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# Investigation of critical conditions for the implementation of empowerment at the workplace: case study of 5-start hotels in Geneva

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## Abstract

The aim of this research is to investigate critical conditions for the implementation of empowerment at the workplace within a Knowledge Management (KM) framework in 5-star hotels in Geneva. Empowerment is a term widely studied in the hospitality industry, but little research has been done on whether the individual needs of employees are addressed within this concept. This is particularly important given that world-class hotels such as Mandarin Oriental, Hotel de la Paix and Hotel des Bergues use empowerment as a one-stop solution. However, through a quantitative study in the form of a self-completed questionnaire, and review of the literature, several limitations and discrepancies were found. In order to solve that gap, and to provide the industry with a more complete model, the researcher suggests the creation of a compound model of empowerment, incorporating KM into the model. Accompanied by a revision of the theory and the strategy of the hotel, it is suggested that the transferring of knowledge to an explicit policy will increase the organisational commitment in front-line employees and address their individual needs in order to create a high-standard product, as is required from 5-star hotels.

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## Chapter 1: Introduction

### 1.1 Background Information

Empowerment as a concept has been used globally in a different arrange of human sciences, such as psychology, political movements and hospitality. The term "empowerment" contains an intrinsic belief that humans must be free to make their own decision to thrive (Traynor, 2003). In hospitality, this is especially true, given that the employees of this industry are challenged because of a "service-driven culture" that entails upholding high standards (Konar, et al. 2018). Nevertheless, this tool has been mostly used within the front-line employees, because of the high contact they have with the guest, which requires a swift adaptability to their needs (Klidas, et al. 2007). Empowerment is seen as relenting power from the administrative level, to the operational (Pelit, et al. 2011). Furthermore, there is a discrepancy between different types of employees, where even though everyone is being empowered, only a few have an outstanding performance (Ro and Chen, 2011). This may be due to the fact that different employees are in need of a different approach (Lashley, 1996).

Empowerment makes the employees "take control over their own lives", but if the individuals are not service-driven, then this tool can result in useless outcomes (Foster-Fishman and Keys, 1997). Due to this fact, it becomes imperative to create a union with another model that will address the individual´s needs. This research suggests that Knowledge Management (KM) may provide the supplement in evaluating the phenomenon to be studied in this research. As such, 5-star hotels with a reputation for using empowerment will be studied. The chosen city for the scenario is Geneva, due to its cosmopolitan and international nature and its common use for hospitality case studies (Raffestin, 1997).

### 1.2 Rationale

Empowerment has been researched throughout the years with different perspectives. Be it so a focus on employee satisfaction and service quality (Islam,

2016); as a concept (Rowlands, 1995) or as a process (Perkins and Zimmerman, 1995). However, its effect on different employees has had few research (Sparrowe, 1994). Moreover, it is believed that empowerment should not only be considered in the individual level, but also in the organizational one (Ro and Chen, 2011). Indeed, there has been precedent of empowerment needing a supporting tool to be efficient, such as transformational leadership (Kark, et al. 2003). However, in the study of Darroch (2005), it is suggested that Knowledge Management (KM) is a model that could manage to complete empowerment and satisfy most of the employee´s necessities.

The goal of this research is to investigate if this hypothesis is correct and provide a list of the conditions necessary to put a more effective empowerment model into practice. Thus, ameliorating the general knowledge of the concept through a different perspective, as well as understanding the true scope of empowerment. The author of this research expects that the hospitality industry will benefit from a far reaching and more effective empowerment model. This model will help cater to the employees' needs and be properly empowered, where they will have high stakes and create a more authentic service-driven culture. The academy in turn, will have a new concept to be analysed, and a revision of the theory applied into a more practical concept. Finally, the results of this study also aims to support Okumus (2013) claims that KM is an effective supporting tool when dealing with different employees.

*1.3 Aim and Objectives*

The aim of this research is to investigate critical conditions for the implementation of empowerment at the workplace within a Knowledge Management framework in 5-star hotels in Geneva.

In order to support this aim, the following objectives will be accomplished:

- To identify the limitations of empowerment when addressing different individual`s needs
- To assess the findings as a discrepancy between the literature and application of empowerment in a hospitality environment
- To analyse the effect of utilizing the Knowledge Management process as a supporting mechanism for empowerment at the workplace of 5 star hotels in Geneva

**Chapter 2: Literature Review**

*2.1 Introduction*

During this chapter, the author will evaluate empowerment and Knowledge Management (KM) in a theoretical framework. Furthermore, this research will acknowledge any flaws in the empowerment model that could be solved with aspects from KM. In addition to this, an evaluation of empirical research will also be made, in order to prove the validity of combining both theories in reality. Given my aims to find discrepancies in the theory of empowerment and analyse the effect of combining it with KM, both theories are of particular importance to this research and must be analysed in depth.

Theoretical Background

*2.1.2 Empowerment*

Empowerment is defined by Perkins and Zimmerman (1995 pp. 569) as "a process where individuals learn to see a closer correspondence between their goals and a sense of how to achieve them, and a relationship between their efforts and life outcomes". Another definition was given out by Hassi (2019 pp. 1786) as "the creation of a conducive environment that enhances organizational members' sense of self-efficacy and control and eliminates factors that uphold feelings of powerlessness". Whereas Perkins and Zimmerman see empowerment as the individual having control, Hassi sees it as the creation of an environment that will avoid feelings of feebleness. The great variation of age between these two concepts makes this contrast even more important, proving a discrepancy with the general understanding of empowerment as a concept.

Empowerment has become increasingly essential in hospitality, due to the need to cater to the customers´ needs in unpredictable situations (Klidas, et al. 2007). According to Sparrowe (1994) leadership and organizational culture are variables in employee empowerment. Empowerment was born for administrative level employees, but because of the discovery of a negative impact in the satisfaction of the employees, it had to be transferred to front-line employees, who are in need of freedom in their acts when dealing with customers. Given that empowerment was initially created for more "powerful" positions, during the transferring of the tool, the fundament of the theory may not have been adapted correctly to cater to the operational individuals. Indeed, Gill et al. (2010) recommend the use of transformational leadership within a hospitality environment before empowering employees because a clarification of the mission, goals and objectives of the firm is required before the application of the concept. Otherwise, the employees will not have an overview of the final goal and lose motivation. Despite the success that empowerment has had, the precedent of needing a complimenting tool to be successful, proves that the theory may not have been adapted to the reality of the day-to-day operations. Notwithstanding the fact that the foundation of empowerment takes into consideration potential reactions from the empowered employees, such as conformity, resistance, and lack of accountability (Sparrowe 1994), it is possible to say that there is still a need of specifying the needs of each employee individually, by reason of every person being different

and in order to cater to their needs, it is necessary to get to know them. Janssen (2004) agrees and identifies the need of a correct leadership. Attributable to the case in which a pro-active employee may be stifled by a resistant supervisor. Notwithstanding that the purpose of empowerment is to relinquish power, inadequate leaders may see this as a threat to their position and create further conflict with their employees.

Figure 1 below explains how the theory should result in positive feedback from both the customer point of view as well as the organizational one.

**Figure 1.** Empowerment model Namasivayan et al. (2014)

The model illustrates that once a leader establishes a positive empowering behaviour, alongside to psychological empowerment and employee satisfaction, the organizational commitment and customer satisfaction will rise. It provides an overview on the correct application of the theory, however, there is a need of a psychological empowerment, which can only be created once the leader has correctly addressed and understood the employee´s needs. Should one of these steps faulter, the theory on empowerment establishes that neither organizational commitment nor customer satisfaction will be achieved, negating the essence of empowerment. Despite these conditions, researchers such as Erstad (1997), see empowerment as a complete and adaptable mechanism that creates a better understanding of the employees´ contexts as well as the customers´ and addresses their needs properly. Nevertheless, Raub and Robert (2013) understand that a relationship between supervisor and employee is a vital element in empowerment practices. They have recognised that empowerment cannot be forced upon an individual, but rather there is a need of a feeling of "psychological empowerment", which is the volition of the employee to have more control. This information provides an insight on how the transfer may have failed from managerial positions to operational ones. Linuesa-Langreo et al. (2016) identify 2 perceptions on the empowerment phenomenon: Psychological empowerment and the empowerment climate. They are two different conditions that need to be present before empowering an employee. The former, is in the individual level. It is understood as motivation created because of having control over the individual´s work and their role in the firm. Employees who in their point of view, are already in charge of themselves, are more willing to use that ability to the benefit of the enterprise. The second one, is at the group level. It is explained as shared perceptions on objectives, goals,

practices, and policies in which power is equally distributed among all individuals, facilitating the decision-making process. If a leader does not spend time with the employee nor creates an environment where it is safe to make decisions without fear of social criticism, then empowerment will never provide the results it is supposed to.

Because of this precedent, it is believed by the researcher, that a supporting mechanism should be put in place. It will have to make the reallocation of power smoother by identifying the needs of every different individual, while increasing their organizational commitment. Thus, creating an empowered employee who is capable of making their own decision and creating a positive product for the company.

Finally, it is possible to say that although the theory explains empowerment as a complete model, the application requires different conditions, such as the need of a leader, as well as a psychological and group empowerment. Should enterprises make use of the model without understanding the previous conditions, it will result in an unsuccessful tool. Organizational commitment will not be achieved and despite the industry´s good intentions, giving freedom to employees who do not want it may result in lowering the standards of service. It is of vital importance to understand that they theory may explain something perfectly, but when applied into a practical framework, unforeseen challenges may always surge.

*2.1.3 Knowledge Management (KM)*

According to Jennex and Smolnik (2011 pp. 2) the concept of Knowledge Management is the following: "KM can be defined as reusing knowledge to improve organizational effectiveness by providing the appropriate knowledge to those that need it when it is needed". It is considered a vital supporting tool since it effectively transforms resources into capabilities (Darroch, 2005). Given its supporting nature and given that every individual has their own special capabilities and personal expertise, absorbing this knowledge into the company will make the individuals more invested in the well-being of the enterprise, as well as making them feel as though they are a necessary asset to the daily operations and standards to be upheld.

It is believed that KM is a useful mechanism nowadays because according to Darroch (2005) only purchasing several resources does not immediately translate into a competitive advantage. If the ensemble of assets is ignored as a whole, then a competitive advantage is lost. It can be possible that the only advantage they can count on is the management of the resources and the services they offer (Spender, 1994).6 Nevertheless, not only a company´s ability to repurpose assets makes them a success. Pitelis and Verbeke (2007)

believed that the growth of an enterprise is restricted by the growth of knowledge inside it, but the size of a firm is determined by their capability to develop an administrative effectiveness.

Growth, however, is dependent on the innovation that can be found within it. As a firm continues to grow, it discovers new resources and new ways of combining them to yield a specific required service from them (Nooteboom, 2006).7 Sustainable competitiveness must be based on a constant organisational learning (Sigala and Chalkiti, 2015). Innovation is putting ideas into practice, whereas creativity is the fabrication of those ideas. When given the opportunity to transfer their knowledge into the organization, their commitment rises as well as their creativity, because their stakes are higher if they want to keep succeeding in their job. Nevertheless, this theory considers knowledge as the sole relevant economic resource.8 Once organizations take a knowledge stance, they are more prone to predicting changes and reacting accordingly (Okumus, 2013). Because of the need firms have to learn in order to remain competitive, the term organizational learning was born. It was created to explain when individual knowledge is transferred to the organization. The employees share what they already know into the company; the company absorbs this knowledge and makes it their own (Spender, 1944).9 This is where the link with KM is noticeable. KM is seen as a problem-solving tool, where knowledge is tacit and needs to be transferred into the organization (Okumus, 2013). A correct application of KM would have an outcome of cost-reduction, service and products improvement, as well as an important competitive advantage. Having knowledge gives the employees the assurance necessary for them to be innovative and improve the performance of the organization itself (Mahapa, 2013). This will help the company grow in both a knowledge framework as well as a sizeable one. Okumus (2013) states that there are 4 ways of managing knowledge, and every way considers different aspects about the relationship between the employee and the organisation. He understands knowledge as tacit and explicit.10 The first one is tacit to tacit knowledge, where employees share their experience and tacit knowledge through speech. It is not useful in this case because the organization is not involved as much, and has no power to control what is being transferred. The second one, is explicit to tacit knowledge. It is the transferring of written knowledge into common experience (know-how). This second way is the result of already committed employees who have such a deep understanding of the explicit knowledge of the enterprise, they are able to share it with others through speech. Thirdly, there is explicit to explicit knowledge, which is taking formal concepts and transforming them into new ones. However, this is theoretical, and it may be hard for the employees to understand something of that calibre. Finally, there is tacit to explicit knowledge, which is rationalising tacit knowledge (experience) into a formal concept

(written). This is considered the optimal way of instituting KM. It is taking already established concepts and creating new, more focused and effective ones (Okumus, 2013). An employee who has a certain way of doing things, and it results beneficial for the enterprise, will be able to show the rest of the colleagues, creating an environment that is willing to let him grow, as well as gain respect in front of others. The knowledge transfer becomes a privilege, and seeing their personal knowledge being essential for the well-being of the enterprise will increase the employee's organizational commitment.

Similarly to empowerment, KM is need of a leader that will take the time to know each employee and the correct way on how to transfer their tacit knowledge into the organization. The researcher believes that once a psychological and environmental empowerment is established within a KM framework, where all knowledge is being transferred into the company itself, will create better results on organizational commitment. Not only is it important to increase their organizational commitment, but their self-esteem as well. Having the opportunity to be empowered, as well as having the possibility of their knowledge being transferred into a written commandment of the enterprise, will make them feel valued and will increase their ability to make beneficial decisions for the company.

*2.2 Review of existing Empirical Research*

*2.2.1 Empowerment*

Given its widely recognized reputation and use of empowerment in the hospitality industry, several studies have been conducted. One of them is the case study of Linuesa-Langreo et al. (2016). It was conducted with the purpose of understanding how servant leadership practices generate an empowerment climate. In a landmark hotel in Cuenca, Spain, the researchers created four work groups with the departments of kitchen, restaurant, reception, and room service, led by a manager each. The employees´ questionnaire assessed the leadership of the supervisor as well as the empowerment climate, whereas the supervisors´ questionnaire assessed the creativity of the group and their perception on the empowerment climate. They also conducted semi-structured interviews with the groups. The results indicated that to create an appropriate empowerment climate, it is compulsory for the supervisor to spend time with the employee and increase their understanding on how each individual should be addressed to increase the creativity of the group. Nevertheless, there are limitations of the research. Among these, were the local and cultural limitations. Given the geographical specificity of the research, its results may be linked to the area. Another limitation is that the consequences of servant leadership may not be gleaned immediately, but in the long term.

Similarly, a study was conducted by Gill et al. (2010), with the purpose

of investigating "how transformational leadership and empowerment affect job satisfaction among Indian restaurant employees". 218 employees from the restaurant industry in Punjab were surveyed. Through this quantitative methodology, they discovered that the employees were more respectful towards a position than to the person in charge of completing a task. As such, they discovered that if the employee perceives that he or she is being empowered, their job satisfaction is high. Correspondingly, if they perceive another person is making use of servant leadership, they perceive their job satisfaction to be higher. Despite the limitations of fewer responses than estimated to the surveys, geographical restriction and the inherent fact that using a survey, the subjects may answer the question just to please the researcher instead of establishing their perception; this case study links empowerment to a sense of satisfaction. The more control an employee has, their perception of their job will ameliorate. Thus, creating more creative and engaging employees.

Both case studies reflect how empowerment is in need of a supplementing tool in order to become effective. Be it so time to understand each employee individually and thus their background, or the perception of how much professional growth they are being given. In the first research, they understood that, contrary to the theory, there is indeed a difference between the managerial positions and the operational ones, which is justified in their use of two different questionnaires. They believed that although empowerment can be used on anyone, a special attention needs to be paid when dealing with different hierarchical positions. As for the second one, they discovered that empowerment is not only about feeling in control, but about being seen in control by others. This links itself with the empowerment climate condition, and despite what the theory says, it is not because of organizational commitment they have a higher job satisfaction, but because others regard them as important when being empowered. Thus, justifying the current research on how empowerment is in need of a supporting tool in order to address these needs.

*2.2.2 Knowledge Management (KM)*

As for KM, there have been several studies conducted in order to demonstrate the consequences of using this model within firms. Such is the case of the case study conducted by Darroch (2005). 1743 surveys were sent to CEOs from 50 different industries in New Zealand, from which only 443 were answered. They were asked whether or not using KM in their firms increases efficiency and innovation within their employees. The response was positive, understanding KM as a coordinating mechanism that has yielded positive results and correctly transformed individual knowledge into competitive advantage. Hence, confirming the validity of the model in a coordinating

mechanism point of view, as well as its effectiveness. Notwithstanding this fact, there exist limitations in this study that are to be considered. Firstly, the respondents amount was not as big as estimated, thus over-representing larger firms. Secondly, the geographical context that already establishes a certain perspective on the topic. And finally, that given the nature of the quantitative research, the respondents may have answered merely to please the researchers.

Another case study was conducted by Mahapa (2013). This was executed in 3 hotels in Zimbabwe. The purpose was identifying KM strategies and their impact on organizational performance. The used methodology was structured interviews where 50 employees participated. 15 were part of the management department and 35 were part of the operational sector. The results exposed that organizations that use KM lead to an improvement on the performance of the hotels. Nevertheless, the model is in need of further development in order to properly manage their knowledge resource and transform it into a competitive advantage, alongside with a need of creating a more rewarding environment for the employees with the objective of them not feeling being used by the company but appreciated. As such, it contributes to this research establishing a precedent on the use of KM in a hospitality context, as well as its value on transforming individual knowledge into a hotel´s asset and its supporting role. On the other hand, it is imperative to establish the limitations of this research, such as the country and context of the research, the need of examining the study with a more varied arrange of employees and finally, the quantitative rigidity of the methodology that may ignore other aspects in order to get a more specific answer.

Ultimately, both studies confirm the efficacy of establishing KM as a coordinating mechanism for knowledge, providing positive results in both employee knowledge transformation into assets, as well as its value within a hospitality framework. In Darroch´s (2005) study, it was proved that KM could be used as a coordinating mechanism rather than a model itself, supporting the researcher stance on a KM as a supporting mechanism for Empowerment. As for the second research, it came to light that the efficacy of KM is proven in both managerial as well as operational positions. Not only does it address the needs of the top management, but also the day to day operations employees. Although KM has not been used commonly in the hospitality industry, this research proves that it can in fact be done, and yield positive results. Should the model of KM be paired with empowerment, the coordinating mechanism provided could address all conditions of individuals.

*2.2.3 Background to the primary research context*

Employees in European countries have high expectations on their jobs (Lewis, 2010). They expect

a well-paid job with a good work-life balance and the chance to make their own decisions. Nevertheless, there is a lack of knowledge of these concepts, especially in Swiss organizations (Ibid). Geneva specially is often used when talking about hospitality because of the high-class hotels that can be found there (Raffestin, 1997).12 Besides that, the Genevan industry is composed of different branches of the hospitality sector, such as youth hostels, campsites, bed & breakfast, restaurants and transportation (SwissTourism, 2018).13 Therefore, the author has decided Geneva is an ideal research location. Not only because of its characteristics, but because other researchers such as Au et al. (2004), conducted a research based on the empowerment effect across culture in Geneva and recommended it as a place in need of further research on the effects of empowerment (The Ritz-Carlton, 2020; Zsurzan, 2014). The author has also decided to limit the scope of the research to 3 that use empowerment on a daily basis, such as Mandarin Oriental (Nayer, 2011), Hotel de la Paix (Ritz Carlton) and Hotel des Bergues (Four Seasons) (Solomon , 2013) These hotels are not only known for their use of empowerment, but considered examples of it. Given that KM has not been majorly studied in the hospitality industry, the researcher has decided to use trademark hotels that have a reputation for using empowerment at its every aspect in order to prove whether or not empowerment within a KM framework will effectively empower and cater to the needs of every different employee.

Based on the above-mentioned reasons the author believes that these properties in Geneva are ideal to test the combination of empowerment into an KM framework and prove its efficacy creating a more complete empowerment tool.

### 2.2.4 Conclusions

In conclusion, the theories proposed create a link to the aims and objectives listed in this research. The author proposes that a relationship between empowerment and KM will provide a more efficient framework towards an empowerment model that will address individual's needs and condition

## Chapter 3: Methodology

### 3.1 Research aim and objectives

The aim of this research is to investigate critical conditions for the implementation of empowerment at the workplace within a Knowledge Management framework in 5-star hotels in Geneva.
In order to support this aim, the following objectives will be accomplished:
To identify the limitations of empowerment when addressing different individual`s needs
To assess the findings as a discrepancy between the literature and application of empowerment in a hospitality environment

To analyse the effect of utilizing the Knowledge Management process as a supporting mechanism for empowerment at the workplace of 5 star hotels in Geneva.

### 3.2 Research approach

Given the previously mentioned aims, the author has decided to use a quantitative approach in order to properly respond to the objectives of this research. Quantitative research was defined by Bryman and Bell (2011, p. 150), as " the collection of numerical data and as exhibiting a view of the relationship between theory and research as deductive, a predilection for a natural science approach and as having an objectivist conception of social reality".

Another definition was given by Mehmetoglu (2004), in which he explains quantitative methods in research as "a strategy that is based on hypothetical deduction and statistical analysis". These definitions create a link with a deductive and positivist approach. This is justified since the purpose of this study is to assess the conditions and environment of empowerment at the workplace. Positivism is characteristic for applying scientific methods to human affairs. Given that the study analyses the weaknesses of empowerment and tries to solve them through a KM framework, it is possible to say that the study falls into this category.

Similarly, given that this research takes deductive guideline, (Punch, as cited in Mehmetoglu, 2004) states that a quantitative approach is to be taken. A deductive approach is characterized by the use of existing theories in order to extract quantitative data (Veal, 2006). According to Bryman and Bell (2011), quantitative methods "suggest that a hypothesis is deduced from the theory and is tested".
These hypotheses are to be proven through a positivist framework (Hussain et al., 2013). Because this study is trying to prove the imperfect approach of empowerment, the need to objectively prove this aspect is essential. As such, a quantitative method will be used, given its nature of understanding the relationship between theory and research, with a special emphasis in the proving or disproving of theories (Bryman, 2012). Despite the fact that a quantitative method has been criticized by Davies (2003), on account of it being incapable of truly assessing "reality" and its intricacies, the researcher believes that this method will provide a rough indication of the interconnections between the two variables (Bryman and Bell, 2011) at the end of this research. In contrast, a qualitative method is not utilised due to the fact that this method focuses on the creation of theories and is in discordance with a positivist worldview because everyone interprets their reality differently (Bryman,2012). Scott (2007) states that a quantitative approach investigates the conditions and environment of a certain

phenomenon, which is the intention of this study. The research is trying to understand if Empowerment creates a functional employee, and should these conditions not to do so, whether or not a KM framework, in this case the transferring of their tacit knowledge into the organisation's policies will.

*3.3 Sampling*

The need to sample is intricate to a quantitative research (Bryman and Bell, 2011). All research needs to identify the population it addresses in order to avoid important errors and facilitate the flow of the information being received (Enarson, et al. 2004). Population is defined by Bryman and Bell (2011) as " the universe of units from which the sample is to be selected". In this particular case, the population of research are the frontline employee of Mandarin Oriental, Hotel de la Paix and Hotel des Bergues in Geneva. Particularly, with a mix between female and male, and a background of at least 3 years in the hospitality industry, as well as having had experience in back-office departments. This is justified by the researcher because in order to truly understand the difference between empowerment in different individuals, it is important for them to have had experienced it in different settings. The hotels to be studied are Mandarin Oriental, Hotel de la Paix (Ritz Carlton) and Hotel des Bergues (Four seasons), due to their known use of empowerment throughout their organization (Nayer, 2011). Given that a quantitative research tries to evaluate the effectiveness of a theory, a large number of participants is required if the research is to be valid (Bryman, 2012). According to Trochim (2020), non-probability sample is commonly used in social studies, and given the nature of the current research, this is the sample to be taken. The methods that fall under that category are convenience sample, snowball and quota (Bryman, 2012). Given the definite characteristics of the population, the quota sampling will be used. Quota sampling is defined as a sampling method that will produce a representative collection of subjects from all backgrounds and categories, such as different age, ethnicity, gender and socio-economic groups. This way, the researcher makes sure that a large percentage of the population is being represented while keeping the distinctiveness of the sample intact. The quota sampling will be used until reaching the number of 30
- 35 front-line employees being empowered from each hotel, reaching a total of 100 employees. Despite the fact that this method suffers criticism such as the sample may not appear representative to the proponents of probability sampling, or that due to the fact that the researcher decides the final subjects in the study, it could be biased (Moser, 1952) the researcher understands this method as the best to correctly test the theory.

*3.4 Data collection*

As for the data collection, the researcher has decided to use a questionnaire administered on a self-completion base. A questionnaire is commonly used in a quantitative research, and in this case, this type of distribution becomes the most cost-effective (Bryman and Bell, 2011). Nevertheless, a clear process must be provided before the completion of the questionnaire. First, is the distribution channel. According to Bryman (2004), the most efficient method to dispense a self-completion questionnaire is via email. An email is the option the researcher has decided to take into this study because of its efficiency (Vanderstoep and Johnston, 2009). Furthermore, it negates common problems such as absence of interviewer effects, lack of interviewer variability, provides a quicker response rate and is the most convenient for the subjects (Bryman, 2004). Thus, providing the most effective distribution method for this research. Second, there is a need to notify the volunteer of the study that the subject is to undertake, through a prior notification email. The research will use a link within an email to the respondents, which will redirect them to a web questionnaire. During the description of the study in the mail, there will be a clause explaining the need of this link and that in no case should it contain any viruses. The sample population will then be able to reply anonymously to the email and allow the researcher to analyse the data collected (Saunders and Lewis, 2012). Given that this study is to be conducted in an industry with a saturated schedule, the researcher has chosen this method due to the fact that providing them with an email option for answering will allow the respondents to reply to it in their own time, and be more critical about their thinking, thus, creating a more valuable analysis (Brodsky, 2016). More importantly, there will be two hypotheses to be used and proven or disproven through the data collection:
H0: Hospitality Front Of house employees' needs are completely addressed by the empowerment theory and application

H1: Hospitality Front of House employees' needs are only completely addressed by a combination of empowerment and KM.
These hypotheses were created using the rational procedure, where H0 uses the information that is already available and H1 uses the new options being proposed (Ippoliti, 2018). To truly understand the consequences, it would be important to follow all the consequences of the H0, but given that they are infinite, an intertwined theory with a phenomenon trying to be explained should be proposed (Hoy, 2012).

*3.5 Ethical Issues*

Nowadays, while conducting a research it is essential not only to follow the procedure, but also make sure that all aspects of the study comply with the ethical regulations of it (Acevedo et al. 2017). Clifford et al. (2007) identifies Consent as the first and most important one when conducting a quantitative

research, and is subdivided in the categories Capacity, Information and Voluntariness. Sankar (2004) understands consent as the subject having full access to all the information of the research at all times. On other words, Capacity is whether or not a person is competent enough to acquire the information, understating and evaluate it. Information refers to the fact that the knowledge provided by the researcher must be relevant and complete. Finally, voluntariness refers to the right of a subject to exercise their freedom at all points during the research (Clifford et al. 2007). Should a researcher negate any of these aspect, an ethical issue would be raised that could possibly negate the validity of the study itself. Kaiser (2019) identifies other issues, such as honesty, protection of integrity and control. Honesty refers to the fact that the research should be transparent at all times towards the subjects should they have any questions and avoid deception at all times. Integrity is a norm that makes sure that every subject involved is correctly being represented and protected under the power of law, as well as making sure that no human rights are being overstepped. Lastly, control implies the responsibility of the researcher over the subjects when submitting them to certain stimuli. The researcher must make sure that he or she is in control at all times and should anything be hazardous to the subjects, prevent it at all costs (Ibid). During this research, all ethical concerns such as respect for persons, beneficence, justice and no sharing of information with third-parties will be assured throughout the process (Vanderstoep and Johnston, 2009). The researcher has decided to create a very detailed description prior to the link in the email explaining every single detail of the study, as well as assuring them their data will not only be confidential, but anonymous. Additionally, should any of the respondents have any concerns, the possibility of responding to the email with questions will be clearly stated, and they will be answered by the researcher at all times.

*3.6 Data Analysis*

The responses of the subjects will be recorded and scored mathematically. The data will be then analysed and interpreted statistically. This way, the research reaches a more respectable truth, because the research can be replicated and verified by others, reaching objectivity and thus, the closest to the truth as possible (Davies, 2003). Nevertheless, it is important to emphasize that the weakness in this method is that the researcher needs to make judgement as to who reaches the criteria and who does not. Davies (2003) establishes that the researchers are not trained to create explanations, but only to look for information and analyse it. As for the type of statistics, there are the inferential statistics and the descriptive statistics that are commonly used. According to Trohim et al. (2016 pp. 292), descriptive statistics are described as "Simple summaries about the sample and the measures". Only bundling up the results and creating

an explanation for their phenomenon. Contrarily, Trohim et al. (2016 pp. 307) understand inferential statistics as the "Process of trying to reach conclusions that extend beyond the immediate data", seeing further beyond, and applying that vision to a specific group. Due to the nature of this research, and empowerment being such an adaptable and almost individual term, the inferential statistics will be used, as they will explain the phenomenon in a deeper fashion.

*3.7 Validity*

The definition of construct validity is "the extent to which the results that you are getting are reliable and can be indeed made inferences from. That the data you are using is not fake or imagined" (Trohim et al. 2016 pp. 128). Meaning that all the data being collected is not subject to biases that could skew the result.
Given the operational nature of this research, one of the main threats to mention are the operationalisation issues. This is explained as the fact that sometimes the correct measurements are not taken, and instead, other types of phenomena are inadvertently analysed instead (Möllering et al. 2004). Another threat to be considered is the internal validity. It will give relevance to the paper if the phenomenon has no other explanation than the one the researcher proposes, making it of essence for the general knowledge (Borg, 1984). Also, the basic principles of hypothesis is something to keep in mind, because of the fact that it states that they can be proven or denied, and that they address directly the studied phenomenon, thus, making it a threat to validity should it not be properly stated (Trohim et al. 2016). All in all, these threats will attempt to be avoided by using the peer method and using the consequential recommendations.

*3.8 Limitations*

As for the limitations, there are several to be noted down. The first one and most important is the geographical barrier. Given the specificity of the location being studied in this research, it is not possible to generalise the results of this research into the whole hospitality industry, because they could be linked only to the canton of Geneva, not possible to generalise according to the number of hotels and neither is it the whole Swiss market (Kim and Mattila, 2011). This is also characteristic of the quantitative research.
Another limitation could be concerning a limited budget, which can result in little time to gather and search for the proper applicants (Chrzanowska, 2002) There is also the interpretation bias, which could be that inadvertently, the researcher interprets the data differently than what it shows, or the tools being used do not measure this phenomenon but another one completely (McDaniel and Gates, 1988). This will of

course try to be avoided through a peer review step before publication.

## Chapter 4: Discussion

### 4.1 Introduction

Empowerment is a concept used very commonly in the hospitality industry (Konar et al. 2018). However, as seen in the previous chapter, there could be a discrepancy as to when and who this theory was created for (Klidas et al. 2007; Pelit et al. 2011). It is due to this, that in this chapter, this discrepancy will be studied, as well as the validity of Darroch's (2005) Knowledge Management model to bridge the gap. Nevertheless, because the primary research has not yet begun, the following contents will be based and analysed according to the literature and statistical information.

*4.2 To identify the limitations of empowerment when addressing different individual`s needs*

One of the most important limitations of empowerment is the lack of understanding of the concept from those who use it. In mandarin oriental, Hotel des Bergues and Hotel de la Paix, there is no written statement about what empowerment represents to them other than relenting power to the operational levels. This may suppose a weakness in their system given that according to Sparrowe (1994), empowerment was created for the administrative levels and then transferred to the operational level without a revision of the concept. As such, a revision of the theory and adaptation to the fast-paced environment of front-office is recommended.
Furthermore, Linuesa-Langreo et al. (2016) identified 2 aspects necessary for the empowerment phenomenon: psychological empowerment and empowerment climate. As previously explained, empowerment does not address the individual needs of a subject without a psychological empowerment. Through this discovery, it is possible to assume that Mandarin oriental, Hotel des Bergues and Hotel de la Paix encourage an empowerment climate, but do not focus on the individual level. This is due to the fact that they enforce empowerment as one of their main policies, but no individual policies can be found (Nayer, 2011; Four Seasons, 2022; Solomon, 2013). It is recommended to address psychological empowerment not only because creating an empowerment climate can be easily created through a leader, as seen in the empirical research of Linuesa-Langreo et al. (2016), but a psychological empowerment is recommended to complete the empowerment model and address the individuals' needs.
Another limitation to be deduced from the literature is exposed by Raub and Robert (2013), where they suggest that a relationship between supervisor and employee is a vital element in empowerment practices. There is already a limitation for empowerment alone

to be one-stop-solution but combined with the fact that a transformational or servant leadership is necessary to create the psychological and environmental empowerment suggests an even more intrinsic fault in the model. As Gil et al. (2010) discovered in the empirical research, environmental empowerment is based in the correct combination of leadership and prestige within the company, which can be achieved by using empowerment on those who already present psychological empowerment traits. As such, it can be recommended to have leaders identify those interested in being empowered and allowed them the liberty to make their own decisions in a day-to -day operation.

*4.3 To assess the findings as a discrepancy between the literature and application of empowerment in a hospitality environment*

Empowerment has been researched throughout the years greatly (Islam, 2016; Rowlands, 1995; Perkins and Zimmerman, 1995). However, it was identified by the researcher that the concepts have greatly changed throughout time, as seen by the contrary concept created by Perkins and Zimmerman (1995) and Hassi (2019). As such, a lack of revision of the theory is a discrepancy. Similarly, it can be assumed that every 5-star hotel has created their own version of empowerment and applied the term indiscreetly. As such, a generalised and actualised concept is recommended to be included in the statements of the 3 hotels studied. Furthermore, Sparrowe (1994) explained that the tool was not initially created for the operational level. However, as Gil et al. (2010) identified in the theory and empirical research, the application of empowerment itself is not complete, as it has been commonly suggested. In fact, when applying it into the industry's fast-paced environment, it does not fully address the needs of the hotel to create a top product. As such, it is recommended for the hotels in question to create a model that addresses only the operational employees.
Additionally, Spender (1994) explained that in the actuality of the business world, it is possible that the only advantage that enterprises can count on is the management of the resources and the services they offer. The implementation of an incomplete tool may not let the hotels exploit their full potential and reach a sustainable advantage. This may be because empowerment has proven useful in the administrative level, that the operational level has not been taken into consideration as in need of a change. It can be considered a fault in management given that their 5 star position obligates them to provide top-notch service but an analysis of the conditions within this sector has not been made. As such, an in-depth analysis of the operational sector's needs is recommended alongside with policies that focus only in this area.

*4.4 To analyse the effect of utilizing the Knowledge Management process as a supporting mechanism for empowerment at the workplace*

Following the past suggestions and possible discrepancies, it is possible to suggest Knowledge Management as the tool that could complete the supposed gap in the Empowerment model. Darroch (2005) explains it in the way of "providing knowledge to those who need it when it is needed". As can be assumed from the literature, empowerment may not fit the dynamics of the operational world, which is why KM may be a solution for the 5 stat hotels.

Furthermore, as previously suggested, a more individual focus should be put in the operational level, which according to Mahapa (2013) and the following empirical research from the same author, will provide with the individualisation that empowerment is lacking.

The 3 hotels subject of this study are currently not using KM as a model, and neither are they prioritising a knowledge stance, which according to Okumus (2013), will provide a resources management structure that may result in sustainable capabilities. As proven by Mahapa's (2013) research, the application of KM could not only be beneficial in a hospitality context but manage to create a sustainable competitive advantage by increasing the organisational commitment commonly found in administrative employees but sparely in the operational ones. As such, it is suggested that by introducing a knowledge stance, having a leader relenting power and using the KM as a supporting tool to empowerment, Mandarin Oriental, Hotel de la Paix and Hotel des Bergues could be the pioneers in the correct application of a complete empowerment tool.

*4.5 Conclusions*

Organisational commitment and knowledge can be considered a competitive advantage (Jennex and Smolnik, 2011). The hotels being studied must remain at the top of the competition chain in order to remain afloat. This could be one of the main reasons why they use empowerment, not only as their model of conduct, but as their flagship product to employees. Their need for quick solutions could have led to a dismissal of theoretical evidence, or even a misconception of the model. Given the discrepancies found between the literature and the application of empowerment, the KM model is suggested as a solution. Not only does it address the gaps found lacking in empowerment, but it also could provide the industry with the multi-solution that it needs. It would solve the problems in empowerment, all the meanwhile identifying new competencies. All in all, Mandarin Oriental, Hotel de la Paix and Hotel des Bergues could combine these two models and create a potentially more powerful advantage to their already well-established brands.

**Chapter 5: Conclusions and Recommendations**

*5.1 Conclusion*

The aim of this study was to identify the limitations of empowerment when addressing different individual's needs. Given that empowerment has become essential in the hospitality industry, the research on empowerment has been wide (Klidas et al. 2007). Nevertheless, the theory has suffered criticisms, and the transfer from a theoretical framework towards reality was analysed. In doing so, Sparrowe (1994) discovered a gap: it was initially created for managerial positions, which already presented a high commitment towards the organisation. Empowerment is commonly used in front line positions (Gil et al. 2010). Given the nature of empowerment, the researcher identified a discrepancy in the theory when addressing different individual's needs, because not all employees are committed to the organisation. Furthermore, Linuesa-Langreo (2016) identified the need to be willing to be empowered first individually and then collectively before being able to be correctly empowered by a leader. Should an employee be given empowerment without commitment nor consent, empowerment will become an ineffective tool.

To solve this discrepancy, a KM framework was put into use. Okumus (2013), identified 4 ways of managing knowledge, however this author only acknowledged transforming tacit knowledge into explicit knowledge. Once the knowledge from an individual is extracted and put into the written organisation's framework, not only will that elevate their organisational commitment, but also let the leader know if they are willing to be empowered (Kiseli and Senaji, 2016), thus, eliminating the gap in the literature and application of empowerment to address different individual's needs.

In order to have a more practical insight of the application of these two frameworks, a quantitative research was conducted in the format of online questionnaires. The population was of the front-line employees of Mandarin Oriental, Hotel de la Paix and Hotel des Bergues in Geneva.

Furthermore, it is possible to glean through this study that the business stance in which these 3 hotels have focused is inconsistent with their claim of empowerment being a complete and useful tool. In fact, it is seen that there is a focus in those who already have organisational commitment instead of increasing it in the operational levels. This may be due to the fact that due to their obligation to maintain high standards, there is little flexibility for the front employees when talking about their own objectives, and neither are they given an overall vision of the goal. The companies prioritise skills rather than knowledge, which according to Spender (1994), it is not the most practical way of creating a sustainable competitive advantage.

Based on the existing literature, combined with the results of this study, the author concludes that KM provides the solution to the disparity between the theory and application of reality, and proves that should empowerment be put into a KM framework not only will it become a complete tool, but also a more successful one.

*5.2 Recommendations*

As for the recommendations of this study, there are several to be made. Throughout this research paper, empowerment as a concept and its application were analysed in depth. It has been noticed that the general conception of empowerment is not a generalised one. As such, it is recommended for the academia and the industry to agree in a generalised term that will eliminate all type of confusion concerning the topic.

Alongside that, it has been seen that empowerment has different limitations. Within them, it is the fact that it does not completely address the needs of an individual in a personal level. The categorisation of the concept to be simply applied without any previous preparation can be considered a fault in the management process. There are different conditions for the application of empowerment such as the existence of a leader, as well as the creation of a psychological and environmental empowerment before the application of the concept. As such, it is recommended for the industry to analyse these conditions and apply them before the application of empowerment, so that it can begin the process of addressing the needs of the employees properly.

Furthermore, it was understood that the concept was not created for the environment of the front-line employees, which is characterised by high-standards, quick dynamics, and the possibility of lacking organisational commitment. Due to that, it is recommended for the concept to be revised not only in an academic level but create a concept that will address the front-line employees only and cater to the individual needs of the sector.

Finally, KM is recommended as a suitable supporting tool for empowerment. Through the transferring of knowledge from a tacit to explicit level, organisational commitment increases, as well as productivity. It should be accompanied by a knowledge stance from the company, where they understand their current resources as possible sustainable capability that can be transformed into a competitive advantage. Because of this, it is recommended for the academy to conduct further research on the application of KM as a supporting tool and envision a compound model to correctly address the needs of individuals. For the industry, it is recommended to apply a slow roll-out of KM as to reduce shock levels in the employees and identify whether they have taken the correct strategic stance for knowledge to become a sustainable competitive advantage.

Moreover, a study where the application of empowerment and KM are used not only in 5-star hotels but also 3 and 4 stars so as to understand if the model will also work in an environment not as stressful as that iof a 5-star hotel, where standards must be outstanding. It is also recommended to conduct a qualitative study where the opinions of the employees are taken into consideration in-depth, to have a rounder understanding of the phenomenon. This study also has several limitations, such as the geographical aspect. As such, it is recommended to conduct a similar study in a different zone as well as in a different scale and number of hotels.

One of the most important limitations is that this paper was based solely on assumptions from the literature, and primary research is recommended in order to confirm the validity of the results. A peer review is also suggested as to limit the interpretation bias.

All in all, it is suggested to create and apply an empowerment-KM model into the industry, test its worthiness in its real application.

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