

## **Empowerment and partnership – is it possible in the academic library?**

The paper presents the idea of empowerment and partnership in the academic library. Some differences between classic and empowerment management and a few most important features of leadership are also pointed out in the study. Difficulties as well as benefits of participation in an academic library are shown in the second part of the paper. There are many areas in the academic library where empowerment and partnership could be successfully implemented in the management process.

There is an old dictum saying that geniuses are able to learn from the mistakes of others, intelligent people from their own, and slow-witted people will simply never learn. It would be logical to assume, that since other people's mistakes can be beneficial to us, their knowledge, if reached for properly, should be even more valuable. That issue, i.e. the utilization of the co-workers' knowledge in the processes of library management, is the subject matter of this paper.

The perception of leadership evolved extensively in the last century. The Taylorian concept of machinist organisation put the leader in the central position, from which he could oversee, manage and supervise the stability of the processes in an organisation. The concept of an organisation seen as a living organism also attributed the greatest importance to the leader who was the "brain" in control of all the bodily functions. Those models served their purpose in the stable reality of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. However, as organisations face the changeable, often turbulent environment of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, the system's practical efficacy has greatly diminished. It seems that the solution lies in shifting the management model towards empowerment and partnership in the relationship between leaders and their subordinates who should be able to participate – directly or not – in decision making processes. Certain elements of this approach are already successfully being implemented in a growing number of commercial institutions. It is often emphasized, that a leader who chooses to surrender some of his authority in favour of the employees in fact gains power in the process<sup>1</sup>. Indeed, the greater the autonomy, the broader the scope of communal control which is by far more effective than any managerial supervision, more independence allows the

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<sup>1</sup> Sikorski Cz. *Ludzie nowej organizacji: wzory kultury organizacyjnej wysokiej tolerancji niepewności*. Łódź, Wydaw. UŁ, 1998 p. 86

employees to appreciate their genuine input into the functional effectiveness of their organisation.

Academic libraries, whose organisational structure has for centuries remained highly complex and strictly hierarchical in nature, are now facing the necessity to transform the stable, traditional employee relationship towards greater flexibility and more varied operation. Is it possible, and if so - to what extent, to delegate power in the specific environment of an academic library? This paper attempts to address this and other similar issues as a voice in a broader discussion, for there is no doubt that the problem of empowerment involves numerous dangers not thoroughly discussed herein.

### **Why does the conventional method of library management need to be altered?**

The hierarchical system of the relations between the superior and the subordinates still predominates the reality of academic libraries, both in respect to formal issues: decision making and subordination as well as emotional relations: the distance separating those on different levels in the hierarchy. In this type of a structure the management is responsible for planning and organisation (via detailed instructions), coordination, adjustment and control, while the staff is expected to follow and carry out the instructions. Communication takes place vertically and usually in only one direction (downwards), those in charge are often unaware of the library users' actual needs – needs that are best recognised by the subordinates who directly handle the information-library tasks. As the superior becomes overburdened with the decision-making tasks and overly involved in the management duties, his focus will be limited to the library's current condition rather than the long-term, strategic considerations. On the other hand, subordinates who are merely informed of the needed and implemented changes but do not participate in their planning – often tend to be distrustful and do not understand their causes or rationale, which leads to reluctance, passiveness or even resistance. As they are not directly responsible for a given activity's implementation (which lies solely with the department's executive) may lead to their lesser involvement in the process and attempts to minimize the effort needed to complete certain tasks. Lack of shared responsibility and democratisation in the library also means weaker identification with the organisation and fragmentary perception of work, seen either through the prism of the given division or simply the currently performed tasks. Furthermore, a vertical organisational structure causes significant delays in the information flow, puts it in danger of distortion, leads to its filtering, whether intended or not, at every level of the hierarchy, hinders the processes of quick response to the varying environment, decreases the flexibility and dynamics of the structures.

In a hierarchically organised library authority is derived mainly from the currently held position, title, experience and number of subordinates, rather than the actual leadership competence and ability to manage people and tasks.

The hierarchical organisational structure and the executive distance functioned fairly well in the last century with the consent of both the superiors and the subordinates. The subordinates were quite content – and sadly in many cases still are – with the stability and security gained at the expense of independence. This phenomenon (by no means limited to the library environment) is explained by Cz. Sikorski by the Polish mentality still influenced by the remnants of the real socialism. Shyness, submissiveness and the ability to blend in, which guaranteed stability and security, became the ultimate virtues, and any attempts to change this “culture of inertia” is a task of great difficulty<sup>2</sup> and poses quite a challenge for the employees and executives of academic libraries. A challenge which has to be faced.

### **Leadership – yes, but of what sort?**

In the face of the constantly changing environment in which a modern academic library has to operate, i.e. the continuously increasing pace of technological development, the evolution of higher education and the methods of scholarly communication, as well as of the methods of providing information-library services to the ever more demanding and impatient users, it seems that libraries have no alternative but to develop towards employee participation. D.E. Riggs stresses the necessity of defining the roles and functions of library executive bodies in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. The focus in modern information-library services falls on ‘leadership’ rather than traditional ‘management’<sup>3</sup>. Table 1 presents the most characteristic cultural features of the traditional system and the creative, empowerment-based method of library administration.

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<sup>2</sup> Ibid, p. 104

<sup>3</sup> Riggs D. E. *The crisis and opportunities in library leadership* „Journal of Library Administration” 2001 Vol. 32 no. 3/4 p. 6-7

	classic library management	creative leadership and empowerment
Executive	planning	strategic thinking
	administration	support
	organisation	co-organisation
	direction and supervision	delegation of power in terms of the current activity
	adjustment	motivation
	control and supervision	trust and truthfulness
	focus on structures and functions	focus on people, their capital and tasks
	questions: how and when?	questions: what and why?
	acceptance of the status quo	acceptance of the challenges and changes
	proper implementation of processes	implementation of proper (needed) processes
Employee	following executive instructions	participation in the formulation of instructions and following them
	focus on performing tasks	performing tasks and initiative in terms of development of the institution
	work in a group	work in a team
	reliance on the experience, skills and knowledge	recognising the need for permanent training
	trained to efficiently perform tasks	also trained to be a leader
Structure	vertical, complex hierarchy	flattened structure, elements of network and matrix structure
	discipline and order	openness, greater independence in terms of performance and opinion-making

Table 1 The most important features of two administrative methods in an academic library: classic management and empowerment (author's analysis)

As confirmed by E.B Zybert's study on the instances of mobbing in libraries (of various types), the predominating administrative styles in such institutions are still the firm management method and the executive force approach, while the democratised style remains in minority (indicated by only 13.3% of respondents)<sup>4</sup>.

It is this author's belief that in academic libraries of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, the main weight of executive approach must be shifted towards democratic, empowerment leadership, where the leader, whose authority is derived from the actual skills and knowledge, may in fact be any of the employees, and the position may depend solely on the currently performed task. Providing library services in an efficient way depends to an increasing extend on not only good performance of tasks and executive orders, discipline and compliance, but also on the ability to think, share knowledge, opinions and ideas, to actively participate in the library's life as well as contribute to the changes and innovations. Ch. A. Olson and P.M.

Ch. A. Olson and P. M. Singer express similar views of the leadership function in a 21<sup>st</sup> century library. The authors strongly suggest the need for departing from the fixed organisational structures and the traditional, one-person decision making and converting the

<sup>4</sup> Zybert E. B. *Problemy mobbingu w zawodowym życiu bibliotekarzy i ich organizacyjnej działalności* „Przegląd Biblioteczny” 2006 R. 74 z. 1 p. 44

libraries into complex, flexible, network organisations which will be able to utilize the new trends and adjust their structure accordingly. The key role in such organisations is played by the library leaders, who no longer issue simple commands or control their subordinates, but rather create strategies, structures and organisational culture which facilitates changes. Their role is to lead the employees into the reality of new opportunities and challenges<sup>5</sup>. The authors postulate the rule of 3xC, i.e. *contribution*, *connection* and *collaboration*, which means that: librarians participate actively in projects, tasks and decision-making processes, relations and networks are built between the employees and above all, team work is the key organisational strategy<sup>6</sup>. Based on the concept proposed by Ch. A. Olson and P. M. Singer, the features of creative and participating library management ought to be discussed in this study as well:

- Contribution

The leader in a 21<sup>st</sup> century library ought to assure that the subordinates are broadly involved in the implementation of tasks and projects. He should be able to properly identify the skills, abilities and talents of the subordinates and to utilize them for the purposes of particular projects. The ability to perceive, utilize and appreciate the employees' skills is one of the key elements of the 21<sup>st</sup> century library leadership. Appreciated and motivated employees become more deeply involved in their tasks and the awareness of responsibility leads to greater diligence and the drive for perfection.

Participation in an organisation can be of one of two main types: non-materialistic and materialistic<sup>7</sup>. Financial participation (e.g. in the form of a share in the profit or the capital stock) is not likely to take place in the case of academic libraries (possibly with the exception of private universities?), non-materialistic participation, however, can safely be implemented in information-library operations. Non-materialistic, i.e. decision-making participation may be both direct and indirect. Direct involvement in administration means that the subordinate becomes an equal and actual entity co-creating the given organisation, not only in formal and structural sense, but also in terms of decision-making processes<sup>8</sup>. In a library, the above may take the form of autonomous teams, quality circles as well as regular or immediate staff meetings on various levels of authority, but also e.g. problem discussion groups on-line, where the management may "post" an unresolved issue or problem. Indirect, i.e.

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<sup>5</sup> Olson Ch., Singer P. *Winning with the library leadership. Enhancing services through connection, contribution and collaboration*. – Chicago: American Library Association, 2004 p. 109

<sup>6</sup> Ibid, p. 29-81

<sup>7</sup> Tuziak A., Tuziak B. *Partycypacja i partnerstwo jako przejawy podmiotowości pracowniczej* [in:] Organizacje przyszłości : szanse i zagrożenia w kontekście integracji europejskiej edited by L. Zbiegiem-Maciąg, W. Pawnika. Kraków, 2003 p. 56

<sup>8</sup> Ibid, p. 57

representational participation involves a group of democratically elected representatives of the workforce, who are allowed into the decision-making and advisory bodies of the organisation. This may be accomplished by the employees' participation in the main decision-making entities, such as e.g. the Library Council; their participation in councils and committees operating alongside the traditional executive structures and summoned on cyclical or immediate bases as well as task-related assemblies relating to implementation of a certain project of solving a certain problem; the third form of representational participation includes all instances of trade union and association activities which may cooperate with the management on partnership basis in creating the mission, strategy and culture of the academic library.

It seems that in a library there is room particularly for the processes of delegating authority to teams of representatives from various library branches. The specific environment of a library (such as the need for structural order, tradition, functionally organised processes, considerable importance of procedures, norms and standards) determines that the most beneficial and desirable method of joint administration by the management and working, task, problem and consultative teams, rather than including only selected individuals in the process.

Management theory literature distinguishes two types of participation: formal (legally sanctioned) and informal, which is based on the network of relations between the particular members of an organisation. J. Mączyński points to a number of factors indicating far greater importance of informal participation in an organisation: the process of consulting the employees is then much more flexible and can easily adapt to the needs of a given situation (task, interpersonal relations, etc.)<sup>9</sup>.

Whatever the form of participation, however, the library management ought to communicate their readiness to accept the opinions and points of view of the employees, to consider any suggestions and ideas concerning improvement of the library's operations and to be open to contribution from all the employees or even to seek that contribution themselves when faced with a particular problem. They ought to create an environment of partnership and minimize the emotional distance which leads e.g. to fear and reluctance of directly contacting the superior. Successful implementation of the participation methods will never be possible without the mutual consent of both the superior and the subordinates. The management has to show trust and allow the library's employees to participate in decision-making processes at

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<sup>9</sup> Mączyński J. *Partycypacja w podejmowaniu decyzji* Warszawa: Wydaw. IFiS PAN, 1996 p. 49

certain levels, while the librarians should be ready to accept the new challenge and change their perspective of the scope of their work and responsibility.

It should be underlined that nowadays, empowerment of employees seems to be much easier than it used to be, librarians are better educated, often hold unique qualifications and are prepared to efficiently direct their own actions<sup>10</sup>. It is also more common for the profession to be chosen by people educated in it and willing to further develop in this field. J. Pelc indicates, that a growing number of people nowadays wish to have active influence upon their professional lives, strive to free themselves from hegemonic ideologies, desire to experience the satisfaction of being creative and forming interpersonal relations based on voluntary, autonomous decisions, they wish to protect their inner intellectual independence and to articulate it in everyday activities<sup>11</sup>. Does the above also refer to us – librarians?

- Connection

The ability to create interpersonal bonds is the main feature of leadership in the modern, network reality and is directly related to the issue of empowerment and creating partnership relations between a librarian and the management. Connection refers to creating desired interrelations, bonds between the employees of an organisation, which allow them to cooperate and work towards common goals. In libraries of the 21<sup>st</sup> century the applicable term should be *power with* rather than *power over*. Partnership, cooperation, teams formed around certain tasks and projects, network organisation of work– are all examples of bonds created in a library, whose main goal is to bring people together and combine their intellectual capital. The above refers to both tightening interpersonal bonds within the library as well as outside of it, i.e. creating networks and relations with representatives of other organisations and professions such as the parent university, other libraries of the given type or from the same region, scientific and research institutions, local and state authorities.

- Collaboration

Collaboration is not a new concept in the organisation of information-library services: sections, divisions, branches within which certain tasks are performed collectively have existed in libraries for years. However, when work in a group leads to fragmentary perception of the library only in terms of advantages for the given organisational unit, if work in the division becomes more important than the general and strategic goals of the organisation as a whole, if it is based on passive participation and performance of only those duties which have

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<sup>10</sup> Stephens D., Russell K. *Organizational development, leadership, change and the future of libraries* "Library Trends" 2004 Vol. 53 No 1 p. 239-241, 244

<sup>11</sup> Penc J. *Umiejętności kierowania ludźmi* „Ekonomika i Organizacja Przedsiębiorstw” 2001 no. 6 p. 30

been assigned personally – then it is necessary to redefine the nature of this cooperation. In the academic library there is room mainly for teamwork rather than group work, and the two vary considerably. A group cooperates mainly to exchange information and make decisions aiming to facilitate its members in performance of their duties, and the result of this activity is merely the sum of individual contributions of particular group members. A team, on the other hand, is a group of people who cooperate in order to reach a certain common goal, and the result of their activity is a positive synergy effect, where the input of particular team members generates greater effectiveness than that which would only be the sum of their efforts<sup>12</sup>. Work in a library team requires, therefore, active participation, sharing information and knowledge, combining various elements of the intellectual capital and creating new knowledge resources. Collaboration, partnership and creation of a community are key trends in modern librarianship. The collaboration should be based on certain crucial pillars, such as: development of common goals, search for new solutions and creating an environment of trust and understanding<sup>13</sup>.

A library manager who apart from the traditional managerial functions will also be able to implement the 3xC rule, will become an actual library leader in the uncertain and changeable reality of the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

### **Characteristics of a leader in the 21<sup>st</sup> century library.**

Managerial activities in modern academic libraries should be based upon task implementation through stimulation and coordination of common efforts towards providing high quality information-library services as well as developing and enriching the intellectual capacities of the employees. Academic libraries managers ought to become leaders, who:

- facilitate the two-directional, vertical and horizontal communication which allows them at all times to have full knowledge of the events taking place, and the employees to understand the rationale and meaning of every implemented change, innovation or activity,
- set clear and unambiguous tasks for the teams and ensure that they follow the specified course of action (it is important for the employees to have a sense of stability obtained through specification of responsibility and deadlines),
- delegate authority to those with greater knowledge, better information and more time required to implement specific tasks,

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<sup>12</sup> Ibid p. 29

<sup>13</sup> Olson Ch. Singer P. *Winning with change ...* p. 77



- motivate, support and supervise the empowered employees (particularly in the initial stage), constantly evaluate the results and award progress if possible, coordinate the activities, share their knowledge, experience and competence,
- make decisions which cannot be made by others due to lack of time, knowledge or authority,
- facilitate personal and professional development of their subordinates and utilize the organisational intellectual capital (support creativity, channel the organisational energies),
- build partnership culture and create an environment of trust by sharing success and – whenever possible – information and knowledge<sup>14</sup>.

D.E. Riggs postulates to finally abandon the myth claiming that one has to be born a leader. Mental and physical capacity is important but not vital. Professional library leadership in the 21<sup>st</sup> century is mainly derived from life and professional experience, knowledge and competence as well as constant processes of self development and learning. It manifests itself in: the vision, dreams, creativity, innovativeness and enterprise, strategic thinking, courage, truthfulness, trust, values, professional passion, care for the colleagues and subordinates, ability to communicate, aptitude for transformation and change as well as self-motivation and the ability to motivate others<sup>15</sup>.

A library leader in the 21<sup>st</sup> century is an expert seen as both the superior and a trustworthy specialist, who is able to provide support in the choice and perfection of the path leading to successful achievement of organisational goals. The determinant of leadership in future libraries ought to be the effectiveness of interpersonal cooperation.

### **Barriers to employee empowerment**

As already mentioned, authority delegation in a library demands mutual acceptance and readiness to involve employees in the decision-making processes. Contrary to all appearances, the task is not as easy as it may seem, and in academic libraries which operate in organisational and cultural conditions originating from the previous century, it is even harder.

Three groups of difficulties can be enumerated, which may hinder the implementation of partnership relationships in the organisation of academic library processes: personality barriers of the leader and the subordinates, cultural barriers and formal barriers originating from e.g. the structure, lack of technical or financial resources, etc.

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<sup>14</sup> Por. Penc J. *Umiejętności kierowania ludźmi...* p. 28

<sup>15</sup> Riggs D. E. *The crisis and opportunities...* p. 9, 13-14

Personality barriers concern individual predispositions of particular people which may be beneficial or not in terms of serving as a leader in an organisation. There are employees who do not feel comfortable in positions of power, do not like making decisions and being responsible for anything, who would not elect to put themselves in a situation which requires independence. Such attitudes are often caused by lack of self-confidence, adverse experiences in the past, shortages in up to date and comprehensive knowledge, which incline such employees to follow orders rather than participate in their shaping. On the other hand, some people are so called born leaders, who – if given a certain amount of power – are reluctant to share it with their employees, they will also hesitate from giving up the prestige they enjoy mainly due to the held position. We all know that representatives of both of the groups are often found in our workplaces.

Cultural barriers originate from established common patterns of thinking and acting in an organisation, i.e. the organisational culture. The hierarchical culture which assumes unequal distribution of power in a library and acceptance of the same by the employees, the considerable emotional distance separating the superior from the subordinates, authority and power derived solely from the position and title held as well as the number of subordinates, are the main cultural barriers hampering the implementation of empowerment in an organisation. Another significant issue may be the low tolerance to uncertainty which is characteristic of library organisational culture. Fear and anxiety experienced by employees in the face of new and unfamiliar situations, such as changes and innovations, will certainly not facilitate participation in decision making processes as it requires courage and self-esteem. Cultural barriers are difficult to minimise as they are usually deeply rooted in the employees' collective mentality and often significantly support the organisational conditions of academic library operation.

Formal barriers may also considerably impede empowerment in a library. Inflexible, hierarchical organisational structure, poor technological facilities (which would allow for e.g. creating virtual teams and sharing knowledge via the internet), insufficient financial resources to utilise materialistic motivators or organise training courses – are all examples of formal barriers which, although unquestionably important, are much easier to overcome than cultural and personality barriers. Table 2 presents a breakdown of the main barriers hindering employee participation in a library.

	Personality barriers	Cultural barriers	Formal barriers
Employees	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ fear of responsibility and independence</li> <li>○ fear of making a mistake</li> <li>○ lack of confidence in ones own knowledge and skills</li> <li>○ anxiety caused by the increased difficulty of work</li> <li>○ lack of self-motivation</li> <li>○ fear of changes</li> <li>○ inability to work in a team</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ tendency to hold on to old, reliable structural and functional patterns</li> <li>○ belief that empowerment is not compatible with the norms and values established in the organisation</li> <li>○ lack of trust and understanding between the employees and the management</li> <li>○ emotional distance between the superiors and the subordinates</li> <li>○ unwillingness to become involved in the necessary training and development processes</li> <li>○ strong individualist predisposition which hinders the formation of advisory teams</li> <li>○ low organisational tolerance to uncertainty</li> <li>○ negative experience of empowerment in the past</li> <li>○ lack of understanding of the necessity of empowerment</li> <li>○ inability to share knowledge</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ hierarchical organisational structure</li> <li>○ vertical and top-down information flow</li> <li>○ insufficient knowledge and skills of the employees</li> <li>○ lack of employees willing to participate</li> <li>○ necessity to devote considerable time to the process</li> <li>○ need to run training courses for the employees</li> <li>○ lack of technical resources</li> <li>○ lack of financial resources</li> </ul>
Superior	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ fear of the employees displaying better leadership qualities</li> <li>○ belief that delegating power may be seen as admitting one's incompetence or ignorance,</li> <li>○ fear of losing authority and the current social and professional status</li> <li>○ conviction that the subordinates do not have sufficient intellectual potential</li> <li>○ inability to discover the unique talents of the employees</li> </ul>		

Table 2 Barriers hindering power delegation in an academic library (author's analysis)

The key to overcoming most of the above difficulties, apart from implementing formal changes in the library and its structure, lies in reforming the organisational mentality of librarians and their work philosophy, i.e. reshaping the organisational culture. The management ought to knowingly create the proper environment for partnership and cooperation, which will allow them to test and asses the abilities of the subordinates, undertake progressive challenges, facilitate participation in training courses and gradually assign managerial and leadership tasks to the employees<sup>16</sup>. Such actions will enable the librarians to define their role and position in terms of the organisation's mission, and their superiors to evaluate the intellectual capital they have at their disposal. Cultural intervention in terms of subjectifying the employees includes: encouraging, mobilising, broadening the possibilities, inspiring, motivating, popularising the idea of cooperation and organising training courses.

<sup>16</sup> Penc J. *Kreowanie zachowań w organizacji* Warszawa: Placet, 2000 p. 221

## **Employee subjectivity in an academic library**

There are many empirically confirmed arguments supporting the need to empower employees in academic libraries. In her study of the effects of implementing the concept of organisational development (which includes the notion of employee empowerment) in the activity of American libraries, K. Holloway identified its numerous advantages manifesting themselves in e.g.: facilitation of inner organisational processes, development of training processes and improvement of the quality of services, and even in more rational financial policies(!)<sup>17</sup>

Research on commercial organisations indicates, that employee subjectivity leads to:

- greater satisfaction from the performed work – participation increases employee satisfaction in two ways: by providing them with the possibility of greater involvement and putting their abilities into use, as well as by allowing them to influence decision-making and cause it to better reflect their own needs.
- higher quality of the decisions made – as long as the following optimum is kept: common goals of the individuals participating in the decision-making processes, comprehensive scope of their knowledge, the size of the group facilitating communication, existence of certain discrepancies in opinion (to prevent the so called group thinking syndrome) as well as the ability to reach consensus and think creatively.
- better employee motivation in implementing the decisions – which is in fact a natural reaction to support the results of one's own labour, the "feeling of ownership" of the decisions is common, which in consequence reduces the resistance to them and ensures faster and more effective action.
- development of employees themselves – noted in their increasing decision-making abilities due to the group-work nature of the processes as well as in strengthening the bond between the employees and the organisation<sup>18</sup>.

With the encouraged sense of influence and causative power, the developing sense of self-esteem and competence, with the awareness of affiliation and interdependence and the discovery of one's own knowledge which offers a sense of security, the library exercising the empowerment style of management will be by far more likely to achieve success.

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<sup>17</sup> Holloway K. *The significance of organizational development in academic research libraries* „Library Trends” 2004 Vol. 53 No 1 p. 14-15

<sup>18</sup> Mączyński J. *Partycypacja w podejmowaniu ...* p. 50-55

Studies of organisational culture performed by the author of this paper in selected Polish academic libraries indicate that the above mentioned benefits are highly unlikely to be seen in state university libraries.

Such facilities are characterised by the cultural profile of significant executive distance. The hierarchic structure was observed mainly in terms of power delegation, or in fact its virtual lack. Over 75% of the surveyed librarians working at state university libraries stated that all or nearly all decisions are made unipersonally by the management. Only 6% confirmed that they often participate in the decision-making process, and no one indicated to do so on permanent basis. The great executive distance seems to be accompanied by also significant, if slightly lesser, emotional distance between the employees and the management. 25% of the respondents admitted that they never or rarely put forward their opinions to the superiors, and nearly half stated that they do it only occasionally. Nearly 43% admitted that there is a distance between the management and the employees and that librarians are not free from emotional anxiety when contacting their superiors. It is manifested in the form in which the communication takes place, the use of titles and formal expressions. The authorities' strong attachment to the power is confirmed by the fact that over 70% of the surveyed librarians claimed that the director is the only person managing the library. It points to strong authority of the management and possibly its legitimisation by the employees.

Considerably different results were obtained from the study of the cultural aspect of authority distance in private university libraries. The main discrepancy in this respect between private and state university libraries is found in the significantly participation of private libraries' employees in the decision-making processes – as many as 81% of the librarians stated that such instances take place always, often or sometimes. The contacts between the superiors and subordinates in private university libraries are less formalised, 82% of the respondents indicated to experience no anxiety when communicating with their superiors, the “love of titles” is much less frequent and the atmosphere is in general more friendly and informal.

What is interesting and particularly significant is the fact that the librarians express the desire to participate in the decision-making processes by declaring equivalent cultural preferences. The results were similar in the case of both types of libraries, in state university libraries 65% of the respondents expressed a wish to work in a library where they could participate in the decision-making processes, and 81% of the respondents supported the notion of freedom in presenting their opinions to their superior. In private university libraries

the as many as 94% conveyed readiness to participate in decision-making processes and 88% admitted that they would like to freely express their opinions.

The above results suggest that the gravity of personality and cultural barriers is lesser than it may seem and that the implementation of elements of employee participation and empowerment in libraries is far from impossible.

To what extent can empowerment function in the academic library?

It seems that academic libraries have room mainly for delegation of authority to advisory and consultative teams, rather than to particular individuals. The days of individualist talents – such as A. Einstein or K. Estreicher – are gone, nowadays success is the domain of well cooperating teams which alongside logical deduction are able to utilize the methods of creative thinking.

Undoubtedly employee participation in academic libraries can take place in consultative and advisory processes in substructural, problem-solving teams, committees or groups. Such organisational structures, whether permanent or temporary, should include representatives from various branches of the library i.e. of various attitudes and points of view. From the perspective of the efficient organisation of work, it is important to precisely specify the scope of such teams' operation: jurisdiction, deadlines and subject matter of their activity. The teams may be entrusted with analysing and solving various problems, both short and long-term, e.g.: planning the professional careers and development of employees, creating the strategic vision of the library in 5, 15 or 15 years, planning and implementing marketing strategies, creating guidelines for library modernisation (the used technologies, new services, tackling specific problems), monitoring the environment and the users, building the long-lasting relationship with the parent university and establishing communication with other library, information or scientific facilities. Temporary participation in responding to current operational issues may also be highly valuable, e.g.: development of more effective methods of retrieving books from university employees, reducing the number of destroyed or stolen volumes, finding sponsorship, extending the opening hours of the library in the period of the end-of-term examinations etc.

It should be noted that apart from actual participation based on having a real influence upon the made decisions, organisations may utilize perceptual participation, aimed at the perception (sense) of the employees in terms of their influence in this respect. The benefits enumerated above can often be secured by purely perceptual participation, where the authority is exercised along the lines of: *You can participate all you like – I'll still do what I think is*

*best*. However, this sort of a solution bears only partial and short-lived success, and library leaders should aim to facilitate actual participation rather than just a decoy.

The available literature on commercial organisation management provides numerous hints to be used in empowerment management, which can successfully be implemented in information-library activity. And although it is unquestionably a complex and difficult task, I hope this “superior” and “employee” opinion to encourage You to further study the issue and possibly inspire to put some of the above into practice.

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## **Dzielenie się władzą i partnerstwo – czy to możliwe w bibliotece akademickiej?**

Przedstawiono problematykę partycypacji pracowniczej w bibliotece akademickiej. Ukazano różnice pomiędzy klasycznym a uczestniczącym stylem zarządzania placówką oraz scharakteryzowano najważniejsze cechy lidera biblioteki XXI w. Bariery na drodze partycypacji pracowniczej oraz korzyści z tej formy zarządzania działalnością informacyjno-biblioteczną przedstawiono w drugiej części referatu. Istnieje wiele obszarów, na których decyzyjna partycypacja pracownicza może z powodzeniem zostać zaimplementowana do zarządzania biblioteką.