EMPLOYEES' EMPOWERMENT AND ENGAGEMENT IN ATTAINING PERSONAL AND ORGANISATIONAL GOALS

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Abstract

Employee empowerment and engagement are critical for any given organization as these positively influence workers to produce better results and attain both personal and company gaols. This specific study focuses on LPG Cyprus Company, where the subject of the employee empowerment and engagement is analysed through a qualitative research design using interviews with the management and the employees about how they are treated and what they think about their company with regards to the subject matter. The findings revealed that while there was a cordial relationship among the management and employees, there was a need for the management to strengthen their strategies to empower the employees and engage them more fruitfully in the working processes.

Keywords: Empowerment, engagement, employees, management, good practice, change management

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1. Introduction

The current global industry is in transition towards a knowledge-based economy, with workers' transformation from physical to knowledge-based employees, due to the shift in the technological paradigm. People's behaviour has greatly changed with regard to values, standards and beliefs (Griffin, Parker, & Mason, 2010; Williams, 2011). Currently, workers are more linked to creativity, flexibility and freedom both in and out of their workplace (Cho, Laschinger, & Wong, 2006; Lockwood, 2007). The changes in the IT sector have erased boundaries, reduced communication expenses, making the globe smaller and larger at the same time (Welch, 2011). Businesses have implemented better, quicker cost effective strategies to share information amongst the team members (Hanaysha, 2016).

Empowerment entails the ability of a worker to make individual decisions without having to consult their managers (Brad Shuck, Rocco, & Albornoz, 2011). Empowerment determines the accountability level and the trust of the workers. In the case of the LPG company investigated in this study, it has been found to be one of the companies that have encouraged empowerment of the workplace to the interest of the firm (Markos & Sridevi, 2010). When staff members are empowered, they are able to influence the firm's quality of services and products (Shuck & Reio, 2014). In the course of the study, LPG companies have been undergoing a revolution in their business cycle by changing their communication channels from traditional to modern approaches (Jose & Mampilly, 2014). Companies in the same sector as LPG are likely to have similar issues and challenges, more so with regard to employee-manager relationships (European LPG Association, 2016). Most corporates work in compliance to a common corporate governance framework (Doz, 2017).

1.1. Knowledge employees

According to Hanaysha (2016), LPG operations are fraught with risk as they deal with Liquefied Petroleum Gas (LPG) used for vehicles, cooking appliances and heating equipment. Hence, the management has to focus on the application, creation and circulation of knowledge within the organization (Bedarkar & Pandita, 2014). Features characterizing knowledge workers include employee knowledge and employee expertise to employ observation technique and performing of a single job in a different way (Joo & Park, 2010).

Andriotis (2017) posits that knowledge management for an LPG company calls for optimal employee empowerment and engagement by the management to achieve better process mastery. This requires the adoption of a deliberate strategy to achieve an excellent performance and maintenance of a commitment, as well as, preferred autonomy (Geldenhuys, Laba, & Venter, 2014). There is, however, a need for trust which is attainable by

empowerment, engagement and possibly leadership change (Danish, Ramzan, & Ahmad, 2013; Hanaysha, 2016). Companies also need to create a way via which they can engage and manage expert employees who are not willing to share their know-how (Danish, Ramzan, & Ahmad, 2013).

1.2. Knowledge employees

Employee empowerment is the process through which power transfer is imparted or enabled from a single individual to another (Rose & Shuck, 2013). Empowered employees are in a better position in making choices appropriate to solve particular problems on their own (Andrew & Sofian, 2012). The process commences with training directed to transitioning the whole organization to an empowered model where workers are trusted to make responsible choices that are beneficial to the company wholly (Taneja, Sewell, & Odom, 2015).

1.3. Employee engagement

Employee engagement is drawn out through a talent management engine directed at drawing its effectiveness and resilience from various internal and external organizational environment factors (Kaliannan & Adjovu, 2015). Employees are offered an opportunity of making choices for the best interest of a firm (Rose, Kumar, & Pak, 2011). Employees' engagement approaches implementation by the company lead to the attainment of some satisfactory levels, though there are areas which require an integration of talent management (Loon Hoe & McShane, 2010).

1.4. Employee engagement

Strategies that assist in engaging and empowering workers in an LPG organization include job importance perception and vivid expectations (Mone, Eisinger, Guggenheim, Price, & Stine, 2011). Regular feedback from the managers and welcoming suggestions is also another strategy that can ensure worker engagement and empowerement. Another critical strategy includes maintaining effective communication. For organisations, effective employee empowerment and engagement is a critical consideration as it leads to a high organizational performance that is measurable by positive financial performance (Alfes, Shantz, Truss, & Soane, 2013). Another positive outcome of effective employee employment and empowerment is higher job commitment and satisfaction, leading to high work effectiveness (Andrew & Sofian, 2012).

1.5. Organizational Change and Change Management

Organizational change refers to the process through which businesses install new cultures, technologies, approaches, operational policies and structures to achieve transformation (Stouten, Rousseau, & De Cremer, 2018). Business ought to have a well-structured and inclusive approach to achieve the intended organizational transformation (Hornstein, 2015). Therefore, businesses must design a well-structured and inclusive approach through which its team can implement to achieve the intended organizational transformation.

2. Purpose of the Study

The research site was one of the LPG providers in Cyprus, a 15-year-old firm which is at the growth stage. The study is motivated by the need to explore actual employment and empowerment strategies and to also unearth gaps in the management of employees, after which recommendations on the study are offered. The participants in the study were involved with identifying gaps and solutions in the current dynamic work place, after which the results offered a framework for good management practice with regard to SMEs.

3. Research Questions

RQ1. What are the impacts on employees' empowerment and engagement strategies employed by managers at the LPG Company?

RQ2. How do the strategies aid in identifying and promoting good organizational practice?

4. Research Design and Methodology

4.1. Design

The study employed a mixed method approach to enhance this qualitative research. Secondary sources were analysed with respect to the topic of inquiry (Jiang, Lepak, Hu, & Baer, 2012). Primary data collection involved the use of interviews and observation of 7 mangers and 29 employees from the company (Buller & McEvoy, 2012). The collected data is descriptive and was analysed with the help of inferential data assessment approach, Bayesian Model (McLaughlin, 2005). Primary data was assessed with respect to existing literatures to ensure the study's credibility and reliability (Suri, 2011).

The data for this research included accessing the company's database to attain an overview on duty assignment, performance, qualification of workers and the length of period of services (Doz, 2011). Physical and online libraries were also accessed to review the

literature. Interaction with the LPG company management was necessary permissions for the interviews and to obtain access to corporate data and archives.

4.2. Sampling Procedure

The random sampling process involved 7 of the 8 heads of departments to ensure optimal inclusion leadership representation. Further, a sample of 29 employees was considered (Spence Laschinger, Leiter, Day, & Gilin, 2009). The intention of the sample size was to obtain a representation of the company's population. 7 managers and 29 employees were considered an ideal number to reflect on 8 managers and 80 workers working in the company under investigation (Chiang & Hsieh, 2012). Generation and gender diversity were also considered in the sampling (Pieterse, Van Knippenberg, Schippers, & Stam, 2010).

4.3. Hypothesis generation

Inferential data was critical for this study where two hypotheses were specifically designed to assess the empowerment and engagement of employees (McLaughlin, 2005). The two hypotheses were with respect to the identification and promotion of good practice in the company (Hoon, Kolb, Hee, & Kyoung, 2012). Two hypotheses were generated for the study. Bayesian Techniques were also incorporated where there is a probabilistic inference via which specific proposed scenarios (Hypotheses A and B) are allotted possibility with respect to the observations of actual events (Roos, Martins, Held, & Rue, 2015). The technique allows the integration of novel data concerning the alternative hypothesis (Fairfield, 2018). The hypotheses include:

Hypothesis A: The impact on employees' empowerment and engagement strategies employed by managers at the LPG Company motivates the identification and promotion of good practice.

Hypothesis B: The impact on employees' empowerment and engagement strategies employed by managers at the LPG Company do not motivate the identification and promotion of good practice.

4.4. Data collection and analysis

The study used qualitative data collection methods which included both primary and secondary data. Primary data collection entailed use of questionnaires, interviews and observation (Bakker, Hakanen, Demerouti, & Xanthopoulou, 2007). Secondary data was

collected through review of existing literatures. The data was analysed by transcribing of data, coding of collected data and the generalization of the data (Cope, 2014).

5. Results and Discussion

5.1. Analysis of Observation

Generally, the employees were observed to be in a happy mood practising good time management abilities and warm relations with the managers (Armstrong & Taylor, 2014). However, it must be noted that the interactions between the employees and the managers are unique to individual managers' personality and the department responsibilities (Berger, 2013).

The results found that the company has invested little in extensive systematic approaches to measure the employees' talents (Bailey, Mankin, Kelliher, & Garavan, 2018). Some employees are working in positions that do not relate to their passion while other are optimally content in their job positions (Bedarkar & Pandita, 2014). Thus, the company has plans to install a novel plan for employee development to a section of its human resource with critical potentials (Men & Stacks, 2013). Employees' energization is below the general manager's expectations which the workers link to bonuses and motivation to work (Jose & Mampilly, 2014). In this regard, the employees are given opportunities to take initiative and make decisions with regard to their roles (Lazaroiu, 2015). The managers consider the employees' opinions and make the final decisions independently. However, most employees are fearful while others avoid taking initiatives (Brad Shuck, Rocco, & Albornoz, 2011). They prefer to just work on the assigned duties; hence, there is a strong focus on attaining the company's goals, problem solving and excellent performance.

Managers are responsible for overseeing change initiation and innovation within their specific departments (Ugwu, Onyishi, & Rodríguez-Sánchez, 2014). The management team is comfortable in initiating and adopting organizational change (Chiang & Hsieh, 2012). They then delegate specific duties to their subordinates (Zhang & Bartol, 2010). To ensure quality work delivery, workers undergo several periodic trainings and development programs (Khalid & Khalid, 2015). However, it was noted that not all the workers are able to attend these sessions which can be construed as detracting from organisational effectiveness.

However, the company's organizational culture highly motivates workers to keep working in the company as it allows a good work-life balance (Albrecht, Bakker, Gruman, Macey, & Saks, 2015).

5.2. Analysis of survey

The data analysis phases for the surveys started by applying the Bayesian Updating Model. Each hypothesis was assigned a 0.5 prior probability (Berger, 2013). Driven by the need to achieve the fairest inferential data, the study employed conditional probability for hypothesis A and B (Fairfield, 2018). This phase was guided by the probability that hypothesis A occurs given an event E: p(A/E) = p(A, E)/p(E).

Thus, p(A/E) = {p(A)*p(E/A)}/{[p(A)*p(E/A)] +[p(NA)*p(E/NA)]}.

On the other hand, the possibility that of B being true given an event A is (1-p(A)) = p(NA). Therefore, p(B/E) = p(E/NA) = {P(E)*p(NA/E)}/{p(NA)} (Karvetski, Olson, Gantz, & Cross, 2013).

Table 1 represents the results following the Bayes analysis of the primary data collected from the LPG Company's employees and managers.

Table 1. Bayes Generalized Estimates on Individual Pieces of Evidence Collected from the Interviews

| Bayesian Updating assessment for Hypotheses A and B through competing hypothesis principles					
Analysis of evidence in relation to the impact of employees' empowerment and engagement strategies employed by managers at an LPG Cyprus Company in identifying and promoting good practice.					
Evidence No.	**Evidence**	**P(Evidence if Hypothesis True)**		**P(Hypothesis Given Evidence)**	
		p(Et | A,[E]t-1)	p(Et|B, [E]t-1)	p(A|E)	p(B|E)
				0.50	0.50
Level 1: Observations					
E1.	Observation on mood	1	0.2	0.83	0.17
E2.	Observation on time management	1	0.3	0.77	0.23
E3.	Observed Employee-Manager relations	1	0.2	0.83	0.17
				0.81	**0.19**
Level 2: Managers' Part 1 Responses					
E4.	Understanding of employees' talents	1	1	0.5	0.5
E5.	Future plans in talent management	1	0.5	0.67	0.33
E6.	Amount of time mangers spend with the employees the kind of interaction they have.	1	0.8	0.56	0.44
				0.57	**0.43**
Level 3: Managers' Part 2 Responses					
E7.	Company's team energization	1	0.85	0.54	0.46
E8.	Employees' aspiration to excel and take initiatives	1	1.2	0.45	0.55
E9.	Employees' focus on company's goals, problem solving and excellent performance.	1	0.5	0.67	0.33
				0.55	**0.45**

Level 4: Managers' Part 3 Responses

E10.	The team's comfort in driving and adopting organizational change	1	0.4	0.71	0.29
E11.	Is change management managers' personal responsibility for managers?	1	0.2	0.83	0.17
E12.	Employees' change management responsibility	1	1.3	0.43	0.57
E13.	Attitudes in being internal change ambassadors	1	1.2	0.45	0.55
E14.	Adoption and application of training and development lessons to work delivery	1	0.6	0.63	0.38
				0.61	**0.39**

Level 5: Managers' Part 4 Responses

E15.	Employees' opportunity to make decisions regarding their responsibilities and company's strategic goals	1	0.8	0.56	0.44
E16.	Managers' engagement with employees in waste and cost minimization	1	0.4	0.71	0.29
E17.	Employees' autonomy in making strategic decisions	1	0.25	0.80	0.20
				0.69	**0.31**

Level 6: Employees' Part 1 Responses

E18.	What they believe they can deliver best linked to their job positions	1	0.3	0.77	0.23
E19.	Major motivation to work at the LPG Company	1	0.1	0.91	0.09
E20.	Activities they enjoy doing at work place.	1	0.1	0.91	0.09
E21.	Activities they enjoy doing outside the working environment	1	0.2	0.83	0.17
E22.	The duties that colleagues endorse	1	0.6	0.62	0.38
E23.	Type of activities that employees engage in so actively that they do not notice time passing	1	0.5	0.67	0.33
				0.79	**0.21**

Level 7: Employees' Part 2 Responses

E24.	Link between workplace duties and individuals' passion, performance and ability to learn	1	1	0.50	0.50
E25.	If employees enjoy their work and their concentration levels	1	1	0.50	0.50
E26.	Focus on Company's goals and problem solving	1	0.4	0.71	0.29
				0.57	**0.43**

Level 8: Employees' Part 3 Responses

E27.	Embracing change management as personal responsibility	1	0.1	0.91	0.09
E28.	Application of training and development lessons to the working environment	1	0.2	0.83	0.17
				0.87	**0.13**

| Level 9: Employees' Part 4 Responses						
E29.	Employee-manager relationships	1	0.32	0.76	0.24
E30.	Foundation of employee- manager relations	1	0.25	0.80	0.20
E31.	If work process involves inclusion	1	0.28	0.78	0.22
E32.	Opportunity and encouragement of being innovative	1	1	0.50	0.50
				0.71	**0.29**

Table 2. Hypotheses Analysis Scores Summary Attained from Table 1's Bayes Analysis of The Qualitative Primary Data Collected in the LPG Cyprus Company's Study

	Proposition A, (p(A|E))	Proposition B, (p(B|E))
Level 1: Observations	0.81	0.19
Level 2: Managers' Part 1 Responses	0.57	0.43
Level 3: Managers' Part 2 Responses	0.55	0.45
Level 4: Managers' Part 3 Responses	0.61	0.39
Level 5: Managers' Part 4 Responses	0.69	0.31
Level 6: Employees' Part 1 Responses	0.79	0.21
Level 7: Employees' Part 2 Responses	0.57	0.43
Level 8: Employees' Part 3 Responses	0.87	0.13
Level 9: Employees' Part 4 Responses	0.71	0.29
Average score	0.69	0.31
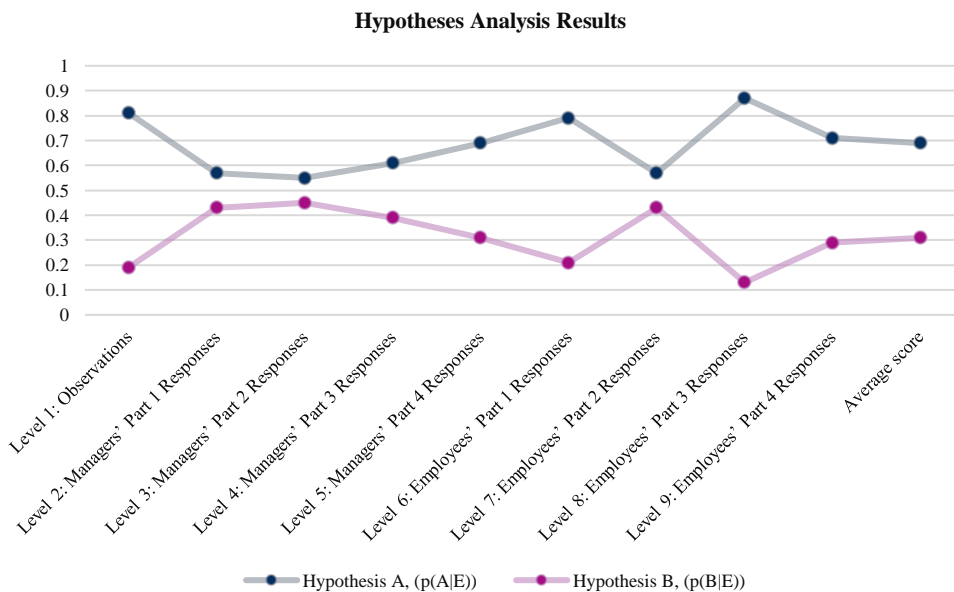
Figure 1. Hypotheses Scores in Table 2 Depicted in a Graphical Manner to Show the Stronger Hypothesis

As illustrated by Table 2 and Figure 1 above, hypothesis A is constantly the most preferred given the study's evidences with its score being over 55% and an average of 69%. Levels 2, 3,4,5 and 7 have scores below 70% at 57.4%, 55.39%, 61.23%, 68.99% and 57.14% respectively which gives hypothesis B a relatively strong position against that of A. However, levels 1, 6, 8 and 9 have a relatively strong support for hypothesis A with score above 70% at 81.20%, 78.54%, 87.12% and 70.97% respectively (Bratton & Gold, 2017).

Average score for Hypotheses A and B
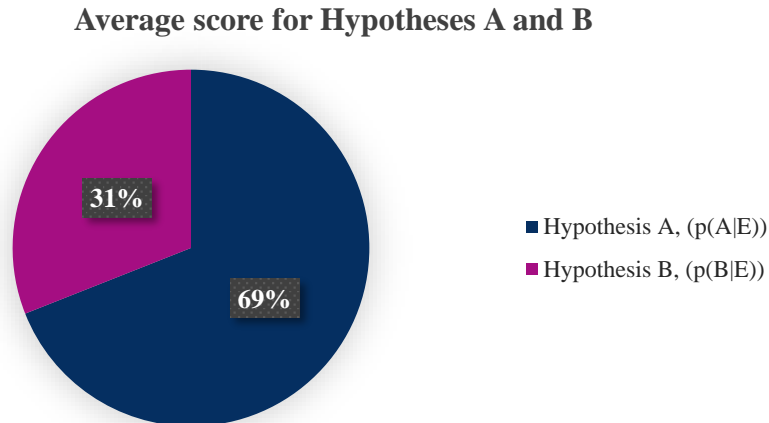
Figure 2. Average Scores for Each of the Hypotheses Derived from the Analysis in Table 2

As illustrated in Figure 2, the level of uncertainty is considerably high at 31% hence posing a substantial gap in employee management towards good practice (Buller & McEvoy, 2012). This LPG Company needs to put in the necessary effort to ensure that the gap is minimized for optimal utilization of the Human Resource Capital.

6. Conclusion

It is evident that employee empowerment and effective engagement strategies are critical for the growth of a company. Empowerment of the workers enhances their creativity. By making a worker feel valued and get a sense of achievement, he or she is most likely to become creative and enhance their critical thinking. This makes employees feel more encouraged and proficient to develop situations through unconventional strategies which improves the product development process (Aghimien, Osanyinro, & Adegbembo, 2017).

It is also apparent that when a worker feels valued and has a sense of achievement, he or she is most likely to become more creative and enhance their critical thinking capacities (Agyemang & Ofei, 2013). From the engagement strategies and the empowerment measures

applied at the LPG Company under investigation, the management have been able to empower the workers with better decision-making skills. By empowering the workers, they get to respond to changes quickly and also find ways of meeting the needs of the customers (Appelbaum, Karasek, Lapointe, & Quelch, 2015).

The study confirmed that empowering employees leads to improving the quality of customer service as resolving issues quickly becomes a part of their professional conduct. Hence, empowerment of employees directly assists in improving the quality of customer service (Truong Quang & Hara, 2017). Such workers are also conversant with the fact that managers respect new ideas, and hence work towards making things better, through focusing on both personal and the company growth (Michael & Taylor, 2014). This finding indirectly reveals that an un-empowered employee does not follow a certain culture or system, and never questions the process (Tariq, Jan, & Ahmad, 2016). The LPG company in this study can, therefore, improve on its operations, and ultimately meet most of its revenue and profit goals and objectives through working towards ensuring there is more empowerment and engagement process of its employees (Han, Seo, Li, & Yoon, 2016) by undertaking an in-depth research on what empowerment entails.

Workers who are motivated tend to keep a close, but cordial relationship with their superior, a factor that is important in boosting their morale, working spirit and ultimately, their results (Kerzner, 2017). However, the results of the study reveal that more ought to be done considering the fact that the company does not have a specific extensive systematic strategy in place to evaluate the talents of the employees. Such a system would be an added advantage to the company, since evaluating the workers would individually empower each one of them and subsequently develop a better and more motivated workforce (Oloko & Ogutu, 2017).

7. Recommendation

The LPG management first needs to provide its employees with generous boundaries in order to enhance the use of team work which lead to better result and also enhance innovation within the company (Maxwell, 2005). The LPG company management, led by the general manager, need to come up with guidelines and best practices clear to their employees, more so with regard to interaction of the mangers and the employees which has been identified in the findings. The company also needs to develop better communication strategies to allow for increased levels of trust among employees and their leaders (Kumar & Kumar, 2017). The firm also needs to offer authority and ownership to employees by delegating responsibility so as to permit the employees to take on new projects and run them till completion. As a way of empowering the employees, the firm ought to provide various ways in which its employees

can grow professionally (Heathfield, 2018). The firm needs to ensure that it praises and rewards effort as a way of encouraging employees to learn more and grow, rather than to simply remain focused on the few things that they can perform easily.

Another critical issue that any company including this LPG company should focus on is the encouragement of trust within the workplace environment. It is critical that the LPG company considers hiring a number of employees which it can assure of employment status once the company faces an economic downturn whereupon it should be willing them in bad and good times as way of earning the trust of its employees (Fernandez & Moldogaziev, 2015).

This LPG Company also needs to foster the behaviour of giving its employees time; to learn, experiment and manage their personal issues since time produces better outcomes (Boswoth, 2016). Giving employees enough time to handle their personal issues will ensure that they are able to focus on their productivity at work. A successful team of employees will always make mistakes as they try on new ideas that aim at getting the company to higher levels. Therefore, the LPG leadership needs to establish clear differences between acceptable mistakes and the critical offenses (LimeadeMarketing, 2018).

A strong leadership team should also be encouraged by the LPG company and any other company as well. Management with good leadership traits are role models to those they lead and unconsciously demand respect from the rest of the employees. Through good leadership, there are clear communications where workers communicate effective and regularly. They also have a positive attitude and treat all employees equally (Khuong & Le Vu, 2014). Good leadership ensures employees are more motivated and empowered to perform excellently. Another recommendation for the company and other firms globally is to ensure that they have leaders who share their leadership vision with the employees to assist them in feeling like they are part of the company's future (Al-Ababneh, Al-Sabi, Al-Shakhsheer, & Masadeh, 2017). By taking note of all the issue raised and implementing the recommended methods into its system, the firm will be able to ultimately empower and motivate its employees, making them feel as part of the company (Shen, Chanda, D'netto, & Monga, 2009). This will result to excellent performance which will in turn enhance the productivity and outcomes of the company (Ongori & Shunda, 2008). Ultimately, it will contribute to a final successful achievement of the major goals and objectives by the company (Allen, Lehmann-Willenbrock, & Sands, 2016). After achieving success, the company will then need to appreciate the workers who will have played a vital part by making sure that they feel like part of the company (Hirzel, Leyer, & Moormann, 2017).

Most companies like the Cyprus LPG Company fail to have good structures to empower their employees; hence, creating a need for a well-developed program that will assist in

empowering them. The first strategy is to develop a well laid out plan. Other parties to be consulted will be all the managers of the Cyprus LPG Company, who may have more ideas on how to empower the employees and also get better engagement within the firm in the future (Teh, 2009). There is also need to remind them of the values of the company and also insist on the fact that they are very critical to the firm, and hence should always feel as part and parcel of the firm (Allen et al., 2016). The next process of empowering employees will entail having a conversation with the employees with regards to boundaries. Another part of the plan for the workers will entail focusing on the issue of mistakes. The managers need to be reminded of the need for forgiving mistakes and how to tolerate the workers who make mistakes (Farndale, 2018). The other part of the plan is to have all the employees put into groups based on the roles each person plays in the organization. Establishing a teamwork structure will also be critical for the empowerment since it will be one of the ways of boosting the morale of the employees. Further on, the program will entail establishing a growth plan for each and every member of the company (Alazzaz & Whyte, 2015). Additionally, establishing a reward system which will not just entail bonuses but rather focus on the efforts and the different talents that the employees have will also be included (Analoui, 2017; De Lange, Kooij, & Van der Heijden, 2015). Finally, a system of earning trust from the employees will be established (Cokins, 2017).

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