Empowerment or Disempowerment of Middle and Lower Level Managers as Efficient Model of Managing in a Manufacturing Company in Poland

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Abstract
During the field studies concerning job satisfaction and commitment, the authors observed that there were no fundamental differences between answers provided by middle and low level managers and ordinary workers, concerning determinants of these phenomena: they showed the same low level of empowerment and complained about the same items to a comparable degree.

The authors conducted the survey in a manufacturing plant with foreign investment by a worldwide operating company, located in Poland (Lower Silesia) in the Spring of 2014. The sample consisted of 81 workers, 25 administrative staff and 11 managers, thus general n=117. The chi-square test of independence, a p-value calculated by Monte Carlo simulation were used to determine whether or not and in which spheres the questioned managers differed from the workers and administrative staff. Consequently, the authors show that in conditions similar to those encountered in the analyzed manufacturing plant, centralization of power may be considerably high and managers of the middle and lower level may be more similar to workers in many respects. Next, the possible reasons for that "disempowerment" in terms of the so-called "end-of-the-pipe model" structure are given and discussed. The authors show also that some kind of remedy can be found in such situations using the simplest empowerment strategy – the so-called suggestion empowerment, as well as TQM or Lean Management practices (e.g., quality circles, 5M, TPM).

Keywords: empowerment, disempowerment, job satisfaction, managers, manufacturing, Poland

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Introduction

Locating manufacturing plants in countries where labor costs are lower than in home (mostly highly developed) markets, but which offer adequate technical culture and accessibility to the market of well-educated personnel at the same time, is a common practice in Europe. The "export" products of Poland, as a receiver of investments of this type, are, for example, car spare parts (in 2013, the export of these goods accounted for EUR 7 billion; in Poland, there are about 900 such firms in operation, whose revenues from sales reach EUR 14 billion), vehicles (production at the level of about EUR 22 billion), buses, tramcars, trains (in 2013, the factories located in Poland exported over 3.3 thousand buses, 25% of which were destined for Germany), furniture (in 2013, Poland was the third biggest exporter of furniture in Europe and ranked the fourth in the world, following China, Germany and Italy; in the same year, Poland's export of furniture accounted for EUR 6.9 billion), household equipment (Poland is the biggest manufacturer of household equipment in Europe, exporting over 85% of the appliances manufactured in the country; the value of sales abroad amounted to EUR 3.398 billion in 2013), yachts (every year Polish boatyards produce over 22 thousand yachts, of which about 6 thousand are luxury vessels; the average value of a yacht produced in Poland ranges between EUR 50 and 60 thousand) (GUS 2015).

The countries (Sweden. Holland, Germany), which are homes to the head offices of the firms that operate abroad are very often well-known for participative and involving forms of management (Wheeler, 2002), as well as a high level of empowerment of their employees. Still, the question arises whether the same forms of management are applied in the countries, where these firms locate their manufacturing plants? The multiplicity of production companies operating in Poland, which have their headquarters abroad, causes the question to acquire a considerable social importance, and – as one could rightly say – also to be of economic significance. The presented case study does not aspire to offer a "typical" case, but is designed to illustrate the situation of a specific enterprise with the head office based in Sweden. However, the authors' observations point to the fact that there are many more cases which are similar to that described in this paper. It needs underlying that apart from the will of the head offices of firms, related to introducing or not introducing the involving forms of management, the role of a determinant is played also by the inclination and mentality of workers in the country, in which the investments are located. The authors made use of a statistical analysis (the chi-square test of independence, a p-value calculated by Monte Carlo simulation) with the aim not to verify general hypotheses, but to obtain a picture of a concrete company and to support statements relating to it, which imply a relatively low level of empowerment of employees and – what is significant – a lack of differences in this respect between management and ordinary workers and other employees. In the article, possible consequences of applying such a model of managing a production company are discussed, ones that can be described in categories of the level of satisfaction with the performed job and commitment to work.

1. The managerial role in an organization and its potentially privileged position as regards empowerment in relation to executive roles

The managerial personnel, due to their special role played in enterprises, which means being a representative of the owner's interests, are naturally expected to occupy a privileged position in comparison with the other groups of employees. It is members of the management who – on the average – have higher salaries than common workers and who perform managerial functions in relation to the latter (planning, organizing, motivating, taking decisions and controlling). Possessing a better access to information, a better knowledge of company's organization, its targets and norms which are binding in it, as well as a sense of exerting an influence on the course of things, the managerial personnel hold a potentially better position from the point of view of the level of empowerment. It is for this reason that the authors decided that comparing opinions expressed by managerial personnel and by other groups of the employed in enterprises on issues which could be connected with dimensions of the phenomenon known as empowerment, would bring us closer to answering the question whether, in reality, managers are empowered to a greater degree than other groups of employees or they are not. The very analysis of managers' opinions itself would be of little reliability since it would lack any referential results in this respect.

2. Empowerment

Empowerment, in the functional sense, as a process, refers to "how the intrinsic motivation and self-efficacy of people are influenced by leadership behavior, job characteristics, organization structure, and their own needs and values" (Yukl, 2006). Empowerment is also perceived in connection with delegating authority. It is, at the same time, a state caused by the fact that superiors, in a conscious and planned (or intuitive) way, have handed part of their power (including formal and/or informal authority) over to employees who are placed on the same or a lower rung of the organizational structure (Bugdol, 2006). Empowerment is also defined as raising in employees a sense of efficacy, confidence and helping to overcome inabilities so as to motivate the inferiors to enthusiastically perform their duties (Blanchard, Carlos, Randoloph, 2003). Thus, the aim of empowerment is seen both in inner motivation, the "can do" attitude, and enthusiasm in doing one's job. The degree of empowerment is determined by its four dimensions: information relating to results obtained by the organization (organization's performance), system of rewarding based on results obtained by the organization, and the possibility of exerting an influence on decisions that remain in relation with the direction in which the organization progresses and its results (Bowen and Lawler 1995). The lowest level of empowerment is – at the same time – the so-called "suggestion empowerment", that is giving to workers a chance of expressing their suggestions and recommendations. The next level is "job commitment", at which a worker can influence the way of performing the job in their own workplace, whereas "high commitment" means an impact which the employed have on management and their involvement in processes of managing their own organizational unit, so – in other words – broad participation. In the framework accepted in the present study, empowerment reflects what meaning employees assign to their own work, their ability to perform work in a competent manner (competence), what sense of exerting an influence on the way in which they perform the work they have (self-determination), as well as regulations and resolutions concerning work in

the organization in general (impact) (Conger and Kanungo, 1988; Thomas and Velthouse, 1990).

3. Antecedents and consequences of empowerment

The factors which influence empowerment can be divided into six categories as follows: individual traits, the task environment, the social structural context, the organizational environment, structural mechanisms and leadership strategies (Barnes, 2013). Moreover, the following, in particular: task interdependence, responsibility, work for a superior who has a wide span of control, the participative climate at work, low ambiguity of tasks and roles in the organization, favor empowerment (Barnes, 2013). Yet, empowerment is not only a natural consequence of situational factors: it is sometimes used as a tool when an inappropriate attitude towards tasks performed by employees destroys effectiveness and efficiency of work (performance). Managers attempt then to achieve effectiveness and innovativeness through developing a favorable, positive attitude to work among their inferiors, as well as through building a positive vision of their company as a place of work. Also, in the situation where we come to deal with team work, which requires cooperation, empowerment turns out to be useful and valuable a tool.

In the authors' opinion, in the case of enterprises which operate in a number of markets and which have their headquarters abroad, an important factor that influences the fact whether or not empowerment is applied, and if so – to what extent it is (as it is shown, it is of a gradual character) are expectations on the part of the headquarters, regarding the role played by the given plant. It is either the typically re-creative, executive, role, most frequently – production, or it is accompanied most often by an innovative role, or still – that of a leader in certain selected projects relevant for a whole group. In the literature of the subject, the first model is referred to as the "end of the pipe", while the other one – an "integrated network" (Bartlett, Ghoshal, 1989). In the conditions of the former, a fairly natural and the most important area of managers' concern will be realization of plans in compliance with those delineated by the concern, connected with suitable cost and quality levels. In such conditions, empowerment can, in the authors' opinion, fade into the background, while the model of strict supervision and absolute primacy of current results will prevail.

Among the consequences of empowerment there are categories which cannot pass undervalued by any manager or any employer. Studies show a positive impact of empowerment on work satisfaction and effectiveness of work (performance) (Hechanova, Alampay, Franco, 2006). There exist premises to think that also organizational commitment, turnover intent and organizational citizenship are connected with application of empowerment (Hechanova, Alampay, Franco, 2006). However, it can be believed that there occurs not a simple relation of resulting and implication, but rather we come to see a circular relation between the above-mentioned factors, a feedback and multi-directional inter-relations of the circulatory and network character (the factors simultaneously determine others and are determined by them themselves).

In this place, it is worth mentioning that empowerment is treated nowadays more as a program or programs for whole organizations (empowerment programs) than individual actions of individual managers perceiving the need to introduce this tool

into life. Detailed, applicable tools in empowerment programs are the following: self-managed teams, democratic structures and processes, employee ownership of the company.

4. The case study

The examined company represents the automotive branch and is a manufacturing company which is an investment of a concern with the central head office in Stockholm (Sweden). The other production departments are located in the USA, Canada, Sweden, Germany and in China. The plant is sited in Lower Silesia (Poland) and employs about 130 people, including the administrative personnel. The firm only sporadically and to a very little extent applies methods of group work, which are typical of many management methods, e.g., TQM.

It could be thought, as it is expressed in the introduction, that managerial posts, independent of the level of management, are in a privileged position in terms of empowerment, in comparison with other posts, particularly those non-managerial ones. Our case study shows, however, that in companies, in which the "end-of-the-pipe" model is used, in which we come to deal – as regards the operational sphere – mainly with routinely executed tasks and stable technology designed abroad and implemented in countries, in which the investments of the production character are realized, the managerial personnel somehow remain at the very bottom of the organizational hierarchy and can play a solely re-creative role, here referred to as "manager as overseer". In such a situation, managers or leaders of production may only very little differ from rank and file executing workers as regards the degree of empowerment. They are indeed workers, whose duty is to see to that discipline is followed, norms are applied and concrete results are achieved. There is no space in these positions for a conceptual activity, since the production is to a high degree "programed". And it is most likely that this must be so as it conditions the effectiveness of activity.

It can be said that the low level of empowerment is an important cause behind the low level of satisfaction and affective commitment – the lack of identification with the firm and workplace, as well as insufficiency in treating it in a personal manner. It is worth mentioning that a positive relation between the level of satisfaction and involvement was observed in empirical studies (Saridakis, Torres, Johnstone, 2013). Consequences of a low level of affective commitment are serious: work is done without enthusiasm, in a solely re-creative way, it is impossible to count on actions reaching beyond standard duties, therefore activities based on workers' commitment, such as aiming at achieving a high level of quality, are difficult to be implemented. How then should the low level of satisfaction and affective commitment be dealt with in situations which are similar to that characterized above?

The figure 1 below illustrates a model framing of the situation in the examined company, which results from the authors' general observations made during the field research carried out in the company. This model can be regarded as an illustration of the conclusions relating to the situation found within the group of company's workers, which are supported by qualitative data in the experimental part of the article ("Data and method"). It is not only in a model way that the dependences between the level of empowerment and satisfaction and involvement were inserted in it, but also a set of

tools was proposed, including practices which pertain to the areas of suggestion empowerment, lean management, or TQM. They can potentially cushion the effects of the "end-of-the-pipe" model.
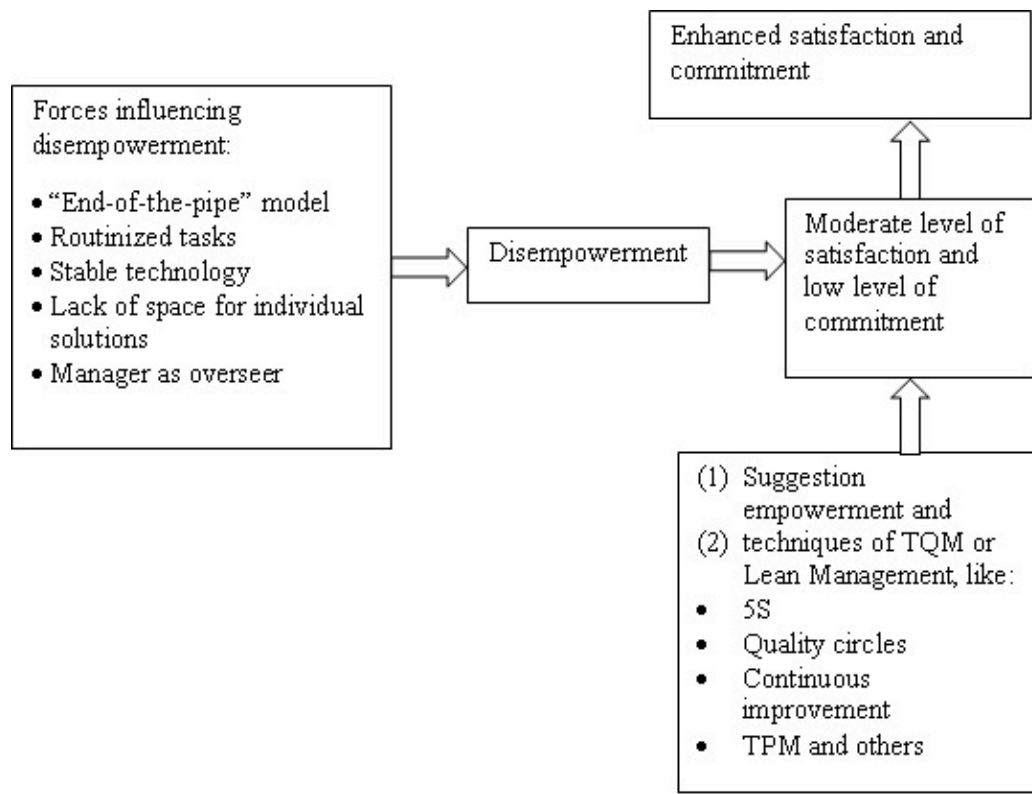

Figure 1: Relations binding empowerment, satisfaction and commitment – a model framework for the examined enterprise, together with a proposal relating to the range of application of tools which serve to raise the level of commitment.
Source: authors' own elaboration.

5. Potential role of TQM practices from the point of view of the level of workers' satisfaction

It is indicated, in the literature of the subject, that certain organizational values, such as trust and empowerment (which is a consequence of the former), are vital from the point of view of making use of the full potential of such approaches towards managing, e.g., TQM (Bugdol, 2013). The authors believe that also – in return – the problem of a low level of empowerment may be compensated through using work techniques that are based on workers' commitment, e.g., techniques included in TQM or Lean Management, which is reflected in the figure 1 presented above. Work in quality circles, especially that concerning work organization, coordination, organization of workplaces, offers an opportunity to generate such ideas and solutions that will be real and will provide a chance of being implemented. Work of teams can be directed towards these areas which are not stiffly regulated in technology, and which are the responsibility of the factory's board of managers. This can enhance workers' innovativeness, both in managerial posts and regular workers' positions, raising the level of affective commitment. As M. Bugdol's studies show (2005), TQM practices, in particular, those remaining within scope of group work and consultative styles of management, are very poorly represented in Polish production plants and

their reception by workers (in the so-called shop floor) is generally positive, although it is not a remedy to solve all problems (Glover, 2000).

6. Data and Method

All of the employed workers were asked to take part in the survey. The study was realized in October 2014, with the use of survey questionnaire (workers – Paper and Pencil Interview, managers and administration – Computer-Assisted Web Interview). All in all, the questionnaires were filled by n=117 respondents (11 managers, 25 administration workers and 81 workers).

Participants graded their answers on a five-item scale: strongly disagree, somewhat disagree, neither agree nor disagree, somewhat agree, strongly agree. The examination of the structure of answers was conducted with the use of chi-square test of independence, and a p-value calculated by Monte Carlo simulation (Mansfield, 1987, Smith, Forster, McDonald, 1996). Monte Carlo simulation was implemented because the sample size was small. If the significance level α were established as 0.05, then definitely the p-value being less than 0.05 would lead to the rejection of the null hypothesis.

Table 1: Operationalization of individual components of empowerment in the form of statements evaluated by the respondents

Components of empowerment	Statements (reference to the component of empowerment is given in italics)
"**Meaning** is the value of a work goal or purpose judged in relations to an individual's own ideals or standards. Meaning involves the perception that a task or activity is of value to oneself. Meaning is also seen as the fit between the requirements of the job tasks and one's own values, beliefs, and behaviors" (Barnes, 2013)	My team appreciate my work and I feel important in it – *belief in the significance and sense of the performed work*
"**Competence**, or self-efficacy, is an individual's belief in his or her capability to perform work activities with skill" (Barnes, 2013)	In my team we concentrate on chances and positive sides, not on problems – *belief in success and own capabilities*
"**Self-determination** is an individual's sense of having a choice of initiating and regulating actions over one's own work" (Barnes, 2013)	Workers' suggestions relating to improvement of effectiveness of the team's work are seriously taken into consideration by the management – *conviction regarding possibilities of influencing the way in which one's own work is performed*
"**Impact** is the degree to which an individual can influence strategic, administrative, or operating outcomes at work" (Barnes, 2013)	My company, in a decisive way, takes into account my goals and values – *conviction regarding an individual being able to influence the organizational system as a whole*

Source: authors' own elaboration.

The most significant question revealed by the results of the study, being an illustration of the reality of the examined enterprise, is that in none of the components of empowerment (meaning, competence, self-determination, impact) are there any statistically significant differences observed in the answers given to the questions by either workers, managerial staff or administrative personnel. According to the leading idea of this article, it could be expected that managerial personnel should perceive both their own work, its motivating character, their own capabilities of influencing the course of things, their attitudes towards work, etc., in a significantly different manner and more optimistically. Nevertheless, there is not much that differs the managerial staff from common workers as far as concerns, inclinations and hardly optimistic perception of the reality are concerned. In our opinion, this is a derivative of the low level of empowerment: the managerial staff are virtually completely similar to ordinary workers. The distribution of the answers referring to the dimensions of empowerment is presented in the four tables below, with the numbers of individual factors. Despite the fact that the factor of meaning proved to be statistically insignificant, it is worth underlining that it is solely in this dimension that managers are slightly more convinced of the significance that their own work has than ordinary

workers. The value p=0.08 could basically be regarded as significant if we were to accept a different level of this significance (α=0.1). As regards the other dimensions there are not any distinctive differences. It concerns both the "can do" attitude (prevalence of the answers in the negative and expressing indifference over those which can testify to the belief in one's own abilities and success) and the conviction that the company treats the employee in a serious way (prevalence of the negative and indifferent answers over those accepting this statement) and that it gives him/her a chance to influence the course of things (prevalence of the answers in the negative and expressing indifference over those accepting this statement, with the exception of the group of managers; still the difference statistically insignificant).

Table 2: My team appreciate my work and I feel important as part of it (statement relates to meaning)

	Strongly disagree, somewhat disagree	Neither agree nor disagree	Somewhat agree, strongly agree	Total
Managers	0	0	11	11
Administrative Staff	4	8	13	25
Workers	14	24	43	81
Total	18	32	67	117

χ^2=9.124, p=0.080
Source: authors' own calculation (SPSS).

Table 3: In my team we concentrate on chances and positive sides, not on problems (statement relates to competence)

	Strongly disagree, somewhat disagree	Neither agree nor disagree	Somewhat agree, strongly agree	Total
Managers	4	2	5	11
Administrative Staff	10	8	7	25
Workers	22	27	32	81
Total	36	37	44	117

χ^2=2.723, p=0.530
Source: authors' own calculation (SPSS).

Table 4: Suggestions offered by workers with reference to improvement of team's work effectiveness are seriously taken into account by the management (statement relates to self-determination)

	Strongly disagree, somewhat disagree	Neither agree nor disagree	Somewhat agree, strongly agree	Total
Managers	1	3	7	11
Administrative Staff	8	11	6	25
Workers	22	24	35	81
Total	31	38	48	117

χ^2=6.104, p=0.180
Source: authors' own calculation (SPSS).

Table 5: My company definitely takes into account my goals and values (statement relates to impact)

	Strongly disagree, somewhat disagree	Neither agree nor disagree	Somewhat agree, strongly agree	Total
Managers	3	5	3	11
Administrative Staff	12	7	6	25
Workers	27	37	17	81
Total	42	49	26	117

χ^2=3.076, p=0.580
Source: authors' own calculation (SPSS).

A similar situation is noticed to occur within the sphere of satisfaction which workers declare in connection with the performed work. The differences in respect of the structure of the responses provided in the cross-section of three groups of workers are not statistically vital. Generally, it can be concluded that the number of people satisfied with the performed work is constantly higher than the sum of those who are

not contented or do not have their opinion on the issue; yet, the level is still hardly satisfactory. This situation is illustrated in the contingency table inserted below.

Table 6: Generally speaking, I am satisfied with this job (statement relates to job satisfaction)

	Strongly disagree, somewhat disagree	Neither agree nor disagree	Somewhat agree, strongly agree	Total
Managers	1	4	6	11
Administrative Staff	7	5	13	25
Workers	9	16	56	81
Total	17	25	75	117

χ^2=6.324, p=0.190
Source: authors' own calculation (SPSS).

The following two statements concern the emotional relation with the firm and the personal meaning from the point of view of the respondents, which is directly linked to the so-called affective commitment. Still, the last statement reflects the so-called normative commitment. The former means – in the simplest framework – the will to take up such a job, taking interest in its content and resulting involvement in its performance. On the other hand, normative commitment, to a great extent results from the need to reciprocate loyalty towards the employer and also from the subjective treatment of the employee by the employer who, among others, invests in the development of the former (Allen, Meyer 1990). As we can see, both affective commitment and the normative commitment remain on a low level in the examined company and do not display any differences at all through the cross-section of the surveyed groups: work does not hold any greater emotional meaning to any of the examined groups of employees. Similarly, they feel only very little obliged to be loyal towards the firm in which they are employed.

Table 7: I feel emotionally connected with the firm for which I work (statement relates to affective commitment)

	Strongly disagree, somewhat disagree	Neither agree nor disagree	Somewhat agree, strongly agree	Total
Managers	4	3	4	11
Administrative Staff	8	8	9	25
Workers	20	37	24	81
Total	32	48	37	117

χ^2=2.496, p=0.657
Source: authors' own calculation (SPSS).

Table 8: The firm for which I am working at present holds a personal significance for me (statement relates to affective commitment)

	Strongly disagree, somewhat disagree	Neither agree nor disagree	Somewhat agree, strongly agree	Total
Managers	5	4	2	11
Administrative Staff	12	8	5	25
Workers	26	41	14	81
Total	43	53	21	117

χ^2=3.319, p=0.503
Source: authors' own calculation (SPSS).

Table 9: One of the reasons why I continue to work here is that I feel morally committed to the company (statement relates to normative commitment)

	Strongly disagree, somewhat disagree	Neither agree nor disagree	Somewhat agree, strongly agree	Total
Managers	6	2	3	11
Administrative Staff	12	9	4	25
Workers	34	31	16	81
Total	52	42	23	117

χ^2=2.019, p=0.768
Source: authors' own calculation (SPSS).

7. Conclusions and recommendations

The case study presented in this article, of a manufacturing plant which belongs to the automotive branch and which is localized in Lower Silesia in Poland, makes it possible to formulate the following synthetic conclusions:
1. In production enterprises having their head offices outside the country where the investment is located there occur cases of managing based on the "end-of-the-pipe" model, in which the managerial personnel of lower level basically do not differ from ordinary workers as regards the level of empowerment, which should itself be defined as low.
2. Disempowerment appears to be the preferred model of managing for the examined company (and, as it can be inferred, also for many comparable enterprises having similar characteristics).
3. Disempowerment appears to be so effective a model that at present there are no attempts undertaken to apply a higher level of empowerment of workers.
4. Job satisfaction remains on a moderate level, which can prove that the lack of empowerment can have its source also in the lack of workers' expectations regarding its introduction.
5. Affective commitment and normative commitment of employees of the company remain on a low level and are apparently connected with a rather instrumental-utilitarian treatment of the employed.

6. In the authors' opinion, to a certain extent, the low level of commitment ought to pose an issue of concern to managers, since it can cause disloyalty, a higher level of absence from work, or an unfavorable climate at work which would result in poorer results achieved by the company.
7. The authors can recommend application of the following two groups of solutions, which should contribute to a change in the level of commitment:
8.
   a. Application of empowerment on the first, lowest level, the so-called suggestion empowerment,
   b. Application of methods of team work and inventive techniques within the TQM system or approaches, such as Lean Management, which liberate initiatives and creative approaches, as well as broaden the scope and the sense of freedom of choice in situations, where a relatively "closed" production-logistic system in itself does not offer such a freedom.

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