THE DEMOCRATISATION OF THE WORKPLACE IN
SELECTED SOUTH AFRICAN ORGANISATIONS

BY

RUAN VON MOLTKE VAN DER WALT

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SUMMARY

THE DEMOCRATISATION OF THE WORKPLACE IN SELECTED SOUTH AFRICAN ORGANISATIONS

BY
RUAN VON MOLTKE VAN DER WALT

PROMOTOR : Prof D. de Villiers
DEPARTMENT : Human Resources Management
DEGREE : D Com (Human Resources Management)

Since 1994 the government has steadily been moving the South African society towards democratic practices. One of the areas of society identified for transformation is the workplace. One of the earliest acts passed by government to achieve this objective is the Labour Relations Act (LRA) (No 66 of 1995).

Ascertaining the views and attitudes of employers and employees towards the undermentioned four aspects of workplace democracy form the research problem of the investigation. The four aims of the investigation are as follows: to determine the views and attitudes of management and workers towards information disclosure; to determine the views and attitudes of management and workers towards collective bargaining; to determine the views and attitudes of management and workers towards worker participation, consultation and joint decision-making. The views and attitudes of management and workers on the above topics were obtained by means of questionnaires and in-depth interviews.

In order to understand the labour movement and industrial democracy, the social and economic conditions that gave rise to these social and economic phenomena need to be examined. As a result of the historical roots and influence which Britain and Europe had on the development of South Africa, this brief survey focussed primarily on developments in Britain and Europe.

An explanation of what is meant by the term “democracy” is presented. Both the direct and indirect forms of democracy are discussed. From democracy the discussion turns to industrial democracy. Various forms and models of industrial democracy are
organisations were engaged in collective bargaining.

Both groups of respondents viewed consultation as discussions and/or an exchange of views. Some management representatives noted that their understanding of what is meant by consultation differed from the trade unions' views that consultation is synonymous with negotiation. It further appears that both groups consider joint decision-making as referring to workers participating in the decision-making process with their employers.

The representatives of management and representatives of workers in organisations that do not have Workplace Forums (WPFs) agreed that WPFs were not established as the trade union had insufficient representivity and that existing representation structures were adequate.

In the case of organisations with WPFs it was found that both management representatives and worker representatives indicated that they followed the requirements for constitutions as prescribed in section 82 of the LRA of 1995 in drawing up the WPF constitution for their respective organisations.

Very little research information on the views and attitudes of both management and the workers in the same organisations in South Africa are available. The current study has contributed insight into the views of both management and workers on the disclosure of information; collective bargaining; worker participation, joint consultation and joint decision-making as well as workplace forums.

Based on the experience of the current study it is recommended that future research include respondents from all nine provinces or at least two or more provinces to ensure greater representivity of South African organisations, management and workers. It is further recommended that future research attempts to include even more than the seven sectors of the economy used in the current study.