



# The International Journal of Applied Economics & Finance

ISSN 1991-0886

**science**  
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## Managing Behind the Scenes: Employee Empowerment

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**Abstract:** The main objective of this study was to find out the strategies for success of employee empowerment in organisation to reduce employee turnover. In addition, the study focuses on benefits and criticism of employee empowerment in organisations. Nowadays empowerment has occupied a central point in many organisations in the 21st century. In this era of globalization, there is need for employee's empowerment in order to enable the organisation to respond quickly to any changes in macro-environment. The methodology adopted in this study is quantitative approach, whereby a convenience sample of one hundred employees was selected for the study. The data was analyzed by using descriptive statistics. This study will contribute greatly to existing literature specifically in inspiring managers to develop appropriate strategies to nurture employee empowerment in organisations. The outcome from the findings shows that employee empowerment is essential to assist organisations to respond quickly to any environmental changes and reduce employee turnover.

**Key words:** Employees, empowerment, management, strategies

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### INTRODUCTION

Employee empowerment has become a buzzword and recent management trends in both the public and private sector (Pitts, 2005). Employee empowerment has received a wide recognition as an important subject in management circles mainly because it is seen as one of the fundamental elements of managerial and organisational effectiveness that increases when power and control are shared in organisation (Ergeneli *et al.*, 2007). Thus employee empowerment has been hailed as a management technique which can be applied universally across all organisations as a means of dealing with the needs of modern global business (Demitriades, 2005). Generally, employee empowerment comprises of an innovative approach in working with people and a shift of power from the top management control to lower level management of the organisation (Tzafirir *et al.*, 2004). Researchers and leaders worldwide have advocated for empowerment of employees to help organisations compete successfully in highly competitive market place (Tjosvold and Snn, 2005). Therefore, organisations that are committed to employee empowerment are in position to motivate and retain their employees (Ongori, 2007). Employee empowerment is seen as a motivational technique if designed and nurtured properly in organisations. Thus employee empowerment will lead to improvement of performance of the organisation through increased levels of employee's participation and self determination (Greasley *et al.*, 2005). Basically employee empowerment is mainly concerned with trust, motivation, decision-making and breaking the inner boundaries between management and employees as them verses us (Tzafirir *et al.*, 2004).

In the literature it is emphasized that employee empowerment will lead to improved productivity, performance, job satisfaction and reduce employee turnover in organisations (Ongori, 2007). Empowerment has been associated with the concept of power, implying that power in organisation should be reshared from the top management to the lower management (Klidas *et al.*, 2007). In this era

of globalization, where there is competition, challenges to provide quality product and services, high degree of innovation, there is need to empower employees to respond quickly to these changes. Similarly empowered workforce will lead to achieving a competitive advantage (Moye and Hankin, 2006).

The purpose of this research was to find out the strategies for the success of employee empowerment in organisations to reduce employee turnover. Specifically, it focuses on benefits and major criticisms of employee empowerment and suggests relevant strategies on how to manage employee empowerment effectively in organisation.

Employee empowerment has been defined in numerous ways, but Klidas *et al.* (2007), Moye and Hankin (2006) and Honold (1997) agreed that the core element of empowerment involves giving employees discretion or latitude over certain task related activities. Smith and Mouly, (1998) defined empowerment as a transfer of power from the employer to the employees to make quick and quality decisions. Honold (1997) argued that empowerment is not only having the freedom to act, but also having higher degree of responsibility and accountability. This indicates that management must empower their employees so that they will be motivated, committed, satisfied and assist the organisation in achieving objectives and minimize employees intention to quit. Transferring power to the employees should be done with due diligence, at the same time employees to whom the power is transferred to, must be held accountable for their actions. Accountability will instil discipline in utilizing the scarce resources optimum for the benefit of the organisation and other stakeholders. Therefore, employees should be empowered through, sharing information, autonomy in making decisions and improving their intellectual capacity. Wellins *et al.* (1991) similarly proposed that an organisation that empowers their employees will be able to survive and grow in any environment.

Mohammed and Pervaiz (1998) argued that empowerment is a state of mind and empowered employees mind experiences feelings of, (1) control over the job to be performed, (2) awareness of the context in which the work is performed, (3) accountability for personal work output, (4) shared responsibility for unit and organisational performance and (5) equity in the rewards based on individual and collective performance.

The Cognitive model of empowerment, defines empowerment on a broad term, which includes the choice of providing employee with genuine job enrichment and opportunities to have their voice heard, having real power for control and influence over work processes, which leads to employees to be confident in discharging their duties. This model further emphasizes that organisations have no options except to empower their employees for purpose of survival, growth and increase efficiency and being competitiveness. Further, the model of work team effectiveness postulated by Cohen *et al.* (1996) consented that employee empowerment should be the primary focus for any manager who tries to design effective self managing work teams in organisation.

Ergeneli *et al.* (2007) suggested that, like the concept of power, empowerment can be viewed in two ways. First, it can be viewed as a relational construct – which means that managers should delegate power to the subordinates. Secondly, a motivational construct where employee empowerment is seen as a technique to motivate employees in organisation. Thus empowered employees feel motivated when they are given autonomy to make decisions about their work or are involved in the planning process of their organisation. Therefore employee empowerment implies that power is granted to the employees or delegation of authority. Similarly, Procter *et al.* (1999) suggested that for the use of the term empowerment of members to be meaningful, there must be a genuine shift in the locus of power away from the top management to the shop floor.

Melhem (2004) argued that empowerment is a complex interactive process which involves the act of developing and increasing power to the subordinates. In addition they identified five core dimensions which can enhance empowerment in organisations and these includes educating of employees, leading, mentoring, supporting and providing proper structures to enhance employee empowerment in organisations. This clearly shows that empowerment is a multi-dimensional process which involves many systems of the organisation and is an ongoing process.

Lloyd *et al.* (1999) asserted that, managers should act as coaches and help employees to solve problems. Managers should empower subordinates by delegating responsibilities and assisting them when they have problems and thus employees will feel more satisfied with their managers and they will consider them to be fair and in return they will perform to their manager's expectations. Employees need to be assisted in the process of empowerment.

Participative management, managers must empower their employees by allowing them to participate in decision making process. For instance the model of employee empowerment postulated by Mallak and Kurstedt (1996) argued that employee empowerment has been expounded upon the concept of participative management. The model emphasized that empowerment to take a strong foundation in organisations; managers should intrinsically motivate the behaviour of their employees and must release some of their authority and responsibility to other levels of the organisation.

Honold (1997) equated employee empowerment as management-by-stress strategy that pushes people and systems to the breaking point by forcing workers to do more. Lack of employee empowerment in many organisations is considered as a major source of organisational stress and conflicts. Management to a certain degree will reduce stress among their employees by empowering them. Employee empowerment is a management practice, which all managers should take seriously in their organisations, because it's through empowerment that employees will improve organisational performance. Management needs to consider the following facts to ensure that empowerment in their organisations is enhanced and nurtured.

Empowerment through job involvement, empowerment significantly enhances job involvement, job satisfaction, career satisfaction and organisational commitment (Noorliza and Hasni, 2006). This in the long run will make employees feel that they are valued in their organisations and create a higher degree of job satisfaction and commitment. Thus employees are motivated by both extrinsic and intrinsic rewards such as autonomy in decision-making and challenging work.

Leadership strategy, good leadership is critical for sustaining continuous improvement of employee empowerment in organisation (Carson and King, 2005). Good leadership needs to be demonstrated at all levels of the organisation. A good leader in an organisation is intuitively able to tap into expressed thoughts of others, to give verbal expression to their feelings, able to delegate and empower employees. This would make vision created by management to be brought into fruition. Good leadership inspires subordinates, creates a vision to be followed by the organization employees and empowers employees through training and development. Hamish (2004) argued that leadership is not only having innovative ideas, but also getting people to follow, not just in dragooned single file, but with pride, aflutter in their hearts and expectations. Employee empowerment to be successful in organisation there is need for good leadership to be in place at all levels of the organisation.

Empowerment to be successful in organisation management should use empowerment for bottom-Line results. Kirkman and Rosen (1999) stated that there are four key ingredients for empowering program to succeed in organisation, these are management must agree to support the program, inauguration warrants fanfare, must be offered for ideas generated and accepted, essential for team leaders, program coordinators and evaluation committees to be in place to evaluate the progress of empowerment and advise the best way to enhance it in organisations.

Therefore, empowerment is not a product of any structure or system, but it is a process, which is ongoing, dynamic and fluctuating. Thorlakson and Murray (1996) stated that empowerment is getting workers to do what needs to be done rather than doing what they are told and involves delegation, individual responsibility, autonomous decision making and feelings of self-efficacy. Employee empowerment program to be successful in organisation, management must put in place a structure in the system to support the whole process (Bogler and Somech, 2004). It is recommendable that empowerment process should take place in an environment where it's allowed, nurtured and promoted by management and employees.

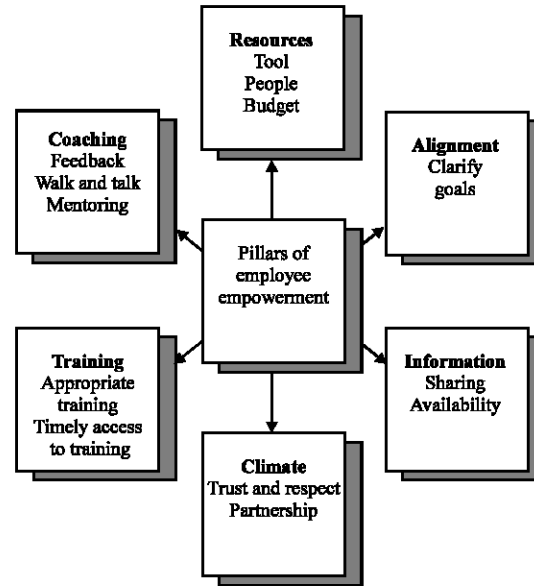


Fig. 1: Basic pillars of employee empowerment

The management style of any organisation must change and accommodate the empowering culture in the organisation. There are three closely inter-linked essentials which are the key success to employee empowerment in organisations, if they are taken seriously by the management of any going concern:

- Attitude is the pivotal point of any progressive idea and relates to the psychological stance (or frame of mind) of an individual or group of individuals who needs to be empowered. In general, one's attitudes are learned from those in authority over one (parents, teachers, managers) and are reinforced, by subsequent experience - unless or until some other different experience enlightens with a new message entirely
- Commitment - this is a sense of duty and obligation of employee to the company which employs him/her. All employees must be committed to ensure that the organisation achieves the objectives of employee empowerment. In addition everyone in the enterprise must accept responsibility to make the process of empowerment successful
- Involvement is keystone of corporate success of empowerment. There is much evidence to prove that involving individuals in the planning processes will lead to higher chances of achieving the plans of the organisation. Equally, where employees are involved in the identification, discussion and agreement of personal objectives (in relation to the corporate plan) there is higher desire to ensure that the tasks for which one is responsible are carried out efficiently and effectively (Moye *et al.*, 2005)

Vision and goals of the organisation must be clearly spelled out by the top management. Therefore employees must clearly understand the vision and goals of the organisation.

Management should encourage communication regularly with their employees, so that they are informed of what is taking place in their organisation (Marc and Susan, 2000). This will ensure that employees are getting the right information and doing the right things at the right time. Communication in particular, is arguably one of the basic empowerment tools, without communication, contemporary organisations would cease to exist (Hornstein, 2006).

In order for employee empowerment process to be successful in any organisation, the following pillars should be put in place by management as indicated in Fig. 1. These six pillars

include resources, coaching, alignment of goals with the organisational strategy, information, climate and training of employees:

- **Resources:** Includes financial, information, tools and equipments.
- **Coaching:** Managers must act as mentors in their organisations.
- **Alignment:** Alignment of organisation goals with the strategy (Integration)-goals formulated by management should be specific, measurable, achievable and realistic and should have the time limit to be achieved. This will motivate employees to work towards achieving these goals.
- **Information:** Employees should get the necessary information in good time to make thoughtful decisions. Information should be readily available and quickly transmitted to all concerned employees.
- **Climate:** high degree of trust among the employees should be highly encouraged and maintained. The higher degree of trust among the employees will make them do right things and make right decisions at the right time which will add value to the organisation. Trust is a lubricant that facilitates the activities in terms of organisational behaviour. Therefore employees should trust their managers and managers should trust their employees too (Ergeneli *et al.*, 2007). This will create an environment of empowerment.
- **Training of employees:** should be encouraged by management in organisation in order to develop the knowledge and skills of their employees.

Employee empowerment is critical for the success and survival of an organisation in this era of globalisation. Empowerment provides significant benefits to the organisation.

- Empowerment makes employees feel that they are vital to the success of the organisation. In addition it serves as a vote of confidence in the employee's ability to significantly contribute to the organization objectives. Empowerment places people at the centre of the circle rather than on the fringes. Then in the long run employees would be committed towards achieving the organisational objectives. Any change which takes place in organisation is effected by employees. Empowered employees facilitate the process of change in organisation (Psoinos and Smithson, 2002).
- Employee empowerment builds commitment and develops a sense of belonging to the organisation. Acceptance and ownership are basic human needs that are satisfied through the empowerment process in organisation (Greasley *et al.*, 2005).
- Empowered people join in creating their own destiny, work becomes exciting, stimulating, enjoyable and meaningful. Empowerment builds trust and promotes effective communication in organisation. Do not delegate an assignment and then attempt to manage it yourself – you will make an enemy of the overruled subordinate (Moye *et al.*, 2005).

Employee empowerment increases organizational effectiveness and employee well-being. For instance empowering employees has proven to improve efficiency and reduce costs on the assembly line in a transmission plant and empowerment of employees leads to job satisfaction, job involvement, loyalty, performance and faster service delivery to customers ( Flohr and Host, 2000).

Empowered employees will make quick decisions and suggestions that will improve quick service delivery in their sphere of operations and will save a lot of money and time in organisation (Flohr and Host, 2000). In addition, empowered employees will provide exceptional customer service in several competitive markets and thus improves the profits of the organisations through repeated business. Similarly employee empowerment is one of the strategies used in organisation in promoting of good relationship between the employee and the customers. The following are additional benefits of employee empowerment in organisation, these are reduction of the top management workload, improved decision-making, improve training, morale and initiative, more flexible and faster decision-making, fosters competitive climate, facilitates change in an organization and respond quickly to

environmental changes. In practice empowered employees have a high sense of self-efficiency accompanied by significant responsibility and authority over their jobs (Moye *et al.*, 2005; Hornstein, 2006).

Many organisation development professionals also link empowerment to increased creativity (Carson and King, 2005). Pressures have increased on business, education, all organisations to become learning organizations. Unless one is empowered, or empowers oneself, it is difficult to participate as a member of a learning organization. Therefore, empowerment promotes learning in organisation.

Employee empowerment is a strategy used to enhance teams in organization, so that they can be effective in performing the activities of the organisation (Psoinos and Smithson, 2002). Therefore, both the individual and members of the teams should be empowered and this will make the organisation to achieve the objectives and be in a position to compete with others in terms of human resource utilization. Additionally, Demitriades (2005) argued that to be successful in a dynamic environment an organisation should strive to become one large empowered team. Thus employee empowerment offers many advantages to the organisation and employees. Employees to a certain degree appreciate the greater responsibility and decision making as one strategy of retaining them in organisation (Carson and King, 2005).

Smith and Mouly (1998) suggested that empowerment often fails due to entrenched patterns and attitudes. Most employees are hampered in their adoption of change, no matter how attractive it may be philosophically, entrenched patterns and self-limiting attitudes. People may believe they want greater freedom and responsibility but, after years of being restricted, may prove unwilling or unable to take advantage of it. However, there are several factors which might discourage employee's empowerment in organisation, such as poor credibility of the management, mistrust in management, fearing of losing jobs and employees not willing to take responsibility for their actions.

Employee empowerment might fail due to lack of information. For instance, management might decentralize resources, but if employees are not informed that resources are available for their use (a perpetual reality), then access to these resources will have little influence on feelings of empowerment nor will employees utilize these resources to effect desired organisational outcomes. In addition employee empowerment is also criticized that increases the scope of employee's jobs. This requires that employees should be properly trained to cope with wider range of tasks (Mohammed and Pervaiz, 1998). Therefore, the recruitment process should ensure that employees recruited should have attitudinal characteristics and skills to cope with empowerment.

Empowerment is also criticized on the aspect of service delivery, it slows down the service delivery to the customers, simply because employee's attempts to individualize service for customers (Psoinos and Smithson, 2002), therefore, reducing the overall productivity of the service. This would have negative effects to the customers and the organisation at large.

In addition Empowerment is criticized in the sense that managers may abdicate all responsibility and accountability for decision making to juniors and in case of accountability purposes employees might be punished for failures, mistakes which there were not the source of the problem and this will make them to shy away from away empowerment and thus increase employee turnover rate.

## **MATERIALS AND METHODS**

### **Research Design**

The research design adopted for this study was cross sectional survey method. The survey instrument used was a questionnaire. Questionnaire is the most used instrument in the literature of employee empowerment (Demitriades, 2005; Ergeneli *et al.*, 2007; Tjosvold and Sun, 2005). A pilot test was conducted to assess the reliability and validity of the survey instrument on a sample selected of the study population. Twenty employees and managers were selected for pilot testing. Their suggestions were incorporated before administering the final questionnaire. The questionnaire was divided into three sections. Section 1 deals with strategies to enhance employee empowerment in organisations, section 2, benefits of employee empowerment and section 3, deals with criticism of

employee empowerment. The five Likert scale was used to measure the perceptions of employees and managers on strategies to enhance employee empowerment, benefits and criticism of employee empowerment in their organisations (strongly agree = 5 to strongly disagree = 1). The higher scores indicate the perceptions of employee strategies being in place to enhance employee empowerment, more benefits and criticism of employee empowerment. Adding up the scores to each item makes the total scores of each respondent on each variable in the instrument.

**The Sampling Plan**

The target population were employees and managers of the five public organisations in Gaborone town, Botswana. A convenience sample of twenty employees and managers from each five organisations was randomly selected to ensure representative of the participants. This was applied to get perceptions of employees and managers about employee empowerment in their organisations. Thus the numbers of employees and managers targeted from the sample was (n = 100), but the questionnaires duly completed and returned was (n = 80), which accounted for 80% of the response rate. The rate is considered satisfactory for survey research type (Babbie, 2001; Yammarino *et al.*, 1991).

**Data Analysis**

Employee empowerment has tended to have a strong quantitative base which consequently produces statistical and quantitative results (Nesan and Holt, 2002). Therefore, the descriptive statistics was used to analyze and present the empirical data. The descriptive statistics were used to describe major study variables. Thus Tabular method was used to condense data collected.

**RESULTS**

The empirical findings on the variables of strategies for success of employee empowerment in organisation are shown in Table 1. The results from the empirical survey indicates that to enhance employee empowerment in organisation, there is need for management to put in place appropriate rewards to motivate employees as supported by most of the participants (84%). These rewards should comprise of intrinsic and extrinsic rewards. Similarly, management should train their employees properly so that they will be in position to discharge duties diligently (80%). Training of employees is considered as one way of empowering employees in organisation. Training of employees should either be done on-the job training or off the job training. This findings consented with Greasley *et al.* (2005), who argued that employees to be empowerment in organisation they should be trained properly in order to make qualitative decisions. Similarly managers should provide appropriate support to their employees (77%) and they should trust their employees (74%). This result concurs with Ergeneli *et al.* (2007), who found that managers should support their subordinates, these support should be in the form of providing resources such as information resource, which is crucial for making informed decisions affecting the organisation. However, management should also mentor and coach

**Table 1: Perceived strategies for successful of employee empowerment in organisation**

Variables	1		2		3		4		5	
	No.	(%)	No.	(%)	No.	(%)	No.	(%)	No.	(%)
Managers should to establish Boundaries	5	6	2	3	21	26	36	45	16	20
Training of employees	5	6	-	-	11	14	44	55	20	25
Managers fully understand what empowerment means	7	8	8	10	22	28	32	40	11	14
Trust employees	3	4	5	6	13	16	43	54	16	20
Good leadership	9	11	3	4	20	25	33	41	15	19
Managers acts as coaches and mentors	12	15	10	12	2	3	20	25	36	45
Managers provide appropriate support	6	7	8	10	5	6	18	23	43	54
Appropriate rewards	4	6	4	5	4	5	22	27	46	57



their employees where necessary, they should fully understand the concept of employee empowerment, create boundaries of empowerment to minimise misuse of power and authority and provide good leadership in their organisations.

Organisations stand to benefits from employee empowerment as shown in Table 2. The findings show that employee empowerment will lead to improvement of the service delivery of the organisation (96%). Empowered employees not only respond to customer needs directly but also deal with dissatisfied customers during service recovery. The service delivery of the organisation will improve because employees are in a position to make spot decisions without delay in consultations process with their immediate supervisors. The results are consistent with Erganeli *et al.* (2007) findings on employee empowerment. In addition employee empowerment will lead to job satisfaction among the employees (96%). Job satisfaction will arise due employees being involved in decision making in organisation. Job satisfaction might also results from being taken for training and development to advance their skills, given challenging work and good employees' relations. These findings are in consistent with Moye and Hankim (2006). Similarly employee empowerment to a certain degree reduces employee turnover in organisation (91%). This makes organisation to save costs incurred in hiring employees who leave the organisation due to lack of employee empowerment. Other benefits of employee empowerment are reduction in the workload of the top management; this gives them time to concentrate on other strategic issues of the organisation. It also promotes cordial relationship between management and employees and facilitates organisational change.

Employee empowerment does not only benefit the organisation but criticized in aspects of misuse of power and authority, lack of top management support; employees might resist to be empowered, fear of loss of jobs and lack of training of employees as shown in Table 3. The result of the empirical survey shows that managers do not trust their employees to be empowered (80%). This result is in consistent with the findings of Greasley *et al.* (2005), who found out that managers do not trust their employees in organisation. However, this goes against the principle of employee empowerment in organisation in this era of globalization. Lack of top management commitment (73%) in the whole process will make employee empowerment not to be successful in organisation. In addition employees feel that empowerment will increase their workload (63%). Therefore, empowerments should be done properly without affecting other employees for instance in increasing the work load of others. Similarly employees should be prepared properly for additional responsibilities. Failure to do this, would affect

**Table 2: Perceived benefits of employee empowerment in organisation**

Variables	1		2		3		4		5	
	No.	(%)	No.	(%)	No.	(%)	No.	(%)	No.	(%)
Improves quick service delivery	1	1	-	-	2	3	30	38	47	58
Leads to job satisfaction	1	1	-	-	2	3	34	42	43	54
Reduces employee turnover	-	-	1	1	6	8	32	40	41	51
Reduces top management workload.	-	-	-	-	10	12	30	38	40	50
Promote employee relations	3	4	3	3	6	8	30	37	38	48
Facilitates change in organisation	-	-	10	13	10	13	15	18	45	56

**Table 3: Perceived Criticisms of employee empowerment**

Variables	1		2		3		4		5	
	No.	(%)	No.	(%)	No.	(%)	No.	(%)	No.	(%)
Employees misuse of power and authority	14	18	6	7	16	20	35	44	9	11
Lack of top management commitment	8	10	3	4	10	13	40	50	19	23
Employees might resist empowerment	17	21	19	24	15	18	22	28	7	9
Increase workload of employees	5	6	10	13	15	18	30	38	20	25
Lack of training of employees	-	-	10	13	25	31	30	38	15	18
Managers don't trust employees	-	-	3	4	13	16	48	60	16	20
Managers don't understand empowerment	7	8	8	10	22	28	32	40	11	14
Fear of loss of jobs	20	25	25	31	15	19	15	19	5	6

the employee relations in organisations. However, some managers in organisations do not understand the benefits of employee empowerment. Therefore, policies of employee empowerment will not be formulated nor implemented in organisations. Therefore, there is need for management to understand employee empowerment in a holistic way. However, in the variable of manager's fear of losing their jobs, if they empower their employees, the results showed that (56%) of the respondents disagreed with this view because they perceive employee empowerment as an appropriate strategy to retain and motivate employees.

### **CONCLUSION AND IMPLICATIONS**

Employee empowerments do exist in organisations but needs to be nurtured, enhanced and supported by management and employees. Therefore, there is need for good leadership to be in place at all levels of the organisation to formulate and implement policies of employee empowerment. Employee empowerment reduces employee turnover and promote good employee relations in organisation. Management should involve and consult employees in decision making process of their organisation. In addition there is need to train employees properly to cope with any changes in macro-environment. Employees who are empowered will make the organisation to survive, grow and face challenges posed by globalization with confidence. Management at all levels of the organisation should trust their employees and encourage open communication.

Employee empowerment is strongly criticized in increasing the work load of employees. Therefore, management should ensure that employee empowerment is seen as an opportunity rather than as a strategy to increase the workload of other employees. Similarly management should put in place internal controls to check the misuse of power and authority in their organisation. Thus employee empowerment without adequate training of employees would be a major treat to employee relations in organisations. Managers should note that empowerment will not happen naturally in organisations but must be initiated and is an ongoing process.

This research will contribute to the existing literature of employee empowerment specifically will inspire managers to come up with various interventions on how to retain employees in their organisations by using employee empowerment as one of the strategies. This study specifically will make management to view employee empowerment as an opportunity of minimizing employee turnover in their organisation rather than as a threat. In this era of globalization the idea of concentrating all decisions on the top management is diminishing very fast and is being replaced by employee empowerment.

The limitation of this study is that the sample selected of twenty employees and managers each from five organisations in Gaborone City does not represent the entire organisations in Botswana, so the results cannot be generalised to organisations that were not part of the study. There is need for qualitative research to be done on longitudinal basis to focus on larger sample and a broader coverage base for a cross validation purposes and to get true picture on employee empowerment and to make concrete conclusions.

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