

CHAPTER 4

BACKGROUND: ALLWEAR

4.1 INTRODUCTION

In order to have a better understanding of this particular study, a background study of the factory from which the research was obtained will follow. This will give the reader a clear picture of the rest of the process and how the factory fits into it.

The researcher chose this factory for the following reasons. The researcher owns a school wear shop. Allwear is one of the factories which supplies uniforms to this shop. Allwear is known as one of the biggest factories within the school wear industry. Allwear's uniforms are of a very high standard. The researcher believed that it would be viable to use Allwear, because of their reputation in the industry and because of the researcher's interests in the factory.

Allwear is an ideal factory for the purpose of this particular study. The factory has never had any empowerment studies done on it or implemented any empowerment strategies. Management and employees can have no biased opinion about empowerment because it is a new development for them. The factory is in a rural area. This adds to the value of the study, as one can then compare these results with international trends. The majority of the literature referred to in this study was international. This study forms a South African contribution to this field.

A study of this kind, situated within the South African context, can be used to determine whether empowerment principles are universally the same, or whether we should adapt these to our particular circumstances. To be able to implement empowerment strategies in a factory like Allwear, the empowerment levels must be determined as well as the measures which management must take to enhance such strategies. The aim of this study is to determine these factors. A programme of empowerment can then be introduced to the factory for their benefit.

Although the background and history of Allwear does not contribute to the study as such, it does give the reader a better understanding of the factory. To implement empowerment programmes within any organisation, that organisation must be understood. Part of this understanding is the knowledge of where they came from, and where they are heading.

4.2 BACKGROUND: ALLWEAR

On 7 December 1939, a company by the name of "*Die Volkshempde en Klerefabriek*" (VEKA) was registered. The goal of this company, as the name indicates, was to make clothes and provide impoverished girls with work.

The factory started up in Fordsburg with only twelve workers. It later grew to 250 workers. At that time the price of a sewing machine was £60, and production output was 100 work trousers per week.

Shares were privately offered to the public and during the first year approximately 1 000 shares were sold for £1 each. By 1942, however, VEKA was in serious financial trouble. ~~Dr A.J.J.~~ Dr. A.J.J. Wessels then became Managing Director of Allwear.

During the 1950s a second factory was opened in Standerton. Following this, more factories were opened, one in Charlestown, and in 1968, one in Newcastle.

In 1957 the name of the company was changed to VEKA BEPERK. Through the years "M. Bertish & Kie" was purchased, a leading manufacturer of men's fashion in Cape Town. The company became one of the largest South African manufacturers of suits, blazers, trousers, shirts and school wear.

Over time the initial white workforce changed to "coloured" and later to black workers. The result was that the manufacturing shifted to where labour was readily available.

In 1983 it was decided to close down the head office in Johannesburg and decentralise operations as follows:

- school wear in Newcastle; and
- fashion in Cape Town.

Early in 1985, the fashion division was sold to the Pepkor-group. Since then all Veka activities relating to manufacturing have been based in Newcastle.

In 1989 WESCO sold its shares in VEKA to a consortium of businessmen. The name of the company changed to ALLWEAR Ltd. Over the next seven years, the majority shareholding was bought by HICOR Ltd, and in July 1997 Hicor Ltd made an offer to the 39% minorities. This offer was accepted by more than 90% of the minority shareholders, and ALLWEAR was consequently delisted. Assets and liabilities were transferred to HICOR Trading Ltd, a subsidiary of Hicor Ltd. On 1 April 1998, Allwear was sold to Waverley Blankets Ltd and the company has since been run as a full division of the latter. Allwear currently remains the leading manufacturer of school wear in South Africa. The name of the holding company is now JORDVEST GROUP (PTY) LTD. The group is lead by its group CEO, Mr J.H. Jordaan.

4.3 FACTORY AND ADMINISTRATION OFFICES

The first part of the factory was built in 1968 in ~~Newcastle~~, Newcastle and the second part only later. The total area of the factory is 21 000m², making it one of the biggest clothing manufacturers under one roof in South Africa.

The workforce today consists of more than 1 500 workers. The general efficiency and quality of the end result has improved considerably over time. This is because of intensive training, strict quality control, modernisation and experience in the manufacturing of school clothes.

4.4 MANUFACTURING

The factory manufactures more than 7 000 garments a day. In order to produce this number of items, 8 km of material and 1 800 km of cotton are used. If the buttons used were placed next to each other, they would circle a rugby field.

A factory manager, industrial engineer and a production manager make sure that there is communication between all workers, that the quality of products is what it should be and that the entire factory is in production. The quality of products is of the highest and strictest standards in the country. Allwear is the first factory to produce and sell school wear with the SABS mark. The SABS mark demands high standards in terms of raw materials and in the manufacturing thereof. The garments are frequently tested by SABS inspectors.

4.5 PLANNING

Long-term planning is essential in an industry like this. Planning must be of such a nature that material arrives at the factory at the correct time to ensure no late deliveries. This makes the planning process crucial. Some materials are ordered five months in advance and, in some cases, even longer. Material is ordered before clients know what they will order.

4.6 PRODUCTS

Allwear's market share in the formal school wear market is high. Allwear is seen as the biggest manufacturer of school uniforms in South Africa.

School uniforms that Allwear manufactures are blazers, shirts, shorts, trousers, dresses, tunics, skirts, tracksuits and jerseys.

These products are marketed as PREFECT PLUS and Allwear.

Under the Giovanni Nero label, shirts, blazers and club blazers are manufactured as fashion items.

4.7 MARKETING

The products are marketed directly to small businesses. Allwear has reps all over the country who act as agents in different areas. The reps are controlled from the marketing office in Crownhood, Johannesburg. Some of South Africa's neighbouring countries also buy from Allwear.

Substantial amounts of money are spent on athletic and tennis tournaments to promote the products.

4.8 PERSONNEL

The majority of workers are Zulu-speaking. Statistics show that workers stay at the factory for eight years on average.

Approximately 50% of workers have a long-term service record of between five and ten years.

The factory supplies free medicines for daily needs, and a qualified industrial nurse is employed full-time. Free family planning services are also offered.

A committee voted by the workers conveys their needs to management, and conducts any necessary negotiation.

All male employees have a compulsory medical scheme and pension scheme.

There are good relations between employees and management.

4.9 TRAINING

There is a full-time registered training centre at the factory. It has black and white instructors. Each employee who undergoes training receives a certificate on completion of the training course. Some of these courses can take up to three months. This training centre is said to be the best in the country.

VEKA shares are held by a consortium comprising the managing director, management and a few young businessmen.

4.10 CONCLUSION

Allwear has been in business since 1939. They have grown considerably since then, and are still doing well. The assumption can be made that the factory is run well. This background also shows the factory has been through a lot of changes over the years, adapting to different circumstances. According to the researcher, most of the changes have focused on management, modernisation and quality control, with far less emphasis on the employees. Although there is training, which is crucial for empowerment, there are no empowerment strategies in place. With the correct, ongoing empowerment programme, the workforce could be greatly improved, together with the factory. An empowerment programme can be developed on the grounds of the results of this study. Since measurement tools will be available after this study, empowerment can also be measured on a frequent basis. This would help to adapt the empowerment programme where necessary. By means of empowerment, the factory can go from strength to strength.