# Employee participation within an engineering support services company

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# ABSTRACT

The general objective of this study was to explore and investigate employee participation within an engineering support services company. Attention was therefore given to the opinions and perceptions of employees and managers regarding employee participation as well as the relationship between employee participation and employees' union membership. To conduct this study a qualitative and quantitative research design was adopted. In order to examine employees and managers' opinions and perceptions, semi-structured one-on-one interviews were conducted with participants. Six employee participation themes were identified as well as various sub-themes. Self-developed group administrative questionnaires were also utilised to determine the relationship between employee participation and union membership. The study found that employees and managers attach positive opinions and perceptions towards employee participation therefore leading to positive participation outcomes. In exploring the relationship between employee participation and union membership it was found that 87.1% of the employees in the company did not belong to a union. It was also found that there is a statistical significance relationship between employees' race and their tendency to join a union (0.068). Employees also indicated that they will join a union if co-management and self-management (as forms of employee participation) is not present in their organisation; with a statistical significance of 0.016 and 0.068. Information presented in this study can be used to develop effective employee participation strategies as well as assist in implementing these strategies.

**Key terms:** Employee participation, union membership, management, engineering organisation

# *OPSOMMING*

*Die algemene doelstelling van hierdie studie was om werkersdeelname binne 'n ondersteunende ingenieurswese organisasie te ondersoek. Aandag was dus gegee aan die opinies en persepsies wat werknemers en bestuurders heg aan werkersdeelname sowel as om die verhouding tussen werkersdeelname en unie lidmaatskap te bestudeer. Om hierdie studie uit te voer was daar gebruik gemaak van 'n kwalitatiewe navorsings ontwerp sowel as 'n kwantitatiewe navorsing ontwerp. Om werknemers en bestuurders se opinies en persepsies te ondersoek was daar gebruik gemaak van semi-gestruktureerde, een-tot-een onderhoude. Ses temas van werkersdeelname saam met verskeie sub-temas was ook geïdentifiseer. Self-ontwikkelende groep vraelyste was gebruik om die verhouding tussen werkersdeelname en unie lidmaatskap te ondersoek. Die studie het gevind dat werknemers en bestuurders positiewe opinies en persepsies aan werkersdeelname heg, wat veroorsaak dat werkersdeelname binne die organisasie positiewe uitkomstes sal bereik. Deur die bestudering van die verhouding tussen werkersdeelname en unie lidmaatskap was daar gevind dat 87.1% van die werknemers in die organisasie nie aan 'n unie behoort nie. Daar was ook gevind dat daar 'n statistiese betekenisvolle verhouding is tussen werknemers se ras en hulle neiging om aan 'n unie te behoort (0.068). Werknemers het ook aangedui dat hulle aan 'n unie sal behoort indien daar nie mede-bestuur of self-bestuur binne die organisasie is nie met 'n statistiese betekenisvolheid van 0.016 en 0.068. Die informasie wat in hierdie studie voorgelê is, kan gebruik word om effektiewe strategieë te ontwikkel vir werkersdeelname sowel as om hierdie strategieë te implementeer.*

***Trefwoorde**: Werknemersdeelname, vakbond lidmaatskap, ingenieursondernemning, bestuur.*

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  "For surely I know the plans I have for you, says the Lord, plans for your welfare and not for harm, to give you a future with hope. Then when you call upon me and come and pray to me, I will hear you. When you search for me, you will find me; if you seek me with all your heart" Jeremiah 29:11-13
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- To my parents for all their love, understanding and support, I'm really blessed.

# DECLARATION

I, Ezalle Viljoen, hereby declare that "Employee participation within an engineering support services company" is my own work and that the views and opinions expressed in this work are those of the author and relevant literature references as shown in the references.

I further declare that the content of this research will not be handed in for any other qualification at any other tertiary institution.

**EZALLE VILJOEN** **NOVEMBER 2012**

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# CHAPTER ONE: RESEARCH PROPOSAL AND PROBLEM STATEMENT

Chapter one comprises the proposal for this study as presented and accepted by the North-West University.

## 1. INTRODUCTION

This research study will focus on exploring and investigating employee participation within a specific engineering support services company. In this chapter the problem statement will be discussed, after which the objectives will be set out. Thereafter the research method will be explained and the divisions of chapters will be provided.

The present-day era is one that is marked by infinite change brought about technological interventions and globalisation; as well as increasingly competitive markets (Robbins, Odendaal & Roodt, 2003). A need therefore arose for employers and employees to co-operate for greater economic development (Seopa, 2000). Anstey (1997) stated that organisations world-wide are seeking to higher their quality standards and competitiveness. To make this process possible a new form of management, greater accountability and decision-making at lower levels in organisations should be formulated and incorporated, consequently changing the traditional organisational structures. Organisational change is therefore the order of the day (Kaufman, 2003). Change is defined as "an ever-present reality, an unavoidable reaction to being alive; part of life and business is being subject to change outside our control" (Diamond and Diamond, 2007, p.140). Change, however, is also about people, their ideas and fears and their capacity and ability to stand and work together towards a different, more prosperous future (National Research Foundation, 2007). According to Fosfuri and Rønde (2009) resistance to change can develop into potential conflicts between functions or departments. One major process that is of importance when dealing with resistance to change is participation (Schalk, Cambell & Freese, 1998; Gollan & Wilkinson, 2007). Beetge (2000) supported this by stating that if employees are not involved in decisions (participation), they will perceive change as a threat. Employee participation combined with trust and mutual sharing can therefore help in leading the way to improved organisational change (Kaufman, 2003). For this reason employee's voice has gained considerable attention the past two decades (Markey, 2001).

## 2. PROBLEM STATMENT

According to Nel, et al. (2008, p.319), participation can be defined as "the involvement of one group of employees (non-management employees) in the decision-making processes of the organisation, which have traditionally been the responsibility and prerogative of another group of employees (managers)". Through participation employees become more aware of

the broader organisational issues as well as enhance and develop their capabilities to discover their full potential (Isabirye, 2007).

Bendix (2001) makes the observation that employee participation consist of involving employee's in the organisation and planning of work processes by contributing towards the establishment of work procedures and by participating in decision-making at different levels in the organisation. Noah (2008) refers to employee participation as any process by which low corps employees are involved in important decision-making within the workplace. This implies not to involve only a specific group within the organisation, for instance the management, with the responsibility of making decisions, but all those affected by these decisions. Employee participation can only exist when employees throughout the organisation have the power to act and make decisions as well as have the information and knowledge necessary to effectively use their power, and are rewarded for doing so (Tang, Chen & Wu, 2010).

Hyman and Mason (1995) however make a distinction between employee participation and employee involvement and emphasise that participation is a state or employee initiative while involvement is always a management initiative. In this study employee participation will refer to all participative practices and policies that provide employees with an opportunity to influence decisions affecting them and their jobs. Anstey (1990) stated that to clearly understand employee participation there should be differentiated between the method of participation, the level and the form of participation, as discussed below.

*Method*

The method of participation involves two forms of participation that can be identified within the literature, namely direct and indirect participation. (Nel, et al., 2008). According to Ramutsheli (2001), direct participation is "face-to-face contact between managers and their subordinates which may primarily involve the passage of information from the former to the latter" (p.2). Direct participation occurs when an employee directly participates in the decision-making process (Ramutsheli, 2001; Beetge, 2000), which have a direct influence on their day to day work (Kim, MacDuffie, Pil, 2010). Participation can be done either individually, in groups or in general meetings (Markey, 2001; Busck, Knudsen & Lind, 2010). Direct participation is frequently done on a voluntary basis and the matter of representation is therefore irrelevant (Nel, et al. 2008).

However indirect participation can only take part through elected representatives (Nel, et al. 2008), for example: unions, work councils, joint labour management, consultation committees etc. (Kim, MacDuffie, Pil, 2010). It can therefore be concluded that indirect participation is regulated by law and or collective agreements (Busck et al., 2010).

*Level*

Participation can take place in different levels of an organisation e.g. lower- level employee, middle level or higher level (management) (Ramutsheli, 2001). Lower-level participation tends to be relating to direct participation and refers to low-level decision-making (Ramutsheli, 2001). This level of participation is more focused on reducing job disagreements as well as the tasks of the individual (Loriston, 1998). Employee participation will typically be used in a selective, narrowly focused, informal and decentralized manner (Kaufman, 2003). Middle-level participation takes place through statutory mechanisms like work councils and workplace forums (Loriston, 1998). And at top-level participation the employer and employees share equally in the decision-making process. It is commonly regarded as top-level decision making (Ramutsheli, 2001).

*Forms*

Employee participation has assumed various forms over time and across countries. Venter (2009) identified consultation, collective bargaining, joint decision-making, co-management, self-management and financial participation as the various forms of participation. Befort and Budd (2007) and Dundon, Wilkinson, Marchington, Ackers (2004) confirmed these forms of employee participation stating that employee participation can take many forms such as self-directed work teams for involving employees in decisions gain sharing for involving employees in the financial side, workplace information and consultation. These forms will be further discussed in chapter two and three and will be referred to as themes.

Employee participation has various advantages for employees and organisations. According to Cooke (1994) employee participation will increases mutual trust as well as sense of belonging between employees and managers. Employees will also become more flexible and responsive to change. Employee participation will ensure that new ideas will be developed as well as greater communication (St Lawrence and Stinnet, 1994). In a study done by Bhatti and Qureshi (2007) they found that employee participation is not only an important

determinant of job satisfaction, but it will also have a positive effect on employees' commitment, productivity and efficiency (Markey, 2007). Skill development (Meyer & Topolnytsky, 2000) and better employee relations will also be in the order of the day (Kaufman, 2003). It is however important to note that employee participation should not be considered a remedy for all organisational problems and conflicts (Nzimande, 1997).

## 3. EMPLOYEE PARTICIPATION IN SOUTH AFRICA

Political democracy has become the standard for business systems, processes, structures and procedures in South Africa (Isabirye, 2007). This new focus on political democracy is found in the Labour Relations Act 65 of 1995 (LRA) (SA, 1995) and the country's post-apartheid Constitution (Markey, 2007). According to Isabirye (2007) both the Act and the Constitution dictate participative practices at both organisational and national level. The principle of employee participation is therefore acknowledged in the core objectives of the Labour Relations Act and has established fundamental changes to the employment relations within South Africa (Ramutsheli, 2001). However, South Africa is currently faced with labour market crises in terms of high levels of unemployment, low productivity and growth and also the failure to compete internationally (Seopa, 2000). The government, organisations and labour realise that these problems exists and that employee participation can be a possible solution (Seopa, 2000). Historically, employee participation as it is practised in Western Europe has up until now not been prevalent in South Africa (Ramutsheli, 2001). South African organisations have not yet joint all employee participative programmes into one co-ordinated management strategy (Isabirye, 2007). Myburg (1990) stated that South Africa support the fact that employees should have a greater say in the workplace, but although they have realised the need for change they still have not taken concrete steps to implement it and this still the case today according to Bendix (2010).

The relationship between employee and employer in South Africa has for many years been characterised by conflict, suspicion, mistrust and sometimes open hatred (Van Rensburg, 1998). Much of the debate regarding employee participation involves issues of power sharing (Horwitz, Jain & Mbabane, 2005). Before industrial revolution the management of an organisation had all the power and employees were the subordinates who had no say in decisions whatsoever (Ramutsheli, 2001). According to Davidson and Mazibuko (2011), management are not always open to the idea of involving lower level employees in management decisions. In a study done by WERS (2004) it was found that managers may

object to involving employees in decision making, reasons for this being because management might feel that employee participation restrict their prerogative and flexibility in decision making (Horwitz, et al., 2005), but also because the implementation of employee participation models usually leads to higher cost and as all employees take part in the employee participation process, decision making usually takes longer (Beetge, 2000). On the other hand some managers according to (Seopa, 2000) do not have a serious problems with employee participation as they realise it will emphasise co-operation.

Union's perspective on employee participation is as varied as the unions themselves from being guarded to outright admiration (Hoell, 1998), but the most common response to employee participation even as far back as 1984 is 'cautious scepticism' (Kochan, Katz & Mower, 1984), and according to Kim et al., (2010), this is still the union's response today. Before employee participation, unions were seen as the only agents to provide employee voice (Wilkinson & Fay, 2011) for this reason Torres (1991) indicated that there is a tendency among unions to discourage their members to participate in employee participation. They consider employee participation as threat to their existence, a challenge to their power (Beetge, 2000) and an undermining of their union activities (Leana, Ahlbrandt & Murrell, 1992). Unions see participation by means of expanding the employer's influence and control over the workplace (Bendix, 2010) and blurring the distinction between management and employee interest (Horwitz, et al., 2005) as employee participation programmes provide alternative sources of information, ideas and interpretation of workplace experiences (Gollan & Wilkinson, 2007) . For these reasons unions often do not favour employee participation schemes. On the other hand according to (Rosner, 2006) the attitude of unions in many cases used to be negative and sceptical; he however feels that their attitudes today are more positive.

More specifically attention to employee participation has been fuelled by context of decline in trade union membership in most countries (Markey, 2007), however although there has been a worldwide decline in trade union membership the last three decades, union's influence at the workplace remains considerable in many countries (Cregan & Brown, 2010).

The problem however is that it quickly becomes obvious that a wide range of opinions and perceptions on the subject of employee involvement exist. Employee participation is causing unions and management to look at labour relations and the employment relationship in a new

way (Hoell, 1998), reason being that employee participation universal outcome is to restore industrial peace and effectively manage workplace conflicts (Nzimande, 1997). In understanding the attitudes of their employees (members) may prove to be a valuable tool to unions, as well as to management. Perhaps the question to ask is what is the employee's opinions and perceptions about employee participation and if these opinion's will have an effect on their union membership.

The following research questions have thus emerged:

- What are the opinions and perceptions of employee participation according to employees and managers?
- What is the relationship between employee participation and union membership?

These research questions mentioned above will be further elaborated and discussed in article one (chapter two) and article two (chapter three).

## 4. RESEARCH OBJECTIVES

### 4.1. General objective

The main focus of this proposed study is to explore and investigate employee participation according to employees and managers employee participation within an engineering support services company

### 4.2. Specific objective

- To examine the opinions and perspectives of employees and mangers regarding employee participation
- To determine the relationship between employee participation and union membership

The reader should note that each of these specific objectives will be broaden and further discussed in article one (chapter two) and article two (chapter three). Article one’s results will be used in article two, the reader should therefore read the different chapters in combined form.

## 5. RESEARCH METHOD

### 5.1. Literature review:

A detailed literature review will focus on employee participation; perceptions formed. A search was conducted on the following databases: Ferdinand Postma Catalogue; SA Catalogue; EBSCOHost: Academic Search Premier, Business Source Premier; MCB Emerald and Science direct to ensure that no other comparable study has been done.

### 5.2. Empirical study:

#### 5.2.1. Article one - Objective one (Chapter two)

Article one will attempt to reach the first specific objective, which is to examine the opinions and perceptions of employees and managers regarding employee participation. Article one will thus be qualitative. To achieve this objective, the following research methods will be utilised:

#### a. Research design

In reaching objective one a qualitative research design will be used, the type of research design that will be used is case study research. The reason for this design is because case studies offer a multi-perspective analysis in which the researcher considers not just the voice and perspective of one or two participants in a situation, but also the views of other participants and the interaction with them. Case study research can thus be defined as "a systematic inquiry into an event or a set of related events which aims to describe and explain the phenomenon of interest" (Maree, 2010, p.75). A major criticism of the case study research method is the incapability of providing a generalising conclusion. But this is not the purpose or intent of this research as this research is only done within one organisation in order to gain a greater insight and understanding.

#### b. Participants

Employees and managers working on different levels in the organisation will form part of the proposed study. Since only employees and managers working in this specific organisation will be interviewed, stratified purposive sampling will be used. This sampling method means that participants are selected because of some defining characteristics; in this case the participants must be working at this specific organisation. The sample size of these participants is not fixed, as interviews will be continued until no new data is gathered.

## c. Data gathering techniques

The data gathering techniques will be documents and interviews. When documents are used as a data gathering technique, there will be focused on written communication that may shed light on reaching this objective. This data source will therefore be a primary source since the data was directly gathered from the participants.

Semi-structured one-on-one interviews will be held with employees and managers. According to Maree (2010) semi-structured interviews is used to corroborate data emerging from other data sources. The reason for the use of semi-structured interviews is because it allows for the probing and clarification of answers. Interviews with employees as well as managers will also ensure that more inclusive answers will be gathered. These interviews will be continued until no new information is identified. A tape recorder shall also be used to record these interviews.

## d. Analysing data

Data analysis includes three steps (Vithal & Jansen, 2010):

### *Scanning and cleaning*

The data will be checked for incomplete, inaccurate, inconsistent or irrelevant data. Preliminary trends in the scanned data will also be identified to facilitate the organisation of the data into meaningful 'chunks'. The identified 'chunks' will be confirmed through a literature review.

### *Organising the data*

The data will be organised by arranging it in manageable forms. Content-, conversation- and, discourse analysis will be used. This will provide an in-dept-analytical description about the events. Content analysis will be used to analyse the semi-structured interviews. According to Maree (2010) content analysis is an inductive and iterative process where there is a search for similarities and differences in text that would corroborate or disconfirm theory. The conversation analysis will be used to focus on the informal talk through detailed inspection of tape recordings. Discourse analysis focuses on the meaning of the spoken and the written word and also the reasons thereof (Maree, 2010).

***Representing the data***

Meaningful summaries will be made of the different interviews through selected quotations. For example: powerful, representative or illustrative direct statements from responses to questions within the interview. The identified themes and sub-themes of employee participation will be used to form a self developed questionnaire which will be used in article two.

**e. Ethics**

A letter and research proposal will be sent to the Ethical committee of the North-West University (NWU) requesting the approval of the research study. Permission to conduct the study will also be obtained from the relevant organisation involved. The purpose of the study will be explained verbally and in writing to management and employees. Participation in the questionnaires is voluntary and the participants are free to withdraw at any point in the research process. The participants will be assured that their names will not be revealed in the research reports emanating from the project. They will also be assured that no negative consequences will emerge for those who are participating in the research process. The final report will be made available to both management and the employees (Struwig & Stead, 2004).

Attention will be given to the following (Wentzel, 2006):

- To be honest, fair and respectful towards the participants and not to attempt to mislead of deceive the research participants;
- To respect the rights and dignity of others. This include respecting the privacy, confidentiality and autonomy of the research participants; and
- To respect the welfare of others.

### 5.2.2. Article 2 – Objective 2 (Chapter three)

Article two will focus on reaching the second objective, which is to determine the relationship between employee participation and union membership. Article two will thus be quantitative. The following research methods will be utilised:

## a. Research design

In reaching objective two a quantitative research design will be used, since the design is descriptive in nature a non-experimental design will also be used. The reason for this design is because the units that will take part in the research are measured on all the relevant variables at one time (Maree, 2010).

## b. Participants

Employees within the organisation will form part of the proposed study, since only employees who is employed in this organisation is included in this study, non-probability convenience sampling method will be used. The reason for using this method is because this method is an inexpensive way of getting the truth. (Maree, 2010). All employees within the company will form part of the proposed study (N=70).

## c. Data gathering techniques

Group administration of questionnaires will be used to gather data. The researcher will wait while the group of respondents completes the questionnaire. The reason for using this technique is, because many respondents can complete the questionnaire in a short period of time. This technique is relatively cheap and easy to do. The researcher will also be able to immediately assist with questions which are not clear for the respondents (Maree, 2010). Closed questions will be used in this questionnaire. Closed questions are quick and easy to answer and will also be simple to analyse statistically (Maree, 2010). This self developed questionnaire will use the employee participation themes identified in Objective one and two (Article one) to develop questions. Scale to be used in this questionnaire will be Likert scaling, this scaling method provides an ordinal measure of respondent's attitudes (Maree, 2010). Likert scaling can be defined as "the process of developing a scale in with the rating of the items are summed to get the final scale score. Ratings are usually done using a one to five Disagree-to-Agree response format" (Trochim & Donnelly, 2007, p.136). A Likert-type scale is usually linked to a number of statements to measure attitudes or perceptions and five-point or seven –point scales are often used (Struwig & Stead, 2004). Each respondent is asked to rate each item on some response scale.

## d. Analysing data

### *Scanning and cleaning*

The researcher will read the data and check for incomplete, inaccurate, inconsistent or irrelevant data. The researcher will also identify preliminary trends in the scanned data to facilitate the organisation of the data into meaningful 'chunks'. The identified 'chunks' will be confirmed through a literature review.

### *Organising the data*

The data will be organised by arranging it in manageable forms. Descriptive statistics will be used. Descriptive statistics will provide statistical summaries of the data to provide an overall, coherent and straightforward picture of the obtained data for interpretation (Struwig & Stead, 2004).

### *Representing the data*

The data will be represented through graphs, means, standard deviations, correlations and statistical summaries. A factor analysis will be used to determine the validity of these instruments. Cronbach's Alpha coefficient as a means of reliability will be used to determine the internal consistency of each of the items of the questionnaires used in this study. The higher the coefficient the higher the reliability of the measure (Maree, 2010).Pearson's correlation will be used to determine the relationship between the constructs. Multiple regression analysis will be used to describe the relationship between variables. This analysing of data will enable the researcher to determine the relationship between employee participation and union membership within the organisation.

## e. Ethics

The purpose of the study will be explained verbally and in writing to employees. Participation in questionnaires is voluntary and the participants are free to withdraw at any point in the research process. The participants will be assured that their names will not be revealed in the research reports emanating from the project. They will also be assured that no negative consequences will emerge for those who are participating in the research process. The final report will be made available to the organisation (Struwig & Stead, 2004).

Attention will be given to the following:

- Assisting with compiling the questionnaires
- Administering the questionnaire
- Facilitating the group administration of questionnaires
- Preparing and structuring interviews
- Conducting interviews
- Analysing the data

## 6. CHAPTER DIVISION

The study will be divided into 4 chapters as follows:

**Chapter one: Research proposal**

In **Chapter one** the research proposal will be done. This includes the problem statement, research questions, research objectives, proposed research methodology and the division of chapters.

**Chapter two: Research Article one**

a. Introduction
b. Qualitative study
c. Discussion and findings
d. Conclusion, limitations and recommendations

**Chapter three: Research Article two**

a. Introduction
b. Quantitative study
c. Discussion and findings
d. Conclusion, limitations and recommendations

**Chapter four: Conclusions, limitations and recommendations**

In the final chapter, conclusions are made about the findings of the previous chapters. Limitations to the study will be discussed as well as recommendations for future research.

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# CHAPTER TWO (ARTICLE ONE): THE OPINIONS AND PERCEPTIONS OF EMPLOYEES AND MANAGERS REGARDING VARIOUS EMPLOYEE PARTICIPATION THEMES

In Chapter two (Article one) the APA style of referencing will be utilise, since the journal for publication considered have not been identified at time of presentation for examination.

**Abstract:**

*This study examined the opinions and perceptions of employees and managers regarding employee participation. In doing this, attention was given to the various meanings of employee participation as understood by employees and managers as well as identifying various themes of employee participation available in the organisation, sub-themes were also determined. This study adopted a qualitative research design using semi-structured one-on-one interviews with employees as well as mangers. Opinions and perceptions play a vital role in determining the variety and extent of participation outcomes, therefore the results has 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. There is however no one pattern of participation that will fit every organisation, what is suitable in one situation may be quite unsuitable in another. The information presented in this study can be used to develop effective employee participation strategies as well assist in implementing them.*

**Opsomming:**

*Hierdie studie bestudeer die opinies en persepsies wat werknemers en bestuurders het aangaande werkersdeelname. Daar was dus gefokus op die verskillende betekenisse wat werknemers en bestuurders heg aan werkersdeelname asook die identifisering van verskeie temas en sub-temas van werkersdeelname wat beskikbaar is binne die organisasie. 'n Kwalitatiewe navorsings ontwerp was gebruik deurdat gedeeltelike gestruktureerde een-tot-een onderhoude plaas gevind het met werknemers en bestuurders. Opinies en persepsies speel 'n belangrike rol om die uitkomstes van werkersdeelname te bepaal, die studie het dus gevind dat individue binne die organisasie verskeie positiewe betekenisse heg aan werkersdeelname. Ses werkersdeelname temas sowel as sub-temas was ook geïdentifiseer. Daar is egter geen werkerdeelname patroon wat elke organisasie sal pas nie, wat van toepassing is op een situasie kan heeltemal nie van toepassing wees op 'n ander situasie. Die resultate en informasie in hierdie studie kan organisasies help om effektiewe werkersdeelname strategieë te ontwikkel sowel as hulle help om hierdie strategieë te implementeer.*

## 1. INTRODUCTION

Opinions and perceptions play a vital role in determining the variety and extent of participation outcomes for this reason an exploratory research approach was utilised, since no studies have focused on employee partition as a broad concept, but only on organisations with one or more themes of employee participation. These various studies and literature has created a basic frame of reference against which employee participation as a broad concept. For this reason, this article will focus on employee participation and its themes as well as deriving sub-themes associated with these themes. This will be accomplished through the use of semi-structured interviews. In this chapter the problem statement will be stated, the objectives and research design will also be identified. Thereafter the results will be discussed and in the closure of this chapter the recommendations and limitations of the study will be highlighted.

## 2. PROBLEM STATMENT

Employee participation has assumed various themes over time and across countries. Result being that there is consequently 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 & Wilson, 2006; Baken, et al., 2004; Poutsma, Nijs & Poole, 2003; Pendleton 1997), or even participation through self-management (Palgi, 2006; Rosner, 2006). By contrast Venter (2009) has identified a broader view of participation by identifying consultation, collective bargaining, joint decision-making, co-management, self-management and financial participation as the various themes of participation. Busck, Knudsen, Lind (2010) confirmed these various themes and also stated that all the above themes fall under the concept employee participation and implies influence or potential influence in the work environment.

Most successful organisations knows that their success lies in their employees and their attitude towards their organisations (Davidson & Mazibuko, 2011) and for this reason as previously mentioned the general objective of this study is to examine the opinions and perceptions of employee participation as broad concept. Therefore this study will focus on the following themes of employee participation: consultation, collective bargaining, joint decision making, co-management, self-management and financial participation.

### *2.1. Consultation*

During consultation, management must acquire the opinions of employees on matters of mutual interest prior to make a final decision, consultation can thus be characterised as the method to exchanging ideas, opinions and suggestions (Koukladaki, 2010). Consultation under the Labour Relations Act 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). Organisation 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 gives employees the opportunity to exercise influence over broader organisational issues. 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, Nesheim, & Olsen 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, but this is the exception rather than the rule, 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 (SA, 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 haven't been effective. Although both employees and managers were present during these councils, employees had very limited power 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 workplace forum. Workplace forums can be seen as an "in-house institution for employee participation and representation at the workplace" (Erasmus, et al., (2003), p.701) Kester and Britwum (2007) defined workplace forums as "institutions which bring together representatives of workers and of managers to take part, jointly, in enterprise decision-

making" (p. 49). For the purpose of this study the concept workplace forums will be used to include similar institutions such as workplace councils, joint consultative councils, labour-management councils, and so on. According to Ramutsheli (2001), workplace forums do not suit all organisations. Workplace forums can only be formed in organisations with more than 100 employees.

From the above mentioned information, one can make the conclusion that consultation retains the managerial right to make the final decision. It is however important to note that negotiation is not a once off situation, for the relationship between employer and employees to be understood and to improve, consultation needs to be a continuous process (Willmott, 2003).

### *2.2. Collective Bargaining*

Labour relations is 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 the most generally acceptable in both industrialised and developing countries (Ntumba, 2003) and can be seen as a process where unions and employers meet in order to reach an agreement (Harrison, 2004). This agreement is usually expressed in a contract, which can include provisions about terms and conditions of employment such as: Salary, bonus payments, overtime etc. (Makhakhe, 2005). Collective bargaining can therefore be seen as a medium to 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 to take active actions the find common ground for agreement (Grogan, 2003)

According to ILO collective bargaining is 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, Dundon, Grugulis, 2007). This exchange of views and concerns will take place through a communication process in which individuals involved is intended to reach a compromise or agreement to the satisfaction of both parties (Ury, Fisher, Patton, 2000). Negotiation therefore allows individuals to become effective in voicing their opinions and to have their work recognized (Nel, 2002). Negotiation should not be confused with consultation as negotiation commits both parties reaching agreement, whereas

consultation is merely a commitment to seek views (Anon, 2011). Employees therefore get involved in mutual decision-making with management (Hodson, 2001), which will brought about worker participation (Harrison, 2004). According to Price (2007) studies of industrial negotiations have worsen because there is a lack of clarity of the aims or goals, there is a poor understanding of the situation or the apparent dispute is not a real problem. It is therefore necessary for the process of collective bargaining and negotiation to be successful and efficient that it must be based on a meaningful balance between cooperation and competition between management and workers (Nel, 2002). Ury, Fisher and Patton (2000) noted that successful negotiation should produce a wise agreement and it should improve the relationship between the different parties involved.

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, therefore alone it is not good enough to address labour relations (Makhakhe, 2005)

### *2.3. 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 higher 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 which were ordinarily the responsibility of the manger or employer (Wickramasinghe & 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 & 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). Information comes in all shapes and sizes and having relevant information about the organisation will help employees to better understand why things are done the way they are (Mc Whirter, 1995; Wilkinson, et al., 2010).

According to literature joint decision making has various advantages. From an organisation's point of view joint decision making can lead to greater employee-employer co-operation (Summers & Hymann 2005) as well as increased commitment and motivation from employees toward the organisation's objectives (Nzimande 1998). Joint decision making can also lead to reducing in absenteeism, grievances, tension and stress (Shapiro, 2002), therefore leading to greater effectiveness of the organisation (Palgi, 2006; Kallenberg, et al., 2009). Employees are less likely to question or undermine decisions if they felt they took a part in making that decisions (Nzimande 1998). Joint decision making can also lead to employee's growing identification towards the organisation (Palgi, 2006), therefore also leading to greater job satisfaction and attitude change (Summers & Hymann 2005; Bakain, et al., 2004). However the manner in which communication is conducted plays a significant role in motivating employees to take part in decision making as well as other work related activities (Msada, 2000). Communication can be seen as a process where ideas are being produced and exchanged (Msada, 2000).

Noah (2008) stated that the denial of workers to take actively part in the decision-making of the organisation can be identified as one of the major causes of problems which manifest in the daily work lives of the employee. In South Africa various companies are trying to involve employees in decision making through implementing voluntary structures, these structures have been proven to enhance cooperation between labour and management (Horwitz, Jain, Mbabane, 2005; Anstey, 1997).

### *2.4. Co-management*

Co-management in participation can be defined as a conscious and intended effort by mangers, to provide role-expanding opportunities for individual employees and groups at lower levels in the organisation (Glew, et al., 1995). Co-management therefore enables workers to be represented on management level as well as on decision-making structures in the organisation (Venter, 2009), which would bring forth a measure of shared power (Whitty, 1996). According to Kester and Britwum (2007) workers that participate at this level in the organisation is 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,

Mac Duffie, Pil, 2010). There are also various benefits associated with employees participating in co-management teams, according to Klein, et al., (2000) it provides a mechanism for reducing 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).

Co-management in employee participation may lead to additional interactions with management and employees and could provide new opportunities for developing a trustful and supporting relationship (Weber & Weber, 2001). When employees and managers become mutually responsible for completing an assignment they must interact in a different way by supporting each other (Van Mierlo, et al., 2005, Ramutsheli, 2001). The core of co-management can therefore be seen as the essential relationships which are being created in the workplace (Whitty, 1996).

### *2.5. 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 organisations objectives and values and make it their own responsibility. Self-managed work team can therefore be seen as groups of employees who are fully responsible for a well-defined segment in the organisation (Coetzee, 2003).

Self-management can also be described as an individual's independence from organisational career management and dependence on oneself (Arthur & Rousseau, 1996). Self-managed work teams are responsible for making their own decisions as well as finding ways in completing their tasks (Coetzee, 2003), they therefore control their own destiny in using their autonomy (Rosner, 2006). According to Kallenberg, et al., (2009) autonomy refers to the degree of discretion and initiation that an employee is able to use within his working environment. Practitioners of self-management continuously examine their environment for opportunities to advance their effectiveness as well as their career success (Castaneda,

Kolenko & Aldag 1999). 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) supported this statement by arguing the fact 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. Self-management can therefore be characterised by the use of a bottom-down approach instead of the traditional top-down approach (Rosner, 2006). It is assumed that self-managed organisation will be productive, healthy, as well as self-sustaining (Rosner, 2006) since self-management enables employees to develop, share and apply their knowledge more fully (Kallenberg, et al, 2009). Langfred (2007) also stated that self-management will lead to an organisation that will be more flexible in adapting to various situations and conditions.

### *2.6. Financial participation*

Financial participation may assume many forms in an organisation 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). Employees thus share in the success of the organisation, meaning that there is a direct link between the proportion of their compensation and the organisation's or department's performance. Financial participation normally has two principle objectives, to stimulate employee's effort as well as co-operation between employees and management (Poole & Jenkins, 1991; 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 & Carbott, 2006; Summers & Hymann, 2005; Poutsma, et al., 2003). According to Pendleton (1997) and Poutsma, et al., (2003), shared ownership schemes are primarily gained from long term increase in the shared value of the organisation, where as profit sharing schemes, also called cash-based profit sharing, are rewards that are paid more or less immediately from the organisation's profit.

As Levine and Tyson (1990) noted, effective participation requires that employees must be rewarded for extra effort. Their remuneration also needs to be linked with the organisation's performance and productivity (Rizzo & Carbott, 2006). Just as participation can lead to demand of profit sharing, profit sharing can lead to demand of participation. Financial participation can therefore be perceived as a reward for employees for becoming more involved in the organisation (Poutsma, et al., 2003).

Financial participation promise to exert fundamentally positive effects at the workplace through removing the boundries between employer and employee and making it less visible (Summers & Hymann, 2005). The concept financial participation have a substantial effect on enhancing an employee's motivation, job attitudes and productivity and therefore also enhancing organisational performance (Baken, et al., 2004; Van Tonder, 2007). Financial participation is also known to enhance employee's commitment to an organisation (Poutsma, et al., 2003), this is especially needed in our competitive economic environment today.

## 3. OBJECTIVES

As previously mentioned opinions and perceptions play a vital role in determining the variety and extent of participation outcomes (Glew, et al., 1995). The way in which employee participation is interpreted will influence the effectiveness of an employee participation program (Beetge, 2000), negative opinions and perceptions can therefore lead to unsuccessful employee participation programs on the long run (Langan-Fox, Code, Gray & Langfield-Smith, 2002). According to (Rosner, 2006), employee participation is usually limited to specific organisational issues or specific levels of the organisation, as a result for employee participation to be effective it should be developed according to the organisation's unique requirements and circumstances (Seopa, 2000). Therefore this article will investigate the opinions and perceptions of employees within this specific engineering support services company in this way current models of employee participation can be expanded or be assisted (Langan-Fox, et al., 2002).

### 3.1. General objective

Examine the opinions and perceptions of employees and managers regarding employee participation. As mentioned in chapter 1 this objective has been broaden and further discussed in the form of the following specific objectives:

### 3.2. Specific objectives

- To determine employee participation according to literature
- To explore the meaning of employee participation as understood by employees and managers
- To explore 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
- To make recommendations for future research concerning employees and managers
- opinions and perceptions regarding employee participation

## 4. RESEARCH DESIGN

For the purposes of this research article, a qualitative research design was utilise. In qualitative research the research can approach the reality from constructivist position, this allows for multiple meanings of individual experiences. Qualitative research thus made it possible to examine and determine the opinions and perceptions of employees and managers regarding employee participation.

### 4.1 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 working in different divisions within the organisation. The sample was thus drawn from the seven divisions within the organisation namely Welders, HP Pipework, General Ductings, Mill end liners, General office, Soot Blower Maintenance as well as Rigger and Tacklers.

The measuring instrument used in this study was semi-structured one-on-one interviews with employees as well as managers. All interviews were faced-to-faced. Consent to conduct the research was received from the organisation. The personnel clerk provided names and details of participants that were participating. The sample size was governed by data saturation. Data saturation occurred after 8 interviews. The interviews took place in a comfortable

environment. A ‘do not disturb’ sign was put outside the door to ensure that the interviews was not interrupted. The introduction took place in a friendly and warm manner in order to put the participant at ease. The context and aim of the interview was then explained, and with the permission of the participant, to ensure that no data was lost during interviews a tape recorder was used to ensure that no data was lost during interviews. The participants were informed that they would remain anonymous and that they can withdraw from the study at any time. On the day of the interview each participant was provided with a confidentially agreement. This agreement stated the aim of the research and guaranteed autonomy and confidentiality of the interviews. Before each interview, the participants were also asked to complete a short biographical questionnaire that included gender, age, race, marital status as well as their position in the organisation. Descriptive information of the sample is given in Table 1.

**Table 1**

**Characteristics of the Participants**

| Item | Category | Frequency | Percentage |
|---|---|---|---|
| **Gender** | Male | 7 | 87.5% |
| | Female | 1 | 12.5% |
| **Age** | 20 – 39 years | 5 | 62.5% |
| | 40 – 59 years | 2 | 25% |
| | 60+ years | 1 | 12.5% |
| **Race** | African | 2 | 25% |
| | White | 6 | 75% |
| **Marital status** | Married | 7 | 87.5% |
| | Single | 1 | 12.5% |
| **Manager (supervisor)** | Yes | 4 | 50% |
| | No | 4 | 50% |

The sample consisted of mainly male participants (87.5 %). Most of the participants were in the ages between 20 and 39 years (62.5%) and were also married (87.5%). Regarding the race of the participants, 6 (75%) were white and 2 (25%) were African. Half of the participants (50%) were managers (supervisors) as the other half (50%) were employees.

All the participants were asked standard questions about employee participation and its various themes. Interviews lasted between 20 and 30 minutes. As aforementioned these various employee participation themes is confirmed through literature. These employee participation themes are: consultation, negotiation, joint decision-making, co-management, self management and financial participation. As the interviews were semi-structured, some participants were also asked additional questions in order to obtain a greater understanding of their opinions and perceptions about employee participation. When the interviews were conducted the researcher had an open body posture and leant slightly forward to ensure that the participants were comfortable. Non-directive dialogue techniques were used in assisting participants to share their opinions and perceptions. These techniques consisted of minimal verbal responses, paraphrasing, clarification, reflection, reflective summary and silence (Wentzel, 2006). 'Yes' or 'no' questions were avoided as well as leading questions. A preliminary pilot study was completed before the main investigation proceeded. This assisted the researcher in making necessary modifications of the data gathering instruments.

Immediately after each interview, field notes regarding that interview were transcribed. According to (Wentzel, 2006), "field notes are a written account of the things the researcher hears, sees experiences and thinks in the course of the interview" (p. 9).

Guba and Lincoln (1981) as cited in Trochin and Donnelly (2007) stated that credibility, transferability, dependability and conformability is the four criteria's for judging the trustworthiness of a qualitative study.

The following was done to ensure that the abovementioned criteria's were met:

- The researcher was supervised in conducting the research
- Anonymity and confidentiality were guaranteed to all participants
- The objectives of this study were explained to each participant
- Participation in this study was voluntary
- After data gathering, data analysis took place thereafter literature confirmation was done
- Interviews were conducted until data saturation was reached
- Field notes were taken directly after each interview to ensure that no data were lost

### 4.2. Data analysis

Data analysis is the route that is followed to bring order, structure and meaning to all the collected data. It's thus an essential aspect to examine employees and manager's understanding, knowledge, attitude, feelings and experiences towards employee participation in order to understand their opinions and perceptions regarding employee participation. This article used content-, conversation- and discourse analysis to analyse the results of the interviews.

#### 4.2.1. Content analysis

Content analysis can be defined as "a systematic approach to qualitative data analysis that identifies and summarises message content" (Maree, 2010, p.101). 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 on the similarities and differences in the interviews in order to corroborate or to disconfirm literature about employee participation.

#### 4.2.2. Conversation analysis

Conversation analysis can be defined as "the study of talk interaction and attempts to describe the orderliness, structure and sequential patterns of interactions" (Maree, 2010, p.102). The reason for choosing this strategy is because a detailed inspection of the tape recordings and transcriptions made from these recordings were done. In doing this patterns and structures have been identified. Focus was specifically on the informal talk of participants.

#### 4.2.3. Discourse analysis

Discourse analysis refers to "expressing oneself using words and to the variety and flexibility of language in the way language is actually used in ordinary interaction" (Maree, 2010, p.102). The reason for choosing this strategy is because it is essential to analyse written and spoken words in order to reveal discursive sources of power, authority, inequality and bias, as well as how these sources are initiated and maintained. Focus was thus specifically on the meaning of the spoken and written words of participants. The researcher made use of a set of existing codes when categorising employee participation, also known as a priori codes (Maree, 2010). These codes were developed through the researcher's literature study in Chapter 1.

## 5. RESULTS

The general objective of this study was to examine the opinions and perceptions of employees and managers regarding employee participation. As employee participation can be seen a very broad spectrum of different structures and processes (Busck, et al., 2010; Budd, Gollan & Wilkinson, 2007), it is therefore necessary to structure the findings of this study in two phases. The first phase of this study will explore the different meanings employees and managers associated with employee participation. Available employee participation themes will also be explored. As previously mentioned these employee participation themes have already been identified in literature (Venter, 2009; Busck, et al., 2010). The reason for exploring employee's and manager's meaning of employee participation is, because the meaning one gives to a subject will influence the opinions and perceptions one express about that subject (Seopa, 2000). Therefore the way in which employee participation is interpreted will have an influence on the effectiveness and implementation of employee participation programs (Beetge, 2000). It is important to note that each employee participation scheme or model differs from one another; one specific scheme that has worked for one organisation will not necessarily work for another organisation (Ntumba, 2003). In exploring the availability of various employee participation themes in this company the researcher will get a better understanding as to what structures and processes contributes to employee participation as a whole.

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 which will determine the specific theme. It often happens that authors use different terminology in their explanation about employee participation, just because the various structures or processes doesn't have the same name as the main employee participation theme, doesn't mean that it is not contributing to that specific employee participation theme (Nel, 1997) These sub-themes will be determined through literature as well as interviews held with employees and managers.

**Phase 1**

## 5.1. Meaning of employee participation

In the first place, this study explores employees and management understanding of employee participation. According to Seopa (2000) 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. Respondents made the following statements when they were asked what employee participation is:

*"...it is an easy and difficult question. For me, I like when people understand why, so my participation to the job is to get the person to understand why something is right or wrong, so next time he will understand why he is doing it wrong and he will not do it again."; "Vir my is werkersdeelname wanneer ons een of ander probleem het en ons vra dan die mense se insette. Ons vra hulle wat dink hulle, hoe dink hulle kan ons dit oplos."; "...as almal saam werk as 'n span. As daar byvoorbeeld werk gedoen moet word en sekere prosedures moet gevolg word, dan kom ons almal saam en bespreek dit, sodat daar nie een persoon kan se dat hy nie geweet het nie."; "...wanneer mens bymekaar kom en praat oor dit wat 'n mens ongelukkig maak en wat daar nog in plek gesit moet word." "...when they say in the safety talks what we are going to do today and what it is that we can do to prevent an accident.";"Ek glo dat werkersdeelname baie belangrik is, definitief. Ons hou elke oggend meeting oor wat die ouens ongelukkig maak en wat ons nog in plek moet sit."; "...as die omstandighede in die werksplek lekker is en mens kan as 'n span saam werk, nie noodwendig oor die weg kom nie. Mens gaan nie altyd 'n groep kry wat met almal oor die weg kom nie, maar as almal as 'n span saam werk kan 'n mens die werk gedoen kry"...omdat jy nie werksmense van 'n boom af pluk nie, jy kweek hulle, moet julle maar saam werk. Jy moet somtyds by hulle aanpas, maar ook jy vorm hulle met ondervinding en tyd."*

## 5.2. 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 since the organisation has only 70 employees there are no specific workplace forums. This however doesn't mean that management doesn't acquire the opinion of employees on matters of mutual interest prior to make a final decision. The following quotations underscore this finding:

*"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."; "Elke oggend het ons team talks, ons noem dit ook Toolbox Talks. Dit is basies die enigste manier om goeie kommunikasie met die ouens te hê op een slag."; "...al die werknemers is deel van hierdie praatjie."; "...we do have a lot of team talks. Every morning. They say that everyone with problems must come forward and tell their problems. Every day people will complain and give their input and stuff." ; "...ons bespreek die probleem en ook hoe ons dit gaan oplos...jy betrek al die ouens om elkeen se opinie te kry, so verstaan ek hierdie ou het daardie opinie en dit is dan hoe ons as 'n span saam werk."; "...everybody has the right to say and everybody has the right to express their feelings."; "...elke ou kry 'n beurt om in die oggende oor iets te praat en dan moet die ander ouens almal input gee"; "Ja ons hou vergaderings as daar werk inkom om te besluit wie gaan waar werk en wie gaan wat doen."*

Respondents stated the following when asked how they feel about these daily meetings:

*"...elke tweede oggend mag daar dalk struwelinge wees, maar voor ons uitstap is dit uitgesort. Elke ou het maak sy eie seining."; "...dit is baie goed om hierdie meetings te hê, want almal se sy se en kry dit uit die pad."; "...ons het al baie sukses behaal deur hierdie praatjies."* One candidate however did not share these positive feelings towards these daily meetings, he stated *"...it is not waste of time as such sometimes it does help, but sometimes it is unnecessary."*

**Collective bargaining (Theme 2)**

Collective bargaining has become the core instrument for negotiating (Beetge, 2000; Price, 2007). 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 recognized (Nel, 2002). Participants mentioned that the organisation did the following to effectively voice their opinions and to have their work recognized:

*"Die supervisor staan nie altyd en praat nie, jy kies 'n ou uit sy groep uit en se vir hom vandag gaan jy nou praat oor werk en dinge."; "If something is wrong the manager will tell the person but is if something is good he will praise the person. And this motivates the workers highly. In here the site manager knows everybody's name, so he talks to you by name, highly motivational because site manger is treating each one like a human being."; "...everybody has the right to say and everybody has te right to express their feelings and stuff";"...elke ou kry 'n beurt om in die oggende oor iets te praat en dan moet die anders ouens input gee omtrent dit, of hulle dit nou like of nie"; "...in die oggende en ook party Vrydae oggende dan praat ons bietjie oor wat maak die ouens ongelukkig en wat ons nog in plek moet sit." ; "...every morning people will complain and give their input."*

**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 it is just small decisions. Participants had the following motivation for their opinions:

*"Waar ons organisasie 'n probleem het, dan vra ons vir die mense hulle insette, hoe dink julle kan ons die probleem oplos, wat dink julle."; "...ek weet wat in hulle werk aangaan en hulle weet wat in my werk aan gaan en so help ons mekaar uit";"As daar groot besluite geneem moet word in die organisasie sal ek se ek het wel 'n se in daardie besluite veral in die tipe werk wat ek doen, omdat ek met mense werk word my opinie in ag geneem."; "Ja ek dink almal werk saam veral in 'n span. As daar byvoorbeeld werk gedoen moet word en daar is sekere prosedures wat gevolg moet word of iets het van hoof kantoor gekom dan sal ons dit bespreek in die Toolbox talks, sodat daar nie een persoon is wat se hy het nie geweet nie"; "Wel baie keer word jy nie gehoor nie, maar op die ou einde van die dag of hulle dit wil hoor of nie wil hoor nie, sekere dinge moet net in plek kom."; "...I feel I can gather information which will be used when decisions are being made."; "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"; "Kyk hierdie is nie dink een ou gaan alles reg kry nie, ongelukkig werk dit nie so nie. Mens kan dink jy het watter geleerdheid, maar partykeer het mens net daardie iemand nodig wat aan 'n ander idee kan dink."; "...op die ou einde van die dag moet 'n mens 'n verhouding bou met*

*jou manager, dit is belangrik dat 'n mens oor die besluite moet praat want op die ou einde van die dag moet jy en hy gelukkig wees."*

**Co-management (Theme 4)**

Co-management enable employees to be represented on management level in the organisation (Venter, 2009) for this reason co-management can be defined as a conscious and intended effort by mangers, to provide role-expanding opportunities for individual employees and groups at lower levels in the organisation (Glew, et al., 1995).

Within co-management the focus will be on the essential relationships which are being created in the workplace (Whitty, 1996). Respondents indicated that the relationship between employees and management is based on support and trust:

*"We work on very balanced rules. Our job is based on trust and the believe that each of us know what we are doing."; "...ek het darem die ondersteuning van my manager af."; "...this is trust, we are like a family here. We have a father and children, figure of speech."; "Ek kry definitief die ondersteuning van ons management af."; "...ek vertrou my werkers want ek is nie die hele tyd daar om toesig oor hulle te hou nie."; "I feel highly comfortable if I have a problem to go to my manager."; "Die site manager sal altyd luister as jy 'n probleem het en hy sal'n punt daarvan maak om jou the help."; "Ek beveel en moedig die werkers aan dat my deur altyd oop staan vir enige een en dit is ook hoe ek 'n goeie werksverhouding met my mense opbou, maak nie saak watter probleem dit is nie, huislik of werksverband"; "...everybody is very helpfull"; "My mense vertrou my, hulle kom elke keer na my toe as hulle 'n probleem het en ek help hulle sover ek kan, ek moet, dit is my werk"*

**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. Participants mentioned that:

*"As daar sekere dinge gedoen moet word neem ek die inisiatief en sal ek net rapporteer wat ek gedoen het, selfs met my eie werkers as hulle dit self raak sien kan hulle dit verander, hulle wys my net." ; "Daar is dinge wat wel met die site manager bespreek moet word, maar tot 'n mate kan ek self besluite neem." ; "...kom ek se vir jou so, as 'n werker na my toe kom en se*

*dat hy het nou gedink as ons die ding nou so doen sal dit beter werk en as ek dit in sien dan sal ek se, doen soos wat jy goed dink. Dit lyk vir my goed." ; "Ek moet baie keer my eie kennis en vaardigheid gebruik om 'n besluit te neem en dan net later vir die supervisor se, maar as dit iets ernstig is sal ek eers vir hom wag." ; "...ek se vir my mense dit is wat gedoen moet word, dan moet hulle hulle progress rapporteer asook hoe hulle dit gaan doen, sodat 'n mens 'n ogie kan hou. So ek gee hulle vrye teuels om hulle eie ding te doen."*

Although great responsibility and empowerment is given to employees and management some of the participants were concerned that not all of the employees are committed to successfully handle their responsibilities. The following quotations proved this concern:
*"Nie almal hier is gecommited tot hulle werk nie. Sommige ouens is net hier om die tyd om te kry of om te se hy het 'n werk. Dit is sleg maar dit is die waarheid. Dit is wat ek nou die dag vir die ouens gesê het, probeer net 'n bietjie jou attitude verander, bietjie anders dink oor dinge en nie altyd dieselfde nie." ; "...hoekom die jong mense van vandag nie meer commitment het nie, weet ek nie. Toe ons jong mense was, het ons belanggestel om te presteer en om iewers iets te bereik. Vandag se jong mense gee net om oor hoeveel geld word in hulle rekening betaal."; "Jy sien baie mense is nie dieselfde in die kop nie. Baie mense is nog nie daar waar hy verstaan nie. Jy se vir hom ons gaan more die ding doen en dan more het hy klaar vergeet."*

When these concerns came to light, I asked the supervisors what strategies are in place to increase employee's commitment. Reason for asking this question is because according to (Van Tonder, 2007) in order to increase the number of motivated employee's one should question management's ability to employ these strategies. Supervisors commented the following:
*"Om my mense meer committed te maak, organise ek baie vinnig 'n bonus. Nie net geldsgewys nie, maar partykeer organise ek ook 'n sertifikaat." ; "Jy weet ons ouens is dankbaar om werk te hê, jy sal alles doen om jou werk te behou." ; "Daar is baie goed wat gebeur, ons hou spanbou om die mense involved te kry. Die tweede ding wat ons doen om die mense te motiveer is om vir hulle te se, hier is jou brood en botter en as jy nie jou werk gaan doen nie gaan jy nie geld hê om vir jou brood en botter en klere te koop nie. En dan die derde ding is dat ons 'n incentive sisteem het, maar dit is die laaste ding wat jy doen om 'n wortel voor die ou te hou en vir hom te se jy gaan meer geld hê."*

**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). It could be seen from the interviews that all participants agreed that the organisation does have rewarding systems in place for hard work. The following quotations support this finding:

*"We get additional hours, we get a bonus."; "We get a production bonus."; "If there is a plan and we must complete certain work in certain time, but if someone work ahead, we get rewarded."; "...as ons 'n miljoen ure kry dan hou ons gewoonlik 'n braai of as die company wil hemde gee. Wat ook al help om die ouens aan te moedig vir die volgende ure." ; "Dit is gewoonlik vir almal wat involve was. As 'n ou ook iets goed doen kry hy byvoorbeeld 'n kaartjie dan kan hy verniet 'n koeldrank gaan kry of so. Elke supervisor kan sy eie mense kies wat die ekstra myl geloop het. Hulle sal dan ook 'n sertifikaat kry of iets in daardie lyn net om hulle weer te motiveer." ; "If the production is up to standard and also above standard, the whole group gets bonuses"; "...elke ekstra hoeveelheid gewerk kry ekstra vergoeding." ; "...ons het 'n safety award wat ons vir die werkers gee en ook 'n sertifikaat vir willingness to walk the extra mile. Dit is vir die ou wat byvoorbeeld uit sy pad sal gaan om iemand anders te help. Ek dink hierdie sertifikaat tel dan ook later vir hom in sy verwysing vir 'n ander werk. Dan het hulle ook iets vir die ou wat iets op 'n baie save manier gedoen het, die ouens ken nie altyd die safety procedures nie. Hierdie ouens kry dan koepons wat hulle by die kantien 'n coke of iets gaan koop."*

Participants also agreed that these rewards systems do work:

*"Ja wel, dit werk. Die ding is hulle wil nie regtig geld uithaal vir sulke tipe goed nie. So mens moet maar klein goedjies doen, en op die einde van die dag help dit." ; "...van hulle sal nie daaroor omgee nie, maar daar is van hulle wat dit wel raaksien."; "Dit is 'n baie goeie ding, dit is genuine 'n baie goeie ding. Jy kry dadelik jou deel van hulle kant af. Hulle voel nou omdat jy vir my georganise het organise ek vir jou."; "The money is great, but sometimes it is dangerous, because sometimes the workers work to fast and if he doesn't get his goggles he will just carry on without them. If you work faster you are going to make mistakes and then you must do everything over again and then the site manager will be on your neck." ; "Dit is die klein goedjies wat die mense motiveer." ; "Dit is my geaardheid om mense reg te behandel, dit is wanneer jy jou beste produksie uit hulle kry."*

**Phase 2**

### 5.3. Sub-themes

This phase specifically focus on deriving sub-themes from the various employee participation themes. Sub-themes were confirmed through literature en participant's responses. Below, each theme and relevant sub-themes will be presented as well as discussed. Some of the verbatim extracts were also included in the table.

**Table: 2**

**Sub-themes derived from various themes of employee participation**

| Theme | Sub-theme | Verbatim extracts from raw data |
|---|---|---|
| **Consultation** | Daily meetings | *"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."* |
| **Collective bargaining** | Involvement | *"...elke ou kry 'n beurt om in die oggende oor iets te praat en dan moet die anders ouens input gee omtrent dit."* |
| **Joint decision making** | Communication<br>Information sharing | *"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"; "Kyk hierdie is nie dink een ou gaan alles reg kry nie, ongelukkig werk dit nie so nie. Mens kan dink jy het watter geleerdheid, maar parykeer het mens net daardie iemand nodig wat aan 'n ander idee kan dink."* |
| **Co-management** | Support<br>Trust | *"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"; "Die site manager sal altyd luister as jy 'n problem het en hy sal'n punt daarvan maak om jou the help."* |
| **Self-management** | Responsibility<br>Commitment | *"As daar sekere dinge gedoen moet word neem ek die inisiatief en sal ek net rapporteer wat ek gedoen het, selfs met my eie werkers as hulle dit self raak sien kan hulle dit verander, hulle wys my net."; "Nie almal hier is gecommited tot hulle werk nie. Sommige ouens is net hier om die tyd om te kry of om te se hy het 'n werk. Dit is sleg maar dit is die waarheid"* |
| **Financial participation** | Rewards | *"We get a production bonus."; "...ons het 'n safety award wat ons vir die werkers gee en ook 'n sertifikaat vir willingness to walk the extra mile. Dit is vir die ou wat byvoorbeeld uit sy pad sal gaan om iemand anders te help.* |

## 6. DISCUSSION

### 6.1 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 express about that subject (Seopa, 2000). Therefore the way in which employee participation is interpreted will have an influence on the effectiveness and implementation of employee participation programs (Beetge, 2000). As seen in the interviews all of the participants had a relatively good understanding of what employee participation is and what it consist of. Employees and management also know the benefits that come with employee participation for themselves as well as the organisation. As Gollan and Wilkinson noted (2007) on the one hand employee participation will have a positive effect on quality and productivity, while on the other hand it could identify and deal with organisation problems. Although there was no specific employee

participation scheme in place, employees did feel that they were a part of the organisation through various techniques.

The overall feeling towards employee participation was also positive, therefore meaning each employee is motivated to become a part of the organisation and giving their best. This is also confirmed through literature as early as the 1900's in a study done by Nel and Van Rooyen (1989) as the reason for employee participation is that it will increase and improve motivation as well as the atmosphere within an organisation. And this will lead to more job satisfaction from employees as well as management.

From participants interviews it quickly becomes evident that employees attach a range of ideas and standards to the concept of employee participation. Individual's responses varied in terms of what they consider important for employee participation as well as what they expect out of employee participation. This said, it doesn't necessarily means 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 which may lead them to view the organisation in different ways and therefore have very different perceptions of and reactions to employee participation (Ramutsheli (2001). Employee participation is such a broad theme with considerable range of definitions (Budd, Gollan & Wilkinson, 2006) that employees can therefore find it difficult to mention just one general accepted idea and standard. Dundon, et al., (2004) confirmed this statement by observing that various types of employee participation can both overlap and convey different meanings while the same process can be translated in very ways in different organisations.

### 6.2. 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. In investigating employee's opinions and perceptions in detail, current employee participation models can be expanded or assisted in implementation (Langan-Fox, et al., 2002).

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

- Management take employee's views in consideration.

- Management regularly seek employee's 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 a 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 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.

## 6.3. Sub-themes

### Consultation (Theme 1)

#### *Daily meetings*

During consultation, management must acquire the opinions of employees on matter of mutual interest, consultation can thus be characterises as the method to exchange ideas, opinions and suggestions (Koukladaki, 2010). In the organisation consultation take 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, how to increase work effectiveness, how their work must be carried out and how their specific duties must be allocated among themselves. It can therefore be concluded that the organisation use daily meetings as a method to get various suggestion from its employees. As Roberts and Wood (2011) stated if management do not consult with their employees they might miss out skilled advice and also lose commitment to the solutions taken. As mentioned above safety concerns is also addressed in the *Toolbox talks*, when teams address problems which is not directly related to productivity it can ultimately lead to improved worker preferences and individual commitment (Hunter, MacDuffie & Doucer, 2002). It is important to note that the organisation does not have any established workplace forums, as workplace forums can only be formed in organisations with more than 100 employees (Ramutsheli, 2001). The organisation currently only has 70 employees.

During daily meetings every employee can take part and express their feelings as well as give their input. According to Mclagan and Nel (1995) this participation makes employees experience that attention is paid to their suggestions and ideas, thus enhancing their self esteem. This would explain why overall the employees felt that these daily meetings were necessary and successful.

From the interviews it can be concluded that management realise that consultation is not just a once off situation, they understood that consultation needs to be a continuous process otherwise the relationship between the two parties will not improve. This is the reason why they continuously ask for their employee's input, what they think and how they think various problems could be resolved. Management should however also note that the success of consultation lies in the level of issues discussed (Gifford, 2006), thus management should not just require the opinions of employees on small issues within the organisation but also on fundamental and long term organisational issues. This will lead to more employee engagement and higher quality of debate (Gifford, 2006). According to Roberts and Wood (2011) the following can be done to ensure that consultation is effective:

- Make sure everyone knows the boundaries of the conversation
- Be prepared to hear what you don't want to hear. When voicing criticism, do it with respect and professionalism

**Collective bargaining (Theme 2)**

***Involvement***

Participation in collective bargaining has become the main instrument for negotiating (Beetge, 2000). Negotiation therefore allows individuals to become effective in voicing their opinions and to have their work recognized (Nel, 2002). Participants mentioned that they felt comfortable in voice their opinions each morning as everyone is given a fair chance to speak and give their inputs. Employee's also mentioned that management do involve them in decisions about work related problems, management also regularly inform them about how the organisation is doing. Willmott (2003) stated if an organisation wants to involve their employees in the operating 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 are both sensible and respectful. According to Olivier (2010) the individual who is closest to problem, normally have the best inside as to how to solve it. If employees are involved in managing the organisation they will be self-motivated, achievement orientated and positively inclined towards accomplishing organisational goals (Baken, et al., 2004), they will also be more likely to believe that they can impact or initiate changes in the organisation (Weber & Weber, 2001). Involvement in the organisation occurs through self-management teams, upward feedback and receiving regular feedback on the organisations results. Employees mentioned however that they were less confident toward believing that management will act on their suggestions. This situation can lead to undesired outcomes as involvement between employees and managers can result in camaraderie (Msada, 2000).

**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 & 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 the sufficient and correct equipment to do their work (Kimball & Nink, 2006). Beetge (2000) supported this by stating that information sharing can be seen as a source of power and without it employee participation will be become impractical. Employee

information is usually provided by management to employees or their representatives (Koukladaki, 2010). Therefore there should be a mechanism in place in order to guarantee proper and correct flow of information. Participants mentioned that they are frequently informed about the organisations procedures, policies, goals etc. This is made possible through their daily meetings. One participant mentioned that he frequently makes a point of assuring that his team understand the reason for "why something is the way it is", he informs them the reason why an idea will work or not as well as the reason why certain decisions must be made. The motivation he use for frequently informing his workers is because if believe that if his workers do not know why they are doing something they will not attach much significance to it. Literature confirmed this statement, according to Hickey and Casner-Lotto (1998) information based on only needs to know restrict true participation. If employees lack information they can't fully understand how they can contribute to the organisation. Giving 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 & Patterson, 1998), therefore if employees are informed they can gain a better understanding of the organisation they are working for (Palgi, 2006). Employees are also less likely to question or undermine decision if they felt they took part in decision making (Nzimande, 1998), management must therefore be willing to make information available to employees if they desire to interact meaningfully with their employees (Ntumba, 2003).

According to Byars and Rue (2000) if meaningful information is transferred to relevant parties it can be described as communication. Open channels of communication in an organisation will therefore allow employees to be informed, ask questions and share information (Olivier, 2010). In the organisation managers continuously ask for the opinions of their employees as well as how they think a problem can be resolved in this way the organisation assuring that their people are continuously involved in issues concerning themselves. According to Msada (2000), this enhances communication and every one can identify with the final decision. However the manner in which communication is conducted plays a significant role in motivating employees to take part in decision making (Msada, 2000). 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 their management if they experience a problem, management mentioned that they will go out of their way to help and support their workers.

Employees and management also mentioned on various occasions that they trust each other and for communication to be successful it is necessary that there is trust on both sides (Msada, 2000).

Overall participants felt that they took part in decision making, although there was mixed feelings as to whether their input and suggestions will influence the final outcome. Management definitely understand the importance of involving employees in decision making as well as the various advantages joint decision making holds for building their relationship and for organisational effectiveness. As previously mentioned joint-decision making has various advantages for the organisation and employees (Summers & Hymann, 2005; Shapiro, 2002; Palgi, 2006; Kallenberg, et al., 2009).

**Co-management (Theme 4)**

***Support and Trust***

Co-management gives employees the ability to make decisions with the management (Beetge 2000) which will bring forth a measure of shared power (Whitty, 1996), for this reason decisions will be jointly taken on all matters of work-related issues. The researcher is of opinion that for these decisions to be taken correctly and in harmony there needs to be a certain amount of support and trust from both parties involved. Weber and Weber (2001), supports this statement by adding that co-management may lead to additional interactions with management and employees and could provide new opportunities for developing a trustful and supporting relationship. When employees and managers become mutually responsible for completing an assignment they must interact in a different way by supporting each other (Van Mierio et al., 2005, Ramutsheli, 2001).

Respondents indicated that the relationship between employees and management are 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 & Weber, 2001). According to Moore and Miljus (1989) supporting the people who do the work is the key to success.

Respondents also referred to the company as *"one big happy family who trust each other".* According to Holtzhausen (2008) trust reflects the belief that another party is reliable. In an

organisation where high levels of trust are present, developing employee participation practices will be in the order of the day (Kessler, Purcel, Shapiro, 2000). 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 & Wilkinson, 2007). If however there is no trust between employees and management it is doubtful whether management will give employees more autonomy when completing their own work (Langfred, 2007). In a study done by Forth, Bewley and Bryson (2004), it was found that the levels of trust between employees and managers appeared to be the highs in smaller firms. With this result in mind, it is not surprising that employees feel like one big happy family who trust each other as the company is relatively small in size.

**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 is issues (Wheatley & 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 do give them 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 (Kallenberg, et al., 2009). Self-management is therefore strongly linked with empowerment and autonomy (Elmuti, 1996). Empowerment increase employee's awareness of responsibility (Everett & Sohal, 1991) and for employees to take on responsibilities is to empower them (Nzimande 1998).

It is therefore important for an organisation to develop an environment that encourages freedom of thought and creativity (Ramutsheli, 2001). As previously mentioned employees together with mangers felt that they have various responsibilities, management also mentioned that they give their workers great responsibly when their tasks are being completed as they know it will help them to develop. This is confirmed in literature as

Nzimande (1998) stated that responsibility is a valuable form of learning and self-actualisation, responsibilities will also increase an employee's involvement within the organisation (Gifford, 2006). Although the organisation give 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 straight forward 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 to their loyalty towards their 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, Lorenzi, Skinner and Crosby, (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). It is therefore expected that employee commitment will result in various behaviours that will support the organisation, such as greater willingness to innovate, less absenteeism (Baken, et al., 2004), improved organisational performance (Rayton, 2006) and better financial performance (Bragg, 2002)

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 are crucial. Organisational change continues at an alarming pace and this may have a serious negative consequence on employee's attitudes (Weber & Weber, 2001). As a result management should recognise that positive employee attitudes is vital in order to achieve organisational goals and for employees to be effective (Eby, et al., 2000; Martin, 1998; Hoell, 2004).

According to Kim, et al., (2011) most antecedents of organisational commitment are related to organisational interventions to motivate employees, therefore managers were asked what strategies are in place to motivate commitment among their workers. Mangers mentioned that they motivate their team of employees through the following:

- Financial rewards

- Rewards: vouchers, certificates
- Team building

Mangers however also mentioned that although giving employees financial rewards motivates them greatly it should not be seen as an easy option to solve motivational problems. *"Om 'n wortel voor die ou se neus te hou",* should be considered as a last option. In a study done by Mc Whirter (1995) he also notes that although management don't want to treat employees like circus animals, by throwing them a treat if they do a trick, the truth is that money does talk. Poutsma, et al., (2003) confirmed this statement stating that financial rewards are known to enhance an employee's commitment to an organisation. There are many ways to built employee commitment and management often fail to realise that some of the most successful ways in doing so cost very little or nothing at all (Olivier 2010).

**Financial participation (Theme 6)**

***Rewards***

Financial participation can be seen as a human resource management reward strategy that seeks to align the interest of the employees jointly with those of the organisation (Poutsma, et al., 2003), 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: profit sharing and employee shared ownership (Rizzo & Carbott, 2006; Summers & Hyman, 2005; Poutsma, et al., 2003). As seen in 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 & Phillips, 2009), as a result employees are continuously seeking reward systems which reflect their individual contribution and performance (Van Tonder, 2007). Beetge (2000), agreed with this statement by adding that the bonus must be available to all employees and separate from personal income, bonus must also be payable in the form of collective consumption of employees. From the interviews and participant's 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 it is much more immediate and closely linked to organisational performance, as a result cash sharing

offers a direct link between employee's effort and reward (McNabb & Whitfield, 1998). Rewards can therefore be seen as important determinants of behaviour in organisations (Beetge, 2000).

One can make the 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. Rewards therefore vary from cash-based profit sharing to vouchers, T-shirts, braai's and certificates.

Management all agreed that their rewarding system does work, although their reward system might not necessarily be immense, they do what they can to motivate their workers. Management also mentioned that although some of the employees might not even see their effort, some of the employees however do see it and they are greatly motivated to do their best. People are motivated to perform an action when they perceive that the consequences of the action are favourable to them, in other words they will achieve goals or outcomes that they desire (Beetge, 2000).

## 7. CONCLUSION

This article aimed to provide an 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; for this reason the research was done. 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 (Seopa, 2000) Employee participation is such broad concept and for this reason the study was divided into two phases. Phase one aimed at exploring participant's meaning 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. As Seopa (2000) noted 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.

This study also identified six employee participation themes through literature and various semi-structured interviews. These themes are as follows: consultation, collective bargaining, joint decision making, co-management, self-management and financial participation. Some themes of employee participation are purposely designed to give employees a very modest role in the organisation, while others are designed to give employees a more significant role within the organisation.

Sub-themes of employee participation were also identified through literature and various semi-structured interviews. It can therefore be concluded that participation takes place through the following: daily meetings; involvement; communication and information sharing; support and trust; responsibility and commitment; and lastly rewards. As seen in 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 recognise that the employee doing the work often has the best knowledge of how it should be done. Management empower the workforce through giving them responsibilities, these decision is however limited and must also be discussed with the managers afterwards. All the themes of employee participation were therefore available in the organisation, just 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 promote it. The study however also revealed that there is mixed feelings as to whether employees input and suggestions will influence the final outcome. Participants also indicated that the organisation is currently struggling with commitment from their employees.

There is no one pattern of participation that will fit every organisation. What is suitable in one situation may be quite unsuitable in another situation. The information presented in this study can be used to develop effective employee participation strategies as well assist in implementing them.

## 8. LIMITATIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

In interpreting the findings from this research, its limitations should be considered:

- The sample is "Regional" in nature and only employees working at this specific engineering support services organisation is included in the sample. It therefore does not allow direct comparison between other types of organisations.
- Choice of variables could be criticised. There are other variables and constructs that could be added to the research. As employee participation is such a large and widely defined concept.
- There might be a possibility that some of the participants were concerned about the confidentiality of the interviews, especially since the interview were recorded with a voice recorder and this might have had an influence on the outcome of the results.
- Managers and employees have different backgrounds, educational levels and job characteristics which may lead them to view the organisation in different ways and therefore have very different perceptions of and reactions to employee participation.

Because of the limitations discussed above, there is a need to explore the following:

- If employers really want to understand what makes their employees and management tick they should conduct regular surveys.
- In this article attention was only given to internal factors that could have an influence on the opinions and perceptions of employees and managers. It is therefore recommended to include external factors such as economic environment, political environment, technological environment and the intuitional environment in the future.

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## CHAPTER THREE (ARTICLE TWO): THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN EMPLOYEE PARTICIPATION AND UNION MEMBERSHIP

In Chapter three (Article two) the APA style of referencing will be utilise, since the journal for publication considered have not been identified at time of presentation for examination.

**Abstract:**

*This study examined the relationship between employee participation and union membership. Researchers are of the opinion that employee participation will have a negative effect on union membership and therefore do not favour employee participative programs. In providing insight into the relationship between employee participation and union membership attention were given to the following: union membership percentage within the organisation, the relationship between biographical information and employees joining a union as well as the relationship between themes of employee participation and employees joining a union. The six themes of employee participation used in this article were identified in chapter two, article one. The study adopted a quantitative research design using a self-developed group administration questionnaire. The results found that 87.1% of the respondents did not belong to a union. In terms of statistical significance it was decided to set the value at a 95% confidence interval ($p < 0.05$), therefore there was a significant relationship between race and employees joining a union with a p-value of 0.068. There was also a statistical significance relationship between themes of employee participation and employees joining a union with co-management (.016) and self-management (.004). The results also found that from the 87.1% participants who did not belong to union indicated that they do not belong to union because it does not interest them.*

**Opsomming:**

*Hierdie studie het die verhouding tussen werkersdeelname en unie lidmaatskap ondersoek. Navorsers is van opinie dat werkersdeelname ŉ negatiewe effek sal hê op unie lidmaatskap en vir hierdie rede is hulle nie altyd ten gunste van werkersdeelname nie. Om meer inligting te gee aangaande die verhouding tussen werkersdeelname en vakbond lidmaatskap, was daar gefokus op die volgende: persentasie werknemers wat aan ŉ unie behoort, die verhouding tussen biografiese inligting en werknemers se neiging om aan ŉ unie te behoort as ook die verhouding tussen die verkeie werkersdeelname temas en werknemers se neiging om aan ŉ unie te behoort. Die ses temas van werkersdeelname was geïdentifiseer in hoofstuk twee, artikel een. ŉ Kwantitatiewe navorsings ontwerp was gebruik aangesiesien ŉ self ontwerpte vraelys gebruik was. Hierdie vraelyste was versprei in groepsverband. Die resultate het gevind dat 87.1% van die werknemers nie aan ŉ unie behoort nie. Statistiese betekenisvolheid was op ŉ 95% interval (p< 0.05), vir hierdie rede was daar ŉ statistiese betekenisvolle verhouding tussen die ras van die werknemers en hulle neiging om aan ŉ unie te behoort met ‘n p-waarde van 0.068. Daar was ook ŉ statistiese betekenisvolle verhouding tussen die verskeie temas van werkersdeelname, onder andere mede-bestuur (.016) as ook self-bestuur (.004), en werknemers se neiging om aan ŉ unie te behoort. Laastens het die resultate ook gevind dat die werknemers wat nie aan ŉ unie behoort (87.1%), nie aan ŉ unie behoort omdat hulle nie daaraan belangstel nie.*

## 1. INTRODUCTION

This article will focus on the relationship between employee participation and union membership since no studies have focused on how employee participation programs might influence other work-related attitudes of employees, such as those associated with union commitment (Hoell, 2004). For this reason an exploratory research approached was utilised, this will be accomplished through the use of a self-developed questionnaire. In this chapter the problem statement will be stated, the objectives and research design will also be identified. Thereafter the results will be discussed and in the closure of this chapter the recommendations and limitations of the study will be highlighted.

## 2. PROBLEM STATEMENT

Industrial relations are generally concerned with the problematic relationship between employees and management (MacDonald, 2005). Since the beginning of the modern industrialized economy the ability of employees to influence the actions of their employer has been a contest area of working life (Millward, Bryson & Forth, 2000), and for this reason employee representation is seen as one of the important elements of the employment relationship (Singh, 2001). Employee representation has played a significant role over the last 25 years in achieving social justice and can be seen as an active resource to facilitate discussion, consultations, negotiations and joint actions involving both employees and employers (Bryson, Forth & George 2012). According to Lahovary (2000), employee representation is generally associated with trade unions.

Historically, employees joined unions because industrialisation forced them into being dependent and their earnings, working conditions and job security were beyond their control (Barker, 2007). Employees therefore joined unions for protection (Venter, 2003) and to promote their interest (Grobler, et al., 2006). Trade unions were traditionally seen as the only agents to provide an employee voice and influence in the workplace (Wilkinson & Fay, 2011) and as the method for voicing employees concerns and opinions (Millward, et al., 2000). In 1995 the Labour Relations Act 65 (of 1995 LRA) (SA 1995) changed the terrain in which unions operated (Manfashe, 2008) and according to Nepgen (2008), the South African trade union movement has since been seen as a success story in global terms.

However, for the last three decades there has been a decline in union membership worldwide (Cregan & Brown, 2010; Nel 2002; Uys, 2011) and since South Africa became a democracy,

public opinion about the labour movement has changed (Bezuidenhout, 2000), meaning that that there has been an ideological loss of support for unions (Ceronie, 2007). The declining in union membership over the last three decades resulted in international interest in employee participation (Markey, 2007; Kim, MacDuffie, & Pil, 2010). Employee participation can be seen as a method of involving employees in the organisation and planning of work processes by contributing towards the establishment of work procedures and by participating in decision-making at different levels in the organisation (Bendix, 2001). Therefore, employee participation actively promotes a new culture within an organisation, for example, where managers directly communicate with their employees through briefings, and the like. By doing this, the organisation reduces the employees' dependence on their union as the primary channel of communication (Gollan & Wilkenson, 2007). For this reason, the most common response from unions regarding employee participation is 'cautious scepticism' (Kochan, Katz, & Mower, 1984) and according to Kim, et al., (2010) this is still the response today.

Unions see participation by means of expanding the employer's influence and control over the workplace (Bendix, 2010) and blurring the distinction between management and employee interest (Horwitz, Jain, Mbabane, 2005). Employee participation is therefore seen as a threat to their existence and challenge to their power (Beetge, 2000). According to Hoell (2004), another reason why employee participation can be seen as a treat to unions, is because of the lack of a common definition of employee participation. This has inhibited the understanding of the factors associated with employee participation. Some researchers have tried to group employee participation, whereas others have isolated the unique aspects of employee participation. In contrast, Gollan and Wilkinson (2007) stated that there is no reason to assume that employee participation is necessarily an alternative to unions. Employee participation need not have a negative effect on unions and in some situations employee participation can even be seen as complementary. Kester (2002) supported this by stating that these kinds of suspicions may be unfounded and without empirically investigating the situation one can be in danger of categorising all non-union representation as effectual and union representation as very effective (Dundon & Rollinson, 2004).

As seen above, different opinions exist among experts as to whether there has been a shift in employees' motivation to join a union or not. According to Hoell (2004), union commitment should be negatively affected by an employee's commitment to their organisation. Will employees' commitment towards their union or organisation therefore change as a result of

employee participation? This research will address this issue and seek to understand the current relationship between employee participation and union membership.

## 3. OBJECTIVES

### 3.1. General objective

To determine the relationship between employee participation and union membership. As mentioned in chapter 1, this objective has been broaden and further discussed in the form of the following specific objectives:

### 3.2. Specific objectives

- To determine union membership
- To determine if there is a relationship between biographical information and employees tendency to join a union
- To determine the comparative relationship between themes of employee participation and employees tendency to join a union
- To make recommendations regarding employee participation and union membership

## 4. RESEARCH DESIGN

To reach the objectives of this study a quantitative research design was used, since the design is descriptive in nature; a non-experimental design was also utilised. The reason for using this design was to obtain quantitative information that can be used to describe and explore the relationship between employee participation and union membership.

### 4.1. Participants and procedure

The target and accessible population were employees at an engineering support services organisation. The focus was on all employees within the organisation and not a specific group; therefore, the sample was drawn from the seven divisions within the organisation namely Welders, HP Pipework, General Ductings, Mill end liners, General office, Soot Blower Maintenance as well as Rigger and Tacklers. The motivation for focusing on all the employees is to ensure equal representation from the different departments in order to determine the relationship between employee participation and union membership within the organisation. Convenience sampling was used in obtaining participants in the organisation to complete the questionnaire. A sample of 70 participants was drawn from the population

(n=70) and consisted of both employees and managers. The questionnaire was anonymous to limit bias and enhance honesty by the participants. Close ended questions were used, from which the respondents had to choose one response; this method made it easier for the researcher to analyse the information (Maree, 2010). Likert scaling was also used; as Likert scaling provides an ordinal measure of a respondent's attitudes (Maree, 2010). Respondents had the following response categories: Yes, maybe, and no. This self-developed questionnaire was formulated through using the themes and sub-themes that were identified in Article one – objective one. When the questionnaire was developed attention was given to the following (Maree, 2010):

- Appearance of the questionnaire
- Question sequence
- Wording of questions
- Response categories

The group administration questionnaire was completed under supervision. In doing this, any questions which may have arisen regarding the understanding of the questions could be answered. No time limits were enforced. Before participants started with the questionnaire a short introduction was given by the researcher, the introduction explained the focus of the survey and the participants were informed that they would remain anonymous and that they can withdraw from the study at any time. Each questionnaire started with a few easy to answer biographical information questions such as gender, age, race, marital status as well as their position in the organisation. Instructions on the questionnaire were simple, clear and concise. Questions about the same topic were arranged together and the topics also followed in logical order. Slang, abbreviations, double-barrelled, double –negative or leading questions were avoided to ensure that respondents understand the various questions (Maree, 2010). Questionnaires were also formulated in the first person and as statements rather than questions. Descriptive information of the sample is given in Table 1.

**Table 1: Characteristics of the Participants**

| Item | Category | Frequency | Percentage |
|---|---|---|---|
| **Gender** | Male | 63 | 90% |
| | Female | 7 | 10% |
| **Age** | 20 – 39 years | 46 | 65.8% |
| | 40 – 59 years | 20 | 28.6% |
| | 60+ years | 4 | 5.8% |
| **Race** | African | 32 | 45.7% |
| | White | 32 | 45.7% |
| | Coloured | 5 | 7.1% |
| | Indian | 1 | 1.4% |
| **Marital status** | Married | 34 | 48.6% |
| | Single | 25 | 35.7% |
| | Divorced | 9 | 12.9% |
| | Widowed | 2 | 2.9% |

Of the total participants, 90% were male and 10% were female. With regards to the representation of different race groups in the sample 45.7% were African, 45.7% White, 7.1% Coloured and 1.4% Indian. The average age of the respondents was 36 years with a standard deviation of 11.3 years. The youngest respondent was 20 years old and the oldest being 61 years of age. Most of the participants were married 48.6%, 35.7% were single, 12.9% were divorced and only 2.9% were widowed.

### 4.2. Data analysis

Data analysis is the route that is followed to bring order, structure and meaning to all the collected data (Maree, 2010); therefore, descriptive statistics were used. Descriptive statistics provided statistical summaries of the data in order to obtain a coherent and straightforward picture for interpretation (Struwig & Stead, 2004). These summaries are represented through frequencies, means, standard deviations, correlations and statistical summaries.

Cronbach's alpha coefficients were utilised to determine the internal consistency, homogeneity and undimensionality of the measuring instruments (Clark & Watson, 1995).

After the internal consistency was determined, Chi-square and T-tests were utilised to determine if the relationship between the two variables are practically significant as well as to determine the differences between the groups in the sample (Ellis & Steyn, 2003). Effect sizes were also utilised to decide on the practical significance and the effect size of the findings (Steyn, 2000). According to APA (1999), in reporting effect sizes the researcher will be assisted with meta-analysis, information subsequent research and in interpreting and evaluating results within the context of the related literature. The types of effect sizes utilised were Cramer's Phi and Cohen's-d. Cramer's Phi, Phi or V is the standardised effect size of association for the Chi-square test; phi is also used for two binary variables (Osteen & Bright, 2010). Cohen's-d is usually used in T-tests and will assist in determining the standardised effect size of the difference between two means (Osteen & Bright, 2010)

After effect sizes were obtained, Mordock (2000), suggests that the researcher has to make a valuable judgment by examining the importance, the feasibility and the practicality of the effect sizes.

## 5. RESULTS

A self-developed questionnaire was divided into six categories and nine sub-categories. These categories were identified in Article one, Chapter two. Each category varied from two to four questions each. Categories, sub-categories together with the questions asked to the respondents are presented in the Table 2 below.

**Table 2: Categories, sub-categories and questions asked**

| Theme | Sub-theme | Questions that were asked |
|---|---|---|
| **Consultation** | Daily meetings | • If there is no more daily meetings, I will join a union<br>• If my opinion in the workplace is not regarded as important, I will join a union<br>• If the working conditions is unacceptable, I will join a union |

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| **Negotiation** | Involvement | • If no-one supports me during a work challenge, I will join a union<br>• If I am not involved in the organisation's Decision-making, I will join a union |
| **Joint decision-making** | Communication<br>Information | • If my work effort is not seen, I will join a union<br>• If I am not informed about the Organisation's decisions, I will join a union |
| **Co-management** | Support<br>Trust | • If I do not have the confidence to go to my site manager, I will join a union<br>• If I do not have the confidence to go to my supervisor, I will join a union<br>• If I feel that my supervisor does not trust me, I will join a union<br>• If I feel I cannot trust my supervisor, I will join a union |
| **Self-management** | Responsibility<br>Commitment | • If other employees are not committed to their work, I will join a union<br>• If there is high absenteeism in the organisation, I will join a union<br>• If my decision-making is restricted, I will join a union<br>• If I cannot make decisions on my own, I will join a union |
| **Financial participation** | Rewards | • If my hard work is not rewarded, I will join a union<br>• If I do not receive a certificate for my hard work, I will join a union<br>• If I do not earn extra time for hard work, I will join a union |

In determining the reliability of the various categories and their sub-categories the Cronbach's Alpha reliability coefficient was computed. In Table 3 the reliability coefficients for each theme are presented.

**Table 3: Reliability of Constructs**

| Theme | Reliability coefficient (Cronbach's Alpha) | N of Items |
|---|---|---|
| **Consultation** | 0.799 | 3 |
| **Negotiation** | 0.746 | 2 |
| **Joint decision-making** | 0.778 | 2 |
| **Co-management** | 0.880 | 4 |
| **Self-management** | 0.859 | 4 |
| **Financial participation** | 0.820 | 3 |

Respondents were asked to indicate whether the stated question will have an influence on them joining a union, as well as the degree to which they believe they will join a union on a 3-point scale ranging from 1=Yes, I will join a union to 2=Maybe, I will join a union and 3=No, I will not join a union. Questions were divided into six categories. These categories were identified in literature as the themes of employee participation. Each category (theme) varied from two to four questions each; these questions were based on sub-categories (themes) which were also identified in Article one, Chapter two (presented in Table 2).

Cronbach's Alpha coefficients were therefore utilised to determine the internal consistency, homogeneity and undimensionality of the measuring instruments (Clark & Watson, 1995). The Cronbach's Alpha coefficient for all the categories (themes) varied from 0.746 to 0.880. According to Baxter and Babbie (2004), a good guideline to keep in mind would be a coefficient of around 0.7. It can therefore be concluded that each category together with its sub-categories are reliable.

Participants were also asked to indicate if they belong to a union. Their answers are represented in Table 4.

**Table 4: Union Membership**

| Question | Frequency | Percentage |
|---|---|---|
| **I do belong to a union** | 9 | 12.9% |
| **I do not belong to a union** | 61 | 87.1% |

Of the total participants, 87.1% did not belong to a union and only 12.9% did, meaning that only 9 from all the participants (n=70) belonged to a union. Table 5 represent the biographical information of the two groups (those employees who *do* belong to a union and those employees who *do not* belong to a union).

**Table 5: Biographical information of the two groups**

| | Gender | | Age | | | Marital Status | | | | Race | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Union Membership** | Male | Female | 20-39 | 40–59 | 60+ | Single | Married | Divorce | Widow | African | Coloured | Indian | White |
| **Yes** | 100% | 0.0 % | 66.67 % | 33.33 % | 0,0% | 22.2% | 44.4% | 33.3% | 0.0% | 11% | 22% | 0.0% | 66.7% |
| **No** | 88.5 % | 11.5% | 63.93 % | 29.51 % | 6.56 % | 37.7% | 49.2% | 9.8% | 3.3% | 50.8% | 4.9% | 1.6% | 42.6% |

As seen in Table 4 and 5 from the 87.1% respondents who *do not* belong to a union 88.5% are male and 11.5% are female. Most of the respondents are married 49.2% and 50.8% of the respondents are African. The average age of this group is 36 years with a standard deviation of 11.3 years.

With regards to the group of respondents who *do* belong to a union 12.9%, all of the respondents are male (100%) and most are married (44.4%) and white (66.7%). The average age of this group is 35 years old with a standard deviation of 12.3 years.

In Table 6 the Chi-square test was utilised to determine if the relationship between participants' biographical information (gender, age, marital status and race) and union membership are practically significant.

**Table 6: Chi-square**

| | Gender | Age | Marital Status | Race |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| **P- Value** | 0.364 | | 0.238 | 0.068 |
| **Phi Coefficient** | 0.128+ | | 0.246+ | 0.319++ |

* $p < 0.05$

+ phi >0.1 (Small effect) ++ phi >0.3 (Medium effect) +++ phi >0.5 (Large effect)

P-value is often incorrectly interpreted; p-value is about the process of generating the data. The p-value can therefore be interpreted in terms of a hypothetical repetition of the study

(Hooper, 1982). In terms of statistical significance it was decided to set the value at a 95% confidence interval ($p< 0.05$). This said, race with a p-value of 0.068 can therefore be seen as having some evidence, although weak, to have an influence on union membership. Gender, age and marital status had no statistical significance regarding its relationship with union membership. The effect value, Phi Coefficient, confirmed the above mentioned finding as shown in Table 6. Race with a value of 0.319 has a medium effect ($phi> 0.3$) on union membership. Gender, age and marital status will however have a small effect on union membership. Litschge, Vaughn and McCred (2010) stated that although an effect size is small it can have substantial effect on the practical value. It is also important to take into a account that the sample was relatively small and this could be the reason why evidence could be so weak. According to Hooper (1982), the larger the sample size the greater the evidence. Litschge, et al., (2010) confirmed this by stating that statistical power is affected by the estimated effect size, $\alpha$ level and sample size.

Table 7 shows the T-test conducted to determine the differences between the two groups (those employees who *do* belong to a union and those employees who *do not* belong to a union) and their relationship with the various themes of employee participation and their tendency to join a union.

**Table 7: T-test**

| Theme | Union Membership | N | Mean | Std Deviation | P-value | Cohen's-d |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Consultation** | Yes | 9 | 1.6296 | .65499 | .112 | 0.57++ |
| | No | 61 | 2.0437 | .72897 | | |
| **Negotiation** | Yes | 9 | 1.8889 | .74068 | .337 | 0.34+ |
| | No | 61 | 2.1557 | .77750 | | |
| **Joint decision-making** | Yes | 9 | 1.8333 | .66144 | .210 | 0.44++ |
| | No | 61 | 2.1803 | .78013 | | |
| **Co-management** | Yes | 9 | 1.833 | .76035 | .016* | 0.80+++ |
| | No | 61 | 2.4426 | .67914 | | |
| **Self-management** | Yes | 9 | 1.7778 | .79495 | .004* | 0.86+++ |
| | No | 61 | 2.4590 | .60756 | | |
| **Financial participation** | Yes | 9 | 1.9259 | .79543 | .157 | 0.47++ |
| | No | 61 | 2.3033 | .72998 | | |

* $p < 0.05$

+ d>0.20 (Small effect) ++ d>0.50 (Medium effect) +++ d>0.80 (Large effect)

As previously mentioned in terms of statistical significance it was decided to set the value at a 95% confidence interval ($p< 0.05$). As seen in Table 7, employee participation themes with the most statistical significance for both groups (those employees who *do* belong to a union and those employees who *do not* belong to a union) are co-management and self-management. Co-management with a p-value of .016 can therefore be seen as having moderate influence on respondents' tendency to join a union, together with self-management with a p-value of .004 which can be seen as having a strong influence on respondents' tendency to join a union. Although the p-value of both these themes are smaller than 0.05 ($p< 0.05$) it is does not necessarily imply influence (Hooper, 1982); for this reason, Cohen's-d effect size was also calculated. Cohen's-d effect size, however, confirmed the results as mentioned above as both co-management and self-management are greater than 0.80 (d> 0.80). Co-management, together with self-management, therefore has a large effect.

## 6. DISCUSSION

The presence of one or more union members is a rough indicator of whether a workplace has employee representation based on trade unions (Millward, et al, 2000). Of the 70 participants, 87.1% did not belong to a union and only 12.9% did. It can therefore be concluded that the organisation's employee representation is not based on trade unions. In a study done by (WERS) 2004, it was found that union membership was lower among employees who worked for small- and medium-sized organisations (Deery, Walsh, & Knox, 2001; Forth, Bewley & Bryson, 2006); when one looks at these results it is not surprising that union membership is so low in the organisation as the organisation is relatively small in size. According to Singh (2001), when union membership is low it is important to have joint governance in the organisation. Joint governance is not a new concept, as it refers to labour management committees. Under joint governance an organisation can practice joint decision-making as well as given the flexibility to solve problems (Singh, 2001).

In Chapter two, article one it is clear from the interviews that the organisation uses non-union forms of employee participation to facilitate join governance. These non-union forms of employee participation have been identified as: daily meetings, involvement, communication, information sharing, support, trust, responsibility, commitment and rewards (See Table 2). According to Markey (2007), non-union forms of employee participation can function to channel dissatisfaction, facilitate communication and encourage cooperation. Change within the organisation can also occur more rapidly because there is no need to consult or negotiate with trade union representatives (Lloyd & Newell, 1998). Non-union forms of employee participation, also called substitutions (Markey, 2007) have a two folded perception. The first perception is that it is a deliberate employer strategy to create a union alternative. The second is that these substitutes may create a more cooperative employment relationship (Markey, 2007, Millward, et al., 2000). As Dundon and Rollinson (2004) noted, non-union does not mean that there are no union members present in the workplace. The term non-union is rather concerned with a situation where union acknowledgment is absent in order to determine terms and conditions of employment. The following is seen as characteristics of non-union employee participation (Kaufman & Taras, 2000) within the workplace:

- These forms are created, structured and operated by employers.
- They are generally informal, with a minority having some kind of an agreement.

- Non-union forms of employee participation can be limited to a work group, for example: quality circles. Or it can be presented in various groups, for example: work councils.
- These forms deal with any issues regarding the employment relationship, but if they involve collective representation and discuss wages or working conditions, they must comply with the law.
- Non-union forms of employee participation entail mutual discussion instead of negotiation/bargaining. The fundamental assumption is not conflict of interest, but rather in-house worker-management cooperation.

As seen in Table 4 and 5 from the 87.1% respondents who did not belong to a union 88.5% were male and 50.8% of the respondents are African. With regards to the group of respondents who did belong to a union (12.9%), all of the respondents are male (100%) and most were White (66.7%).

The Chi-square test was utilised to determine if the relationship between participants' biographical information (gender, age, marital status and race) and union membership are practically significant. It was found that race could have an influence on employees joining a union. This can be confirmed in literature as individuals have different backgrounds, ethical morals and values; for this reason, each individual (in this case race) will re-act different (Ramutsheli, 2001). Gender, age and marital status however had no effect on employee's tendency to join a union. This finding is however in contrast to a study done by Barratt (2009). Barratt (2009), found that union density among 20 – 24 year-olds is only 12.2% compared to 38.3% for employees in their 50's. For this reason he concluded that age has a likelihood of influencing employee's union membership.

The T-test was also conducted to determine the differences between the two groups (those employees who *do* belong to a union and those employees who *do not* belong to a union) and their relationship with the various themes of employee participation and their tendency to join a union. It was found that both co-management and self-management could have a strong influence on employees joining a union, meaning that employees will join a union if co-management en self-management is not present in the organisation. The key challenge

regarding employee relations in the organisation is therefore to shift from a legacy of adversarial relationships to employee participation and workplace co-operation.

Co-management is seen as an intended effort by managers, to provide role-expanding opportunities for individuals and group employees at lower levels in the organisation (Glew, et al., 1995). Co-management will therefore result in a measure of shared power (Whitty, 1996) and will also enable workers to be represented at management level as well as on decision-making structures in the organisation (Venter, 2009). An organisation will function at its best when the goals and behaviours of all the members are aligned. Co-management as a form of employee participation encourages this alignment since employees will feel a greater sense of partnership, common purpose and commitment to the organisation (Kaufman, 2003). Interaction between employees and management will be in the order of the day and could provide new opportunities for developing trustful and supportive relationships (Weber & Weber, 2001). As soon as managers and employees become mutually responsible for completing an assignment they must interact in a different way by supporting each other (Van Mierio, et al., 2005, Ramutsheli, 2001). Co-management will result in the following benefits for employees and managers: (Kaufman, 2003)

- Enhanced communication between various parties
- Increased interaction between parties
- Improved and more positive relationships

According to T-test results, employees in the organisation also indicated that self-management will have a strong influence on them joining a union. Self-management can be seen as an individual's desire to assume autonomy by controlling their own destiny (Rosner, 2006). Giving employees more influence on how they perform their work is believed to be both beneficial for employees and employers (Kim, et al., 2010). Few employees want their every action to be monitored. Most employees appreciate having the flexibility to do their job as they see fit (Olivier, 2010). Self-managed organisations can be more flexible in adapting to various situations (Langfred, 2007) and will also be more productive, healthy, as well as self-sustaining (Rosner, 2006) since self-management enables employees to develop, share and apply their knowledge more fully (Kallenberg, Nesheim, Olsen, 2009).

The results therefore indicate that it is vital for employees in this organisation to be represented at management level as well as be a part of the decision-making structures within the organisation in order for them to build partnerships with their managers. Employees in the organisation also want autonomy in completing their responsibilities without being micro-managed. They need to have the freedom to structure their internal work structure in order to reach their goals.

The question however remains, what is the core reason for such a low quantity of union representation in the organisation? Does the organisation forbid employees to belong to a union? Or maybe the participants do not know what employee participation is? Another reason could also be because belonging to a union does not interest the employees. Therefore, the questionnaire ended with asking respondents to state the reason for not belonging to a union. Their answers are presented in Table 8:

**Table 8: Reasons for not belonging to a union**

| Question | Yes | Maybe | No |
|---|---|---|---|
| **I do not belong to a union because my work does not allow me to do so** | 14.8% | 16.4% | 68.9% |
| **I do not belong to a union because it does not interest me** | 46.7% | 16.7% | 36.7% |
| **I do not belong to a union because I do not know what a union is** | 28.8% | 5.1% | 66.1% |

As seen from Table 8, of the 87.1% individuals who did not belong to a union 14.8% said it was because the organisation prohibited them to do so. Some 46.7% said that they do not belong to a union because it does not interest them. And lastly, 28.8% said they do not belong to a union because they do not know what a union is. It can therefore be concluded that there is no tendency within the organisation to substitute trade union membership (trade union representation) for non-union forms of employee participation such as daily meetings, involvement, communication, information sharing, support, trust, responsibility, commitment and rewards. Employees and managers simply *do not* belong to a union because it does not interest them.

## 7. CONCLUSION

This article aimed to provide an insight into the relationship between employee participation and union membership. Researchers are of the opinion that organisations use employee participative programs as a substitute for trade union representative and that employee participation will have a negative effect on union membership and for these reasons they do not favour employee participative programs. However, the study found that 87.1% of its employees did not belong to a union and that there are no tendencies that the organisation uses employee participation as a substitute for trade union representative as the core reason why 87.1% individuals *do not* belong to a union is because belonging to a union does not interest them.

The study found that race will have an influence on employees joining a union. There were no practical significance found regarding gender, age and marital status and union membership. The participants in the organisation attach high value to an environment where they can take on more responsibilities. They will also feel empowered when they take on new responsibilities. Taking on more and new responsibilities can occur within a team (co-management) or individually (self-management). It is therefore important for the organisation to develop an environment that encourages freedom of thought and creativity for their employees.

## 8. LIMITATIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

In interpreting the findings from this research, its limitations should be considered:

- The disadvantages of using group administration of questionnaires is that the researcher has limited control over what happens in the field and the conditions in which the questionnaire is administrated cannot be controlled.
- The disadvantage of closed questions is that the answer the respondent wants to give may not be one of the options, answers are very simple with no detail, a respondent can answer even if she or he has no opinion or knowledge.
- Language barrier can also be seen as a limitation, most of the participants spoke an African language, but the questionnaire was only available in English or Afrikaans.
- Since non-probability sampling method were utilised it would be therefore dangerous to draw important conclusions about labour as a whole regarding the relationship between employee participation and union membership.

- Liker scaling was utilise, but instead of the normal 5 point scale a 3 point scale was utilise as participants had only limited education.
- Sample size was small.

Because of the limitations discussed above, there is a need to explore the following:

- More items could be added to the categories (themes), as this will lead to more internal consistency of the tests, however it is important to note that too many items can result in participants becoming less interested in the test and this can reduce the internal consistency of the test.
- A more detailed questionnaire could be developed.

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# CHAPTER FOUR: CONCLUSIONS, LIMITATIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

In this chapter, the conclusions of the research study are given in accordance with its objectives. Subsequently the limitations of the research are discussed together with the recommendations for future research.

# 1. CONCLUSIONS

***In order to reach the first general objective of examining the opinions and perceptions of employees and managers regarding employee participation the following specific objectives were researched:***

The first specific objective was to determine employee participation according to literature and it was found that there is no universal agreement as to what constitutes participation and how to define its various elements. Employee participation has assumed various themes over time and across countries therefore the difficulty in defining it.

The second specific objective was to explore the meaning of employee participation as understood by employees and managers. It was found that participants had attached various positive meanings to employee participation; therefore, respondents' meaning of employee participation had a positive influence on their opinions and perceptions.

The third specific objective was to explore perceptions of employees and managers regarding the various themes of employee participation available in their organisation. The study therefore also identified the following six employee participation themes: consultation, collective bargaining, joint decision-making, co-management, self-management and financial participation. Some themes of employee participation were purposely designed to give employees a very modest role in the organisation, while others are designed to give employees a more significant role within the organisation.

The fourth specific objective was to determine the sub-themes of the various employee participation themes. It was found that participation took place through daily meetings; involvement; communication and information sharing; support and trust; responsibility and commitment; and lastly rewards. The study also revealed that there is mixed feelings as to whether employees input and suggestions will influence the final outcome. Participants also indicated that the organisation is currently struggling with commitment from their employees.

***In order to reach the second general objective of deterring the relationship between employee participation and union membership the following specific objectives were researched:***

The first specific objective was to determine union membership. It was found that a large number of employees did not belong to a union. All of the participants who did however belong to a union were male and mostly White.

The second specific objective was to determine if there is a relationship between biographical information of participants and them joining a union. In reaching this objective a Chi-square test was utilised. It was found that only race proved to have a practical significant influence. Gender, age and marital status had no effect whatsoever on the relationship between biographical information of participants and them joining a union.

The third specific objective of the study was to determine the comparative relationship between themes of employee participation and employees joining a union. In reaching this objective a T-test was utilised. It was found from all of the employee participation themes: consultation, collective bargaining, joint decision-making, co-management, self-management and financial participation, there were only two themes that had a comparative relationship with employees joining a union. These themes were identified as co-management and self-management. Participants felt strongly about these two themes and they indicated that if these themes are not present in the organisation they will join a union.

## 2. RECOMMENDATIONS AND LIMITATIONS

The recommendations for this research are divided into two sections. The first section deals with recommendations made to ensure employee participative programs are developed and implemented with success in the future. The second sections deals with recommendations for further research and the limitations of this research.

### Recommendations linking to the problem statement

- Employee participation is not for every organisation.
- A high level employee participation program will fail unless not evidently adds to the bottom-line.
- The employee participation program has to be made a core part of the organisation.

- Employee participation programs involves time, funds and the necessary infrastructure. Organisations should therefore be in it for the long run.
- Management commitment is crucial.
- If employers really want to understand what makes their employees and management tick they should conduct regular surveys.
- Although employee participation programs can be costly in the beginning, once it has been effectively implemented it may become a good investment in the long term.
- Employee participation programs should not be considered a remedy for all organisational problems or conflicts.

**Recommendations for further research and limitations of the research**

- Literature is limited in explaining the effectiveness of employee participation in the South African context.
- When it comes to the various forms of employee participation, there seems to be no general consensus as to what these forms are. Everyone seems to know what it is, but once the different forms are given, many realise that what they agreed upon, is in actuality a closely held personal belief of what the forms should be. It is also likely that the different forms of employee participation will mean different things to different people.
- The sample is "regional" in nature and only employees working at this specific engineering support services organisation are included in the sample. It therefore does not allow direct comparison between other types of organisations.
- Choice of variables could be criticised. There are other variables and constructs that could be added to the research as employee participation is such a large and widely defined concept.
- Attention was only given to internal factors that could have an influence on the opinions and perceptions of employees and managers. It is therefore recommended to include external factors such as economic environment, political environment and technological environment for further studies.
- There might be a possibility that some of the participants were concerned about the confidentiality of the interviews, especially since the interview were recorded with a voice recorder and this might have had an influence on the outcome of the results.

- Questionnaires used in previous studies which investigated employee participation only focused their questionnaires on one form of employee participation. For example: joint decision-making or financial participation.
- Language barriers can also be seen as a limitation, most of the participants spoke an African language, but the questionnaire was only available in English or Afrikaans.
- The disadvantage of closed questions is that the answer the respondent wants to give may not be one of the options, answers are very simple with no detail, and a respondent can answer even if she or he has no opinion or knowledge. Therefore a more detailed questionnaire could be developed. Especially in this case where the participant must indicate if they will join a union or note. It is recommending that reason for "joining or not joining" a union be provided.
- In the questionnaire liker scaling was utilise, but instead of the 5-point scale a 3-point scale was utilise as participants had limited education. Therefore, more items could be added to the categories (themes), this will also help with the increase of the internal consistency of the test; however, it is important to note that too many items can result in participants becoming less interested in the test and this can reduce the internal consistency of the test.
- The sample size was small and this made the comparison between the two groups difficult.
- The literature is limited to in-depth research about the relationship between employee participation and union membership. The findings, therefore, clearly indicate that additional studies need to be done in order to clarify the relationship between employee participation and union membership.

# APPENDIX A: DECLARATION BY LANGUAGE EDITOR




November 14, 2012

**To whom it may concern**

## Re: Letter of confirmation of language editing

The MBA mini-dissertation "*Employee participation within an engineering support services company*" BY E. Viljoen (20280890) was language, technically and typographically edited. The sources and referencing technique applied was checked to comply with the specific Harvard technique as per North-West University prescriptions. Final editing and printing remains the responsibility of the student.



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