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Empowerment

- A case study in a Swedish hotel setting

Bachelor's thesis within Business Administration

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Abstract

Purpose

The aim of this study is to gain an understanding of managers perception of the consequences of empowerment as well as their employees desire of being empowered.

Background

Empowerment means giving people the power to do the job demanded by their position. It has been shown that empowerment has both positive and negative consequences. It is also something well spoken of but not so often implemented. The hotel industry is widely used in the empowerment research field because of the wide variety of customer requests and the various situations where employees needs to meet customer demands. Therefore Elite hotel Jönköping was an ideal choice in order to answer the purpose of the thesis.

Method

This thesis is based upon a deductive, qualitative, single case study. Our main source of empirics have been through semi-structured interviews as well as participant observation.

Conclusions and recommendations

During our research we found that management at Elite hotel thinks very highly of empowerment but lacks an understanding of the possible negative consequences of empowerment. Employees also felt that being empowered was necessary to fully handle all challenges in their job but some expressed anxiety of too much responsibility and the consequences of their decisions. Rewards and training are factors highlighted in literature to successfully implement empowerment. Reward systems exist at Elite hotel but our research shows that the given rewards should stand in greater relation to the performed accomplishment.

Training is underestimated at Elite hotel and a training program is presented as one of our main recommendations to Elite hotel to improve employees performance and for them to be more comfortable with their decision making. Another recommendation from the authors to Elite hotel is to use Conger and Kanungos` (1988) five step approach towards the process of empowerment. The framework will be useful in order for Elite hotel to work more actively and goal-oriented with empowerment.

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1 Introduction

In this section we present the background of the problem area and why we have chosen Elite hotel Jönköping as source for our research as well as why a hotel is suitable for investigating the phenomenon of empowerment. Further we present our purpose, the related research questions and a problem discussion which lays the foundation of the thesis.

1.1 Background

Empowerment as a concept has been widely discussed the last couple of decenniums and so it is not a new phenomena. However the concept itself have not been implemented in business as much as one would think and Argyris (1998) argues that little real empowerment has been seen over the years in spite of being well-spoken off in business communities.

According to Johnsson (1994) empowerment means giving people the power to do the job demanded by their position. Empowerment is an important concept in situations where employees are interacting with customers in so called service encounters and since the employees behavior will direct a large part of customers perception of the service quality it follows naturally that their behavior becomes a central issue to focus on for management (Gill, Fitzgerald, Bhutani, Mand & Sharma, 2009). Bowen and Lawler (1992) also explains that empowerment looks to the performer of a task for solutions to service deficiencies.

Scholars have noted both benefits and costs associated with empowerment and there are no “one-size fits all” solutions concerning the implementation of empowerment (Forrester, 2000). Bowen and Lawler (1992) states benefits as quicker response to customer needs during service delivery, employees feeling better about themselves and their work, employees being a resource for new ideas, a factor for creating positive word of mouth and customer loyalty. However they also point out costs associated with empowerment; for instance increased expenses due to more advanced hiring and training, as well as slower or inconsistent service and employees giving away too much or making bad decisions. Ahmed and Rafiq (1998) also says that not all employees can or should be empowered when not everyone wants the increased responsibilities that goes with it.

Conger and Kanungo (1988) is emphasizing upon the connection between empowerment and enabling. To enable employees to use the new authority they have been given is a necessity for empowerment to function. Enabling consists of managerial, technical and knowledge support.

1.2 Elite Hotel Jönköping

When conducting a qualitative study a hotel is a natural choice due to the many everyday service encounters where customer contact employees interact with customers. In such a setting empowerment have been shown to be of great importance (Gill et. al, 2009). We chose Elite hotel Jönköping due to the fact that the Elite hotel chain is an upper class, renowned hotel chain. In our literature search we also found that many of the articles reflecting on empowerment in hotels were related to upper class hotels. In addi-

tion to that we got good contact with the manager of Elite hotel and he showed enthusiasm for our study and were willing to help in several ways

At hotels service encounters occur on a daily basis in different settings such as in the reception area, restaurant, housekeeping etc. Hartline and Ferrel (1999) says that in the service and hospitality industry empowerment has become increasingly important. Situations where frontline employees are dependent on own decision making authority to be able to respond quickly to individual customer needs in an increasingly demanding and unpredictable service setting are growing (Hartline & Ferrel, 1999). Brymer (1991) says that it is by no coincidence that a considerable amount of research on empowerment has had focus on the hotel industry. Therefore our cooperation with Elite hotel in Jönköping have been valuable for us in order to collect data.

Today the hotel has 60 employees and offers 135 different guestrooms. Apart from offering accommodation Elite hotel also offers large banquettes and conference activities.

Elite has been the owner of Stora hotellet since 2001. Just before that the hotel was managed by the Scandic hotel chain. According to the current hotel manager the work at the hotel is characterized by decentralization. The Elite hotel chain is not a public company but wholly owned by Bicky Chakraborty.

1.3 Problem discussion

Gill, Biger and Bhutani (2010) has performed extensive research about empowerment and transformational leadership and in one of their papers they suggested the following further research questions:

- Further research should be done to see the degree to which managers understands the consequences of empowerment and...
- ... the degree to which management understands the desire of their employees to be empowered

It is the aim of this thesis to observe these two further research questions. This thesis is therefore interesting since it is looking into parts of the empowerment theories that has not yet been comprehensively researched and hopefully some new insights will be discovered during this process. We have understood that this part of the empowerment phenomena has been overlooked for a long time since Bowen and Lawler (1992) stated already back then that there were "precious little research" on the consequences of empowerment and since Gill et. al (2010) are stating the very same as a further research question nearly 20 years later we draw the conclusion that there is still a need of more research within that specific area.

Empowerment as a concept is not new but according to Argyris (1998) little real empowerment has been seen and therefore we also believe it to be interesting to continue research in the area and to see if it is possible to observe any connection with the lack of "real empowerment" and the further research questions listed above.

Since our work with this thesis is being conducted in co-operation with the hotel manager of Elite Hotel Jönköping there is a point in finding out to what extent the management of the hotel understands the consequences of empowerment and the extent to which the employees wishes to be empowered since it will affect their everyday work. It

has also been shown in the literature that not all employees want to be empowered (Ahmed & Rafiq, 1998) and it would be interesting to see how things are at Elite hotel concerning these questions. In addition to this it is the aim of this thesis to also observe empowerment at the Elite hotel – do the employees wish to be empowered or not, do they feel as if they are empowered and so on. Concerning the degree to which management understands the consequences of empowerment our focus lays on the positive and negative aspects of empowerment and how management is acting in this area. Perhaps management is over-optimistic about it and a stricter attitude towards empowerment should be taken or perhaps management has a very negative attitude and would be better off with a more positive approach towards empowerment.

1.4 Purpose

The aim of this study is to gain an understanding of managers' perception of the consequences of empowerment as well as their employees' desire of being empowered.

1.5 Research questions

- To what degree have management understood the consequences of empowerment?
- To what degree have management understood the desire of their employees to be empowered?
- How can the employees at Elite hotel affect their work situation?
- How is training and rewards used at Elite hotel in order to endorse empowerment?

1.6 Delimitations

We have no intentions to cover such subjects as team empowerment or customer empowerment. Instead we solely focused our efforts upon empowerment on employee/individual level. Nor will we put any focus on so called matrix organizations which we regard as irrelevant for our study.

We have chosen to not conduct any quantitative study in our research and instead focused on a qualitative in-depth study. The interview respondents were randomly selected with the only demand for them to have some kind of customer contact in their work.

2 Frame of reference

In order to answer our research questions we judge that a thorough explanation of empowerment as a concept and its pros and cons is needed. In this part of the thesis we will also explain the importance of training and enabling which are important parts of empowerment. The psychological approach towards empowerment will also be briefly explained in order to explain the importance of employees feeling as if they are empowered.

2.1 Empowerment

Empowerment is not a new concept but according to Argyris (1998) it is not as commonly used as one might think it would be. Argyris (1998) even goes so far as to argue that it is much like the fable of the emperor's new clothes meaning that it is a commonly known and well "spoken of" phenomena but not implemented so often (Argyris, 1998). Hales and Klidas (1998) state a similar fact as they explain that after a study at ten five-star hotels in Amsterdam they found that although there is lots of talk about it the scope for empowerment, even in favorable circumstances, are limited. Empowerment is simply put a process of decentralizing decision making within a company which gives greater independence to employees in order to make own decisions (Johnsson, 1994). This does not mean that a company is turned into a democracy or that leaders quits being leaders but rather that management gets a new role of supporting, guiding and assisting employees in achieving success through a self directed leadership tactic (Johnsson, 1994).

"Empowerment means giving people the power to do the job demanded by their position". (Johnsson, 1994, p. 19)

Argyris (1998) states that the concept of commitment is important in workplaces and that particularly internal commitment is utterly important for empowerment to function. He continues to say that there is also something called external commitment which is formed when employees are told what to do and can't do anything in order to influence their own situation and are expected to fulfill what is expected of them. It means that someone else is dictating what employees should do and why and how it matters (Argyris, 1998). He continues to say that internal commitment on the other hand implies that employees define their own tasks, and how to perform them and individually define the purpose of doing them. Together with management employees will jointly define challenging goals for the individual. Argyris (1998) states that these actions will create internal commitment and thus functions as a foundation for empowerment to function. The problem as Argyris (1998) presents it is that there is a limit of how many employees that can actually be given that freedom to define their own work tasks and that in reality not many firms actually implement empowerment and internal commitment even though they know it is supposedly a good theory. Argyris (1998) goes so far as to say that managers even hinder empowerment – that they don't seem to want what they say they need.

According to Gill, Fitzgerald, Bhutani, Mand and Sharma (2009) empowerment is essential for excellent service in hospitality organizations. They also say that many situa-

tions require that employees are empowered in order to make service decisions independently and on the spot.

Gill et al. (2009) also underlines that customer contact employees play an important role since they interact with many individuals: both fellow employees and managers as well as customers. Appelbaum and Honegger (1998) predicted that empowerment would be remembered as one of the big topics in the business world in the 1990s.

Conger and Kanungo (1988) says that many scholars have simply understood empowerment as delegating or sharing power with subordinates and that no distinction between empowerment and the power concept is needed. Conger and Kanungo (1988) believes this thinking has several faults. They also propose that empowerment should be viewed as a motivational construct with focus on enabling rather than just delegate and they mean that the need to empower employees becomes critical when employees feel powerless. Conger and Kanungo (1988) also suggests a five step approach to the process of empowerment:

1. First the conditions leading to a psychological state of powerlessness must be discovered.
2. Then managerial strategies and techniques such as goal setting and job enrichment must be implemented.
3. Management should provide self-efficacy information to subordinates through establishing achievements, vicarious experience, verbal persuasion and emotional arousal and the conditions listed under stage one should also be removed.
4. Here the results of empowering for the subordinate should be seen in the form of strengthened self-efficacy or performance expectancy.
5. At the fifth stage effects of new behavior should be seen by persistence to accomplish task objectives.

Wynne (1993) makes quite clear that a distinction between “real” empowerment and only so-called empowerment must be made by arguing that when employees are only asked to follow further routinized decisions and without being given any reward that is simply not empowerment. Therefore it is important for management to make sure that their planned empowerment is not just another control system for the employees which holds them responsible if something goes wrong (Wynne, 1993).

Gill and Biger (2010) defines empowerment as an individual’s belief in his or her own ability to exercise choice. They also argue that empowerment and what they call transformational leadership are among the best ways of treating employee job stress. Job stress is something negative which should be counteracted and that becomes clear when realizing that job stress can lead to both physical problems such as headaches, high blood pressure and stomach problems as well as mental problems such as job dissatisfaction and depression (Gill & Biger, 2010).

Gill and Biger (2010) also showed that the reduction in the degree of perceived job stress of customer contact service employees was related to the improvement in the degree of perceived empowerment.

Empowerment places the customer contact person in focus and Bowen and Lawler (1992) says that empowerment very much looks to the performer of a task for solutions to service problems. Forrester (2000) tells us that empowerment is a descendant of the

theories of participation and involvement but that it is distinguished from them by the freedom and ability to make decisions and commitments, not just to suggest them. He also emphasizes that it is about power and to enhance it. In contradiction to what Argyris (1998) thinks, Forrester (2000) believes that the problems circling empowerment is not about flaws in the concept but rather on the level of implementation of the concept.

Forrester (2000) continues to say that reasons for empowerment not succeeding could be some of the following examples: the empowerment process is implemented too rapidly and/or middle management is taken away and their workload are then instead put on “empowered” employees that instead of actually being empowered end up being overpowered.

2.1.1 Enabling

Empowerment has different meanings; for some empowerment means allowing employees to decide how to greet their customers, while for others it includes giving employees almost unlimited discretionary power to recover any service problem (Bowen & Lawler, 1995). Regardless of what managers put into the definition of empowerment it means to somehow increase the responsibility and commitment from employees to their work. However, Smith (1997) warns for a big bang approach of ‘there you are, I’ve empowered you all and given you lots of choices’ - this kind of approach should be avoided at all costs, or it will end up as all costs and no benefits. Smith (1997) says that we all need demands and some constraints as well as choices - managers should empower their employees within certain boundaries.

Bowen and Lawler (1995) describes enabling as the process of creating the conditions required for empowerment. They state that many empowerment programs fail because employees are not enabled. Managers may focus on “power” without redistributing information, knowledge and rewards (Bowen & Lawler, 1995). The result is that customer contact employees have been given the power to act to please the customer, but don’t have the training and prerequisites to act accordingly within their extended responsibility. To enable frontline employees means to prepare workers to take the responsibility that goes with the new authority (Bowen & Lawler, 1995).

Kappelman and Richards (1996) states that empowerment itself is a complicated and demanding organizational change. Furthermore, like many change efforts, Kappelman and Richards (1996) says that an incremental and gradual implementation strategy is recommended on the road to full empowerment. They emphasize the role of training in this process and that it cannot be highlighted enough since training is how they acquire the skills and knowledge necessary for effective empowerment. Smith (1997) also highlights training because empowerment is a process which needs careful introduction, together with training and support.

Grönroos (1990) explains why it is so important to enable customer contact employees to handle customer demands in the best possible manner by saying that:

“Ideally, the front-line employee should have the authority to make prompt decisions. Otherwise, sales opportunities and opportunities to correct quality mistakes and avoid quality problems in these moments of truth are not used intelligently, and become truly

wasted moments of opportunity to correct mistakes, recover critical situations and achieve re-sales and cross sales”. (Grönroos, 1990, p. 9).

Grönroos (1990) continues by saying that empowering employees is a powerful way of mobilizing the energy which human beings have. Though it demands that staff is encouraged and trained to recognize the diversity of customer contact situations and use their knowledge to handle problems that deviate from standard procedure. Instead of that delays and dissatisfaction among customers is created, empowered employees can create customer satisfaction (Grönroos, 1990).

Bowen and Lawler (1995) presents a number of conditions that the company and management should implement to help employees. Management should provide employees with information about the performance of the organization and make the frontline aware of business goals and objectives as well as the service delivery process they are a part of. Employees should be awarded based on organizational and personal performance and the company should also create a knowledge base that makes it clear for employees to grasp and contribute to the performance of the company. Finally they should give employees the power to make decisions that influence the organizations direction and performance. These actions will not just state that employees are empowered but will also enable them to act accordingly and thus reaches what Bowen and Lawler (1995) calls an “empowered state of mind”.

Smith (1997) additionally points to the managers crucial role as a “coach” on the road to empowerment; for empowerment to flourish, people need to feel that they are valued. They need to be given frequent and constructive feedback on their performance by managers.

In order to be fully empowered at work companies must have organizational and managerial activities and those activities should encourage employees to behave in the organizations best interest and perform their best in their roles at work (Kappelman & Richards, 1996). Training gives an opportunity to empower employees according to Kappelman and Richards (1996). Empowered people are more able to adapt to change in their work and that creates benefits for the company (Kappelman & Richards, 1996).

To wield real influence is what empowerment is all about according to Kappelman and Richards (1996). To expose employees with own opportunities gives them a chance to make own decisions.

To manage to get people empowered concerns the business and those involved, especially the employees, and in that way they must find a concept for empowerment. With this concept the business can enable the employee to perform activities that is beneficial for the business and gives satisfaction to the employees themselves.

To enable people is important within the field of empowerment. In this concept it is important that the strategies and the tactic is well structured so that the external conditions not becomes a problem (Conger & Kanungo, 1988). It must provide information that directly reaches the employees personal and individual performance. Conger and Kanungo (1988) further assumes that people has internal needs and needs for control in their own environment.

2.1.2 Positive aspects of empowerment

One of our research questions is to what degree managers understand the consequences of empowerment. In order to investigate their understanding it is important to clarify what these consequences might be; what are the benefits of empowering service employees and what are the downsides?

Johnsson (1994) states several reasons as to why empowerment is beneficial for companies. For example when employees are given more authority and flexibility they will be encouraged to be more creative. Furthermore when employees take on greater responsibility management will have more time for managerial tasks.

Appelbaum and Honegger (1998) state a list of benefits for empowerment which they have collected through the help of other scholars. The benefits are as follows: increased productivity, enthusiasm, morale, creativity, higher quality products and services, improved teamwork, improved customer service and competitive position, increased speed and responsiveness and lessened emotional impact of demoralizing organizational changes and reconstructing.

Another benefit with empowerment is quicker response to customer needs during the service delivery. To start off Bowen and Lawler (1992) exemplifies this benefit of empowerment fittingly with a hotel example; if check in time at a hotel begins at 12.00 am but the guest asks the receptionist if he/she can check in at 11.00 am the receptionist would often like to say something other than “no, it’s against the rules” or “I will have to check with my manager”. Empowering employees in a situation like this can help turning a possibly frustrated customer into a satisfied one by generating the feeling of the employees spontaneity and willingness to help in any way (Bowen & Lawler, 1992). These quick responding reactions eliminate the wait and frustration with the customer and the employee feel capable of handling all situations before even greeting new customers (Bowen & Lawler, 1992). Bitner (1990) also show through qualitative studies that customers are more satisfied with the service encounter when employees possess the ability, willingness, and competence to solve their problems.

Quicker response to dissatisfied customers in service recovery situations is another benefit with empowerment (Bowen and Lawler, 1992). Customer service includes both delivery of the service, such as checking the hotel guest into a hotel room and service recovery such as changing the room for a guest who is dissatisfied with the room he/she was given. Different customers have different demands regarding what is satisfying service quality but commonly all customers feel that services should be corrected if something fails (Bowen & Lawler, 1992). There are numerous studies pointing to that solving a problem after something has been done wrong in the first place could turn a dissatisfied customer into a satisfied or even loyal one (Bowen & Lawler, 1992). But the problem is that service companies frequently fail at this because service employees are not empowered to make the required actions to help the customer. Enabling the customer contact employees in these matters could be very beneficial in gaining satisfied and loyal customers (Bowen & Lawler, 1992).

Empowerment could also make employees feel better about their work and themselves. Letting employees make decisions on their own allow them to feel responsibility for their job and find their work meaningful. Bowen and Lawler (1992) also claim that

when employees feel in control and that their job is meaningful employee satisfaction rises and accordingly higher employee retention.

Another positive aspect with empowerment is that employees will interact more enthusiastically with their customers. Customers want employees to feel concerned about their needs and employees who feel motivation and dedication to their work will be more aware and keen to fulfill the needs of the customer (Bowen & Lawler, 1992). In service encounters, employees' feelings about their jobs will affect how customers will feel about the service they get (Bowen & Lawler, 1992). Bowen and Lawler (1992) means that since there are often few or none tangible assets in the service outcome the employees behavior and ability in solving customer problems becomes increasingly important.

Empowered employees are also instrumental in creating positive word of mouth referrals and increasing customer retention (Bowen & Lawler, 1992). Several studies have shown that the friendliness, enthusiasm, and attentiveness of contact employees positively affect customers' perceptions of service quality (Bowen and Schneider 1985; Rafaeli 1993).

2.1.3 Negative aspects of empowerment

As mentioned one of our research questions was to investigate managements understanding of the consequences of empowerment and theoretically there are some negative consequences with empowerment and not just positive aspects as mentioned above. Hartline and Ferrel (1996) tells us that previous research has shown that management can affect customer-contact employees responses in order to increase the service quality and that the various responses from employees affects customers perception of service quality and the service encounter itself.

Although empowerment has many positive effects it might not be suitable for all situations or all companies. One negative aspect is the increased costs that it will incur. For instance the extra required training as well as more dedicated hiring procedures will increase costs and so will the higher labor costs (Bowen & Lawler, 1992). Other negative aspects of empowerment is that it can create slower or inconsistent service delivery, employees making bad decisions or giving away too much to customers. Another example could be customers experiencing service recoveries as unfair if they get the feeling they were treated good just because they got in contact with "the right person" rather than because of a fair service recovery system (Bowen & Lawler, 1992).

Hartline and Ferrel (1996) also found that empowerment not only have positive aspects but also negative in the sense that employees may experience frustration in their attempts of trying to fill several roles. This frustration can lead to role ambiguity which in turn indirectly leads to reduced job satisfaction.

2.2 Training and rewards

"Good service training guides and enhances employees' service skills to provide excellent services". (Ro & Chen, 2011, p. 422)

Ro and Chen (2011) means that empowering guest contact persons has been prescribed as an efficient tactic for hospitality organizations but they mean that individual and or-

ganizational factors should be considered to gain even greater insight into employees perception of empowerment. In their study where they interviewed over 200 customer contact employees they found that there are at least one individual factor namely customer orientation and three supporting factors which are training, rewards and service standards communication which functions as a guiding framework for employees (Ro & Chen, 2011). In other words it is important to hire staff that has a service mindedness and to not just say that employees are empowered without giving the necessary training, rewards and communication service standards.

2.2.1 Rewards

Birch (2002) says that in the hotel sector, a variety of rewards are used to encourage high levels of customer service including both tangible (monetary and symbolic) and intangible (praise and positive feedback) rewards. Schlesinger and Heskett (1991) also says that in some service organizations employees are encouraged and rewarded for taking initiative and exercising their own judgment, or in other words acting according to the rules of empowerment. Also behaviorally-oriented researchers have argued that rewards are positive reinforcements that strengthen desired behaviors and increase intrinsic motivation (Birch, 2002). Furthermore Birch (2002) have conducted a study which showed that monetary and symbolic rewards were perceived by hotel employees to be the 'icing on the cake', and served as an important instrument for managers to recognize and reward the efforts of their staff. However, Birch (2002) also discovered that praise and appreciation given with the tangible reward was equally if not more valued by employees, rather than the financial or symbolic value of the reward itself.

Born and Molleman (1996) states that empowerment should have implications for rewards and that the process of empowerment should be supported by reward systems. However they also say that there are limitations towards this and that the production situation should first be critically considered. Another limitation towards this could be if detailed job descriptions are the foundation for rewards (Born & Molleman, 1996). It is also recommended that various reward systems are used. One reward system could for instance be based on multi-functionality of workers while another reward system could focus more on the performance of the team. However it should be noted that reward systems are both costly and time-consuming to administer and implement, and thus managers need to cautiously consider the consequences of using tangible rewards (Kohn, 1993).

2.2.2 Training

Kappelman and Richards (1996) emphasizes empowerment as an important factor in organizational change processes because empowerment fulfills the individual's need for a sense of control. This is a particularly critical need during a time of organizational change because these type of major changes in the employees environment is usually formed and decided outside the individuals control and hardly anyone likes to feel like they are being pushed around.

Training helps in preparing the organization and its employees for change, in accomplishing the change itself, and in making the change a lasting part of the organization (Kappelman & Richards, 1996). Ahmed and Rafiq (1998) also says that training programs can ensure that the customer contact employees have the required skills and personal characteristics to cope with empowerment.

Furthermore, it is generally accepted that motivation and other attitudes can influence training outcomes, and that the outcomes of training are not only knowledge and understanding, but also emotions and attitudes.

Training can provide a chance to empower and motivate employees. Empowering employees in small ways during the actual implementation of the organizational change can provide workers with a degree of control over what was really a change process over which they had no control (Kappelman & Richards, 1996). Providing workers with this small amount of control can further offer an opportunity to demonstrate management's dedication to empowerment. Such early demonstrations are likely to breed early employee "buy-in" to the change, thereby reducing employee resistance, and increasing the chances of program success.

In a field study by Kappelman and Richards (1996) they showed that empowerment resulted in large increases in employee motivation towards change, in their satisfaction with the training they received, and in their general satisfaction with the transformation. Also important were the economic implications of these findings. Motivated and satisfied employees were namely more productive.

Kappelman & Richards (1996) also claim that even when limited, empowerment could lead to big payoffs. Their study showed that giving employees a small empowering experience could have a profound effect on employees' motivation and satisfaction with the organizational change itself. The ability to cope with change, is a survival skill no organization can do without (Kappelman & Richards, 1996).

2.2.3 Training framework

To illustrate how training for empowerment could be put into practice and what is important for managers and employees to be aware of we present a three step training framework constructed by Nicholls (1995). Furthermore Nicholls (1995) emphasizes training as a powerful and necessary part of implementing empowerment to hinder it from becoming an illusion, something talked about but not really implemented.

1. It is important to get the basic functioning first. This means to empower people to the fullest extent of their current capability within the scope of their current job. Nicholls (1995) says that managers tend to over-control, for instance when delegating a task they still interfere; the job should be done their way to avoid the risk of failure. Also delegating responsibility are often seen by managers as having someone else taking control of their managerial responsibilities, therefore they have a hard time letting go. Nicholls (1995) asks managers how they could strive for empowerment if employees are not even able to handle the responsibilities of their position without constant interference? In the first step, managers should act as enablers meaning that managers should delegate within the employees current job to optimize the employees current capability.
2. The second step is to grow people beyond their current capabilities. Nicholls (1995) says that managers should try to delegate responsibility slightly beyond their current limits. Also for managers to show positive expectations towards the employees performance, as well as expressing praise and recognition when

something is done well will enhance the employees motivation and determination to do better. Good managers do not concentrate on correcting mistakes (Nicholls, 1995). If delegation and empowerment are used to develop people, their capabilities will also increase. The second stage is reached when managers are striving to have their employees reaching their full potential (Nicholls, 1995).

3. In the first two stages the focus has been on managers empowering their employees. Through these stages the foundation for a change in attitude and behavior has been laid. Now employees would hopefully have reached a wider understanding and greater capability in their work and have been given the authority to act as well as the motivation to exceed their previous borders of decision making (Nicholls, 1995). Managers should have created the environment for self managing teams and empowerment through the whole of the organization. It is in this third stage managers hopefully will realize that by letting go of authority and power they gain the power to energize people – achieving results beyond expectations. According to Nicholls (1995) this is the ultimate goal of empowerment: a dedicated personnel with everyone whole-heartedly devoting all their efforts and capabilities to the achievement of a common vision. The managers role will be to inform and involve people as well as giving them their share of the success. Not just by bonuses and rewards but just as important through praise and recognition, the workers will feel pride, trust and accountability for the results (Nicholls, 1995).

Nicholls (1995) says that it is important to still remember that certain difficult and strategic decisions are to be made by managers following the criteria of their position, but the totality of the work should affect a broader part of the workforce and the manager's job is to guide and encourage its staff to an empowered state of mind.

2.2.4 The coaching process, practical advice

Finally Nicholls (1995) gives some practical advice to how the training program can be successfully implemented.

- During daily activity: take time to show people how to perform tasks that are beyond their current range. Practice with simulated events. Do not let pride of position get in the way.
- Be aware of real opportunities to test what has been practiced. Look for SMART opportunities (Specific, Measureable, Achievable, Relevant and Timely). Plenty of feedback, encouragement – employees stay motivated.
- During implementation – avoid the temptation to over-control. Do not insist on employees doing it exactly the way you would.
- When the task is successfully done, congratulate, praise and recognize the effort. Do it in the spur-of-the-moment, be sincere and do not evaluate, critique or comment details right away.

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- Later, invite employees to review their own performance and work together to find lessons for the future.

Empowerment demands knowledge, some kind of implementation and quality programs so that the employee can work in ways which creates benefits for the company. In order to create benefits it is necessary that the employee show participation and receives information and real influence (Kappelman & Richards, 1996). The employee must solve in the surrounding of the problems that occurs in customer business service to give consistently satisfied customers. Empowering employees are important and fulfills the individuals need for a sense of control (Kappelman & Richards, 1996). The company has an advantage by getting benefits from the effectiveness that empowerment construct.

Kappelman and Richards (1996) further says that programs for training and change in work is important for empowerment and they also say that the skills comes from training and empowerment and change in organizations.

2.3 Psychological approach

Forrester (2000) says concerning the psychological concept of empowerment that a present danger would be that empowerment becomes nothing but a mind game with no real power to the employees. If that happens employees are likely to grow cynical and feel ripped-off.

Boudrias, Gaudreau, Savoie and Morin (2009) argues that employee empowerment can be conceived in two ways: either as a set of managerial practices aiming at expanding employees autonomy and responsibilities and/or as an individual proactive work orientation.

Spreitzer (1995) states that a sense of meaning, competence, self-determination (a sense of choice in initiating and regulating ones actions) and impact are the common sets of dimensions which defines the psychological experience of empowerment in the workplace. Spreitzer (1995) continues to say that a basic proposition is that when individuals view their work environment as providing opportunities for individual behavior they will feel more empowered. On the contrary traditional bureaucratic social structures with hierarchy, formalization and centralization will most likely be viewed as constraints.

In order for individuals to feel empowered they need to understand their work units goals and also how it is connected to the larger system (Spreitzer, 1995). It is also important that the boundaries for decision-making authority are clear so that the employees are not afraid of possible punishments due to decisions made with ambiguous authority. On the contrary they should feel safe and comfortable with the decisions they have made (Conger & Kanungo, 1988).

Boudrias et al. (2009) are also saying that if organizations wish to know whether they are taking advantage of their managerial empowerment practices it is needed that they measure whether they are successfully fostering a proactive motivational orientation in their employees.

3 Method

In this section relevant research method theories and our performed research are explained to give a deeper understanding of how we have collected our data.

3.1 Deductive approach

Jacobsen (2002) says that deductive research goes from theory to empirics. He explains that the way to conduct research best in a deductive way is to first construct expectations about what the world looks like and then go on collecting empirics to see whether or not it coincides with the expectations. The expectations builds upon earlier empirics and previous theories. In our study we have chosen to start off from existing theories and in that way we found interesting ideas and recommended areas for further research. The knowledge we gained by studying these theories helped us in forming our research questions for studying empowerment at Elite Hotel. Critique towards this way of doing research is that the scholar will only look for information that he finds relevant which of course limits the amount of information and quite possibly even the best data (Jacobsen, 2002). We have tried to look as broadly as possible at the field of empowerment and gain a proper understanding of the phenomena.

Jacobsen (2002) describes inductive as the opposite of deductive meaning that the start-off is from empirics to theories. The ideal here would be researchers that go about their research completely without expectations and gathers all relevant data and then systematizes it. The goal is that nothing should limit the information that the researcher collects (Jacobsen, 2002). In our study the deductive approach seemed most suitable since our point of departure has been existing theories.

At the beginning of our study we started by conducting a literature search based on the following keywords: empowerment, enabling, empowerment and psychology, employee satisfaction and training. We used several sources that were to be found on the University's library website. We have used Google scholar, Emerald insight, Business Source Premier and Scopus to find articles that could be relevant to our study. At first we searched for articles about empowerment and then we were able to find more relevant articles by reading the reference lists in the articles already found. We were also able to find other relevant articles by contacting a professor in Business Administration working in the US whom we had heard of by reading one of his articles about empowerment and transformational leadership. By using the articles together with the collected data we performed our analysis connected to the purpose and research questions of empowerment and management.

3.2 Quantitative and Qualitative approaches

Jacobsen (2002) defines quantitative research as results that can be measured by numbers and statistics. In order to conduct such a research the researcher needs knowledge about the subject and the interviewee needs to be able to express his or her thoughts about life into predetermined answering alternatives (Jacobsen, 2002).

Bryman and Burgess (1999) claims that qualitative research methods are often stereotypically viewed as less trustworthy and presents less hard facts than quantitative data does. They state that soft data is often viewed as more unstable, weak and sensual than

quantitative data. They continue to say that due to the increased interest in qualitative research it is increasingly important to challenge these old clusters of assumptions (Bryman & Burgess, 1999).

Jacobsen (2002) states that the qualitative approach strives towards understanding social phenomena's through understanding how people interprets the social reality and the only way to do that is by observing what they say and do. Qualitative researches are also more flexible than the quantitative, it is for instance not possible to change a questionnaire once it has been performed. As we performed the work with our thesis we used semi-structured interviews and observation. We also gave the interviewees the possibility to include additional information to their answers afterwards. However none of the respondents actually wanted to add anything afterwards.

Jacobsen (2002) continues to say that a qualitative approach is well suitable for interpreting and understanding particular situations. It can also be used to create better understanding of an unclear subject or to see it from different angles. We chose a qualitative approach because we didn't want to limit ourselves to predetermined answering alternatives and rather get an in-depth understanding of our research questions.

3.3 Interviews

As part of our qualitative research design we conducted eleven interviews. Interviews could be performed individually or in groups and could be structured, semi-structured or unstructured (Jacobsen, 2002). It is also one of the most important sources of information when it comes to case studies (Yin, 2007). When looking for different opinions, meanings and knowledge with a population, a common approach in research context are the use of interviews or surveys (Ejvegård, 2009).

Conducting interviews is one of the most widely used methods of data collection within the social sciences (Bryman & Burgess, 1999). Semi-structured interviews could be described as that interviewees are asked the same series of questions but that they are given a substantial freedom in what sequence they answer the questions and how they answer them (Bryman & Burgess, 1999). Saunders et al. (2009) describe semi-structured interviews as a kind of interview where the researcher will have a list of themes and questions to be covered but with the notion that these can vary among different interviews. They also state that the order of questions can vary depending on the flow of the conversation and that extra questions might be needed to be asked in order to fully answer the decided research questions (Saunders et al., 2009).

An interview can be more or less open and usually an interview is positively influenced by having some structure with a list of topics to be discussed or certain questions the interviewer wants the interviewee to elaborate on (Jacobsen, 2009). This is part of the reason why we chose to use semi-structured interviews. Jacobsen (2009) presents two arguments to why semi-structured interviews are superior; first of all totally unstructured interviews will gather so much complex information that it would be very hard and demanding to analyze. Secondly a pre-structured interview does not inhibit the answers rather that specific aspects you want answers to are elaborated on (Jacobsen, 2009).

Ejvegård (2009) underlines the importance of neutrality when asking interview questions but at the same time the interviewer should be encouraging and positive towards the interviewee. We had a positive attitude and were open-minded to the respondents.

Further we tried not to reveal any reactions towards the answers given more than a general encouragement in order to make the interviewees move forward. The questions should not be leading but rather open and the questions asked should not be to standardized or else much of the advantages of interviews as a method is lost (Ejvegård, 2009). We formulated our interview questions to be as open as possible in order to get in depth answers. The only interference we felt we had to commit was to keep the respondents within the boundaries of the subject.

Another way of characterizing the importance of neutrality of the interviewer is what is called the interviewer effect, it means that the physical presence of the interviewer could influence the interviewee to act “abnormal”, interpreting face expressions, body language and reactions from the interviewer and giving the answers the interviewer wants (Jacobsen, 2002).

Our interviews was performed using a semi-structured interview approach. The goal was to inspire the interviewees to feel relaxed and talk about the subject as they felt naturally. We still had prepared questions but the aim was still to make the respondents feel free to discuss the subject in a manner that suited them best. Upon receiving approval from the respondents a tape recorder was used to record the interviews. Transcripts were also written from each interview. We conducted the interviews with one respondent at a time simply because we did not want respondents affecting each other. The respondents were also given the opportunity of being anonymous in order to give them a greater feeling of liberty and not having to fear any repercussions from management due to their answers during the interviews. This is also the reason for why we do not mention the employees name or positions throughout the thesis apart from a few exceptions.

The questions we used for our interviews were constructed with inspiration from existing theories within the field of research of empowerment. We first constructed our research questions with the help from an existing article and we then constructed our interview questions based upon our research questions. If we would have used an existing framework of questions created by another scholar it would have hindered the answers we received. This is because our semi-structured interviews was focusing on what the respondents were saying about empowerment which led to that some questions were barely answered by some interviewees and others were given in-depth answers. If we would have kept our questions strictly to an existing framework we might have missed out on important facts.

Since we were conducting our interviews during working hours we experienced some unexpected problems since some of the respondents felt stressed and would probably have been able to give us more thorough answers if they had more time. However most of the interviews were satisfying and the average length of the interviews was about 20 minutes. Our interview with the hotel manager was substantially longer though. We conducted interviews with both employees having managerial roles as well as staff not having any managerial responsibilities. The employees we interviewed worked within different areas such as housekeeping services, the reception, the restaurant and the department responsible for reservations. The facility where we interviewed the employees was in a nice setting in a closed seating section of the hotel restaurant with closed doors. A positive aspect of carrying out the interviews at the hotel was that the employees were

used to the surroundings. The fact that we had closed doors encouraged many to answer more truthfully since there were no risk of their colleagues to overhear the conversation. Furthermore the interviews were seated in comfortable chairs and with calm music in the background. Since the interviews were done during their working hours many of the interviewees were a bit stressed and this might have affected their answers to some extent. One of the interviews were actually done when the interviewee were still working and that was unsurprisingly the less useful interview. Some of the employees wished to remain anonymous and therefore we choose to not reveal any of the respondents identity throughout the study.

3.4 Case study

In order to fulfill the purpose of this report the thesis has had a case study as research design. The case study approach is good for situations when how and why questions are asked. However it is just one of many ways of performing social science research upon (Yin, 2007). Due to the fact that we have explored empowerment within a hotel setting a case study seemed to be a reasonable way of conducting our research.

One of the reasons for choosing the case study research method is since it is convenient for developing an existing theory (Ghuri & Grønhaug, 2010; Yin, 2007). However our study aims at gaining contextual understanding of empowerment rather than developing a new theory. When conducting a case study it is possible to use either a single or a multiple case approach. In this thesis a single case approach was chosen since a multiple case study would have been a hindrance for us of going in depth and would somewhat have scattered the focus of the thesis.

In order to be successful with a case study approach it is needed to have a constant collaboration between data and theories (Yin, 2007). Furthermore it demands a lot from the authors to be able to perform a good analysis of the findings and we acknowledge that to be a challenge.

According to Yin (2007) and Ghauri & Grønhaug (2010) there are six primary sources of data for a case study: documents, archive material, interviews, direct observation, participating observation and physical artifacts. In this thesis the major focus of data collection has been on interviews and direct observation.

Ejvegård (2009) says that the purpose of a case study is to take a small part from a larger context and from that describe reality and saying that the case will have to represent the reality. However a single case can never fully represent reality and therefore he states that the conclusions made must be carefully evaluated (Ejvegård, 2009).

Fisher (2007) describes case studies as a form of study which enables you to give a holistic account of the subject of research. Yin (1994) identifies the following as characteristics of a case study:

- It investigates a contemporary phenomenon within its real life context.
- It has a single location, such as a team or an organization, but with many variables.

A case study can use a variety of research methods and can happily accommodate quantitative data and qualitative material. Case study researchers tend to use theoretical propositions developed prior to the study to guide the data collection. Yin (2007) fur-

ther explains that in a case study you are required to tell a story from as broad perspective as is necessary.

Our location for study was the Elite Hotel in Jönköping and our main collection of data was qualitative in terms of interviews and observations. The hotel setting is interesting because of the recent growth of importance which empowerment has experienced within this setting (Hartline & Ferrell, 1999). Empowerment is important when employees have to make fast decisions to satisfy their customers and since these kind of situations occur on a daily basis in hotels we found Elite hotel to be a suitable choice for our study (Brymer, 1991).

We have developed a theoretical framework or propositions as Yin (2007) calls it, to guide our data collection through research and interview questions. We describe the theoretical view of empowerment in an organizational setting and show the practical implications of empowerment through the information gathered through our work with Elite Hotel in Jönköping.

3.5 Observation

By permission from the hotel manager we were able to conduct observations in the reception area of the hotel. We spent a total of eight hours observing the work in the reception. Observation as an aspect of research is a bit neglected but is actually both rewarding and enlightening to pursue and can add substantially to the richness of research data (Saunders, Lewis & Thornhill, 2009). Observation can be divided into two parts; one is called participant observation and is qualitative in nature and focuses on discovering the meanings that people attach to their actions (Saunders et al., 2009). The second Saunders et al. (2009) calls structured observation and is quantitative and is more focused on the frequency of actions. Our aim in this thesis have been to do so called participant observations to understand how staff and leaders at Elite hotel views empowerment and how it functions for their everyday work in practice. It has been our aim to gain a wider knowledge and understanding of empowerment in a real life context by using both interviews and observation to gain a broader knowledge.

Observation has been used as a method for data collection in this study and gathered as information for analysis about social processes in working processes in its natural context (Silverman, 2006). Silverman (2006) says that observations are often combined with interviews. The observations are combined with interviews and the focus for the observations has been on what the staff are doing at the hotel in terms of empowerment. Structured observations are also called systematic observation and are a technique where the researcher has constructed explicitly formulated rules for the observation (Bryman 2001). The rules are constructed in a way so that they show what the researcher should look for and how they should record behavior. The employees that we have studied are observed with these rules which were noted in a schedule (see appendix) and this method is similar to a structured interview schedule with closed questions (Bryman, 2001). Each participants behavior is systematically recorded so that it is possible to connect it to the sample that is configured as variables that should be recorded. Our sample for observation was the employees working in the reception. In this study we have a probability sample (Bryman, 2001) which means that all employees in the reception were randomly selected with an equal chance of being observed.

We have collected data and transferred it to written material so that the reader can see that we have produced data as reliable evidence. We have focused on a structured approach to observe different categories and also been observing the interactions between people in meetings. We used a scheme of categories so that our research observations could be analyzed afterwards in a relevant way which according to Fisher (2007) is a dependable way of interpreting data.

We did our observations at the hotel lobby at Elite hotel over two sessions at a total of eight hours. We spent time observing both daytime and during an evening. In addition to giving us some sightings of empowerment at work the observation also helped us gaining a greater feeling of what it is like working at Elite hotel. The observation also showed us what empowerment could be like in real life. During the observation we sat in the reception area at a seating section close to the reception desk and had good visual and quite good hearing without interfering the employees. The receptionists working during our observation knew of who we were but not all of them were aware of that we were sitting there in order to do some observation. At our first occasion for observation, which were during daytime, not much related to own decision making could be seen among the staff mainly because the timing was poorly chosen as not many guest check-in or out during those hours. At our second occasion of observation which was during a Friday evening several customers arrived and checked out of the hotel and naturally there were more relevant observations made.

In order to fully understand when employees in fact took empowered decisions we believe it would have been necessary to have knowledge about what kind of situations that normally occurs at the hotel, and in our case the reception. In order to gain that knowledge it would probably have been necessary to spend substantially more time observing which has not been possible for us.

3.6 Trustworthiness

It has been widely debated how to judge qualitative research in terms of validity and reliability (Barasso, 2002, Rolfe, 2004). Some scholars also claim that there is no consensus on quality criteria in qualitative research because there is no unified body of theory, methodology or method that can collectively be described as qualitative research (Sandelowski & Barasso, 2002).

However, different scholars have made numerous attempts to approach validity and reliability of qualitative research methods. Sandelowski (1993) argued that issues of validity in qualitative research should be linked to *trustworthiness* of data which then becomes a matter of persuasion where the scientist is viewed to have made his discoveries and his approaches to his findings visible and therefore reviewable. This means that the researcher thoroughly explains and shows the reader his method of research so that the reader would be able to track and verify the research process (Sandelowski, 1993). This do however put a lot of responsibility on the reader to verify if the data is trustworthy or not. Trustworthiness has been further divided into credibility which match more or less to the concept of internal validity of quantitative research, dependability which relates more to reliability, transferability; a form of external validity and conformability which is more a subject of presentation (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). We explain the concepts briefly and connect them to our study.

3.6.1 Credibility

Credibility is about establishing that the result of qualitative research are credible from the perspective of the participants that have been involved in the research (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Since the participants (our) perspective is determining the credibility of the research the purpose of qualitative research is to illustrate or comprehend the phenomena of interest from the participants eyes, the participants are the ones who bring legitimacy to the results through their reasoning and description of the research process (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Through our study we have tried to our best ability to describe the steps we have taken concerning our different paths when it comes to method, all to show that our results come from trustworthy research. We have recorded all our interviews to make our quotations correct and letting the results illustrate the reality as precise as possible. Furthermore we have been three researchers interpreting the data collected which also adds to the credibility of our findings.

3.6.2 Transferability

Transferability regards the degree to which the results of qualitative research can be generalized to other settings. Lincoln and Guba (1985) says that from a qualitative perspective transferability is mostly the researchers responsibility when it is they who are doing the generalizing. Transferability can be improved by thoroughly describing the process, assumptions and the research context that has been vital to the research process (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Lincoln and Guba (1985) further says that the individuals who desire to use the results to other contexts is then responsible for making the judgment for how reliable the transfer would be. In our case the results could be of guidance to how hotels relate to empowerment as well as adding knowledge to the field of research within empowerment.

3.6.3 Dependability

As mentioned earlier scholars have made the comparison between dependability in qualitative research and reliability of quantitative research (Sandelowski, 1993, Rolfe 2004, Lincoln & Guba, 1985). This view of reliability in quantitative research is based on the ability to replicate the study to verify the results. Dependability on the other hand relies on the researcher to account for the diversity and changes in the context of where the research has taken place. To account for dependability of the study the report should describe the setting and the changes in the setting and how this has affected the study (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

As we were conducting our interviews the answers that we got were to some extent affected by time constraints. Interviews and observations were our two main research methods of collecting data at the hotel. Many of the interviews were shorter than we first anticipated. We expected interviews to be about 45 minutes but most of them were around 20 minutes. Our understanding is also that some of the respondents felt a little bit uncomfortable to answer completely honest with some of the questions, even though we assured them that their answers would be handled anonymously. During observations we did not get to observe as many customer interactions as we expected due to the fact that there were not as many customers arriving to or leaving the hotel during our first observation session. However the second observation session were much more rewarding as numerous guests both arrived and checked out at that time. We have tried to

specify the context thoroughly as well as account for factors that could have had an impact on our results.

3.6.4 Conformability

Conformability refers to the degree to which the results could be confirmed by others. Lincoln and Guba (1985) points to strategies for enhancing conformability, for instance have the researcher documenting the procedures of data collection for re-checking the data throughout the study. After the study one can examine the data collection and analysis procedures and make judgments about the potential for bias or distortion. We have recorded and transcribed all interviews throughout the study and in that way we have re-checked the data throughout the study. It is also possible for others to look through our method for data collection and make judgments about the potential for bias or distortion.

3.6.5 Triangulation

Williamson (2002) says that triangulation are two folded: namely methods and sources. Methods triangulation is about checking the consistency of your results by using different data-collection methods. The methods could be only qualitative or quantitative, or it could be a mix of both. Sources triangulation means cross-checking for consistency of the information that is collected at different points in time and from different people. In our case we have used the qualitative triangulation approach with semi-structured interviews and observations to make our answers more reliable. Also the sources triangulation is applied in the way that we have different interview respondents and observations performed during both daytime as well as during evening hours. We also observed different employees working with the same tasks.

Williamson (2002) says that the advantages of triangulation is that the findings are more likely to be reliable when the data are collected from more than one source and by applying more than one method. When different methods are applied the researcher can take advantage of the strengths and minimize the weaknesses. Since we have used two types of data-collection methods as well as several respondents for the interviews it has increased the reliability of our results.

4 Results

In this section a summary of the empirical findings derived from the interviews and observations are presented. From the wide collection of data we have focused our results related to our purpose and research questions.

The Elite hotel chain is an upper-class four star hotel chain with more than 20 facilities around the country. The Elite hotel in Jönköping is called Stora hotellet and is a hotel with a long and interesting history. Even though Elite has many hotels in Sweden we have chosen to work solely with Elite hotel in Jönköping. Elite hotels building were originally planned to be finished at the same time as the railroad was built through Jönköping. The railroad were initially planned to be done 1860 and that was also the year that Elite hotel were actually done, however it took yet three more years for the railroad to be finished. The investors behind the building of the hotel were local entrepreneurs. The hotel also contained Jönköping's first health resort.

The current hotel manager of Elite hotel told us that before he started to work at the hotel there were a centralized way of directing the hotel. Supposedly staff at the hotel at that time were quite afraid of doing anything unless management had first approved of it. That way of directing the hotel is something that he tells us he has been trying to alter and he claims that due to the changed situation some middle managers ended their employment due to the loss of their authority. One of the situations that we observed that to some extent confirms those statements is that when we came to Elite hotel for the first time and no-one except the manager himself knew of us. When we asked for the hotel manager the employee working at the reception at that moment even made fun of the fact that we asked for the "hotel manager" and referred to his title and not just his name. This might very well be an indication of that the former hierarchical structure is gone and that a more informal tone and casual communication between managers and employees is now prevalent. However the following parts of the results section will scrutinize other factors of empowerment at Elite hotel in order to see what possible areas for bettering that might exist.

4.1 Interviews

4.1.1 Managements and employees perception of the consequences of empowerment

Management at the hotel claims that empowerment is already in function and many employees state that they both feel empowered and that they have managerial back-up in order to take own responsibility at their job.

"Each and every employee at the hotel have a quite large opportunity to affect his own work situation within a given framework" (Hotel manager at Elite hotel, personal communication, 2011-03-16).

One of the employees confirm the hotel managers statement by saying that: *"management says that you should never let an unhappy guest leave the hotel"* (Employee 1, personal communication, 2011-03-28). By saying this she meant that she has the authority to make own decisions to a certain extent.

Many of the employees that we have interviewed at Elite hotel seemed convinced that empowerment was necessary for them in order to fulfill their work tasks. One of them said that it is important to have empowerment when doing his kind of work. Another thought that empowerment must function in order for customers to be satisfied and not having to wait for a manager that might not even be at the hotel at that moment. One of the employees that have worked for 18 years says that making own decisions comes naturally for her and because she has worked for such a long time she is expected to make her own decisions without consulting management first. She also explains that she plans her own work even though she has no managerial responsibilities. Another employee said the following:

“One needs to be independent since it is not possible to run and ask a manager all the time...it is a lot of individual work” (Employee 3, personal communication, 2011-03-28).

“If you want to have a good service or product you need focused employees and they become more focused if they have responsibility for their own job” (Employee 2, personal communication, 2011-03-28).

Another employee confirms the above quotation by saying that it is not possible running around looking for a manager to make a decision for a customer in the daily business.

In the interviews we held we asked the employees in what situations they were able and required to make own decisions. A lot of the situations that we were told about when employees are empowered where at points in time where there were no managers around to ask or as one of the employees stated above said – that it is not possible to run around and ask managers about everything. For example an employee explained that she works mostly night shifts and at this time managers are usually not present and thereby she is forced to make own decisions. Also during interviews respondents were asked in what type of situations own decision making were most commonly asked for. One employee highlighted situations where customers were not pleased with their rooms. Further she explained that they have the authority to compensate these types of complaints within certain boundaries, for instance upgrading to a room with higher standard or compensate financially. However they are not allowed to give away a free room to satisfy a guest. One of the other employees confirms this statement by saying that if a guest complains she is allowed and has the authority to do adjustments in the price for instance to satisfy the guests needs. However that employee believed that her ability to make decisions like that had to do with having a bit more managerial responsibilities than others with the same position. Another employee says that a common situation where empowerment is needed when guests ask for specialized meals because of allergies or similar. The employee manages situations like this without conferring with managers.

At Elite hotel there is an outspoken tendency among both managers and employees that empowerment is something positive. Empowerment at Elite hotel is commonly viewed as something worth pursuing and connoted with superlatives.

One of the questions asked to all of the interviewees was what positive and negative aspects they associate with empowerment.

“In general I can only see positive aspects... since it gives employees the ability to affect their work” (Hotel manager, personal communication, 2011-03-16).

Several employees some of which have managerial responsibilities says that customers are commonly satisfied when they have made empowered decisions. Through the interviews not one of the respondents could think of any negative aspects associated with empowerment.

4.1.2 Employees desire to be empowered

Many of the employees interviewed that have the authority to make own decisions have explained that they see the benefits from being empowered. But several of them also seemed to think that the amount of authority that they have is just about enough. This seems to be connected to a fear of the consequences of their decisions. Some employees also mentioned that they have a hard time letting go of their decisions when they go home from work.

“Even though I do not have any managerial responsibilities I still feel a large responsibility for my work tasks and I feel that it is hard to let go of it as I am finished with work for the day” (Employee 3, personal communication, 2011-03-28).

There is no doubt that most of the employees actually want to be empowered but there seems to be limits to how much responsibility that they desire. However the opinions among the employees differs a bit and some of them can only see possibilities with empowerment. The following quotation is an example of how a number of employees expressed empowerment both as a necessity and a liability:

“Personally I sometimes feel a too heavy load due to responsibilities when a lot hinges upon my decisions but I still see it as a necessity to do my job properly” (Employee 4, personal communication, 2011-03-28).

When it comes to Elite hotels managers perception of employees desire to be empowered some of the department managers expressed that they think that their co-workers wants to be empowered since it gives them greater freedom in their daily work. Another middle-manager said the following:

“The majority of the group like it when they are challenged more while of course some are quite happy not being asked to take more charge and get more authority” (Employee 2, personal communication, 2011-03-28).

The hotel manager of Elite hotel said that it is alright for the employees to make mistakes as long as they learn something from it. He also said that he believes it differs among the employees who of them that wants to be empowered and those who do not.

“There are employees that only go to work and does not have any higher ambitions in terms of responsibility but there are also those who takes initiatives and larger responsibility within their field of work” (Hotel manager, personal communication, 2011-03-16).

The hotel manager also said that he believes that it is most important that the department managers feel empowered to make own decisions. He also explains that he thinks empowerment is important, that each department knows their court and that own decisions is acceptable within certain boundaries.

4.1.3 Management support

During our time at Elite hotel it became clear during the interviews we conducted that most of the employees felt management support in taking empowered decisions. However when asked in what ways they experienced this support few of them could actually give any examples of how. Most just said that they “feel” support from management. One of the employees said that she feels that management trusts them with responsibility and she states that she “just knows” that she have management support. One of the employees working with maintenance said that she wants the responsibility to meet customers and make her own decisions and that she feels she have management support but she cannot think of any particular way they have showed support. According to our interviews there are no technical support for employees to make empowered decisions either. The following quotation underlines that not all employees share the notion of management support.

“I don’t really have any support from management in making own decisions other than that they give feedback if I do something right or wrong” (Employee 2, personal communication, 2011-03-28).

In terms of communication between management and employees it is quite clear that they have several forums for that. For instance they have a meeting everyday at quarter to ten where the outline for the day is discussed. On Tuesdays there is a meeting for managers from different parts of the hotel where different topics are discussed which are then conveyed to the rest of the work force. They also have different meetings for the hotels various departments. Most of the employees express that they see their managers frequently and they discuss various issues regarding their work but empowerment is not mentioned as an example during the interviews.

4.1.4 Employees ability to affect their work

Another aspect of empowerment that we covered during the interviews at Elite hotel was the employees ability to affect their work. It turned out that many of them can see and feel that their individual tasks affects the result of the entire hotel. One employee that has worked several years in the reception believes she has been given a mandate to be part of forming the routines and standards for reception workers:

“We are the ones working with the customers everyday and I feel this is why management have wanted us to be part of developing routines of how we can best meet customer demands” (Employee 1, personal communication, 2011-03-28).

One of the employees that have some responsibility over the housekeeping services of the hotel expressed that consequences of her decisions can lead to that if cleaning is being performed too slowly or that if they have too many employees it will lead to less good financial results – the same would be true for the opposite as well of course. However this same employee also expressed that she would need more time in order to make sensible decisions.

“Fast decisions are not always the best decisions” (Employee 4, personal communication, 2011-03-28).

There is plenty of information about the hotels results presented to the employees and this is something that several of the employees have expressed as an example of how

their work affects the common results of the hotel. One such example is the feedback that the employees receive that works in the reception. They have an aim to always try and sell a more exclusive or larger room to the guests that check-in at the hotel and one of the employees working in the reception pointed out that due to all the information it was possible for her to see that one's attempts of trying to sell a more expensive room category will lead to higher average room prices. Someone also mentioned that because there is a lot of large companies and organizations that stay at Elite hotel the word goes around quickly among a large amount of people if the service have been good or bad. In that way this employee felt that her actions towards the guests can greatly affect the relative success of the hotel. It seems that the information given from the management of Elite hotel has fed an awareness in many of the employees minds of that their achievements can actually affect the results of the entire hotel. However we were also informed that there is a tendency that the feedback that the employees receive is often points of improvement and not so much encouragement when something good is actually done. Someone suggested that it would have been nice to go to a restaurant together with their colleagues when they had performed something of greater value, as a gesture of appreciation from the hotels side. Another issue that we came across was that not all employees feel as if their ideas of how to improve the everyday work is heard. That their suggestions does not reach the management of Elite hotel.

"I think every employee can be heard regarding their suggestions but of course there are some boundaries to be crossed when you are not in a managerial position" (Employee 5, personal communication, 2011-03-28).

4.1.5 Rewards

One aspect often associated with empowerment and motivation of employees are rewards. All employees were during the interviews asked about the practice of using rewards at the hotel; are rewards used, what qualifies to get rewarded, are there different types of rewards and so on.

There is a clear tendency from our interviews that the "size" of the reward is connected to the position of the employee. Managers often have cash-bonuses if they manage their work well and exceed their goals, while employees on lower ranked positions mostly get movie tickets if they have done something good.

One of the reception workers says that rewards are based on internal competition between employees in the reception on who can sell the most and have customers upgrade their rooms. The reward for this she says is movie tickets.

In the interview with the hotel manager he explained how the reward systems functions. He explained that it would be faulty to say that all employees on all levels are rewarded for their work achievements. The department managers have individual bonuses. They are the ones that can be rewarded financially. The receptionists are working a lot with selling more expensive room categories to what guest had initially booked and that there are rewards related to this. Housekeeping are rewarded based on their group performance as to how many rooms they clean per hour and so on and in the restaurant and the pub they have rewards based upon the amounts of beverages and food sold. Mostly the rewards in these departments are movie tickets. However one of the middle managers undermined the importance of the reward itself and said that he does not so much

reward people in material things, but more in showing his appreciation with their work and give them a pat on the shoulder.

“I like to give a lot of positive feedback if somebody does something good...I think you need both, both criticism and positive feedback, of course, a movie ticket is a reward, but I think some positive words and a pat on the shoulder could be worth more”. (Employee 2, personal communication).

Rewards have been a part of the organizational life at Elite hotel for some time to some extent and recently there have been upgraded systems in order to highlight achievements that have been made. Some employees mentioned that they do not know of any specific rewards at their departments and there also seems to be a lack of individual rewards at some departments. There have also been cases which have been mentioned to us where the rewards have not been in proportion with the actual value of the employee performance. The following quotation illustrates this:

“I actually got rewarded with movie tickets once. I came in and worked even though I was sick because there was sort of a crisis at the hotel. Apart from that I have not really received any rewards” (Employee 6, personal communication, 2011-03-28).

4.1.6 Training

Most of the employees at Elite hotel that we interviewed told us that at the inception of their career at Elite hotel most of them were taught how to perform their work tasks by going beside one of the other more seasoned employees working at their position. There have also been some training concerning safety and environmental regulations as well as courses within new computer programs and similar activities for many of the employees. On the other hand there have not been any training concerning empowerment. Empowerment circles around customer contact employees interaction with customers but during our interviews we have not been able to discern any training that has aimed towards bettering those interactions apart from the initial training.

“ I got a regular training consisting of walking beside another employee who has been there a while, learning the methods and practices of the hotel. Other than that I have not received any more training” (Employee 7, personal communication, 2011-04-01).

Another of the employees that have been working for a very long time explained that there have been very little training over the years that she has been employed at the hotel. This seems to be a recurring pattern at the hotel.

“The only training I remember that I have received is that I was walking beside another co-worker for some time at the beginning of my employment as well as some computer programs training” (Employee 1, personal communication, 2011-03-28).

Another employee that have been working for quite some time at the hotel told us that she have had some training concerning called “hotel co-worker education” for some time ago. However according to the data we collected this seems to be a somewhat isolated event.

4.2 Observation

During our observations our prime focus was to observe employees making empowered decisions in order to help customers. We wanted to observe employees in their natural

work environment and see if they were making decisions without consulting managers and how customers responded to these actions. During our first observation there were not a lot of guests checking in or out of the hotel, thereby the receptionists had plenty of time and opportunity to handle the few guests who actually came.

To make our observations more relevant to empowerment we used a simple grading system which is included in the appendices. We also noted the specifics for the most relevant situations. Of course there were plenty of situations occurring which were of little interest to us, however the following captured our interest in terms of empowerment.

There were some incidents that caught our attention regarding decision making and handling of customer requests. One such incident were an older couple asking about borrowing a computer when the computer in the reception area available to guests were out of function. The receptionist explained that someone were to fix the problem soon, but at the time she said that there were nothing she could do to help.

There were some examples where rather simple requests were made by guests that the employees solved swiftly and without consulting any manger. It was not clear in those situations if those incidents were common problems or not. Examples of such situations were a customer who wanted to check out in the middle of the night which were not a problem. Another guest wanted to be woken up in the morning as well as made a request for a sandwich brought to his room in the morning – this was also solved without any problems. Yet another example was a dad with his two daughters requesting an extra bed - this was also solved by an employee delivering the bed to their room in a timely manner.

Another episode that caught our attention were a phone call to the reception were the request was to cancel a combined golf and hotel visit. There had been a mistake in the booking process and the guest wanted to cancel his booking. This turned out to be a bit of a problem and the receptionist could not solve it right away. Some of the receptionist discussed the issue for some time but eventually had to tell the guest that they had to call back later with a solution. At this time the receptionist had to call for a manager to make the decision on how to solve the issue. This did take some time and wait for the customer, however we cannot account for how big of a problem this caused for the guest. Neither are we sure if this is a type of decision that the receptionist are allowed to make without contacting a manager.

5 Analysis

In this section an analysis of the empirical data is given. The results are analyzed connected to the theoretical framework as well as the purpose and research questions of the study.

5.1 Managements and employees view of empowerments consequences

During our study at Elite hotel Jönköping it became quite clear that most of the management and rest of the employees have a positive almost rosy view of empowerment. It became obvious that empowerment to a certain degree is necessary in a hotel setting but there seems to be a lack of an understanding of the costs associated with empowerment. It also became clear that even though there is a fundamental understanding of the need of empowerment the steps taken to implement it is rather ambiguous.

Even if everybody at Elite hotel speaks positively and enthusiastically about empowerment and the ability for employees to make own decisions we are questioning if the employees are as empowered as they think they are. We are also curious if management have really let go of their control in order for the employees to really be empowered. Argyris (1998) said that empowerment is commonly well known and well spoken-off but not implemented so often. We have seen empowerment in practice at Elite hotel and know that it exists more than as an outspoken non implemented idea but there seems to be too much control from managements side. Elite hotels manager made clear that empowerment must function within certain boundaries. Our question then is why it is so important for the managers to know of every individual empowered decision that the employees make? Many of the employees that we spoke to commented that management wanted to know about what decisions were made even if they had the mandate to make such decisions. Several of the department managers that we spoke to said that they wanted their co-workers to take action on their own but they also admitted that they were keen on getting informed about what decisions that they made. We believe that this need of control contradicts the empowerment which they give the employees.

5.1.1 Positive and negative aspects of empowerment

As we have mentioned both managers and employees at Elite hotel have a positive view of empowerment. However as Bowen and Lawler (1992) and Hartline and Ferrel (1996) pointed out there are also negative aspects of empowerment such as incurred costs, slower or inconsistent service delivery, employees making bad decisions etc. However at the hotel neither employees nor managers did recognize or point out any of these aspects, instead they could only see positive sides.

“In general I can only see positive aspects... since it gives employees the ability to affect their work” (Hotel manager, personal communication, 2011-03-16).

Bowen and Lawler (1992) says that a benefit of empowerment is that employees can respond quicker to customer needs which in turn leads to customer satisfaction. During our observation we witnessed a clear example of such a situation where a customer

wanted to check out in the middle of the night as well as another hotel guest that requested early wake-up and a sandwich delivered to the room. Neither of these requests were encountered with any hindrances and the receptionist took the decision without hesitation or consulting a manager. Empowering employees in a situation like this can help turning a possibly frustrated customer into a satisfied one (Bowen & Lawler, 1992). As a consequence of the employees behavior there was clearly positive reactions from the affected guests.

In order to fully grasp the idea of empowerment we believe it is important for both the hotel managers and employees to understand both the positive and negative aspects of empowerment. Considering this we think that Elite hotel would profit from evaluating which employees that it is valuable to empower. They should be realistic about the costs and failures which might occur through empowering employees.

The hotel manager also said that it differs among the employees who wants to take a larger responsibility and those who do not. It would be a good idea to empower those employees that wishes to take a larger responsibility and perhaps question the amount of own decision making that the others should be given. Otherwise those employees that does not strive towards a greater responsibility might make decisions that is not carefully considered just because they felt they “had to”. It is also a risk that employees that does not wish to be empowered would get dissatisfied if they were forced to make own decisions.

In our theoretical framework we also mentioned the psychological approach of empowerment and Spreitzer (1995) claims that meaning, competence, self-determination and impact defines the psychological experience of empowerment. This means that it is important for management to make sure that these factors functions as underlying basics in order for empowerment to function well at Elite hotel. This is important in order for empowerment to become something positive at Elite hotel since it will make employees more satisfied with their job and making them feel that their actions contributes to the hotels direction.

5.2 Employees desire to be empowered

We wanted to investigate managements understanding of their employees desire to be empowered. According to our interpretation it seems like many employees feel frightened of the consequences of their decisions. At the same time they also view their authority as a necessity in order to fulfill their work requirements. From our perspective this creates a form of dilemma for the hotel. The employees needs to be empowered but at the same time fear its consequences.

“Personally I sometimes feel a too heavy load due to responsibilities when a lot hinges upon my decisions but I still see it as a necessity to do my job properly” (Employee 4, personal communication, 2011-03-28).

It seems to us that this is a signal managers should take seriously in terms of having their employees feeling comfortable and motivated to make fast and rewarding decisions for both their customers and themselves. We experienced through the interviews with managers that there were a clear tendency of them wanting their employees to have authority and make decisions but that managers still wanted to be in control. We would like to call for self-assessment among Elite hotels managers since there is a risk that as

it is today the need for control that managers have scare employees from making own decisions. Some of the employees also experience a lack of encouragement and rewards when something worthy of notice has been done. If an employee feel that the only feedback from own decision making that they receive is negative then the motivation for being empowered rapidly decreases. Wynne (1993) claims that it is important for management to make sure that their planned empowerment is not just another control system for the employees which holds them responsible if something goes wrong. In order to further encourage the employees of Elite hotel to make empowered decisions we see it as mandatory for management to more commonly encourage positive effects of decisions which employees have made as well as train and inform them about what areas and in what ways they can make own decisions. Management should not interfere but stay in the background as a backup for the employees and not be stuffed with a need of deciding but instead letting the employees decide.

“There are employees that only go to work and does not have any higher ambitions in terms of responsibility but there are also those who takes initiatives and larger responsibility within their field of work” (Hotel manager, personal communication, 2011-03-16).

The hotel manager also said that he believes that it is most important that the department managers feel empowered to make own decisions. He also explains that he thinks empowerment is important, that each department knows their court and that own decisions is acceptable within certain boundaries. We would like to address this issue by reminding that empowerment is perhaps best suited for customer contact employees and not managers which means that the floor staff are supposed to be able to make own decisions in order to create larger customer satisfaction (Gill et al., 2009). Therefore the management of Elite hotel would benefit from addressing empowerment from a different angle and not just focusing on empowering department managers. The most important employees to empower might very well be all the customer contact employees since they are the ones that will often direct a customer’s satisfaction. Management should try and stay in the back and support the customer contact employees and step away from the notion that they should make all the decisions. Oftentimes the customer contact employees are better equipped to make the right decisions and if management has to be notified about every decision the employees make then part of the benefits with empowerment is lost.

5.3 Employees ability to affect their work

Whether employees feel that they can affect their work situation or not is an important aspect of empowerment from a psychological perspective. We have mentioned earlier that impact and self-determination are both part of creating a mindset within the employees minds which makes them feel empowered (Spreitzer, 1995). It became clear from our empirical collection that many employees at Elite hotel felt that they could affect not only their own work but also the relative success of the entire hotel. This is something that Elite hotel deserves some praise for. It is much likely that those employees who expressed those thoughts are more satisfied than others. Spreitzer (1995) also says that in order for individuals to feel empowered they need to understand their work units goals and how it is connected to the larger system. This part Elite hotel has been successful at creating and employees are more than aware of what is expected from them and key ratios are commonly used at the hotel. Bowen and Lawler (1995) suggest

that in order to create an “empowered state of mind” employees should be briefed about company results. Our research has shown that Elite hotel has been successful at this.

Even though lots of good work has been done in this area there is still some aspects that we wish to mention that needs some bettering at Elite hotel. One employee said the following concerning the ability to affect the work at the hotel:

“ I think every employee can be heard regarding their suggestions but of course there are some boundaries to be crossed when you are not in a managerial position” (Employee 5, personal communication, 2011-03-28).

This statement was backed up by several employees and reveals that it might be difficult for employees to gain feedback and responses on their ideas unless they are managers. We think it would be healthy for Elite hotel to remove the obstacles that hinders employees ideas for improvement to reach top management. If employees feel as if their ability to impact their everyday work is nonexistent their feeling of being empowered might also decline which in turn could lead to dissatisfaction and their work to impair. It seems to be a recurring theme that management at Elite hotel talks fondly of empowerment and realizes its values but is not implementing it as efficiently as would be possible. This is much like Argyris (1998) claimed; that empowerment is often well spoken off but not so often implemented. Elite hotel have reached some success this far and we believe that they can keep bettering their work with empowerment and one way to do that would be to make sure that the customer contact employees ideas for bettering is used more efficiently. This would most likely increase their employees work satisfaction as well as increase the hotels performance since customer contact employees are the ones that interact with customers and therefore have lots of knowledge about customer needs and desires.

5.4 Training

Ro and Chen (2011) underlines the importance of training for employees in order to make fully empowered decisions and provide excellent service. Training programs can also ensure that customer contact employees have the required skills and personal characteristics to cope with empowerment (Ahmed & Rafiq, 1998).

During our time spent at Elite hotel we have discovered through our interviews that there is almost no training at all for the hotels employees concerning empowerment. They have of course training in order for the employees to learn how to do handle their daily activities but nothing concerning how to make empowered decisions. All employees have received some initial training at the beginning of their employment. Most of the training consists of walking beside another employee which functions as a mentor for the newly employed. We believe that it would be beneficial for Elite hotel to train the employees more concerning customer service, how to make own decisions without asking a manager first and making swift decisions on the spot. This would also create an awareness towards why it is important to respond quickly to customer demands. Kappelman and Richards (1996) also underlines that training can be a way of motivating employees. Training would help Elite hotel to show their dedication towards empowerment – it could be a way of reassuring the employees that they have the authority to take own decisions within certain boundaries and that they also have support from management to take empowered decisions. When asked most of the employees said that they feel as if they have management support – both in general and concerning their decision

making ability. However not many could give actual examples of how this management support revealed itself. Many described it as a fuzzy feeling. We believe that the manager of Elite hotel has a task here: to make the management support visible and clear. Training could be a way of visualizing their desire to actually have employees making their own decisions. In our theoretical framework we have presented an example by Nicholls (1995) on an empowerment training framework which we suggest that Elite hotel takes a look at in order to get a feeling for how to enhance empowerment training.

“ I got a regular training consisting of walking beside another employee who has been there awhile learning the methods and practices of the hotel. Other than that I have not received any more training” (Employee 7, personal communication, 2011-04-01).

5.5 Rewards

Scholars (Bowen & Lawler, 1992; Kappelman & Richards, 1996) have pointed out the relative importance of rewards in a context of empowerment. It is important to reward employees for good deeds in order to motivate them to continue to make own empowered decisions. Birch (2002) says that in the hotel sector, a variety of rewards are used to encourage high levels of customer service including both tangible (monetary and symbolic) and intangible (praise and positive feedback) rewards. At Elite hotel different ways of rewarding employees have been around for some time and there are some new systems newly implemented at the hotel. The hotel manager said that many but not all employees get rewarded for their individual efforts. There is also a clear distinction between managers and employees rewards. We are not opposing the idea to reward certain employees differently than others but we do believe that the rewards should be relative to performance. We were told about one example when an employee was called in to work extra even though she was sick and all that she received as a reward was a couple of movie tickets.

“I actually got rewarded with movie tickets once. I came in and worked even though I was sick because there was sort of a crisis at the hotel. Apart from that I have not really received any rewards” (Employee 6, personal communication, 2011-03-28).

It is understandable that such a reward must have felt quite disappointing since the same reward is given for much less appreciated deeds. What we are saying is not that it is negative with rewards but the rewards should stay in proportion to the actual effort.

In a study performed by Birch (2002) it was also discovered that praise and appreciation given with tangible rewards was equally if not more valued by employees, rather than the financial or symbolic value of the reward itself. It could be valuable for Elite hotel to recognize these results. It is an inexpensive way of possibly having more motivated and satisfied employees. It should however be noted that one of the middle managers stated that he acted according to these results.

“I like to give a lot of positive feedback if somebody does something good...I think you need both, both criticism and positive feedback, of course, a movie ticket is a reward, but I think some positive words and a pat on the shoulder could be worth more”. (Employee 2, personal communication).

In conclusion it could be said that even though Elite hotel has done some work concerning rewards there are still room for improvements.

6 Conclusions

The results of our research has shown that empowerment is not an unfamiliar subject to Elite hotels managers and employees. However we believe that when interpreting our data there are things that could be improved to reach a more rewarding situation for both employees, managers and customers in terms of empowerment. One of our research questions was to what extent management understands the consequences of empowerment. The data points towards that the managers interviewed had what seem to be an overly positive view of empowerment, not being able to see any negative aspects of delegating authority and decision making to the customer contact employees. This stands in contradiction to the literature where both positive and negative aspects are mentioned. Negative aspects is for instance increased costs due to training, employees making dire decisions, slower or inconsistent service delivery and employees giving away too much to satisfy a customer (Bowen & Lawler, 1992). These are all consequences managers should be aware of before implementing an empowerment approach.

Our second research question was to what degree management have understood their employees desire to be empowered. Some employees responded that they feel a bit frightened by having too much responsibility and for the consequences of their decisions. We believe that training would be one of the main cures for this problem, both in creating managerial awareness of the employees feelings towards empowerment and what it really means to give employees authority according to an empowerment incentive. The very same employees that was frightened for the consequences of their decisions also realized that being empowered was necessary for them to do their job. Apart from training we believe it would profit Elite hotel if management encouraged employees more frequently when well executed empowered decisions has been done in order to enhance employees willingness of making own decisions.

Our third research question was how the employees at Elite hotel can affect their work situation. Our conclusion here is that many employees feel that they can affect their work situation. However it seems as if the employees without any managerial responsibilities have a hard time getting their ideas through. Their inability to impact their work might lead to employee dissatisfaction which in turn will affect their empowered decisions in a negative way. Therefore we view it as a necessity for Elite hotel to reconsider their view of this matter.

How training and rewards are used at Elite hotel in order to endorse empowerment is our fourth research question. We found out that apart from some basic training at the beginning of an employee's career at the hotel no other training is actually given. It would be good for Elite hotel to train their employees in how to make own decisions and this would also create an awareness of that it is important to swiftly respond to customer needs. We will give some advice of what sort of training that can be given in the managerial implications section of the thesis. Elite hotel have some reward systems already which seems to function well. However we believe that all rewards should stand in relation to the performed accomplishment. This is of course a challenge but none the less an important aspect since it will affect the employees attitudes towards empowerment. Finally managers at Elite hotel should recognize the value in showing praise and appreciation with tangible rewards and how that could be more valuable to employees. It would be, as mentioned, an inexpensive way of possibly getting more motivated and satisfied employees.

7 Recommendations

As a result of our study we would like to propose some recommendations to Elite hotel. We believe that it would be helpful for Elite hotel to work more actively and goal-oriented with empowerment. In order to do this we believe that Conger and Kanungos (1988) five step approach towards the process of empowerment that we presented in the frame of reference part of the thesis would be helpful:

1. First the conditions leading to a psychological state of powerlessness must be discovered.
2. Then managerial strategies and techniques such as goal setting and job enrichment must be implemented.
3. Management should provide self-efficacy information to subordinates through establishing achievements, vicarious experience, verbal persuasion and emotional arousal and the conditions listed under stage one should also be removed.
4. Here the results of empowering for the subordinate should be seen in the form of strengthened self-efficacy or performance expectancy.
5. At the fifth stage effects of new behavioral should be seen by persistence of behavior to accomplish task objectives.

Another recommendation we would like to give concerns training for the customer contact employees. We have stressed the importance of training for employees in order to really be empowered and Nicholls (1995) states that training is a powerful and necessary part of implementing empowerment in order to hinder it from becoming only an illusion. We recommend Elite hotel to use Nicholls (1995) three step training framework as a tool to enhance their employees empowerment. In short Nicholls (1995) three steps consists of doing the following:

1. Empower people to the fullest extent of their current capability within the scope of their current job
2. Grow people beyond their current capabilities
3. Managers letting go of authority and instead focus to energize people – achieving results beyond expectations.

Nicholls (1995) however underlines that certain difficult and strategic decisions should be made by managers but that the totality of the work should be influenced by the broader part of the workforce. Managers should instead focus on guiding and encouraging the employees. The three steps are explained fully in the frame of reference part of the thesis under the heading: 2.2.1 Training framework.

By using this framework it would be easier for Elite hotel to counter Argyris (1998) claim that empowerment is commonly something well spoken off but seldom implemented. Throughout this thesis it has been shown that empowerment has both positive and negative aspects and by following the recommendations Elite hotel will hopefully be able to avoid part of the negative consequences while still reaping the benefits from empowerments positive consequences.

8 Further research

We have conducted a single-case study which means that our findings in the thesis cannot be transformed into any theory nor can we generalize from it but we have tried to distill some perspectives of how things are at Elite hotel Jönköping. For future studies it would be possible to conduct quantitative studies or multiple case studies to see if the findings from this thesis holds when studied at a broader base.

Employee satisfaction is another interesting topic that in combination with empowerment would be interesting to perform research within. Therefore a further research area would be to study how empowerment affects employee satisfaction. It would be interesting to do research in order to see to what degree empowerment can affect employee satisfaction, both positively and negatively since not all employees may wish to be empowered.

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Appendix 1 - Interview questions

Employees

1. What is background on the hotel? (how long have you worked there, work tasks, career etc)
2. How were you recruited to the hotel?
3. In what kind of situations do you feel you get to make work related decisions on your own without first asking your closest manager?
4. How often would you say such situations occur?
5. Do you experience that the customers gets satisfied in those situations?
6. When you started working at the hotel: what kind of training did you receive?
7. Have you been given any further training afterwards?
8. Do you want the possibility to make own decision on how to solve work related problems?
9. Can you feel that you get support from management in making own decisions?
If yes – in what way?
10. How do you experience the communication between yourself and your bosses?
11. How do you experience the working atmosphere emotionally?
12. Are you as an employee informed about the hotels success or decline?
13. Are your personal achievements measured somehow?
14. Are you rewarded based upon the hotels or your personal achievements?
15. Are there any knowledgebase within the hotel?
16. Do you feel that you can add to the hotels direction and relative success?
17. What technological support do you have in order to solve work related problems?
18. Do you think you should have a greater ability to make own decisions at your job? Are there any restrictions?
19. Do you feel that you have a too great responsibility at your job?
20. Are there any job instructions for your work?
21. What consequences do you see with delegation of responsibility?
22. Are there anything you would like to change with your work? (related to empowerment)
23. Does your (in)ability to make work related decisions affect your job satisfaction?

Managers

1. What is background on the hotel? (how long have you worked there, work tasks, career etc)
2. How were you recruited to the hotel?
3. How do you view delegation of responsibility?
4. To what extent do you think the employees feel authorized to make own work related decisions?

5. To what extent do you think the employees want to take own responsibility?
6. How have delegation of responsibility to employees affected the everyday work at the hotel?
7. In what way do you think delegation of responsibility have affected the employees job satisfaction?
8. In what way are the employees supported to make own decisions?
9. Is there any technical, knowledge or management support?
10. How often do you think situations occur where delegation of responsibility becomes necessary?
11. Do you believe the hotel guests got satisfied in those situations?
12. How do you experience the communication between yourself and your employees?
13. How do you experience the work atmosphere emotionally?
14. Are you informing the employees about the hotels success or decline? If yes – in what way?
15. Are your personal achievements measured?
16. Are the employees rewarded based upon the hotels/personal achievements?
17. Is there any knowledgebase within the hotel? Such as a database.
18. Do you feel that the employees can affect the direction of the hotel?
19. Does the employees have explicit work instructions?

Interview questions in Swedish to employees

1. Vad är din bakgrund på hotellet? (anställningstid, arbetsuppgift, avancemang, etc.)
2. Hur rekryterades du till hotellet?
3. I vilka situationer upplever du att du får agera efter eget huvud utan att först fråga närmsta chef?
4. Hur ofta uppskattar du att sådana situationer uppstår?
5. Upplever du att kunderna blivit nöjda i de situationerna?
6. När du började: vilken form av träning fick du då?
7. Har du fått någon vidareutbildning?
8. Vill du ha möjlighet att fatta egna beslut som påverkar hur problem i arbetet löses?
9. Upplever du att du får stöd av ledningen att fatta egna beslut i arbetet? Om ja, hur?
10. Hur upplever du kommunikationen mellan dig och dina chefer?
11. Hur upplever du arbetsmiljön emotionellt?
12. Informeras du som anställd om företagets fram och tillbakagångar?
13. Mäts dina personliga prestationer?
14. Belönas du baserat på organisationens prestationer/personliga prestationer?
15. Finns det någon kunskapsbas inom hotellet?
16. Känner du att du kan bidra till företagets riktning och prestation?

17. Vilken typ av teknik har du till ditt förfogande för att lösa arbetsrelaterade problem?
18. Känner du att du borde ha ett större utrymme att fatta egna beslut i ditt arbete? Eventuella restriktioner?
19. Känner du ett för stort ansvar i ditt arbete?
20. Finns det arbetsinstruktioner för din tjänst?
21. Vilka konsekvenser ser du vid delegering av ansvar?
22. Är det saker du skulle vilja ändra på i ditt arbete?
23. Påverkar din möjlighet att fatta egna beslut hur nöjd du är med ditt arbete?

Interview questions in Swedish to managers

1. Vad är din bakgrund på hotellet? (anställnings tid, arbetsuppgift, avancemang, etc.)
2. Hur rekryterades du till hotellet?
3. Hur ser du på ansvarsdelegering?
4. I vilken utsträckning tror du dem anställda känner sig bemyndigade att fatta egna beslut?
5. I vilken utsträckning tror du att dem anställda vill få eget ansvar?
6. Hur har ansvarsdelegering till anställda påverkat det dagliga arbetet på hotellet?
7. Hur tror du att ansvarsdelegeringen har påverkat de anställdas nöjdhet med sitt arbete?
8. Hur stöttas de anställda i att fatta egna beslut?
9. Finns det någon form av teknisk support? Kunskapssupport/management support?
10. Hur ofta tror du det uppstår situationer där ansvarsdelegering är aktuellt?
11. Tror du att kunderna blivit nöjda i de situationerna?
12. Hur upplever du kommunikationen mellan dig och dina anställda?
13. Hur upplever du arbetsmiljön emotionellt?
14. Informerar ni och i sådana fall hur, dem anställda om företagets fram och tillbakagångar?
15. Mäts dina personliga prestationer?
16. Belönas de anställda baserat på organisationens prestationer/personliga prestationer?
17. Finns det någon kunskapsbas inom hotellet, exempelvis en databas?
18. Känner du att de anställda kan bidra till företagets riktning?
19. Har de anställda tydliga arbetsinstruktioner?

Appendix 2 - Observations

Here is the collected data transferred into written script so that the reader can see that data is produced as reliable evidence (Silverman, 2006). Scheme is used for analysis afterwards in a relevant way (Fischer, 2007).

Employee Categories	1	2	3	4	Sum
Decision-making	3	3	2	1	9
Satisfied	4	4	2	1	11
Customer focus	3	3	4	3	13
Discuss with each other	1	1	2	1	5
Fluent action	3	3	3	3	12

0=could not judge 1=sufficient 2=middle 3=high 4=very high

A checklist with a grading system shows the observers perception of the employees performance of the work. Here are notes from “social processes in working processes in naturally occurring contexts” (Silverman, 2006). In the observation study the people that we observed were randomly chosen. The observations were performed at Elite hotels reception area. The observations was done at two occasions with totally four employees observed.

When the observations with the categories were evaluated the following appeared:

- That those with higher degree of decision-making did not discuss with others and those that was lower graded did discuss with each other more before making decisions.
- In these actions were the four of them similar they had a fluent performance to handle the work
- They had also customer focus to a high degree.
- The low degree for discussion with each other shows that they were fluent in their actions and did make quick decisions and in that combination they had high customer focus. That shows also a high degree of customer focus.
- The perception of the employees satisfaction had also a high degree together with customer focus and fluent action.

Overall the employees in the reception had high performance on four contributions:

- Decision-making
- Satisfaction
- Customer focus
- Fluent action

Appendix 3 – Interviews at Elite hotel

	RESPONDENT	DATE	TIME
1	Employee	2011-03-28	22 minutes
2	Employee, middle manager	2011-03-28	20 minutes
3	Employee	2011-03-28	17 minutes
4	Employee, middle manager	2011-03-28	15 minutes
5	Employee	2011-03-28	21 minutes
6	Employee	2011-03-28	15 minutes
7	Employee	2011-04-01	20 minutes
8	Employee, middle manager	2011-04-05	25 minutes
9	Hotel Manager	2011-03-16	50 minutes
10	Employee, middle manager	2011-03-28	17 minutes
11	Employee	2011-04-01	12 minutes