subordinates and thus having, by default, a lesser degree of agency.

Although the study objects of this thesis are not micro-interactions as such, it is argued that the context of communication deserves a much larger emphasis in analyses of empowerment than has been the case in previous empowerment studies. What such a middle-range approach aims to achieve is a greater level of Weberian understanding. Yet, slightly diverging from Weber's focus on understanding motivations behind *actions* (Weber [1922] 1978:8), the focus here is on understanding how communicative contexts may influence attitudes and orientations—which, in turn, may ultimately lead to certain actions.

6 Method and Data

The aim of this thesis is to advance knowledge and analyses of empowerment processes by proposing sociologically inspired theoretical reflections that contribute with insights into underlying assumptions of empowerment change and agent–recipient relations. For that purpose, Papers I and II start out by exploring theoretical prerequisites as seen from a sociological and communicative point of view, thus involving literature reviews, syntheses, and the introduction of new concepts that aim at explaining the observed problem (see Swedberg 2014 on theorizing in the social sciences). Paper III probes deeper into the applicability of the developed theoretical frameworks by presenting results of a quantitative study. Method and data of the quantitative study are discussed in the following paragraphs.

Reflections on Methodology

The focus of Paper III is to find answers to three research questions: First, do employees generally prefer empowered workplaces to less empowered ones? Second, do respondents' empowerment preferences align with their expectations concerning possible outcomes of change efforts in general? And third, do empowerment preferences correlate with respondents' current private and working life situations? In this study, the focus is *not* on how the empowerment recipients evaluate actual, experienced empowerment change efforts. Rather, the intention is to capture employees' attitudes and states of mind *prior* to such changes in order to understand how the point of departure might look like for change agents and their planned efforts. Empowerment efforts, after all, are not introduced to a "neutral" group of recipients. Thus, the aim of this study is to explore in which way employees may differ from a "neutral" stance and whether patterns can be found in employees' orientations, attitudes, and preferences against the backdrop of their current private and working life situation. In light of these questions, the choice of method for this study did not present itself as entirely self-evident.

Studying preferences, especially in fields such as psychology and economics, is often associated with conducting experiments (Carpenter and Seki 2010; Charness, Gneezy, and Imas 2013; Lazear, Malmendier, and Weber 2012). However, considering this method, it became evident that investigating preferences toward empowerment practices or empowered jobs more

generally seems less suitable for experimental setups, since these would have to involve some sort of "performance" or "role play," presented believably enough for respondents to genuinely engage in the situation. While the possibility of short videos as experimental material was discussed, even this idea was discarded due to the high demands for quality that such videos would have to fulfill and, associated with that, practical, logistical, and financial constraints (see Aguinis and Bradley 2014).

More sociological approaches toward capturing preferences and expectations are qualitative approaches such as observations, focus groups, and in-depth interviews. Observation was quickly dismissed, since the purpose of the study is not, as mentioned above, to investigate employees' attitudes toward already consummated changes—and, thus, there would be nothing to observe.

Focus groups present an intriguing way of collecting data and, applied in the right research context, can contribute with a rich amount of data. Yet the risk of emerging group dynamics that could influence how far respondents dare to speak about their "real" preferences and expectations is pervasive in focus groups and must be taken into consideration (Krueger and Casey 2009:13ff.). In this study, for example, respondents with work orientations focusing on earning money but otherwise not being interested in becoming more engaged could hesitate to speak up when confronted with more career-oriented, highly motivated employees. For the purpose of this study, focus groups were, therefore, not deemed to be the best option.

Semistructured in-depth interviews were considered as a potentially suitable strategy, since they present an opportunity to gain deeper understanding of the respondents' reasoning about attitudes, preferences, and expectations (Jones and Kelly 2014; Rubin and Rubin 2012). However, in-depth interviews, as well as focus groups, are usually conducted among a fairly well-defined group of respondents. This implies that it is already known which concrete groups might be relevant to interview. In this case, such knowledge does not yet exist. Therefore, an in-depth exploration of particular individuals' empowerment orientations is possible after it has been established that employees do in fact have different empowerment orientations and whether they can be categorized into different groups that would be interesting to study further.

Consequently, the purpose of the study was more oriented toward conducting a pilot study, that is, precisely the idea of defining whether certain groups of employees can be identified whose attitudes and orientations to empowerment seem worth exploring more deeply in subsequent research. The study set out to test whether the theoretical assumptions as developed in Papers I and II could be shown to have any relevance for analyzing the "real world"—and if so, to define those groups of employees that appear to be relevant study objects for further qualitative research aimed at more comprehensive *understanding* of the issues. To test this, a larger sample than is usu-

ally obtained in qualitative methods was necessary, which pointed in the direction of quantitative data as the next stage.

With the research objectives in mind, a quantitative survey study was chosen as most appropriate—despite the fact that this decision might seem to disagree fundamentally with the Weberian notion of *verstehen*, which was argued above to be of such central importance to this thesis. However, as mentioned before, the focus on "understanding" should here be perceived as attempting to grasp the "Sinnzusammenhang," referring to "a coherent whole on the level of meaning" (Weber [1922] 1978:8, 58). In this context, a quantitative study is not seen as opposed to Weber's view on sociology but, rather, as a point of departure, leading the way to more research oriented toward understanding later on.

Field Selection: The Retail Sector

Like the methodological decision, the question of study objects was not apparent from the very beginning. After all, the field of "employees" is vast. A considerable amount of international research on empowerment is concerned with the health care professions (Ahmad and Oranye 2010; Bartunek et al. 2006; Read and Laschinger 2015; Wang and Liu 2015), with service workers employed at hotels, food services, call centers, airlines, banks, and other groups (Bowen and Lawler 2006; Corsun and Enz 1999; Gazzoli, Hancer, and Park 2010; Hechanova, Alampay, and Franco 2006), and with sales personnel (Ahearne, Mathieu, and Rapp 2005; Martin and Bush 2006; Pappas and Flaherty 2008; Sallee and Flaherty 2013).

As discussed earlier, research on workplace empowerment in Sweden is often focused on employees' physical and mental well-being; it is also quite general in scope when concerning the investigation of specific businesses, branches, niches, or professions. Therefore, selection criteria for a study field were not oriented toward previous researcher's field selections but, rather, toward professions where empowerment could be assumed to generate decisive advantages compared to nonempowered workplaces.

The retail sector was defined as such a study field due to its performance-oriented character and the fact that changes in performance become visible comparatively quickly. Thus, an empowered retail workforce should, theoretically, be able to have a fairly immediate and positive impact on aspects such as sales volume and customer retention—which have been shown to rest more and more on the quality of customer service and the salesforce's behavior rather than pricing (Dahle 2000; Siu and Cheung 2001; Wetzels, Ruyter, and Bloemer 2000).

This might be surprising in light of the current paradigm shift in the retail sector, where customers' buying behavior has shifted from the so-called multichannel buying behavior (access through various channels, such as

physical department stores, catalogues, TV shows, internet, etc.) to omni-channel buying behavior, where buyers increasingly use "smart" and online technology (Wallström et al. 2017b), such as mobile phone apps, to collect extensive information about the retail chain and/or the products before purchasing.

Despite an increase in omnichannel buying behavior, however, department stores and salesforces remain influential in terms of customers' experiences. This is due, for example, to the stores' new roles in new contexts, such as the opportunity to "buy online and pick up in store" (Gao and Su 2016), or merging of online and offline forms of buying (Frazer and Stiehler 2014); customers may be located in physical stores while simultaneously using smart devices to gather information about products, for instance, or to compare them to similar products from other brands (Verhoef, Kannan, and Inman 2015; Wallström et al. 2017a). Furthermore, research underlines the importance that physical retail stores still have for customers when wanting to get inspired (see Wallström et al. 2017b) and the possibilities that store innovation can present in order to "retail a brand's point of difference" (Aubrey and Judge 2012:31). Thus, with new ways of retailing, "the variety of skills demanded by employers within the sector" (Nickson et al. 2017:694) increases rather than diminishes. Consequently, what the salesforce does or does not do matters.

In terms of what they are—or are expected to be—doing, the term "emotional labor" (Hochschild 2003:147ff.) summarizes different skillsets that characterize successful salespeople: managing their performances both front stage (toward customers) and back stage (toward superiors) (see Wetzels et al. 2000); continuous interest in and evaluation of one's own performance (Ackfeldt and Coote 2005); and proficiency in adaptive selling techniques (Simintiras et al. 2013), that is, approaching customers while considering possible idiosyncrasies—an aspect that might become more difficult in light of ever more informed and demanding customers.

As a result of these specific requirements in salesforces, retail employees might be particularly interested in empowerment change efforts: a greater sense of flexibility and freedom in being able to assess selling interactions, handling of different stages, and having an impact on one's own performance (see Ahearne et al. 2005) could motivate the salesforce and increase their sense of meaningfulness. For these reasons, the retail sector was chosen as the object of the quantitative survey study in Paper III.

Questionnaire Design

Since the research focus of the study is rather specific, the use of already existing data was not possible. Instead, a study-specific questionnaire had to be designed. To avoid confusion or perplexity among respondents, who cannot be assumed to be familiar with the term "empowerment" (Greasley et al. 2008), the overall "theme" that was set for the questionnaire and described as its objective was not empowerment but "motivation and change at the workplace." The word "empowerment" was not used in any of the items.

The process of developing items alternated between four different procedures: searching for validated survey items and evaluating their relation and applicability to relevant themes of the study; developing new items tailored to the specific research interests of the study; regularly discussing with colleagues and supervisors about the use of different items, their value for the study, as well as topics such as phrasing, translation, etc.; and finally, conducting several small pre-studies that tested how well the items worked for respondents.

A challenge in connection with the development of the items was the "hypothetical" nature of the research questions, since the focus was not on employees' concrete experiences with empowerment change but, rather, on their attitudes toward such efforts based on their current private and working life situation. Apart from asking respondents to rate the importance they assign to aspects of structural and psychological empowerment (as defined by the literature), the idea of presenting the respondents with some kind of case study was discussed. The presentation of such a case study could, for instance, be realized through the use of vignettes (see Aguinis and Bradley 2014).

However, attempts to design such vignettes resulted in the insight that, in order to be able to distinguish between different types of empowerment change efforts, a large number of vignettes would have to be included in the questionnaire—risking a decrease of respondent's willingness to participate due to the time-consuming participation process it would entail. Nevertheless, the idea of vignettes gave inspiration to look for other ways of developing items. Ultimately, a job-choice format as used by Hackman and Oldham (1975) was chosen for some items, asking respondents to rate their preference for job A or job B on a 5-point Likert scale, where job A had the value 1 and described a less empowered job (called "alternative job" in Paper III), while job B had the value 5 and described a more empowered job. In the end, the questionnaire consisted of 31 items, of which 6 included between four to sixteen subquestions.

Furthermore, in accordance with the *Code of Ethics* provided by the International Sociological Association (2016), the *Ethical Principles of Psychologists and Code of Conduct* provided by the American Psychological Association, as well as the ethical guidelines provided by the Swedish Vet-

enskapsrådet (Vetenskapsrådet 2002, 2011), the final version of the questionnaire (to be found in the Appendix) contained an introduction, providing information on the objective of the survey and a paragraph that explained the ethical prerequisites for the study; respondents' *voluntary* participation; confidentiality in handling the data; and use of the data for research purposes only. Respondents had to tick an obligatory box to indicate that they understood these prerequisites and agreed to participate. The questionnaire could not be accessed without ticking this box.

A web-based version of the questionnaire for both computer and smart-device usage was chosen over a paper version, based on the assumption that respondents would be more willing to fill in a web-based questionnaire and submit it conveniently by hitting "send" rather than having to fill in and post a paper version. In contrast to paper questionnaires, web-based questionnaires offer some features that might or might not be useful for different studies. One of these features, for instance, is the possibility of rendering all questions obligatory, meaning one can only proceed to the next page of questions if all questions on the present page have been answered. The advantage of this feature is lower or nonexistent internal nonresponse. On the other hand, the fact that respondents are unable to "scroll" beyond the first page and have a look at the entire questionnaire before answering, as well as the possibility of leaving out some questions and get back to them later, might influence the response rate negatively. In order to find a balance between obligatory questions and a possibly large amount of internal nonresponse, the possibility to choose "Don't know" was added to almost every question in the questionnaire, thus leaving the possibility of not answering while still having read the question. This method worked well and no observations had to be excluded due to large amounts of missing items.

Data Collection

Data collection took place from October 2016 until March 2017. The chosen population for the study comprised employees working in the Swedish retail sector. The population included all hierarchical levels of retail employees, from warehouse workers up to store owners. The sampling method can be described as a hybrid of simple random sampling and convenience sampling: in order to reach as many respondents as possible, larger retail groups and chains as well as smaller retail businesses were randomly chosen, approached, and offered participation in the survey. All in all, 134 retail groups, chains, and businesses were contacted by email as well as telephone. Whenever possible, direct contact was sought with chief executive officers (CEOs) or human resource (HR) managers in order to immediately reach the decision-making level of the organization and thus reduce bureaucratic processes across different levels of authority. The objective of the study and the

way in which the process of participation would work were explained. Closer contact and communication was established with thirteen organizations, of which five ultimately agreed to participate.

Once an organization was on board, a designated contact person (such as HR specialists) was appointed to help with the details. An email was sent to this contact person, containing short information directed toward respondents, explaining the objective of the study, the voluntariness of their participation, and the possibility of ending their participation at any point, as well as containing a web-link to the questionnaire. After discussing the best means to reach out to the employees, the contact person forwarded this information and the questionnaire web-link to different units (regions, headquarters, warehouses, stores, or employees), either via email lists, the intranet, or the organization's mobile app newsfeed. This way, approximately 1550 employees could be reached.

A deadline of two weeks was set for the completion of the questionnaire. At the end of the first week, the contact person reached out to the employees once more, reminding them of the approaching deadline and asking them to fill in the questionnaire. In the end, 268 fully completed questionnaires were submitted, which corresponds to a 17% response rate.

Limitations

Since the study aims at testing the value and practicability of the theoretical assumptions developed in Papers I and II, its main goal is not to lead to representative results. If the intention had been to arrive at such results, some decisions would have had to be taken differently, mainly in terms of sampling. Nevertheless, despite the theoretical motivation behind this study, some limitations relating to the questionnaire, data, and sampling need to be addressed.

First, the sampling method and way of approaching organizations may have caused a certain bias, possibly resulting in a positive, motivated, involved, and engaged sample. Since organizations were approached via their "gatekeepers" (CEOs, HR managers) rather than contacting employees directly, it is likely that those organizations that agreed to participate experience themselves as having "well-functioning" employees and did not fear the "revelation" of unhappy, unsatisfied, or critical employees. Thus, a certain level of self-selection cannot be ruled out.

Furthermore, considering that the link for the questionnaire was officially distributed by employers, a nonresponse bias is not entirely unlikely: employees with a positive relation to their work, employer, and/or organization might be more willing to fill in such a questionnaire than those who feel dissatisfied and unhappy. Also, and ironically, since empowerment involves taking initiative, responsibility, and agreeing to be open to new and extended

work tasks, the motivation needed to fill in the questionnaire might separate those employees who are fond of these aspects from those who are not: the applied sampling method might just have missed those individuals with a work-orientation similar to those belonging to Goldthorpe's (1970) cash nexus.

Second, an aspect that had not been considered enough beforehand was the problem of which employees could be reached via email, intranet, and mobile app and which could not. A problem that emerged during the data collection process was the fact that many warehouse and store workers did not have individualized, organization-specific email addresses, and in all cases organizations refused (for understandable reasons) to send the questionnaire to their employees' private email addresses. Thus, the questionnaire could only be distributed to those employees with individualized, organization-specific email addresses. In some cases, warehouse or store superiors were asked by their superiors to give their employees access to the questionnaire on central computers in order to reach employees without such email addresses.

Although one might assume that this particular, structural problem could have led to mostly office workers in the sample, this was not the case: of 268 respondents, 41% were office workers (or other; see Paper III) and 59% were warehouse or store workers. Yet this aspect of distribution via email remains problematic in terms of sampling.

In the case of the distribution of the questionnaire via an organization's mobile app (this was the case for one of the five organizations), a similar selection problem arose: of the organization's employees, only about half had downloaded the mobile app and were thus informed of the study. Apart from not reaching everyone, it is likely that there is a bias in who could be reached this way: again, it might be the already very dedicated, motivated, and engaged employees who not only download the app but do actually use it, meaning they spent time looking at their organization's app newsfeed, found the questionnaire, and chose to fill it in.

Third, the sample's results for self-rated levels of psychological empowerment, job satisfaction, and work performance indicate that, overall, the sample seems to consist of relatively happy and content employees (see Paper III). Thus, the level of positivity represented in the sample may not be suitable for generalizing to the Swedish retail workforce, and hence it is uncertain whether less satisfied employees might have rated empowerment as more or less desirable than did the respondents in the sample.

Fourth, during the process of designing the questionnaire, Professor Gretchen Spreitzer at the University of Michigan's Ross School of Business was consulted on the use of her items measuring psychological empowerment. In her validated questionnaire, Spreitzer had included three items for each of the four psychological empowerment dimensions: meaning, competence, self-determination, and impact (Spreitzer 1995a). Since the question-

naire was already rather lengthy questionnaire and adding to it risked increasing the nonresponse rate, the decision was taken to integrate only *one* of three items for each dimension. According to Professor Spreitzer, she had no experience of only using one item per dimension and thus could not express any recommendations or predictions as to whether one item each might work just as well.

Considering the outcome of the OLS regression measuring the importance of psychological empowerment (in form of a scale composed by the four psychological empowerment dimensions), as reported in Paper III (Table 5), the consistently nonsignificant results may indicate that only including one of three items might not have worked as well as hoped. Consequently, to avoid doubting the strength of the results due to leaving out validated items, it might be advisable to continue to include all of the twelve items in future research.

A fifth limitation of the study is the "coincidence" of three of five participating organizations operating in the same niche of the retail sector (hardware/handicraft stores and chains). This translates into 83% hardware employees and 17% employees from other niches. Since there was no intentional selection of organizations or niches included in the sampling process, it would be interesting to know whether this selection is, indeed, coincidental or whether it reflects a real bias. As argued here as well as in Paper III, since the study is not aimed at representativeness, this limitation does not, at this point, present a major problem. Nevertheless, it is worthwhile to keep in mind for future research.

7 Overview of the Studies

Paper I: Empowerment Gone Bad: Communicative Consequences of Power Transfers

As described earlier, the phenomenon of "paradoxical empowerment" is well known in respective research fields, yet little theorizing has been published as to the possible reasons for this paradox. Therefore, the first paper sets out to analyze the concept of empowerment from a sociological point of view and, by means of sociological and social-psychological theories of communication and interaction, to identify possible mechanisms behind paradoxical empowerment. It is argued that such paradoxes may evolve from discrepancies between approaching empowerment from a purely economic and structural versus a communicative and relational viewpoint. Using a communicative view on power, three assumptions on transferable power are presented: *power is a resource*; *power limits agency*; and *power is zero sum*. Following these assumptions, an analysis is presented that discusses communicative consequences of power transfers. These consequences are *power differentials*, *reciprocity*, and *paternalism*. The theoretical analysis concludes with the observation that, although empowerees' agency might be increased on a structural level, they might experience a parallel decrease of agential options on a communicative level, creating the paradox of empowerment and possibly feelings of *dis*empowerment.

Paper II: It Takes Two to Empower: The Communicative Context of Empowerment Change in the Workplace

Paper II aims at narrowing the focus from an analysis of empowerment in a *general* context in Paper I to a *specific* empowerment context: empowerment at the workplace as change and/or human resource management. The workplace context is of particular interest, since the original idea of empowerment referred to the *sharing of real power* and/or the *fostering of individuals' welfare* (see chapter on "Distinctions and Approaches"). However, sharing real power seems intuitively to represent a stark contrast to the principles behind organized, hierarchical, and highly structured work environments. Therefore, it is not surprising that empowerment was redefined by the management field as *fostering production and performance* instead. This aspect of using the positively connoted concept of empowerment in contexts that could be perceived by empowerees as anything but empowering prompts the

question as to how much paradoxical empowerment at the workplace might be related to communicative interaction between change agents and recipients. Theorizing about relational aspects, a "basic communicative structure" is identified. It is analyzed as comprising a contractual and a communicative context that should be taken into consideration by empowerers in order to avoid misunderstandings in the recipients' processes of ascribing meaning. Paper II concludes by arguing that recipients' ascriptions of meaning to their roles and situations as defined by employment and/or psychological contracts might not necessarily be in line with the communicative meanings they ascribe to the change agents' actions, and vice versa.

Paper III: Does One Size Fit All? Investigating Different Empowerment Orientations in the Heterogeneous Workforce of the Swedish Retail Sector

Evolving from the theoretical to the empirical level, Paper III aims at testing some of the theoretical assumptions presented in Paper II. Paper III asks whether it can be assumed that empowerees generally engage in similar sensemaking processes or whether disregarding the "basic communicative structure" in empowerment change efforts might lead to differing empowerment outcomes among employees. The main theoretically motivated research question asked is whether those aspects typically associated with structural and psychological empowerment efforts at the workplace are indeed perceived as desirable and positive by all employees. Employees' orientations and attitudes toward empowerment and their attitudes' relevance for the success of empowerment efforts are investigated. These questions are explored by analyzing survey data from 268 employees in the Swedish retail sector. Results indicate that age and work intensity (part-time vs. full-time), as well as cohabitation status may have significant impact on how empowerment efforts are approached by employees.

8 Concluding Remarks

Research shows consistently that an increase of employees' autonomy at work generally increases employees' job and leisure satisfaction (Wheatley 2017). While there is no reason to doubt these results, this thesis started to take its course through the more nuanced observation that far from *all* employees seem to experience workplace change efforts as positive, feel a greater sense of satisfaction and happiness when urged to take on more responsibility, or act more autonomously. The number of less enthusiastic employees might be relatively small. However, in their joint endeavors to satisfy employers' need for the execution of labor, on the one hand, and the employees' need to earn one's livelihood, on the other, employers and employees can be assumed to share an interest in well-functioning work relations and general well-being at work. Therefore, both organizations and individuals might benefit if those orientations to work are also taken into account when planning change initiatives that lie *outside* the conception of empowerment as "one size fits all." To be better able to do so, knowledge has to be generated as to which groups of employees might need, want, or demand different ways of empowerment than those commonly implemented.

The theoretical reflections presented in Papers I and II contribute to this gap in empowerment research by proposing to use a communicative framework in the analysis of empowerment interaction. The empirical study in Paper III investigates employees' expectations of empowerment change efforts as well as their attitudes and orientations toward them. The results indicate that the majority of employees do prefer empowered workplaces to less empowered ones. However, in terms of their general attitude to the expected *outcome* of change efforts, they seemed rather skeptical: concerning several possible outcomes of change efforts, such as more power, more freedom, room for creativity and autonomy, meaningfulness, etc., employees were not convinced that these outcomes would mean an improvement. This result may point to previously disappointing experiences with change management and possibly the feeling of a breached psychological contract—aspects that could be valuable for empowerers to take into consideration when communicating empowerment change. Lastly, results show that older employees (ca. 40+), part-time employees (working less than 75%), and those not cohabiting with their partners are less likely to rate classical empowerment efforts as important for their well-being at work.

These results raise several questions that will be discussed in the following paragraphs: Is the use of empowerment as a leadership and management strategy still meaningful? What are the consequences of the results? How can empowerment processes become more nuanced? And lastly, where to go from here?

Discussion

Managing people is never an easy task. Nevertheless, it seems safe to say that, particularly in work contexts, it constitutes a necessary and unavoidable element if at least some degree of efficiency is supposed to be achieved (see Ahrne 1994:15; Allvin et al. 2011:36f.; Allvin and Movitz 2017:121f.). As Ahrne, Brunsson and Hallström (2007:619) state,

> (…) to organize is to create a specific order among individuals or organizations, to attribute certain identities and to prescribe certain patterns of behavior. A standard purpose is to facilitate interaction and communication by making people or organizations behave in predictable ways and by introducing certain identities and common status orders.

However, the practical realization of efficiency must find balance on the thin line between rigid, predefined, and predictable work processes, on the one hand, and the idea of flexible, autonomous, inspired, creative, and motivated employees, on the other. A middle way has to be found between behaving "because an external force exerts power" over one—and having the power to act for oneself, that is, to be one's "own [master]" (Cruikshank 1999:19). As argued by previous research, such a middle way can be approached through empowerment. Considering the largely positive outcomes of workplace empowerment in the form of greater job satisfaction and commitment, increased performance, and decreased turnover intention (Ahmad and Oranye 2010; Guthrie 2001; Harris, Wheeler, and Kacmar 2009; Humborstad and Perry 2011; Read and Laschinger 2015; Spence Laschinger, Finegan, and Shamian 2001), the meaningfulness of empowerment as a leadership and management strategy is not easily contested. Neither are the results of the empirical study in Paper III intended to serve as evidence against reports of empowerment's notable success. Rather, they are meant to contribute to a more nuanced way of looking at the effects of empowerment on different groups of employees.

Thus, it can be argued that the use and investigation of empowerment as leadership and management strategy is still meaningful—and might be even more so if research and practice were to open up to a wider perspective on who might be or want to be empowered by means of which measures. Such a wider perspective might, in the long run, also lead to a revision of the empowerment conceptions as defined by Spreitzer, where other aspects might

become more significant than others. For instance, technological developments enable ever more flexible workplaces and provide opportunities to work at other places than the office. For some employees, such freedom of choice may be experienced as empowering, while others might prefer the context of the workplace rather than having to muster the necessary discipline to avoid "drifting" (Allvin 2011:39).

The question remains: how would it be possible to empower in a more nuanced way? As an overall conclusion of this particular thesis, it is suggested that the answer lies in an awareness of the unintended impact that communicative interaction can have on the outcome of intended, planned change. This includes reflections on who is involved in the communication and, following from this, how communicative messages may be interpreted by the receivers depending on their different social, individual, and professional backgrounds. Furthermore, part of unintended impacts on a planned outcome may also concern risks that some employees may experience a breach of the psychological contract as a result of empowerment change.

Yet communicative awareness can only be considered the starting point for more nuanced empowerment. What needs to follow from such awareness is specific consideration and respectful treatment rather than mere tolerance (see Schirmer, Weidenstedt, and Reich 2012, 2013) of different groups' factual needs, wants, and demands for a greater feeling of satisfaction, greater motivation to perform well, and lower turnover intention. Some employees might desire precisely what classical empowerment efforts have to offer. Yet others might appreciate a more structured, predefined, and predictable work situation. For them, empowerment might mean the opposite of what is commonly associated with it. Thus, the consideration of various needs rather than the assumption of having found *one solution fit for everyone* would be more in line with a nuanced, respectful empowerment approach.

Outlook

Lastly, the question is: where to go from here? First, an extension of the quantitative study beyond the retail sector to different areas of the labor market would contribute to a more detailed picture of which groups of employees appreciate classical empowerment measures and which would prefer other types of empowering change. Additionally, an investigation of empowerment orientations across cultures could provide further insights into employees' attitudes to empowerment change at the workplace.

Second, qualitative studies could contribute intriguing knowledge when probing deeper into the significance of communicative interaction for employees' attitudes to empowerment, and could also pinpoint what those employees less fond of classical empowerment would appreciate instead—and the reasons why. After all, while the type of quantitative data used here can

contribute with knowledge as to *what* respondents chose to answer in the survey, a qualitative study could give greater insights into *why* respondents hold certain orientations. In this way, their motivations and backgrounds would gain greater significance, as would the knowledge about intersecting aspects of their lives that shape their work orientations and attitudes toward empowerment. As Ylva Ulfsdotter Eriksson (2012:87) puts it:

> Individuals are influenced by what they do and (…) these doings interact with experiences from past and present, and with their current settings. For these reasons it ought to be difficult to separate attitudes from roles and questions of social identity.

Finally, further qualitative data could inform empowerment processes through more detailed knowledge on employees' sensemaking of empowerment change in terms of psychological contract expectations. Which empowerment measures would be experienced as breaches of the psychological contract, and which would not? Both case studies and in-depth interviews could, for instance, provide such insights.

Appendix

English Survey Questionnaire

The appendix comprises the English translation of the original Swedish survey questionnaire. The Swedish questionnaire can be obtained through the author.

Title of the questionnaire: Motivation and change at the workplace

General Information

1. Your **year** of birth (four digits):

   ____

2. Your sex:
   O female
   O male
   O I do not identify with any of these two options

3. What is your current relationship status?
   O single
   O you have a partner but are not living together
   O married / cohabiting
   O other: _____

4. Are there children currently living in the household at least 50% of the time?
   O yes
   O no

   5. How many of the children currently living in the household are aged… (use digits)
      0-3 years ____
      4-6 years ____
      7-9 years ____
      10-15 years ____
      16-20 years ____
      21 years and older ____

6. Your educational level:
   O not completed elementary school
   O completed elementary school
   O graduated from high school
   O taken classes at university, college etc., **for at least 1 year**
   O graduated from university, college etc., **for at least 1 year**
   O don't know
   O other: _____

7. In which part of the world were you born?
   O Scandinavian countries
   O Europe
   O Africa
   O North America
   O South America
   O Middle East
   O Asia
   O Oceania

8. For how long have you been living in Sweden?
   O less than 1 year
   O 1-3 years
   O 4-6 years
   O 7-10 years
   O more than 10 years

9. How do you rate your general state of health? Is it…
   O good
   O bad
   O something in-between
   O don't know

10. During the last 12 months, have you suffered from one or more of the following symptoms?

	Yes, mild	Yes, severe	No
• general tiredness	O	O	O
• insomnia	O	O	O
• nervous trouble (anxiety,			
• uneasiness, anguish)	O	O	O
• depression or deep dejection	O	O	O

11. Have one or several of these symptoms been so severe during the last 12 months that you…

	Yes	No	Don't know
were not able to go to work?	O	O	O
went to see a nurse or doctor?	O	O	O

Your working life and your current workplace

12. During the last 12 months, have you been looking for or waiting for work or in any other way been without work for at least 3 months?
O yes
O no
O other: _____

13. In what year (roughly) were you hired at your current organization (**four** digits)?
_____

14. Have you changed positions within your current organization during the last 12 months?
O yes
O no
O other: _____

15. What type of employment is your current employment?
O permanent
O temporary
O don't know
O other: _____

16. How many working hours is your ordinary working week?
O 20-29
O 30-39
O 40-49
O 50-59
O 60-69
O more than 70 hours
O don't know

17. Your workplace:
O warehouse
O store
O office
O don't know
O other: _____

18. Your salary before tax in SEK (Swedish kronor):
    O less than 20,500
    O 20,501 – 25,000
    O 25,001 – 30,000
    O 30,001 – 35,000
    O 35,001 – 40,000
    O 40,001 – 45,500
    O more than 45,500

19. How many people are you supervising?
    O 0
    O 1-5
    O 6-10
    O 11-20
    O more than 20
    O don't know

20. How often are you working overtime at your current employment?
    O basically never
    O a few times per year
    O a few times per month
    O about once a week
    O several times a week
    O don't know

Assessment of your work situation and your performance

21. Given your situation today, to what extent do you agree with the following
    statements about you?

    > 5 point Likert response format:
    > 1 Do not agree – 5 Agree fully
    > + "don't know"

- The work I do is meaningful to me.
- I am confident about my ability to do my job.
- I can decide on my own how to go about doing my work.
- My impact on what happens in my department is large.
- When there's a job to be done, I   devote all my energy to getting it done.
- When I work, I do so with intensity.
- I work at my full capacity in all of my job duties.
- I strive as hard as I can to be successful in my work.
- When I work, I really exert myself to the fullest.
- Generally speaking, I am very satisfied with this job.
- I would recommend this workplace to a friend/acquaintance.
- I frequently think of quitting this job.

Please consider **your situation today** when answering the following questions.

22. Imagine the following hypothetical situation:
Your superior tells you that the organization's leaders have decided to imple-ment some changes that will affect your workplace—without mentioning at that point how these changes will look like more concretely.

Do you think that these changes will involve **more** of the list below?

<div align="center">
5 point Likert response format:
1 I expect more of this: Do not agree – 5 I expect more of this: Agree fully
+ "don't know"
</div>

- freedom in how you do your job
- salary
- overtime
- power
- opportunities for promotion
- room for creativity and autonomy
- work tasks
- responsibilities
- demand for knowledge and competence
- own engagement and motivation
- demands on how you do your job
- demands on the quality of my work
- feeling of meaningfulness of your work
- employment security
- workload
- impact on what happens at your workplace

23. Assuming that you could have a say, how important would it be for you that a change of your work situation would include that…

5 point Likert response format:
1 Not at all important – 5 Very important
+ "don't know"

- you can have an impact on your salary through increased performance, skill and knowledge?
- you are more included in decision-making processes concerning your work, that is, you can decide for yourself how to do your job?
- you more than before cooperate and share responsibility with your colleagues, through teamwork?
- you and your superior exchange information, that is, you update each other on a regular basis on expectations, needs, visions, and ideas?
- you develop and educate yourself through taking part in seminars, workshops, training, etc., as a part of your work tasks?

24. Given your situation today, to what extent would the following changes at your current workplace influence your **wish to quit**?

5 point Likert response format:
1 Would **not** influence my wish to quit – 5 Would influence my wish to quit **a lot**
+ "don't know"

- Increased demands on development and competence
- More freedom in how you do your job
- Decreased opportunities for promotion
- Decreased exchange of information with your superior on ideas, wishes, needs, and expectations
- Decreased responsibilities
- Increased opportunities to influence your salary through performance
- Decreased possibilities to make your own decisions
- Decreased demands on development and competence
- Increased responsibilities
- Increased opportunities for promotion
- Increased possibilities to make your own decisions
- Decreased opportunities to influence your salary through performance
- Increased cooperation with colleagues through teamwork
- Decreased cooperation with colleagues through teamwork
- Increased exchange of information with your superior on ideas, wishes, needs, and expectations
- Less freedom in how you do your job

25. Given your situation today, to what extent would the following changes at your current workplace influence your **well-being at work**?

<div align="center">
5 point Likert response format:
1 Would **not** influence my well-being at work – 5 Would influence my well-being at work **a lot**
+ "don't know"
</div>

- Increased demands on development and competence
- More freedom in how you do your job
- Decreased opportunities for promotion
- Decreased exchange of information with your superior on ideas, wishes, needs, and expectations
- Decreased responsibilities
- Increased opportunities to influence your salary through performance
- Decreased possibilities to make your own decisions
- Decreased demands on development and competence
- Increased responsibilities
- Increased opportunities for promotion
- Increased possibilities to make your own decisions
- Decreased opportunities to influence your salary through performance
- Increased cooperation with colleagues through teamwork
- Decreased cooperation with colleagues through teamwork
- Increased exchange of information with your superior on ideas, wishes, needs, and expectations
- Less freedom in how you do your job

If you could choose…

Given your situation today and assuming that you could choose freely between job A and job B, which job would you prefer?

26. Job A: Fixed salary, that is, according to union wage rates.

    Job B: Individual salary based on engagement, initiative, performance, and responsibility.

<div align="center">
5 point Likert response format:
1 I prefer job A (fixed union wage rates) –
5 I prefer job B (individual salary based on performance)
+ "don't know"
</div>

27. <u>Job A:</u> You carry out your work tasks according to the agreements with your superior. Your superior has the overall responsibility.

   <u>Job B:</u> You make your own decisions and are part of decision-making processes. Therefore, you are expected to take on more responsibility yourself.

   <div align="center">
   5 point Likert response format:
   1 I prefer job A (not included in decision making) – 5 I prefer job B (included in decision making)
   + "don't know"
   </div>

28. <u>Job A:</u> Your work tasks are clearly delimited, you work independently while carrying out "your" tasks.

   <u>Job B:</u> Your job consists of a variety of different work tasks that have to be tackled in parallel. You work a lot in teams and are part of a working group that shares responsibility for the work everybody does.

   <div align="center">
   5 point Likert response format:
   1 I prefer job A (clearly delimited, individual work tasks) –
   5 I prefer job B (many tasks, teamwork)
   + "don't know"
   </div>

29. <u>Job A:</u> The management assumes that employees will get in touch if they are not happy.

   <u>Job B:</u> The management creates opportunities for the exchange of information, opinions, and ideas.

   <div align="center">
   5 point Likert response format:
   1 I prefer job A (the management acts more passively) –
   5 I prefer job B (the management encourages an exchange of information)
   + "don't know"
   </div>

30. <u>Job A:</u> Development and competency trainings are considered part of your work.

   <u>Job B:</u> Development and competency trainings are up to you and are not considered part of your work.

   <div align="center">
   5 point Likert response format:
   1 I prefer job A (development as work task) – 5 I prefer job B (development on top of work task)
   + "don't know"
   </div>

31. Given your situation today, how important is it for you that…

<div align="center">
5 point Likert response format:
1 Not at all important – 5 Very important
+ "don't know"
</div>

- the work you do is meaningful to you?
- you are confident about your ability to do your job?
- you can decide on your own **how** to go about doing your work?
- your impact on what happens in your department is large?

32. If you have any further opinions on the topic of "motivation and change at the workplace" or comments on the questionnaire, you are welcome to leave them here:

    _____

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