An investigation of employee empowerment as an organisational culture in the South African public sector

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ABSTRACT

This paper examines how employee empowerment impacted the South African public sector. A qualitative research approach was utilised based on the narratives and stories of seven employees operating in the Eastern Cape Province of South Africa from the Department of Economic Development, Environmental Affairs Tourism (DEDEAT) and East London Industrial Development Zone (ELIDZ) gathered through the use of in-depth interviews. It was found that, the concept of empowerment has not been fully institutionalised in the Public sector. The research suggests strategies that managers can adopt to assist institutionalise Employee empowerment in the Public sector. This study extends and advances the literature on employee empowerment and more particularly psychological empowerment. The study found employee empowerment to be a vital tool to improve service delivery in the Public sector. However, it was found that more personalised approaches like, delegation and mentorship can be institutionalised for psychological empowerment purposes. In general, the findings indicated that Employee empowerment has a positive influence on organisational performance and service delivery.

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Introduction

The South African public sector is faced with a plethora of challenges, which includes skills shortage, poor leadership, the paucity of resources and many more with all culminating in service delivery inefficiency. Employee empowerment is one method that the municipal leadership can use to improve service delivery by capacitating and empowering employees with knowledge, skills and resources. The concept of empowerment has penetrated organisational literature engaging researchers and practitioners to look into the paradigmatic shift in the way employees are perceived.

Organisations are now considering employee empowerment as one of the strategies to improve organisational performance (Priyadharshany & Sujatha, 2016). Employee empowerment (EE) is a critical phenomenon in this era of globalisation, as it equips employees to take quick decisions and react quickly to the constantly changing environment (Ravisha & Pakkerappa, 2017). Many organisational leaders have realised that the biggest hindrance to organisational success is the scope (Ravisha & Pakkerappa, 2017) and extent of employees' participation, hence they need to be empowered (Rothermel & Lamarsh, 2012).

Managers who implement empowerment policies and practices can positively influence and improve how employee's performance (Park, et al., 2021). This is because empowerment encourages creativity, innovation and improved performance. Empowered employees present a more positive attitude and behaviour, reduced stress and feelings of job uncertainties and improved autonomy to work (RashidAzar, et al., 2018). Given the ramification that such an issue places on organisational performance, there is a need to come up with interventions that will improve organisational performance (Priyadharshany & Sujatha, 2015).

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The study seeks to investigate the culture of EE in the South African public sector. It aims to understand the extent to which empowerment is being employed in the public sector and the strategies being employed to empower public sector employees.

A qualitative approach was used to get a better understanding of employee empowerment as a leadership tool in the Public sector. A narrative approach grounded in social constructionism was used to explore the experiences of employees in order to achieve the desired results. A small sample was used for the study through the use of structured interviews thus providing an in-depth understanding of the subject matter through the collection of rich and detailed description of the relevant issues by participants. An interview schedule containing open-ended questions was used for the study. Open-ended questions allow the researcher to probe and solicit deep understanding of the subject matter.

A sample of seven participants was interviewed, five from the Department of Economic Development, Environmental Affairs and Tourism (DEDEAT) and two participants came from East London Industrial Development (ELIDZ); both departments based in the Eastern Cape. Research participants comprised of both managerial and non-managerial staff. Participants were interviewed at their working space, participants comprised of three managers and four employees. The interview proceedings were audio-recorded and later transcribed for analysis. A non-probability sample was used for the study because it was impossible to interview all employees from the organisation. Only employees that have had at least ten years working experience in the public sector were included in the study. While sampling was primarily purposive, the snowballing approach was employed for the recruitment as interviewed participants were encouraged to make referrals to other participants who met the inclusion criteria.

Data analysis involves the process of understanding the information provided by participants from the questionnaires. It is the process of finding patterns, interpreting raw data in a meaningful manner and communicating properly what the raw data is (Du Plooy-Cilliers et al., 2014). An inductive approach was used to analyse the data; inductive uses a bottom-up approach, thus reading and using the participants' views and ideas to form themes. Responses were grouped to identified patterns and differences. Open or substantive coding was used. In order to preclude bias in the coding or identification of the themes, an independent analyst was involved in the analysis (Liu, 2016). The researcher followed some steps to maintain data trustworthiness (credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability). The conditions stated in the ethical clearance and consent form were adhered too. To maintain confidentiality and privacy, title names and occupations were excluded from the study. The researcher tried by all means to report a detailed report a detailed research methodology, so that if another researcher were to repeat the same study even if it's not to gain the same results they would do so without finding difficulties. In terms of conformability the researcher avoided unfair behaviour and favouritism, presenting a true reflection of the participants' responses. Sufficient data was presented in the report to enable transferability. Through respect and collegiality, trust and honesty were built allowing participants comfortably share their experiences and knowledge. Confidentiality was maintained throughout the study process. Added to these precautions include: a) requesting permission to record participants; b) taking notes during data collection; c) transcription be made within 48 hours of the interviews being conducted.

The rest of this paper will be structured as follow; first, the concept of employee empowerment is discussed, then aspects of the literature relevant to the study are presented. This is followed by a presentation of how the study was conducted then a presentation of the findings and its discussion.

Theoretical and Conceptual Background

An organizational culture is a working method based on a system of values held by every staff or employees Empowerment is a relatively new human resource practice, it is a strategy of assigning more responsibility and accountability to employees as a means for ensuring their development (Dahou, et al., 2016). Empowerment is an evolving leadership concept (Priyadharshany & Sujatha, 2015) which essentially boils down to allowing employees to take responsibility for their growth and development (Chib, 2016). Employees feel empowered when they are given freedom to independently make decisions relating to their own work (Min, et al., 2016). According to Park, Doan, Zhud, & Kim (2021), "empowerment is defined as the process of providing formal and informal organizational supportive practices and techniques from leaders to enhance the self-efficacy of employees". The empowerment process assists to continuously improve organizational performance through delegation, responsibility and autonomy in decision-making, it has also been said to decrease the alienation employees feel working in bureaucratic environments (Wählin-Jacobsen, 2019).

Empowerment is linked to how employees perceive their sense of meaning, competence, self-determination and impact on their work and performance (Allen, et al., 2016). Management plays a vital role on how employees perceive their roles at work, managers ought to share information, rewards and power so that employees become more keen to initiate and solve problems (Motamarria, et al., 2020), this resonates with the description of empowerment as: "the process of tending towards continuous improvement of organisational performance realized through developing and expanding authority of competent individuals and teams in most aspects and this, per se, influences the whole organisation's performance" (Hashemya, et al., 2016, p. 8). Employees want to know and feel that they have influence in their work environment (Deja & Wójcik, 2021).

Empowerment as an Aspect of Organisational culture

The effectiveness of employee empowerment is contingent on the existence of an enabling organisational culture (Afsar, et al., 2014; Zhang & Begley, 2011). Every organisation has its own philosophy and how they do things cultivating its own unique culture (Schultz, 2014). Management uses the organisation's culture to reinforce principles and desired values within the organisation (Çakar & Ertürk, 2010). Organisational culture is shaped by the beliefs, attitudes and behaviour of the individuals (Muscalu, 2014). Organisational cultures evolve with time; they are usually put in place to improve the performance and ultimately achieve desired goals (Moldovan & Macarie, 2014). An organisation's culture exerts control on how employees behave, it is usually deeply embedded and slow to change (Jandaghi, et al., 2010).

Employees' empowerment is not something that can be achieved overnight, it requires a significant cultural change which requires time and commitment from all the stakeholders in the organisation. Introduction and embedment of empowerment as a management philosophy in an organisation will require a major cultural shift and congruence with the organisation's values (Afsar, et al., 2014; Zhang & Begley, 2011). Employee empowerment and organisational culture work in close association with each other; a culture that gives freedom for decision-making encourages empowering practices and visa versa (Balkar, 2015). Empowerment is not an easy process to implement it requires teamwork to succeed (Çakar & Ertürk, 2010). Organisational culture improves how employees perform which ultimately improves the organisation's performance, this can only be achieved if the environment is transformed from a command and control to a more supportive and empowering environment (Ghalavi & Naser, 2020).

Forms of Empowerment

There are two but not mutually exclusive forms of empowerment. These are psychological and structural empowerment. Psychological empowerment puts focus on the individual while structural empowerment looks at certain social workplace conditions such as providing access to opportunities, resources, information etc. (Amor, et al., 2021). This section will dwell more on the different forms of empowerment.

Psychological Empowerment

Psychological empowerment plays a vital role in organisational success, researchers and practitioners have identified it as a powerful motivation tool (Jena, et al., 2019). Psychological empowerment is a motivational construct manifested in four cognitions: self-determination, competence, meaning and impact (Motammaria, et al., 2020). Leaders exert empowerment by sharing power with subordinates, allowing employees to also take part in decision making (Kazlauskaitė, et al., 2011). Leaders need to provide employees with opportunities that will develop their subordinates with self-leadership skills, thus encouraging employees to take up more responsibility towards their work (Bester, et al., 2015). Psychologically empowered employees tend to be committed to their work and organisations (Garg & Dhar, 2016). Psychological empowerment is active rather than passive, the way an employee feels will shape his or her work performance (Dust, et al., 2018), it is the psychological state of the human being (Malik, et al., 2021). Psychological empowerment looks at the individual's reaction towards their work environment. The theory on psychological empowerment explains; "that the work environment leads to the development of an active motivational orientation, which in turn leads to proactivity and organizational citizenship behavior" (Kang, et al., 2017, p. 178). Employing useful and productive strategies enhances the empowerment process (Ghalavi & Naser, 2020).

Psychological empowerment has been described as an, "intrinsic task motivation reflecting a sense of self-control in relation to one's work and an active involvement with one's work role" (Seibert, et al., 2011, p. 981). It looks at the beliefs of employees by considering meaning, competence, autonomy and impact (Calvo & García, 2017). Meaning refers to the value an employee sees in her/his job while competency considers the confidence an individual has to carry their job (Shah, et al., 2019). Autonomy refers to the choice an employee has over their work, the decision to decide how their own work should be carried out. Impact is associated with the employee being able to contribute to significant outcomes for the organisation (Calvo & García, 2017).

Structural Empowerment

The term structure is usually identified with the organisation's chart but it goes beyond that, it involves the parameters and the boundaries in which employees are to operate (Mishra & Bhaskar, 2010). structural empowerment is organisational centric (Silen, et al., 2019). Structural empowerment relates to important indicators of the quality of working life, such as job satisfaction (Orgambidez & Almeida, 2020).

Structural empowerment entails providing an empowering work context or environments such as having the autonomy to make your own decisions and having shared control over resources. It can also be extended having access to information and opportunities (Pandey, 2016; Calvo & García, 2017). Structural empowerment could also refer to the activities that the organisation uses to involve employees in power sources and decisions makings (RashidAzar, et al., 2018). When employees feel they have access to empowering structures, they are more likely to identify their workplace as a healthy work environment (Havaei & Dahinten, 2017), therefore it is imperative that employers empower their employees by providing adequate structural conditions (Sieversa, et al., 2021). Structural empowerment has shown results of higher job satisfaction and employee commitment, ensuring that employees (Martin, 2020). Support from managers and feedback also plays a vital part in structural empowerment (Kim & Shin, 2020). Access to opportunities involves opportunities for growth and promotion within the organisation and progression in the company. Access to information

refers to knowledge necessary to fulfill employee tasks effectively and efficiently. Support means receiving guidance and feedback from managers. Lastly, access to resources refers to the materials, means, and time to complete the work (Orgambidez & Almeida, 2020). Empowering structures are influenced by formal and informal power, formal power being given the opportunity to be flexible and creative in the work place, while informal powers refer to social connections, the relationship an employee has with its seniors and colleagues (Ta'an, et al., 2021). Structural empowerment is grounded on job characteristic models focusing on sharing authority from top managers to junior staff. The environment tends to share power, decision making and formal control over resources (Meng, Jin, & Guo, 2016). Scholars have argued that empowering structures provide higher effectiveness and increased work engagement among employees (Amor, et al., 2021).

Benefits of Employee Empowerment

Employee empowerment brings forth many benefits to how an organization performs (Motamarria, et al., 2020). Empowered employees are more active than passive, they do not wait to be instructed rather take ownership of their work and influence their work environment, which may lead to efficient work progress (Allen, et al., 2016).

Empowerment enhances productivity and work commitment (Jones & Rivas, 2011). Leaders who embrace employee empowerment as an organisational strategy are quick to adapt and evolve with environmental changes. Joo & Shim, (2010) maintained employee empowerment increases job performance and commitment towards the organisation. It also, provides an opportunity for employees to explore their creative potentials (Orgambidez & Borrego Ales, 2014). Empowered employees can solve issues faster because they are self-driven. Less time is wasted decision making because employees are empowered and capacitated to make independent decisions (Armache, 2013). Empowered employees are more committed to perform their duties because of the appreciation the organisation gives to them (Wong & Laschinger, 2013). A learning organisation is a developing organisation, empowered employees encourage learning within the organisation by coming up with innovative and creative solutions (Bagheri, et al., 2011).

Arogundade & Arogundade (2015) describe people as free-spirited when empowered with knowledge and provided with the necessary resources to perform their duties, it results in improved productivity and job satisfaction. An empowered employee is keener to participate and contribute towards achieving organisational goals (Prathiba, 2016). Human capital is the engine of the organisation, they create value for the company by using their skills and competences.

Challenges of Employee Empowerment

As much as empowerment has many benefits, it is important also to understand and address the challenges that come with empowering employee. Organisations sometimes fall short by applying the same empowerment strategy for all employees, instead of individualising each situation accordingly, (Zhang & Bartol, 2017). Employees may have been conditioned over the years to follow orders, not collaborate with management. According to (Prati & Zani, 2013) it is important that managers and employees share power to enhance organisational performance. Being given greater responsibility may induce fear and insecurity in some employees (Chamorro- Premuzic, 2016).

Training employees usually takes time, which means a lot of sacrifice from the managers which could impact negatively on their other duties (Sharma & Kaur, 2008; Temtime, et al., 2011), further elaborates that not only it takes time from managers but also from employees, which can disrupt daily operations. Managers tend to focus on short term motivators such as free holiday trips and bonuses (Mohapatra & Mishra, 2018), mentions that motivators such as good working conditions, allowing employees to initiate new developments and a better organisational can enhance employee empowerment. Implementing empowering programmes is a major challenge, leaders pay less attention to organisational conditions that can foster empowerment processes (Proenca, 2014).

Discussion

The Public sector is affected by various factors such, unskilled labour, resource shortage, environmental variables which tend to have a great impact on the organisation's performance. Hence, it is necessary for employees to be empowered to come up with possible innovative and creative strategies or processes to enhance organisational performance. Five main themes emerged, which form the basis of the discussion being made in this article. The first theme was to understand the concept empowerment, second theme entailed experience with employee empowerment, third theme looked at attitude towards empowerment, fourth theme addressed empowerment strategies and lastly the impact of employee empowerment.

Objective 1: Assess the understanding of empowerment as a leadership tool in SA public sector

The research objective assessed how much employees in the public sector understand about employee empowerment. All participants who were interviewed did not only demonstrate that they have good understanding of what empowerment in the work place is and entailed, they also seem to unanimously agree that employee empowerment should be institutionalised in the public sector. Participants shared that employee empowerment encourages a participative work ethic. They alluded that EE has the propensity to promote innovation and creativity which are highly needed in the public sector work space given the complexity of the broader working context. The participants have two notions of how EE can be achieved; the first one is the belief that training plays an important role in employee empowerment and the second one is that involvement in strategic sessions play a key role towards

employee empowerment. Aspects of this finding conform with the thought by Orgambidez-Ramos and Borrego-Ales (2014) that employee empowerment provides an opportunity for employees to be creative.

To support the above-mentioned analysis the following participants said the following:

Participant 1: "There are basic things that are institutionalized, the legislation is mandates HR (DPSA, PFMA) or requires HR to do certain things e.g. Skills development trainings, offering bursaries to employees."

Participant 2: "Employees get empower, we are taken to trainings. Employees fill in what we call a performance development plan (PDP) at the beginning of the year, were we write what we would like to be trained on".

Participant 3: "The department uses what is called a PMDS to assess employee performance, this is a tool used by all government organizations. Here in the department we have a performance development plan (PDP) that is filled at the beginning of each year, this form we use it to fill in the areas were we would like to be trained".

Objective 2: To explore the extent in which culture of employee empowerment exists in the South African Public Sector

This objective seeks to understand the extent to which employee empowerment strategy is practised. There were mixed feelings from the participants on this. While some felt that EE is being practised within the organisations, others felt that there is a gap in the implementation process of employee empowerment. To understand the extent to which EE is practised two themes were identified: experience with empowerment and attitude with empowerment; three categories were developed; positive experience, negative experience and in-difference experience.

Employees who have positive experience around employee empowerment commemorated the department doing a job in empowering their employees. Three participants felt empowered; including two were managers and one was non-managerial. The subordinate said they were receiving support from their manager, complementing this statement were there two managers to mentioned that they empower and provide support to their subordinates. Participants alluded that empowering employees really helps boost the morale of employees by being more committed to their work which improves organisation's performance. They also mentioned that the empowering strategies motivate employees and allow them to be more open with their managers

Theme: under the theme experience with empowerment

Employees who were positively empowered had the following to say: One participant mentioned: "My manager allows me to make presentations at meeting as an example, this helps me build confidence and self-esteem as well as improve my communication skills"

Another participants said: "Employees always want short cuts, they do not want to equip themselves they want easy things, employees want promotions and salary increases but do not want to work for it, as a manager I try to support and encourage my junior. I also share information with them and give them feedback". The other participant said: "In my business unit I have initiated weekly meeting every Friday to allow employees to share their challenges and work experiences".

Unfortunately, some of the participants shook their heads when it comes to employee empowerment. Two managers expressed dissatisfaction when it comes to employee empowerment. Both managers alluded to meetings not transpiring as they should be with management and when the meetings actually do happen there is no information sharing relating to unit/departmental activities. The managers also mentioned that one on one sessions with their subordinates are not happening.

The two participants who were negatively impacted gave utterance to the following: One manager said: "*There are basic things that are institutionalised in the department, the legislation mandates or requires HR (DPSA, PFMA) to do certain things e.g. skill employees by taking them to trainings. The unfortunate thing is that skills development and trainings do not happen often in the department, sometimes it is because of scarce resources and budget limitations. Meetings for example are a part of management cycle designed to empower everyone starting from the top, EXCO meetings happen regularly, the layer below that is MANCO but those meetings are not happening as they are supposed too. Manager and employee empowerment is not institutionalized in the department, managers and employees do not seat with each other regularly if at all to discuss and chat about employee challenges, interests and progress*".

Another manager said: "*An institution that does not allow innovation is unfortunate and this is where the Public sector lacks, technology changes every day the old people cannot use it but students fresh from school can use it. Public sector does not encourage innovation. The department uses a top-down approach which demotivates employees, the old employee officials don't want to adopt to new environments*".

To further conclude on the negative experiences faced by employees, participants mentioned that they identified gaps; in sometime instances managers fail to empower employees even though in some instance's empowerment is properly applied. According to some of the employee's managers share information instances and sometimes no information sharing takes place. It was also mentioned that promotions are a bit of a challenge and the reason is that staff training and skills development is not adequately executed. On the contrary though they applauded that when they have performed well in their KPIs, they receive bonuses at the end of year encouraging them.

The last group of participants had indifferences expressed as follows: A participant shared and said: *“Even though the organisation provides some form of training but in many instances the organisation fails, as an example the finance unit should be trained on GAAP maybe every year but the is no programme developed for that. Employees find their own way of getting empowered by obtaining the latest principals on GAAP procedures”*. Another participant said: *“In some areas employees are empowered but empowerment still lacks in other areas”*.

Theme: Attitude with empowerment

Two themes came up regarding attitude, one being pleased and the other unhappy. A sense of happiness was picked up by the researcher when the topic employee empowerment was brought up. One participant mentioned: *“The culture of empowerment is institutionalised in the organization as the vision statement states ‘We build individual and collective expertise through continuous learning and active knowledge sharing’. Empowerment gives employees confidence”*. The other theme was unhappiness. Some employees felt unhappy with the level employee empowerment was practiced within the organisations. They mentioned that sometimes their efforts are not appreciated by their managers. Participants also mentioned that managers do not give them feedback when assessing their performance. One participant mentioned: *“Whenever I ask my manager to explain why they scored me low on a certain KPI, they usually are unable to give reasons for the low scores”*. Another participant said: *“Because of favouritism from the managers, some of us do get PMDS at the end of the year. The PMDS process is not an exciting one for many employees said the interviewee, and further explaining “because we often see people yearly getting bonuses while some of us get nothing, 80% of us are unhappy with PMDS”*.

Objective 3: Identifying strategies and methods by which leaders in the Public sector empower their subordinates

The third objective of the study looks at some of the strategies used in the organisations to empower their employees. Most of the participants mentioned that the organisations do not have adequate resources for employees to perform their duties well. They mentioned limited resources in terms of vehicles used by managers to visit districts are limited in number as well as the limited budget. They alluded that vehicles were used by managers to measure progress and performance through district visits. They also mentioned that due to insufficient funds it becomes a challenge to send employees to training and workshops.

The following strategies and methods were mentioned:

Resources provision

One respondent mentioned *“The department has a hierarchical structure which makes it challenging to properly empower employees. Work is centralized for example the budget is centralized, other regions have to come to the centre to obtain budget, which disempowers staff, employees should be empowered with their own resources and make decisions dependably at that level. If the centre is scared of miss-management of resources, they can increase their risks management resources e.g. on a daily or weekly basis you check for certain transactions to minimum fraud. So, at the moment I feel we are not properly empowering staff, we disempower them by centralising their functions. If you make resources available to staff, that is empowerment at the moment I don’t feel we have given our staff and employees enough resources to discharge their responsibilities. For example, the department will say there is no money for travelling, sleepover etc.”* Another participant said: *The office space is uncomfortable to work in, the offices have no windows and air cons, and there is no air ventilation. People get sick because of this making them take sick leaves more often. The environment is not healthy as well as unhygienic. The chairs we seat are also uncomfortable they cause back pains, we complain but nothing is done about this. Management says there is no money to fix these problems”*

Employee development

One of the strategies mentioned is the offering of bursaries to employees. One participant mentioned that: *“I am currently doing a project management course at Stellenbosch University; the course helps me on how to manage some of the projects in my unit. Sometimes when my manager is not around I act in her place so I need to be able to management projects effectively and efficiently”*.

Another strategy that was mentioned during the interview session was skills development. One participant mentioned: *“Informal training is much better than the formal training that is done outside the organisation. With informal training managers are able to show a person several times on how to do something and it is more practical than the formal training”*.

Information sharing

Information sharing was considered to be one of the strategies. One participant mentioned: *“The strategic sessions help us a lot because managers get to share how the organization performed in the past financial year”*. Another said: *“Empowerment involves good communication between manager and employees. I and my employees communicate often regarding how the unit is performing as well as other projects that are in the pipeline”*.

Performance Tracking System

Together with the APP the organisations use what is called a performance management development system (PMDS) to assess employees performed that has been derived from the APP. The participants mentioned that the PMDS is a very empowering tool

because it gives the manager an opportunity to assess their subordinates as well as give feedback/recommendations regarding performance.

One participant mentioned: *“But managers do not utilize this section, they don’t give reasons and recommendations were they have scored you low. When you have performed very well managers are able to recommend employees for a bonus”*.

Another participant said: *“The PMDS tool is very helpful because it allows us as employees know how we are performing, so that we can improve if we need too”*.

Objective 4: Determining the impact of employee empowerment or the lack of it in the Public Sector

The objective looks at whether the implementation of employee empowerment has an impact or not in the public sector. Participants revealed both positive and challenging scenarios when it comes employee empowerment. Some of the positive experiences mentioned by the participants entail being sent for trainings and workshops. Most revealed that employee empowerment would increase productivity and performance in the organisation. But other participants felt there is very little employee empowerment, some of the issues raised included; no staff promotion, decision making is top down with little or no input from employees and some managers do not have skills or knowledge to empower employees. The following participants showed the positives of EE.

Participant 1: “When you empower employees you get quality returns and satisfaction in terms of employee commitment. Employee empowerment is an investment designed to achieve organizational goals. Empowerment allows employees to deliver their duties diligently, while up skilling employees for future prospects.”

Participant 2: “If the organization could properly empower employees, more employees would be happy and satisfied at work.”

Participant 3: “If empowerment would be fully enforced in the organization, employees would be more competent resulting in less tasks being outsourced (consultant). When employees are empowered and competent it increases trust between manager and employee, boosting self-esteem of employees.”

Not all participants shared the same sentiment, the following participants shared some of the challenges faced by the Public sector regarding EE.

Participant 1: “Employees do not get promoted for better opportunities, vacant posts are often filled by people from outside. The reason for not appointing internal candidates for senior positions is because managers have not developed junior staff to be competent for senior posts. The organization is dominated by male senior managers especially in the finance unit, therefore less empowerment on women. Another challenging matter is that organization gives more preference to non-South Africans for senior roles.”

Participant 2: “The Public sector has a top down structure compared to private sector, they normally have flat structures. Top down structure mainly means that decisions come from the top with minimal inputs from employees. The top down structure discourages innovation.”

Participant 3: “The phenomena of empowerment is indeed a challenge some of the senior managers do not have sufficient skills on Microsoft suite e.g. Microsoft Access or Excel, this is a huge problem to junior staff, trust and respect decreases for a manager who cannot use basic software. Managers sometimes fail to make provision for employees who have been to training and workshops, there is no monitoring of employee progress. Another challenge that the department usually faces is the mismatch of theory and practicality at work, new employees and interns in the organisation usually struggle to apply what they studied at Varsity, thus demanding more time from the manager and supervisor in terms of teaching and monitoring. With lack of resources it also becomes challenging to deliver on some duties.”

Participant 4: “One of the APPs strategies is to perform customer surveys both internally and externally. The customer survey gives the entity guidance on the focus areas that the organization has to pay attention too. The target for this year was to obtain 80% in the customer survey and the organization only achieved round about 65%, the survey’s results highlighted that the organization mainly managers are not communicating enough. Employees want more communication through the organization.”

Participant 5: “The Public sector has a top down structure compared to private sector they normally have flat structures. Top down structure mainly means that decisions come from the top with minimal inputs from employees. The top down structure discourages innovation.”

The findings obtained make several contributions to literature review and practice. The findings of the study tend to show support of previous work detailing the importance of organisations (public sector) paying attention to the needs of their employees through employee empowerment (Motamarria, et al., 2020). The departments use several methods and strategies to empower their employees, which include, skills development through bursary awards and trainings, they also have a performance bonus system, resources e.g. office space, working equipment are also provided. This notion is supported by (Martin, 2020) structural empowerment entails having access to information, opportunities, support and resources through formal and informal structures. The findings showed that minimal psychological empowerment is practiced in the public sector. Employees made mention that decision making is top down failing to support (Kazlauskaitė, et al., 2011) psychological empowerment encourages sharing of power, it was mentioned that leaders fail to promote employees (Bester, et al., 2015) allowing employees to take up more responsibility. It is also important to adopt and entrench

more personalised approaches like, delegation and mentorship which has the propensity of also empowering employees psychologically.

Conclusions

The economic development of a nation depends on well-equipped employees. The study focused on the impact employee empowerment has in the sustainability and operations of the Public sector in South Africa. The findings of this study point to the fact that constructs such as empowerment have a bearing in how organisations perform. In light of these findings, it could be concluded that employee empowerment comes with great benefits for the public sector, even though it is partially institutionalised. Employee empowerment has shown that if it could be properly institutionalised the public sector could really improve its service delivery. The study may ignite dialogue between managers and employees on how best to work together to overcome the challenges of employee empowerment. The findings not only add value to the employee empowerment literature but also call on Public sector managers to further investigate the impact psychological empowerment has on service delivery and organisational performance.

The research study faced some challenges. The sample size was a limitation on its own as few drawings were presented. Interviewing participants at their own working station was a challenge because they had to speak softly for privacy matters, as the offices are open plan. Obtaining permission to conduct the study from the organisations nearly became a challenge, eventually it was granted. The method used in the study accommodated a small number of participants. However, it is essential to note that the limitations experienced during the study did not prevent the researcher from conducting the study or interfere with the outcomes of the study. The study intended on providing clear representative results and not generalised results.

The researcher further recommends that the public sector should conduct research and develop an employee empowerment framework or policy that will clearly outline steps on how to empower employees. The framework or policy will have to differentiate the role of managers and the role of employees. The Public sector faces many complex challenges and the solutions for many of these challenges require non-linear practices. Systems thinking can be used to assist the Public sector in solving these challenges. A more comprehensive examination can be looked at using system theory to support psychological empowerment to employees.

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