The Impact of Employer-Employee Relationships on Business Growth

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ABSTRACT This paper aims to outline the importance of the employer-employee relationship and describes the role this relationship plays towards the growth of a business. The paper also highlights the role job satisfaction plays towards stimulating good relationships between these two parties and provides guidelines to business owners on how the relationship can be managed. A relationship survey was designed for the study. The survey aimed to determine the business owners' opinions about relationships, and whether they believed these play a significant role towards the success of their businesses. The survey further aimed to measure job satisfaction of the employees. In the study, job satisfaction was identified as an accurate indicator of good relationships between employers and employees. The study found that business owners shared a positive notion that relationships play an important role towards their business as these contribute to the growth of their business. The employees indicated high levels of satisfaction with their jobs. The study concludes by outlining the key factors and benefits of managing employer-employee relationships.

INTRODUCTION

Business owners wishing to compete at a world-class level must understand the human side of their organisation and business processes. According to Jansen et al. (2013: 192-216), they must be social architects who can work across levels and functions of the organisation, continuously improving the business process and fostering an atmosphere favourable for innovation, risk-taking, self-directed teamwork, commitment, quality and self-improvement. To survive and grow in the twenty-first century, entrepreneurs must learn and use appropriate human skills to motivate and inspire all those involved in their business (McDermott and Conway 2013: 289).

Various sources including Accuff and Wood (2004), Browne and Keeley (2009), Donaldson and O'Toole (2007), Ford et al. (2003), and Selmier and Travis (2013) have suggested that without strong relationships, it becomes impossible to be successful as a business owner. These studies express the opinion that business owners need to have long-term customer and employee relationships that will carry them through challenging and difficult times, as well as relationships with other business owners, to share struggles, resources and best practices, which can really give them an edge.

Relationships are complex but research from Anderson and Kerr (2002), Boxall (2013), Hartline and Bejou (2004), and Alcarzar et al. (2013) suggest that they can be managed. Jackson (2009) concluded that the reality about business relationships is that they are just like any other relationship; they require lots of effort to maintain and they must be mutually beneficial to all the stakeholders. Jackson emphasised that as in any business relationship, a business owner must be willing to give, share and support, not just take or receive.

Objectives

This study was developed with the intention to:
- Highlight the critical role played by positive employer-employee relationships towards business success;
- Discuss interpersonal skills as the basis for establishing and maintaining relationships;
- Discuss the role played by job satisfaction on employer-employee relationships;
- Assess the nature of the relationship between businesses and their employees in a targeted community in the Western Cape Province of South Africa and discuss the role this relationship contributes to the success of SMMEs in the community.

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Literature Review

The relationship between the employer and the employee is important, therefore business owners need to pay attention to this relationship if they want their businesses to grow and succeed (Bhattacharya et al. 2012). There are a number of employee retention strategies that business owners can utilise in order to maintain the good relationship they have with the employees. Several sources including Kleinaltenkamp and Ehret (2006), Strohmeier (2013), and Yan and Stafford (2011) outline relationship strategies targeted at workers might include amongst others motivating, providing incentives, delegating important responsibilities, being open and transparent, team building, and so on.

Burns (2012: 186-196) declared that good employer-employee relations are essential for different reasons. These reasons might include:

- Employees who are inspired to work produce better and more results.
- The level of competency of the staff increases because of their drive to become better.
- Customer service is improved because employees who have good relations with their employer are usually viewed as good customer consultants.

Institute of Leadership and Management (2007) outlines a number of issues that can cause the downfall of the employer-employee relationship. Some of the issues include:

The High Rate of Inflation

The increment of the inflation rate in an economy results in an increased standard of living (Berument et al. 2011: 149). When this happens, workers start to demand higher salaries to complement the increased cost of living. This situation possesses the potential for the breakdown of the employer-employee relationship.

Lack of Trust and Respect

According to Hunt et al. (2009: 71-77) trust and respect are earned by an employer through open communication, consistent feedback and delegation of responsibilities to the staff. An employer who fails to abide by these elements of trust and respect will eventually also put a negative strain on the relationship.

Globalisation

Globalisation provides the platform for changes in work processes, management style, and technology (Spence 2011: 28). Business owners should always monitor the global economy to ensure they are up to date with current global trends of relationship management. A business that fails to do so is faced with the potential of losing their workforce.

Labour Laws

Labour laws were designed by the South Africa government to protect workers against unfair treatment by their employers (Cazes et al. 2012). Every employee eventually becomes aware of these. It is important for the employer to ensure that they comply with these laws or face penalties and a demise of the relationship they have with the staff.

Daft and Marcic (2010) advise business owners to never allow a negative relationship to exist between themselves and their staff. If this happens, the productivity levels of the organisation decrease. The employees are the ones who have direct contact with the customers and go an extra mile to be helpful. When they are happy, a good relationship between themselves and the customer is created and maintained. When they are unhappy these employees often direct their unhappiness at the customers.

Interpersonal Skills as the Basis for Building and Maintaining Relationships

To build strong relationships in the workplace, business owners need to develop their interpersonal skills. According to Nkosi et al. (2013: 10-20), interpersonal skills will make it easier for the business owners to manage relationships and succeed in business. Some of the interpersonal skills include:

I.   The ability to understand other people's behaviours and interpret them correctly (Gilley 2006: 5). The business owners must aim to recognise and correctly interpret the feelings, thinking, and behaviour of another person. Gilley states that this is done in an effort to discover their fears, failures, successes and actions.

II. The ability to manage impressions and present oneself competently to others

(Chiaburu and Stoverink 2013). Success in business today depends on building successful relationships. Knowing how to present yourself professionally gives you a powerful edge over the competition. Business owners must have a combination of confidence, competence, attitude, manners, and communication. These are enhanced by a polished executive image; knowing what to do, how and when to do it.

III. The ability to communicate and get your message across (Jones and Sinnett 2011). Good communication skills will enable business owners to convey important information. They should never be tongue tied, know what to say, and say it.

IV. The ability to persuade others and influence their behaviours, attitudes, opinions and beliefs (Kehoe and Wright 2013). Business owners are encouraged to use the authority and systems they have in their organisation to persuade and influence staff to work efficiently and effectively to ensure that the organisational goals are met and good relationships are maintained.

V. The ability to use power (Pfeffer 2009). Business owners must use the power they have to influence staff but must not act in an intimidating manner.

Job Satisfaction

Job satisfaction has been outlined as a difficult entity to define even in simplistic operational terms. Schults and Schults (2002) referred to job satisfaction as the positive feelings and attitudes employees hold about their jobs. This depended on many work-related factors, ranging from the sense of fulfilment workers get on their daily tasks and many more. Yang et al. (2011) states that personnel factors can also affect job satisfaction. These factors include age, health, and length of job experience, emotional stability, social status, family and other social relationships. Their motivations and aspirations and how well these are satisfied by their work also affect their attitudes towards their jobs.

Daft and Marcic (2010) describe job satisfaction as an accurate indicator of good relationships between the employer and the employ-

ees. This is because a satisfied worker usually has good relationships with the employer.

Previous research from Jeon and Choi (2012) pointed out that employees who were happy with their jobs are the most likely to satisfy customers and manage good relationships with them. This may suggest that treating employees well puts them in a better frame of mind to treat customers well. Lusch and Vargo (2006) were of the opinion that customer service and employee satisfaction were closely related to each other. Customers, for example expect outstanding customer service. Employees want recognition and compensation that relate to the achievement of customer service goals. Customers want to deal with knowledgeable customer-contact personnel who can make decisions. Employees want to be led, inspired and recognised.

This study encourages business owners to continuously make efforts to satisfy their employees as they are the ones who contribute the most to production, sales and customer satisfaction. The owners should make efforts to understand what satisfies their staff and continuously check whether the business processes and management are in line with what the employees want. The owners must find their own method to measure job satisfaction either by having one on one session with staff, distribution of questionnaires, and so on.

As far back as 1989, Bennet stated that job satisfaction was not easy to measure because there was no standard measurement criterion for business owners. Some firms issue questionnaires to employees asking them to list in rank order the tasks that they find particularly boring and/ or unpleasant. Equally, employees might be invited to comment on the working conditions they regard as most attractive (security, good working conditions, responsibility, control over work, etc.). Results from such surveys may help in providing to the employees what they need in the organisation in order to be satisfied.

The factors that affect job satisfaction vary from one worker to another and from day to day, but include the following:

* The nature of the work (the tasks involved, and the interest and challenge the job generates).
* The level of compensation
* The perceived fairness of the promotion system within a company

- The quality of the working conditions
- Management style
- Social relationships in the workplace

Along with contributing to a general sense of personal well-being, job satisfaction is perceived to be linked to a positive work attitude and increased productivity.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

A quantitative approach was followed for this research. Houser and Osman (2010: 75) defined a quantitative approach as a formal, objective, systematic process to describe, test relationships and examine cause and effect interactions among variables. Houser and Osman further declare that quantitative research focuses on gathering numerical data and generalising it across groups of people.

The researchers conducted a survey in an attempt to collect data from a sample of participants drawn from a larger population through the use of standardized questionnaires which were carefully constructed and developed to ensure that they would gather the desired information.

Dewitt and Hernandez (2003:136) state that surveys of this kind aim to paint an accurate picture of the phenomenon under investigation. This is because the results of surveys are representative of the population within a certain degree of error.

To measure the role played by business relationships towards the growth of businesses, the researcher divided the survey into two sections.

Section 1

The first section aimed to determine the business owners' opinions about their relationships with staff and whether they believe this relationship contributes to the success of their business.

Section 2

This section assessed the satisfaction level of the staff towards the business and its ownership. Basically, job satisfaction was measured. If the results indicate that the satisfaction of staff is high, then this would suggest employees had a good relationship with the business. The section on job satisfaction outlined the direct link between job satisfaction and good employer-employee relationships. Job satisfaction was outlined as an accurate indicator of good relationships between these two parties.

Research Population

In the context of this research, the population included every individual or element within the research environment that was likely to be affected in one way or another by the findings of the research. The targeted population for this research consisted of SMMEs in the targeted community. The research encompasses all the businesses operating in the community. The total number is calculated at 60.

The Research Sample

A sample has been defined as a subset drawn from the targeted population that is directly involved in or participate in the data collection of the research (Wellman and Kruger 2004: 50). A sample is further described by these authors as the resemblance of the population from which it was drawn.

According to Wellman and Kruger (2004: 96) a sample has the following elements:

- Representivity: the sample must represent the population
- Sample must be of a reasonable size if the researcher is going to be able to generalise his or her findings to that population.
- Generally the acceptable sample size drawn from the targeted population must be 33% and in some cases 25% is acceptable.
- Randomness of the sample: Anyone in the population could have fallen into the sample.

The sample for this research consisted of businesses in the targeted community. Majority of legally operating businesses in this community are registered under a business forum. The forum is responsible for co-ordinating business relationships among its members, facilitate development, and provide training and networking opportunities. The researchers obtained a list which contained all information about the businesses registered in this forum.

Participants

Systematic sampling was used to determine the participants that qualify in the sample. Bry-

man (2012: 63) highlights that with systematic sampling the researchers decided on a system to qualify the businesses that will participate. The businesses that qualified for this research were those that employ five or more employees. Various researchers have used various systems to decide on an appropriate number to target. This selection depends on the attributes of the research population. The provided list of 60 businesses indicated that only 25 businesses employed 5 or more staff members. These were automatically selected to be the sample for the research.

The 5 employees for each business were selected and asked to complete a job satisfaction questionnaire. These were selected according to their willingness and availability.

LIMITATIONS

The major limitations that confronted the research were:

- Some of the staff members were not comfortable in completing the questionnaire in the business premises, so they requested the researcher to meet them elsewhere. These employees feared that their anonymity was compromised, despite the fact that their confidentiality was guaranteed.
- There were carelessly completed questionnaires which resulted in some missing or unclear values.
- Some staff members in senior positions of the businesses in the uptown area were unavailable to complete the questionnaires and so a large majority of the participating employees represent lower level employees. This limited the researchers from obtaining responses from different ranks of the businesses.
- There were some language and literacy problems for some employees as they were not able to read and understand English properly. The researchers had to give clear instructions to these participants in their language of choice and then completed the questionnaire for those who could not write. This procedure was time consuming.
- Only 20 businesses from the selected ones showed interest to take part in the research.

Data Analysis

After the data was collected it was organised and analysed. For analysis of the questionnaires, a computer programme called Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) was used. Data was analysed by using descriptive statistics.

Discussion of Owner Responses

The main intention of this study was to evaluate the business owners' opinions about the nature of the relationship they have with their staff. This was done so that the researchers could determine whether these relationships contribute to the success of their organisations. The response to the majority of the questions was positive, signalling that a large majority of them strongly believe that relationships are important and that it is important that they build and strengthen them in order to obtain sustainable success for their businesses.

Their responses also showed that they are businessmen who believe that relationships possess the potential for growth and are a vital success factor. The business owners signalled that the relationships they have with their staff contributes to the effective and efficient functioning of the businesses.

The owners believed it was true that good relationships contribute to the increase of productivity in their businesses. They believe it is easy to motivate staff with whom they have a good relationship with as well as to carry out instructions.

Incentives might be the front line tool to get people to work to their best but good relationships form the foundation for increased productivity.

All the business owners agreed that a good relationship with employees improve customer service. This is because satisfied staff serves customers well.

The majority of business owners though feel that good relationships amongst staff members do not make it easy for businesses to retain valuable staff members. Employees might remain loyal to the business because of other motivators such as growth opportunities as well as increased pay. It is in the nature of human beings to always look for better opportunities for growth and more money for a better lifestyle. Society today is designed in such a way, that people will overlook relationships if an opportunity to have a better lifestyle comes their way.

Table 1: Business owner questionnaire

Variable	Categories	Frequency	Proportion (%)	Comments
1. Gender	Male	14	70%	Males were the dominant gender in terms of business
	Female	6	30%	ownership in this community.
2. Age	18- under 25	0	0%	All 20 business owners indicated that their age was
	25-under 30	0	0%	above 35.
	30-under 35	0	0%	
	35 and above	20	100%	
3. Ethnic Group	Black/African	10	50%	Out of 20 respondents, 10 owners indicated they
	Coloured	6	30%	were African/Black representing 50% of the
	White	4	20%	respondents, 6 were Coloureds representing 30%
				and there were 4 Whites representing 20% of the
				respondents. There was no other ethnic group.
4. Nationality	South African	15	75%	The nationality of the owners is: 15 of them were
	Nigerian	1	5%	South African and 5 were non-South Africans. Of
	Senegalese	1	5%	the non-South African group there were 3
	Somalia	3	15%	Somalians, 1 Nigerian and 1 Senegalese national.
5. Number of	5	5	25%	All the businesses indicated that they employed 5 or
Employees	6-10	9	45%	more employees.
	11-15	4	20%	
	21 or more	2	10%	
6. Years of	1-under 5	6	30%	Of the selected businesses, 80% of them have been
Existence	5-under 10	10	50%	in existence for less than 10 years and 20% for
	10-under 15	1	5%	more than 10 years. During questionnaire
	15-under 20	2	10%	distribution, the researcher observed that it was
	20 or more	1	5%	mainly the businesses that employed more than 10
				employees that have been in existence for longer
				than 10 years and the ones that have fewer
				employees still have not made the 10 year mark in
				terms of existence.
Question 7:	Strongly agree	18	90%	Ninety percent of the respondents strongly agreed
Business cannot	Agree	2	10%	with this statement and 10% agreed. There was no
survive without	Disagree	0	0%	disagreement or strong disagreement answers to the
relationships	Strongly disagree	0	0%	statement. All business owners signalled this
				statement was true.
Question 9:	Strongly agree	15	75%	Of the business owners 75% strongly agreed with the
Good employer	Agree	4	20%	statement, 20% agreed and 5% strongly disagreed. A
employee	Disagree	0	0%	combined total of 95% of the business owners
relationships	Strongly disagree	1	5%	believed this statement to be true and 5% indicated
create a positive				it was untrue.
business image				
and profile in				
the community				
Question 10:	Strongly agree	9	45%	Of the owners 45% strongly agreed with the
Good relation-	Agree	9	45%	statement, 45% agreed and 10% disagreed. A
ships with	Disagree	2	10%	combined total of 90% of the owners indicated the
employees	Strongly disagree	0	0%	statement to be true while 10% said it was untrue.
increase pro-				
ductivity				
Question 11:	Strongly agree	11	55%	Responses to this statement were all positive as 55%
Good relation-	Agree	9	45%	of the owners indicated they strongly agreed and
ships with emp-	Disagree	0	0%	45% indicated they agreed. The owners believed
loyees improve	Strongly disagree	0	0%	the statement to be true.
customer				
service.				
Question 12:	Strongly agree	4	20%	Of the owners 20% strongly agreed, 15% agreed,
Good relation-	Agree	3	15%	35% disagreed and 30% strongly disagreed. A
ships with emp-	Disagree	7	35%	combined total of 35% believed this statement to
loyees make it	Strongly disagree	6	30%	be true and 65% indicated it was untrue.
easy to retain				
valuable				
employees.				

Table 1: Contd...

Variable	Categories	Frequency	Proportion (%)	Comments
Question 13: Good relation-ships with emp-loyees reduce employee strikes	Strongly agree Agree Disagree Strongly disagree	4 6 4 6	20% 30% 20% 30%	The owners had different opinions with regard to this statement as 20% of them strongly agreed, 30% agreed, 20% disagreed and 30 % disagreed. A combined total of 50% of the respondents believed this statement to be true and 50% indicated it was untrue.
Question 14: Good relation-ships with employees pro-mote trust and open commu-nication	Strongly agree Agree Disagree Strongly disagree	8 9 3 0	40% 45% 15% 0%	Of the respondents 40% strongly agreed with the statement, 45% agreed and 15% disagreed. A combined total of 85% of the owners believed this to be true and 15% indicated it was untrue.
Question 15: Good relation-ships amongst employees create a good working environment	Strongly agree Agree Disagree Strongly disagree	16 4 0 0	80% 20% 0% 0%	Of the owners 80% strongly agreed with this statement and 20% disagreed. This means all of the owners believed this statement to be true.

From the statement that good relationships with employees reduce employee strikes, fifty percent of the business owners agreed with it and another fifty percent said it was untrue. For a business to reduce industrial action there must be transparency and communication between employers and employees. This promotes trust and eliminates strikes in the business (See Table 1).

The majority of owners agreed to the statement that good relationships with employees promote trust and open communication. When there exists a good relationship, trust and open communication come naturally.

Discussion of Employee Responses

In this study, job satisfaction was identified as an accurate indicator of good relationships between employees and employers.

In this questionnaire the employees indicated many of the statements provided by the researcher were true. This would suggest that the majority of employees from the sampled businesses were satisfied with their jobs and therefore had a good relationship with the business and its ownership.

The majority of employees indicated that they were willing to work for their current employers for the next five years. Factors that might have come into play when the employees answered this question would have been the size of the organisation they work for, the satisfaction employees have about the work that they do and lastly the role the job plays in their livelihood. Employees who work in much more developed business would feel happy with their earnings and opportunities provided by the business and therefore rule out the option of furthering their career elsewhere. The respondents who work in smaller businesses on the other hand, would have made this selection because job is a form of security for their family income and they are not willing enough to endeavour or take risks to find better opportunities elsewhere.

A majority of the respondents felt a strong personal attachment to the business they worked for this might be mainly because they are provided with an income every month for their contribution to its success.

A larger part of the respondents believed that the business cared about them and contributed to their success. The experience these employees gain while working for these businesses is something that they can cherish and it contributes to their development as individuals.

The majority of staff in all the businesses believed they contributed to the existence, growth and success of that business. This response signals that the employers give responsibility to the staff. The small or big tasks they do, regardless of its nature or importance, they believe make a meaningful contribution to the success of the business they work for.

Table 2: Employee questionnaire

Variable	Categories	Frequency	Proportion (%)	Comments
1. Gender	Male	60	60%	There were 100 employees who completed the
	Female	40	40%	questionnaires. 60 of them were male and 40 were female.
2. Age	18 - under 25	26	26%	Out of the 100 employees who were willing to complete
	25 – under 30	30	30%	the questionnaire, 26 of them were in the 18 to under
	30 – under 35	27	27%	25 category, 30 in the 25 to under 30 category, 27 in
	35 and above	17	17%	the 30 to under 35 category while 17 were in the 35 or more category.
3. Ethnic Group	Black / African	57	57%	Of the respondents 57% were African/Black, 42% were
	Coloured	42	42%	Coloured and 1% represented the whites. There was
	White	1	1%	no other ethnic group.
4. Nationality	South African	82	82%	The nationality of the employees of the businesses is
	Angola	1	1%	as follows: 82% were South Africans and 18% were
	Malawi	1	1%	non-South Africans. The non-South African group
	Mozambique	1	1%	included: 1% Angola, 1% Malawi, 1% Mozambique,
	Nigerian	2	2%	2% Nigeria, 7% Somalia and 6% Zimbabwe.
	Somalia	7	7%	
	Zimbabwe	6	6%	
5. Number of Years Working for the Business	0 - under 1	28	28%	The working years for the respondents are as follows:
	1 - under 5	54	54%	0-under 1 is 28%, 1-under 5 is 54%, 5-under 10 is 12%
	5 - under 10	12	12%	and 10-under 15 is 6%.
	10 - under 15	6	6%	
Question 6: I am willing to work for this company for the next 5 years	Strongly agree	26	26%	Of the employees 26% indicated that they strongly
	Agree	37	37%	agreed with this statement, 37% agreed, 28% disagreed
	Disagree	28	28%	and 9% strongly disagreed. A combined total of 63%
	Strongly disagree	9	9%	of the respondents believed this statement to be true and 37% said it was untrue.
Question 7: I have a good relationship with my employer	Strongly agree	28	28%	Of the respondents 28% indicated that they strongly
	Agree	57	57%	agreed with this statement, 57% agreed, 12% disagreed
	Disagree	12	12%	and 3% strongly disagreed. A combined total of 85%
	Strongly disagree	3	3%	of the respondents believed the statement to be true and 15% indicated this to be untrue.
Question 8: I feel a strong personal attachment to the business	Strongly agree	26	26%	Of the respondents 26% strongly agreed with the
	Agree	41	41%	statement, 41% agreed, 29% disagreed and 4% strongly
	Disagree	29	29%	disagreed. A combined total of 67% believed the
	Strongly disagree	4	4%	statement to be true and 33% indicated this to be untrue.
Question 9: The business cares about me and contributes to my success	Strongly agree	24	24%	Of the respondents 24% strongly agreed with this
	Agree	38	38%	statement, 38% agreed, 30% disagreed and 8% strongly
	Disagree	30	30%	disagreed. A total of 62% agreed with the statement
	Strongly disagree	8	8%	and 38% disagreed.
Question 10: I contribute to the success of this business	Strongly agree	47	47%	Of the employees 47% strongly agreed, 40% agreed,
	Agree	40	40%	10% disagreed and 3% disagreed. A combined total of
	Disagree	10	10%	87% believed the statement to be true and 13%
	Strongly disagree	3	3%	indicated it was untrue.
Question 11: The company attracts and retains outstanding employees	Strongly agree	22	22%	Of respondents 22% strongly agreed, 40% agreed, 26%
	Agree	40	40%	disagreed and 12% strongly disagreed with the
	Disagree	26	26%	statement. A combined total of 62% believed this
	Strongly disagree	12	12%	statement to be true and 38% said it was untrue.
Question 12: The employer communicates openly and honestly with the employees	Strongly agree	21	21%	Of the respondents 21% strongly agreed, 35%
	Agree	35	35%	disagreed, 22% disagreed and 22% strongly disagreed
	Disagree	22	22%	with the statement. A combined total of 56% of the
	Strongly disagree	22	22%	respondents believed this statement to be true and 44% indicated it to be untrue.

Table 2: Contd...

Variable	Categories	Frequency	Proportion (%)	Comments
Question 13: I would like to see my relationship with the company grow in the foreseeable future	Strongly agree	37	37%	Of the respondents 37% strongly agreed with this statement, 48% agreed, 11% disagreed and 4% strongly disagreed. A combined total of 85% believed this to be true and 15% indicated it was untrue.
	Agree	48	48%	
	Disagree	11	11%	
	Strongly disagree	4	4%	
Question 14: I understand the principles and values of this business	Strongly agree	23	23%	Of the respondents 23% strongly agreed, 49% agreed, 24% disagreed and 4% strongly disagreed with the statement. This means 72% believe the statement to be true and 28% believe this to be untrue.
	Agree	49	49%	
	Disagree	24	24%	
	Strongly disagree	4	4%	
Question 15: I understand the business strategy and the role I must play for success	Strongly agree	24	24%	Of the respondents 24% strongly agreed with the statement, 55% agreed, 18% disagreed and 3% strongly disagreed. A combined total of 79% indicated this statement was true and 21% said it was untrue.
	Agree	55	55%	
	Disagree	18	18%	
	Strongly disagree	3	3%	
Question 16: Employee loyalty is valued and rewarded in this business	Strongly agree	17	17%	Of the respondents 17% strongly agreed with this statement, 36% agreed, 31% disagreed and 16% strongly disagreed. This meant that 53% believed the statement to be true and 47% said it was untrue.
	Agree	36	36%	
	Disagree	31	31%	
	Strongly disagree	16	16%	
Question 17: Good relation-ships with customers provide the opportunity to grow	Strongly agree	17	17%	Of the respondents 17% strongly agreed with this statement, 34% agreed, 30% disagreed and 19% strongly disagreed. A combined total of 51 respondents indicated this statement to be true and 49% was untrue.
	Agree	34	34%	
	Disagree	30	30%	
	Strongly disagree	19	19%	
Question 18: I believe the business deserves my loyalty	Strongly agree	22	22%	Of the respondents 22% strongly agreed to this statement, 51% agreed, 22% disagreed and 5% strongly disagreed. A combined total of 73% of the respondents believed this statement was true and 27% said it was untrue.
	Agree	51	51%	
	Disagree	22	22%	
	Strongly disagree	5	5%	
Question 19: Over the years my loyalty to the company has grown stronger	Strongly agree	25	25%	Of the respondents 25% strongly agreed with the statement, 51% agreed, 20% disagreed and 4% strongly disagreed. A combined total of 76% believed the statement was true and 24% indicated the statement was untrue.
	Agree	51	51%	
	Disagree	20	20%	
	Strongly disagree	4	4%	

Sixty percent of the employees believed the businesses they worked for attract outstanding employees and the other forty percent disagreed with this statement. Outstanding employees are usually attracted by better opportunities to grow and better incentives.

The research determined that a majority of the staff felt the owner communicated openly and honestly with them. This signals that employees felt involved in decision making and are well informed about all information about the business. (See Table 2).

More than ninety percent of the staff wanted their relationship with the business to grow in the foreseeable future. Both parties must work on this. The owner needs to take all the steps that will enable the staff to work to the best of their ability and the staff must in turn be reasonable and understanding with their demands.

The majority of the staff said they understood the principles of the business they worked for. This means the majority of owners were able to sell their vision and present the objectives they set for their businesses clearly to the staff.

The majority of employees also said they understood the business strategy and the role they should play towards achieving success for that business. This was as a result of the open and honest communication existing between them and the owner.

Nearly half of the employees felt their loyalty was recognised, valued and rewarded by the business for its long time success and the other half disagreed with this statement. It is human nature wanting to be rewarded for whatever they do. Those who do not feel that way usually understand the situation they work under and feel there is no need to expect more.

The majority of employees believe that the businesses they work for deserve their loyalty. This might be as a result that they feel they are treated well and are informed about what is happening in the business.

The majority of employees agreed with the statement that their loyalty to the business has grown stronger. This signals that they are cared for and understand that they are valued in that business.

Results from this survey indicate positive levels of satisfaction from the employees. The majority of statements that were put forward were agreed to. This occurrence, together with the positive opinions the business owners shared about their relationship with the staff, makes it safe for the researcher to come to the conclusion that good relationships between employers and employees existed during this study and that these relationships had played a role towards the growth and success of the businesses in the community (See Table 3).

CONCLUSION

In this study business owners are advised to never allow a negative relationship to exist between themselves and their staff. If this happens, the productivity levels of the organization will decrease. The employees are the ones who have direct contact with the customers and go the extra mile to be helpful. When they are happy, a good relationship between them and the customer is created and maintained. When they are unhappy these employees often direct their unhappiness towards the customers.

This study highlighted the critical role played by positive employer-employee relationships towards business success. Various sources suggested that without strong relationships, it becomes impossible to be successful as a business owner. Business owners need to have long-term and employee relationships that will carry them through challenging and difficult times, as well as relationships with other business owners, to share struggles, resources and best practices, which can really give them an edge. Business owners who want to compete at a world-class level should understand the human side of their organisation and business processes. They must be social architects who can work across levels and functions of the organisation, continuously improving the business process and fostering an atmosphere favourable to innovation, risk-taking, self-directed teamwork, commitment, quality and self-improvement. To survive and grow in the twenty-first century, business owners must learn and use appropriate human skills to motivate and inspire all those

Table 3: Employer-employee relationship factors

The benefits of good employer–employee relationships	Disadvantages of poor employer-employee relationships	What are relationship enhancers?
• Good relationships have the potential to inspire workers to work harder • Employees who are inspired to work produce better and more results. • The level of competency of the staff increases because of their drive to become better. • Customer service is improved because employees who have good relations with their employer usually provide good customer consultants.	• Potential for low levels of production • Decline in profits • Loss of human resource to competitors • Low customer satisfaction • Potential for loss of customers • Business failure	• General Managerial tasks which include Planning, Organising, Leading, and Controlling • The provision of job satisfaction factors in the workplace

involved in their business. Table 3 provides a summary of discussed points in this study:

RECOMMENDATIONS

Despite the few limitations expressed earlier in this paper, the authors particularly note that only 20 businesses from the population showed interest in this research. This justifies the call for caution in the generalisation of the results, although the findings are in consonance with previous studies. In this study, the results seem to suggest an over-reliance on perceptions (opinions), thus limiting the findings. The study could perhaps have benefitted from some inferential statistics or a much more complex statistical analysis. This could be the focus of a future study.

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