

Employee Empowerment to Improve Organizational Effectiveness at South African Universities

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Abstract—This paper scrutinizes employee empowerment and seeks to provide a model for its implementation which addresses needs identified in the literature but inadequately addressed previously in the context of South Africa. Empowerment is a process whereby a culture of empowerment is developed, information is shared, competency is developed, and resources and support are provided. The benefits of employee empowerment are noted, and objections to it are addressed. Theoretical foundations of employee empowerment are examined in practice. A model for understanding and implementing employee empowerment is discussed. Employees in universities in South Africa are viewed first as apprentices while their skills and knowledge within a given task set are developing, then journey persons through continued development, and finally as leaders of their craft. An assessment of organizational empowerment is provided and training responses based upon this assessment are suggested.

Keywords—Authority, Devolution of responsibility, Motivation, Power-sharing, Participative decision-making.

I. INTRODUCTION

HIGHER education for example universities are a locus of scholarly development and workstation, where a considerable number of people are employed; and where employee productivity rises and falls in relation to increases or decreases in stability and instability and predictability in the work environment alone, or the work environment in combination with family and community. An area where universities of SA have channeled their efforts in development is by offering permanent staff free education even as far as their extended families. This is just one of their empowerment initiatives as a benefit to their employees the location of empowerment in a university is very essential in determining its impact within the organization. Because empowerment and involvement have the capacity to impact on both employees and the organization as its primary client, it does have the potential to make a great impact in organization business process where these interface with individual output. The utilization of such programs is to facilitate the achievement of the objectives of universities, in particular service excellence, continuous improvement and total quality management [1].

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The notion of empowerment

Empowerment is derived from alienation, industrial democracy, participative management and job enrichment. It concerns a form of employee empowerment initiative and refers to the degree with which employees are encouraged to make certain decisions without consulting their supervisors so that some and in some cases most of the organization dynamics are initiated at the bottom [2]. It focuses on the employee perception of their individual power to cope with events, situations and people they encounter at work. Empowerment implies that people at a lower level at work who sometimes know best take part in decision making and taking. The leaders' role should be to act as coaches or mentors and important decisions can be made at all levels of the organization. In brief, empowerment practices should stimulate individual frontline service employees to deliver high quality service as a discretionary effort.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

Employee empowerment is described and conceptualized by different authors in different ways. Key themes that emerged from the literature were power-sharing, participative decision-making, devolution of responsibility and people oriented leadership style [3]. It was very interesting to note how some authors put more emphasis on power-sharing while others stress the importance of participative decision-making and devolution of responsibility. However with reference to leadership style there is common agreement that an autocratic style is not desirable and an emphasis is put on people oriented leadership style with regards to empowering people. Suffice to say that if organizations are serious about empowering their employees then these four themes need to be considered at length before employee empowerment process can begin [4], [5], [6]. Empowerment means to invest legally or formally with the power to enable, permit people to do things the way they would otherwise be unable to do. It means removing the restrictions- artificial or otherwise that prevent people from doing things that are within their ability to achieve. It requires sharing of knowledge and information. Two fundamental approaches can be observed. The first is the behavioral dimension dealing with the role of top management in employee empowering. The second is the psychological dimension encompassing the perception of employees towards

the behavior of supervisors and the conditions created. The issue is about the task and responsibilities of top management and the actions performed by top managers. Some researchers focus on how employees perceive the activities of empowerment, not on what top management should do to implement empowerment [4].

Employee empowerment is thought to enhance job satisfaction and has positive effects on perceived service quality. Behavioral empowerment, convenient communication, an atmosphere of trust and motivational tools provided by employers lead to a positive impact in job satisfaction and brings decision makers and employees closer hence shortening the duration of tasks. Empowerment is also defined as giving authority, license and power to employees to take direct control and ownership of certain tasks. It is part of an overall plan to achieve organizational improvement in areas such as customer care, quality management and continuous improvement [7]. It means that employees are valued, their opinions sought and their views taken into account. The focus is on seeking or taking corrective action to solve problems together and prevent recurrence. It recognizes employee's intelligence as well as their labor, the individuality of each person as well as enhances employment status. The aspirations of individuals and employees' efforts are recognised therefore assisting to achieve personal self-fulfillment within the workplace. Empowerment forces the workforce to keep abreast with the latest skills and technology and encourages mobility that benefits the economy. Managers, supervisors and employees, all need to be empowered [8].

A. Empowered culture

Employees should see their self-interests as being tied up with the fortunes of the business. They achieve a sense of personal worth and esteem by succeeding in their tasks, working with others to achieve results, helping others to succeed and being part of a winning team in an organization. They are motivated by a sense of belonging to a good group of people, sharing success and achieving worthwhile goals. They are demotivated when they feel that they are not informed and consulted or being treated unfairly [6].

B. How to empower

Employee empowerment is a strategy and philosophy that enables employees to make decisions about their jobs. Employee empowerment helps employees own their work and take responsibility for their results. Employee empowerment helps employees serve customers at the level of the organization where the customer interface exists. Empowerment for employees involves delegating responsibility with authority. When empowered, an employee has the responsibility to make decisions about a project and decide how the project is done. They have the freedom to do jobs in own way. By delegating responsibility and authority, management demonstrate employee them and encourage development of new skills. Management must provide them with the necessary information and skills to do the job [5].

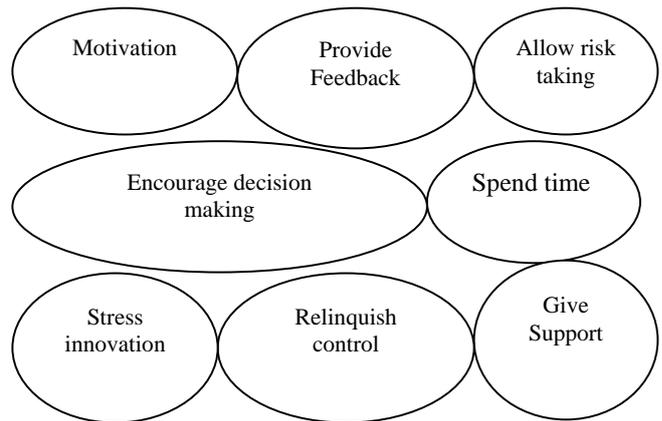


Fig. 1 A model of how to empower

C. Roots of Concepts of Employee Empowerment

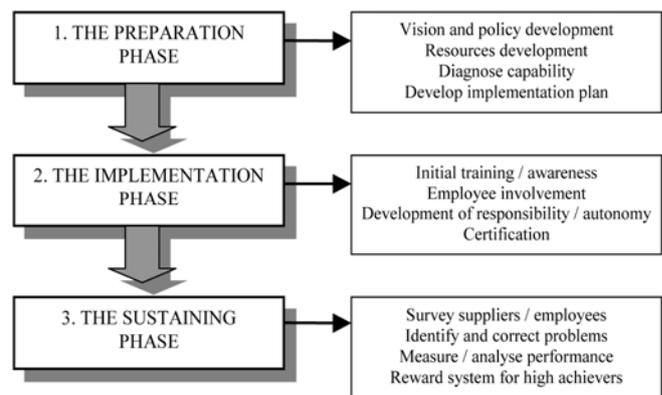


Fig. 2 The stages in employee empowerment

Empowerment must address the needs and culture of each entity. Without this self-reference employee empowerment can fail because the commitment or the sense of ownership is not created. Control of one's own work, autonomy on the job, variations of teamwork and pay systems that link pay with performance are all encouraged. Empowerment is looked by various researchers using different lenses. [2] Some of the items addressed are teams, job enrichment and payment for performance, stock ownership these are some of the techniques managers use to create an environment that allows for and even facilitates employees opting for an empowered state. Leaders should create an environment where individuals are able to make that choice [4], [9], [10].

Literature on job autonomy addresses another component of employee empowerment. This is the approach that empowers subordinates as a primary component of managerial and organizational effectiveness. Empowerment can be divided into five groupings which are leadership, the individual empowered state, collaborative work, structural or procedural change and multi-dimensional perspective [11], [12], [13], [14].

D. Leading an Empowered Organization

Developing the leadership needed to succeed is important. Empowered organizations need leadership and management. The fact that people at all levels are making decisions does not do away with the need for managers. The nature of management and changes, the management style and tools of the trade characteristic of the command and control type of organization will prove to be a disaster if they are used by a manager in an empowered organization. Different management styles and tools are required. In an empowered organization many of the tasks are dedicated to the workforce who releases the management to deal with the longer term issues [15]. The directors of an empowered organization have an overriding responsibility to secure the long term future of the enterprise. To gain commitment of the workforce so vital to success people need a vision of the organization. What kind of the organization it should be and how to make it so are some of the major challenges. An empowered organization does just not only achieve results: it becomes a recognizable entity. People need to know what an organization achieves, what values are implicit in the way an organization views its employees, the community, and the environment. In an empowered organization, the managers do not need to allocate staff to tasks at the beginning of a shift, the teams can see to this. The managers will not have to intervene every time there is a minor problem- the workforce will sort it out [10].

Training and helping people to learn assumes much greater significance in an empowered organization. People have to learn to think, become acquainted with the overall picture and activities with how they fit into empowerment. They have to learn how to cooperate with others and to make decisions themselves and in collaboration with others. Managers have to encourage, support and coach employees so that they acquire these skills. At times managers should be able to recognize their own limitations and be prepared to listen to the ideas and opinions of their juniors and to learn from them. Management has a duty to respond to all the legitimate concerns of their employees and to give them feedback on any suggestions and questions raised [11].

The managers leading in an empowered organization lead by setting goals and creating the climate for an effective operation. The qualities required for empowerment leaders are difficult to capture in words. A leader in an empowered organization must have an ability to look ahead and plan to succeed, must be able to communicate effectively with the workforce regarding targets and expectations, listen to the depth of the feeling behind the words. The leader must monitor results and give praise and constructive feedback to employees when required, be sensitive to anyone with grievance and be able to discern whether or not it is justified. The leader will demonstrate a very real concern of the health and safety of the workforce. Managers open to comments from subordinates as well as from their peers and bosses often find that this can accelerate their personal development [13].

III. METHODOLOGY

A comprehensive questionnaire was developed by the researcher based on the information gained from the literature study and from other similar questionnaires to determine from relevant stakeholders what the underlying reasons for poor utilization of employee empowerment programmes in South African universities [12]. Formal and informal discussions (interviews) were carried out with various interested stakeholders. They provided the researcher with the benefit of probing and solving problems through interactive measures and also provided very elaborate answers in an attempt to figure out the purpose of the study [7]. Data were obtained through written questionnaires, where multiple informants within each department, ranging from top management and university unit level informants to low level workers. Different positions were targeted, each position with its own set of questions. This was done to allow respondents to answer questions in their area of expertise. Also, by using multiple informants the possible effects of common response bias were eliminated. The data was later, after initial screening and data cleaning, aggregated to the level of the institutions and all subsequent analyses used these data. Descriptive statistics were used to describe the basic features of the data in the study. Simple summaries of sample and measures are outlined. The data was analyzed using the SPSS software to determine the frequency of occurrence for a specific question. The statistical procedure was used in interpreting and analyzing the data was determined in consultation with the fellow researchers and with the statistician at the time the questionnaire and surveys were designed [8].

Measuring Instruments

The primary researcher developed the Employee Empowerment Survey to determine the nature, content, context, participants, role players, anticipated benefits and possible drawbacks of an empowerment programme in each organisation. This survey included quantitative items and qualitative questions that required further explanation. To ensure content validity, the researchers developed the questionnaire from the literature study. Over a period of three months, the researchers sent the questionnaire to experts in the field of employee empowerment (both in the academia and organisations) to judge its face validity. They used a trial run to assess whether the items were understandable and to detect problems in the questionnaire. The questionnaire was divided into five sections: Section 1 contained information about the organisations, including their types, sectors of operations, annual turnover and number of full-time employees. Section II contained reasons for introducing employee empowerment and perceived successes or failures. For example, the researchers asked organisations to rate, on a 5-point Linker scale, 'How successful is your Employee Empowerment Programme?' They then asked the organisations to give reasons to support their evaluations. Section III contained information about the effectiveness, activities and levels of employee participation. For example, the researchers asked

organisations 'How is the effectiveness of the employee empowerment Programme determined?' Section 4 contained information about organisations' contributions, strikes, absenteeism and staff turnover. For example, the researchers asked 'How many days sick leave were taken in the last 12 months for the organisation as a whole?' They then asked organisations to give the five main reasons for the sick leave. Section V contained information about budgets, needs analyses and the emphases of the organisations. For example, the researchers asked the organisations to indicate 'What is the total annual budget allocated to the employee empowerment programme in your organisation?'

Research procedure

The researchers invited the people responsible for managing empowerment programmes in universities in South Africa to participate in this study. The researchers also targeted employees, labour unions and service providers. They also asked the four service providers to describe the nature of the employee empowerment services they provide in South Africa. The researchers gained a good idea of the current situation about employee empowerment practices in South African universities from the stakeholders.

V. FINDINGS AND RESULTS

It was found out that more participatory approaches are, in general, associated with higher levels of employee motivation, acceptance of and adaptability to change, managerial decision quality, teamwork and morale, and individual employee development. When decision-making responsibilities are shared, slumbering organizations often "wake up." Workers will increase their expectations of both themselves and the organization. The overall objective of the study was to examine the relationship between overall job satisfaction and the facets of employee empowerment and organizational effectiveness. In addition, the study also investigated the most significant predictors of overall job satisfaction within universities. The results of the study revealed that, in general, empowerment to some extent affects job satisfaction among employees. Training and rewards as facets of empowerment and job dedication behaviors within higher education are perceived to be the most significant and dominant predictors of overall job satisfaction among the employees at the institutions. In contrast, information sharing and trust as a facet of empowerment and interpersonal facilitation behaviors were found to have insignificant contributions towards the overall effectiveness of the universities. Employees were quite skeptical in answering questionnaires as they felt that they were being investigated. In most cases employee empowerment was at the periphery of real business activities and was often regarded by management as a 'nice to have rather' than as a business imperative [3]. It was found out that the higher education sector as an employer does not take seriously the personal perspectives of employees despite the impact of these on productivity and morale. The importance

of the management of change was considered and the results are shown in Fig. 3.

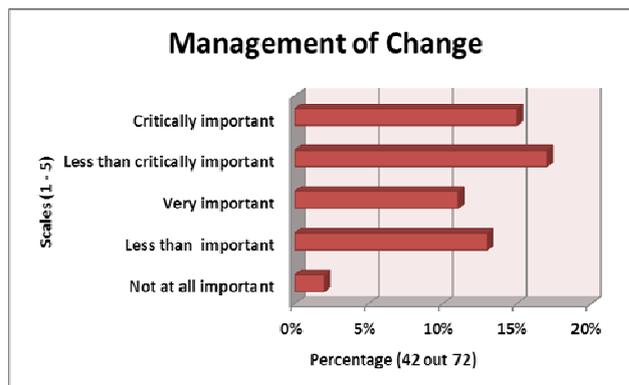


Fig. 3 The importance of management of change

Staff totally disagree that they are involved in the management of change. They just see improvement initiatives but no communication has been brought to their attention. The changes startle them sometimes and therefore they become resistant as they cannot get out of their status quo before they have been prepared for that. Less than 20% of the employees felt that they were involved in change management. This means that the management should give more attention to employee empowerment and involvement. The universities need to create a suitable and healthy environment to foster employee empowerment. This can improve performance and can contribute to the success of the organizations. A number of factors affecting job satisfaction were identified: These include employment status (permanent or temporary), duration of employment, location of the establishment, content of the work itself or its nature, opportunities to sharpen skills, the routine of the work, benefits, wages, shifts, job-family adaption, organization support, relation with colleagues, managerial style of supervisors, opportunity of self-physical conditions, participation in decision making, employment position, as well as the demographic factors such as age, gender, marital status, and level of education. Results for the frequency of training and development are shown in Fig. 4.

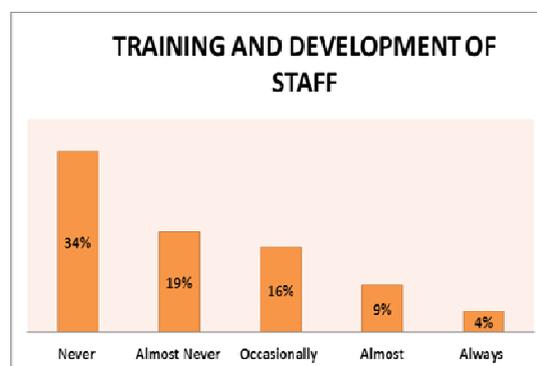


Fig. 4 The frequency of training and development of staff

This indicates that 34% of respondents received relevant training and development necessary to improve their skills and expertise. The universities have not taken advantage of their academic and training resources. Results for the importance of participation in decision making are shown in Fig. 5.

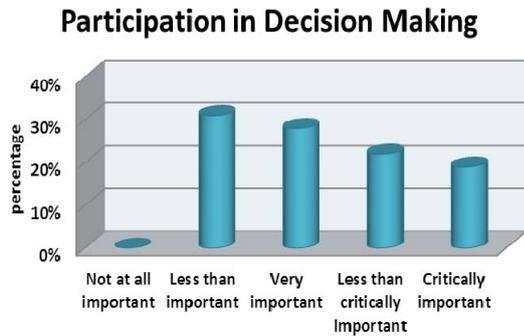


Fig. 5 The importance of participation in decision making

Fig. 5.3 indicates the percentages of respondents that feel they are involved and that they are important in decision making: only 35% are involved in a way that is important. This is the illustration of the few empowered employees who felt decision making is very important and effective to them as employees of this institution. The universities have no appreciation of this fact. It is notable that there seems to be little that has been done to encourage the inflow of empowerment into the institutions. Fig. 6 shows how often work is delegated to employees by the managers and leaders.



Fig. 6 The frequency of delegation of work by leaders

This shows that 46% of respondents feel that work is delegated to them. It seemed that work was only delegated because of the need to reduce the work load of senior management. Shared decision making can lead to better decisions, increased communication with employees, bolsters worker motivation, and increases acceptance of difficult decisions. In some cases delegation may save time in the long run but it takes more time in the short term. Circumstances are critical, as are both the supervisor's and the subordinate's skills and perspectives. Whether delegating routine jobs or important decision-making assignments, supervisors also need

to assure instructions are clear, communicating the limits of the shared decision-making power and ensuring that tasks are carried out in a timely fashion. Delegation and empowerment work best when done in small increments. Sometimes employers over-delegate leading to failure and chaos and reversal of empowerment. Instead, as the employee succeeds at increasingly more difficult tasks, more can be delegated. When delegating, ensure that the employees will do the job just as well, if not better. Thus the supervisor needs to test for employee understanding before delegating [11].

Fig. 7 shows the results on the importance of the perception of the supervisor when it comes to employee empowerment. The findings show that 30% of the respondents' perception of their immediate supervisor was not favorable to effective employee involvement and empowerment. They felt that their opinions were not sought. Their immediate supervisors in many times did not take their opinions to consideration their contributions are just dismissed.

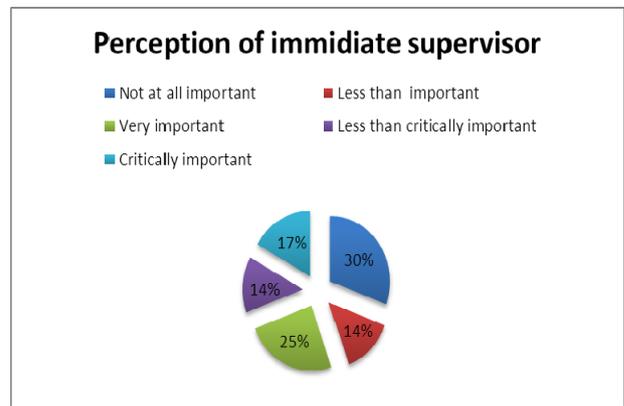


Fig. 7 Employee perception of the immediate supervisor

While empowerment at a workplace is important, emotions of employees are also important. Emotions at work appear to be a part of daily working life company which makes one's working day complete or incomplete. Emotions such as anger, fear, happiness, joy, frustration, pride and many other forms may eventually in one way or another influence the performance of individual employees at work. Conceptual study has provided evidence that emotions may contribute to quality of working life which could contribute to both negative and positive impacts on organizational behaviors [10]. We argue that the practice of empowerment may help to increase the positive level of employee's emotions at work due to the benefit that empowerment bring to the employees. Accordingly, the empowerment of employees is expected to reduce the negative emotions of employees at work and this is in agreement with other research findings [16], [17], [18].

VI. RECOMMENDATIONS

The findings provide a strong signal to the management of the universities that the practice of empowerment at work is important in bringing satisfaction to the employees. Similarly,

nurturing positive emotions among employee is imperative as it serves as an important strategy in improving employee satisfaction. Based on the findings, it is concluded that empowerment has an important role in shaping the right emotions of the employees, and it acts as an important strategy in contributing to employees' satisfaction at work. Interestingly, the study also found that positive emotions have significant impact on employee satisfaction at work. In general, there seems to be high initial positive responses to the questions relating to the facets of employee empowerment and organizational effectiveness. All of the facets of employee empowerment except rewards also portray moderately high scores. Information sharing, training and trust seem to be the main contribution to the overall job satisfaction when employees are empowered.

The data suggests that in this study, social structural characteristics like self-esteem, information, knowledge, rewards, organizational climate constitute a positive factor in influencing empowerment in universities. It is therefore recommended that the universities engage these characteristics at high level in order to set state-of-the-art standards in this sector.

When aspects in social structural characteristics received by employees are perceived as capable of fulfilling their needs and desires, they will experience or feel a positive emotional state, by being more empowered. A supervisor's confidence in his workers may depend partly on their general inclinations but certainly ought to also be based upon employee ability and interest. Most workers enjoy responsibility if they are given the training, materials, time, and freedom to act.

Some employees tend to be negative and blame everyone but themselves when things go wrong. Others may only pretend to follow instructions. With their look or voice they may say, "See, it does not work." Some workers may try making the supervisor feel guilty for delegating a task. Effective interpersonal skills are critical when dealing with employees, especially when difficulties arise.

Employers concerned with developing high levels of employee empowerment need to focus their attention on providing ample self-esteem, information, knowledge, rewards and creating a conducive organizational climate for organizational effectiveness. Individuals do respond differently to decision-making opportunities. It is crucial to remember, however, that most employees are capable of significantly expanding their skills. How they develop is partly influenced by their supervisor's expectations of them.

There could be more factors that influence empowerment in organizations. These should be identified and attempts made to introduce them in the organizations. Providing for the development of self-worth by negotiating for latitude in decision making and changing aspects of employees job leads to increased levels of perceived self-control and hence empowerment levels of involvement. A supervisor may usefully include others in virtually every decision. When *and* to what extent to involve workers is part key management choices. These provide scope for more research in future.

VII. CONCLUSION

In conclusion, in order to meet employee empowerment and involvement challenges top management need to enter into a kind of relationship with its employees. It is a kind of synergistic partnership where each depends on the other for success. Employees can become more independent, more self-sufficient and more empowered. A key factor in determining the success of an empowerment program lies in the setting up of all the necessary conditions. Empowerment only work by involving all levels of management and employees. Transferring responsibility to the employees is the major desired outcome of the empowerment process. There is a need to move away from any simplistic or uni-linear conceptions of empowerment. Not only it is the case that varying types of empowerment carry different meanings but also different workforces may experience techniques with the same name, structure and processes in a very different fashion. As a result empowerment initiatives cannot be analyzed in isolation from the other organization policies that impact on the employment relationship.

In general, there seems to be high initial positive responses to the questions relating to the facets of employee empowerment and organizational effectiveness. All of the facets of employee empowerment except rewards also portray moderately high scores on the scale. However, on the other hand the negative responses on the rewards question also shed light on the importance of this facet to employee empowerment in determining overall job satisfaction. The purpose of this study was to discuss the approaches and perceptions of different employees about empowerment with a view to counseling universities on what might be best possible course of action. The analysis helps to identify shortcomings on the current empowerment initiatives at the South African universities under examination while also identifying best practices that universities can model for their own effectiveness.

The study finds that among many initiatives aimed at addressing empowerment intensified training and development measures are important. In the light of the presented results, empowerment is a total concept encompassing both the structural as well as the psychological conditions. Psychological empowerment needs to be studied at the individual level. However the impacts need to be assessed at the organizational level too. Organizations need to take necessary measures to identify those conditions that can facilitate the sense of empowerment in the employees.

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