

**EMPLOYEE PERCEPTION OF EMPOWERMENT PRACTICES AT
UNGA LIMITED**

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DECLARATION

This research project is my original work and has not been presented to any other examination body.

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DEDICATION

This research project is dedicated to my family.

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I am deeply thankful to the Almighty God for giving me this privileged learning opportunity and seeing completion of my research project. I acknowledge support received from my family at large for their unwavering support towards my education elevation. My heartfelt gratitude to my children Elizabeth and Gabriella who tolerated my absence during my committed time in concluding this project. I salute my classmates and colleagues especially Doreen Kendi and Nathan Majani who remained an encouragement; supporting me at all levels even when I was almost giving up. I cannot forget my supervisor George Omondi for his guidance from the research proposal writing phase to research proposal which was the foundation of my research. Finally I appreciate all lecturers and staff at School of Business, University of Nairobi, who directly played a role in the completion of this project. Since it is not possible to mention your names, May God Almighty bless you all abundantly.

ABSTRACT

Empowerment is a dynamic process that focuses on linking competencies and employee strength towards being proactive in a social dynamic and subsequent change. Its practices are manifested through levels of employees' involvement in decision making, levels of work related participation, effective communication, continuous employee training and development, favorable organizational culture, well laid incentive systems, trust among employees, clarity of roles and expectations, sufficient information about work and teamwork. The objective developed for this study was to determine employee perception of empowerment practices. The study was descriptive survey design whereby data was collected by use of semi structured questionnaires. The study was undertaken within Uasin Gishu and Nairobi Counties where the focus were the permanent employees of Unga Limited at Headquarters office, Nairobi and Eldoret branch. The sample size of the study was 46 permanent employees of Unga Limited selected through stratified and random sampling, however only 40 employees participated, hence response rate of 87%. The data from the study was analyzed using descriptive statistics and inferential statistics whereby frequencies, percentages weighted means and average weighted means were used to weigh employees' perception of empowerment practices. The findings revealed that employees have a positive perception towards empowerment practices as weighted means to all statements were above 2.5. It emerged that Unga Limited has its Vision and goals clearly spelt which had the highest weight of 3.95, followed by employees' participation in decision making and company having pro-empowerment policy and structures in place, both coming second with a mean weight of 3.875 each. However, managers mentoring lower cadres had the least mean weight score of 2.55. The main limitation in undertaking the study was failure to get 100% response, and getting the respondents return back the questionnaires on time. From the findings, there is need for Unga to have some reforms on its management through encouraging formal mentorship programs of lower cadres spearheaded by management, management to enhance positive attitudes, commitments and involvement of employees in work related matters, delegate duties more and avail sufficient resources needed in execution of tasks. Given that this study used structured and semi structured as the only data collection tool, suggestion is made for future researches using other tools. Future research could also focus on perception of employee empowerment practices in other industries and service organizations using similar variables to identify if employee perceptions are similar or differ from one industry to another.

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CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background of the Study

Employee empowerment is one of the effective techniques for increasing employees' productivity through optimal use of their individual and group capabilities in order to achieve organizational objectives (GanjiNia et al, 2013). Melhem (2006) defines employee empowerment as recognizing and releasing into an organization the power possessed by employees; such as relevant knowledge, job experience and internal motivation. Employee empowerment is a complex procedure encompassing a clear vision, an invigorating learning atmosphere for management, supervisors and employees, participation and presence of implementation tools and techniques (Pande and Dhar, 2014). Hence, it is a continuing process in harnessing full potential of employees through allowing them to release their innovative energies to benefit shareholders, suppliers, customers and employees themselves.

Organizations are increasingly adopting employee empowerment as universal competitive strategy to survive in modern business environment (Lashley, 2000). This is attributed to recognition that uniqueness found in human resource can be used as a differentiating factor given the fact that it cannot be replicated by competitors (Karakoc et al, 2009; Zairi and Jarrar, 2010). This places organizations' competing power under a committed, highly motivated, satisfied and innovative human resource that displays unique knowledge, skills and abilities (Elnaga and Imran 2014). Osborne (2000) sums that empowerment is giving power and authority to employees to perform effectively. It is not just giving employees power but also involves transfer of power from managers to employees to enable the latter perform well in their assigned tasks. This is where managers are encouraged to reduce their close supervision roles and control while employees take more responsibility for their work (Isimoya and Bakarey, 2013). It covers active employee participation and delegation of authority to juniors along with the motivation of the employees. Employees are more involved in processes regarding relevant decision making and handle more responsibility and authority. For the strategy to succeed, there is need for an enabling environment whereby there is support from management through presence of favorable policies, structures, cultures and more important employees' willingness to take over more responsibilities for their actions.

This study is guided by Victor Vroom's motivation theory of Expectancy, Fredrick Herzberg's Two Factor theory of hygienic factors and motivators, and Douglas McGregor's Theory 'X' and 'Y'. Expectancy theory hypothesizes that a person makes an effort in anticipation to meet a desired performance leading to a desired outcome (Lunenburg, 2011). In Two Factor theory, the factors in reference are from both the surrounding environment as well as within employees that are pro-empowerment among them; policies, organizational structures, employees' attitudes and their levels of trainings. Theory X and Y theory is developed on two distinct preconceived perceptions where X management view employees as lazy, dislike and avoid responsibilities, hence need for managements' active intervention while Y managers hold employees as having natural attraction to work, leaving management with the responsibility of developing employees potential (Opu, 2008).

Unga Limited has adopted 'collective thinking power' strategy of all employees where managers delegate as much authority as possible to employees in lower cadres who in turn are all encouraged to actively participate towards achieving the company's results (Unga Limited Annual Report - 2014). The company is keen on developing competencies among its human resources by being receptive to new ideas, initiative and practicing culture of inclusiveness to enhance career growth within the company and succession planning (Rotich, 2013). This is the foundation of Unga Limited current employee empowerment policy towards achieving its goals of enhancing employees' performance, satisfaction, reduction of employee turnover, optimal and quality production and, enhanced collaboration among employees and clients.

1.1.1 Concept of Perception

According to Robbins and Judge (2011) perception is defined as cognitive processes through which individuals select, organize and attach meaning to an environmental phenomenon. Perception leads to making decisions and taking actions in addition to making choices. Perception is a process by which individuals organize and interpret their sensory impressions in order to give meaning to their environment, thus perception affects not only management in making major decisions regarding the direction of their business but also the way employees execute their tasks. Perception is also affected by individual attitudes, personality, motive, interests, experience and expectations (Atsanga, 2012).

Vithessonthi (2005) argues that perceptions influence the ways in which human understand the world around them and how they make decisions. Hence it plays a significant role in shaping employee behavior in organizations; this is in regard to time, work setting and social setting. For employee empowerment practices in play, employees' interpretations of their organizations' policies on empowerment and their subsequent perceptions influences the organization's performance. Hence positive employee perception towards the organization empowerment practices enhances chances of achieving its goals effectively while negative perception is likely to undermine the organization's objectives. It is from positive perception that virtues like trust, confidence, loyalty and teamwork are cemented and empowerment practices easily accepted by both managers and employees.

1.1.2 Employee Empowerment

Employee empowerment is a multidimensional concept that links employee's strengths and competencies, natural helping systems and spur proactive response towards social dynamics and subsequent change (Kahreh et al, 2011). It is a state of mind resulting from significant responsibility being vested in the people who are nearest to the problem (Melhem, 2006). This is on the premise that at their levels they have a better assessment of issues and problems facing the organization, hence can generate better solutions on the same. This increases their responsibilities paving ways for flexibilities in work schedule, enjoyable work culture, and open appreciation for employees' success. An employee with an empowered state of mind experiences feelings of control over the tasks to be performed, awareness of the context in which the work is done, accountable for personal work, mutual responsibility for both unit and overall organisational performance, is confident, capable, determined to work more effectively and efficiently and is motivated by equity in rewards based on individual and collective performance (Ongori, 2009; Bakari, 2008).

Employees to be empowered are those in lower cadres who through empowerment draw power and authority from supervisors, peers and themselves to execute tasks satisfactorily (Karakoc, 2009). This argument is however weak as it is not addressing the empowerment concerns of middle and senior management employees commensurate to their roles and positions so as to be accountable for their actions. Empowered employees are provided with means and resources to achieve results and both employers and employees are able to evaluate the cost effectiveness of their actions. Empowerment process enables managers to

exploit opportunities and strengths of individual employees; making employees more proactive and self-sufficient in enhancing organizations' performance (Osborne, 2000).

Empowered employees have a sense of self-determination, meaning, competency and influence (Pande and Dhar, 2014). Hence they are responsible, are aware of what's expected of them, are involved in making decisions on how things are done and have control over their work. The success of employee empowerment practices is dependent on willingness of both managers and employees to exercise power respectively in an enabling empowerment environment. These practices are; employee training and development, participative decision-making, effective communication and information sharing, upward problem solving, enabling organizational environment, equity in rewards and feedback (Murimi, 2015; Thompson, 2013; Bakari, 2008). Enabling environment comprises presence of necessary resources, employee support from management and peers through coaching, mentoring and encouragement, offering directions to employees regarding task execution through anticipated results, measurements, goals, contributing to employees' effective performance and job satisfaction (Melhem, 2006).

1.1.3 Employee Empowerment Practices

Employers strive to achieve competitive advantage over their competitors so as to survive and succeed in business through among others empowering their employees for optimal benefit owing to their uniqueness (Karakoc et al, 2009). Thompson (2013) agrees that employee empowerment is essential in this era of globalization so as to enable organizations to quickly respond to any changes in the environment and also reduce employee turnover. It is a management practice through which management share information, rewards and power with employees so that an employee can take initiative and make decisions to mitigate emerging problems as well as improve on their service delivery and general performance. This is emphasized by Isimoya and Bakarey (2013) who conclude that employee empowerment is a general recipe for enhancing work performance and organization's prosperity.

Employee empowerment involves decision making process, planning process, appreciating employees' efforts and enabling access adequate training and support (Lawson, 2006). It is a process that addresses expectations of both internal and external customers which increases the employees' authority over their work, knowledge, skill, opportunities, self-confidence and

desire related to their authority and more so providing perception related to this increase. Covey (1992) highlights conditions underlying empowerment as; win-win agreement of employee and organization, employees' self-supervision, supportive structure and accountability arising from psychological and social agreements between manager and subordinate on desired results which include setting some guidelines, availing necessary resources, defining accountability and finally determining consequences.

Zairi and Jarrar (2010) argue that the best employee empowerment practices include letting employees participate in decision-making processes, giving them responsibility and authority to circumvent the rules to enhance service and customer satisfaction, allow them to influence and decorate their own workplace, let them set and monitor their production goals, allow them flexible work hours and free to dress the way they wish. According to Al Sada (2003), the following are empowering management practices that facilitate empowerment; sharing of relevant information between management and subordinates, involving employees in the processes of planning and making decision which increases their commitment and sense of belongingness, delegating authority to subordinates, rewarding performance and enhancing feedback on performance.

Empowered employees enjoy flexibility and freedom to decide and execute tasks since they are enabled to decide on how to perform their jobs, own their work and take responsibility for outcomes. Empowered employees dedicate their energies on their job, improve their work-life and this leads to improvements in coordination and work procedures (Isimoya and Bakarey, 2013). Elnaga and Imran (2014) maintain that empowerment process succeeds when employees enjoy independence and feedback within the organization. This is when management responsibility is largely to create and foster an environment in which it is apparent that employees input is desired, cultivated and achieved through trust between management and employees in an environment of effective communication.

1.1.4 Unga Limited

Unga Limited is one of the four subsidiaries of Unga Holdings Limited. Unga Limited is Kenya's oldest and largest flour miller with over a century experience in grain milling. It has its headquarters located in Nairobi and operates a branch each in Nairobi and Eldoret. Other companies under Unga Holdings are Unga Farm Care (EA) Limited located in Nakuru, Unga

Millers Uganda, Unga Limited Uganda and EnnsValley confectionary in Nairobi (Ungagroup.com, 2015; Rotich, 2013).

Unga limited has a total of 453 permanent staff and 460 unskilled manpower that the company engages on temporary basis. Headquarters office along Commercial Street in Nairobi has 88 permanent staff, Nairobi branch has 250 permanent and 160 unskilled manpower while Eldoret branch has 115 permanent and 300 unskilled manpower (Unga Group Annual Report - 2014). This research proposal targets Unga limited since it has been able to survive competition in the flour milling industry in the country by retaining its market share and sustaining presence of her products on the market besides expanding to neighboring countries. Though other players have substantial investments in infrastructure, Unga's resilience lies in the company's empowered employees. This study covers only permanent staff as unskilled manpower is outside the caliber that the company normally emphasizes empowerment practices.

1.2 Research Problem

Employee empowerment is a development strategy towards organizational prosperity achieved through transfer of power from employer to employees. In this, managers learn to reduce their close supervision and control roles while employees take more responsibility for their work by virtue of being in-charge of their actions (Isimoya and Bakarey, 2013). Managers enable empowerment through involving employees in decision-making process, clarifying organizational goals and objectives to employees, delegating responsibility and authority, taking into consideration individual differences in employees' ability and motivation, providing employees access to relevant information, providing resources needed for new work responsibilities, re-aligning management systems consistent with empowerment principles, removing bureaucratic constraints and unnecessary controls, expressing confidence and trust in people, providing mentoring and advice on a timely basis, encouraging and supporting initiative and problem solving skills, recognizing important contributions and achievements, ensuring equity in rewards and, ensuring accountability for the ethical use of power. Ongori (2009) agrees that employee empowerment is essential for continued organizations' success as it enables organizations to quickly respond to emerging changes in the environment as well as reduce employee turnover.

Unga Limited is a subsidiary of Unga Group Limited, one of Kenya's oldest companies established in 1908 with the sole objective of meeting the milling needs of fledgling wheat growing industry in the country. The company has been in operation for over a century, a period through which it has survived monopoly as well as liberalized competitive environment which allowed new entrants in milling of flour for human consumption in the country. The company used various winning strategies; among them downsizing, closing of some branches, opening strategic subsidiaries and expanding its operations in East Africa Region. This move has enabled it to retain substantial market share in both animal and human health and nutrition products in the country. The company has an employee empowerment policy in place to encourage innovations and above all sustain a competitive edge against her competitors in the milling industry (Ungagroup.com).

A number of studies have been conducted on employee empowerment among them: Nyanchama (2009) conducted a census survey on Employee Empowerment Practices in Commercial Banks in Kenya and this study confirmed that most of Commercial Banks in Kenya had employee empowerment policies acting as basis for employee empowerment practices perceived to enhance employee performance. Bakari (2008) conducted a case study on the Relationship between Empowerment and Performance in the City Council of Nairobi and established that that employee empowerment had a significant positive influence on performance of an organization. Murimi (2015) conducted a study on Employee Empowerment and Organization Performance of Tata Chemicals Magadi Limited and the findings demonstrated the influence of employee empowerment on organizational performance in the manufacturing sector. Previous researches on employee empowerment in the country targeted on the variable of performance in regard to employee empowerment and none has however been conducted on employees' perception of empowerment practices at Unga Limited. This study therefore limits itself to the Unga Limited employees' perception of empowerment practices in their organization.

1.3 Objective of the Study

The objective of this study is to determine employees' perception of empowerment practices in Unga Limited.

1.4 Value of the Study

This research will help human resource management of Unga Limited and other companies in flour milling industry take into cognizance benefits realized from pursuing appropriate employee empowerment practices to act as a unique strategic approach to survive competition and even edge out competitors. Further, the findings would challenge them to innovate unique employee empowerment practices that befit their operating environments as well as nature and expectations of their organizations, employees and clients.

The outcome of the study will also be of value to policy makers and managers since it will aid them develop insights into the need to employee relevant human resource practices among them empowering employees for optimal returns. This would enable them initiate and develop pro-empowerment policies for the interests of firm owners, employees and consumers of output.

This study will also act as a platform as it contributes to existing knowledge on employee empowerment and provides background information that could be used by academicians, researchers and students of human resource management in future research and further discussions on evolving employee empowerment practices in organizations in regard to Kenyan context.

CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Introduction

This chapter is divided into two parts. The first part comprises theoretical foundation of the study while the second reviews literature of previous studies on employee empowerment.

2.2 Theoretical Foundation

The study is grounded on expectancy theory, two factor theory and theory 'X' and 'Y'.

2.2.1 Expectancy Theory

Victor Vroom's Expectancy theory explains motivational force for people's behavior, action, or task as a function of three distinct perceptions namely expectancy, instrumentality and valence (Khanzadeh et al, 2011). Generally, expectancy is an anticipation of a consequence resulting from directed efforts. Expectancy theory is about the probability that the effort put forth will lead to the desired performance and secondly that tasks are achievable and resulting performance will lead to a particular reward (Muogbo, 2013; Lunenburg, 2011).

Expectancy is 'personal' believe that employees can complete given tasks and that levels of expectancy are influenced largely by the levels of employee empowerment they enjoy. This includes levels of skills needed to undertake the task against skills possessed by the employee, tools needed to execute the task against tools available to the employee, previous experience in regard to the task at hand, amount of relevant information available to the employee to execute the task and, support arising from expectations of supervisors and co-workers. Valence focuses on employees' values and preferences where they attach a consequence for achieving a goal and their behavior shaped depending on consequence being positive or negative. Instrumentality is the probability of completing the task leading to desired consequence, leading to focus on perceived sense of trust between the employee, supervisors, co-workers and organization at large, clarity on instructions, processes and security (Bowen and Lawler's, 1992; 1995).

According to Crampton and Wagner (1994), employee empowerment raises employees' levels of needed skills, providing necessary tools, information, exposure and other relevant support from peers and management. On the part of the organization, formulation of

favorable policies and structures, employees' expectancy levels are raised and this increases chances for their confidence and efficiency in executing tasks. Further, people join organizations with expectations and if they are met they stick to the organization (Namusonge et al, 2012). Hence, employees are likely to put in a good performance, remain loyal to employer and be creative in their work when they value and own what they are doing in anticipation of expected consequence.

2.2.2 Two-Factor Theory

In Fredrick Herzberg's two dimensional paradigms of hygiene and motivator factors in relation to work output, Herzberg (1974) contents that hygiene factors are those related to job context and they act as dissatisfies to employees. These are; organizations' favorable culture, administration practices, supervision, regulations, salary and policies. Motivators are those factors that encourage man to perform better and are manifested in employees' desire for achievement and feelings of recognition (Opu, 2008). These among others employees' jobs like achievement, recognition for achievement, interesting work, increased responsibility, growth and advancement.

Employee empowerment is viewed as fulfilling employees' hygiene and motivator needs including a sense of security and achievement (Ogutu and Oloko, 2012). Under Herzberg's approach, organizations strive and meet employees' needs through ensuring presence of hygienic factors as well as motivators to enhance employees' levels of empowerment and ultimate contribution to organizations' success.

2.2.3 Theory X and Y

Douglas McGregor's Theory 'X' and 'Y' is developed on two distinct preconceived perceptions where X management view people as lazy, dislike and avoid work/responsibilities hence need for managements' active intervention to make them work unlike Y managers who view employees as having natural attraction to work leaving management with responsibility to develop employees potential (Opu, 2008).

Employee empowerment is supported by Y style of management in which employees are self-driven and willing to undertake new work related responsibilities. With empowerment, employees enjoy freedom in executing their work and trust of management since they are

involved in decision-making on issues pertaining to welfare of organization, customers and employees themselves. They are considered valuable to the existence of the organization and there are open opportunities for their advancement.

2.3 Empowering Employees

Employee empowerment is achieved when managers and employees sincerely infuse and embrace organization climate that has incentives, rewards, recognition of efforts maintained, effective communication and flow of information, employee training and development (Melhem, 2006). In empowering, managers must ensure that employees at the lowest hierarchical levels have the right mix of information, knowledge, power and rewards to work independently without management's control and direction (Ogutu and Oloko, 2012). This pushes down the element of decision making to workers who are near the problem to choose appropriate schedules and procedures to solve work-related problems (Isimoya and Bakarey, 2013; Val Del, 2003). By virtue of possessing right knowledge, skills, abilities, positive attitudes, access to relevant information and some degree of independence, employees are able to easily resolve issues at work places. This strategy builds trust, promotes effective communication and good relationship among employees and, between employees and employers; making employees feel most valued hence winning their cooperation and loyalty.

Empowerment is a process whose success calls for commitment and support from both management and employees. Empowerment is normally prompted when employees feel some powerlessness affecting their productivity hence compelling employers to identify internal and external conditions causing this powerlessness as well as empowerment strategies and tactics to mitigate them. However, lessening external conditions and adopting empowerment strategies might not necessary guarantee feeling of empowerment unless employees realize their personal efficacy. The process represents a wide variety of activities, from "sham" to a high level of employee involvement and devolution of power. This can range from mere recognition of their contribution, providing necessary trainings and development, rewarding their efforts and giving them power to act within acceptable discretion (Bakari, 2008). GanjiNia et al (2013) state that staff empowerment process consists of three phases namely; information sharing, autonomous working across organizational boundaries and replacement of hierarchies in decision making processes, and empowerment process need to be gradually integrated into the employee working environment.

Employee empowerment practices success is dependent on contextual factors (Murimi, 2015). Practices that work well in one organization or region might be counterproductive in another organization and vice versa hence need for tailored suitable practices. However, there is overwhelming consensus on some key practices applying across all divide in empowering employees. These are; employee involvement in decision-making, information sharing, flattened organizational structures, relevant trainings to employees, task autonomy, reward for efforts and feedback to guide future employee efforts. Employee empowerment facilitates organizations to increase production, motivate employees, increase employee retention, meet clients' needs and increase profits however other scholars argue that it leads to employee burnouts and added baggage to the organizations (Murimi, 2015). Further, Heathfield (2006) proposed several management principles that reinforce employee empowerment as; managers demonstrating value for employees to make employees feel part and parcel of the organization, share goals and direction of the organization with employees to enable them know where they are headed and what is expected of them in achieving the goals, trust people as they are entrusted to discharge right decisions, delegate real authority to enable employees attain experience and develop new skills, provide frequent feedback to enable employees know how they are performing as well as recognizing their efforts, solve problems without laying blame on employees, listen to learn and ask questions to provide guidance and finally help employees feel rewarded and recognized for empowered behavior:

Osborne and Plastrik (2000) add that some employees are excited about opportunity to make decisions without necessarily being under constant management supervision while others search for tangible incentives like attached monetary gains. Osborne and Plastrik also emphasize need for communicating and consulting with employees for their input after understanding why empowerment is being adopted and how it meets purpose and goals of the organization, furnish employees with relevant information through a well laid-out of circulating information, investing in employees through developing employees skills, equitable reward to employees for taking on new responsibilities.

2.3.1 Participative Decision-Making

In employee empowerment, decision making process is not limited to employees with formal power but range from first-line workers, supervisors, middle managers to top management. The influence of managers and employees could be shared at any stage ranging from identification of problem to election of decisions, implementation or revision (Del Val,

2003). Notably, employees at lower levels in organizations are involved in decision-making and their inputs influence both high level strategic and operation decisions. Decision-making for empowered employees in lower cadres is done at operating level whereby employees are given freedom to make choices about schedules, procedures and how to solve work-related problems, hence influence 'when' and 'how' the job is carried out making them feel most valued (Isimoya and Bakarey, 2013). Involving employees in decision-making process through practices like consultation and application of suggestion schemes makes employees more responsible, enhances decision-making processes, improves operations, reduces the cost and enhances organization efficiency (GanjiNia et al, 2013).

Lawson (2006) has observed that though, employees may still execute their tasks and meet set targets even when they are not involved in making decisions they will lack the spark and zeal in executing the tasks, denying a meaning to what they do and to what customers see. Hence it is beneficial to involve employees in lower cadres as they have unique perception of issues they handle and problems facing the organization at their levels. This places them in a better position to effectively respond to emerging issues in appropriate manner.

2.3.2 Task Autonomy and Flattened Organizational Structures

Empowerment is expanding employees' autonomy in making workplace decision; basically the freedom and discretion to make decisions about execution of a particular task (Murimi, 2015; Kahreh et al, 2011). Empowered employees are motivated to pursue task accomplishment through independent action, a sense of meaning and their self-efficacy (Oloko and Ogutu, 2012). Employees with sufficient knowledge on their employers' goals and specific tasks to achieve set objectives enjoy the freedom and discretion on how to execute these tasks in appropriate manner to organization, clients and employees themselves.

Task execution autonomy entails lessened top-down tight hierarchical controls and coordination in making decisions on work aspects to allow employees across the organization to choose how they execute their duties with less supervision (Murimi, 2015). Kahreh et al (2011); Hossein et al (2012) aver that empowerment breaks down traditional hierarchical structures replacing them with team work. Further, Osborne and Plastrik (2000) also argue that for employees to be bestowed with real power, bureaucratic controls among them; centralized organizational structures, excessive layers of management, rigid job classifications and inflexible labour-management contracts and grievance processes need to

be dismantled. This enhances employees creativity, innovations, motivation, satisfaction of employees and customers (Ghorbani and Ahmadi, 2011; GanjiNia et al, 2013). Employees enjoying greater autonomy possess high levels of confidence in undertaking tasks given that they are exposed to opportunities to learn and work on their weak areas. Isimoya and Bakarey (2013) further argue that if employees have greater influence and autonomy over what happens at work, they are more likely to better address individual needs of the customer and offer personal service hence increasing their efficiency and effectiveness.

2.3.3 Communication and Information Sharing

Open communication which tends to lay less emphasis on organizational hierarchies is essential in firm's success as it has correlation to reduction of stress and diffusion of ambiguity and anger in an organization (Ghorbani, 2011). Information, the input in communication is a powerful tool that guides on how work is done, measure of expectations on employees efforts, consequence, areas for improvement, guide relationship between employer, employees and customers qualifying it as a key determinant of work, workers and work environment.

Open flow of information across hierarchies in the organization enables employees to get feedback on their input and how it affects an organization in meeting its objectives and goals hence allowing employees know their organization status (GanjiNia et al, 2013). This is enabled through trust between employees and supervisors/organization and collapsing some of hierarchical organizations' decision-making structures hence increasing the employees' sense of responsibility, increasing their commitment to quality, reduction in wastages, accidents and increased production. Ghorbani (2011) and Melhem (2006) aver that open communication is closely related to worker empowerment, since without information people cannot act responsibly, even if they want to. In this era of high technological dynamism employees are exposed to a lot of information which enables them to profitably manage the information for their own and firm's benefit.

2.3.4 Employee Training and Development

Empowerment plays a vital role in encouraging a learning culture (Hossein et al, 2012). Employee empowerment is achieved through proper and relevant training in relation to specific jobs to be executed by the employees. Training and development are often used to close the gap between current performances and expected future performance. Namusonge et

al (2012); Melhem (2006) and Wang et al (2009) note that training; whether individual or organization-sponsored is a form of human capital investment to impart employees with specific skills or helps to correct deficiencies in their performances, while development is an effort to provide employees with abilities needed by the organization in future. According to GanjiNia et al (2013) the purpose of training is to enhance relationship between employees and management, employees' participation in institutional programs to enhance work motivation. Further, employees behave in more or less empowered ways depending on their level of self-esteem, skill development and surrounding circumstances (Ogutu and Oloko, 2012).

Isimoya and Bakarey (2013) and GanjiNia et al (2013) also argue that employees who are encouraged and supported in the development of their skills, through appropriate training, are better positioned to perform their jobs to meet customers' satisfaction and enhance relationship between employees and management and, subsequent participation in institutional programs to enhance work motivation. Thompson (2013) comments that educative efforts not only enables employees to build knowledge, skills and abilities to do their own jobs better but also, gives them an opportunity to learn about skills and the economies of the larger organization. Furechi (2015) concludes that training and development is an indication of the organizations commitment resulting in psychological bonding with organization and willingness to work hard and increase organization effectiveness. Properly trained and developed employees have their job competencies enhanced, enjoy more confidence in making job related decisions and, are more likely to be trusted by management making it easier to delegate decision making power to them (Wang et al, 2009).

2.3.5 Organizational Culture and Climate

Wang et al (2009) defines culture as shared system of meaning that guides members of a specific group's believing, thinking, perceiving, feeling and ultimately directing their common behavior. A positive organizational culture to empowerment is both a prerequisite and a by-product of successful empowerment strategy. Hossein et al (2012) avers that the structure of an organization is associated with employees' empowerment. Bureaucratic and authoritarian settings where employees opinions are rejected, employees do not find organizations goals meaningful and are reluctant even to improve on their skills instead remain dependent. Prior to successful empowerment campaign, both managers and employees need to accept the strategy with management ceding some power and authority,

providing resources and information while employees need to take over initiative and execute their tasks towards achieving these goals. Hence culture has effect on retention of employees, their performance, commitment to work, their self-confidence in work and their ethical behavior.

Further, Ongori and Shunda (2008) argue that to foster conducive climate of empowerment, there is need for high degree of trust to be nurtured and maintained among the employees and further suggest that vision and goals of the organization need to be clearly spelled out by the top management and should be specific, measurable, achievable and realistic and should have the time limit to be achieved. Given the dynamism in business and consumer behavior as part of climate surrounding organization operations, human resource need to be prepared and anticipate tackling emerging changes fast to satisfaction of consumers, employers without causing strains on themselves. Imran and Elnaga (2014) maintain that conducive empowerment organization culture as one flexible, learning and participative enabler, fair, encouraging constructive judgment of ideas, presence of fair rewards and recognition, mechanisms in place to develop new ideas, an active flow of ideas and shared vision.

2.3.6 Rewards and Feedback

Rewards and feedback are part of recognition of employees as being of value to an organization. Imran and Elnaga (2014) argue that employees need to get bonus pegged on both personal and organizations' performance, hence need to ensure that rewards commensurate with employees new responsibilities. Wang et al (2009) and Hossein et al (2012) recommend that adequate rewards need to be linked to desired employee behavior hence for organizations pursuing employee empowerment practices need to put in place appropriate reward system to encourage employees to assume additional decision making responsibilities brought on board through employee empowerment. Proper and equitable rewards can make employees to be more committed towards the organizational cause through appreciation and their willingness to engage in stirring organizational growth, recognition and trust between employees and employers.

Reward is also a form of feedback to employees recognizing their efforts towards achieving organizational goals. Providing employees with more feedback on assignments they execute also serves to give them timely direction and advice on how to improve their work and also makes them feel recognized and appreciated. It also boosts confidence and levels of trust

between employees and managers as well as boosts their sense of belonging to the organization. Imran and Elnaga (2014) argue that granting independence to employees and feedback within the organization are key things that enable successful empowerment process.

CHAPTER THREE: RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

3.0 Introduction

This chapter describes the research design, population of study, sample and sampling method, data collection and data analysis procedures.

3.1 Research Design

This study adopted a descriptive survey design. According to Mugenda and Mugenda (2003), descriptive studies determine and report the way things are and helps in establishing current status of the population under study. This design was appropriate since respondents were drawn from all branches of Unga Limited and they were to describe their perception on empowerment practices in Unga ‘as they perceive,’ their responses being true reflections on what is on the ground.

3.2 Population of the Study

According to Ogula (2005), a population is a group of institutions, people or objects with common characteristics. This study carried out a survey on Unga Limited employees which has a population of 453 members of permanent staff based at Headquarters office, Nairobi and Eldoret branches (Unga Group Limited Human Resource Staff Records – April 2015).

3.3 Sample Design

This study adopted stratified random sampling technique. The 2 branches of Unga Limited and Headquarters staff were stratified. These 3 strata were further clustered into top management, middle management and lower cadres; to make 9 strata. Simple random sampling technique was used to select the sample size of 10% from each stratum participating in the study (Mugenda and Mugenda, 2003). Each stratum sample size was calculated based on 10% of the staff of each section ($10/100 \times$ population of each stratum). On this basis, the sample has been computed as shown in Table 3.1

Table 3.1: Computation of the Sample size per strata

	Branch	Number of Permanent Employees*	Sample
1	Headquarters		
	Top management	14	1
	Mid. Management	27	3
	Lower cadre	47	5
2	Nairobi		
	Top management	12	1
	Mid. Management	50	5
	Lower cadre	188	19
3	Eldoret		
	Top management	4	1
	Mid. Management	18	2
	Lower cadre	93	9
	Total	453	46

Source: Unga Group Limited Human Resource Staff Records – April 2015.

3.4 Data Collection

Data was collected using structured and semi-structured questionnaire with Likert type statements. It was administered through the drop and pick method. The questionnaire was organized in two sections; Section A provides general information on respondents while Section B focuses on respondents rating of employee empowerment practices.

3.5 Data Analysis

Descriptive statistics was used to analyse the data. It was essential in analysis since the data comprised of both qualitative and quantitative. Each objective of the study was analysed using the computer package-Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS version 20.0). Descriptive statistics included frequencies and percentages. Weighted mean was also used to analyse the Likert scale responses which were addressing the objective of the study. The findings of the study were presented in form of tables.

CHAPTER FOUR: DATA ANALYSIS, RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

4.0 Introduction

This chapter presents response rate, demographic characteristics of the respondents' and employee empowerment practices.

4.1 Response Rate

From the sample size of 46 respondents; 40 respondents equivalent of 87% responded while 6 corresponding 13% of the sample did not respond. Hence the study had a high response rate of 87% which is the basis of the analysis herein.

4.2 Demographic Characteristics of the Respondents

The demographic data was to help researcher understand the composition and diversity of the respondents who are the employees of Unga limited in terms of gender, age distribution, length of service in the firm and highest level of education attained.

4.2.1 Gender of Respondents

The Table 4.1 shows results on gender of respondent that participated in the study.

Table 4.1 Gender of Respondents

Gender	Respondents	Percentage
Male	25	63
Female	15	37
Total	40	100

It is seen from Table 4.1 that 25(63%) employees of Unga Limited were males while 15(37%) were females. Results reveal that most of the employees in Unga Limited are males.

4.2.2 Age Distribution of Employees

Age was also looked at as one of the demographics; results are shown in Table 4.2.

Table 4.2 Age Distribution of Employees

Age bracket	Respondents	Percentage
20-29	5	12.5
30-39	22	55
40-49	10	25
50 and above	3	7.5
Total	40	100

From Table 4.2, most of the employees lie in the age bracket between 30-39 who make up 55% followed by those between 40-49 at 25%, 20-29 at 12.5% and above 50 years at 7.5%. This is an indicator that the company has a relatively youthful workforce, most of whom have more than 20 years to work for the company based on the assumption that the company is able to retain them and they work to retirement age of 60.

4.2.3 Highest Level of Education

The table 4.3 shows results on highest level of education of employees of Unga Limited.

Table 4.3 Highest Level of Education

Level of Education	Respondents	Percentage
Secondary certificate	5	12.5
Diploma	12	30
Bachelors	16	40
Masters	7	17.5
Total	40	100

As indicated in Table 4.3, 16 (40.0%) of the respondents had Bachelors degree, 12 (30.0%) had a diploma, 7 (17.5%) were master degree holders while 5 (12.5%) had only secondary certificate. Results show that most of employees in Unga are Bachelors degree holders.

4.2.4 Length of Service in the Firm

The Table 4.4 shows results on employees' length of service in Unga.

Table 4.4 Length of Service in the Firm

Length of Service	Respondents	Percentage
Below 3 years	4	10
3 – 6 years	2	5
7 – 9 years	24	60
Above 9 years	10	25
Total	40	100

From Table 4.4, 24 (60.0%) of the employees had worked in the company between 7 – 9 years, 10 (25.0%) above 9 years while 4 (10.0%) between 3 – 6 years while only 2 (5.0%). Results imply that most of the employees had been working in Unga Limited between 7 – 9 years.

4.2.5 Presence of Employee Empowerment Policy in the Company

The table 4.5 indicates results on employees' knowledge on existence of employee empowerment policy in the company.

Table 4.5 Presence of Employee Empowerment Policy in the Company

Presence of Employee Policy	Respondents	Percentage
Yes	27	67.5
No	8	20
Not aware	5	12.5
Total	40	100

According to Table 4.5, a higher percentage of responded affirmed that Unga Limited had employee empowerment policy; which was to motivate, enhances employee engagement and contribute to employees career and personal development.

4.3 Employee Empowerment Practices

Empowerment plays a key role in influencing perception among employees as well as enhancing employees to develop; resultant development assists organizations to attain their respective vision, mission, objectives and values. In the quest for development, empowered employees have a sense of self determination, meaning, competency and influence (Pande and Dhar, 2014). From the research findings, Unga Limited employees have generally a positive perception on empowerment practices adopted by the company.

4.3.1 Participative Decision Making

Employees' perception towards participative decision making is positive with aggregate mean of 3.3 out of a possible average mean weight of 5. Participative decision making is an inclusive process that provides semblance that employee will have a sense of belongings to the organization by feeling part of it. This involves employees in decision making process through practices like consultations and application of suggestions schemes; which makes employees more responsible, enhance decision making processes, improves operations, reduces the cost and enhances organizations efficiencies (GanjiNia et al, 2013).

Isimoya and Bakarey (2013) note that decision making for empowered employees in lower cadre is done at operating levels whereby employees are given freedom to make choices about schedules, procedures and how to solve work related problems, hence influence 'when' and 'how' the job is carried out making them valued. This infers that employees' are given latitude to execute tasks based on their judgment with managers being not only leaders but also role models to employees under them, hence responsible for the acts of the latter. However, more efforts need to be put into management supporting their employees through enhancing positive attitude, commitment and involvement which had a mean aggregate of 2.925. This affirms Lawson's (2006) assertion who observes that though employees may still execute their tasks and meet set targets even when they are not involved in making decisions they will lack the spark and zeal in executing the tasks, denying a meaning to what they do and to what customers see, hence the necessity of participative decision making.

4.3.2 Task Autonomy and Flattened Organizational Structure

Unga Limited employees have a negative perception on their autonomy in regard to task execution and organizational structure with aggregate mean of 2.85 out of a weight of 5. It came out that management mentoring other employees had the least weight 2.55. Nyanchama (2009) argue that mentoring is one of the core dimension that enhance mentoring process in the organization, with other dimensions being supporting, providing proper structures to enhance empowerment, educating and leading.

From the finding, Unga has to establish and encourage mentorship programs both vertical (among peers) and horizontal. Empowerment enables employees make informed decisions about their tasks, own their work and responsibility for outputs and serve clients at the level of the organization where the customer interface exists, hence need for employees to have empowerment policies and organizations to have pro-empowerment structures in place (Lashley, 2000).

4.3.3 Communication and Information Sharing

On communication and information sharing, employees have positive perception with an aggregate mean of 3.54 out of possible 5. Lawler (1992) notes that employee empowerment might fail if there is lack of information. This view is shared by Al Sada (2003) who emphasize that organization implementing empowerment programs cannot achieve their goals unless there is efficient information network at more levels through more devices allowing everyone to access and share information. This enables employees to swiftly and promptly make an appropriate decision at hand. Heathfield (2006) comments that vision and goals of the organization need to be clearly spelt out by top management to enable employees direct their efforts in achieving them as a team.

4.3.4 Employee Training and Development

Employees' perception towards trainings and development is positive with an aggregate mean of 3.375 out of a total of 5. Ongori and Shunda (2008) emphasize that for successful employee empowering, organization management need to consider among others the strategy of the organization in achieving organizational goals. The findings indicate that trainings offered are aligned to organizational strategy.

4.3.5 Organizational Culture and Climate

Employees' perception on organizational culture and climate towards employee empowerment is positive at an average weighted mean of 3.367. On Climate, a high degree of trust among the employees should be highly encouraged and maintained to encourage employees do the right things and make right decisions at the right time, adding value to the organization. This involves managers releasing some of their authority and responsibility to lower cadre, tapping into employees' expressions, supporting introduction of new empowerment programs and inspiring subordinates through visionary and effective leadership. Meanwhile, availability of adequate resources had a mean weight of 2.65 out of possible 5.

4.2.6 Rewards and Feedback

Employees have a positive perception towards rewards and feedback with an average weighted mean of 3.2. Al Sada (2003) argues that reward is one of key elements in empowering employees. It is an incentive to employees to put in good performance knowing that they will be appreciated, hence the findings attests that employees are positive about rewards being offered in appreciation of their work output. Nyanchama (2009) equates feedback to being in a way reward and recognition and advises management to provide frequent and constructive feedback so that employees know how they are doing as well as continue to develop their knowledge and skills.

CHAPTER FIVE: SUMMARY OF FINDINGS, CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

5.0 Introduction

This chapter contains findings, conclusion, limitations of the study, recommendations and suggestions for further research.

5.1 Summary of Findings

The findings indicate that Unga Limited employees' perception of empowerment practices basing on the variables that were being tested is positive. From the findings, Unga has a clear Vision and goals which had the highest weight while managers mentoring lower cadre employees had the least weight. Generally, employees perceive their participation in decision making process, communication and sufficient information sharing, presence of pro-empowerment organizational culture and climate and equitable rewards given on merit and feedback positively. There is much evidence to prove that involving individuals in the planning process will lead to higher chances of achieving the plans of the organization, hence empowerment remains the keystone of corporate success. Equally, where employees are involved in the identification, discussion and agreement of personal objectives there is higher desire to ensure that the tasks for which one is responsible are carried out efficiently and effectively (Nyanchama 2009). At the same time, empowerment is not a product of any structure or system, but rather it is a process, which is ongoing, dynamic and fluctuating (Ongori and Shunda, 2008).

5.2 Conclusion

In conclusion, findings of this study indicate that the management of Unga Limited has cultivated an environment for empowerment which helps employees through allowing employees to participate in decision making, sustaining communication and sufficient information sharing, rewarding where due and having feedback mechanism in place; these act as a motivational and a building block to organizational success. The company has a clear spelt policy on employee empowerment and this has laid down basis for the adoption of numerous employee empowerment practices. The findings also indicate that Unga Limited has adopted employee empowerment practices that range from having the Vision and Goals clearly spelt out by the top management and having all employees clearly understand them up

to and including constantly training employees to develop their knowledge and skills. In comparison to the findings of other studies, Nyanchama (2009) argues that organizations' pursuit to survive competition has prompted organizations to adopt employee empowerment strategy as one of means in developing their internal capabilities and a source of their sustainable competitive advantage over other operating in their industries.

5.3 Recommendations

From the findings, Unga management need to put in place both formal and informal mentoring programs to enhance process of managers to mentor employees in lower cadre. The company needs to avail sufficient resources to enable employees execute their duties comfortably without obstacles. Management need to be encouraged to release some of their authority and responsibilities to other levels of the organization to free management to dedicate their energies to more superior duties while motivating and preparing lower cadres to take up higher positions and execute their duties more effectively. Lastly managers need to enhance positive attitude, commitment and involvement among employees to enable employees feel as part of the company, hence boost their commitment and work related engagements.

5.4 Limitation of the Study

Use of Unga Limited Human Resource personnel to issue and collect questionnaires to and from respondents initially created some suspicions and subsequent reluctance among some respondents to honestly disclose some information as they suspected that the study was by the organization for undisclosed reasons but they were reassured that the study was purely for academic purpose. 6 respondents failed to give back the questionnaires despite the reassurance.

5.5 Suggestion for Further Research

Since this study used semi structured questionnaire as a tool of data collection, a research on the same should be done using other tools of data collection. One might consider doing a census survey to obtain views of entire population. Similar studies in other industries besides flour milling and other service organizations could be considered to enable comparison of findings.

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APPENDIX 1: LETTER OF INTRODUCTION

Dear Respondent,

I am..... a student of University of Nairobi conducting a study on employee perception of empowerment practices at Unga Limited. The purpose of this questionnaire is to help in the facilitation of this research study.

You are kindly requested to answer the questions herein to the best of your knowledge. In this regard, the responses will be treated with utmost confidentiality and data collected is purely for academic purposes.

Thank you in advance.

Christine Manyonge.

APPENDIX 2: QUESTIONNAIRE

Part A: Demographic Data (Please tick where appropriate)

1. What is your gender? Male () Female ()
2. What is your age bracket?
20-29 years () 30-39 years () 40-49 years () Above50 years ()
3. What is your level of education? a) Secondary () b) certificate () c) Diploma d)
Bachelors () e) Masters Degree and above ()
4. What is your job position?
5. How long have you been working in the institution?
Below 3 years () 3-6 years () 7-9 years () above 9 years ()
6. How many trainings (both self and company sponsored) have you undertaken in the last
three years
Self: 0 () 1 – 3 () 4-6 () above 7 ()
Company sponsored: 0 () 1 – 3 () 4-6 () above 7 ()
7. Other () If other specify.....
8. Does Unga Limited have a policy on employee empowerment? Yes [] No []
9. If Yes in (8) above, briefly state the essence of the policy.

Part B: Employee Empowerment Practices

Indicate the extent to which you agree with the following statements.

1. Not at all
2. To a less extent
3. To a moderate extent
4. To a large extent
5. To a very large extent

	Statement	1	2	3	4	5
A. Participative Decision Making						
1	Employees of Unga Limited are allowed to participate in decision making process.					
2	There is extensive delegation, individual responsibility and autonomy in decision making.					
3	Managers get employees to do what needs to be done rather than doing what they are told.					
4	Managers enhance positive attitude, commitment and involvement among employees					
B. Task Autonomy and Flattened Organization structures						
5	High degree of trust is highly encouraged and maintained between managers and employees and among employees themselves.					
6	Managers act as mentors to the employees in the company.					
C. Communication and Information Sharing						
7	Vision and goals of Unga Limited are clearly spelt out by the top management and all employees clearly understand them.					
8	Managers encourage regular communication with their employees so that they are informed of what is taking place in the company					
9	Necessary information is readily availed to all concerned employees in good time to enable them make timely and thoughtful decisions.					
D. Employee Training and Development						
10	Employees in Unga Limited are constantly trained to develop their knowledge and skills.					

11	The company's goals are well aligned with its strategy to motivate employees towards achieving projected goals.					
E. Organizational culture and Climate						
12	Managers release some of their authority and responsibility to other levels of the organization.					
13	The company has adopted a leadership strategy in which managers naturally tap into expressed thoughts of employees, give verbal expression to their feelings and embrace delegation.					
14	Adequate resources (financial, information, tools and equipment) are provided to employees whenever they are required in undertaking their duties.					
15	The company's management has put in place structures and systems that support employee empowerment.					
16	Management supports the inauguration of empowerment programs in the company whenever such programs are initiated.					
17	Managers inspire subordinates through visionary and effective leadership.					
F. Rewards and Feedback						
18	Merit and fanfare are offered for ideas generated by employees and accepted for use in the company.					
19	Employees of Unga Limited are motivated by rewards such as autonomy in decision-making and being assigned challenging work.					
20	There is basic motivation of employee behavior by managers.					

Thank for your kind cooperation.