

**UNIVERSITY OF KWAZULU NATAL**

**INVESTIGATING THE CULTURE OF EMPLOYEE EMPOWERMENT IN THE  
SOUTH AFRICAN PUBLIC SECTOR**

By

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This dissertation is submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Commerce in Leadership Studies at the University of KwaZulu-Natal.

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Date: .....13 February 2019.....

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## **ABSTRACT**

One of the many challenges that face the South African public sector other than resources includes skills shortage, improper alignment of job descriptions, poor leadership and many more. Workforce diversity, distrust in leadership and service inefficiency are the major challenges facing South Africa. Such challenges make it hard to deliver proper services to customers and stakeholders. Therefore, the key process for better service delivery from the government is to strategically use their leadership skills effectively, capacitate and empower employees with knowledge, skills and resources. The study focuses on the role of empowerment in the public sector as a leadership tool to improve government services. The main research problem was to make an in-depth analysis of the culture of empowerment in the government sector and the effect it has on organisational performance. A qualitative research methodology was followed during the research study. The study is mainly targeted at government officials who have five years or more working experience. Managerial and non-managerial employees from different business units participated in face to face interviews. The research study is based on the Department of Economic Development, Environmental Affairs and Tourism (DEDEAT) and East London Industrial Development Zone (ELIDZ). The researcher interviewed a sample of seven employees, whom five came from DEDEAT and two from ELIDZ. The Research study revealed that employee empowerment is a critical tool for organisational success to improve service delivery within the public sector. The study revealed that the public sector uses different strategies such as PMDS, mentorship, training and workshops to empower their employees. But the study showed that there are gaps and room for improvement in the strategies that it uses. Recommendations to improve those strategies have been mentioned in the dissertation.

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## Acronym list

APP	Annual performance plan
CEO	Chief Executive Officer
DEDEAT	Department of Economic Development and Environmental
EE	Employee Empowerment
ELIDZ	Eastern Cape industrial development zone
EC	Eastern Cape
GAAP	Generally accepted accounting principles
HR	Human Resource
KPA	Key performance area
KPI	Key performance indicator
MANCO	Management committee
NDSIII	National development skills3
OPS	Operational Plan
PDP	Performance Development Plan
PMDS	Performance Management Development System
SA	South Africa

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# CHAPTER 1

## INTRODUCTION AND OVERVIEW OF THE STUDY

### 1.1 Introduction

As organisations struggle to function in turbulent environments, a paradigm shift is required for organisations to become more adaptive to the ever-changing markets. It is with no doubt that the world is evolving, and many factors contribute to these phenomena such as technology advances, globalization, economic factors, social effects and several other factors. The South African public service, being the largest single employer is facing numerous challenges. Some of the critical challenges facing the public service include; service inefficiency, workforce diversity and distrust in the leadership (Barnard and Simbhoo, 2014). Employee Empowerment (EE) is considered to be one of the many strategies that organisations can use to improve organisational performance.

This study looks at empowerment as a leadership tool focusing on the South African public sector in particular. The South African public sector includes all non-profit organisations and agencies that deliver government programmes, goods and services (Mbanga, 2012). As the largest single employer in South Africa, the public sector faces complex bureaucratic challenges. The challenges faced are both structural and people-centred oriented and such challenges include service inefficiency, inadequate skills for leadership, maintaining a productive workforce and many more (Barnard and Simbhoo, 2014)

The introductory chapter provides the historical background that contributed to the challenges of a skills shortage in the country, and a brief overview of the employee empowerment as one of the interventions to address the challenges facing the South African Public Sector. This chapter continues with delineation of the aims and objectives of the study, including the research questions and the research problem. In conclusion, the chapter outlines the general structure of the study.

### 1.2 Background to the Study

The concept of leadership goes far back, the first type of leadership was known to be the personality era associated with *great man period* and *trait period*, this kind of leadership suggested that if people copied the personalities and traits of great men they would be great leaders, but research revealed that it is not easy to copy personal (Chamorro-Premuzic, 2016). The second era was known as the Influence era, this kind of leadership was associated with

power relations period and persuasion period. This type of leadership has proven to be inappropriate for today's complex issues, top-down approach with no conscious for the needs of employees cannot solve the problems of today. Following came situation era, contingency era, the transactional era followed by the culture era (Gardner and Olson, 2010). Looking at all these types of leadership they have one thing in common and that is leadership involves purposeful influence on employees in an organisation (Gardner and Olson, 2010). The phenomena of leadership have evolved throughout the years, many organisations are adapting to transformational leadership to help organisations cope with the complexities face (Boseman, 2008). Transformational leadership encourages employee performance and improvement in the organisation, but researchers have found limitations with this style of leadership even though it encourages growth, independence and empowering followers. Transformational leadership is influential by nature, followers depend on the leader to motivate and encourage them in order to perform their tasks well (Al Zefeiti, 2017). Today organisations need self-starters who are creative and self-motivated. Transformational leadership exerts empowering characteristics such as delegating responsibility to the followers, capacitating followers to think independently and encouraging innovation amongst employees (Al Zefeiti, 2017).

Considerable changes in the business environment have forced organisations to re-think their management system strategy if they want to remain competitive in the turbulent economy. Organisational leaders have opted for employee empowerment as a central theme that organisations practice to gain advantage of the competitive environment (Ramesh and Kumar, 2014). Successful organisations are non-linear and flexible in operation compared to yesterday's organisations that were typically bureaucratic, rigid and linear (Dahou et al., 2016). Organisations use EE to improve performance and service-delivery in turbulent environments and empowerment encourages employees to be self-determined and committed to their work (Moldovan and Macarie, 2014). Many researchers suggest that empowered employees usually yield higher results and are more committed and self-motivated (Joo and Shim, 2010). HamonL'Estrange was the first person to use the word empowerment in the seventeenth century in his book entitled *The Reign of King Charles*. The verb empower was found some two hundred years ago (Randolph, 1995).

Good leadership is very important for organisational success and such leadership is defined in different ways by different authors. Solomon et al. (2016) noted that leadership involves identifying goals or a sense of direction for an organisation through support and commitment. Yukl (2012) argued that leadership is a process where one member in the group will have more

influence on the group member's behaviour and decision-making. Leadership is the ability to influence people in working together towards a common goal and effective leaders are those who motivate people to perform tasks beyond the required scope (Yukl, 2012). Leadership came about in the 1700s although the term 'leader' goes as far back to even before the biblical times, the scientific research of leadership only began in the 20<sup>th</sup> century (Randolph, 1995). The notion of leadership can be applied almost anywhere and everywhere. In the corporate field with family, communities, education and many more (Gardner and Olson, 2010).

The concept of leadership goes far back. The earliest type of leadership was known to be the personality era associated with'. Chamorro-Premuzic (2016) explains that this kind of leadership suggested that if people copied the personalities and traits of great men, they would be great leaders, but research revealed that it is not easy to copy personal traits. The second era was known as the 'Influence era'. This kind of leadership was associated with the power relations period and the persuasion period. This type of leadership has not proven to be appropriate for today's complex issues. A top-down approach with no awareness of the needs of employees cannot alone solve the problems of today. Following this came the 'situation' era, the 'contingency' era, the 'transactional' era followed by the 'culture' era (Gardner and Olson, 2010). The notion of leadership involves interaction; it is a relationship between a leader and his/her followers (Banerjee, 2015). Leadership involves working in socially appropriate ways to influence others in subordinate or follower positions to achieve principle-driven goals and objectives that individuals may not have wanted to reach, may not have thought of reaching, or may not have had the courage or motivation to attempt on their own (Gabel, 2011).

Empowerment is one of many strategies that leaders use to ensure organisational success, according to Jandaghi et al. (2010), empowerment can be defined as giving employees the authority to make decisions. Empowerment entails a commitment from leaders as it is the process of empowering the next person in becoming everything that they are capable of being. Leaders need to provide a conducive environment for their followers and to create friendly conditions to share power amongst employees (Brumm and Drury, 2013). Empowerment involves power-sharing, thus having managers share their decisions and tasks with their employees (Zhang and Bartol, 2010). Cattaneo et al. (2014) describes power as the ability of an individual to be free from the influence of third parties and the power to make their own decisions. Authentic leadership allows openness among subordinates by applying transparency and ethical behaviour. It also encourages information- sharing.

### **1.3. Organisational Background**

#### **1.3.1 East London Industrial Development Zone**

The East London Industrial Development Zone (ELIDZ) is listed as a Schedule 3D entity. The entity is funded by the Eastern Cape Development Corporation. ELIDZ operates under the following vision and mission statements.

Its vision as stated on its website is to become “World Class operator of a prestigious industrial complex where highly competitive organisations thrive on streamlined business benefits and regional economic growth”. Its mission is “To provide investor solutions and to attract and develop strategic industries that strengthen South African export competitiveness through the development and operation of a thriving, specialized industrial complex (ELIDZ, 2015).

The Entity’s management structure is comprised of four Programmes: Programme 1- Zone Development, Programme 2- Zone Operations, Programme 3- Office of the CEO, Programme 4-Corporate Affairs. The Zone Development programme mainly focuses on attracting investors and investment. Zone Operations plays a critical role in the ELIDZ as the operation ensures sound Safety, Health & Environmental (SHE) Management of operational and other activities. The office of the CEO and Corporate Affairs provide strategic support and direction to the entire organisation.

#### **1.3.2 Department of Economic Development, Environmental Affairs and Tourism**

The Eastern Cape Department of Economic Development, Environmental Affairs and Tourism form part of the provincial government’s intent to spearhead growth and development of the provincial economy. The department functions under the following vision statement: “The department’s vision is of an Eastern Cape where economic growth and sound environmental management underpin sustainable development”. The department oversees seven regional offices and seven entities.

East London Industrial Development Zone and the Department of Environmental Affairs and Tourism were there two organisations the researcher chose for data collection. A brief background has given for the two organisations.

## **1.4 Problem statement**

The intention of this research was to investigate the culture of empowerment as a leadership tool in the South African public sector. The South African public sector is faced with many challenges such as poor service delivery, lack of skills, leadership inefficiency and many more (Barnard and Simbhoo, 2014).

Research has shown that leaders in top management fail to empower their employees, and states that little has been written on the phenomena of leaders empowering employees (Brumm and Drury, 2013). Empowerment contributes positively to organisations when used as a leadership tool to make decisions, but managers do not use it extensively (Campbell and Campbell, 2011).

Therefore, the research wants to evaluate and understand the extent to which the South African public sector applies empowerment as a leadership tool in their organisations and how do they do it.

## **1.5 Objectives of the study**

**The study is intended to respond to the following objectives:**

- 1.5.1: Assess the understanding of employee empowerment as a leadership tool in South African Public sector
- 1.5. 2: To explore the extent to which the culture of employee empowerment is practised in the South African public sector
- 1.5. 3: Identify strategies or methods by which leaders in the public sector empower their subordinates
- 1.5.4. To determine the impact of employee empowerment or the lack of it in the Public sector

## **1.6 Research questions**

**The study is intended to respond to the following questions:**

- 1.6.1 How do Public sector officials perceive or understand the notion of employee empowerment as a leadership tool in the Public sector?
- 1.6.2 To what extent has the culture of empowerment been implemented in the South African public sector?
- 1.6.3 What are the strategies used in the Public sector to empower employees?
- 1.6.4 What is the impact of empowerment in the organizational development-public sector?



## **1.7 Research Methodology**

According to Henning et al. (2013), research methodology is a method used to produce data and findings explored in a research study. The purpose of the research methodology indicates how the researcher went about answering the research objectives.

This study was based on an exploratory case study. Exploratory research is used to obtain a deeper understanding of a study (Zikmund et al., 2013). The researcher used a qualitative approach to gain a better and deeper understanding of how employee empowerment is practised in the Public sector. The researcher also wanted to explore the strategies and processes used to empower employees in the Public sector.

## **1.8 Outline of the dissertation**

### **Chapter One: Introduction**

This chapter gives a general overview of the study, detailing its aim, scope and background. The chapter also gives a presentation of the research problem and the research objectives

### **Chapter Two: Literature Review**

This chapter presents a comprehensive analysis of the literature reviewed by the researcher during the study. Key important concepts of empowerment are conceptualised throughout the literature review.

### **Chapter Three: Research design and methodology**

This chapter draws the reader's attention to the scientific procedures applied in the study. This entails the sampling techniques, data collection and analysis.

### **Chapter Four: Presentation and analysis of results**

The findings of the study are presented in this chapter. A discussion of the research findings was undertaken to serve to integrate the research questions and objectives, literature review, and the conceptual framework that was adopted for the purposes of this study.

### **Chapter Five: Conclusions and recommendations**

Logical conclusions are drawn from the discussion of the research results. Recommendations on how best to improve leadership in organisations through empowerment strategies are given. This chapter concludes with a presentation of possible directions requiring further study.

## **1.9 Conclusion**

This chapter aimed to give an introduction and background description of the research study. It also gave a description of the research problem, research objectives and the research methodology followed by the researcher. The nature and extent of employee empowerment in the South African Public Sector is a matter that has been investigated in this study. In order to have an in-depth understanding of the culture of employee empowerment; the next chapter analysis the relevant concepts by presenting and examining the broad employee empowerment theory.

## **CHAPTER 2:**

### **LITERATURE REVIEW**

#### **2.1 Introduction**

This chapter provides a foundation and an understanding of employee empowerment and how empowerment has evolved in the public sector as a leadership tool. Different perspectives of empowerment are dealt with extensively in this chapter. The chapter concludes by conducting a comparative review of other studies that have applied empowerment as a leadership tool to improve organisational performance.

Many scholars and practitioners have provided insight into the concept of employee empowerment and its evolution and application in the private sector. There have been limited public sector contributions; a South African perspective to the development of employee empowerment theories. Therefore, new insight based on the public sector experiences in employee empowerment are still awaited, this study intended to contribute in this regard.

Various scholars hold different perspective on employee empowerment concepts, and in this chapter, an attempt was made to present such contending views, where these emerge. It is equally important to highlight that this chapter deals with key employee empowerment concepts that are pertinent to the study. This chapter will discuss in detail the role of leadership in employee empowerment, the different perspectives to employee empowerment, the benefits and challenges as well as the organisational culture within employee empowerment.

## **2.2 The role of leadership in empowerment**

Leadership is a complex process by which an experienced and knowledgeable person exerts influence on others for the purpose of accomplishing the desired goals. Leaders need to have a thorough understanding of their environment; they need to be aware of the strengths and weaknesses in relation to the organisation's environment. They must be knowledgeable about internal and external processes, organisational culture and structure. Good leaders are those who are able to adapt to situations and apply an appropriate leadership style for each scenario. The third characteristic is that leaders are goal-oriented and set realistic goals for an organisation and its members and are proactive in accomplishing these goals. Leadership is the willingness and ability to manage a component of the organisation or the entire organisation to perform to the best of its ability. Because organisations are faced with constant change due to external environmental factors and internal process, one of the leadership roles is to initiate and manage change (Charanjit, 2017). Leaders need employees to implement change and that is why EE is very critical in organisational change which will ultimately result in organisational success.

Empowerment leadership comprises of different theories. These theories have a lot in common such as improving the moral of leaders, encouraging power-sharing among employees through team building and developing or empowering followers. Such theories include moral/ethical leadership, cultural leadership, visionary leadership, servant leadership and collaborative/group leadership (Anderson and Sun, 2017). Visionary leadership is when a leader comes up with news, proposing a vision especially in instances where the organization is stagnant. Moral/ethical leadership- entails leading by morals and ethical beliefs or values. This kind of leadership shares responsibility and shows compassion for each other (Anderson and Sun, 2017).. Servant leadership- aims to provide emotional support to the followers, making sure that they reach their full potential. With such leadership followers usually regard their leaders as role models (Liden et al., 2014). Cultural leadership- entails values, collegial relationships, individual empowerment, vision and trust. For the purpose of the research, the different theories will not be discussed in detail.

According to Brumm and Drury (2013) leaders can groom or develop followers by building a relationship of mutual influence between them. Authenticity is very key in developing good followers. Leaders need to act in a truthful manner, showing care, integrity, conducive working environment. Leaders who engage with their employees maintain employee trust, keep

productivity levels at an optimal level, increase overall satisfaction and are able to position the organisation for success (Wiley, 2010). Leaders with good behaviour encourage their followers to emulate them. In most cases you find that employees or followers do not relate with the vision and mission of the organisation, in order to overcome this; good leaders will develop followers with high self-concept to identify with organisational values. Followers need leaders who will allow power sharing and autonomy in decision making. According to Anderson and Sun (2017), there has been a paradigm shift from power leadership into empowerment leadership. Power leadership is associated with control, authority, command and self-centeredness and the unwillingness to share power. While on the other hand empowerment leadership can be associated with innovative, positive relationships, removing bureaucratic constraints, providing a participatory platform for knowledge sharing and delegating authority to employees so that they are able to make their own decision without supervision. Empowerment leadership involves power-sharing, thus having dyad linkages and relations (Zhang and Bartol, 2010). Empowerment leaders are known to be strategic planners, and strategic planners are good developers of employees. Good planning requires good followers, what is the point of having a good plan, but no one to implement it properly? Hence it is important that leaders train their followers very well. Followers need to work closely with leaders and engage in the leadership-follower relationship, effective followers support their leaders.

Brumm and Drury (2013) describes four types of followers under the follower theory, which are:

- Partner: combines two characteristics of follower, a partner supports their leaders and is also willing to challenge
- Implementers are high in support but very low in willingness to challenge the leader.
- Individualists-usually like to challenge their leaders but don't give much attention in supporting them.

Resource – only focuses on doing their job, they do not give much attention to challenging or supporting their leaders

Leadership is defined as a process involving a person or group of people who want to achieve common goals. A leader is a person who exerts motivation and performance on team members. Leaders need to uphold high moral standards for the people they lead. Leaders develop

company strategies, vision, mission and sharing the vision with employees at an operational level. Leadership involves the ability to improve and sustain the capacity of learning and the change management process (Bilgin et al., 2017).

Banerjee (2015) defines leadership as a skill. Skill is the expertise that one possesses to encourage subordinates to accomplish personal and organisational skills. Skilled leaders should have substantive knowledge on how to fundraise for programs, have strategies in place to achieve goals and be able to foresee challenges. Skill is acquired through learning and practice. Leaders must have an insight into the challenges that face employees and come up with strategies to resolve them. When leaders know and understand their employees' challenges, they are able to advise and motivate their employees accordingly (Dhar, 2018). Traits and behaviours of leaders are divided into two categories (Jandaghi et al., 2010). The first category is that of leaders having certain traits and behaviours effective for all situations and individuals. In common, leaders must be intelligent, have good communication skills and physical stature. The other category is where the traits and behaviours of the leader suite a particular situation or group. Therefore, defining leadership as a trait puts substantive attention to the qualities of the individual leader rather than on the process of influencing (Banerjee, 2015). According to Jones and Rivas (2011) leadership has challenges of its own, amongst many include creating and maintaining a diversified team, inspiring others to share the leaders/organizational vision, facilitating open and clear communication among co-workers, empowering incumbents to take responsibility for their actions and providing inspiration to others.

Gabel (2012) describes leadership as the process of exerting power on employees. Power is described into six main types. The first type of power is legitimate power also known as positional power, this is where the leader will influence the employees to do something that they feel is important or good for the organisation. This type of leadership is hierarchal and there is usually no platform for negotiation, if there is it's minimal, the employee does what the leader asks. Rewarding power is the second type of power, this is where the leader influences the employees to do certain tasks and the successful implementation is usually rewarded. The reward can be concrete or materialistic. Coercive power is the third leadership power, this kind of leadership involves punishment if the employee does not execute as requested by the leader. Gabel (2012) describes the fourth power leadership is when the leader is an expert in a given area and influences the employee under their opinion. Referent power is when the employee wishes to emulate a certain leader, maybe they like how they carry themselves or how they deal with issues. The employee is usually inspired and motivated by

that leader. Informal power is the last type of leadership where the leader provides information about a better way an employee can do things. Power can be defined as the ability to make sure that things are being done and obtain the necessary resources to achieve organisational goals. Informal power refers to the social support and communication that employees have in the organisation (Gabel, 2012).

The role of leadership in employee empowerment (EE) can be divided into three leadership levels. Senior leaders play a very critical role in creating an environment that will promote high level performing employees through efficiency and effectiveness. Senior managers together with middle managers are responsible for promoting good employee behaviour through transactional and transformational leadership. Frontline or junior managers have similar responsibilities as senior and middle managers but at a lower management level. The leadership levels play an important role in influencing employees to access information, encourage and boost employee self-esteem, reward good performance and so forth (Min et al., 2016). Employee empowerment gains support from top management to lower level management and vice-versa. A mutual understanding is required between top management and lower level management for empowerment to be effectively practised. It is vital that the leadership of the organisation and its' employees create a healthy relationship between them for healthy progress (Ravisha and Pakkerappa, 2017). According to Armache (2013), leaders play a critical role in empowering their employees. They do so by providing a conducive working environment and a well-defined vision and mission statement. It is also their key role to inspire the subordinates in driving the success of the organisation. Good leaders give their employees clear goals and organisational direction, understanding the important role they must play in leading the organisation to successes. Good leaders put employees' interest before theirs (Liden et al., 2014). The role of good leadership at all levels becomes very important in sustaining continuous improvement of employee empowerment. According to Wiley (2010), good leaders lead by example.

The role of leaders in a complex organisation is to change how a situation is perceived. It is imperative that leaders are able to scan the environment and interpret issues in order to make the right decision for the organisation. Leaders are there to give meaning to unfolding events, they must make connections, must always be in the look for new opportunities and adapt to the ever-changing environment (Niemandt, 2015).

### **2.3 The concept of empowerment**

It is important that the phenomena of power be explained before elaborating on the concept of empowerment. Orgambídez Ramos and Borrego Alés (2014) describe power as the ability to make things happen through resource mobilisation. Power can only be exercised when employees have access to resources, information, opportunities to learn and grow as well as support from management, without these leaders cannot exert power.

Empowerment is about top management sharing their power with employees in lower levels of the organisation, whether it be responsibilities, accountability or resources. Boseman (2008) distinguishes two fundamental arguments when it comes to empowerment, firstly it develops and grows individuals; secondly, employees who have been well developed produce positive energy in the organisation. The following authors (Al Zefeiti, 2017, Chamorro-Premuzic, 2016) distinguish empowerment as self-efficacy and collective efficacy, the first one deals with an individual's ability to perform tasks successfully, whereas collective efficacy is the belief that when individuals work in groups, they are more effective. This results in a two-dimensional view, impact and competence. Impact refers to the belief of the follower being able to have influence and impact at work. Competence links with self-efficacy, the belief of having the required skills to perform tasks in an effective and efficient manner. There are several ways of improving organisational progress through empowerment; Das and Maharana (2016) defines empowering programs as one of them. Employee programs provide managers with the opportunity to share information with employees. Organisations can also allow democratic decision processes, where employees can choose their leaders, and bring employee representatives when decisions are made. Another important factor involves self-managed teams when employees are left to manage themselves, self-esteem and trust are built. Team members identify their own leader. Empowerment can also be described from a two multilevel approach; individual empowerment and group empowerment (Auh et al., 2014). Individual empowerment is the degree to which an employee perceives the influence of empowerment from their manager. As a result Auh et al. (2014) links individual empowerment with psychological empowerment, psychological deals with intrinsic motivation, when employees are supported by their managers to make decisions and attend to their work challenges independently, self-fulfilment and self-esteem is built in an individual.

Employee empowerment has become very important in this era of globalization for employees to be able to take quick decisions and react quickly to the constantly changing environment



(Ravisha and Pakkerappa, 2017). Many organisational leaders have realised that the biggest hindrance to organisational success is the employees, hence they need to be empowered (Rothermel and LaMarsh, 2012). Employees are the core asset for organisational success and survival. Possessing competent and motivated individuals has become the engine of differentiation between competing organisations. Hence organisations have become more conscious of the importance of aligning their strategic management of human resource with the corporate strategy. Developing an alignment between the organisations' strategies and human resource management gives birth to the best human resource practices, thus increasing organisational performance. Employee empowerment is one of these new best practices (Dahou et al., 2016).

Empowerment is an evolving concept of leadership (Priyadharshany and Sujatha, 2015). Leaders who empower their employees give employees an opportunity to be creative and innovative when delivering their duties. Empowerment improves the quality of service delivery and producing customer satisfaction. Empowered employees are more confident with their work (Abbasi et al., 2011). Employee empowerment should result in improved organisational outcomes. Empowerment encourages innovation, it also should allow for greater effectiveness when doing daily duties and lastly better performance encouraged by a decentralised structure (Petter et al., 2002, Kariuki and Kiambati, 2017).

Employee empowerment involves learning when employees are being empowered it means they are learning. A learning organisation puts itself in a better position to survive and compete in turbulent environments (Dahou et al., 2016). Increasing learning capability and organisational knowledge among employees helps with long-term success for the organisation. Organisational learning comes from new knowledge and past experience that organisations go through, it is mainly measured through a shared vision, open-mindedness to learn, employee commitment and knowledge sharing. Organisational learning empowers employees with new skill and knowledge that they can use solve problems in ever-changing environments. A learning environment within an organisation encourages people to be more proactive and innovative in seeking new solutions to deal with current solutions. Knowledge sharing is one key aspect that helps develop knowledgeable employees (Alavi et al., 2014). Empowerment involves the process of transferring skills, knowledge and abilities from top management to junior level employees. It involves giving individuals responsibility and accountability for their work, this (Alavi et al., 2014) makes employees enjoy all the credit of success. Empowerment builds leadership qualities among employees and forces employee loyalty to the organisation.

The success of EE depends on employees being involved in the process from conceptual to implementation (Ravisha and Pakkerappa, 2017).

There are many definitions associated with the concept of empowerment, according to Chib (2016) EE is a strategy that assists employees to own and take responsibility for their own growth at work. Employee empowerment is the extent to which employees feel empowered regarding work processes and how they are satisfied when it comes to making decisions that will affect their own work (Min et al., 2016). Employee empowerment is a process of developing employees by giving them the power to solve problems but not only limited to that, but it is also the process of transferring knowledge and skills to employees (Chib, 2016).

Generally, empowerment is the shifting of authority and accountability for decision making and performance of work tasks from managers to employees who perform the daily work. Empowerment is one of the newest human resource management practices. It is one technique of employee involvement, a strategy of assigning to employees more responsibility and accountability, prompting the authority to make decisions down to the first level of qualified people in the organization (Dahou et al., 2016).

Empowering leadership refers to the shift of resources, information and the delegation of authority to employees. Auh et al. (2014) defines leadership from two perspectives: a macro perspective which looks at sharing authority and resources as well as a micro perspective which deals with providing motivation to the employees. According to Rezaie and Bagheri (2014) it is a means of getting people involved and being participatory in making organisational decisions. Empowerment is giving employees autonomy to perform their key performance indicators (Zhang and Begley, 2011). According to Edmonstone (2000), empowerment is an instrument to minimise authoritarian leadership and maximise democracy. More recently the same argument is advanced by Auh et al. (2014) who said; it is not just giving people the power to make decisions but making them aware of the power they already possess through knowledge and internal motivation. Cho and Faerman (2010) argue that many researchers believe that empowerment may be an efficacious management tool to transform public organisations in becoming more effective in their operations. There are three components that sustain empowerment Schultz (2014), the defined direction is the first component. Leaders need to have set boundaries for the empowerment process, define the desired outcomes, define how results will be measured and any other information that will give clear instructions. The second component refers to the freedom of choice that employees have towards their job, being able to make their own decisions without being second-guessed. The last component is getting

enough support from the organisation to complete the necessary assignments. This means providing enough resources to get the job done.

According to Jandaghi et al. (2010) there, notable factors to consider when discussing employee empowerment include level, content, context and state. At a level factor empowerment can occur at all levels from top management to front line workers, is therefore important to consider and analyse where empowerment is needed considering the situation and position of the company at that moment. Content empowerment focuses on empowering a group of people, individuals may feel empowered but belong to a powerless group. Context refers to the context within which empowerment will take place, this may be a training session, practical exercise, therefore, leaders need to choose the appropriate context to empower. Empowerment can be viewed as a process or a product. Process refers to the means and the authority given to employees to make their own decision. Product relates to the psychological perspective of empowerment thus raising employee effectiveness when conducting their duties.

Ramesh and Kumar (2014) defines employee empowerment from three perspectives which are empowerment from an employer's perspective, empowerment from an employee's perspective and empowerment from an organisational perspective. Employer perspective involves, influence through context implies a higher level of trust in an employee by defining the context and standards where the employee has the liberty to be creative and innovative. Influence through context develops leadership and proactiveness in employees. The second point when it comes to an employer's perspective is to create a feeling of inclusion by making sure that employees across all levels have a voice and that their opinions are being heard. Leaders need to allow new ideas and incorporate when making decisions. The third employer's perspective is to support employee empowerment, this involves giving employees responsibility rather than delegation. Articulate a common purpose is the fourth point in the employer's perspective, it is the clarity that the leader needs to set by creating a clear vision and goals for the organisation. A lack of clarity disempowers employees. The last point on the employer's perspectives is to equip people for success. Before leaders give employees responsibility, they need to equip their employees through training sessions, information sharing and providing resources to stand a good chance of succeeding. The second perspective that (Ramesh and Kumar, 2014) talk about is the employee's perspective. Employee's perspective involves open communication where employees can have a continuous dialogue with managers, where employees can share their ideas, assumptions, biases and fears. Providing a climate where ideas are owned and challenged through honest dialogue. The second point in employee's perspective is working in teams, thus

collaborative learning and respecting another person's opinion. The third perspective is to gain wisdom to be fully empowered, data are the collection of discrete elements and concepts. Information is specified for specific stakeholder and machine. Information is the facts collected about someone or something. Knowledge is used to reason and predict unknown resources (Ceylan et al., 2014). Wisdom is the result of thinking about the future, recognising trends, doing forecasts for anticipated events or outcomes that may affect the organisation. The fourth perspective is to tolerate uncertainty, leaders need to allow employees to solve problems on their own sometimes even if the environment looks unsettled, thus, to create self-confidence and more independence. The last one is to obtain courage from within and take responsibility.

Wiley (2010) adds the following when it comes to employee's perspective: Employees are likely to view innovative leaders as effective leaders. Effective leaders need to demonstrate a quick response to the complex environment that the organisation operates in. Leaders must keep their promises and deliver on what they said they would do. Employees have confidence in leaders who define clear expectations from their employees. Leaders need to make employees accountable and responsible for the tasks given to them. Clear expectations provide focus and direction to the employees.

Ramesh and Kumar (2014) explains the last perspective which is, empowerment from an organisation's view is. The first point in empowerment from an organisation's view is decentralization. This means giving employees the authority to make their own decisions with the knowledge they learn. Information sharing is the sharing of information to employees about the organisation's developments and status quo. The third point is contingent rewards which refer to a leader giving a clear clarification of roles and tasks that employees are responsible for, rewards are given on the fulfilment of contractual obligations (Camps and Torres, 2011). The last point is alignment, when the organisation does not share common goals and a common vision, empowering employees will be cumbersome and daunting. Empowered organisations must structure processes, goals, people, and reward systems aligned with each other (Ramesh and Kumar, 2014).

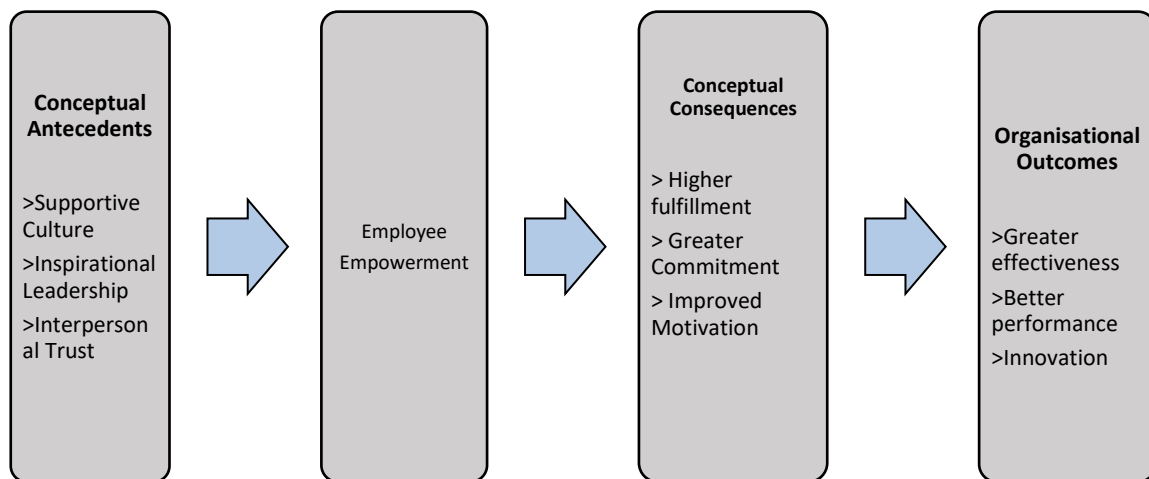
Empowerment can be viewed through two different lenses; structural empowerment and psychological empowerment (Armache, 2013). Each element provides a different perspective towards empowerment; different but complementary to one another. According to Gkorezis and Petridou (2011), structural empowerment involves managerial practices. It is giving power and authority to employees through information sharing. Managers need to grant employees

information on organisational performance, rewards based on the organisation's performance and provide employees with knowledge that will enable them to contribute to the success of the organisation. Structural empowerment also involves allowing employees to make decisions that will have a direct impact on the organisation's mandate. According to Taylor (2013), psychological empowerment refers to the psychological state of a human being manifested in four cognitions; meaning, competence, self-determination and impact.

Information sharing is a critical empowerment tool and managers need to share organisational objectives and strategies (Tremblay and Landreville, 2015). Information sharing builds trust in employees as well as a sense of ownership that makes them feel part of the bigger picture. The reason why employees require information is that they want to know how the company is doing and whether their efforts are making an impact on the organisation. According to Fernandez and Moldogaziev (2013), empowerment involves teamwork, information sharing and creating new structures where employee talent can be developed, (Çakar and Ertürk, 2010) explains empowerment as a process where management delegates tasks and activities and involves employees in decision-making processes. Employee empowerment is defined as providing a conducive environment for the employee where, they can take responsibility for their actions and also account for the outcomes of the decisions they make (Şahin et al., 2014).

Petters et al. (2002) came up with a framework for empowerment and this has been demonstrated in figure 2.1 below. The conceptual antecedents describe the elements needed for effective empowerment. The three conceptual antecedents include supportive culture, inspirational leadership and interpersonal trust and are the foundation of employee empowerment. Managers need to create a conducive environment for their employees, an environment where employees find it easy to share and talk with their managers. Good conceptual antecedents give birth to positive conceptual consequences; higher fulfilment, greater commitment and improved motivation. When employees are motivated and committed, they are able to provide the organisation with better results through innovation and higher impact.

Figure 1: Conceptual Framework of employee empowerment



Source: Petter, Byrnes, Choi, Fegan & Miller (2002, p377. 24p.)

## 2.4 Structural perspective

Structural empowerment is the process whereby management gives subordinates the responsibility of participating in decision-making, in the sharing of information and in taking up responsibilities for their key performance areas- (KPA) (Cho and Faerman, 2010). According to Wilson (2011) structural empowerment is more concerned with giving employees the autonomy to make decisions that will contribute towards achieving organisational goals. According to Orgambidez Ramos and Borrego Alés (2014), structural empowerment involves giving employees access to opportunities such as acquiring skills and knowledge and the opportunity to grow and move up the ladder in the organisation. Managers also need to be receptive to receiving feedback and guidance from subordinates, peers and managers. Structural empowerment also involves making resources and information accessible to employees. This helps them understand organisational policies and future goals of the organisation as well as helping to deliver key performance indicators effectively and efficiently.

Structural empowerment comprises of the following dimensions; participative decision making (PDM) and delegation and feedback on performance. According to Lam et al. (2015), PDM is sharing decisions between the leader and the follower. Managers and employees require a mutual relationship of information-sharing, e.g. organisational goals, budget allocations, etc. According to Randolph (1995), as well as Afsar, Badir, and Bin Saeed (2014), goals are developed and used as milestones for organisational progress and when set properly they encourage collaboration and a team spirit among employees. Employees usually do not know

how to set goals and tasks that align with the vision because of the lack of knowledge and support from managers. In addition, managers must commit to helping employees achieve their goals through empowering partnerships. When it comes to decision-making, employees usually get the perception that they will be making all the decisions. That is why managers need to explain properly that employees will be more involved in the operational-level decision-making, and thereby allowing employees to account and take responsibility, for the operational activities.

Empowerment from a structural perspective involves creating a platform for employees to gain knowledge, resources and support to fulfil their duties at work. The organisation should provide a facilitative environment for the employees, so, therefore, the organisation must be structured in a manner that makes it easy to implement empowerment. Structure of opportunity provides support to the employees on their professional development while the structure of power is providing the employee with resources needed for them to deliver their duties. Structural empowerment involves six dimensions: opportunity, information, support, resources, formal power and informal power.

Structural empowerment centres on the idea that leaders can influence their employees professionally by providing an innovative environment that will encourage employee collaboration and development. Many methods can be used such as developing a robust strategic plan, concrete policies, encouraging employees to further their studies and acknowledge employee expertise. When employees feel valued, they support their leaders willingly in achieving the organisation's vision and mission (Tinkham, 2013, Afsar et al., 2014).

Van Der Westhuizen et al. (2012) further explain that if employees are involved in decision-making, implementation tends to be much easier. Having employees communicate their work-related issues gives the organisation an opportunity to receive innovative suggestions and solutions regarding the organisation's challenges and processes. Allowing employees, the freedom to participate in decisions gives subordinates job satisfaction. Managers who practise participative management tend to improve organisational communication while participative management also allows employees an opportunity to reveal their skills thus increasing self-competencies (Şahin et al., 2014).

The term 'structure' is usually identified with the organisation's chart, but it goes beyond that, as it involves the parameters and the boundaries within which employees are to operate (Mishra

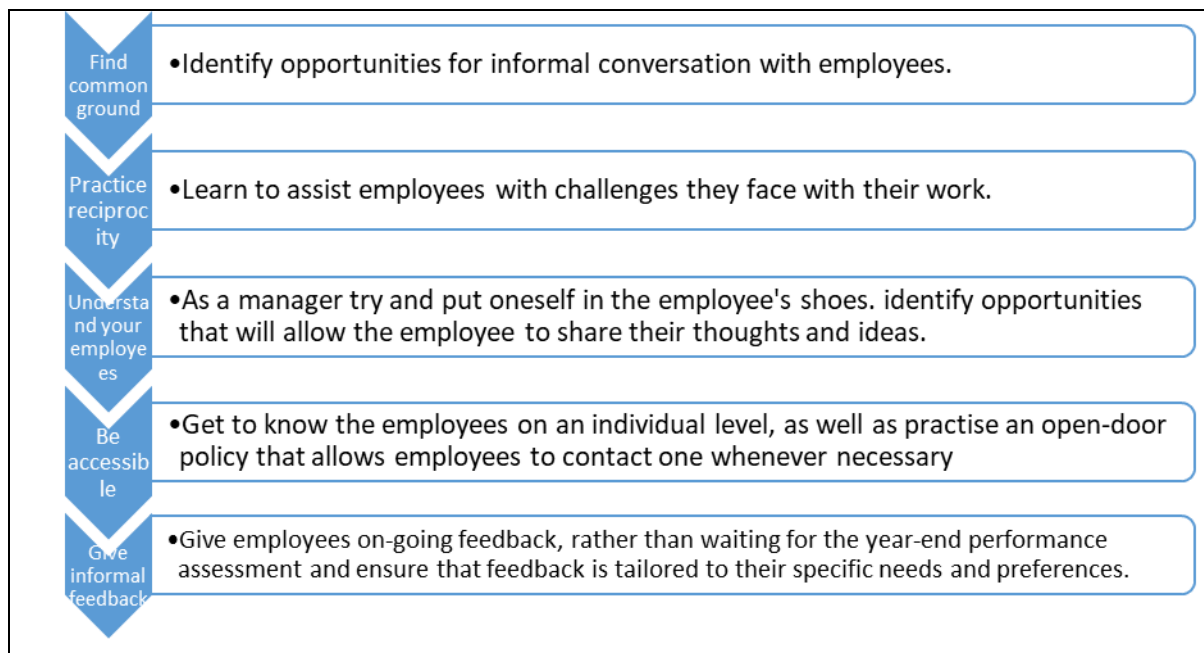
and Bhaskar, 2010). Structure affects many aspects of the organisation such as the vision, goals and objectives, strategy implementation, employee performance and many more. Managers and employees across the organisation must be able to transform the vision into action, and this is done through information sharing, which translates to employee empowerment (Alavi et al., 2014).

Feedback refers to the information given to employees relating their success (Şahin et al., 2014). Feedback can also foster employee motivation (Gabriel et al., 2014). Managers who provide feedback to their employees are most likely to get better performance. According to Teckchandani and Pichler (2015), the relationship between manager and employee becomes crucial when it comes to feedback as employees want to feel a sense of trust and support from their managers. Managers are most likely to form high-quality relationships with employees they like more and low-quality relationships with employees they least like. This should not be the case all employees deserve a sense of trust and support from their managers. If employees trust one, they are bound to be more receptive to feedback as well as be open to give back feedback, thus improving both employee and organisational performance.

Teckchandani and Pichler (2015) define five strategies that can enhance the relationship between manager and employee towards effective feedback. The five strategies include the manager and employee finding common ground to discuss issues, and for the manager to practice reciprocity by assisting employees with any challenges they face in their work situations. Managers need to have a good understanding of their employees, they must be accessible to their employees and, lastly, it is important that managers give continuous feedback to their employees.



Figure 2: Five strategies of feedback



Source: Teckchandani & Pichler (2015)

Delegation-effective leaders delegate some of their work and tasks to their employees. Delegation earns respect from employees; it builds employee morale and self-esteem and allows different perspectives on tasks. Through delegation, the managers earn themselves more time to focus on important tasks such as strategy and future planning for the organisation. A lack of delegation can deprive employees of an opportunity to grow and be innovative (Johnson, 2013).

Orgambídez Ramos and Borrego Alés (2014) describes four components of structural empowerment; they are access to opportunity, access to resources, access to information and access to support. Proenca (2014) elaborates by saying employee perform better when they know that the organisation is committed to them. Employees look at the way leaders react to employee mistakes, suggestions by employees and how they are treated when they are sick. High level of organisational support will encourage employees to repay the organisation with high commitment and good organisational citizenship behaviour. It is imperative that when leaders share information, they consider how employees will receive and respond to the information. Employees may not positively welcome information that will challenge their current values, hence a lot of support is required from the organisation. Great organisational

support can influence the way employees react when they are given greater access to resources, it also enhances the employee's sense of meaning and competence.

**Table 1: The components of structural empowerment**

<b><u>COMPONENTS OF STRUCTURAL EMPOWERMENT</u></b>	
<b>ATTRIBUTE</b>	<b>DESCRIPTION</b>
Access to opportunity	refers to an opportunity of acquiring skills and knowledge and growing within the organisation
Access to resources	Entails time, finances, material etc. that will assist the organisation to be able to do its work.
Access to information	employees need to have access to information such as organisational policies, organisation's strategies and many more
Access to support	means that employees should get feedback from their managers, peers and subordinates

Source: Orgamidez-Ramos & Borrego-Ales (2014)

Referring to the above components of structural empowerment, Casey et al. (2010) further explains two more components which include formal and informal power. Formal power often comes from job titles and job descriptions. It is the power that employees have because of their job characteristics. Informal power may be detached from titles. It is the influence that an employee has on the employees without an official leadership title. Informal power is gained through informal sessions with peers, subordinates and other business units.

## **2.5 Psychological perspective**

As organisations become more complex, employees need to be more flexible and adaptive to the emerging environment (Balkar, 2015). Managers usually lay more emphasis on structural empowerment and tend to forget about the psychological framework of empowerment (Cho and Faerman, 2010). In order to fully understand the role of empowerment, it is imperative to discuss the psychological aspects of it. Psychological empowerment focuses on intrinsic motivation; it is not what managers do to their employees but the mindset that employees have in the organisation concerning their roles. According to Soin (2013), psychological empowerment focuses on the person's inner feelings, the values they possess as an individual

and the autonomy they have to make decisions concerning their own work. Psychological empowerment can be defined as a motivational attribute comprising four concepts: self-determination (self-efficacy), meaning, impact and competence (Lin and Tseng, 2013). Self-efficacy is the autonomy to make decisions. It empowers the individual's inner being, encouraging commitment and effectiveness in work activities towards achieving desired goals. When leaders persuade a positive meaning to employees' jobs, employees will be more motivated to do their best and learn a new innovative and creative way to do their tasks. Having a sense of competency gives employees the capability to perform skilfully their work duties (Dahou et al., 2016).

Psychological empowerment cannot be fully understood without understanding the concept of psychological capital, the concept comprises of self-efficacy, hope, optimism and resilience. When the psychological capital of the employee is developed individuals can solve problems with confidence, the feeling of optimism about challenges can be overcome. Employees' hopes are positive towards new things introduced in the organisation and when a failure occurs employees are self-motivated to start again (Şahin et al., 2014). Psychological capital has three sub-themes which include; situational optimism, situational hope, self-sufficiency related to role and fortitude. Situational optimism refers to the positive thoughts that the individual has about their efforts. When optimistic employees receive positive feedbacks from their colleagues, they believe that they will be successful in all their duties. Situational hope refers to those employees who have hope that in every situation there is always an alternative solution to achieve the desired goal. Hopeful employees are always more motivated to achieve satisfactory results in their tasks. Self-sufficiency related to a role is when an employee demonstrates the required efforts to solve challenges and self-confidence to overcome difficult situations. Fortitude is the last sub-theme of psychological capital; it is when the employee continues to be motivated irrespective the challenges they continue to face. It can be defined as the ability of the employee to fine-tune themselves in uncertain environments and being able to quickly recover from setbacks.

Psychological empowerment is the beliefs, expectations and motivation of employees in reference to power. Psychological empowerment can be experienced well by the employee understanding very well their role in the organisation, another way is when employees feel they have a means to resources for accomplishing their work duties. The last experience is when employees perceive that they have the freedom to use organisational resources in reaching their targets. Psychological empowerment goes beyond intrinsic motivation but also addresses

behaviours such as job performance and organisational commitment (Wilson, 2011). Organisational commitment refers to the attachment that an employee has in the organisation, it is divided into affective, continuance and normative commitment. Affective commitment refers to the emotional attachment that employee has with the company, it contributes to their feeling of competence in the role they play at work. Continuance commitment is based on the employee's awareness of the cost associated impact if they were to leave the organisation. It also results in the contributions that the employee has made to the organisation and if they left that would be lost. Normative commitment is based on ethical behaviour where they feel staying in the organisation is the right thing to do (Jandaghi et al., 2010). Job satisfaction is the point where employees feel they have reached their full potential. Job satisfaction is experienced most when employees feel they are recognised for their good work, given the opportunity to use their abilities, attention paid to suggestions and leaders manage challenges (Casey et al., 2010). Job satisfaction can be obtained through job redesign which entails job enrichment, job enlargement and job rotation. Job enrichment includes higher level motivators when it comes to one's job such as being given more responsibility, freedom to make decisions and be more involved to change initiatives. Job enlargement means adding more similar tasks but with no responsibility added to the employee's role. And lastly, job rotation means moving the employee from department to another to gain exposure and knowledge (Curtis and O'Connell, 2011).

Psychological empowerment refers to how employees feel about their role in the organisation, it basically touches into the intrinsic motivation and self-efficacy (Nasser and Saadeh, 2013). Positive psychology within an organisation encourages positive behaviour amongst employees. Positive behaviour gives birth to a better understanding of positive psychological capital. Psychological capital entails hope, resilience, self-efficacy and optimism. Hope means having patience in attaining goals, resilience is the ability to overcome challenging situations despite the difficulties, self-efficacy refers to the ability or confidence of overcoming difficult tasks (Kaya and Altinkurt, 2018).

Information plays a critical role in psychological empowerment; employees feel empowered when leaders share organisational information. Information should be shared with everyone at all levels. The information allows employees to see the bigger picture of the organisation and provide a better understanding of their roles and decision making within the workplace (Gkorezis and Petridou, 2011). When employees have a poor grasp of organisational objectives and strategies, may not be aware of the role and contribution they need to input towards the

organisation's overall performance. Employees will be challenged to act responsibly if they are not given enough information (Tremblay and Landreville, 2015).

Recognition is one of the most powerful psychological empowerments that leaders can use to empower their employees, it is less costly compared to other strategies. Employees who don't get recognition can sabotage their leaders and the company. Recognition of efforts boosts employee's self-esteem. Psychological empowerment also entails job security, organisations empower employees in this regard by having flexible employment conditions where employees can study further, go to training for self-development. If employees feel insecure with their jobs, they may not be motivated with their work (Gkorezis and Petridou, 2011).

According to Sharma and Kaur (2008), the following factors can lead to an absence of self-efficacy; power dilemmas, style of supervision, reward system and job design. Power dilemmas involve bureaucracy in the organisation, centralised decision making etc. Employees tend to lose confidence in themselves or withdraw from participation when leadership is highly autocratic.

Discouragement is also found when managers focus a great deal on the negative without providing proper reasons and feedback. If employee rewards are not implemented or acknowledged, employees tend to lose interest in the efforts they put into their work, because of low incentives, a lack of innovation-based rewards and many more. Job design involves factors such as lack of clarity in the job description and being given unrealistic goals but expected to perform with efficacy and efficiency. When employees are given small tasks, and there is a lack of autonomy and with high rule structures in which to function, they tend to lose interest in the tasks and in innovation, thus affecting organisational performance. According to Şahin et al. (2014) when the psychological side of empowerment has been established the fear of dealing with challenging situations can be overcome. Employees become self-motivated and confident at work.

Psychological empowerment refers to the intrinsic behaviour comprised of four components; meaning, competence, self-determination and impact. Joo and Shim (2010) describe the four components as an important source for organisational commitment, explaining that employees become committed when managers can create platforms or opportunities for learning.

Zhang and Bartol (2010) enhances the argument by saying a leader should assist an employee by bringing meaning to their work ensuring that they understand how important their work is to the overall goal of the organization. A leader should also show confidence in an employee's

competence to produce high performing results. Leaders must provide employees with the freedom of making their decisions when it comes to their work.

The first component is meaning, Soin (2013), and refers to meaning as the engine of empowerment. It describes the perceived value that the employees have on their work. Employees evaluate their jobs based on their values, hoping they add meaning to the work they do (Joo and Shim, 2010). Employees evaluate their work based on the values they carry which makes them feel they are doing something meaningful (Mehta and Sharma, 2014). Meaning comes from the notion of having a meaningful experience at work, it the link between the job's requirements and the employee's values. It is the alignment of one's values regarding the goals they must achieve. Empowered employees feel that their job is important to them, once employees value their jobs, they become more committed and involved in the organisation (Cho and Faerman, 2010).

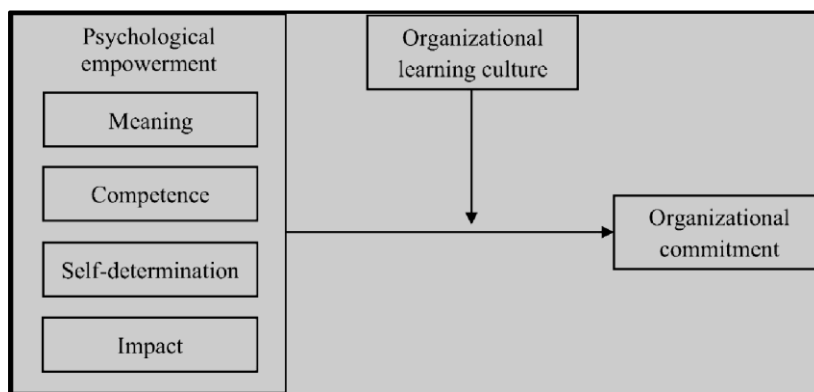
Competence is the second component of psychological empowerment and according to Proenca (2014), competency refers to the employees' belief that they can perform their tasks and duties with competence and confidence. It is the degree or the extent to which an employee knows and understands how effectively they are performing their jobs. It is one's realisation of how successful they can perform an outcome. An employee who feels competent based on skills and abilities is more likely to perform their duties well. Competence improves the effectiveness of duties and job performance (Cho and Faerman, 2010). Employees need to feel competent to pursue tasks required by the organisation. Mehta and Sharma (2014) further talks about trust, empowerment cannot be implemented where there is no trust between the employee and the employer.

The third factor is known as self-determination. It is the autonomy of choice that employees have over work, i.e. the decision to decide how their own work should be carried out. The employee initiates the method and pace in which their activities and tasks will be carried out (Soin, 2013). Self-determination theory states that psychological needs must be met for the well-being of employees in the work environment (Gabriel et al., 2014).

The last component in psychological empowerment is impact; Dust et al. (2014) describe impact as the degree to which employees believe they can influence or impact on the outcomes at work, thus making a difference at the workplace. Yukl (2012) further elaborate on impact as the concept of locus of control and the belief that employees can influence strategic, administrative and operational decisions made in the organisation. Soin (2013) believes that

good behaviour can be developed through psychological empowerment. Impact refers to the individual's perceived impact, it how the employee has personal control over their decisions-making and personal control over the information they receive. This refers to the access of information in the organisation and the ability to make decisions relate to the extent employees perceive they have a voice to influence decisions in the organisation. Therefore, leader supportive feedback environment positively enhances the employee's perception of meaning, self-determination, competence and impact at work (Gabriel et al., 2014).

Figure 3: Psychological empowerment



Source: Joo & Shim (2010)

## 2.6 Benefits of empowerment

Empowering employees comes with many benefits. According to Jones and Rivas (2011) empowerment increases productivity and commitment. Organisations that use empowerment as a leadership tool are quick to adapt and co-evolve with the environment while the feedback gained is used to improve organisational processes. Command and control organisations, because of their centralised decision-making mechanisms take time to respond to the evolving environment. Empowered organisations embrace their employees, knowing that they are the greatest assets, whereas in a command and control environment, organisations put more emphasis on new technology, profit and so on.

Empowering organisations tend to attract a pool of individuals who seek more than just a salary but are those who want to learn and grow. According to Joo and Shim (2010) employee empowerment could increase the level of job performance and better work satisfaction as well organisational commitment. Empowered employees can solve problems very quickly, they are able to create alternative solutions for customers by narrowing the decision-making processing

into one or two layers instead of having too many decisions. The time saved on resolving issues can be directed on making constructive decisions (Armache, 2013).

Empowered individuals usually have higher levels of concentration and are more energised and self-motivated. Empowered staff have greater authority and responsibility for their work than they would in more traditionally designed organisations (Wong and Laschinger, 2013). Empowerment provides effective teamwork, greater commitment from employees, effective decision-making in the organisation and increased productivity. Empowered employees encourage a learning environment, where employees become interested in learning and applying new methods to achieve organisational goals (Bagheri et al., 2011).

Empowerment encourages job satisfaction (Arogundade and Arogundade, 2015) describes human beings as free spirited in nature, when empowered with knowledge, skills and resources to do their work, they are much more productive resulting in job satisfaction. Feedback is also determined as a positive concept in empowerment (Cho and Faerman, 2010) describes feedback as information on the performance of duty or task, effective feedback encourages employees. Empowerment encourages teamwork, teamwork shares leadership roles, allows mutual accountability, employees work collectively and allows open-ended discussions in attending to challenges.

Organisations need be accountable for their own survival, looking at the rapid changes in information and environmental transformation many organisations believe employee empowerment will help solve the challenges posed the environment. Capable and efficient human resources are effective in realizing organizational goals since a capable human capital would make organization capable and would create a collaborative environment for employees. On the other hand, by having motivated and competent employees, empowerment makes it possible for managers to react quickly in the competitive environment (Rezaie and Bagheri, 2014). It can be said that human capital is the real engine for organisational success. Employee empowerment is a very powerful human resource practice with great contributions to the organisation. It enhances job involvement, job satisfaction, career satisfaction and organisational commitment within the organisation. Empowered employees create value for the company through their skills and competence by improving organisational performance. Empowered employees bring positive energy into the company which is easily transferable to other employees and are committed to the company. An empowered employee is keener to participate and contribute towards achieving organisational goals (Prathiba, 2016).



## **2.7 Empowerment as an Aspect of Organisational culture**

Empowerment is not a once off event, it is an ongoing process that requires a significant cultural change. Empowerment can be effective when it is aligned to the organisation's value statement (Afsar et al., 2014, Zhang and Begley, 2011). Every organisation exhibits culture (Schultz, 2014). Culture is a foundation used by management to reinforce principles and guidelines for the organisation and it refers to the shared values and beliefs by the organisation (Çakar and Ertürk, 2010). Muscalu (2014) further explains organisational culture by maintaining that it is shaped over time through values, beliefs, behaviours and ambitions desired by the organisation. The current and existing culture is the result of beliefs, attitudes and behaviours acquired throughout the years. Culture brings unity and cohesion in the organisation.

Implementing employee empowerment in the public sector will impact on the current culture that exists. Moldovan and Macarie (2014) explain five stages on how to successfully implement culture change in an organization. The five stages include: the initial state, the unfreezing, the change, the freezing and final state. The initial state involves a situation where the organization is inconstant with both the external and internal environment. The unfreezing stage is when management and employees realise that the initial values and ideas, they shared in the initial stage are no longer relevant thus requiring an organizational change. At this stage leaders design a transformation process that will outline the new desired cultural framework to be implemented. The change stage is where implementation takes place of the new proposed cultural framework, it is recommended to introduce implementation of the framework in smaller scales in order to quickly manage any challenges should they arise. The fourth stage is freezing it is the process where management tries to stabilize the new values at organizational level. This can be done by using different strategies such as seminars, meetings, brochures and so forth, the aim is to strengthen the new values and do away with old ones. The final state looks at all the previous processes. At this stage the organization has acquired new values, norms and behaviours but it must be noted with caution that the new type of culture will also become redundant with as new development continues to occur. Therefore, the final stage could easily turn into an initial state, from this perspective it can be said that culture is a continuous operation (Moldovan and Macarie, 2014).

Organisational transformation is usually achieved by reshaping the organisation's values, traditions, myths and the shared behaviour by employees, with the ultimate goal of having a

new organisational identity. Change in organisational culture is usually implemented to improve the organisation's performance through effective and efficient procedures, and to attain organisational goals and objectives ((Moldovan and Macarie, 2014). The culture of an organisation determines what strategies or processes should be used by the organisation (Cakar and Erturk, 2010). Organisations with a high-power distance culture, expect managers to give direction, tell employees what to do, take decisions and control information. High power distance cultures tend to lack platforms for information sharing between managers and employees. In lower power cultures employees are involved in decision-making; while participative management techniques are more likely to be used.

Culture is the force that guides employee's interactions in the organisation with one another and those outside the organisation. The organisation has its own culture as well as the departments. Since culture has a significant impact on how employees interact with each other and how they accomplish their duties, when introducing a new strategy or plan the leaders might fiddle with some culture attributes. Culture is shaped by many complex actions that unfold with time, organisational culture is not something that can be easily manipulated (Schultz, 2014).

The way an organisation does things, the shared beliefs, values, rituals, ideology, myths and language defines its culture. Organisational culture comprises of a set of shared beliefs and assumptions built through rituals and symbols. Culture defines the unique character of the organisation and provide meaning to employees. An organisation's culture exerts control on how employees behave, it is deeply embedded and slow to change (Jandaghi et al., 2010). Empowerment is not something that can be done overnight, it requires a significant cultural change which requires time and commitment from all the employees in the organization. Introduction of empowerment will require a great cultural shift, the effectiveness of it is linked to the organisation's values (Afsar et al., 2014, Zhang and Begley, 2011). The concept of culture and empowerment go hand in hand with each other, the level of empowerment in an organization is determined by its culture. Culture involves building relationships between employees, relationships are created based on trust and communication, relationship structures reflect the character of the organisation's culture. A culture that allows employees autonomy of decision-making usually encourages empowering practices (Balkar, 2015).

Empowerment focuses on a collaborative working environment, with both individualism and collectivism important for empowerment (Alavi et al., 2014). Empowerment is not an easy

process to implement and as a result, individualistic cultures struggle to implement it as against collective cultures who work in teams. Individualistic cultures share information that relates only to the employee's key performance indicator whereas collectivistic cultures share all the important information that the employees need to know, such as the organisation's goals, strategies and plans (Çakar and Ertürk, 2010).

Organisational culture are shared beliefs, values, language, myths and assumptions. The culture emphasises the unique character of the organisation and brings meaning to the employees. Culture has great influence on how employees behave, it embedded and slow to change (Jandaghi et al., 2010). Leaders need to recognise and appreciate that the culture is what sustains the organisation and not structure, but structure cannot be ignored.

With less structured organisations employees are motivated to be more innovative towards their work and explore various sources. Employees are generally involved in more meaningful work instead of following linear set rules. Less structured work environments motivate employees to be more proactive and creative. More formalised structures can restrict agile behaviour, employees are usually less motivated not that presentation of news is not accommodated, but with less enthusiasm due to the strict rigid rules. A decentralised organisational structure is more likely to produce creative ideas because management encourages their employees to make decisions independently. Employees have more opportunities to contribute and flexibility on how to do their work. Decentralisation makes employees own their work thus making them more committed and proactive when dealing with challenges and work duties. In centralised structures decisions are only made by top management and employees are required to implement them (Alavi et al., 2014). High power distance cultures usually pose a challenge to employees, individuals view participative management with distrust, fear and disrespect only because participation is not consistent with organisational culture. With high power distance cultures managers hold all the information, decisions are done at the top and employees get told what to do. Low power distance cultures encourage decision making from employees. Low power cultures are more receptive to employee empowerment versus the autocratic management style of high-power cultures (Cakar and Erturk, 2011).

Organizational culture improves employee performance as it conveys shared vision, shared values, traditions and common expectations of commitment and passion for success. Good leaders develop orientation programs for new employees to introduce the shared values and vision of the company. When changes in the environment are gradual and no obvious crisis has

occurred, people may fail to recognize emerging threats or opportunities. This is where leaders come in, they are the ones to identify opportunities for the organisation, do comparative benchmarks with competitors. Leaders are able to foresee undesirable results if emerging problems occur. Influencing employees to accept change involves increasing the awareness of problems and the danger they may have in business operations if not attended too. Resistance to change is very common in organisations, it brings fear and anxiety to the employees. Effective change requires good leaders' skills. (Yulk, 2012).

## **2.8 Challenges of empowerment**

As much as empowerment has many benefits, it is important to also understand and address the challenges that come with empowering employee. According to Edmonstone (2000) and Hepworth et al. (2016) an organisation's top management are faced with the challenge of providing tangible results during their term of duty often becoming overwhelmed, they find quick ways for achieving their goals. This should not be the case and a more sustained approach should be used. Organisations often face many complex challenges that require more than one solution and instead a more integrated solution is needed. According to Zhang and Bartol (2010), empowerment strategies usually fall short because of the 'one size fits all' approach, and managers need to look at the different skills and capabilities of employees, understanding their strengths and weaknesses. Top management has a misplaced belief that if they allow employees to participate in decision-making situations, the organisation will not obtain desired results. Without proper communication structures employees may feel they are not needed, and as a result become unprepared to take on more responsibility. A lack of communication hinders autonomy in employees (Ji-Eun, 2012).

Employee empowerment requires managers to relinquish some of their control to employees, which is usually not easy. Some of the challenges that can hinder, or slow down empowerment is managers being afraid to release power and responsibility to employees. The fear is in being scared that employees may make mistakes or not deliver to expectation. Some managers are threatened in losing their power. Another challenge is that empowerment takes time, it is a long-term change that requires participation and involvement in employees. There is a possibility that employees may resist empowerment. Employees may have been conditioned over the years to follow orders, not collaborate with management. Being given greater responsibility may induce fear and insecurity in some employees (Chamorro-Premuzic, 2016). Employee empowerment needs to be aligned with the strategic goals and business processes of the

organisation. During the empowerment process, conflict may arise between leaders and employees while defining power, managers may be reluctant to give away their power to employees. Other challenges that come with employee empowerment might involve employees losing interest and becoming cynical on the other hand leaders can oppose empowerment because they see it as losing their authority of making decisions. Another challenge is that training employees to be able to take their own decisions could be a time-consuming process that could be considered large barrier to fast success. Because no one knows exactly how long the empowerment will take, employees can get tired waiting for results to show. There is also a risk of burning up important resources before the empowerment process can be seen (Sharma and Kaur, 2008).

Silo mentality is one of the many challenges that organisations face when it comes to employee empowerment, employees should be willing collaborate and work together as a team. If employees do not take advantage of technology they will fall behind, technology allows for quicker communication, access to information, collaboration and many. Managers need to empower their employees to use technology for better efficiency (Clarke and Livingston, 2012).

## **2.9 The Public Sector of South Africa**

The public sector is not an easy phenomenon to describe. For the purpose of this study it can be explained as the sector that consists of the government, publicly funded enterprises, agencies and any other entity that delivers public goods or services (Mbanga, 2012). The public sector can be separated into four levels; local level such as municipalities, a regional level including a province/state within a national state, the national level known as an independent state and an international level such as your multistate entities or partnerships (Dube and Danescu, 2011). From the mentioned levels, the public sector can be divided into three types of organisations.

- Core government- includes all departments and branches of the government integral to the government. These structures report directly to the central authority-council, cabinet, legislature and executive head.
- Agencies- are a part of government but they partially operate independently and exist as separate organisations in their own right. They are headed by a board of directors or other appointed body.
- Public enterprises- are agencies that operate independently of government. They deliver public programmes, services and goods. Public enterprises have their own source of

revenue and sometimes compete in private markets making profit for themselves. Government is the major shareholder in these organisations and government acts and regulations are usually followed.

This study has used the core government department and a public enterprise to gather information and an understanding of empowerment in the public sector as a leadership tool. The public sector also consists of the following types of organisation:

State business- are sometimes considered as being part of the public sector, as government owns and controls the functioning of these enterprises. Goods and services are sold to make a profit in the private markets, but the organisations do not deliver public programmes, services or goods.

Public contractors- are legal independent entities functioning outside government. Funding for these organisations is obtained from the public. They deliver goods, services and public programmes.

The Public Sector (Government) is usually referred to as the organisational sector that drives the political system of the country (Waddell, 2005). Government plays an administrative role in society, it defines all the laws, rules and policies that citizens and organisations need to abide too. The Government survives on tax as a result they always feel dominant and powerful over other sectors. Decision making is usually very slow and politically driven. This sector usually fights for equality. The two macro factors that seem to be disturbing in government involve citizen pressure and globalisation; other factors include growth of information technology, cross cultural engagements, market trading and population growth.

In the non-profit sector, an organisation's 'mission' reflects a commitment to social and community development and building social capital and advocacy in social policy. Civil society plays a huge role in community participation, values and tradition play a critical role as well. The civil society focuses on community networks but usually has a weak understanding in the economic system of the country or province. Its core competency is to provide and support the vulnerable and less fortunate individuals. Public sectors function under strict rules and regulations which can limit organizational creativeness and innovation. Regulations are there to keep order, but organization are so complex that sometimes these rules and regulation obstruct the progress of the business. Strategic planners need to be able to adapt to these unfavourable conditions by coping with the strict set rules (Van Wart, 2014). That is

why leaders need to develop followers that can stand together by making collective decisions to overcome such complexities.

One of the major challenges facing SA is a lack of skills within organisations. To improve the economic growth and addresses the social issues facing the country, organisations need employees who have the required skills, training and education. This can only be achieved if the leadership is well-positioned and functioning, and this is where empowerment comes into play as a leadership tool. The National Skills Development Strategy (NSDS III) places great emphasis on linking skills development to career paths and the promotion of sustainable employment to drive organisational success in meeting their goals. The NSDS III highlights some of the challenges facing the economy of South Africa, such as the failure of organisations to equip their workforce to adapt to the evolving economic changes. When organisations are faced with structural changes, they usually respond with retrenchments rather than applying empowerment strategies such as training and redeployment of employees.

When talking about empowerment it is important to mention skills development. According to the NSDS III and the Human Resource Development Strategy for South Africa (HRDSSA II), the country has a shortage of skills and as a result the public service struggles to deliver good service. Because of this shortage one of the country's goals as mentioned in the NSDS III and HRDSSA II is increasing public sector capacity for improved service delivery and supporting the building of a developmental state. Without the right skills and competencies, the public sector will continue to fall short in delivering proper service delivery, hence it is imperative for managers to transfer skills so that employees acquire and develop the required core competencies through empowerment.

## **2.10 Comparative review of selected international cases**

Benchmarking involves comparing the standards with the aim of changing an existing state or improving the performance by being educated about possible improvements that could better organisational performance. Grifoll, Huertas, Prades, Rodríguez, Rubin, Mulder & Ossiannilsson (2010) identified that there are ten good reasons why participating in benchmarking is important and these are:

- The organization can conduct a self-assessment so that the organization can have more insight on the organization.
- To gain an in-depth understanding of the organisations processes that is currently in place.

- To measure and compare the organization with other similar organisations
- Being innovative through discovery of new ideas while conducting the benchmarking process.
- It is a process of research because data is obtained which will assist decision makers to make more informed decisions.
- New targets can be set in order to have improvements in the organization.
- To strengthen the institutions identity in the process improving the institutions reputation.
- To get insight on how best to formulate strategy and to implement it.
- A better way to respond to the national performance indicators and benchmarks.
- To be able to set new standards in the learning developments.

It is important to look at strategies used in other countries using employee empowerment in improving their service delivery and organisational performance.

#### Japanese

According to the Japanese practice, empowerment is significantly known by ‘learning by doing’. They use what is called a ‘Kanban system’. Organisations apply more horizontal coordination than vertical coordination, allowing autonomy from employees and less supervision for management. The Japanese also use the ‘ringi-ko’ decision-making system. Instead of top management making all the decisions; documents are circulated throughout the entire organisation allowing comments and discussions (Thirkell and Ashman, 2014, Hepworth et al., 2016).

#### Europe-Finserve

According to Randolph (1995), Finserve believes in partnership rather than a top down approach with both the employee and the manager sharing their ideas in goal setting, and the managers have to agree that they will provide the necessary leadership to help the employee achieve his or her goals. Finserve is a financial service company that focuses on mortgage and credit card transactions. During the performance review an employee can critique the manager’s leadership skills, while the manager gets to comment and critique the employee’s performance. Finserve shares that this was not an easy change were managers had to commit in putting their leadership involvement on paper. The company believes in the concept that says, ‘How can I fail, if we’re partners?’



### **2.11 The Systems thinking and Complex Adaptive Systems (CAS) approach**

The leaders of today are confronted with complex problems that require several solutions. Up until now the study has only addressed a linear method or solution in addressing challenges and complexities faced by the organisations. One of the key tasks facing the new administration in South Africa today is to ensure that the myriad of good policies that have been put into place by previous administrations are translated into concrete programmes aimed at improving the lives of the people, in particular the poor. Strategic performance planning is a tool that government departments utilise to translate public policies into development programmes that facilitate socio-economic development and improvement of the quality of citizens' life. Other than empowering employees, these complexities and turbulent environments require systems thinkers who can employ non-linear solutions that will assist organisations to successfully operate in these environments. Hence, some authors introduced the concept of 'system' thinking. This section will show how leadership can be viewed from a system's thinking view.

Empowered employees are quick decision makers, thus being able to respond and adapt quickly to environment changes that could affect the productivity of the organisation. When leaders transfer authority, accountability and responsibility to their employees it enables the organisation to be linear and responsive towards developing the organisation in a manner that is competitive in the environment (Prathiba, 2016).

Before systems thinking can be understood it is imperative to define what a system is. According to Jackson (2003), a system is a whole that comprises of parts or agents that are interrelated, interactive, and interdependent or interconnected with each other. The agents (elements) in this case comprise employees, managers, staff and stakeholders that are connected to produce a whole (system), the whole is shaped by the attributes and behaviour of agents (Dawidowicz, 2012). Systems thinking gives the viewer a 'big picture' compared to a microscopic view and it enables one to see how all the pieces fit within the picture.

It is important to understand that leaders and employees in the public sector do not function alone but exist in a wider complex system. The public sector on its own is a system and within that system exist other systems. For the purpose of this study, the Public sector is the supra system; a department or entity is the system, while within the department or entity exists units/divisions (sub-systems) that are made up of diverse groups of agents. The agents in this context include employees, managers, stakeholders and any other person that interacts or benefits from the public sector. Organisations face increasingly turbulent environments, with

leaders constantly having to evolve and adapt to changing environments (Florice and Miller, 2001). This challenge the traditional way of planning by leaders because managers constantly have to change their strategies to adapt to the constant changes in the environment. EE becomes very critical for employees to perform in turbulent environments. By using EE as a leadership tool, employees are kept abreast of the environmental challenges through training, workshops, mentorship and constant feedback.

According to Jackson (2003), complex systems are non-linear, unpredictable and emergent. Emergence is the way in which complex systems and patterns arise from interactions and connectivity of agents (Sturmberg et al., 2014). Because of the non-linear organisational processes, employees need to be constantly empowered to provide satisfactory performance in the changing environments. Empowered employees can cope better with complex environments and proactively resolve organisational challenges (Min et al., 2016).

Leaders who view problems from a complexity perspective as proposed to the linear and predictable way are more inclined to respond appropriately than force inadequate solutions. There is a strong connection between successful leadership and complex adaptive environments (Watkins et al., 2017). Complexity suggests that leadership needs to maintain stability and control in the organisation irrespective of the complex environment. They are also able to generate innovative and creative ideas from the different situations that the environment brings. Employees can be the biggest impediment when it comes to organisational success, unempowered employees can hinder progress. Employees can push back on changes, slow down processes and be against the implementation process. Hence it is important for leaders to develop a change management strategy to accommodate such reaction from employees (Rothermel and LaMarsh, 2012).

Leadership is a complex dynamic process that emerges from individual relationships. It is the emergence of interaction and information exchange amongst individuals (Psychogios and Garev, 2012). Leadership emerges from individual interactions which go hand in hand with the emergent unpredictable nature of the complex environment shaped by the continuous social interactions among agents. It is imperative that leaders assist their employees adapt to the constant environmental changes by equipping them with skills and knowledge (Rothermel and LaMarsh, 2012). Leaders struggle to clearly define each situation because of emerging problems. The future is a continuous creative process and the present is constantly being adjusted based on past situations (Pauliené, 2017).

The traditional way of viewing problems assumes that the future can be predicted and that the present can be controlled in order to predict a desirable future. The leaders lead their employees in a controlled manner, problems are solved using reductionism which defies complexity instead of embracing it. Reductionism and certainty work best in simple and isolated systems but does not cater for complex environments that the public sector finds itself in. Leaders need to address problems from a perspective that acknowledges complexity instead of reducing it. It is important that leaders approach challenges from a holistic and transdisciplinary perspective. The reality is that in such a complex world, leaders cannot predict the future of a long-time span nor can they solve problems with programmed intervention. This phenomenon challenges the traditional plans of organisations such as strategic plans, operational plan etc but does not disregard them. Complex systems such as the public sector are self-emergent, and their future is unpredictable therefore leadership emerges through the process of interaction of order and disorder. For organisations to be creative disorder and instability, stable environments result in stagnation. Leadership strategies will be useless if they cannot accommodate for complexity, the effectiveness of leadership relies on the constant interaction between employees and their environment (Geerlof and van Beckhoven, 2016).

Great leaders should acknowledge uncertainty and not back away from the uncertainty that constantly faces the organisation. Leaders should be open to their employees about the uncertainty facing the organisation. Tradition leaders believe in an environment that is controlled, leading through command and a clear vision as guidance. Whereas complex leaders encourage innovation, they set simple rules and allow employees to explore and experiment for themselves (Niemandt, 2015).

Leadership goes broader than influence, because influence can come from stakeholders inside and outside the organisation. Metcalf and Benn (2013) describe leadership as a social concept that contains complex relationships. Leaders need to make sense of the environment that the organisations operate in, they need to adapt to rapid changes in the environment and constantly support new stakeholder demands. The most effective leadership is through emergent properties rather than traditional measures of individuals. Today's managers and organisations are confronted with complex problems that require complex transdisciplinary solutions. Whilst reductionism showed cracks in responding to such problem situations, a pathway opened for holism to hail and germinate from the failure of reductionism to cope with complexity and became 'the antithesis of this scientific method of solving problems. Systems thinking is predicated on and concerned about holism. According to Jackson (2003) systems thinking

literature reductionism is defined as decomposition of the whole into its ‘constituent parts’ and analysis thereof in order to understand the whole. It is the way of understanding the whole through understanding of parts. When a system is decomposed into constituents’ parts something could be lost, systems thinking argues and describes this as the “*fallacy of analysis*”.

Rotmans and Loorbach (2009) provide some guidelines on how leaders can succeed in complex environments such as the public sector, these include management at system level, the status of the system, objectives adjustable and flexible at the system, lastly creating space for agents to build up alternative regimes. Management at system levels means that some challenges may surface at a system level instead of lower levels, emergent properties are usually hidden in this case, hence leaders need to be able to deal with complex problems. The status of the system determines the way it is managed, this simple means managers should have insight of how the system (organisation) works. The third guideline which is to have flexible objectives means that with evolving objectives the organisation is in a better position to deal complex problems. The last point which is creating space for agents to build up alternative regimes for innovation means that leaders need to stimulate emergence and divergence for innovation to take place.

## **2.12 Conclusion**

Many scholars and practitioners have provided insight into the concept of employee but there are some unanswered questions on the question of empowerment which include:

- How is empowerment measured within organisations?
- There also appears to be very little understanding of how the empowerment process can be developed
- How equipped and comfortable are managers to empower their subordinates?

The above chapter shared views on the importance of employee empowerment as a leadership tool. Leaders need a new paradigm shift, back in the days as far as before the 20<sup>th</sup> century the economic and social life have always operated in linear, hierarchical and centralized domains. The new world functions more on networks, inter-cultural exchange, collective intelligence, shared visions and strategies through globalization.

Empowerment plays an important role in increasing performance and service delivery through employee motivation and support. Benefits of empowerment have been discussed as well and benchmarking case studies that can be used in South Africa’s public service. Furthermore, the

literature reviews also explored empowerment strategies and processes that managers and employees can use to improve organisational performance in the Public sector.

## **CHAPTER 3:**

### **RESEARCH METHODOLOGY**

#### **3.1 Introduction**

This chapter provides a detailed account of all the steps and procedures that were followed in completing the study. It involved a blueprint for data collection and analysis. The researcher has provided methods and techniques that were used in the collection, processing and analysis of data. Methodology is a group of coherent methods that are appropriate for producing data and findings that help respond to research questions and meet the objectives of the research (Henning et al., 2013). The rationale for research methodology is to provide a clearer indication of the means by which the researcher intends to achieve the objectives of the research (Malhotra and Malhotra, 2012). The chapter outlined the objectives of the study, provided an outline that was used to conduct the study, including the participants, location of the study, research approach, sample size and data analysis methods. Basic assumptions that underpinned the study process and the major study limitations have been discussed.

#### **3.2 Research Design**

Researchers have distinguished between two research methodologies, quantitative and qualitative research. Quantitative research uses statistical calculations, it searches for facts and can be thought as ‘what’ questions, e.g. what is the percentage or number of people that will buy product A as compared to product B? Qualitative research is used for more in-depth understanding of a subject matter or topic. It looks at behaviour, attitudes and motives behind situations. Qualitative research uses the ‘why’ questions e.g. Why do you like/prefer product B? (Barnham, 2015).

The researcher chose to use a qualitative approach considering the type of data and the nature of the research study. The reason why the researcher chose to use this approach was because qualitative analysis suggests providing a detailed understanding using employee empowerment as a leadership tool in the Public sector. Though the sample size was small, but the use of interviews gave the researcher better understanding of how empowerment is applied in organisations. Miller and Yang (2007) further provides four cognitive processes that are involved in the stages of qualitative research:

Comprehending: This means studying everything about a setting or the experience of participants. This step is not complete until the researcher has enough data to be able to write a complete, coherent, detailed and rich description. When overlaid on the concrete research design, this step parallels data gathering.

Synthesising: This is the emergence of several stories, experiences, or cases to describe a typical or composite pattern of behaviour or response.

Theorising: This is the process of constructing alternative explanations and of holding these against the data until a 'best fit' that explains the data most simply is obtained. In a research design, this will be the phase of laying down the result of the research connecting specific phenomena in the study.

### **3.3 Objectives of the study**

**The study is intended to respond to the following objectives:**

3.3.1: Assess the understanding of employee empowerment as a leadership tool in South African Public sector

3.3.2: To explore the extent in which the culture employee empowerment is practised in the South African public sector

3.3.3: Identify strategies or methods by which leaders in the public sector empower their subordinates

3.3.4: To determine the impact of employee empowerment or the lack of it in the Public sector

### **3.4 Research Methodology**

A research methodology is described as a roadmap giving direction and steps followed to conduct a research project (Malhotra and Malhotra, 2012). The researcher used a qualitative approach for the research study. Qualitative research depends upon the detailed description by respondents and allows deeper insight into the problem because it uses smaller sample sizes (Zikmund et al., 2013). The researcher identified the qualitative approach as most relevant to assist in finding answers to the research questions because it allowed the researcher to provide elaborate interpretations of employees' concepts and their understanding of empowerment (Malhotra & Malhotra, 2012).

The interview schedule contained open-ended questions that encouraged dialogue, rather than dictating the course of the interview. In-depth interviews enable interviewers to gain a deeper understanding of subject matter for it allows for probing and soliciting of the opinions and beliefs of participants (du Plooy-Cilliers et al., 2014). The researcher was able to obtain data from participants which enabled the researcher to answer the problem statement.

### **3.5 Study population**

The research study was conducted in the Eastern Cape Province. Research participants included management and non-managerial employees. The researcher chose the East London Industrial Development Zone (ELIDZ) and the Department of Economic Development, Environmental Affairs and Tourism (DEDEAT) as a source of the research study. The researcher interviewed seven respondents, five respondents were from DEDEAT and two from ELIDZ. The respondents were interviewed at their working stations for the employees and respondent's office for the managers. Three of the respondents were managers and the four were normal employees. The researcher had her laptop for notetaking and cell phone for the recordings. It was a one on one interview session with each respondent, the researcher asked the questions according to the interview schedule and the respondent provided answers based on the question asked.

### **3.6 Sampling**

Sampling is a technique or strategy used to select a small group of people to participate in a study with a view to representing a larger group or community. Sample size needs to be selected appropriately so that a true or close reflection of the larger group is properly presented. Smaller sample sizes save time and resources, versus large populations that can be more time consuming and costly (Brynard and Hanekom, 2006). There are two main categories of sampling: probability and non-probability sampling. Probability sampling, which is mainly applied in quantitative studies, determines that each element in the population has the same known probability of being selected. Non-probability sampling, on the other hand, is not based on the occurrence of an equal chance of selection.

A non-probability sample was used for the study because it was impossible to interview all employees from the organisation. Employees were sampled from the large population. According to du Plooy-Cilliers et al. (2014) non-probability sampling refers to a situation where it is impossible to determine the population size or there are difficulties in gaining access to the entire population.



The following methods were used: purposive, convenience and snowball sampling.

- Purposive sampling, according to du Plooy-Cilliers et al. (2014), is when a researcher selects samples based on his personal judgement about appropriate characteristics to use in the research. Participants were selected based on the researcher's knowledge. The participants were relevant to the research study. The researcher chose participants for their judgement and knowledge of what the research required. So, if the researcher saw that the participant was knowledgeable and had the ability to assist towards the research, they were then interviewed.
- Convenience sampling entails selecting participants according to convenience in terms of geographic location and willingness to participate (du Plooy-Cilliers et al., 2014). The researcher selected participants who were available and relevant for the pilot study. The pilot study was to test the success of the research study.
- Snowball sampling is used for a small group of participants, where the participants are difficult to obtain (du Plooy-Cilliers et al., 2014). This involves asking participants for recommendations of acquaintances who might qualify for participation and who might have an interest in the research. The topic chosen for the study was not an easy one and individuals might have felt uneasy in talking about management or their supervisors. The topic required participants to touch on other sensitive factors such as managerial skills and management styles. Participants made some referrals of other participants who were relevant and keen to participate in the study.

The researcher used an inclusion criterion based on the following:

- All participants had ten and more years working experience in public sector
- Both managerial and non-managerial employees were interviewed.

### **3.7 Data collection**

#### **3.7.1 Interview**

Data collection entails the scientific way in which a researcher gathers data and information (Zikmund et al., 2013). This study made use of In-depth interviews. In-depth interview was chosen because it gives an interviewer an opportunity to engage with an interviewee in order

to get an in-depth understanding of a scenario (du Plooy-Cilliers et al., 2014). In-depth interviews also allow the opportunity for follow-up and probing questions.

In-depth interview sessions were held with seven participants, which were very comfortable in sharing their views, beliefs and opinions on the subject matter. Interview appointments were made telephonically and confirmed via email. Follow-ups were also done by email and telephone. Interviews took place at the participant's convenience. Employees from ELIDZ were interviewed in their offices while others were interviewed at the DEDEAT offices. All interviews were recorded. The researcher also took notes as a backup. After the interview sessions were completed, the researcher transcribed all audio recordings on Ms Word, making sure to take down all the details, word for word.

### 3.7.2 Recruitment

The researcher used purposive and snow-balling sampling to recruit research participants. Purposive sampling was used, based on the researcher's knowledge of participants that would be valuable to the study. According to du Plooy-Cilliers et al. (2014) purposive sampling is when the researcher chooses whom to interview in the research study and snow-ball sampling is a chain referral process where participants provide referrers to the researcher to participate in the study. The researcher was referred to some of the participants who participated in the study. The study planned on interviewing twelve people but only seven people participated in the study. The inclusion criteria used was that all participants had to have had ten years or more working experience in the public sector.

### 3.7.3 Interview Schedule

The researcher developed two separate interview schedules for the managerial and non-managerial employees. The interview schedule for managers contained ten questions and for the non-managerial employees, twelve questions. The reason for separate interview schedules was to ensure that the questions asked were directed at each category of respondents' job status.

The interview schedule was developed by the researcher and compiled in English. The interview schedule was used during the interview sessions to guide participants in answering the research questions. The development of research questions was guided by the research objectives which were aligned to the research topic. The researcher conducted a pilot study with participants to test if the questions were understandable. The interview schedule was emailed to three participants and all three responded. The pilot study came back with positive feedback, which made the researcher continue with the questions in the main research study.

#### 3.7.4 Secondary Data

The researcher used academic journals mainly from Ebscohost and ProQuest, books and official government documents to obtain data for the research study. The data was organised and presented in Chapter 2 as the literature review. In addition, documents such as the DEDEAT Annual Report, ELIDZ annual report, Skills Development Act; no 97 of 1998, Performance Management Development System guidelines and National Skills Development Strategy were used in chapter 2 in the literature review.

### 3.8 Data Analysis

Data analysis entails the process of understanding in detail the data that has been collected from respondent questionnaires. It is the process of finding patterns, interpreting raw data in a meaningful manner and communicating properly what the raw data (du Plooy-Cilliers et al., 2014).

According to Soiferman (2010), in research the two main types of analysis typically used are quantitative (deductive) and qualitative (inductive). The researcher used the inductive approach to analyse the data. An inductive approach works from the bottom-up, meaning that the researcher reads and uses participants' views and ideas to form themes, unlike in the deductive approach where themes are first identified and then data is assigned to the relevant themes. The researcher used the eight-step content analysis set out by du Plooy-Cilliers et al. (2014). The steps include; preparing the data, defining the code unit to be analysed, developing categories and coding schemes, testing the coding on a sample text and then coding all the text, assessing the coding consistency and, following the drawing conclusions from the coded data and then finally reporting on the method and findings.

The researcher listened to the audio recordings again and again to be able to transcribe the data. The transcribed data was read and re-read again to enable familiarisation with the data. The research analysed the responses given by participants for each question and then grouped the responses to identify if there were consistencies or differences.

The research used open or substantive coding. Data was categorised by assigning abbreviated codes next to similar concepts and ideas. Thereafter themes and sub-themes were identified. The coding process was done manually after the researcher had printed all the transcribed interviews. The sub-themes were linked to a particular theme which was then linked to the relevant objective. The research identified five themes, which emerged as the researcher was busy familiarising herself with the data, the researcher continued identifying themes until there were no new themes emerging.

Thereafter, connections, differences and patterns were identified and discussed. Summaries were then completed pertaining to each theme to obtain similarities and differences given by the different participants in responding to the research questions and this ultimately answered the research objective.

According to du Plooy-Cilliers et al. (2014, p.235) there are 8 steps to follow when conducting qualitative content analysis and the steps include:

1. *Prepare the data-* This is when the researcher arranges the raw data that was collected through interviews and recordings and writes it down as a text and when it is a recording the researcher must transcribe the information on the recorder.
2. *Define the coding unit to be analysed-* The decision of how the coding is going to be done is made here where the researcher can choose whether to use phrases, sentences, individual words or paragraphs as their coding units. This helps to organize data by breaking it down to parts.
3. *Develop categories and coding scheme or conceptual framework-* Once the researcher has coded the data at this step the related codes must be grouped together so there can be categories of codes. These categories must be named so it could be easier for identification purposes. It is also important to consider that the categories must be able to accommodate all the data meaning that the categories must be exhaustive. Categories must be mutually exclusive meaning they must not overlap, and it should be clear where each theme code must be grouped, and no unit must be in more than one category. The themes must be specific, and it should be clear why they should exist.
4. *Test your coding scheme-* The clarity and consistency of the categories should be tested on a sample and the level of consistency should be high.

5. *Code all text*- the scrutiny of data takes place here where the researcher takes note of all the relevant sections which will assist in answering the research questions. There are different ways of coding and they are:
  - Line by line coding, the researcher reads through the text line by line with the aim of making notes of the relevant words and phrases to the research.
  - Open or substantive coding, reading through the whole text so that the researcher can get an overall understanding of what the text is saying while grouping the concepts that are related.
  - Axial coding, the connections between categories is made and there is a comparison of categories of concepts. The researcher identifies the relationship within the categories and based on the analysis of the relationships this may lead to merging or re categorizing.
  - Selective coding, it is when the researcher selects the codes that are most relevant, and which will describe the research being conducted.
  - Thematic coding, coding done through the identification of themes and this theme is found in the data collect and usually a resultant of the literature review.
6. *Assess the coding consistency*- It is essential that the researcher rechecks the coding to ensure that it was done in a consistent way as coding consistency is very important for the findings.
7. *Interpret data through drawing conclusions*- All the categories and the themes that the researcher has identified are now interpreted in this step. An explanation of how the researcher's interpretation is linked to the broader context is needed meaning that attention must be paid to the cultural, political and social environments.
8. *Report your methods and findings*- It is important for the researcher to be honest about the methods that they used in the coding, analysis and interpretation of the data they collected so that the reliability of the data can be assessed.

When conducting data analysis, the researcher followed the data analysis steps that are prescribed by Henning et al. (2013, p.124) for qualitative research analysis using the coding method and the steps are as follows:

### **3.9 Ethical Issues**

In keeping with the ethical demands of social research at large and the University of KwaZulu-Natal in particular, signed gatekeeper's letters were procured from the organisations involved and they were used to make interview arrangements with the respondents. The researcher applied for ethical clearance at the research office and ethical clearance was granted to the researcher. A consent form that had to be signed was sent to the participants highlighting the following key factors:

- Participation on the study was voluntary.
- Participants were at liberty to withdraw from the study at any time should they have felt the need to do so.
- Interview information and confidentiality of records would be stored at the Graduate School of Business and Leadership on the University's premises.
- The researcher adhered to the conditions given during the application process. These include:
  - Sharing and disclosing information without the participant's consent.
  - Causing discomfort to the participants by asking for sensitive and personal information, as well as information of other employees.
  - Using an audio recorder without the consent of the participant.

### **3.10 Challenges and limitations**

Research comes with many challenges. The researcher encountered some challenges along the way, and they included, the fact that the researcher had planned to interview twelve participants for the study but ended up interviewing only seven participants. The reason was that employees had other commitments and schedules to attend to while one of the participants that the researcher had intended to interview had left the organisation just before the study commenced. Another challenge was time management. It is hard to do research and focus on other work as well, much sacrifice had to be made but the researcher was able to handle the time factors.

The researcher had initially planned to do the research at the Eastern Cape Premier's Office (OTP) due to internal challenges of the department was referred to the Department of Economic Development and Environmental (DEDEAT). The referral process delayed the submission of ethical clearance to the university.

The findings of the study cannot be generalised due to the sampling method used, as qualitative approach uses small samples to represent large populations. The study used purposive and snowballing methods which were a limitation. Purposive sampling involves a small number of participants whereas snowballing had some limitations as well, the employees that the researcher was referred too were either occupied with other projects or had other deadlines to meet. However, a few finally agreed to participate.

The ethical clearance granted by the university had conditions that needed to be followed. The form clearly stipulated that the researcher might not send reminders or request permission from potential participants more than once.

It can be said that irrespective of the challenges that the researcher faced, the study was able to be undertaken without interfering of the research outcomes and findings.

### **3.11 Trustworthiness in Qualitative research**

This section discusses the trustworthiness of the study. Qualitative research should be addressed to bring forth quality Porritt et al. (2014) argue that qualitative research has a possibility of being accurate hence the researcher has explained their position of trustworthiness when conducting research. The researcher has used the following criteria for developing the trustworthiness of the qualitative investigation: credibility, transferability, dependability, conformability and authenticity.

#### **3.11.1 Credibility**

The researcher used three different methods to collect data. These included in-depth interviews, journals and interview schedule to increase credibility of the study. Credibility refers is making sure that the data interpreted from participants is accurate (du Plooy-Cilliers et al., 2014). It is the confidence that one puts on the data presented. The researcher honoured confidentiality of information and tried not to break any promises made to the participants. The research as tried to display the true picture of the phenomenon of which the investigation aimed to achieve. One of the strategies employed to ensure the credibility of the study was to draw data using different data collection tools, namely interviews, questionnaires, and documents. The researcher honoured the terms and conditions stipulated in the ethical clearance and permission. This included a high level of confidentiality, privacy and anonymity for the participants, by using pseudonyms where necessary. This also included not using the title or occupation of any participants. The credibility of the data was enhanced by recording of interviews, and the assurance that the data would be kept for a period of five years.

### 3.11.2 Confirmability

According to Cope (2014) conformability relates to the researcher's ability to present data and findings that are free from bias and present a true reflection of the participants' response. The researcher made sure to avoid unfair behaviour and favouritism throughout the study. The data presented is a true reflection of the participants' responses. An independent data analyst was employed to analyse the data. They did this by coding the data, the results were compared to get to the final coding.

### 3.11.3 Authenticity

Authenticity refers to a researcher being able to present participants' data in a faithful, trustworthy manner (Cope, 2014). Inputs from participants should be clearly and accurately recorded (White et al., 2012). The researcher gave the participants respect which made it easy to build trust and honesty from participants. The researcher transcribed participants' answers word for word exactly it was said, and quotation marks were used to illustrate such. The researcher wrote a report that conveyed the experiences, perceptions and views of participants regarding the research phenomenon, as they were presented during the study. Where necessary, inverted commas were used to cite in verbatim, while ensuring that confidentiality was not compromised by using pseudonyms, as well as ensuring that all personal data was anonymous. The researcher also ensured that no participant was marginalised in terms of their views because of their level, knowledge or experience.

## 3.12 Conclusion

Chapter 3 explained the research methodology that the researcher followed to conduct the study. A qualitative methodology was used to conduct the research. Face-to-face interviews were conducted with seven participants. Research questions were separated into managerial and non-managerial questions. Data was analysed using coding and themes to answer the research problem.



## **CHAPTER 4**

### **DATA ANALYSIS AND PRESENTATION**

#### **4.1 Introduction**

The section presents data qualitatively using thematic analysis with the aid of a computer assisted qualitative data analysis (CASQDA) software Nvivo11. Thematic analysis highlights patterns, pinpoints, and examines data for recurring themes. According to Clarke and Braun (2014), there are six basic procedures to follow when using thematic analysis, they include:

1. Getting familiar with the data.
2. Generating the first set of codes.
3. Searching for themes in the coded data.
4. Reviewing the themes.
5. Redefining the themes and naming the themes.
6. Producing the final report.

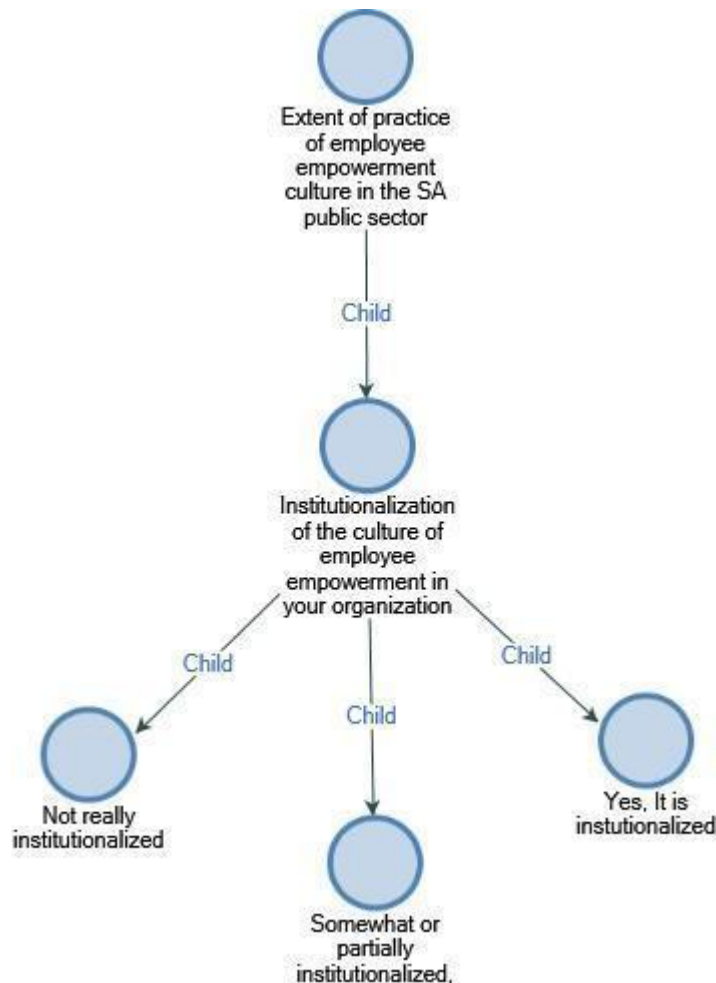
The research study sought answers to the following objectives: assess the understanding of employee empowerment and how it can be used as a leadership tool in the South African public sector; evaluate the extent to which a culture of employee empowerment is practised in the South African public sector, established the impact of employee empowerment or lack of it in the public sector; identify the strategies or methods by which leaders in the public sector empower their employees. In order to pose answers to the objectives, the researcher gathered information using research questions (interview questions) by conducting interviews on 7 respondents.

After data collection was done through interviewing, the researcher transcribed and imported the data into the Nvivo 11 software for coding and analysis. After exporting to Nvivo, the first set of coding was done using the research objectives as the main themes. This was followed by the interview questions as the sub-themes and then the responses and non-responses formed the sub-sub-themes. After an in-depth review to search for recurring patterns, themes and consistencies, the responses also gave rise to other set of themes. All the themes were represented accordingly in a Nvivo 11 generated model to visualize the responses.

Below are the questions, the model generated from the responses and the interpretation of the model.

## 4.2 Data Presentation

### 1. Do you think empowering employees is institutionalized in the culture of this organization?



**Figure 4.1. Model showing the responses generated on the question on ‘if the culture of EE is institutionalized in your organization’.**

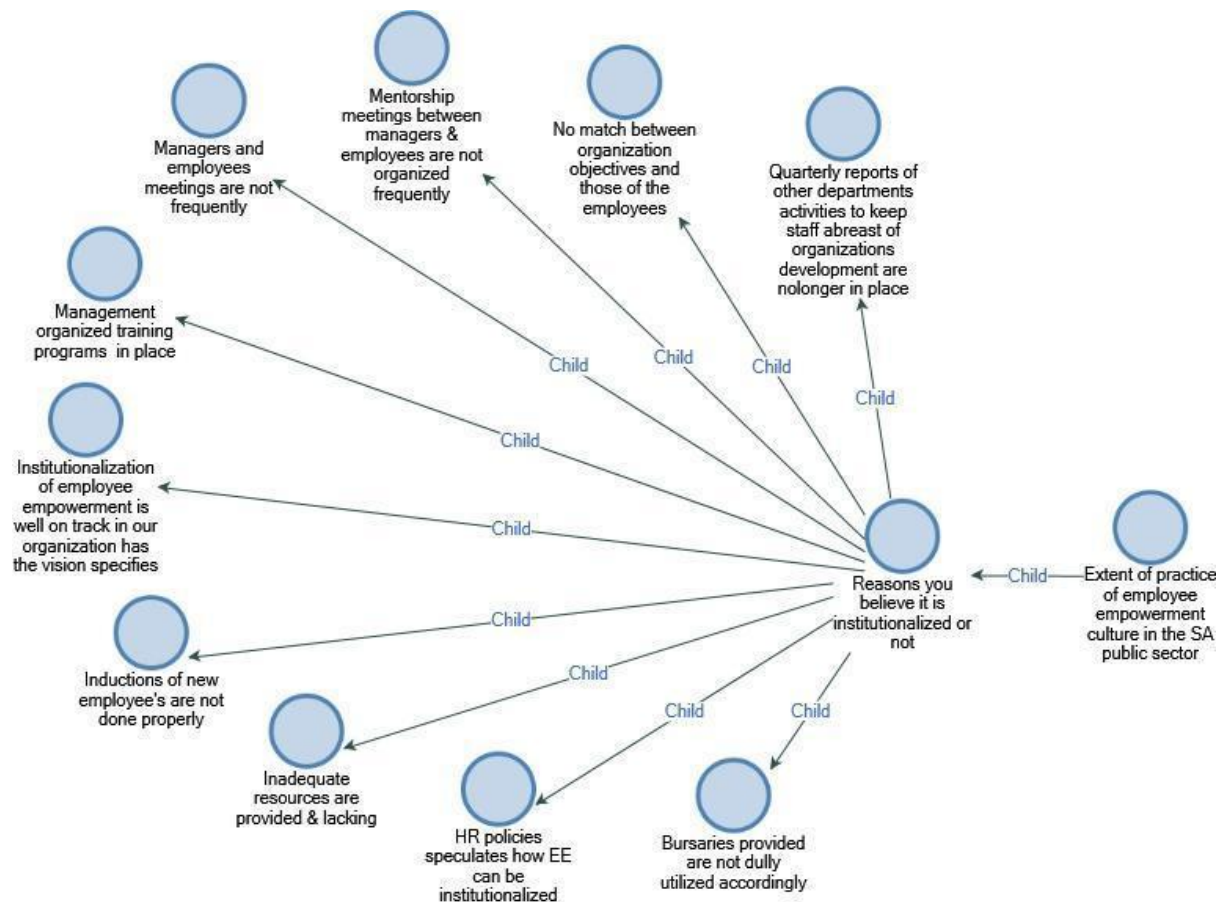
This question aimed at answering objective one, which was to find out the extent to which Employee Empowerment is institutionalized in the public sector.

**Interpretation:** There were diverse views on how the culture of employee empowerment was institutionalised in the organisation being researched. The views ranged from “*Yes, it is institutionalised*”, another was “*Somewhat or partly institutionalised*” through to a view that it was “*not institutionalised*”.

The participants that replied by saying, “*Not really institutionalized*”, are the participants that felt that their organisations do not use EE as part of their strategy to develop employees. The

second group of participants are those who answered, “*Somewhat or partially institutionalized*”, these participants when interviewed responded by saying that EE is used to empower employees but at a very minimal execution. The last group of participants said, “*Yes, it is institutionalized*”, these participants during the interview sessions alluded that their organisations empower their employees.

## 2. What are the reasons for believing it is institutionalized or if not why not?



**Figure. 4.2. The model shows the responses adduced as the reasons for institutionalization or not in your organization**

The above question aimed at answering objective one, the objective aimed at finding out the extent to which Employee Empowerment is institutionalised in the public sector. The respondents had to explain and give reasons why they thought EE was institutionalised or not institutionalised within the public sector.

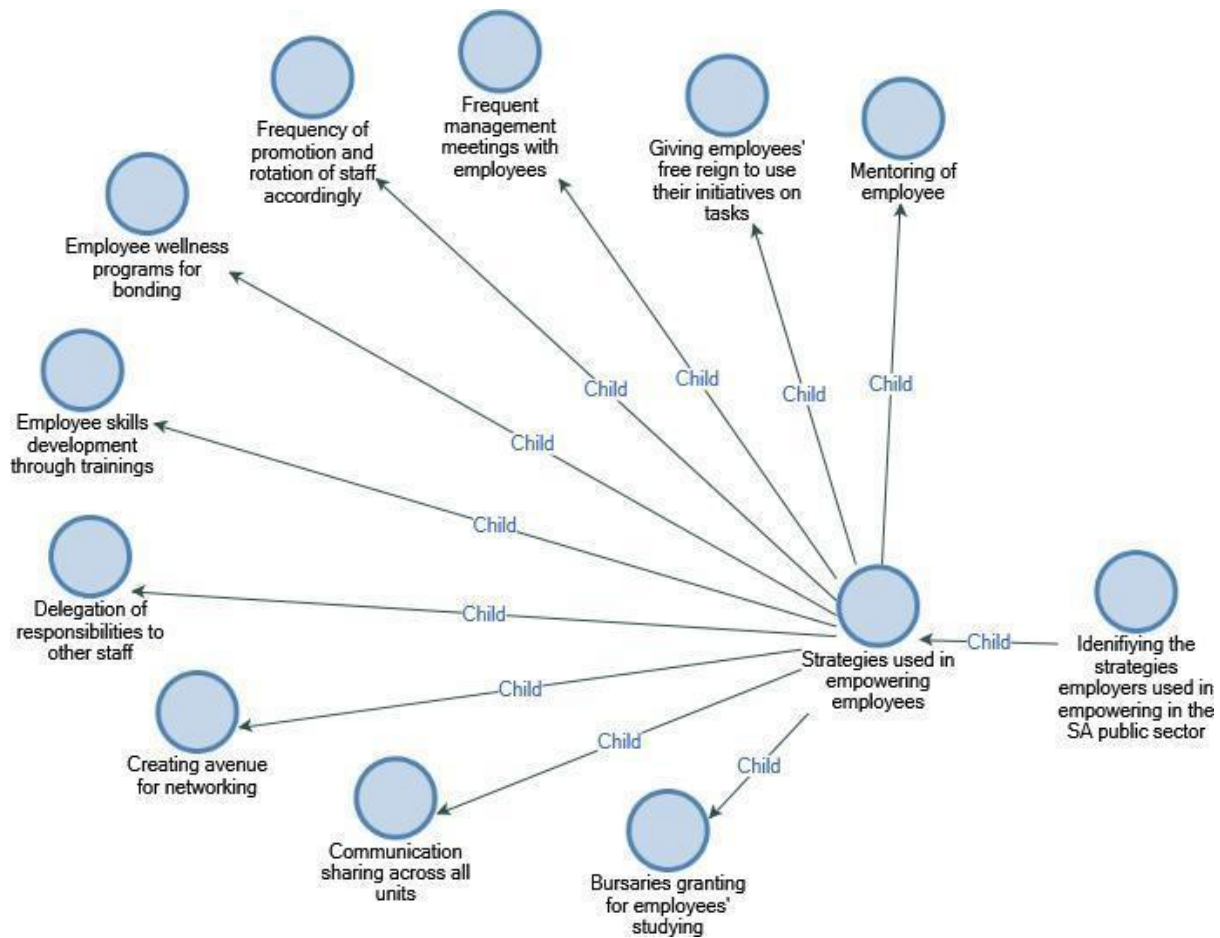
**Interpretation:** Those respondents that stated “Yes” or “No”. They were further asked to give reasons for their responses.

Some of the responses adduced were: For respondents that stated there was no institutionalisation, their reasons were :*“Utilization of bursaries are not done accordingly, quarterly reports of other department’s activities to keep staff abreast of organisation development were no longer in place, no match between organisation objectives and those of the employees, mentorship meetings between managers and employees were not organized frequently, managers and employees meetings were not frequent, inductions of new employees were not done properly, inadequate resources ”*.

Employees felt that bursaries are not given according to the organisation’s policy, whereby giving bursaries to employees that are doing modules aligned to organisational development. Another issue that the employees raised was that departments were no longer doing reports to share with other employees from different departments. The employees also mentioned that managers are were not frequently meeting up with their employees to ensure that employees are being mentored as supposed to be. Employees stated that there was no proper induction for new employees. A common heart felt agreement amongst the employees was that the organisation had inadequate resources to sometimes implement employee empowerment in the organisation.

For the respondents who felt EE was already institutionalised, their reasons included: *“Management organised training programmes. Institutionalisation of employee empowerment is well on track in our organisation”*.

### 3. What are the strategies used to empower employees?



**Figure. 4.3. The model illustrates the different strategies used to empower employees.**

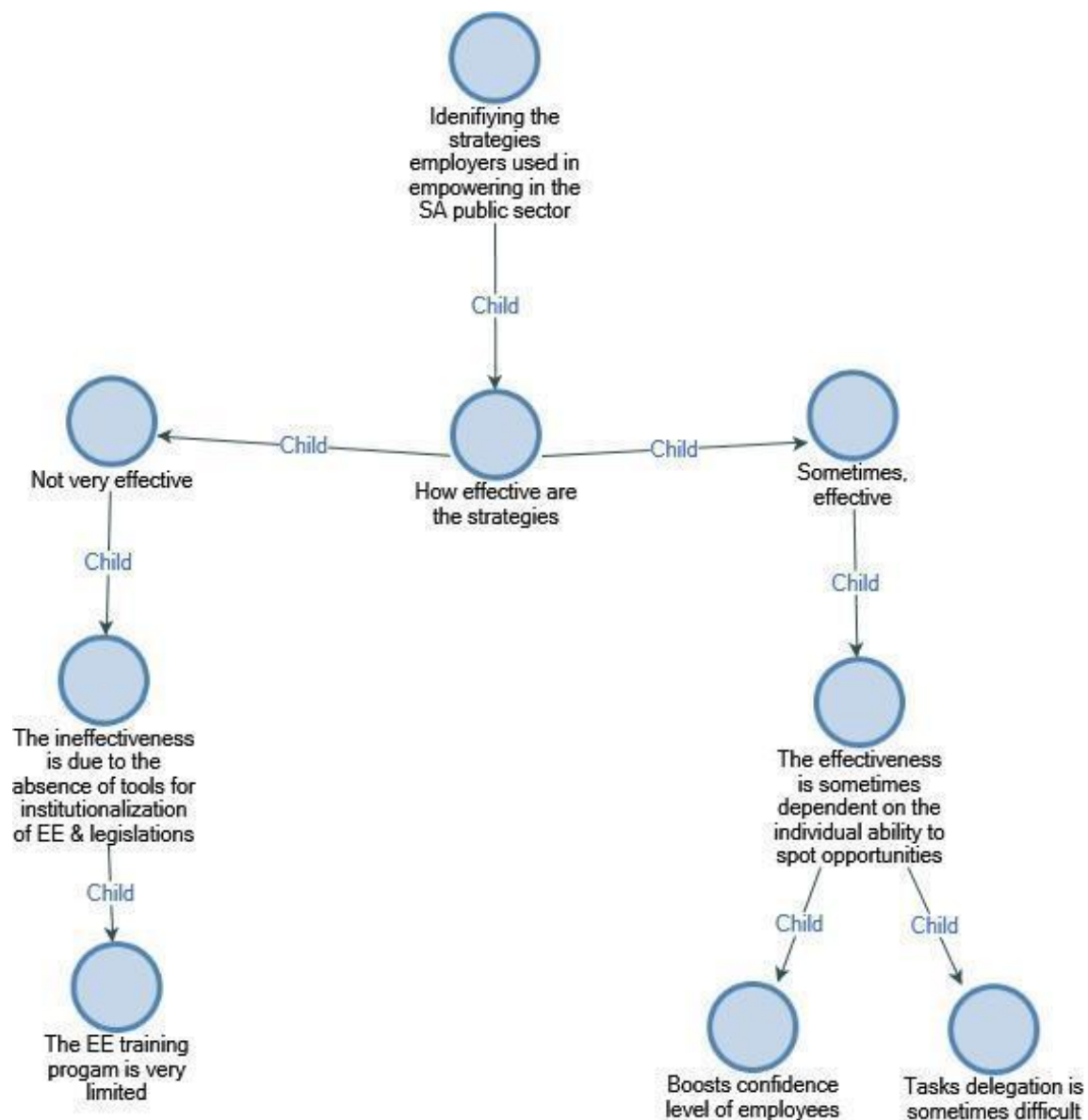
This question aimed at addressing objective 3, which is to identify strategies or methods by which leaders in the public sector empower their subordinates. There were many strategies that employees mentioned to have used to empower employees.

**Interpretation:** There are several strategies employed by the organisation as enumerated by the respondents. These strategies included: “Granting of bursaries to upskill employees studying, Regular and frequent sharing of communication across all units in the organisation, Creating avenues for networking, Delegation of responsibilities, Mentoring of employees, Giving employees free reign to use their initiatives on tasks, Frequent management meetings with employees, Frequency of promotion and rotation of staff when due, Frequency in employee wellness programmes for bonding and employee skills development through training”. Respondent 1 mentioned: “Employees are empowered in the department, we are taken to training. Employees fill in what we call a performance development plan (PDP) at the beginning of the year, we write what we would like to be trained on”. Respondent 2 said: “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'. The organisation ensures that there is continuous learning and information sharing in the organisation''.*

Employees mentioned that employees were granted bursaries to upskill and empower themselves. Some of the employees also mentioned that information is shared across the organisation to all employees so that they become aware of what is happening in the organisation. The respondents also mentioned that the organisation provides networking platforms for employees, by taking them to workshops and conferences. Delegation of responsibilities was alluded too as well as one of the empowering strategies used to develop employees. Some of the employees mentioned that their supervisors and managers play a mentorship role to their employees, by supporting them. The respondents also said that empowerment also happens through frequent meetings between the manager and the employees. According to the respondents' employees were also sent to trainings to upskill themselves and were also encouraged to participate in employee wellness programmes.

#### 4. How would you describe the effectiveness of these strategies?



**Figure. 4.4.** The model shows the responses to the question on describing how effective the strategies are

This question aimed at addressing objective 3 which is to identify strategies or methods by which leaders in the public sector empower their subordinates.

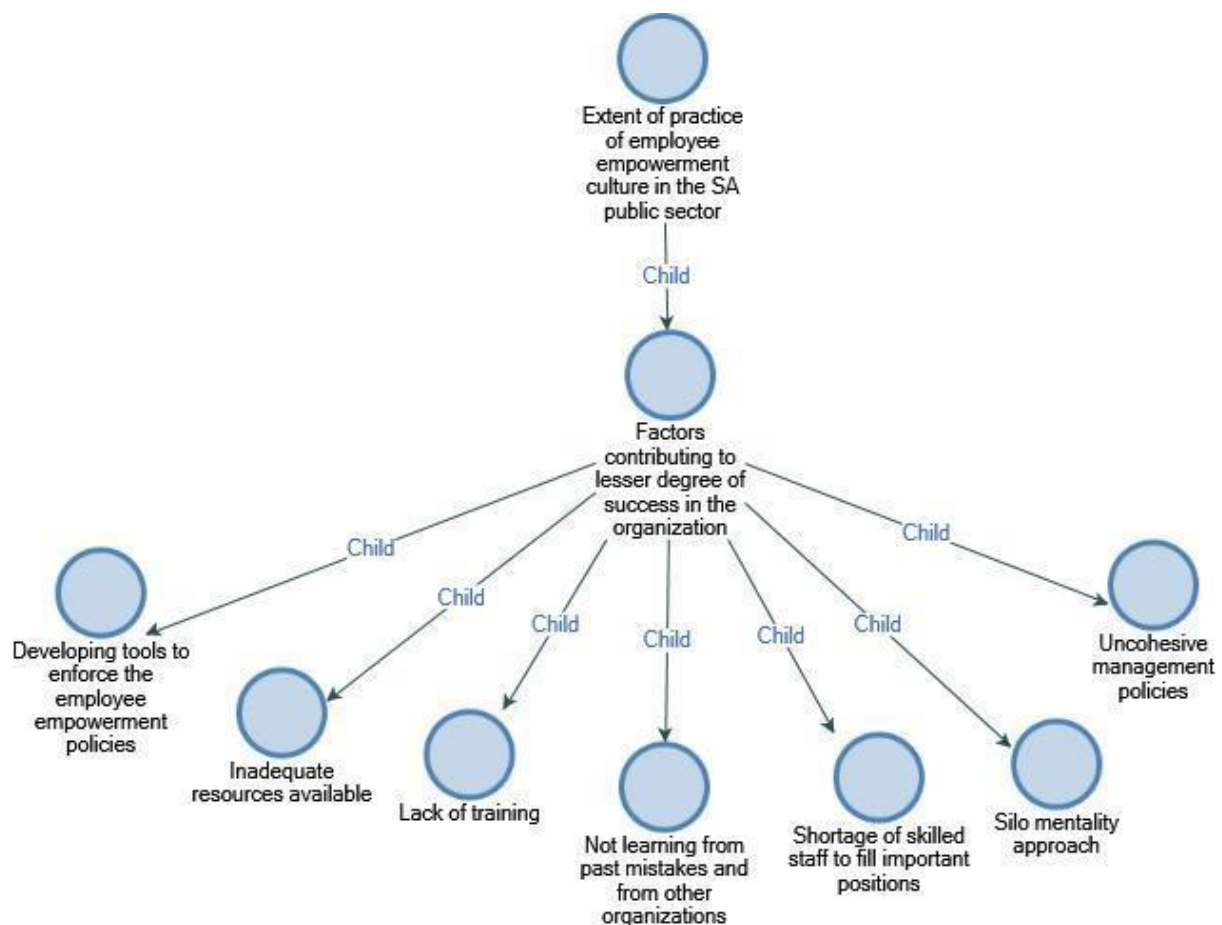
**Interpretations:** This question focused on addressing how effective the above-mentioned strategies were. Some of the respondents asserted that the strategies were sometimes effective. This group of respondents further stated that the effectiveness was dependent of the employee's ability to spot the opportunities: *"this ability helps to boost employee's*

confidence at the workplace and sometimes the employees do find the task difficult or 'tough to crack'".

In the same vein another set of respondents stated that the strategies were not very effective. *"This ineffectiveness is attributed to be due to the absence of tools for institutionalisation of employee empowerment as well as legislations to enforce it"*. Consequently, *"the EE training programmes at this firm are very limited"*.

The employees mentioned that the effectiveness of the empowerment strategies also depend on the individual's effort to identify opportunities provided by the company. Other employees alluded that the strategies used by the organisation were not so effective. Employees mentioned that there no resources to empower employees and that there was no policy or document in place that the organisation can follow to implement empowerment strategies. Employees also stated that the company was offering very few training sessions for the people.

**5. Where there have been lesser degrees of success in the organisation, what could be the contributing factors?**





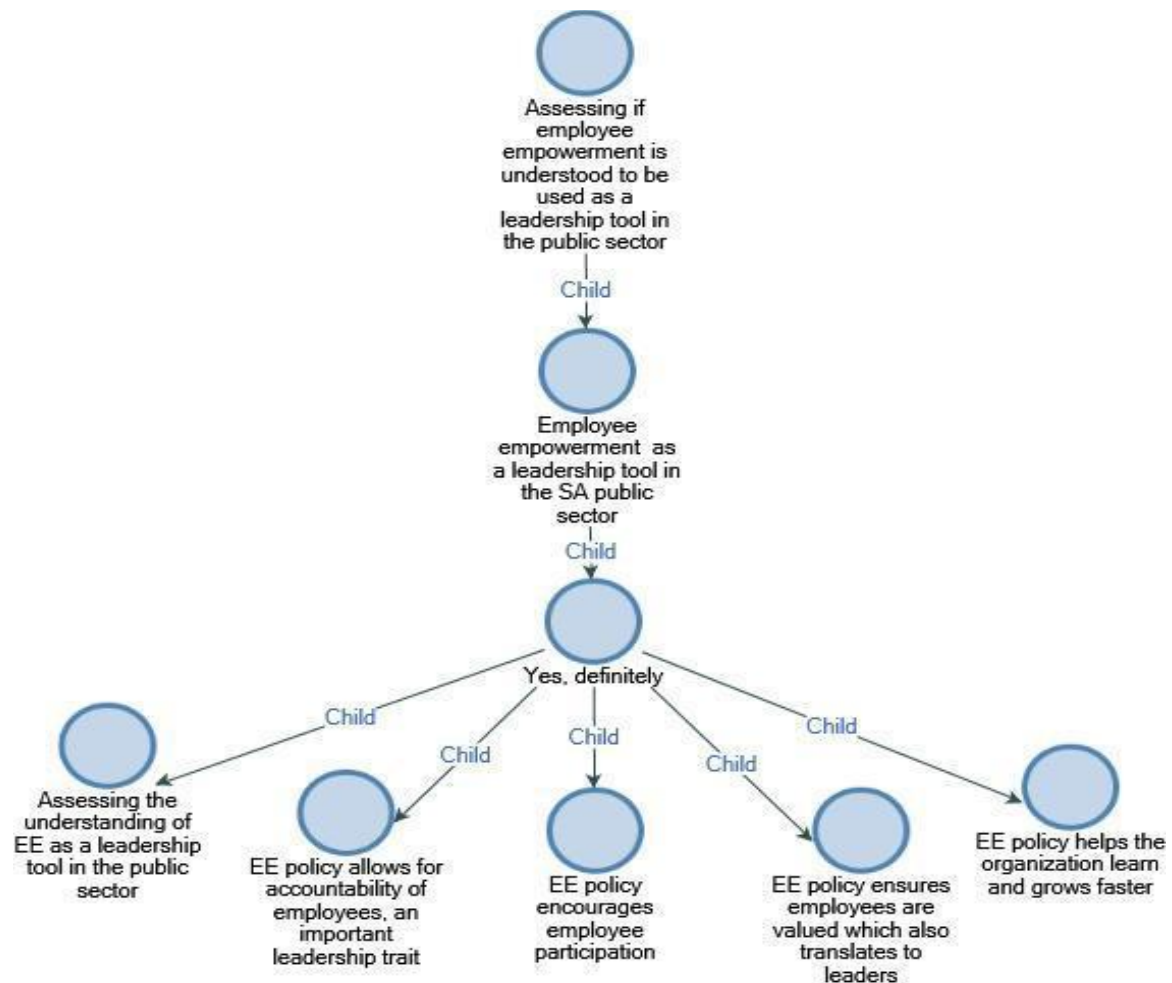
**Figure 4.5. The model shows the responses to the question on factors contributing to lesser degree of success in the organizations**

This question aimed at addressing objective 2 which is to understand the extent of practice of employee empowerment culture in the South African public sector.

**Interpretation:** This question attempted to show the factors responsible for a ‘lesser degree of success in the organization’. Some of the factors adduced included: *“developing enforcement tools to ensure employment policies, non-availability of resources to ensure EE, Lack of training programmes, not learning from past mistakes or the mistakes of other organisations, Skills shortage to fill the available important positions, Silo-mentality approach to governance and non-cohesive management policies”*.

During the interview session the employees mentioned that the organization does not have tool that employees can use to follow, which would help enforce the implementation of company policies. Another challenged mentioned by the employees was that sometimes they were no resources to implement some KPI’s. Employees mentioned that training sessions for the people are very limited. The organisation does not have an action plan for past mistakes that the organisation has gone through. The employees also mentioned that there was skills shortage, vacant positions were not filled. It was mentioned again that the company policies for the different departments were not talking to each other.

**6. Do you believe that employee empowerment should be used as a leadership tool in the South African Public Sector?**



**Figure 4.6.** The model shows the responses to the question on employee empowerment can be used as a leadership tool in the SA public sector.

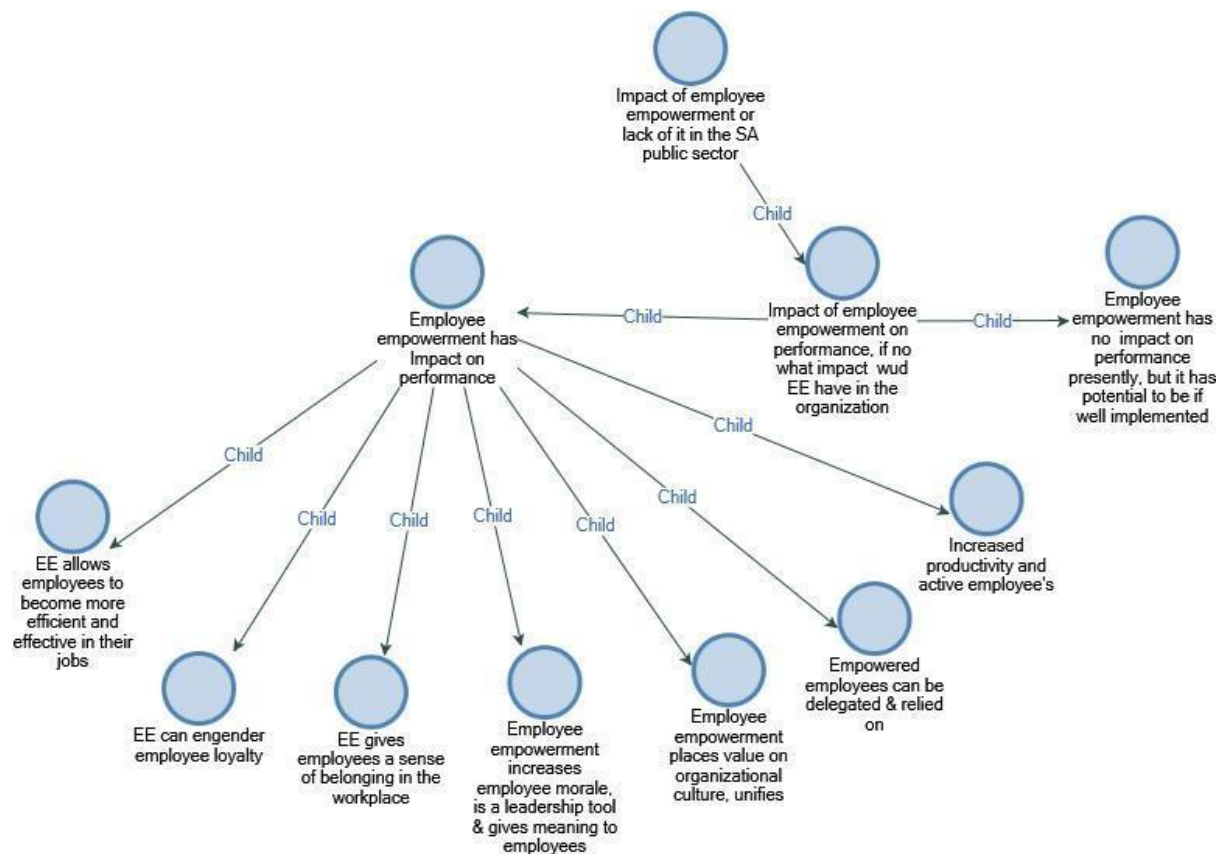
The above objective addressed objective 1 which was to assess if employee empowerment is understood to be used as a leadership tool in the public sector.

**Interpretation:** All the interviewed respondents affirmed *YES*, that employee empowerment should be used as a leadership tool in the South African public sector. They added that EE could be useful as a leadership tool when used in the following ways: *“It helps in assessing the understanding of EE as a leadership tool. It also allows for accountability of employee’s an important leadership trait, it encourages for employee participation, it ensures employees are valued, this attitude can be transferred to leaders and it can help the organisation in the public sector to learn and grow faster with its employees”*. Respondent 1: *“If empowerment would be*

fully enforced in the organisation, 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.” Another respondent said: “The department has a hierarchical structure which makes it challenging to properly empower versus a flat structure. Work is centralised for example the budget is centralised.”

The employees mentioned that having employee empowerment in the organization would encourage the employees to be more involved and participative in organisational activities. Employees also mentioned that employee empowerment is another way of showing employees that their efforts in the company are being valued.

**7. What do you think are the impacts of employee empowerment on the performance of this organisation? If no, what difference do you think empowerment could have made in the organisation?**



**Figure 4.7. The model shows the responses to the question on the impact of employee empowerment on performance, if no, what impact would it have in the organization?**

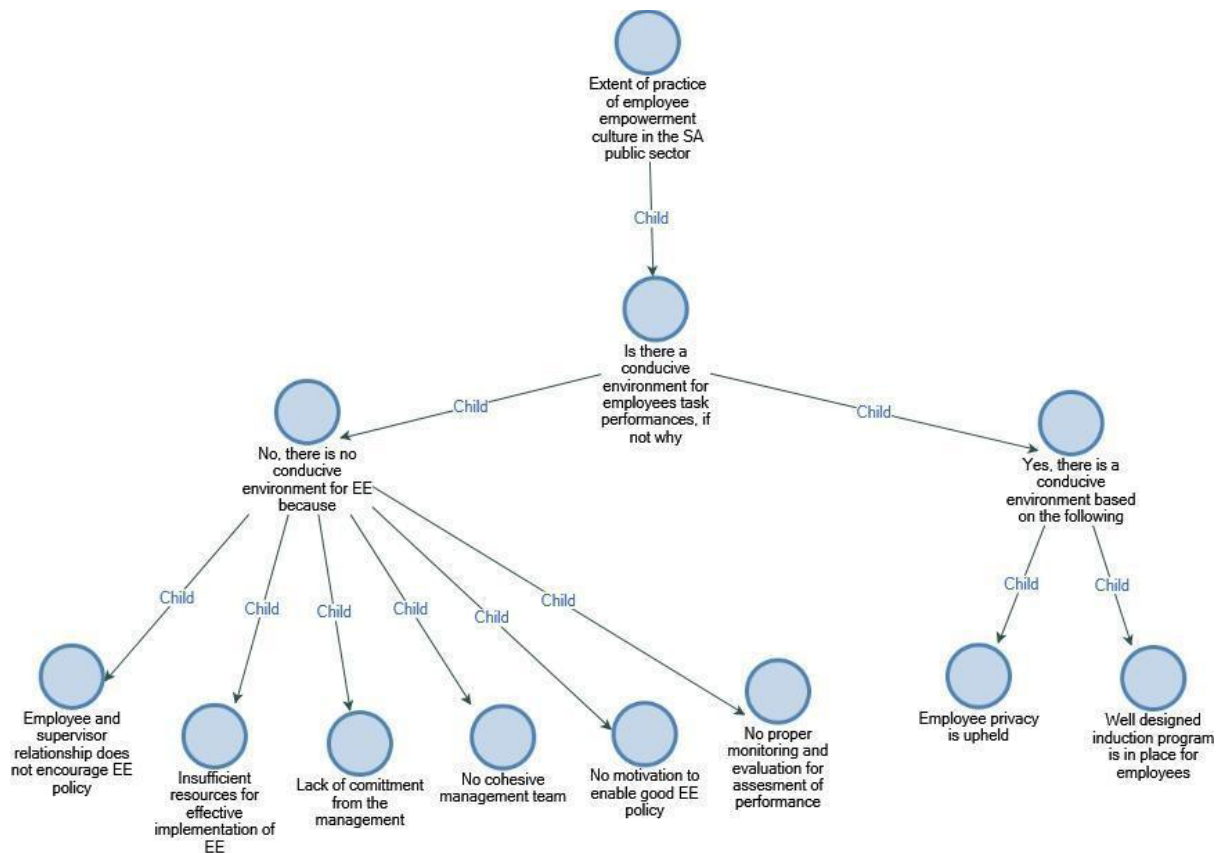
The following question was developed to address objective 4 which is to determine the impact of employee empowerment or the lack of it in the Public sector.

**Interpretation:** This question attempted to show the impact of employee empowerment on performance, or if there wasn't an impact. Respondent views were divided in two: those that believed that employee empowerment had an impact on performance, and employee empowerment has no impact on performance. Almost all the respondents alluded to the view that employee empowerment has impact on performance. These were enumerated in the following points: *“EE allows employees to become more efficient and effective in their jobs, EE also engender employee loyalty, EE gives employees a sense of belonging in the workplace, EE empowerment increases employee morale, Serves as a leadership tool and gives meaning to employees, EE places value on organisational culture and unifies, Empowered employees can be delegated and relied upon, and EE fosters increased productivity and active employees”*.

One or two of the respondents stated that *“Employee empowerment had no impact on performance presently, but quickly added that it surely had potential to contribute to employee performance if well implemented”*. A respondent said: *“The Public sector has a top down structure compared to the private sector they normally have flat structures. A top down structure mainly means that decisions come from the top with minimal inputs from employees. The top down structure discourages innovation.”* Another respondent said: *“There are no systematic tools for employee empowerment. There must be a tool written in black and white for the department to fully institutionalise employee empowerment”*.

During the interview session students alluded that employee empowerment made employees to be more efficient, achieving performance at a maximum level with little effort and waste. Employees also mentioned that they were effective in their jobs, making sure that they produce the intended or desired results. Through employee empowerment employees mentioned that they were more encouraged to be loyal to the organization. Employees also mentioned that EE built trust and respect for leadership and displayed through the employee's morale. Employees that were empowered were given more responsibility, such as representing employees at meetings and many more.

**8. Is the organisational environment conducive for employees to perform their tasks properly? If not, what could be the reason?**



**Figure 4.8. The model shows responses to the question on if there is a conducive environment for employees’ task performance and if not, why?**

The above question was developed to address objective 4, which is to determine the impact of employee empowerment or the lack of it in the Public sector.

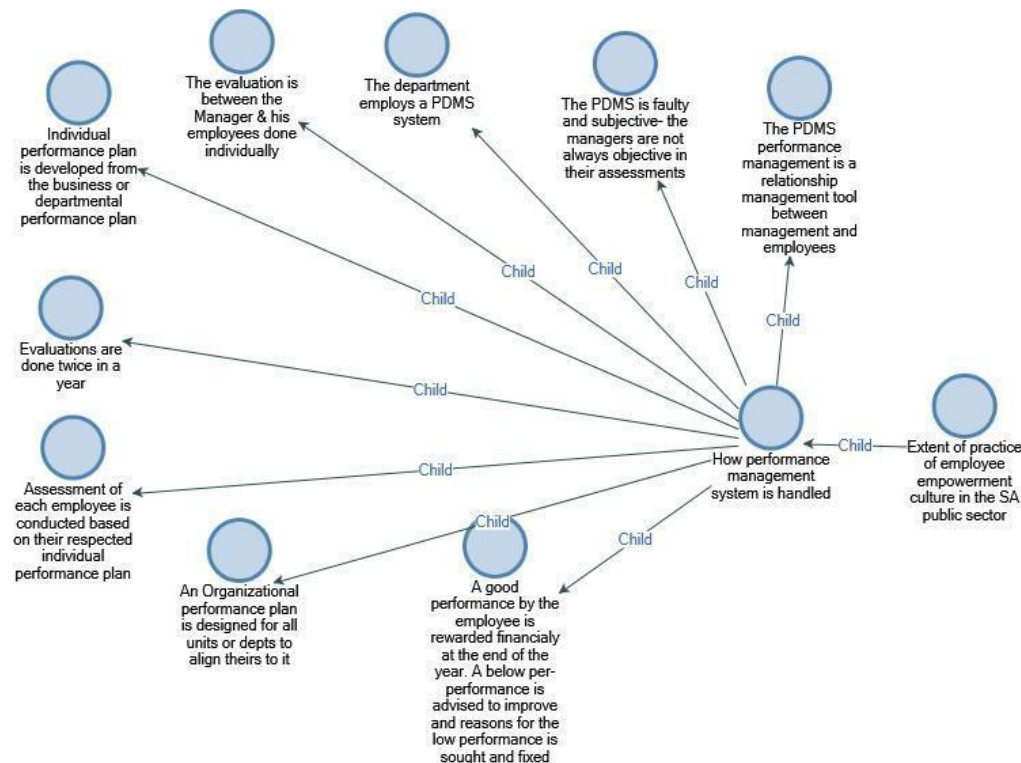
**Interpretation:** The question sought to know if there was a conducive environment for employees’ task performance, and otherwise if not. The responses showed there are two main views: Few respondents affirmed, “*Yes, there is a conducive environment based on the following points. “Employee privacy is upheld in the organization” and there is a “well-designed induction programmes in place for employees in the organisation”.*

On the other hand, many of the respondents stated that there was no conducive environment for employee empowerment based on the following reasons: “*Employee and supervisor relationships do not encourage EE policy, there is insufficient resources for effective implementation of EE, Lack of commitment from the management, No cohesive management team, No motivation to enable good EE policy, and no proper monitoring and evaluation for*

assessment of performance”. One of the respondents 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 leave more often. The environment is not healthy as well as unhygienic. The chairs we sit are also uncomfortable as they cause back pain. We complain but nothing is done about this. Management says there is no money to fix these problems”.

The employees mentioned that the organisation had an induction programme in place that was used to induct and introduce employees to organisational procedures and policies. Many of the employees mentioned that the environment employees were working in, were not conducive to encourage employee effectiveness.

## 9. How is the system of performance management handled in your organization?



**Figure. 4.9. The model shows the responses to the question on how performance management system is handled in the organization**

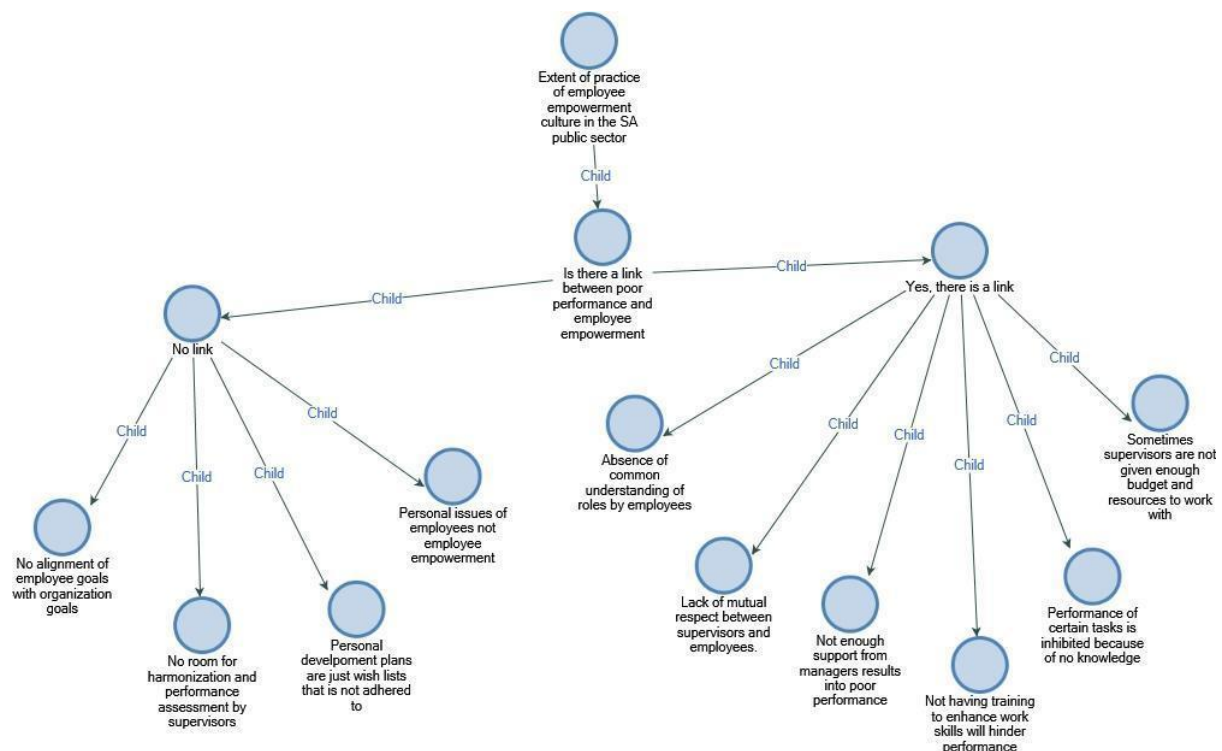
The above research questioned was developed to address objective 4, which is to determine the impact of employee empowerment or the lack of it in the Public sector.

**Interpretation:** This question aimed to find out the various ways the organisation handles its performance management system.

Many of the respondents' views are expressed below: *“Financial rewards is done at the end of the year, while a sub-par performance is advised, urged and asked for the reasons for such performances and thereafter fixed. There is an organisational development plan in place where all departments and units are expected to align theirs into. Evaluations are done bi-annually. Each goal are assessed based on the personal development performance plan, the organisations used a performance development management system (PDMS) system, the PDMS is a relationship management tool between management and employees, the evaluations is between the employee and the supervisor of manager, although some of the respondents claimed that the PDMS was subjective- that supervisors use it to victimize any subordinate they are not happy”*.

Employees mentioned that the PMDS is a tool that expresses the relationship between the employee and the manager regarding employee performance. This the tool that the manager used when assessing the employee's performance. Assessment was done bi-annually for all employees.

#### 10. Where there are deficiencies in performance, is there a link between poor performance and employee empowerment?



**Figure. 4.10. The model shows the responses to the question on if there is a link between poor performance and employee empowerment**

This question was created to address objective 4, which is to determine the impact of employee empowerment or the lack of it in the Public sector.

**Interpretation:** There were two opposing views in response to the question on if there is a link between poor performance and employee empowerment. There are some respondents that stated “*Yes, there is a link*”, while the remaining few stated there is “*No link*”.

The “*Yes, there is a link*” views presented the following reasons: *Absence of common understanding of roles of employees, sometimes supervisors are not given enough budget and resources to work with. Lack of mutual respect between supervisors and employees, performance of certain tasks is inhibited because of no knowledge and not having training to enhance work skills hinder performance*”.

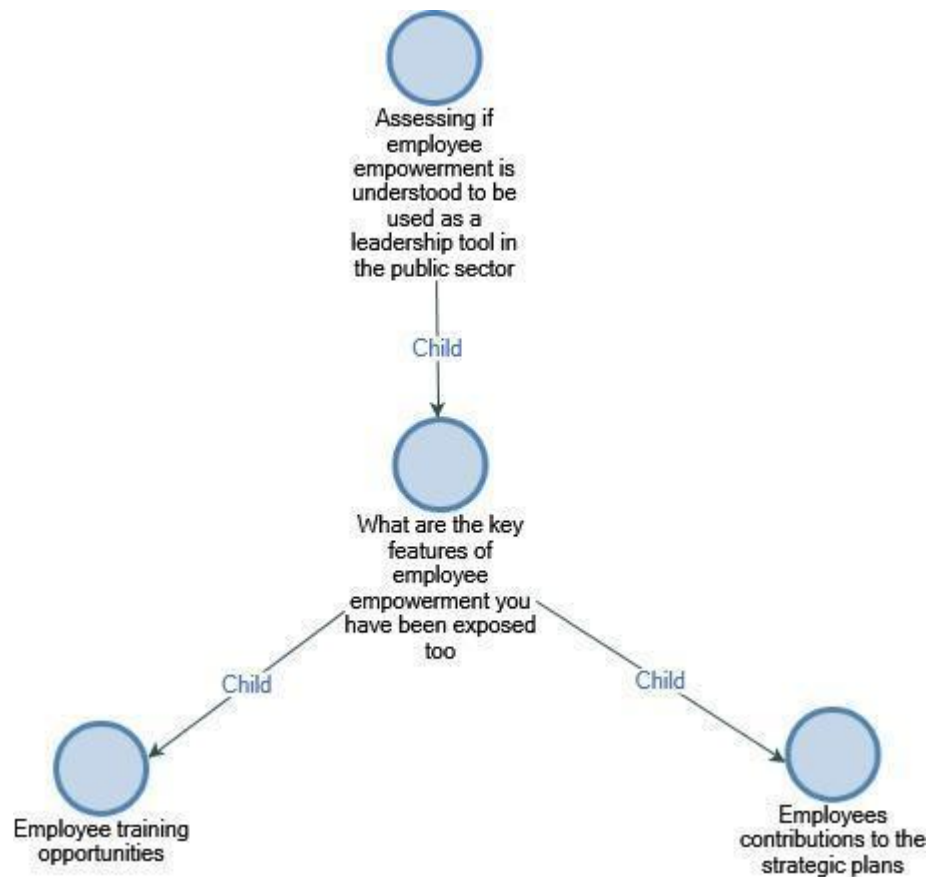
Employees alluded that employees do not have one or a common view to the roles of employees, thus relating to job descriptions. Because of limited budget some tasks cannot be performed as intended but some tasks do not occur due to lack of knowledge and skills regarded for that specific task.

The “*No, there is no link*” views posited the following reasons: “*Personal issues of employees not employee empowerment, no alignment of employee goals with the organisational goals, personal development plans are just wish lists that is not adhered to, and no room for harmonisation and performance assessment by supervisors*”.

Employees who said there was no link mentioned that the issue was with employees having personal issues and not the notion of employee empowerment itself. They also said that employee’s personal development goals were only as good as they were on paper. Many of the employee’s personal goals did not align with the organisation’s goals.



**11. As an employee, what are the key features or aspects of people or employee empowerment that you have been exposed to?**



**Figures. 4.11.** The model shows the responses to the questions on what the key features of employee empowerment are the respondent have been exposed to.

The question above addresses objective 1, which assess the understanding of employee empowerment as a leadership tool in South African Public sector

**Interpretation:** Much of the responses were centred on two main themes: “*EE gives employees training opportunities to improve and grow in their chosen careers as employees*”.

The other major recurring theme was the fact that “*Employee empowerment allows employees of organisations to contribute or be a part of the strategic plan-making of an organization*”. Respondent 1: “*Even though I learn a lot from training sessions I prefer informal training 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*”. Respondent 2 mentioned: “*The strategic sessions help us a lot because*

*managers get to share how the organization performed in the past financial year. With this information employees are able to identify performance gaps and make improvements on them”.*

During the interview session the employees mentioned that trainings and workshops were very helpful but preferred informal sessions with their managers or supervisors. Employees also mentioned that sharing sessions were very empowering as well, such as the strategic planning session.

**12. What has been the basis for implementing those employee empowerment programmes?**

The above question addressed objective 1, which assess the understanding of employee empowerment as a leadership tool in South African Public sector.

Only one respondent responded to the question, with: *“There are no formal programmes for employee empowerment”*. The other respondents did not respond to the question.

## **4.2 Conclusion**

Chapter 4 presented the data that was collected from respondents. The data revealed that the Public sector does have EE strategies but some of the strategies have revealed to have gaps and need to be revisited. The data presented seemed to have addressed the objectives of the research report.

## CHAPTER 5

### DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

#### 5.1 Introduction

The idea of employee empowerment might seem quite straightforward, such as taking employees to workshops, providing bursaries to employees, etc. but from the literature review and findings it is far more complex than that. This chapter takes the preceding analysis further by drawing conclusions through a brief discussion of the main findings emerging from this study. This chapter concludes by highlighting gaps and uncertainties that require further research as well as recommendations that the Public sector can apply to improve service delivery of the South African economy. Chapter 4 presented the findings of the study and Chapter 5 gives a summary, recommendations and the conclusion to the study.

#### 5.2 Discussion of Objectives

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

The research objective mentioned above investigated how much employees in the public sector understood about the concept and the effects of employee empowerment in organisational development. All respondents affirmed that Employee Empowerment (EE) should be used as a leadership tool in the SA public sector. The respondents alluded that EE encouraged a participative work ethic. It encouraged innovation in the organisation and it also marked employees accountable for their own work and lastly, when employees were empowered, they felt that the organisation valued their efforts in the company. The literature also differentiated two types of employee empowerment and which are psychological empowerment and structural empowerment. The findings seemed to have fitted in more with the definition of structural empowerment. According to Orgamidez-Ramos & Borrego-Ales (2014) structural empowerment refers to access to opportunities, thus growing within the organisation, having the necessary resources to perform duties, having access to information and support from managers and peers. Literature has shown psychological empowerment to be as important as structural empowerment.

The researcher is of the view that all EE components are very important for organisational development, thus meaning that psychological empowerment is to be considered as important as much as structural empowerment. Psychological empowerment refers to the intrinsic

behaviour comprised of four components; meaning, competence, self-determination and impact, (Joo & Shim 2010).

Respondents came up with two main themes that revealed their understanding of what employee empowerment entailed. The first one was that they believed that organisational training is a big part of EE and the second one was that the strategic sessions held by the organisation also played a great role in employee empowerment. The study compliments the literature reviewed, which supports the idea that empowerment entails giving employees the opportunity to improve their skills through opportunities (Orgambídez Ramos and Borrego Alés, 2014).

However, the pertinent question to be asked is whether there any formal tools or models that the departments use as a guideline to empower employees. The researcher believes that a more formalised tool or policy would make EE more effective and practical. Even though literature has referred to EE, none of it specifically refers to the South African public sector.

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

Numerous findings emerged from Chapter 4 regarding the extent to which EE is practised in the SA public sector. Findings from the interview sessions revealed that for some employee empowerment was greatly practised in the organisation while others believed that there was no EE institutionalised in their organisation. Some of the respondents believed that EE was partially practised. In other words, there are still gaps in how employee empowerment is being practised in the South African public sector.

INSTITUTIONALIZATION OF EMPLOYEE EMPOWERMENT	
YES	NO
Training programmes are well organised.	There is no inter departmental sharing of quarterly reports.
	There is no match between organisational objectives and employee empowerment.
	Bursaries are not equally distributed.
EE is well institutionalized and aligned to the organisation's vision.	Meeting between manager and employee are not frequently organised or held.
	There is no proper induction for new employees.
	Inadequate resources
	The are no mentorship meetings between manager and employee

Table 2: Institutionalization of EE

The study has revealed that EE is being institutionalised in the public sector but with many gaps thus requiring improvement on how it is currently done. Table 5.1 above shows the respondents' views on EE. Empowerment focuses on collaborative working environment with both individualism and collectivism important for empowerment (Çakar and Ertürk, 2010). Empowerment can be effective when it is aligned to the organisations' value statement (Afsar et al., 2014, Zhang and Begley, 2011). The researcher believes that there needs to be alignment between the vision and EE policy.

The study also showed that the departments' works in silos, programmes/units have little or no interaction nor collaborations with each other. This is contrary to the spirit of empowerment which encourages teamwork and a collaborative work environment (Çakar and Ertürk, 2010).

Results showed that some of the management meetings did not occur regularly as schedules; because managers failed to meet. This it happens that they become un-aware of what is happening in other programmes or units. Meetings with employees did not happen as well. The study revealed that the public sector failed to cater for innovation because of its top-down structure having to go through many levels/stages to obtain approval. The top down structure

also disadvantages the employees from making other decisions because most of the decisions were made at the top. The literature review stipulates that empowered employees encourage a learning environment wherein employees become interested to learn and apply new methods to achieve organisational goals (Bagheri et al., 2011). The researcher is of the view that if employees are better empowered, they will be more creative and innovative.

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

This objective focused on the strategies used by the organisations to empower their employees. The study has shown several strategies that are used to empower employees. Among many the following stand out:

- Offering bursaries for employees to further their studies.
- Managers delegating some duties/activities to their subordinates.
- Mentoring employees through information session, skills development trainings and frequent meetings.

The study complements the literature reviewed, which supports that empowerment entails giving employees the opportunity to improve their skills through opportunities (Orgambídez Ramos and Borrego Alés, 2014). The literature review encourages proper feedback to be given to employees (Gabriel et al., 2014), the study has failed to show feedback as one of the EE strategies.

The study revealed the PMDS to be one of the major strategies used in the public sector to empower employees. All respondents alluded to it. The PMDS is used to assess employee performance, this is where the manager gets the opportunity to give feedback to the employee. Feedback is given based on the employees KPIs, where these KPIs are derived from the organisational strategy and operational plan. During the feedback sessions reasons for poor or weaker achievement was usually not given; neither a way forward for both the manager and the employee. This contradicts the literature that encourages proper feedback to be given to employees (Gabriel et al., 2014). The respondents' interviews suggested that the PMDS has gaps and that managers were not always objective when conducting employee assessment. The researcher is of the view that the PMDS should be revisited and amended where there are gaps.

Objective 4: *To determine the impact of employee empowerment or the lack of it in the Public Sector*

The research objective focused on whether the implementation of EE had an impact or not in the public sector. The study revealed two sides from the respondents which included '*Yes it has impact*' and '*No it has no impact*'. The study has shown that EE encourages productivity in the organisation, and which is consistent with the argument by Amarche (2013) that employee empowerment assists organisations in improving productivity and when productivity improves the organisation can better achieve its organisational goals.

Other important aspects that came out from the interviews, were that empowered employees can be relied on and delegated some tasks to do. Empowered employees are more effective and efficient in their jobs and more loyal to the organisation. The study complements the literature review done where according to Joo and Shim (2010) employee empowerment could increase the level of job performance, better work satisfaction as well organisational commitment.

Two respondents said that if EE can be implemented properly it would bear positive results within the organisation. The study revealed that decisions follow a top-down approach were also centralisation takes place. The literature review states that command and control organisations, because of the centralised decision-making mechanism take time to respond to the evolving environment (Jones and Rivas, 2011). The researcher is of the view that if the public sector can decentralise its decision-making processes, implementation of processes would be more relevant.

### **5.3 Implication of the study**

The research study revealed that employee empowerment would improve the way in which public sector implements EE in their organisations. The suggestions of revisiting the PMDS as one of the strategies would also be beneficial in addressing the gaps found in EE.

## **5.4 Limitations of the study**

The setting of the interviews was quite a challenge since interviews were conducted at the respondents' workplace during office hours. There was also lots of noise from colleague due to the open plan structure. The researcher used purposive and snowballing techniques, which on their own allow for a small sample size. However, it is important 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 intention of the study was not to generalise the results, given the nature of the sampling size, but to provide clear representative results.

## **5.5 Conclusion**

This chapter discussed the research findings. The data was analysed to answer each research question. Coding of respondents was done using software Nvivo11 which grouped together participants with similar answers to answer each research question, the findings were analysed according to each objective. Recommendations obtained from the findings have been presented in chapter 6.



## **CHAPTER 6**

### **SUMMARY, CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

#### **6.1 Introduction**

The main aim of the study was to understand the culture of employee employment in the Public Sector. This was achieved by engaging in the literature review and data collected through interviews with the government officials. Chapter one presented an introduction and background to the study; Chapter two presented the literature review; Chapter three outlined the research methodology; Chapter four presented the data; Chapter five provided a discussion to the findings; and this chapter will look at some of the recommendations made for practice and future studies.

#### **6.2 Recommendations for practice**

Having analysed the data gathered from the interviews as well as the literature reviewed, the following recommendations can be made:

- The study revealed that many decisions are centralized because of the top- down strategy. Employees should be allowed to make greater inputs into decision-making especially concerning their field of work. The department can apply the Kanban system discussed in the literature reviewed. Kanban applies more of a horizontal approach.
- Challenges of management meetings and one-on-one session are not happening as planned. The Department should hold a workshop to discuss reasons, and a forward to rectify this. The department should develop a schedule for manager and employee to meet regularly to discuss challenges and any other rising matters that the employee may have.
- The public sector needs to revisit the National Performance Development Management System, this tool could be improved by making sure that it does not only cater for employee performance assessments but also manages the relationship between manager/supervisor and employee performance.
- Lastly, the public sector can do a benchmark exercise to see and compare how other organisations and countries use empowerment to improve the organisational performance.

### **6.3 Recommendations for further research**

Research can be conducted to develop an EE framework or policy that will provide proper steps to follow on how to empower employees. A framework that will define and explain the role managers must play towards employee empowerment, as well as explain the role junior employees will have to play towards making empowerment a success in the organisation, is worthy of investigations.

### **6.4 Conclusion**

The purpose of the study was to investigate the culture of employee empowerment in the public sector. The study achieved its purpose through the literature reviewed and the interview sessions that were conducted. The study revealed that employee empowerment is partially institutionalised in the public sector. There are great benefits that come with empowering employees. These include growth and development, better performance for both the individual and the organisation and which ultimately improves the service delivery of the public sector. The study showed some gaps that the public sector will have to attend in order to improve some of the strategies used to empower employees. Recommendations have been given in this chapter. The public sector needs to have a holistic view to attend to and overcome the challenges they are facing. Systems thinking as recommended, will assist in understanding the complexities faced by the sector. Employee empowerment has shown that if it could be properly institutionalised the public sector could really improve its service delivery.

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