

Boosting Production Performance Through Employee Empowerment and Sense of Belonging: A Case Study at PT Batu Gunung Mulia Putra Agro

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Abstract. This study examines how employee empowerment influences production employees' performance, with sense of belonging serving as a mediating mechanism. In competitive operations, empowerment that grants autonomy, recognizes contributions, and invites participation in decisions is expected to strengthen attachment to the organization and, in turn, productivity. The study contributes evidence from Indonesia's agro-manufacturing sector, an important yet underexamined context. A quantitative explanatory design was employed. Relationships among constructs were estimated using Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modeling. The population consisted of 98 production employees at PT Batu Gunung Mulia Putra Agro. Total sampling used in this research yielded 42 respondents, including 40 employees and two supervisors. Data were collected through a structured questionnaire on a five-point Likert scale. Results indicate that empowerment significantly increases both sense of belonging and performance. Sense of belonging also exerts a positive effect on performance and mediates the relationship between empowerment and performance, suggesting an indirect pathway from empowerment to outcomes. Model diagnostics show accuracy, with R-square values of 0.631 for sense of belonging and 0.856 for performance. These findings imply that autonomy, recognition, and participatory decision-making are effective levers for cultivating emotional bonds and sustaining productivity. Organizations are encouraged to institutionalize empowerment-based policies to enhance performance.

Keywords: Employee empowerment; Production employee performance; Sense of belonging.

Abstrak. Penelitian ini menelaah pengaruh pemberdayaan karyawan terhadap kinerja karyawan produksi dengan sense of belonging sebagai variabel mediasi. Dalam lingkungan yang kompetitif, praktik pemberdayaan yang memberi otonomi, mengakui kontribusi, dan melibatkan karyawan dalam pengambilan keputusan diperkirakan memperkuat keterikatan pada organisasi sekaligus meningkatkan produktivitas. Kontribusi studi terletak pada pengujian peran mediasi sense of belonging pada konteks agro-manufaktur Indonesia yang relatif belum banyak dikaji. Pendekatan kuantitatif eksplanatori digunakan, dan hubungan antarkonstruksi diestimasi menggunakan PLS-SEM. Populasi menca-

kup 98 karyawan produksi PT Batu Gunung Mulia Putra Agro. Teknik total sampling yang digunakan menghasilkan 42 responden, terdiri atas 40 karyawan dan 2 atasan. Data dikumpulkan melalui kuesioner terstruktur dengan skala Likert lima poin. Hasil menunjukkan bahwa pemberdayaan secara signifikan meningkatkan sense of belonging dan kinerja. Sense of belonging juga berpengaruh positif terhadap kinerja serta memediasi hubungan antara pemberdayaan dan kinerja, sehingga membentuk jalur tidak langsung dari pemberdayaan menuju hasil kerja. Diagnostik model menunjukkan daya prediksi yang kuat dengan nilai R-square 0,631 untuk sense of belonging dan 0,856 untuk kinerja. Temuan ini menyiratkan bahwa otonomi, pengakuan, dan keputusan partisipatif efektif membangun ikatan emosional serta mempertahankan produktivitas. Organisasi disarankan mengadopsi kebijakan berbasis pemberdayaan untuk meningkatkan capaian kinerja.

Kata kunci: Kinerja karyawan produksi; Pemberdayaan karyawan; Rasa memiliki.

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BACKGROUND

In the era of globalization, organizational performance increasingly hinges on effective human resource management rather than solely on technological capability, capital, or natural resources. The World Economic Forum (2023) Reports that organizations investing in workforce development and engagement can boost productivity by up to 25%, while Yang et al. (2024) finds that empowered employees outperform disengaged ones by 21% in productivity and 17% in profitability. In Indonesia, the agro-industrial sector remains economically vital, accounting for more than 13% of GDP and employing millions, but continues to grapple with low employee involvement and limited autonomy in operational roles (Budiman & Ardhiyansyah, 2023; Qorri et al., 2024).

Employee empowerment, comprising authority, trust, and participation in decision-making, is widely regarded as a strategic lever for enhancing performance outcomes (Hassard et al., 2023; Riak & Wanyama, 2025). Similarly, the *sense of belonging*, an emotional and social attachment to one's organization, is a critical psychological factor that fosters motivation, discretionary effort, and job satisfaction (Lee et al., 2023; Shannon et al., 2022). Fostering belonging can reduce turnover risk by up to 50% and significantly elevate engagement levels (Brown et al., 2025).

Despite the recognized importance of these constructs, empirical evidence on the interplay between empowerment, belonging, and performance remains inconclusive. Research has shown inconsistent direct effects of empowerment on performance (Orenuga et al., 2024), and belonging may not reliably predict productivity (Astuti & Datrini, 2021). Moreover, the mediating role of belonging in linking empowerment to performance in Indonesian agribusiness contexts is not well-explored, a significant gap given the sector's operational complexity and socio-cultural dynamics.

Against this backdrop, the Indonesian agro-manufacturing context presents a timely performance challenge: plants operate with lean crews and tight quality targets, yet

decision rights and employee voice often remain concentrated at supervisory levels. Secondary evidence links empowerment and belonging to measurable uplifts in engagement and output, with global reports noting meaningful productivity gains in empowered workforces and sector studies identifying empowerment as a driver of capability and performance. Consolidating these strands, the present study poses an urgent, practice-oriented question for palm-oil processing in South Kalimantan: can empowerment policies that expand autonomy, recognition, and participatory decision making enhance production performance by strengthening employees' sense of belonging. This focus introduces novelty by testing a mediation pathway in an underexamined Indonesian setting and by integrating workforce outcomes that matter operationally, i.e. productivity, quality adherence, and timeliness (Budiman & Ardhiyansyah, 2023; Forum, 2023; Qorri et al., 2024; Wordsworth & Nilakant, 2021).

This research is inspired by internal data from PT Batu Gunung Mulia Putra Agro, a palm oil agribusiness in South Kalimantan. A 2025 employee survey revealed that 62% of production staff feel excluded from decision-making processes, 65% experience limited task autonomy, and 60% feel their opinions are undervalued despite meeting performance standards. These findings suggest a critical disconnect between performance outcomes and workplace experience. Therefore, this study aims to investigate how employee empowerment, mediated by sense of belonging, influences production employee performance, offering valuable contributions both theoretically to HRM literature and practically to agribusiness management strategies.

THEORETICAL REVIEW

Employee Empowerment

In organizational practice, employee empowerment is the deliberate delegation of decision rights, accountability, and discretion, enabling employees to choose courses of action and execute their tasks independently within the scope of their roles (Spreitzer, 1995). It extends beyond task delegation to include trust, involvement in decision-making, and recognition of employee contributions. (Hassard et al., 2023). According to Robbins and Judge (2022), empowerment enhances employees' self-efficacy, job involvement, and productivity. Four common dimensions of empowerment are meaning, competence, self-determination, and impact, which collectively shape employees' perceptions of their role and influence in the organization. (Thomas & Velthouse, 1990). Previous empirical studies indicate that empowerment positively affects performance (Orenuga et al., 2024; Qorri et al., 2024), and strengthens job satisfaction and organizational commitment (Budiman & Ardhiyansyah, 2023).

Sense of Belonging

Sense of belonging is the emotional, social, and psychological connection an individual feels toward a group or organization. (Hagerty et al., 1996). In the workplace, it fosters a positive climate that encourages engagement, motivation, and commitment (Thissen (2023). Core dimensions include membership, acceptance, identification, and emotional connection, which collectively drive employees to feel valued and integral to the organization (Baumeister & Leary, 1995). Studies have shown that a strong sense of belonging correlates with higher job engagement (Brown et al., 2025), reduces turnover

intention, and mediates the relationship between empowerment and performance (Astuti & Datrini, 2021).

Employee Performance

Employee performance refers to the measurable outcomes of work accomplished by an individual or group in alignment with organizational standards and objectives. It encompasses aspects such as work quality, quantity, timeliness, and cooperation (Dessler, 2018). In production settings, performance is often evaluated through output volume, defect rates, adherence to schedules, and teamwork. Previous research confirms that both empowerment and sense of belonging positively influence performance directly and indirectly through psychological mechanisms (Budiman & Ardhiansyah, 2023; Orenuga et al., 2024; Qorri et al., 2024).

Hypotheses Development

Employee empowerment and sense of belonging are widely recognized as critical determinants of employee performance in various organizational contexts. Empowerment provides employees with greater authority, autonomy, and responsibility, which not only enhances decision-making and problem-solving capabilities but also strengthens their sense of ownership over work outcomes. Meanwhile, a sense of belonging cultivates emotional and social bonds between employees and their organization, encouraging engagement, loyalty, and commitment. Both factors are interrelated and can jointly influence performance outcomes, with belongingness potentially acting as a mediating mechanism that enhances the effect of empowerment.

In manufacturing and agribusiness settings, where operational demands are high and teamwork is essential, empowerment and belongingness become even more crucial. Empowered employees tend to take initiative in addressing challenges, while those with a strong sense of belonging are more inclined to support their peers and maintain consistent performance standards. Previous empirical evidence has demonstrated that these factors significantly improve productivity, work quality, and overall organizational effectiveness, providing a strong theoretical basis for the hypotheses proposed in this study.

Employee empowerment, manifested through authority, autonomy, and responsibility, enables employees to make decisions, innovate, and take ownership of their tasks. Such conditions enhance productivity, improve problem-solving abilities, and strengthen alignment with organizational goals. Previous studies have consistently shown that empowered employees demonstrate stronger commitment and achieve higher performance levels (Budiman & Ardhiansyah, 2023; Orenuga et al., 2024). In the context of PT Batu Gunung Mulia Putra Agro, empowering production employees allows them to respond more effectively to operational challenges, thereby improving efficiency and output quality.

H1: Employee empowerment has a positive and significant effect on employee performance.

Providing employees with greater decision-making authority, trust, and participation opportunities strengthens their identification and emotional connection with the organization. This empowerment fosters feelings of acceptance and being valued, which are essential components of workplace belongingness (Baumeister & Leary, 1995; Jiang

& Yang, 2023). In the context of PT Batu Gunung Mulia Putra Agro, granting autonomy and trust to production employees is expected to enhance their psychological attachment and sense of inclusion within the company.

H2: Employee empowerment has a positive and significant effect on sense of belonging.

A strong sense of belonging cultivates engagement, loyalty, and motivation, leading to better individual and team performance. Employees who feel connected to their organization are more willing to contribute extra effort, cooperate with colleagues, and maintain high work quality (Orenuga et al., 2024). At PT Batu Gunung Mulia Putra Agro, fostering a sense of belonging among production employees is anticipated to strengthen teamwork and operational discipline, resulting in improved performance.

H3: Sense of belonging has a positive and significant effect on employee performance.

While empowerment directly influences performance, its impact can be amplified through psychological mechanisms such as belongingness. Empowerment fosters a sense of belonging, which in turn enhances engagement and performance outcomes (Astuti & Datrini, 2021; Jiang & Yang, 2023). In PT Batu Gunung Mulia Putra Agro, this mediation pathway is expected to reinforce the link between empowerment initiatives and sustainable performance improvements.

H4: Sense of belonging mediates the relationship between employee empowerment and employee performance.

The relationships among the variables and the proposed hypotheses are illustrated in Figure 1.

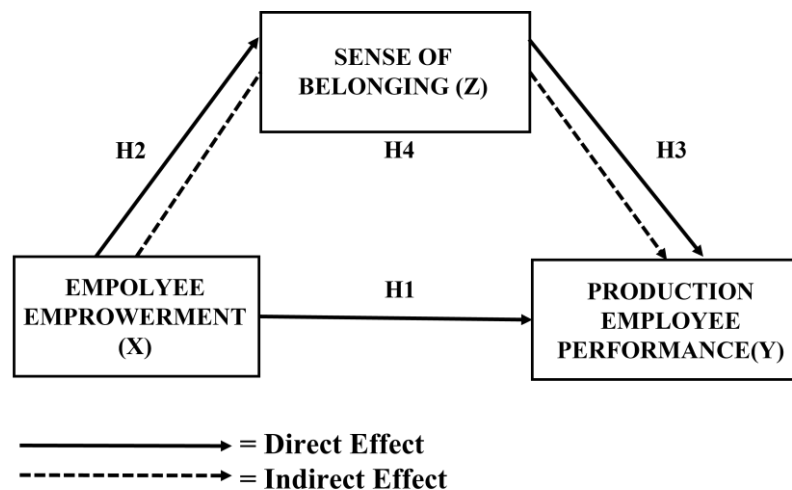


Figure 1. Conceptual Framework

RESEARCH METHODS

This study adopts a quantitative research approach with an explanatory design, aiming to examine the causal relationship between employee empowerment, sense of belonging, and employee performance. The research was conducted at PT Batu Gunung Mulia Putra Agro, an agribusiness company operating in the palm oil processing industry

located in Tanah Laut Regency, South Kalimantan, Indonesia. The focus was on production employees, as they directly contribute to operational efficiency and output quality. Quantitative explanatory research is appropriate when the goal is to test hypotheses and measure relationships among variables using statistical methods (Hair et al., 2024).

The population consisted of all 98 production employees and their direct supervisors. Using a total sampling technique, the study collected data from the entire population to ensure comprehensive coverage and minimize sampling error, as recommended for small and homogeneous populations (Hair et al., 2024). Of these, 42 respondents participated, comprising 40 production employees and 2 supervisors who provided performance assessments.

A structured questionnaire was employed for data collection, utilizing a five-point Likert scale anchored at 1 for strongly disagree and 5 for strongly agree. The scale is widely adopted in organizational and behavioral research as it reliably elicits attitudinal judgments, improves measurement precision, and supports robust quantitative evaluation (Hair et al., 2024). The employee empowerment construct was measured using indicators of authority, autonomy, and responsibility (Spreitzer, 1995). The sense of belonging construct was adapted from Hagerty et al. (1996), including emotional attachment, feeling valued, and team inclusion. Employee performance was assessed through productivity, work quality, and timeliness, based on Sahadev et al. (2024) framework and validated by supervisors.

Before estimating the structural relationships, we verified the measurement quality by examining indicator loadings, Average Variance Extracted (AVE), Composite Reliability (CR), and Cronbach's alpha, with all indicators satisfying the benchmark criteria recommended by Hair et al. (2024). The dataset was then analyzed using Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modeling in SmartPLS 4.0, a choice justified by its suitability for modest sample sizes and mediation-oriented, multi-path models (Hair et al., 2024; Sarstedt et al., 2022). The analytic plan encompassed tests of direct, indirect, and total effects and included a formal assessment of the mediating role of sense of belonging in the link between employee empowerment and employee performance.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

Results

The results section presents the empirical findings of the study, beginning with an overview of the research setting and respondent characteristics, followed by a descriptive analysis of the key variables under investigation. This structure enables a clear understanding of the organizational context, demographic profile, and general perceptions of respondents before proceeding to the hypothesis testing phase. By first outlining the company profile and workforce composition, the subsequent analysis of empowerment, sense of belonging, and performance can be interpreted within a well-defined operational and social environment.

1. Profile of PT Batu Gunung Mulia Putra Agro and Respondent Characteristics

PT Batu Gunung Mulia Putra Agro is an agribusiness company located in Bati-Bati, Tanah Laut Regency, South Kalimantan, specializing in the cultivation, processing, and

distribution of high-value commodities such as crude palm oil (CPO) and latex sheets. Established in 2012, the company operates under a modern production management framework that emphasizes efficiency, sustainability, and employee empowerment. The production division consists of 98 permanent employees, with 40 production workers, the primary focus of this study, operating under a 24-hour shift system. The company's organizational approach integrates operational excellence with workforce development, aiming to foster both productivity and long-term employee commitment.

The study involved 42 respondents, comprising 40 production employees and 2 direct supervisors. Most respondents (85.7%) were aged 26–40 years, all were male, and the majority had vocational high school (SMK) qualifications (54.8%), followed by senior high school (SMA) at 35.7%, and small proportions holding D3 or S1 degrees (9.5% each). In terms of tenure, 50.0% had worked for four years, 38.1% for five years, and 11.9% for three years, indicating stable workforce retention. Furthermore, 85.7% were married, suggesting socio-economic stability. Job distribution was nearly balanced between Production Process A (47.6%) and Process B (52.4%), each under distinct shift supervision. This demographic profile portrays a homogeneous, experienced, and physically capable workforce, suitable for analyzing the interaction between empowerment, belonging, and performance.

2. Descriptive Analysis

Descriptive statistical analysis was used to examine respondents' perceptions of employee empowerment, sense of belonging, and employee performance, all measured on a 5-point Likert scale. Employee empowerment achieved an average score of 4.20, categorized as "Good." The highest ratings were observed for job autonomy (4.4) and decision-making authority (4.3), indicating substantial operational freedom for employees. Items such as "I have the authority to carry out my work" and "I can set my own work schedule" received "Very Good" ratings, reflecting strong managerial trust. While training, recognition, and work-life balance scored slightly lower, they still demonstrated positive organizational support that extends beyond operational autonomy.

The sense of belonging variable recorded an average score of 4.10, also in the "Good" category. The highest-rated items included "I feel accepted by my colleagues" and "I feel welcomed at the workplace," suggesting a strong degree of social integration and psychological comfort. Employee performance was also rated at 4.10 on average, with particularly high scores in maintaining low levels of counterproductive behavior (4.3) and adaptability to change (4.2). Task performance indicators such as meeting quality standards and completing assignments on time were consistently strong, though contextual performance elements like taking initiative scored slightly lower. Collectively, these descriptive findings highlight a workforce that perceives high empowerment and belonging, aligning with strong performance outcomes and setting the foundation for subsequent hypothesis testing.

3. Outer Model Results

The summary of these results, including the mean outer loading, AVE, Cronbach's alpha, and composite reliability for each construct, is presented in Table 1. Values in Table 1 show that the constructs achieve high psychometric adequacy. The large mean outer loadings suggest that the indicators contribute substantially to their respective latent variables, while AVE figures confirm that the constructs account for more than 50 percent

of indicator variance in line with recommended practice. Cronbach’s alpha and composite reliability are all above 0.94, demonstrating excellent internal consistency and surpassing the minimum standard of 0.70 (Hair et al., 2024). These outcomes validate the strength of the measurement model and support the credibility of subsequent analyses of the hypothesized links between empowerment, sense of belonging, and performance.

Table 1. Outer Model Evaluation Results

Construct	Mean Outer Loading	AVE	Cronbach’s Alpha	Composite Reliability
Employee Empowerment (X)	0.764	0.578	0.944	0.950
Sense of Belonging (Z)	0.857	0.738	0.949	0.957
Employee Performance (Y)	0.825	0.693	0.945	0.953

4. Inner Model Results

The inner model was appraised through explanatory power, effect sizes, predictive relevance, and overall fit to judge the robustness of the structural links. Sense of belonging recorded $R^2=0.631$, indicating that employee empowerment explains 63.1% of its variance, while employee performance achieved $R^2=0.856$, jointly accounted for by empowerment and belonging; both exceed the 0.26 benchmark for substantial explanation in social science (Hair et al., 2024). Effect-size diagnostics showed large contributions of empowerment to belonging ($f^2=1.710$) and to performance ($f^2=0.608$), as well as a large effect of belonging on performance ($f^2=0.613$). Predictive relevance from blindfolding was high ($Q^2=0.947$), and overall model fit was strong with $GoF=0.706$, surpassing the 0.36 threshold for a large model (Hair et al., 2024). The summary of these metrics is presented in Table 2.

Table 2. Inner Model Evaluation Results

Endogenous Construct	R^2	f^2 (From X)	f^2 (From Z)	Q^2	GoF
Sense of Belonging (Z)	0.631	1.71	–	0.947	0.706
Employee Performance (Y)	0.856	0.608	0.613	0.947	0.706

The results in Table 2 demonstrate that the structural model has strong explanatory power, with R^2 values well above the minimum criteria for substantial models. The large f^2 values indicate that employee empowerment is a key driver of both sense of belonging and employee performance, while sense of belonging itself significantly enhances performance outcomes. The high Q^2 value confirms the predictive accuracy of the model, aligning with recommendations by Hair et al. (2024) That Q^2 values greater than zero indicate predictive relevance. Moreover, the GoF value of 0.706 signifies that the model has an excellent overall fit, integrating measurement quality and structural validity into a coherent and reliable framework. These findings establish a solid basis for interpreting the hypothesis testing results in the next section.

5. Hypothesis Results

Hypothesis testing was conducted using the bootstrapping procedure in SmartPLS 4.0 with 5,000 resamples to assess the significance of direct and indirect relationships between variables. Path coefficients, t-statistics, and p-values were used as the basis for determining statistical significance, with t-values above 1.96 and p-values below 0.05

considered significant (Magno et al., 2024). The results show that all hypothesized relationships, both direct and indirect, were statistically supported, confirming the proposed conceptual model. The summary of hypothesis testing results is presented in Table 3.

Table 3. Hypothesis Results

Hypothesis	Path Relationship	β (Original Sample)	t-Statistic	p-Value
H1	Employee Empowerment \rightarrow Sense of Belonging	0.794	17.092	0
H2	Sense of Belonging \rightarrow Employee Performance	0.489	4.197	0
H3	Employee Empowerment \rightarrow Employee Performance	0.487	4.065	0
H4	Employee Empowerment \rightarrow Sense of Belonging \rightarrow Employee Performance	0.389	4.012	0

Table 3 shows a robust, positive path from employee empowerment to sense of belonging ($\beta=0.794$, $p<0.001$) and a moderate yet significant direct path from empowerment to employee performance ($\beta=0.487$, $p<0.001$). Sense of belonging likewise exerts a significant positive influence on performance ($\beta=0.489$, $p<0.001$), underscoring its role as a proximal driver of outcomes. Mediation testing further indicates that sense of belonging partially transmits the effect of empowerment to performance ($\beta=0.389$, $p<0.001$). This pattern is consistent with Pacheco et al. (2023), who define partial mediation as the condition in which both the direct path and the indirect path are statistically significant, implying that empowerment enhances performance both directly and by strengthening employees' sense of affiliation.

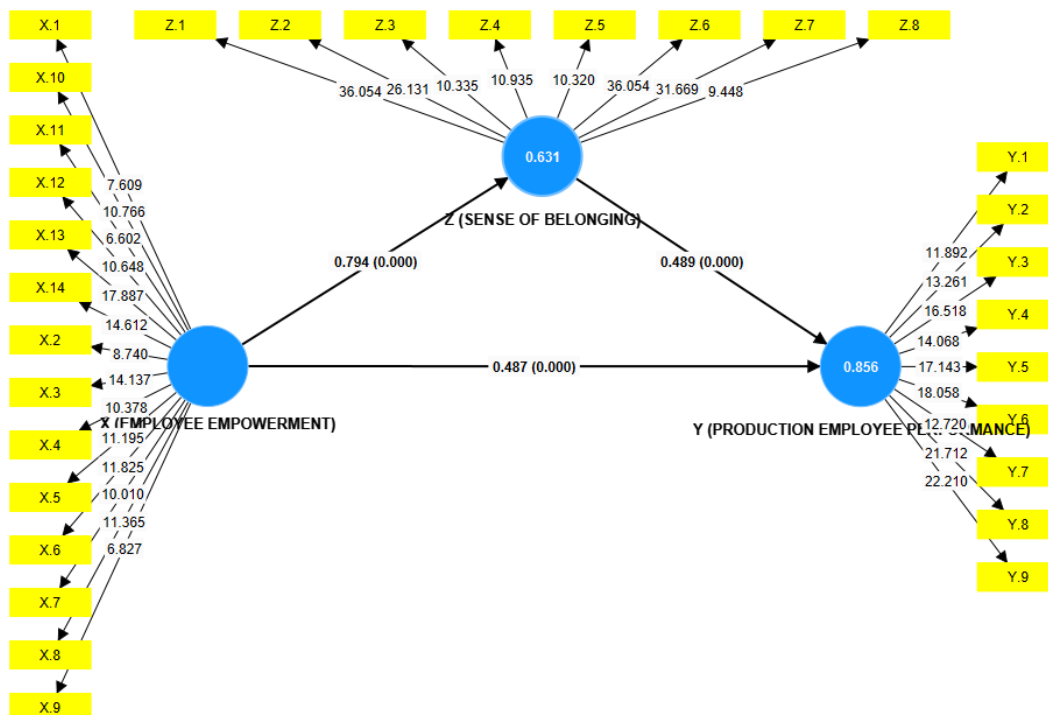


Figure 2. Bootstrapping Test Results

These findings are consistent with prior studies, such as Hassard et al. (2023), Seo (2023), and Orenuga et al. (2024), which emphasizes the importance of psychological and social factors in translating empowerment into tangible performance outcomes. The confirmation of all four hypotheses reinforces the theoretical proposition that empowerment strategies should not only focus on structural autonomy but also on cultivating a strong sense of belonging to maximize performance in production environments. This integrated effect is visually summarized in Figure 2 (Bootstrapping Test Results), which illustrates the magnitude and significance of both direct and indirect relationships among the studied variables.

Discussions

1. The Impact of Employee Empowerment on Sense of Belonging

The hypothesis testing confirmed that H1 is accepted, indicating that employee empowerment exerts a strong positive effect on sense of belonging. This suggests that granting employees autonomy, decision-making authority, and recognition enhances their emotional attachment to the organization. This finding aligns with Social Exchange Theory (Blau et al., 2023), which proposes that when organizations invest meaningful support such as trust and autonomy, employees reciprocate through increased psychological commitment and organizational identification.

Empirical studies support this relationship. Hashemi et al. (2025), and Seo (2023) Found that psychological empowerment significantly enhances the sense of belonging, which in turn strengthens knowledge-sharing behaviors (Seo, 2023). Similarly, Liu (2024) demonstrated that inclusive leadership practices such as recognition and acceptance satisfy employees' belonging needs and improve workplace well-being. Thissen (2023) observed that recognition programs significantly increase employees' sense of belonging by enhancing visibility and social inclusion among staff (Thissen, 2023).

In the context of PT Batu Gunung Mulia Putra Agro, empowerment practices like delegating operational decisions and acknowledging contributions have likely fostered a perception of value and belonging among employees. This relational dimension of empowerment goes beyond mere efficiency; it establishes the emotional foundations for sustained engagement and performance in production teams.

2. The Influence of Sense of Belonging on Employee Performance

Hypothesis testing indicates that H2 is accepted, demonstrating a significant positive effect of sense of belonging on employee performance. Employees who feel accepted, valued, and connected within their organization are more likely to sustain high-quality, reliable performance. This pattern aligns with Self-Determination Theory (Deci & Ryan, 2000), in which a strong sense of belonging fulfills a fundamental psychological need that heightens intrinsic motivation, supports emotional stability, and maintains engagement over time. Within PT Batu Gunung Mulia Putra Agro, a collaborative and inclusive climate appears to foster social integration, thereby improving productivity and strengthening teamwork in a production-oriented setting.

This relationship is supported by prior research. Baumeister and Leary (1995) argued that the need to belong is a fundamental human motivation that directly affects behavior and performance. Desta and Mulie (2024), Tian et al. (2023), Yang et al. (2023),

and Dewi and Gentari (2021) found that employees with strong belongingness tend to display better adaptability and commitment, leading to higher task completion rates. Bonini et al. (2024), Kim and Cho (2024), and Seo (2023) reported that belongingness not only enhances motivation but also reduces withdrawal behaviors, which in turn supports performance outcomes. Furthermore, Orenuga et al. (2024) demonstrated that in labor-intensive sectors, belongingness fosters mutual trust and resilience, enabling employees to maintain performance under operational pressure.

The present study extends these insights by confirming that in a shift-based manufacturing setting, belongingness operates as a strategic performance enabler. This underscores that performance management should not only focus on technical competencies but also prioritize creating an inclusive, trust-based environment where employees feel a genuine part of the organizational fabric.

3. The Direct Effect of Employee Empowerment on Employee Performance

The hypothesis testing confirmed that H3 is accepted, revealing that employee empowerment has a significant positive effect on employee performance. This indicates that when employees are provided with greater autonomy, decision-making authority, and opportunities for skill utilization, their performance levels improve. This relationship aligns with Job Characteristics Theory (Hackman & Oldham, 1976), which posits that enriched job roles with autonomy and responsibility lead to higher motivation, job satisfaction, and performance outcomes. Empowerment encourages proactive behavior, problem-solving initiative, and accountability, which are essential in maintaining operational efficiency at PT Batu Gunung Mulia Putra Agro.

Empirical evidence reinforces these findings. Spreitzer (1995) demonstrated that psychological empowerment is positively associated with work effectiveness and adaptability across organizational contexts. found that empowerment enhances employees' sense of competence and control, which translates into higher task performance and reduced turnover intention. More recently, Ghosh et al. (2023), Juyumaya (2022), and Llorente-Alonso et al. (2024) reported that empowerment initiatives in manufacturing settings significantly improved productivity, quality standards, and innovation capability. The consistency of these results across diverse sectors underscores the universal impact of empowerment as a strategic human resource practice (Cudjoe et al., 2023; Kimpah et al., 2024).

In the operational setting of PT Batu Gunung Mulia Putra Agro, the empowerment of production employees through delegation of operational decisions, access to problem-solving forums, and recognition for process improvements appears to directly contribute to performance gains. This finding highlights the value of embedding empowerment into performance management systems, ensuring that autonomy is matched with adequate resources and skill development to sustain long-term productivity.

4. The Mediating Role of Sense of Belonging

The hypothesis testing confirmed that H4 is accepted, indicating that sense of belonging significantly mediates the relationship between employee empowerment and employee performance. This suggests that empowerment not only has a direct impact on performance but also works indirectly by enhancing employees' psychological attachment to the organization, which in turn drives higher performance. This mechanism aligns with Social Identity Theory (Tajfel & Turner, 2019), which posits that individuals derive

part of their self-concept from their membership and identification with the organization, and that stronger identification leads to improved work outcomes.

This mediating pathway is supported by prior research. Chu et al. (2024), Li et al. (2024), and Ugwoke et al. (2025) found that psychological empowerment fosters affective commitment, which strengthens organizational identification and performance. demonstrated that belongingness Urrila et al. (2025) mediates the link between supportive leadership and performance, emphasizing the role of social bonds in converting empowerment into tangible results. More recently, Albrecht et al. (2021), and Kepplinger et al. (2024) highlighted that employee engagement and belongingness serve as key conduits through which empowerment practices translate into sustained performance improvements.

In the operational context of PT Batu Gunung Mulia Putra Agro, empowerment initiatives such as delegating decision-making authority, providing constructive feedback, and recognizing contributions seem to enhance employees' sense of belonging, which subsequently boosts their performance. This underscores that empowerment strategies should be coupled with initiatives aimed at building inclusive work cultures, ensuring that the psychological benefits of empowerment are fully realized in performance outcomes.

5. Practical Implications

The findings of this study provide actionable insights for organizational leaders, particularly in production-driven agribusiness environments. The positive influence of employee empowerment on both sense of belonging and performance suggests that management should embed empowerment practices into daily operations. Initiatives such as granting decision-making autonomy, involving employees in operational problem-solving, and expanding skill development opportunities can enhance operational agility while fostering a stronger psychological connection to the organization. When employees feel trusted and capable, they not only perform better but also contribute more actively to organizational improvement and innovation.

The mediating role of sense of belonging highlights the strategic importance of cultivating an inclusive and collaborative workplace culture. Management should design structured recognition programs, implement team cohesion activities, and encourage peer-support mechanisms to strengthen interpersonal bonds. Integrating belongingness and empowerment metrics into performance management systems can lead to sustainable productivity improvements. In the context of PT Batu Gunung Mulia Putra Agro, these measures can reduce turnover intentions, improve morale, and ensure that performance growth is underpinned by a motivated and engaged workforce, turning empowerment into a driver of long-term competitiveness.

6. Limitations and Suggestions for Future Research

This study has two main constraints. The cross-sectional survey design limits causal inference among empowerment, belonging, and performance, since temporal ordering cannot be established. The single-company setting in an agribusiness manufacturer also narrows external validity, because the firm's operational routines, managerial practices, and workforce profile may differ from those in other sectors or cultures.

Future work should use multi-industry and cross-cultural samples to test the generalizability of the framework. Longitudinal designs can trace how empowerment initiatives shape belonging and sustain performance over time. Complementary qualitative approaches, such as interviews or focus groups, can deepen insight into employees' experiences. Extending the model with potential moderators, including leadership style, organizational support, and job complexity, would clarify mechanisms and boundary conditions that drive performance.

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The study concludes that employee empowerment plays a critical role in enhancing both sense of belonging and employee performance within production-oriented organizations. Empowerment not only exerts a direct positive influence on performance but also operates indirectly through the strengthening of employees' psychological attachment to the organization. These findings affirm that organizational practices that grant autonomy, recognize contributions, and foster skill development can create a more engaged and committed workforce. In the case of PT Batu Gunung Mulia Putra Agro, the integration of empowerment and belongingness into management strategies has the potential to sustain high productivity and operational excellence over time.

Future research should address the limitations of this study by expanding the scope beyond a single company and incorporating diverse industrial and cultural contexts. Longitudinal studies are recommended to capture the dynamic nature of the empowerment belongingness performance relationship over time. Furthermore, qualitative approaches could be employed to explore employees' personal experiences and perceptions in greater depth. For practitioners, it is advised to institutionalize empowerment practices alongside initiatives that strengthen workplace belongingness, ensuring that performance gains are sustainable. Policymakers and industry leaders may also consider integrating these findings into workforce development programs to enhance organizational competitiveness at a broader scale.

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