

CHAPTER 1

ORIENTATION TO THE STUDY

1.1 INTRODUCTION

In the workplace today, employees are needed that can make decisions, take responsibility, take initiative, find solutions to problems, as well as being motivated and having the company's best interest at heart. These employees are empowered. The employees in every company should be empowered, and the company should follow and enhance the principles of employee empowerment.

This study intends to identify the dimensions of employee empowerment as well as the criteria needed for an organisation to enhance employee empowerment. "Empowered employees see themselves as more effective in their work, they see themselves as innovative and show less fear of trying something new. Empowered employees are transformational in their leadership ability (Quinn & Spreitzer, 1997:42)." Similarly Lawson (2001:8) argues that: "When you allow your employees to think independently and assist the company, they will respond with increased work effort and greater efficiency." In organisations where empowerment has been enacted successfully, both the philosophy and the term itself enjoy a high level of acceptance (Burdett, 1999).

"To empower means to enable; it means to help people develop a sense of self-worth; it means to overcome causes of powerlessness or helplessness; it means to energise people to take action; it means to mobilise intrinsic excitement factors in work. It is more than merely giving power to someone. Power does allow us to get things done, but empowerment involves not only the capacity to accomplish a task but also includes a way of defining oneself. Empowered people not only possess the wherewithal to accomplish something, they also think of themselves differently than they did before they were empowered (Whetten, Cameron & Woods, 2000:405)."

At the same time organisations have to survive in a highly competitive environment. Their workforce should be the company's most important resource. Identifying the criteria required for employee empowerment is a step in the right direction. In addition, certain measurements should be in place to assess the criteria. These measurements should determine motivation levels and levels of training of employees. Being able to assess levels of empowerment in terms of the different criteria would be more effective. Organisations could then develop empowerment strategies according to these assessments, and plan training to address specific needs. Through continuous assessment and continuous training, organisations can work towards the goal of continuous improvement.

“Measurements of empowerment strategies form a very critical part of the changing process that is experienced by the employee. Therefore one must develop a measurement system that is suited to one's own organisation. The problem that arises is that there are no guidelines that can be followed. Measurements are there to determine if there is achievement and improvement (Badenhorst, 1999:11).”

According to the researcher, the employee and the organisation cannot be separated when considering empowerment. Organisations continually strive to be effective, successful and to be more productive and profitable in a constantly changing environment. Organisations need the employees to be able to achieve organisational goals. These employees need to be well equipped. Employees must be trained well, and be able to work autonomously, adapt to this changing environment and develop their skills and knowledge base. Therefore the organisation and employees are interlinked and one or the other cannot be studied as an entity on its own.

This study aims to develop a scale that can measure employee empowerment in an organisation, as well as a set of indicators that will reflect the level of employee empowerment in an organisation.

Having a scale that can measure employee empowerment levels will provide the organisation with data on how to empower their employees and what is most applicable to the structure and nature of the organisation. The indicators will

assist the organisation to adapt to correct organisational structures to achieve optimal empowerment levels.

Central to this study is the question of why empowerment is important. “In the world of global competition, flat organisations, continuous change and customer-focused efforts, empowerment has become almost sacred. Most organisations automatically subscribe to the rhetoric of empowerment. Empowered employees see themselves as more effective in their work; they see themselves as innovative and show less fear of trying something new. Empowered employees are also transformational in their leadership ability, and are seen as charismatic by the people who work for them (Quinn & Spreitzer, 1997:42).

“Empowerment is a quality that is reflected in every aspect of the work environment. Start by checking your level of empowerment using an assessment tool (Scott & Jaffe, 1991:29).”

Empowerment in an organisation must be reflected within the employees, different teams in the organisation and in the bigger organisation itself. There should be a total change in attitude. The change towards empowerment should be supported on all levels. Empowerment should be an ongoing process. To be able to change to empowerment there should be assessment tools available to measure empowerment within employees, teams and at organisational level. If empowerment can be measured, it can also be sustained and developed with appropriate training.

From the argument outlined above, it is clear that employee empowerment is important and beneficial both to the organisation and to the employee. But what is the link between employee empowerment and social work?

1.2 EMPLOYEE EMPOWERMENT AND SOCIAL WORK: MOTIVATION

In motivating this study it is important to look at employee empowerment from macro, mezzo and micro levels.

The King Report (2002) plays a crucial role at macro level. The purpose of the King Report (2002) is to promote the highest standard of corporate governance in South Africa. It argues that companies should report on aspects of their human resources such as morale, skills, training, incentivisation, attraction of talent and succession. Other examples of non-financial aspects of company performance include innovation and training. The King Report (2002) also states that a company should reflect the value system of the society in which it operates. A crucial aspect is that there should be an inherent trust and belief in the fairness of all human beings. This manifests itself in the predisposition towards universal brotherhood.

According to the King Report (2002), matters that should require consideration are:

- safety at work;
- supporting practices, like black empowerment; and
- developing human capital.

The King Report (2002) claims that the wellbeing of the employee and the employee's surroundings are important on a macro level. It suggests that companies should have practices in place to improve employees' performance and enhance their working conditions. Employees should be developed for the benefit of the company as well as for themselves. Not only should employees be treated fairly because they are employees but because all human beings have the right to fair treatment. On this basis employee empowerment practices will be enhanced at macro level.

Since the 1980s, many South African companies have recognised that Employee Assistance Programmes (EAPs) have the potential to play a role in enhancing employees' performance (Harper, 1999:2). The overall benefits include enhancing employee well-being and maintaining job performance (Du Plessis, 1991:260). Psychological and social problems will negatively affect the individual, his/her dependents and his/her colleagues to such an extent that productivity will suffer. The earlier problems are identified and treated, the higher the rate of success. It is

to the benefit of the employer to assist employees with those problems and an EAP would be the vehicle for implementing this assistance (Peters, 1999:82). The EAP must be carefully positioned in order to maximise not only the contribution to individual employee-clients, but also its value as an employee benefit, and its role in the organisational change and development (Berridge; Cooper & Highley-Marchington, 1997:91). “The management of human resources has sprung from this conception of the people of organisations as a collection of assets that must be managed in the same way as the other non-human assets of the corporation” (Handy, 1999:23).

From the above argument, it is clear that social well-being cannot be separated from the workplace. When things are going well with the employee, this affects his/her productivity and performance, which in turn affects the organisation. If the employer looks after the employees, the employer will reap the benefits. The EAP motivates employee empowerment on a mezzo level, and shows why it is important to organisations.

Armstrong (1999:784) provides the following arguments regarding why organisations should provide welfare services to their employees:

- Providing employee welfare services rests mainly on the abstract grounds of the social responsibility of the organisation towards those who work in them. It is the realisation that in exchange for offering their services employees are entitled to rather more than their pay, benefits, and health and safety systems at work. They are also entitled to consideration as human beings, especially when it is remembered that many of their personal problems arise in the context of work and are best dealt with there. People’s worries and the resulting stress may well arise from work and their concerns about security, money, health and relationship with others. But they also bring their personal problems to work and many of these cannot be solved without reference to the situation there. Increase in morale or loyalty may not result in commensurate or, indeed in any increases in productivity, but undue anxiety can result in reduced effectiveness.

- A reputation for showing concern by management helps to improve the image of the firm as a good employer and thus assists recruitment. Therefore it may not directly increase productivity but it may increase commitment and help in the retention of key employees.

The researcher is of the opinion that employee well-being will benefit the organisation. It is not traditionally a direct responsibility of the organisation. By taking on this responsibility both the organisation and employees improve their positions. Organisations usually don't have the know-how to deal with personal problems. Specialised people are needed; this is where social work plays a crucial role.

Social workers are trained to implement the EAP in organisations and to look after the employee's well-being. The researcher is of the opinion that empowerment of employees' goes hand-in-hand with employee well-being as well as benefiting the organisation. The EAP can be utilised for this purpose by social workers.

The Employee Assistance Programme (EAP) is an employee benefit which acknowledges the fact that personal problems can and do affect job performance. These problems could include emotional problems, alcohol- and drug abuse, family and marital problems, stress as well as financial, legal and health concerns.

The EAP aims to:

- Provide assistance to supervisors and managers in situations where personal problems are affecting an employee's job performance.
- Provide confidential assistance to all employees. The overall benefit includes enhancing employee well-being and maintaining job performance (Du Plessis, 1991:260).

The researcher is of the opinion that there is a link between employee well-being and organisational growth. Part of employee well-being is employee empowerment. To empower employees is to improve the individual – by

improving the individual that employee's well-being has improved. As it is a chain reaction, the same applies to the organisation. The organisation takes responsibility for looking after their employees by means of the EAP, and improving their employees through empowerment strategies. The organisation should be able to see the differences in their productivity.

"The employee development policy should express the organisation's commitment to the continuous development of the skills and abilities of employees in order to maximise their contribution and to give them the opportunity to enhance their skills, realise their potential, advance their careers and increase their employability both within and outside the organisation" (Armstrong, 1999:264).

The policies organisations introduce for employees do not only benefit the organisation, but also the employees. This development of the employees happens on a micro level.

The focus of this study is on the development of an instrument which will assess employee empowerment and will indicate to an organisation where its employee empowerment strengths lie.

The value of the research topic plays an important role. The research must be of such a nature that it will enhance theory, be used in practice and enhance further research. This study will be empirically testable as a scale and indicators will be developed on the basis of a literature study on empowerment and organisations. The scale and indicators will be tested in practice. The topic is workable given that there is a significant amount of literature on organisations. Organisations can be approached to develop and test the scale within the organisation for their own benefit. Organisations would benefit by discovering how to enhance employee empowerment. Organisations would also be able to test their employees' levels of empowerment. Based on the results, organisations can intervene to improve levels of employee empowerment. There is scope for this kind of research. With advancing globalisation, organisations have to keep ahead of the times to survive. Research like this will not only benefit practice, but will enhance the organisation's ability to keep up with current changes. A scale and indicators will be in place for

the advancement of theory, but will also be practical applicable. The results of the study can be utilised in different organisations.

1.3 LITERATURE REVIEW

Organisations need to provide a work culture that encourages continuous new learning. They should also be more selective in their recruitment to create self-managed, accountable teams and decentralised strategic business units, outsourcing non-care work as part of organisational redesign. Leading edge firms usually invest heavily in extensive training and development. These companies have flexible work practices and flat organisational structures, with reduced status levels according to job description. They are willing to share information and put much effort into developing trust with their employees, knowing that people perform better if they are up to date with real-time and relevant company information (Horwitz, 2000:ix).

It is clear from the description above that organisations which reinforce the empowerment of employees need to have certain practices in place. A flat organisational structure is one, while the development and continuous training of employees is another. Empowerment does not just happen. A company needs to have procedures in place aimed at sharing information with employees and making them part of the process.

Management literature abounds with the benefits of empowerment (increased productivity, reduced absenteeism and increased job satisfaction) (Badenhorst, 1999:8; Randolph, 2000b:95; Quinn & Spreitzer, 1997:38). If organisations have not transformed to incorporate employee empowerment, this can be a difficult process. The company might realise that there is a need for change, but doesn't have the "know-how".

Measurement of empowerment strategies forms a critical part of the transformation process experienced by the employee. Therefore one must develop a measurement system that is suited to one's own organisation. Measurements are there to determine whether there is achievement and

improvement (Badenhorst, 1999:11). To be able to measure employee empowerment a measuring instrument must be developed. This measuring instrument would then be able to measure employee empowerment and determine whether there was any improvement and, if so, to what extent.

Empowered personnel have responsibility, a sense of ownership, satisfaction in accomplishments, power over what and how things are done, recognition for their ideas and the knowledge that they are important to the organisation (Turney, 1993:30). It is clear that employee empowerment and organisational practices that support employee empowerment go hand in hand and cannot be separated. It is not something that can happen overnight, but is a process that has to be followed. Empowerment practices by the organisation and the empowerment of employees are ongoing processes.

Independence and empowerment through delegating, performance-based rewards and multi-skilled teams are features of the more flexible and agile companies. Innovation and new knowledge come increasingly from teams rather than individuals working on their own. Developed, peer group performance management through delegated team participation is replacing traditional forms of managerial control. As organisations delayer, lateral mobility and teamwork relations provide more opportunity for growth and development than traditional hierarchical promotions (Horwitz, 2000).

The traditional hierarchical organisations are something from the past. For organisations to stay competitive in the global market they need to change. Companies need to show that the human factor can add value to an organisation. For employee empowerment to be successful there must be synergy between the organisation and the employee. Both the organisation and the employee need to change and practice empowerment strategies. Companies must recognise the value of the human factor in their organisations. Organisation structures need to change to accommodate the human factor. The organisation must be able to use the skills, abilities and experience of their employees to benefit both.

Empowered employees need to:

- Be flexible and proactive in improving their own performance.
- Learn to adapt to change.
- Be innovative and able to cope with stress.
- Balance work and non-work time and interests.
- Maintain a sense of responsibility for one's own career.
- Adapt to a new psychological contrast where life-long employment with one organisation is unlikely.
- Accept that employment continuity – rather than job security – means continuous development, retraining and renewal of knowledge.

(Horwitz, 2000:x).

Research forms an integral part of employee empowerment. Organisations must have the “know how” to start the process of employee empowerment. Linked to this, this study originated with the idea of adding to the databank of research on employee empowerment.

The goal and objectives of the study are outlined below.

1.4 GOAL AND OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

1.4.1 Goal

The goal of this study is to develop a system of indicators which reflect the level of employee empowerment in an organisation.

1.4.2 Objectives

The objectives of the study can be listed as follows:

- To conduct a literature study on employee empowerment as a multi-dimensional concept within organisations with the aim of identifying the crucial components needed for an organisation to empower employees.

- To use scale development research methodology to develop a scale to measure an employee's empowerment level.
- To develop indicators which specify the minimum requirements which enable an organisation to empower its employees.

1.5 RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

A quantitative-qualitative approach will be followed in this study. A dominant-less dominant model will be used (De Vos, Strydom, Fouché & Delport, 2002:306). A quantitative approach will be followed in developing a scale able to measure the level of empowerment of an employee in an organisation. A quantitative-qualitative approach will be followed to determine the indicators for the organisation. The study will be controlled and defined. The researcher will be an objective observer. Data collection procedures will be constructed in advance and applied in a standardised manner. Statistical methods will be used to analyse the data.

Faul (1995) has developed research methodology in scale development and scale validation. It seems viable to use Faul's (1995) research methodology for this particular study since it has been used and has been successful. Roestenburg (1999) has developed research methodology in the design and development of indicators. Again this study does not focus primarily on indicator development but identifies indicators of an organisation which enhance empowerment of employees. It seems viable to use Roestenburg's (1999) research methodology for this particular study since it was successfully applied after its development.

The empirical phase would consist of two phases. The first phase would be a focus group with role players at Allwear involved with empowerment strategies and management strategies. A sample of not more than 12 respondents is needed to participate in this focus group. The data gathered will provide the basis for the selection of potential indicators. The second phase would consist of data gathering by means of questionnaires. A sample of ± 300 respondents from

different levels in Allwear would be needed. The results from this phase will be statistically analysed. The results will provide the necessary data to develop the employee empowerment scale and indicators for the organisation. The research methodology as used in this study is discussed in Chapter 3. An overview of Allwear is provided in Chapter 4.

1.6 OUTLINE OF THIS STUDY

The study consists of seven chapters:

- Chapter 1: Orientation of the study
- Chapter 2: Literature study: Empowerment
- Chapter 3: Research methodology
- Chapter 4: Background: Allwear
- Chapter 5: Data analysis
- Chapter 6: Validation and reliability
- Chapter 7: Conclusions and recommendations.

1.7 DEFINITIONS

In this section, key terms are defined for the purposes of clarification.

1.7.1 Empowerment

Empowerment is recognising and releasing into the organisation the power that people already have in their wealth of useful knowledge and internal motivation (Randolph, 2000a:20). Frymier, Shulman and Houser (1996:184) have defined empowerment as the process of creating intrinsic task motivation by providing an environment and tasks which increase one's feeling of self-efficacy and energy. Luechauer and Shulman (1993:13) view empowerment as "the humanistic process of adopting the values and practising the behaviours of enlightened self-interest so that personal and organisational goals may be aligned in a way that promotes growth, learning and fulfilment". This definition suggests that communication is necessary to achieve an alignment of values and actions between those acting in

an empowering manner and those feeling empowered. Alignment implies that empowered individuals are not entitled to do anything they feel like without regard for the organisational tasks, but at the same time have a level of control over those tasks, one that is mutually valued by the individuals and their employers (Frymier, et al. 1996:183).

The researcher is of opinion that empowerment is a multi-faceted concept. Empowerment is taking the best from a person and using it to make that individual even better. Empowerment is not something that happens to a person and stays there forever. Empowerment is a process and something that needs to be worked on constantly. It is a form of self-actualisation or enlightenment within its own context. In the case of employee empowerment, an employee will be empowered as a result of processes set in place by the organisation. The level of empowerment depends on how the employee adapts these processes to his/her life. The researcher agrees that it is a relationship that mutually benefits the organisation and the employee.

1.7.2 Empowered Organisations

In an empowered organisation opportunities are developed and the environment shaped to encourage innovation and creativity. This ensures that the organisation as an entity will constantly learn and improve. This results in a situation where the employees become better managers of their jobs (Badenhorst, 1999:89). The general aspiration to be an empowered organisation is motivated by the desire for:

- Business teams based on products, processes and customers.
- People led by coaches and mentors, with managers as the enablers.
- Roles developing to suit customer needs, with barriers to learning removed.
- Team involvement in target setting.
- Positive use of measurement to support expanding personal skills together with recognition for team effort.
- Same team involvement in determining rewards and establishing initiatives.
- Immediate communication and 360-degree feedback of performance.

(Badenhorst, 1999:86).

The empowered organisation creates a culture of participation by providing a compelling mission, a structure that emphasises flexibility and autonomy, rewards participation while encouraging risk taking, as well as providing ongoing involvement programmes and support for the integration of the employee's work and family lives (Honold, 1997).

An organisation must make a conscious decision to be an organisation that follows empowerment principles. Some organisations might still be rigid in their outlook, still follow hierarchical structures and not be open to change. Employee empowerment should be viewed as beneficial to the organisation and not as simply as an additional workload. If an organisation accepts the principles of employee empowerment and acknowledges the value of employees, it can only benefit from this. An organisation must also allow for initial problems when starting this new outlook, but should also see these as opportunities to learn, rather than mistakes.

1.7.3 Empowered Employees

Employee empowerment can be seen as providing workers with opportunities to influence decisions, promote worker motivation and reduces worker resistance towards organisational change. Employee empowerment is important to the process of organisational change because empowerment fulfils the individual's need for a sense of control. This is a particularly critical need during a time of organisational change because the larger forces of change are usually beyond the individual employee's control (Kappelman & Richards, 1996).

Employees are only empowered if they genuinely feel their voices are heard and that, not only will they be listened to and possibly involved, but also that their knowledge will empower them to make decisions. A key factor in determining the success of an empowerment programme lies in the setting up of all the necessary conditions. Empowerment only works by involving all levels of management and employees (Badenhorst, 1999:36).

The researcher believes that the empowerment of employees is not just a single change but a total shift in perspective by the employees and the organisation. Empowered employees should have the power to influence others and inspire co-workers. The empowered employees should be involved and committed to the process of empowerment. This process must not be forced upon employees.

Empowerment, the empowered employee and the empowered organisation are intertwined. The researcher argues that it is crucial not to focus on any one of the three factors. Each is intrinsically linked to the others, and compliments the others.

1.8 LIMITATIONS OF THIS STUDY

- A possible limitation of this study might be in the choice of the organisation. The organisation must be representative of other organisations as far as possible. If the organisation is not representative, this must be clearly stated.
- Depending on the language of the employees, language may be a limitation. Questionnaires should be translated into the employee's language, without any shift in meaning.
- The confidentiality of the questionnaires must be guaranteed. Employees should not be worried that the information will be leaked or linked to them individually. This will encourage them to respond honestly.
- Cooperation of the employees might be a problem depending how the organisation deals with the research. The employees should not feel forced to participate. The results should also be of concern to the employees. The organisation should ensure that their employees are aware of the motivation for the study.

- The organisation should not regard the study as a waste of time, but as research from which they can benefit. It is the role of the researcher to ensure that the organisation understands the motivation for the study.
- Employees from different “status” levels in the organisation should be asked to complete the questionnaire. Overall feedback from all employees will make the study more reliable. By doing this, the levels of employee empowerment across all employees can be determined.

Following from this overview, the research should be linked to a theoretical framework. This will enable the researcher to focus on the issues of employee empowerment that are central to the research.

1.9 THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

A theoretical framework will enable the researcher to make the necessary links between employees, organisations and empowerment. It should be done in such a manner that the focus is on the synergy between individuals and the organisation to work together towards empowerment.

Employee empowerment has to do with new ideas, new theories, thinking processes, intellectualising and reasoning. Principally, “old” thinking has to change to “new” thinking. Because of this, the cognitive theoretical framework seems viable. Cormier and Cormier (1998:276) summarise the cognitive theory as: “Intellectualising; logical, rational, [and] systematic behaviour; reasoned, computer-like approach to problem-solving and decision-making; receptive to logic, ideas, theories, concepts, analysis and synthesis.”

However employee empowerment is not only a cognitive process, as behaviour is also involved. The employee's behaviour needs to change. Employees need to get involved, motivated and innovative. Behaviour that was previously linked to the “old” thinking should now change to behaviour associated with the “new” way of thinking about empowerment. Employees need to take responsibility, be

creative, take action and work towards certain goals. This means that the behavioural theoretical framework is also applicable to this particular study.

Cormier and Cormier (1998:276) summarise the behavioural theory as: “Involvement in activities; strong goal orientation, need to be constantly doing something; receptive to activity, action, [and] getting something done.”

1.10 CONCLUSION

This chapter presented an overview of the study. The researcher provided a broad explanation of employee empowerment as an introduction to this study.

A very crucial part of this study is the link between social work and employee empowerment. The EAP forms a crucial link between these. A literature overview provided a broad view of employee empowerment and its crucial role in organisations. The goal and objectives were formulated with a short introduction to the research methodology to be used in this study. Definitions, limitations and a theoretical framework concluded this chapter.

---o0o---