

EMPOWERMENT

by

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1. Introduction

As we approach the 21st century, we are entering a new era in the evolution of management. Changes in the economic environment caused by globalization and technology have forced organization to make significant transformation in order to adopt and service in this new world. Apart from economic and technology changes, organization also faces major changes in other areas such as workplace environment, customer demands and high expectation from their own workers. Unless very effective strategy are taken to face all this changes, organization will face the problem of survival in this competitive world. As cited from Block P. (1997), to complete effectively in this world market place, we need further improvement. To move ahead demands empowerment where people taking responsibility for themselves and the organization. This is a move away from a system in which individual waits for all decision from the top, take the safe path, and blame others when things go wrong.

Before we discuss further on empowerment, let see what does different authors said about the definition of Empowerment. According to Hitt (1996), Empowerment is a process giving powers to others. Faure (1996) defined empowerment as a process that increases employees intrinsic task inclusion. In another words, key word in empowerment is power. Power means the ability to influence others, on order to get things done. Even though the word '*power*' sometimes carries a negative connotation, in itself is neither positive nor negative. It depends on the intend of the power is actually used. For manager or an individual contributor to get things accomplished in organizational setting, power is essential. In traditional organizational, the power and authority to make decision is solely the responsibility of the people at the top because it was always believed that they had the ability, experience, training and information to enable them to make decisions. However many organization are now mooring away from this traditional bureaucracy style of management. They want to involve their people and fully utilize their skills and enthusiasm. They want people who are fully committed to achieving the common goal where they continually strive to improve processes and problems are resolved quickly and effectively.

2. Why Empowerment?

Empowerment are difference from command and control environment. In traditional managers role, they allocate work, decide how it is done and monitor progress. Where as in an empowered environment, the managers gives their people the responsibility, training, authority and support to enable them to decide how to act. Their people decide how to do their job and how to resolve problems which reduce their effectiveness. The managers become a coach and facilitator. As a result, things usually work because people become committed and have the confidence to make the commitment.

According to Faure (1996), when give to much the powers, responsibility and trust to the top people, what usually happen was that :

- (i) Problems are allowed to fester because the people at the coal face couldn't face battling with bureaucrats to get them sorted out.
- (ii) Decision were slow because only a few people had the necessary authority and the paperwork had to pass up the chain of command.
- (iii) Decision were often wrong because they were made by people who were remote from the problem.

3. How to Empower People?

Marquodt (1998) suggest several guidelines to consider in the empowerment of employees that are:

- (i) Treat Employees Mature, Capable Workers and Learners.
- (ii) Encourage Employee Freedom, Energy and Enthusiasm.
- (iii) Maximize the Delegation At Authority and Responsibility.
- (iv) Involve Employees in Developing Strategies and Planning.

According to Marquodt, employees should be treated as adults who have the capability to learn, to handle problem and other potentialities. Employees too should be empowered to take part in planning and to develop strategy and tactics in areas that effect their professional work. To transform the organization toward full employee involvement leaders should be careful and be patient because it has implication to the whole organization. In another words, it cannot be implemented in piecemeal. Faure (1996), suggest we follow in path through three key stages that are :

- Stage 1 Here suggestions are welcomed from employees and actions are implemented to improve the day-to-day working of the organization. Vehicles to achieve this include employee suggestion schemes, quality circles and the early examples of 'work-out' introduced by General Electric in 1989. Although these activities do involve employees, they tend to focus on specific problems and fit into the traditional organization structure where managers retain control over decision-making.
- Stage 2 Here, employees become more involved in managing the business. Work groups or task forces are allowed to become self-managing. These groups determine how the process operates and how performance is monitored. Before this can happen, however, individuals need training and access to the necessary information to enable them to make decisions. The work groups are, however, limited to making decisions relating to the work processes which they operate. They are not involved in making strategic decisions or other management activities outside their day-to-day work environment. This is the system they operate at Toyota, UK.
- Stage 3 Here the process is taken a step further and employees take responsibility for all activities in the organization. Individuals are concerned with their own performance, that of their group, and of the organization as a whole. Individuals can only give this commitment

ment if they have information about, and can influence company performance. They must have the necessary skills and knowledge to enable them to make a contribution and should be rewarded for improved performance. For employees to have this level of involvement, the whole structure the organization has to change. Organizations need to be based around customer-focused business units and not on traditional functional lines.

To empowered people, we must develop the right culture and appropriate structure. This requires managers to devolve real power to lower levels within the organization. In an empowered environment, people must have necessary :

- Knowledge and training to ensure everyone understands the organization and their role in it, so that they have the ability and confidence to know how to improve performance.
- Information so that they are able to make sensible decisions and understand the impact of those decisions on others who may be effected, and on company performance.
- Authority and responsibility to make decisions which affect the performance of activities under their control.
- Share in the rewards of improved performance - if this does not happen the additional responsibilities will have a hollow ring to them - they will be more of a burden.

In traditional command and control organizations these elements exist only at the top of the tree. In an empowered organization they exist throughout, from the top of the bottom.

4. Barriers to Empowerment

Despite the recent popularity of empowerment, some notes of caution need to be sounded. There are potential barriers to empowered that can doom any program. Some of these barriers are fairly easily removed, while others present long-term, or even impossible, obstacles to empowerment's success.

There are organization where empowerment's goal of inclusion is incongruent with the culture. These are cultures in which employees lack commitment, members fail to share the organization's goals, or employees are fearful or retribution if they take the initiative. Some workers are often reluctant to take the initiative unless they have a union to protect them. Management, of course, can change its organizational culture to be more supportive of empowerment, but this is typically a long-term proposition.

Fear of retribution can be a problem for management too. It is unreasonable to expect managers to distribute power to others if they can expect to be punished when those others make mistakes. Managers will not delegate authority if they must retain full responsibility for decisions made in their units. The practice of firing the coach when the team loses can be changed, but where it exists and has an entrenched history, managers will fight the process of empowering their people.

Some organizations have, intentionally or otherwise, hired employees with a low need for autonomy. They then reinforce this need by providing directive or autocratic leadership. Employees who want the security of having some one tell them what to do and when to do it will resist

empowerment. Training and education can often be effective in overcoming this obstacle, however.

Certain managerial personalities can be a handicap to implementing an empowerment program. For example, managers with a high power need are likely to be reluctant to give up the control they have worked hard to earn. While some of these managers may '**get the empowerment message**', other may not. Managers in the latter group will probably need to be replaced if empowerment is to work.

5. Conclusion

To conclude, empowerment has many benefits. More works can be done with less people. Customer satisfaction will increase, problems will be able to be resolved faster because decisions are made quickly. This is because workers will be more responsive to changes in customer need and become more involved. Workers today are very valuable. They want the opportunity to be challenged and freedom to explore, to take risk, to be innovative and creative. They desire flexibility, responsibility and accountability. In other words, today's workers are more committed to work with managers who empower them, who respect them and who can mentor them to the new heights.

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