

## **CHAPTER 5: CONCLUSION, SUMMARY OF FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

### **5.1 Conclusion**

Though South African organisations have acknowledged the importance of employee participation as a tool for global competitiveness, and though the South African government has enacted a law (the LRA) to enforce Participation, many managers have not succeeded in implementing it in the work-place.

This has inevitably divided the labour force into two groups: Management who have a monopoly of decision-making powers and employees who have to carry out the decisions as required by management. Unfortunately the interests and goals of the two parties tend to differ; inevitably leading to adversarial relationships in the work-place.

It is evident from this study that adversarial relationships between employees and employers or management does not auger well for the competitiveness of any business world-wide. Indeed “*world-class*” organisations and those aspiring to become “*world-class*” have to use employee participation to eliminate adversarialism and improve work performance and productivity.

Based on the above scenario, literature focusing on the characteristics of “*world-class*” organisations and how organisations may ascend to the status of “*world-class*” was explored in Chapter 2. I was discovered that “*world-class*” organisations effectively respond to their customers’ demands by adopting customer-centred strategies (see paragraph 2.3.1.1). Such strategies are guided by a customer-centred leadership (paragraph 2.3.2) which, with the consent of other stakeholders formulates business systems, processes and procedures that support Employee Participation to enable effective organisational response to customer needs. To ensure that the formulated systems continuously deliver best-quality products and services to their customers, they (systems) are benchmarked against the world’s best (see paragraph 2.4).

From the literature as explored in Chapter 2 it became clear that becoming “*world-class*” demands uncompromising service and quality commitment to customers; and that “*world-class*” organisations have unique characteristics which are carefully designed. It was indicated that “*world-class*” organisations emphasise quality for the customer. All their strategies, structures and culture are designed to ensure not only quality production but also quick and efficient response to both internal and external customers’ needs.

Against the above background, Chapter 3 explored the need for a paradigm shift in employment relations management to ensure employee participation in the work-place. In order to understand and appreciate the need for a paradigm shift in the management of employment relations in south africa, a historical development of people management in the country was discussed (see par 3.2). It was indicated that prior to the democratisation of the country in May 1994, and the enactment of the LRA, employment relations in South Africa were characterised by adversarialism. The labour force was politicised, militant and did not identify with the goals of the organisations. In response, businesses were also assertively adversarial in their relations with Labour. The net result of such relations was increased militant trade unionism, social instability and political resistance. Such workplace conflict, political and social instability resulted in economic decline causing higher labour costs and low productivity.

Therefore, in order to avoid the scenario as depicted above, it was argued in Chapter 3 that a new frame-work in which to manage employment relations in the country be developed. It was indicated that in order to avoid such conflict and enable all stakeholders to identify with organisational goals, there was a need to integrate the needs and aspirations of all the stakeholders with the goals of the organisation. In this regard it would require balancing the informal (see paragraph 3.3.3) and the formal (see paragraph 3.3.2) aspects of the employment relationship. In light of the high socio-economic expectations of the South African employees today, a corporatist approach (see paragraph 3.4.2.2) to employment relations management was also proposed.

Chapter 3 therefore revealed the need for a holistic approach to employment relations management where by social aspects would be integrated in the strategic management and decision-making of the organisation. This would not only mean integration of the formal and informal dimensions of the employment relationship as indicated earlier, but also balancing the individual and collective dimensions (see paragraph 3.3.1) of the relationship. In this regard an employment relations strategy that maximises the collective and the individual dimensions of the employment relations was proposed.

Chapter 4 focused on employee participation as a tool for global competitiveness in post-apartheid South Africa. Statutory and economic imperatives for employee participation were explored. It became clear that the democratisation of the country in April 1994, coupled with the pressures related to the development of the global economy provided strong reasons for the democratisation of the work-place (see paragraph 4.4.1 and 4.4.2). If the country was to succeed and even survive after apartheid, all her organisations had to improve their productivity, quality of the products and services, reduce waste and cut costs. Employee participation was one tool that could be employed to do all this.

Against the above background a constitution that supported democratic values (see paragraph 4.4.1.1) was drawn and accepted in 1996. Legislation was enacted in form of the LRA. The Act supported the democratic values upon which the country's constitution was based. The most significant provision related to employee participation was the section that advocated for the establishment of the Work-Place Forums (see par. 4.6.1). The Forums were designed to promote worker participation in the affairs of the company and foster co-operative processes on all matters outside those covered by the highly centralised corporatist system of negotiation (promoted by industry-level bargaining councils) with a more flexible consensus-based system at the enterprise-level.

Apart from work-place forums, the role of the collective structures in enhancing employee participation and harmonising the employment relationship was also discussed (see paragraph 4.6.2). It was made clear in this regard that integrative bargaining as opposed to distributive bargaining had the potential to harmonise the employment

relationship in the South African workplace. Structures like NEDLAC (paragraph 4.6.3.1), bargaining and statutory councils (paragraph 4.6.3.2; 4.6.3.2), plant/ single company negotiating forums (see paragraph 4.6.3.4) were discussed as collective bargaining structures through which employees can influence organisational policy through negotiation.

On addition to the examination of the formal participative structures as indicated above, chapter 4 also dealt with informal structures in form of briefing groups (paragraph 4.7.1), quality circles (see paragraph 4.7.2) and teams (see paragraph 4.7.3). But despite the presence of both formal and informal participative structures, it was revealed that many South African employees do not participate in the management and decision-making processes in their work-place.

A number of factors were identified as working against the proper implementation and functioning of workplace forums (see paragraph 4.6.1.1). Such reasons included among others opposition from both unions and business. With regard to collective bargaining structures, it was found that they too fell short of enhancing employee participation and the companies' competitiveness. This is because the collective bargaining process lacks the element of compulsion; while employers too are unwilling to encourage centralised collective bargaining. Other reasons noted for improper implementation of participative programmes included: lack of managerial commitment, absence of a culture of group cohesion, poor leadership and lack of employee empowerment.

From the theory as given in the foregoing chapters and from the reality as explored from the relevant literature, the researcher notes a gap between theory and reality. In this regard a summary of the finding is given in paragraph 5.2.

## **5.2 Summary of Findings**

The following is a summary of findings that flow from the theoretical study as undertaken in the previous chapters.

- South African employees are not equipped with enough and relevant information to enable them effectively participate in organisational affairs.
- South African employees still lack the skills and competencies required for effective employee participation.
- Management within the South African organisation is still traditional.
- South African organisations have not yet succeeded in moving away from traditional remuneration practices to world class remuneration.
- South African organisations are yet to adopt a holistic approach to the management of Employment Relations where all the dimensions of the Employment Relationship are integrated and balanced .
- South African organisations are still “*hard on people*” and “*hard on performance*” as opposed to being “*soft on people*” and hard on “*performance*”.
- Many a South African origin are yet to establish the right corporate culture designed to enhance increased productivity and competitiveness.

The overall implication of the above findings is that South African companies are still lagging behind “*world-class*” organisations with regard to the implementation and use of participative practices as a tool for global competitiveness.

### **5.3 Recommendations**

In light of the above findings and the identified factors which impede reciprocal understanding in the South African work-place, and which occasionally frustrate industrial tranquillity and the organisations’ competitiveness, the following recommendations are made.

- Government continues with its policy of supporting employee participation through legislation. However, strict law enforcement should be avoided. Instead, Government should be inclined towards facilitating greater convergence between employers and employees with regard to mutual perceptions and organisational goals.

- A research and training unit be established by the Department of Labour. The role of such a unit should be to empower employer representatives, trade union officials, shop stewards and other concerned stakeholders by offering them introductory courses concerning employment relations of the 21<sup>st</sup> century. Courses in elementary labour law, elementary micro and macro economics, conflict management and business administration could also be conducted at the established units.
- The concepts of employee participation and global competition be widely promoted in all work-places. This could be done through workshops, seminars and Information-dissemination among all employees and trade unions.
- The Labour Relations Act 66 (1995) be written in simplified English and be translated in all other official languages so that it can easily be understood by all stakeholders. Clear and simple guidelines to assist both unions and employers in the effective application of the Act be drawn and made available to all concerned parties.
- Seminars and workshops concerning labour related matters like employee productivity, participation and organisational competitiveness be jointly held by trade union officials, government representatives and employers. This will help to forge more compatible views, values and perceptions among all stakeholders.
- Organisations should consider encouraging managerial staff to take short courses concerning employment relations. Emphasis in such courses be put on the benefits of co-ordinated participative programmes and the need for managers to evolve into customer-centred-leaders. Managers who successfully complete such courses should be recognised by awarding certificates to them. As a way of encouraging the practice, enterprises that formally allocate resources to upgrade employment relations expertise among their managerial staff should be considered for tax concessions.
- Employment relations and labour economics as subjects be introduced and made compulsory non-examinable subjects in grade 12 in all high schools. It is the author's

conviction that this will equip grade 12 learners (potential employees) with knowledge regarding employee participation and work-place democratisation. It is also hoped that such aspects would lessen the burden on potential employers as regards equipping employees with the relevant knowledge.

It is hoped that favourable consideration of the above recommendations by policy makers in public and private organisations and government will enable all stakeholders to co-operate more efficiently as regards the maintenance of improved employment relations. This will no doubt eradicate adversarialism and support an environment supportive of increased quality production.

It is vital that as stakeholders strive to achieve the above goals emphasis is laid on creating a common ground upon which all partners may base to achieve the common goal. Such a common ground could be achieved during training at the labour training and research unit as proposed in the recommendations. If all stakeholders for instance agree that employee participation is essential for an organisation's global competitiveness, and that the results of excellent performance by an organisation is for the benefit of all, they will jointly work together to ensure success.

Though the findings have been listed in paragraph 5.2 and recommendations given in the preceding paragraph, it is vital to note that this has been a theoretical study entirely based on literature exploration. It is therefore important that future researchers conduct empirical studies to test the validity of the findings as listed in paragraph 5.2. It is the researcher's conviction that the literature as presented and analysed in this study will enable future researchers to identify research questions which will then be investigated empirically.

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