Chapter 9

Managing Human Resource Management through Empowerment Policy:
Assessing Structural Perceptions at a Local Authority Level

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ABSTRACT

Since 1990s, local government reforms in Tanzania have emphasized empowerment at all levels as part of decentralisation by devolution. The major objective was to give more power where it should belong. One of the areas was human resource empowerment to take proactive roles in decision-making and day-to-day management of local authorities. The chapter draws data from a cross-sectional case study covering a sample of 103 out of 206 employees working in Mvomero district council to determine employees' perceptions on the existence of structural aspects of empowerment in the organisation. By using frequencies and Chi square tests, the chapter concludes that the general perception is weak, and indeed, there is significant difference between theory and practice.

INTRODUCTION

The governmental reform process (reinventing government) advocated by (Osborne and Gaebler, 1992) emphasized the role of employees and the need to empower them as core of any effort to reduce the size of government and to improve government services to citizens. Employee empowerment promised a move from a system where the hierarchical decision-making approach depended upon managers to a system where the control hierarchy was reduced or dismantled, i.e., a push of decision-making authority down to the frontline employees (Langbein, 2000). Empowerment under this sense took advantage of employee creativity and talents – a creativity that both human relations and reinvention theories believed the traditional organization structure stifled.

Employee empowerment in Tanzania is envisaged in a trend of local government reforms which has been taking place since 1990's under the policy of devolution. This is part of the significant changes going on in Tanzania, towards adoption of many tenets of new public management systems that had already been introduced in western and other developing countries (LGRP, 1998-2008). The major aim was to give more power to employees in the local government to make decision regarding their jobs towards service delivery.

EMPLOYEE EMPOWERMENT AS POLICY AND STRATEGIC ENDOWMENT

Employee empowerment which came up in 1990's is known as one of the new management concepts (Honold, 1997). The reviews of various literatures indicate that, the main theme of empowerment basically revolves around the concept of empowerment and organizational change. Peters and Waterman documented a new management approach that understood employees as "entrepreneurs" who, if allowed to function without bureaucratic rules, could take "destiny into their own hands" (Wilkinson, 1998). This concept became popular in management approaches such as Total Quality Management (TQM) and the Human Resource Management (HRM) movement. Thomas and Velthouse (1990) believed that empowered employees demonstrate flexibility in controlling their own tasks, initiate new tasks in response to problems or opportunities, and demonstrate resiliency to obstacles, thereby sustaining motivation in the face of problems or ambiguity.

Parker and Price (1994) used self-administered surveys to study 692 workers and 141 managers of group homes in Michigan. They defined empowerment as the employee's perceived control over decision making in the organization. They examined the level of managerial support for empowerment and found that managers

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