

Opinions and Perceptions of Employees and Managers on Various Employee Participation Themes

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ABSTRACT In this paper, the opinions and perceptions of employees and managers regarding employee participation were examined. In doing this, attention was paid to the various meanings of employee participation as understood by employees and managers as well as identifying various themes and sub-themes of employee participation available in the organisation. This study adopted a qualitative research design using semi-structured one-on-one interviews with 70 participants, who included employees as well as managers. Opinions and perceptions play a vital role in determining the variety and extent of participation outcomes; therefore, the results found that participants attached various positive meanings to employee participation. Six employee participation themes were also identified in this study as well as various sub-themes.

INTRODUCTION

Opinions and perceptions play a vital role in determining the variety and extent of participation outcomes and, for this reason, an exploratory research approach was utilised since no studies have focused on employee participation as a broad concept, but only on organisations with one or more themes of employee participation. These various studies and literature have created a basic frame of reference for employee participation as a broad concept. Employee participation is a generic term describing a diversity of practices often associated with a sundry-related terminology, including employee voice, employee involvement and empowerment (Markey et al. 2016, cited in Markey and Townsend 2013; Wilkinson et al. 2010). For this reason, this paper will focus on employee participation and its themes as well as deriving sub-themes associated with these themes

Problem Statement

Employee participation has assumed various themes over time and across countries. Resultantly, there is no universal agreement as to what constitutes participation and how to define its various elements. In an attempt to investigate participation, some researchers have adopted a

narrower view of participation by focusing only on participation within joint decision-making (Galle et al. 2002; Zhou 2006) or within financial participation (Robinson and Wilson 2006; Bakken et al. 2004; Poutsma et al. 2003; Pendleton 1997), or even participation through self-management (Palgi 2006; Rosner 2006). Employee financial participation has almost a century-long history under the label of economic democracy at the workplace (Jaakson and Kallaste 2014). By contrast, Venter (2009) has identified a broader view of participation by identifying consultation, collective bargaining and joint decision-making. According to Wang (et al. 2016), an employee may not be active in all types of participatory behaviours, but only in some he regards as applicable. Co-management, self-management and financial participation are the various themes of participation (Busck et al. 2010; Horwitz et al. 2005). Therefore, this paper will focus on the following themes of employee participation: consultation, collective bargaining, joint decision-making, co-management, self-management and financial participation.

Consultation

During consultation, management must acquire the opinions of employees on matters of mutual interest prior to making a final decision;

consultation can therefore be characterised as the method of exchanging ideas opinions and suggestions (Koukiadaki 2010). Marcu (2016) stated that, in a well-structured organisation, culture is joins the organisation in a chain of tacit meanings, offering specific meaning to all human activities and organisational processes through consultation with employees. Consultation under the Labour Relations Act (LRA) 65 of 1995 (LRA) means to put proposals together rather than finished decisions to unions/employees as well as disclosing all relevant information (Markey 2007; Horwitz et al. 2005). Organisations must then also allow trade unions/employees to respond to these proposals and, if these alternative proposals are not acceptable to the employer, reasons for rejecting these alternative proposals must be provided (Du Toit 2003). Consultation within an organisation therefore offers employees the opportunity to exercise influence over broader organisational issues. Despite differences in job roles in organisations, employees emphasized confidence in the participative decision-making (Harrison et al. 2016). These issues include both on-line issues related to activities within the production process itself and off-line participation in practices that are concerned with broader organisational issues and concerns, such as working conditions and occupational health and safety (Kallenberg et al. 2009; Appelbaum et al. 2000)

According to Ramutsheli (2001), the consultation procedure may sometimes only involve top-level employees and therefore it can be seen as top-level decision-making; however, this is the exception rather than the rule and, for this reason, workplace forums and councils were established. Workplace forums and work councils provide a forum for consultation (Venter 2009). It is important that workplace forums and workplace councils should not be confused with each other. According to Erasmus et al. (2003), under the old Labour Relations Act 28 of 1956, an employer and employees could set up a structure called work councils. In South Africa, work councils were generally not used for the purpose of collective bargaining, but were mainly there to serve as a forum for communication and consultation between managers and workers. According to Kester and Britwum (2007), these councils have not been effective. Although both employees and managers were present during these councils, employees had very limited pow-

er to influence the decisions that were made. The new LRA (65 of 1995) introduced fundamental changes to employment relations and collective bargaining in South Africa. One of these changes was the introduction of a new concept, that is, the workplace forum. Workplace forums can be seen as an “in-house institution for employee participation and representation at the workplace” (Erasmus et al. 2003).

Collective Bargaining

Labour relations are characterised by inherent conflict and the best way of reducing this conflict is through collective bargaining (Makhakhe 2005). Collective bargaining stands out as the most universal and most generally acceptable in both industrialised and developing countries (Ntumba 2003; Ribeiro 2016) and can be seen as a process where unions and employers meet in order to reach an agreement (Harrison 2004). An important issue in the literature has been the degree to which unions discount the future in term of collective bargaining in the specific organisation to meet their expectations (Addison et al. 2017). This agreement is usually expressed in a contract, which can include provisions about terms and conditions of employment, such as salaries, bonuses, payments, overtime etc. (Makhakhe 2005). Collective bargaining can therefore be seen as a medium to determine the scope of the employee/employer relationship (Harrison 2004) as well as a medium to predict workplace behaviour (Beetge 2000). Unlike ordinary consultation, collective bargaining assumes willingness on each side not just to listen, but also to take action to find common ground for agreement (Grogan 2003).

In 1996, the International Labour Organisation (ILO) defined collective bargaining as a bipartite process about negotiations. Beetge (2000) and Price (2007) agreed by stating that collective bargaining has become the core instrument for negotiating. Negotiation can be defined as the exchange of views and concerns between employees and employer (Wilkinson et al. 2007). This exchange of views and concerns will take place through a communication process in which individuals involved are intended to reach a compromise or agreement to the satisfaction of both parties (Ury et al. 2000). Negotiation therefore allows individuals to become effective in voicing their opinions and to have their work recog-

nised (Brett and Thompson 2016; Nel 2002), employees therefore get involved in mutual decision-making with management (Hodson 2001), which will bring about worker participation (Harrison 2004). It is therefore necessary for the process of collective bargaining and negotiation to be successful and efficient and must be based on a meaningful balance between cooperation and competition between management and workers (Nel 2002).

It is clear that collective bargaining will remain central to South African industrial relations (Harrison 2004). It is, however, important to note that collective bargaining is an on-going process in which the rules of the game can change from time to time, and justice always be part of it (Druckman and Wagner 2017).

Joint Decision-making

A participative and inclusive decision-making style is surfacing all over the world as one of the hallmarks for a competitive and leading organisation (Ntumba 2003). Organisations are seeking to improve their quality standards and their competitiveness (Anstey 1997); to make this process possible, it is necessary to change the traditional organisational structure and give way for a flatter, more de-layered structure (Ntumba 2003). In doing this, decisions within the workplace must be taken by the people directly involved in that particular activity. As Beetge (2000) noted, the person who does the work has the best knowledge and relevant skills to solve problems and improve work methods. Participation in decision-making therefore refers to employees sharing in the decisions made that were ordinarily the responsibility of the manager or employer (Wickramasinghe and Wickramasinghe 2011). Employee participation in joint decision-making can offer employees various levels of influence, varied from formal established committees to the development of relationships with managers (Scott-Ladd and Marshall 2004). In having full, joint decision-making participation within an organisation, it is important that employees must have sufficient access to information (Prasnikar 1991).

From an organisation's point of view, joint decision-making can lead to greater employee-employer co-operation (Summers and Hymann

2005) as well as increased commitment and motivation from employees toward the organisation's objectives (Nzimande 1998).

Employees are less likely to question or undermine decisions if they feel they took a part in making that decisions (Nzimande 1998; Noah 2008). Joint decision-making can also lead to employees' growing identification towards the organisation (Palgi 2006).

Co-management

Co-management in participation can be defined as a conscious and intended effort by managers to provide role-expanding opportunities for individual employees and groups at lower levels in the organisation (Glew et al. 2005). The notion of 'co-management' has predominantly been used to investigate the management of natural resources considering ecological, economic and societal influences, where the latter involves resource users and the government (Wagner and Eggert 2016).

Co-management therefore enables workers to be represented on management level as well as on decision-making structures in the organisation (Venter 2009; Noah 2008), which would bring forth a measure of shared power (Whitty 1996). According to Kester and Britwum (2007), workers who participate at this level in the organisation are expected to ensure that the employers and management are made more aware of the interest of the employees. Co-management will place a tool in the hands of employees to make their work more efficient (Whitty 1996). Giving employees more influence on how they perform their work is believed to be both beneficial for employees and employers (Kim et al. 2010). There are also various benefits associated with employees participating in co-management teams. According to Klein et al. (2000), it provides a mechanism to reduce resistance to change, increased commitment and ultimately leading to improved performance. In short, according to Carlsson and Berkers (2005), co-management is seen as the logical approach to solving resource management problems through partnership; however, it requires that the parties involved must be committed to their work and each other in order to reach consensus (Westenholz 2006). A challenge in effective communication relates to the workplace context. Newnam et al. (2016) are of the opinion that distinctive

characteristics and successes of many organisations are seated in their workplace structure, in particular, the level of visibility, communication, co-management and participation between supervisors and their workers.

Self-management

Self-managed work teams have become a corporate catch phrase; every organisation wants to survive within this global competitive environment and it is believed that self-managed employees can help organisations to achieve this goal (Coetzee 2003). According to Busck et al. (2010), self-management is the expectancy that employees will act according to the organisation's objectives and values and make it their own responsibility. Self-managed work teams can therefore be seen as groups of employees who are fully responsible for a well-defined segment in the organisation (Coetzee 2003). An understanding regarding how to use teams in a business in a self-managed environment is still not an embedded part of many organisations, and new generations of participants are not necessarily exposed to this understanding (Trent 2016).

Self-management can also be described as an individual's independence from organisational career management and dependence on oneself (Arthur and Rousseau 1996). Self-managed work teams are responsible for making their own decisions as well as finding ways to complete their tasks (Coetzee 2003); they therefore control their own destiny by using their autonomy (Rosner 2006). It can therefore be concluded that self-management is strongly linked with empowerment and autonomy (Elmuti 1996).

Wheatley and Szwejczewski (1995) suggested that self-management teams are usually free to make decisions without resorting to managers or supervisors on a wide range of issues formerly handled by management above them; they also have the freedom and ability to organise their internal work structure to best accomplish their goals (Langfred 2007). Kester and Britwurn (2007) support this statement by arguing that self-management participation is a form of direct participation, implying that every individual has access to decisions made without a representative elected or appointed.

Financial Participation

Financial participation may assume many forms in an organisation and, for this reason, it

is not a new phenomenon; it can be traced back as far as the late nineteenth century (Poutsma et al. 2003). Financial participation can be seen as a form of employee participation in which workers share in the financial success of the organisation (Venter 2009; Wilkinson et al. 2010). Employees therefore share in the success of the organisation, meaning that there is a direct link between the proportion of their compensation and the organisation or department's performance. Employees can be motivated to participate in financial participation setting, intrinsically or extrinsically. Intrinsic motivation for financial participation starts from within the employees and becomes a prioritised goal. On the other hand, extrinsic motivation to financial participation is a controlled activity from the organisation itself (Heshmati et al. 2106). Financial participation normally has two principle objectives to stimulate employees' efforts as well as co-operation between employees and management (Poutsma et al. 2003). Everyone appreciates getting credit when it is due (Olivier 2010). The main forms of financial participation are profit sharing and employee-shared ownership (Rizzo and Carbott 2006; Summers and Hymann 2005; Poutsma et al. 2003). According to Pendleton (1997) and Poutsma et al. (2003), shared ownership schemes are primarily gained from a long-term increase in the shared value of the organisation, whereas profit-sharing schemes (also called cash-based profit sharing) are rewards that are paid more or less immediately from the organisation's profit.

Objectives

The way in which employee participation is interpreted will influence the effectiveness of an employee participation programme (Beetge 2000); negative opinions and perceptions can therefore lead to unsuccessful employee participation programmes in the long run (Langan-Fox et al. 2002). According to Rosner (2006), employee participation is usually limited to specific organisational issues or specific levels of the organisation and, as a result, for employee participation to be effective, it should be developed according to the organisation's unique requirements and circumstances (Seopa 2000; Wang et al. 2016). Therefore, this paper will investigate the opinions and perceptions of employees within a specific engineering support services company.

General Objective

Examine the opinions and perceptions of employees and managers regarding employee participation.

Specific Objectives

- To explore the meaning of employee participation as understood by employees and managers.
- To explore the perceptions of employees and managers regarding the various themes of employee participation available in their organisation.
- To determine the sub-themes of the various employee participation themes.

METHODOLOGY

For the purposes of this study, a qualitative research design was utilised. In qualitative research, the researcher can approach the reality from a constructivist position, as this allows for multiple meanings of individual experiences. Qualitative research therefore makes it possible to examine and determine the opinions and perceptions of employees and managers regarding employee participation.

Participants and Procedure

Stratified purposive sampling was used to reach the objective of the study. This sampling method means that participants are selected because of some defining characteristics (Maree 2010). Stratified purposive sampling was used since only employees and managers working in this specific organisation formed part of the interviewing process. The population included all employees and managers (N=123) working in different divisions within the organisation, the sample of which was 70 participants.

The measuring instrument used in this study was semi-structured, one-on-one interviews with employees as well as managers. All interviews were face-to-face. The sample size was governed by data saturation and saturation occurred after eight interviews.

All the participants were asked standard questions about employee participation and its various themes. As mentioned above, these various employee participation themes were con-

firmed through literature. The employee participation themes are consultation, negotiation, joint decision-making, co-management, self-management and financial participation.

Data and Content Analysis

Content analysis can be defined as “a systematic approach to qualitative data analysis that identifies and summarises message content” (Maree 2010). The reason for choosing this strategy to analyse data is because data will then be looked at from different angles to identify certain keys that will help in understanding and interpreting the responses gave to the open-ended questions asked in the interviews. Focus was specifically placed on the similarities and differences in the interviews in order to corroborate or to disconfirm literature about employee participation.

RESULTS

As employee participation can be seen as a very broad spectrum of different structures and processes (Busck et al. 2010; Budd et al. 2010), it is necessary to structure the findings of this study into two phases. The first phase of this paper will explore the different meanings employees and managers associate with employee participation. Available employee participation themes will also be explored. The reason for exploring employees and managers’ meaning of employee participation is because the meaning one gives to a subject will influence the opinions and perceptions one expresses about that subject (Seopa 2000).

The second phase of the findings will focus on deriving sub-themes associated with the various employee participation themes. The reason for deriving sub-themes of each employee participation theme is because each theme consists of various structures and processes that will determine the specific theme. These sub-themes will be determined through literature as well as interviews held with employees and managers.

Phase 1

Meaning of Employee Participation

In the first place, this study explores employees and management’s understanding of employee participation. According to Seopa (2000) and Wickramasinghe and Wickramasinghe (2011), the

meaning one gives to a subject will influence the opinions and perceptions expressed about that subject. This is based on the fact that one's ideology about a subject is influenced by his or her understanding of it.

Availability of Various Themes of Employee Participation

Consultation (Theme 1)

Workplace forums can only be formed in organisations with more than 100 employees (Ramutsheli 2001) and, in this specific organisation, this method of employee participation is not utilised. This, however, does not mean that management does not acquire the opinions of employees on matters of mutual interest prior to making a final decision.

Collective Bargaining (Theme 2)

Collective bargaining has become the core instrument of negotiation (Beetge 2000; Price 2007; Addison et al. 2017). Negotiation can be defined as the exchange of views and concerns between employees and employer (Wilkinson et al. 2007). Negotiation therefore allows individuals to become effective in voicing their opinions and to have their work recognised (Nel 2002).

Joint Decision-making (Theme 3)

With regard to joint decision-making, mixed feelings came to light; most of the participants, however, indicated that they felt involved when decisions were being made, even if they are just small decisions.

Co-management (Theme 4)

Co-management enables employees to be represented on management level in the organisation (Venter 2009) and, for this reason, co-management can be defined as a conscious and intended effort by managers to provide role-expanding opportunities for individual employees and groups at lower levels in the organisation (Glew et al. 2005; Wagner and Eggert 2016).

Within co-management, the focus will be on the essential relationships that are being created in the workplace (Whitty 1996). Respondents indicated that the relationship between employ-

ees and management is based on support and trust.

Self-management (Theme 5)

Wheatley and Szwejczewski (1995) suggested that self-management teams are usually free to make decisions without resorting to managers or supervisors on a wide range of issues formerly handled by management above them; they also have the freedom and ability to organise their internal work structure to best accomplish their goals (Langfred 2007). Participants were of the opinion that they are free to make small decisions; however, they must report these decisions to management.

Although great responsibility and empowerment are given to employees and management, some of the participants were concerned that not all of the employees are committed to successfully handle their responsibilities.

Financial Participation (Theme 6)

Financial participation can be seen as a form of employee participation in which workers share in the financial success of the company (Venter 2009; Trent 2016). It could be seen from the interviews that all participants agreed that the organisation does have rewarding systems in place for hard work.

Phase 2

Sub-themes

This phase specifically focuses on deriving sub-themes from the various employee participation themes. Sub-themes were confirmed through literature and participants' responses; the themes and relevant sub-themes will be presented as well as discussed (Table 1).

DISCUSSION

Meaning of Employee Participation

The first specific objective of this study was to explore the meaning of employee participation as understood by employees and management. The meaning one gives to a subject will influence the opinions and perceptions one expresses about that subject (Seopa 2000). There-

Table 1: Sub-themes derived from various themes of employee participation

<i>Theme</i>	<i>Sub-theme</i>	<i>Verbatim extracts from raw data</i>
<i>Consultation</i>	Daily meetings	<i>“In the mornings we have safety quality talk; we start the day like that. Also called Toolbox Talks. We have a prayer and then next we raise the safety concerns. Once a week we also do quality talks. Everybody has the right to say and everybody has the right to express their feelings.”</i>
<i>Collective Bargaining</i>	Involvement	<i>“...everyone gets a chance in the mornings to talk about something and then the others have to provide input about it.”</i>
<i>Joint Decision-making</i>	Communication Information sharing	<i>“We have a strict path of communication and decisions. Big decisions are up to our site manager that is what they are employed to do that is what they are paid to do. I’m paid for making small decisions”; “You see, this does not mean that one person will be able to accomplish everything; unfortunately it does not work that way. You can think you are very well educated, but sometimes you need that someone who can think of another idea.”</i>
<i>Co-management</i>	Support Trust	<i>“We work on very balanced rules. Our job is based on trust and the believe that each of us know what we are doing.”; “...this is trust we are like a family here”; “The site manager will always listen if you have a problem and he will make a point of trying to help you.”</i>
<i>Self-management</i>	Responsibility Commitment	<i>“If certain things have to be done, I take the initiative and will only report what I have done; even with my own workers, if they see it themselves, they can change it; they just have to show me.” “Not everyone here is committed to their work.” “Some guys are only here to pass time or to be able to say that he has a job. This is not nice, but it is the truth.”</i>
<i>Financial Participation</i>	Rewards	<i>“We get a production bonus.” “...we have a safety award that we offer the workers as well as a certificate for willingness to walk the extra mile. This is for the guy who would, for example, go out of his way to help someone else.”</i>

fore, the way in which employee participation is interpreted will have an influence on the effectiveness and implementation of employee participation programmes (Beetge 2000). As seen from the interviews, all of the participants had a relatively good understanding of what employee participation is and what it consists of. Employees and management also know the benefits that arise from employee participation – for themselves as well as the organisation.

From the participants’ interviews, it quickly becomes evident that employees attach a range of ideas and standards to the concept of employee participation. Individuals’ responses varied in terms of what they consider important for

employee participation, as well as what they expect from employee participation. This said, it does not necessarily mean that one group is correct and the other incorrect. Reasons for this happening could be because managers and employees have different backgrounds, educational levels and job characteristics that may lead them to view the organisation in different ways and therefore having very different perceptions of and reactions to employee participation (Ramutsheli 2001). Employee participation is such a broad theme with a considerable range of definitions (Budd et al. 2010) that employees can find it difficult to mention just one generally accepted idea and standard.

Availability of Various Themes of Employee Participation

The second specific objective of this study was to explore the perceptions of employees and management regarding the availability of various employee participation themes.

From the interviews, the following conclusions have emerged regarding the availability of various themes of employee participation:

- Management takes employees' views into consideration.
- Management regularly seeks employees' views.
- Management continuously encourages staff to make suggestions.
- Employees were less confident towards believing that management will act on their suggestions.
- Every employee has the right to take part in discussions and to express their feelings.
- Generally, participants felt that daily meetings were necessary and successful.
- Employees experience that they are involved in decision-making.
- Employees feel they are informed.
- Management stated that they involve employees in decision-making through daily meetings, etc.
- Communication is informal and relaxed.
- Both employees and management regard their work environment as informal and see the company as a family.
- Both employees and management indicated that their relationship is based on support and trust.
- Employees felt that they do have an influence on how they conduct their work.
- Employees have various responsibilities.
- A few employees were concerned that their co-workers are not committed to their work and will not be able to handle all their responsibilities.
- Managers feel that they do motivate their workers through various actions and teamwork.
- All participants believe that they do get rewarded for their hard work.
- Participants agreed that although their rewarding system is relatively small, it is successful.

Sub-themes

Consultation (Theme 1)

Daily Meetings

During consultation, management must acquire the opinions of employees on matters of mutual interest; consultation can therefore be characterised as the method to exchange ideas, opinions and suggestions (Koukladaki 2009). In the organisation, consultation takes place through daily meetings, also called *toolbox talks*. Participants mentioned that every morning before work starts they have a meeting to discuss the day's work as well as any safety concerns. These *toolbox talks* focus on day-to-day decision-making, where employees can make suggestions on technological improvements on how to increase work effectiveness, how their work must be carried out and how the specific duties must be allocated among themselves. It can therefore be concluded that the organisation uses daily meetings as a method to get various suggestions from its employees.

During daily meetings, every employee can take part and express his feelings as well as give input. According to McLagan and Nel (1995), this participation causes employees to feel that attention is paid to their suggestions and ideas, thereby enhancing their self-esteem.

From the interviews, it can be concluded that management realises that consultation is not just a once-off situation; they understood that consultation needs to be a continuous process.

Collective Bargaining (Theme 2)

Involvement

Participation in collective bargaining has become the main instrument for negotiations (Beetge 2000). Negotiation therefore allows individuals to become effective in voicing their opinions and to have their work recognised (Nel 2002). Participants mentioned that they felt comfortable in voicing their opinions each morning as everyone is given a fair chance to speak and provide their inputs. Employees also mentioned that management does involve them in decisions about work-related problems and management also regularly informs them about how the organisation is doing. Willmott (2003) stated that

if an organisation wants to involve its employees in the operations of the organisation, it is vital to tell them on a regular basis how the organisation is doing. Involving employees in decision-making, especially when the decisions taken directly influence the employees, is both sensible and respectful. According to Olivier (2010), the individual who is closest to the problem normally has the best insight into solving it. If employees are involved in managing the organisation, they will be self-motivated, achievement orientated and positively inclined towards accomplishing organisational goals (Bakain et al. 2004). They will also be more likely to believe that they can affect or initiate changes in the organisation (Weber and Weber 2001).

Joint Decision-making (Theme 3)

Information Sharing and Communication

Participation in decision-making refers to employees sharing in the decisions made, which was originally the responsibility of the manager or employer (Wickramasinghe and Wickramasinghe 2011). In having full, joint decision-making participation within an organisation, it is important that employees must have sufficient access to information (Prasnikar 1991). Employees can only be committed if they know what is expected of them and when they have sufficient and correct equipment to do their work (Kimball and Nink 2006). Therefore, there should be a mechanism in place in order to guarantee the proper and correct flow of information. Participants mentioned that they are frequently informed about the organisation's procedures, policies, goals, etc. This is made possible through their daily meetings. One participant mentioned that he frequently makes a point of ensuring that his team understands the reason "why something is the way it is"; he informs them about the reason why an idea will work or not, as well as the reason why certain decisions must be made. If employees lack information, they cannot fully understand how they can contribute to the organisation. Providing information to employees, even at the lowest level of the organisation, will give employees the capability to manage their work, identify problems and generate solutions (West and Patterson 1998).

From the interviews, it can be concluded that both employees and management had a very strict path of communication, although communication takes place in an informal manner. Employees are also not fearful to go to management if they experience a problem; management mentioned that they will go out of their way to help and support their workers. Overall, participants felt that they took part in decision-making, although there were mixed feelings as to whether their inputs and suggestions will influence the final outcome. Management definitely understands the importance of involving employees in decision-making, as well as the various advantages that joint decision-making holds for building their relationship and for organisational effectiveness.

Co-management (Theme 4)

Support and Trust

Co-management gives employees the ability to make decisions together with management (Beetge 2000), which will bring forth a measure of shared power (Whitty 1996); and for this reason, decisions will be jointly taken on all matters of work-related issues. Weber and Weber (2001) support this statement by adding that co-management may lead to additional interactions with management and employees and could provide new opportunities to develop a trustful and supporting relationship. When employees and managers become mutually responsible for the completion of an assignment, they must interact in a different way by supporting each other (Van Mierlo et al. 2005; Ramutsheli 2001). Respondents indicated that the relationship between employees and management is based on support and trust. Management stated on various occasions that they support their team of employees; when employees receive managerial support for their ideas, they will be less defensive and more willing to be involved in the organisation (Weber and Weber 2001).

According to Holtzhausen (2008), trust reflects the belief that another party is reliable. Employees who trust their management will feel more parallel with managerial values and tend to react more positively towards the organisation (Martin 1998) and show greater productivity and effectiveness towards their organisation (Gollan and Wilkinson 2007).

Self-management (Theme 5)

Responsibility and Commitment

Self-management teams are usually free to make decisions without reporting to managers or supervisors on a wide range of issues (Wheatley and Szwejczewski 1995); they also have the freedom and ability to organise their internal work structure to best accomplish their goals (Langfred 2007). Participants mentioned that the organisation does give them the freedom to make their own decisions as well as to organise their internal work structures; however, employees and management must frequently report their progress or adjustments made. It can therefore be concluded that employees have a low degree of autonomy because although an individual or team can work independently, they are still constrained by rules and procedures in how to carry out their job (Langfred 2007). Employees with a high degree of autonomy have significant freedom from control by technical means, rules and procedures and direct involvement from managers (Kalleberg et al. 2009). Self-management is therefore strongly linked with empowerment and autonomy (Elmuti 1996). Empowerment increases employees' awareness of responsibility (Everett and Sohal 1991), and for employees to take on responsibilities, is to empower them (Nzimande 1998).

As previously mentioned, employees together with managers felt that they have various responsibilities; management also mentioned that they give their workers great responsibility when their tasks are being completed, as they know it will help them to develop. Although the organisation gives employees and management responsibilities and empowerment, some of the participants were concerned that not all of the employees are committed to the organisation in order to successfully handle their responsibilities. According to Kim et al. (2011), there is a direct link between empowerment and organisational commitment. Commitment is not a straightforward concept – it is the end product of a complex set of psychological and sociological relationships between employee and employer (Crawford 2009). Olivier (2010) confirmed this by stating that commitment is an employee's attitude regarding his/her loyalty towards the organisation. Participants mentioned that various employees were not committed to their work; they

are only concerned about the amount of money they will get at the end of the day. According to Ivancevich et al. (2005), the absence of commitment between employees can reduce organisational effectiveness. Employee commitment is critical as it affects the physical and psychological well-being of employees (Van Tonder 2007).

One participant mentioned that an attitude change might motivate employees to be more committed to their work. According to Summers and Hymann (2005), for participative schemes to succeed, an attitude change among employees and management is crucial. Organisational change continues at an alarming pace and this may have a serious negative consequence on employees' attitudes (Weber and Weber 2001). As a result, management should recognise that positive employee attitudes are vital in order to achieve organisational goals and for employees to be effective (Eby et al. 2000; Martin 1998; Hoell 2004).

Financial Participation (Theme 6)

Rewards

Financial participation can be seen as a human resource management reward strategy that seeks to align the interests of the employees jointly with those of the organisation (Poutsma et al. 2003), and as a result, workers can share in the financial success of the organisation (Venter 2009), meaning that there is a direct link between the proportion of their compensation and the organisation's performance. There are mainly two forms of financial participation, that is, profit sharing and employee-shared ownership (Rizzo and Carbott 2006; Summers and Hyman 2005; Poutsma et al. 2003). As seen from the interviews, all participants stated that they get a production bonus separate from their personal income if their performance was above standard. According to Prasnikar (1991), for a *bonus payment* to act as a motivational factor, the bonus must be related to the work done. Employees have a need for rewards that are based on performance (Phillips and Phillips 2009); and as a result, employees are continuously seeking reward systems that reflect their individual contribution and performance (Van Tonder 2007). From the interviews and participants' statements, it can be concluded that the organisation uses profit-sharing financial participation (also called

cash-based profit sharing). Cash-based schemes have various benefits as they are much more immediate and closely linked to organisational performance and, as a result, cash sharing offers a direct link between employees' efforts and rewards (McNabb and Whitfield 1998).

One can make a distinction between internal and external rewards. Employees added that they also get rewarded for their safety performances; the entire group will receive a reward if they reach a million hours without any accidents. If an individual was willing to walk the extra mile for his colleague, or if he conducted his work precisely according to the safety procedures, he will receive vouchers or a certificate.

Management all agreed that their reward system does work; however, although their reward system might not necessarily be immense, they do what they can to motivate their workers. Management also mentioned that some of the employees might not even see their effort; however, some of the employees do see it and they are greatly motivated to do their best.

CONCLUSION

This paper aimed to provide insight into the opinions and perceptions of employees and managers regarding employee participation. Opinions and perceptions play a vital role in determining the variety and extent of participation outcomes. It is important for every organisation to first be aware of the respective opinions and perceptions of its employees and management about employee participation before deciding whether employee participation is necessary and the form it should take. Employee participation is such a broad concept and, for this reason, the study was divided into two phases. Phase 1 aimed at exploring participants' understanding of employee participation as well as the availability of various employee participation themes, whereas phase 2 aimed at deriving sub-themes from employee participation.

It was found that participants had attached various positive meanings to employee participation. The meaning one gives to a subject will influence your opinion and perception of that subject. It can therefore be concluded that respondents' meaning of employee participation had a positive influence on their opinions and perceptions. As seen from the interviews, the organisation has incorporated participation into

their day-to-day work environment. The workforce is continuously motivated to take part in decision-making through daily meetings, as management recognises that the employee doing the work often has the best knowledge of how it should be done. Management empowers the workforce by giving them responsibilities; these decisions are, however, limited and must also be discussed with the managers afterwards. All the themes of employee participation were therefore available in the organisation – merely in various approaches. It is important to note that participation cannot be imposed onto employees. For employee participation to grow, management must actively and consciously be involved.

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