Submission to the 41st EIBA conference
Track 7: International HRM and cross-cultural management
Competitive Session

"Trust but verify" – empowerment under control

Abstract: The purpose of the study is to increase the understanding of employee empowerment in a transition economy. As employee empowerment has been developed in the West and thus reflects the Western cultural characteristics, there is a need to examine its adaptability in other contexts. This paper discusses how historical and cultural features impact the perceptions of managers and employees on empowerment in a transition economy. The study is based on an embedded single-case study of a Finnish MNC operating in six cities in Russia. It adopts a qualitative approach by interviewing 85 managers and employees. The findings are discussed in the light of Russian proverbs: trust, showing initiatives, and attitude to mistakes. The results of the study emphasize the influence of historical and cultural elements on the behaviour of organisational actors. It contributes to the empowerment literature by studying empowerment in a non-Western context and concentrating on perceptions of both managers and employees. The findings identify the role of control and trust in the supervisor-subordinate relationship being crucial in empowerment by showing that control is an inevitable part of any leadership practice and accepted also by employees, and that manager's trust to employee increases his psychological empowerment.

INTRODUCTION

Employee empowerment is a management concept that has gained popularity among both academics and practitioners of the management field during the last 30 years (Conger and Kanungo, 1988; Spreitzer, 1995; Thomas and Velthouse, 1990). Empowerment 'entails the delegation of authority to the lower level in the organization, where a competent decision can be made' (Conger&Kanungo, 1988). As companies are faced with competitive demands for lower costs, higher performance and more flexibility, they have increasingly turned to employee empowerment to enhance their performance (Spreitzer and Doneson, 2005). Employee empowerment initiatives enhance employee performance, well-being and positive attitudes and thus help develop a more creative, interested and therefore more productive workforce (Maynard et al., 2012).

Employee empowerment, as many other management concepts, was developed in the West and thus reflects the characteristics of the Western culture (Michailova, 2002). The applicability of employee empowerment in different cultural environments, like in a transition economy, has been questioned. This research examines employee empowerment in Russia, which is a major transition economy. Russia is a significant economic power in the world as the world's largest country with over 140 million inhabitants, well-educated labor supply and vast natural resources (Fey and Shekshnia, 2011, Puffer and McCarthy, 2011). As Holden and Vaiman (2013) state, 'Russia is a country of considerable geopolitical importance: just as in Soviet times what is decided in the Kremlin often has worldwide repercussions'. Although the possibility to use the full potential of all employees would be beneficial for MNCs and local companies operating in Russia, in order to perform successfully in the global economy, the cultural elements of the environment, however, do not support the implementation of

empowerment (Fey 2008, McCarthy et al., 2008; Michailova 2002). As Fey puts it, involving employees fully in a Russian organization is indeed the greatest management challenge in Russia today (Fey, 2008).

Empowerment has been studied from various perspectives, either focusing on empowerment through organisational structures and policies, or empowerment on the individual level. There has been, however, a limited amount of research that has looked at empowerment in various cultural environments, although a number of scholars, such as Spreitzer (2008), Seibert et al. (2004; 2011), and Maynard et al. (2012) have called for future research on empowerment in culturally distinct geographic regions. In addition, earlier studies on employee empowerment have been concentrating mainly on antecedents to or outcomes of empowerment, but there has been a limited emphasis in empirical research on employees' and managers' perceptions and experiences of empowerment, in order to study the nature and content of empowerment and to identify possible new dimensions of empowerment that current definitions do not capture. From a methodological point of view, positivist research approaches have dominated the previous research, whereas alternative research methods that are especially appropriate to identify the unique experiences of individuals and to capture the contextual embeddedness of a phenomenon, have received scant attention (Foster-Fishman, 1998). Finally, there have been calls to study whether change has occurred concerning cultural traits in Russia (Puffer anf McCarthy, 2011), to which this study aims to give further insights.

Drawing on these shortcomings of previous research, this study aims at providing an in-depth understanding on the perceptions and experiences of empowerment in a transition economy. More specifically, the impact of historical and cultural features on perceptions will be discussed with the use of proverbs relating to trust, showing initiatives and making mistakes.

The question will be explored by conducting a qualitative case study in Russian companies, acquired by a Finnish MNC during the years 1998-2006 in five cities in Russia. The paper is structured as follows. I will first discuss the empowerment definition and literature based on various perspectives. I will then describe the case company and methodological approach. Finally, I will present the empirical results with discussion of the findings.

EMPOWERMENT

There are two basic perspectives that contemporary management scholars have used while studying empowerment: the social structural perspective and the psychological perspective. The social structural perspective refers to organisational policies, practices and structures that grant employees a greater freedom to make decisions and influence on their work. Seibert et al. (2011) concluded that the practices that have been consistently identified in the literature as empowering employees include open information sharing, decentralization of power, participative decision-making, extensive training and contingent compensation. Instead of focusing on managerial practices that share power with employees at all levels, the psychological perspective is focused on how employees experience their work. Conger and Kanungo (1988) argued that empowerment should be viewed as a motivational construct, meaning to enable rather than simply to delegate. They defined empowerment as a 'process of enhancing feelings of self-efficacy among organizational members through the identification of conditions that foster powerlessness and through their removal by both formal organizational practices and informal techniques of providing efficacy information.' Spreitzer (1997) defined empowerment consisting of four dimensions as follows: *Meaning* involves a fit between the needs of one's work role and one's beliefs, values and behaviours; *Competence* refers to self-efficacy specific to one's work, or a belief in one's capacity to

perform work activities with skill; *Self-determination* is a sense of choice in initiating and regulating one's actions, and finally, *Impact* is the degree to which one can influence strategic, administrative or operating outcomes at work. Spreitzer (2008) argues that a complete understanding of empowerment requires the integration of both perspectives, social-structural and psychological perspectives, which will be followed in this study.

In addition to the social structural perspective and psychological perspective, empowerment has been studied from a critical point of view. Critical perspective emphasizes the contradictions of employee empowerment, namely, that while the language of empowerment promises the decentralization of power, practice limits the transfer of power to subordinates (Appelbaum et al., 1999). The failure of delivering the promised benefits of empowerment is attributed to the traditional management systems and their contradictions with the philosophy on empowerment (Psoinos and Smithson, 2002). Empowerment depends on the ability of the manager to accept the potential loss of control inherent in sharing power (Mills and Ungson, 2003). It has also been stated that employees may resist empowerment as they fear the increased levels of responsibility and accountability (Johnsson, 1994).

There are a few studies on empowerment that have been conducted in non-Western context. In these studies the cultural dimension of power distance has received considerable attention among researchers. The studies have been conducted in countries like China (Hui et al. 2004), India and Poland (Robert et al., 2000), using quantitative methods, mainly Spreitzer's (1995) four-dimensional measure of empowerment. The results have shown that empowerment had less effect on job satisfaction in high power distance culture than in low power distance culture (Robert et al., 2000; Hui, 2004), and that empowerment in high power distance culture resulted in weak performance (Eylon and Au, 1999). The empowerment studies on Russia

show that involving employees in a Russian organisation meets obstacles (Fey, 2008; Fey and Shekshnia, 2011; Michailova, 2002), which include one-man authority, anti-individualism and dependence, hierarchical organisational structures, as well as lack of sharing information and knowledge (Michailova, 2002). To sum up, the previous research on empowerment in non-Western context indicates that the outcomes of empowerment have not been identical to the outcomes found in the Western culture, which calls for more research on empowerment in different cultural and institutional contexts in order to contribute to the body of knowledge on empowerment.

STUDY APPROACH AND METHODOLOGY

The study has been conducted using qualitative case study method in order to provide a rich contextual description. The main purpose is not to generate law-like explanations, but to understand the particular (Welch et al., 2011). The study applies interpretive perspective that gives priority to showing patterns and connections rather than to linear reasoning or causality (Charmaz, 2006). It uses an embedded, single-case design, meaning that within one company there are subunits (Yin, 2014). The case company is a Finnish MNC that operates in seven countries and has 6.500 employees in Europe. The company has been operating in Finland for over 100 years and in the Russian market for over 50 years. The company has six subsidiaries in Russia: in Moscow, Moscow region, St. Petersburg, Rostov-on-Don, Yekaterinburg and Kazan. The subsidiaries are either brownfield acquisitions or greenfield investments. In brownfield acquisitions the Finnish MNC acquired part of an existing local company and in greenfield investments the MNC founded a new company with local partners. In both cases the local management and part of personnel were transferred to the new subsidiary of the MNC. This was considered important by the MNC as the business is very local by character

and therefore the management also needs to be local in order to manage the business successfully. Hence, although the Russian companies are subsidiaries of a Finnish MNC, they are managed locally by local managing director and the whole personnel consist of local employees. Additionally, majority of the people, including top management, don't speak any foreign languages nor have previously worked in Western companies. The case company is one of the biggest Finnish operators in the Russian market, which together with the wide geographical expansion will offer a rich source of information for the study. I have been working for the company for a couple of years, which provided the access to the company. Table 1 provides basic information about the subsidiaries in Russia.

The companies in Russia work in close cooperation, and the managing directors form together the Russian management board, where they discuss current business questions, share best practices and decide on common policies to be implemented in the Russian market. Thus they share common guidelines and practices concerning all business functions, including human resources practices. One of the most important ways to manage employees is the performance management system according to which each employee has a discussion twice a year regarding his new targets for the coming period and an evaluation of his performance during the past period (performance and development discussion). These discussions, which provide a tool for empowering employees, have been conducted in each Russian company for several years. The Russian managers and supervisors attend common trainings, where different empowering leadership practices are discussed. Also, there is a constant sharing of best practices between representatives of the Finnish mother company as well as from other countries in Europe within different business functions.

Altogether 85 in-depth semi-structured interviews were conducted in different cities during May 2013 – April 2014. My unique access to the Russian companies provided me the access to unique material, and also the possibility to have as many interviews I considered necessary. I wanted to have multiple views from each of the subsidiaries in order to have comparisons between different units and areas but this part of the research findings is not within the scope of this paper. The interview guide was prepared based on the themes used in the literature, for example in Spreitzer's (1995) psychological empowerment dimensions. The challenge with the term 'empowerment' is in the translation of the word in Russian or Finnish language, as there is no equivalent word either in Russian or Finnish. Therefore the subject was discussed using related concepts, such as decision-making or possibility to influence. The interviews were conducted with representatives of different employee categories: top management, middle management and office employees as well as expatriates. With each interviewee the interviews were conducted in native language, either Russian or Finnish. The interviews lasted 1-1,5 hours. All except two interviews, by the request of the interviewees, were tape-recorded and transcribed verbatim. The quotations from interviews have been translated to English. In the research findings the position, gender and age of the interviewee for each quotation have been shown, as they indicate the uniformity of the perceptions.

FINDINGS

The research findings will be discussed in the light of the Russian proverbs used by the interviewees. Proverbs can be defined as 'a short, generally known sentence of the folk which contains wisdom, truth, morals, and traditional views in a metaphorical, fixed, and memorisable form and which is handed down from generation to generation' (Mieder, 1993). Russian language is rich with thousands of proverbs and sayings. Russian researcher of

paremiology (study of proverbs) Grigory Permyakov claimed that every adult Russian language speaker knows no fewer that 800 proverbs, proverbial expressions, popular literary quotations and other forms of clichés (Permyakov, 1989). As such, proverbs reflect historical and cultural features of a nation.

The cultural features of Russia, especially high power-distance, uncertainty avoidance and collectivistic environment, do not support the implementation of empowerment practices. High power distance illustrates that throughout Russian history, people were accustomed to centralized decision making (Elenkov, 1998). Russian people accept the unequal distribution of power and indicate wish for strong leader to make the decisions and take care of them (Ketz de Vries, 2001). Autocratic leaders have been seen as delivering extraordinary results, demonstrating superior ability, being released from the rules, being caregivers to the common people, and acting assertively (Puffer and McCarthy, 2011). Autocratic leadership style also indicates that the leader directs and controls all activities without participation from the subordinates. Based on the high uncertainty avoidance, the compliance with rules has been rewarded, while taking risks has been discouraged and even punished (Puffer and Shekshnia, 1996). This has resulted in the average Russian employee being reluctant to take initiative (Fey et al. 1999). In the traditional Russian society, people were taught to subordinate themselves and be loyal to the group, and individuals who tried to make themselves better than the group were looked at with suspicion and seen as taking away the rightful share of others (Elenkov, 1998; Puffer and Shekshnia, 1996). Individualistic traits, such as achievement striving, ambition, and initiative were considered to be socially undesirable and destructive for group harmony (Puffer, 1994). The norm was to be loyal to the group, seek protection in it, and avoid standing out and challenging the standard way of doing things (Puffer, 1994). To conclude, all these historical and cultural elements have resulted in

employees' reluctance to show initiative and take responsibility, which make practicing empowerment challenging in a Russian environment. Next I will discuss the interview findings using proverbs illustrating three cultural features described above: trust (vs. control), showing initiatives and attitude to mistakes.

Trust but verify

The interviews showed that managers want to verify and control subordinates' performance. The proverb 'trust but verify' (doveryai, no proveryai) was used by many managerial interviewees. Each of the 65 managers considered controlling of employees very important. The importance of control was illustrated by the following discussion:

> *Interviewer: What are the main tasks of a manager?*
> *Interviewee: Besides control?*

The manager's reply clearly expressed his view that control was by far the most important task of a manager.

Based on the interviews, control is implemented daily and weekly. Managers think that as part of their tasks are implemented through subordinates, they need to control subordinates because they as managers are responsible for the results in front of the company management. The control is needed in order to avoid mistakes, get the needed result, complete the task in time, be sure that the person goes to the right direction, and makes the right steps.

> *I like to control the situation; leader needs to know what is happening around him everywhere. I need to control because I am responsible for the result of their work, and my own result. I am aware of all questions, I control their implementation, schedules, give tasks. (Project manager, male, 31 years)*

> *Control is always needed, then you know that it will be implemented. If from the top is asked, then you always know how things are going. When you participate then you know. You control at least once a week if the task is long, or the next*

> *day if the task takes a week. If you don't control, there is no interest. It is participation more than control, you show that to your employees. Employees see that you participate and try to implement the work better. You have to know details. Employees expect advice from me, there fore I need to manage all. (Service Director, male, 43 years)*

As the above quotation illustrates, control is a sign to employees that manager is interested in the work performance. Control represents manager's participation in employee's work performance and support more than control, as also the following quotation shows:

> *Control of all processes in constant. I also work with each employee regularly, not just sign papers and make decisions. I have to know the problem from inside, I need to know all problems. It is important to control. It doesn't mean that you don't trust. Manager is responsible for the whole work, and when employee feels this, he feels support. I cannot verify everything but I'm aware of all problems. Subordinates know that all is under control. We discuss and decide all together. Even if I know that specialist is very good, but situations change, it is not control, it is cooperation. It is comfortable for all to work in cooperation. But you need to know who is doing what. I don't control by points, it is constant process. We cooperate all the time. (Chief accountant, female, 52 years)*

In some companies there is even an electronic program for controlling the fulfilment of tasks the manager has given to subordinates. In one company this program is called SKIP (Sistema kontrolya ispolnenij poruchenii). The manager puts the tasks he wants the employee to implement to the program and follows the implementation of the task through the program. The program is used to control daily tasks. The employees called the task received through SKIP as skipovy tasks. The need to start using such a system is explained as follows by the managing director of the company:

> *We put tasks in skip when they emerge. In Russia without control unfortunately nothing happens. Here to control business and to manage business, are in practice synonyms, who doesn't control, he doesn't manage. People also expect control, if they don't see this, then they don't work in a qualitative way and quickly. It relaxes people, they require control. I have tried earlier other ways, but without control there is low self discipline in Russia. Less than 20 % of people are self disciplinary. In Finland it is probably the opposite. Second thing is the laziness in Russian culture, extra creativity, in the beginning they do nothing, then quickly think how to achieve the result quickly with low self disciplinary. This kind of combination requires control. Not only for the result*

> *but to give him a command to start fulfilling the task, check in the middle if he goes to the right direction and at the end, if he achieved. If in Finland you need to control once, in Russia it is minimum three times. The lower the status, the more often control is needed (Managing director, male, 43 years).*

Employees seem to accept control. 'Of course manager needs to control, he is a manager!' Control should also exist, as employee cannot by himself always evaluate the situation, as the following quotation illustrates:

> *Control is needed because it gives discipline, helps to put priorities in a right way. Manager also sees the amount of work the subordinate implements, what kind of tasks, where he goes. So that for performance evaluation it would be understood what was done and which results were achieved. (Sales person, female, 35 years)*

Employees felt that when manager controls less, it is a question of trust. Often employees feel that they want to ask their manager to verify their task, if the task is complicated and responsible. In the control literature, trust is considered as opposite to control. The interviews showed that trust and control are not in contradiction in Russia. It was clearly stated by both employees and managers that without trust there would not be a working relationship.

> *The more I trust the person, the less I control. As soon as they show that they manage their work that I can trust on them, immediately the level of control decreases. (Production director, male, 44 years)*

It seems that trusting subordinates means controlling them less, but control is anyhow needed, trust does not eliminate the need for control.

> *Control is needed, as people are lazy by nature. I give subordinates a huge freedom but at least once a week I should find out where he is going, in which point he is now. Level of control depends on personal characteristics of a person, mentality. One can be competent but his character is that he likes to drink coffee, have a cigarette. (Manager of technical service, male, 46 years)*

Employees also reported that when manager controls them less, they feel that they are trusted.

> *I think my manager trusts, if she didn't, she would control more. (Engineer, female, 28 years)*

Employees felt that they are trusted as manager delegates them tasks. It was also related to competencies:

> *Trust in employee is important. If he is employed, then his professional abilities are not in doubt. (Finance specialist, female, 26 years)*

Initiative is punished

In Russia everyone knows the saying 'initiative is punished' (iniciativa nakazuema). Also in the subsidiaries each interviewee was aware of this saying. In all subsidiaries it was, however, reported that initiatives are welcomed. In the group level there had been a campaign for demonstrating initiatives which probably also had influenced the attitude of interviewees. There were some hesitations, however, from the side of managers concerning initiatives:

> *It is welcomed but depending on what kind of a task was given. Initiative needs to be agreed with me, because it can be something additional and lead to bad result. (Project manager, male, 42 years)*

One interviewee explained the meaning of the proverb 'initiative is punished' that was popular in Soviet times. It was explained by the importance of implementation; if employee only expresses initiatives, it is not accepted, but he should also be ready to implement it:

> *It is a principle of pioneer organisations: if you don't like this, criticize, if you criticize, then suggest, if you suggest, then implement. This is very good .We all were pioneers. If you don't like something, don't be silent, but talk. Once someone criticized a document that it was not written in a right way, I returned it immediately with a question how to correct it. (Service Director, female, 41 years)*

As the above quotation describes, showing initiatives means that person should be ready to implement them, which automatically leads to weakening attempts to show initiatives. This explanation was confirmed by other employees as well; people are afraid of showing initiatives as they will be required to implement them. Also it was emphasized that it is important to agree with the manager the possible new initiatives. The comments of managers

clearly show that the need to control employees is also reflected in their comments of employees' initiatives; initiatives need to be first agreed with them.

Mistakes are different

In the Russian literature fear for making mistakes have been seen as obstacles for people taking more responsibility of their work. Mistakes have been severely punished and people are hesitant to try new things while being afraid of making mistakes and thus getting punishments. The interviews showed that mistakes were usually analysed and discussed in order to prevent them in the future.

> *Mistakes can happen, I support the saying 'the one that does not work, does not make mistakes either'. Every mistake is a consequence of some activity, you need to see if the person learns from mistakes. There are no ideal people, all make mistakes. I take mistakes normally, it is important to point out the mistake and give possibility to correct it and learn from this mistake and in the future then do different mistakes. (Managing director, male, 42 years)*

In each subsidiary it was considered important to confess mistakes and discuss them inside the department and correct them. The learning point was emphasized in all subsidiaries; it is important to learn from mistakes and not to repeat them in the future.

> *Mistakes need to be confessed and corrected. If person does not do that, confess and correct, then it is not needed to work in the company. To do so that in the future there would not be such mistakes. The higher the self-evaluation, the more difficult it is for a person to confess mistake. But it is about the quality of feedback. At the end it is not about making person confess but making him do the right way. Most often people take feedback and confess mistakes. (Project Director, male, 38 years)*

It was emphasized that it is considered important to find out who is guilty in order to define his weak points and to do actions to correct mistakes. It was mentioned that making mistakes is normal for human beings and explained by many interviewees by the proverb 'the one who does not work, does not make mistakes either'. The proverb 'mistakes are different' (oshibka

oshibke rozn) describes the attitudes towards mistakes. If the mistake is something that could have not have been expected, the reaction is more accepting, but if the mistake could have been seen in planning, but was not taken into account, then it is considered more seriously. Also if the mistake takes place once and considers a new task, the reaction is accepting, but if the mistake is repeated several times, then more serious actions are taken. It is important to give feedback for the mistake as was explained by one interviewee:

> *If the manager doesn't punish for the mistake, then there can be a feeling that it is not a mistake at all and those can be done' (Sales Director, male, 52 years).*

In the subsidiaries there were clear differences between the subsidiaries (and cities) how mistakes are treated. In some companies, especially in the regions, typical Russian ways of punishment were in use:

> *Generally, no one has been dismissed so far, but we punish. We declare a warning. For example once we declared a warning and when they corrected all the mistakes we wrote an administrative order of cancelling the warning. Now there are three persons under warning, they should improve during three months, and then we cancel the warning. If they don't improve, then we will look at differently the prolongation of their employment contract. Here it is a good instrument for motivation. We inform all employees by email about declared warnings. They know that a certain person has a warning. Someone may think that this happened because of him and he might help this person. Or just won't make himself such mistakes. That kind of punishments we have. Salaries we don't deprive, it is against the law. Only after performance discussion we paid less bonus as employees were not in time, but then we paid bonuses when the project was completed earlier. (HR manager, female, 59 years)*

The interviews showed that attitudes to mistakes in the subsidiaries reflect the echoes from the past. Mistakes need to be confessed, analysed and corrected. In more serious mistakes also some subsidiaries used punishments.

DISCUSSION

The goal of the study was to shed light on the perceptions of empowerment in the Russian context. The main focus was to discuss the impact of historical and cultural features on the perceptions of empowerment among both managers and employees. The findings were discussed in the light of Russian proverbs or sayings that were related to trust, initiatives and mistakes and were also frequently used by the interviewees. The proverb 'trust but verify' illustrates the need of managers to constantly control the performance of subordinates. The need to control was explained by the ultimate responsibility of the manager over the tasks, by showing support to employees, avoiding mistakes, or ensuring the schedule. Although there is a certain connection between trust and control in a sense that when manager trusts subordinates, he controls them less, but trust does not anyhow eliminate the need for control. Employees feel trusted when manager controls them less and this feeling of trust also motivates them. Nevertheless, employees found the control from manager's side as one of the main tasks of the manager and therefore accept it. The saying 'initiative is punished' is well known in Russia and often understood literally, although some of the interviewees explained that punishable is showing initiative without implementation. It seems that it is the requirement for implementation of the initiative that might hinder the activity in showing them. Throughout the Russian history mistakes have been taken seriously and punishments for mistakes may have been severe. The saying 'mistakes are different' emphasizes the importance of the type and size of the mistake. It is important to confess mistakes, discuss them and finally learn from them in order to prevent their occurrence in the future. In some of the subsidiaries punishments still played a role in discussing mistakes. It is likely that these attitudes to mistakes have an influence on the readiness of employees to make decisions and take responsibility for their work.

The findings of the present study show that empowerment in a non-Western context looks different than in a western context. An important finding and contribution to the empowerment literature is the role of control and trust in the manager-subordinate relationship. Control and trust are not in contradiction in Russia, but exist simultaneously. The manager can both trust and control the employee. In empowerment literature, trust is an alternative to traditional control mechanisms (Spreitzer and Mishra, 1999). In controlling the work of people, there are two phenomena that can be observed, monitored and counted: behaviour and the output, which results from behaviour, thus leading to behaviour control and output control (Ouchi, 1977). Output-based control allows employees to achieve their goals as they see appropriate while being accountable for results, whereas behaviour-based control concerns supervision and monitoring of employees' activities that managers consider important. This research shows that the behaviour-based control applies largely in Russia. In addition, trust has been suggested to be a critical psychological state that determines the success of the empowerment process (Mayer et al., 1995). This study confirms the importance of trust so that when employee feels trusted by manager, he is motivated and thus more empowered, which indicates that trust is one of the dimensions of psychological empowerment.

Recently the importance of context in the research concerning Russia has been emphasized (Dixon et al., 2014; Fey and Sheksnia, 2011; Holden and Vaiman, 2013; Koveshnikov et al., 2011). This research also confirms these findings. The historical, institutional and cultural features significantly impact the behaviour of the organisational actors in the society. This study also confirmed that cultural values are deeply rooted in the minds of people and change slowly. Russia has been undergoing fundamental institutional change for over 20 years already, and a new generation is leading companies now. This is the generation that

represented the young generation in the literature of the 90's, the generation that was so eager to accept Western management practices in that time. Although western management practices have been and are implemented, they are adapted and they carry the Russian flavour. The present study contributes to the literature by providing a thick description of this Russian flavour on empowerment.

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	St. Petersburg	Moscow region	Moscow city	Yekaterin-burg	Kazan	Rostov-on-Don
Year of foundation	1997	2003	2005	2006	2006	2007
Number of employees	1000	600	45	100	40	160

Table 1. Basic information about the companies in Russia