

EMPLOYEE EMPOWERMENT: A CRUCIAL FACTOR FOR ORGANIZATION EFFECTIVENESS

Dr. Rita Nagpal*

ABSTRACT

In the era of globalization, there's need for employee empowerment practices in all types of organizations, as a result which employees are in a position to quickly respond to the changes in the environment and take quick decisions. Employee empowerment may be a key process whereby a culture of empowerment is developed. All the required information is shared in the form of clear vision, specific goals along with the results expected and also the results of efforts and their impact on the entire process is shared. Generally, employee empowerment encompasses an innovative approach in working with people and a shift of power from the higher levels to lower management level of the organization. Thus, employee empowerment will result in improvement of performance of the organization through increased levels of the employees' participation and self-determination. Employee empowerment practices have received an intensive recognition as a critical subject in management circles, mainly, because it is seen as one of the fundamental elements of managerial and organizational effectiveness that increases when power and control are shared in an organization. Empowerment practices are often implemented with the hopes of overcoming employee dissatisfaction and reducing absenteeism, turnover, and poor quality work. Empowerment practices are being introduced by a number of organizations to boost productivity, increase customer satisfaction and enhance competitive advantage.

Keywords: Empowerment, Organization, Productivity, Innovative Performance, Self-Determination.

Introduction

The worldwide management thinkers assert that managing wouldn't be the same again. As we are in the 21st century, the global market competitiveness is a real challenge for the policy-makers, business leaders and entrepreneurs in every industry. Furthermore the current business world is witnessing fast changing business environment, sophisticated technology, knowledge workers and aware customers. All this necessitate quick decision-making which needs a shift from traditional management practices (i.e., Command and Control) to democratic strategies which provide greater autonomy, confidence and freedom to employees to take relevant decisions. However such democratic practices won't be effective unless employees are empowered, as the human resources are the drivers of organizational effectiveness and growth. Employee empowerment, in fact, starts with the strategic fit between people, tasks, technology, information processes, rewards and organizational structure that all must be in alignment before the organization could work efficiently. Employees with strong organizational commitment are emotionally attached to the organization and have a strong

* Associate Professor, Dyal Singh College, University of Delhi, Delhi, India.

desire to contribute significantly towards organizational success. This results in increase in competitiveness, accountability, low wastage, risk-taking, innovativeness and a desire to improve overall job performance. Moreover the increased individual commitment to their respective groups or teams improve self-confidence, team performance, interpersonal interaction, and the degree of satisfaction. Empowerment thus inspires change and increases the extent of workplace commitment which further increases the degree of individual employee commitment and helps in achieving the overall organizational goals.

Employee Empowerment: Concept and Meaning

The word 'empower' is of French and Latin derivation consisting of preposition 'em' and noun 'power'. Em probably comes from French and it means 'in' and Power means 'control/influence'. The Latin source of 'em' is more complicated and holds the identical meaning as 'look' or 'come'. The primary recorded use of the word 'empower' was in the seventeenth century by Hamon L'estrage in his book 'The Reign of King Charles'. The primary usage was synonymous in meaning with the thought of authorizing or licensing. As per the Oxford English Dictionary, empowerment means "to give official authority or to delegate power or to commission or authorizing or licensing". Empowerment focuses on employees to make use of their full potential. On the other hand, empowerment aspires to relinquishing control and allows every employee to create decisions, set goals, accomplish results and receive rewards. In the words of Richard Carver 2 "Empowerment is encouraging and allowing individuals to assess personal responsibility for improving the way they are doing their jobs and contributing to the organization's goals". Initially, empowerment is predicted to boost customer satisfaction by having the worker closer to the customer. Furthermore it is anticipated to extend employee loyalty because employee's pride and self-respect is increased. Finally, the delegation of authority is predicted to enhance productivity, which ultimately leads to higher profits. Employee empowerment is the process of giving employees the authority, responsibility, resources, freedom to take decisions and solve work related problems in the organization. In order to take such initiatives and decisions, they're given adequate authority and resources because the cycle time of deciding is incredibly important in many business activities. This allocation of authority isn't the same thing as "delegation" based relationship. In empowerment, it's a "trust based relationship", which is established between management and employees, as a relentless process and is one amongst the foremost critical success factors for a corporation. The empowered employee becomes "self motivated", "self directed" and "self controlled".

In simple words, empowerment is giving power. The verb empowers means to provide the means, ability and authority. Viewed from this angle, employee empowerment in an organisational setting resulting into giving employees the means, ability and authority to enable them to accomplish the required work. Employee empowerment (or empowering employees) involves increasing both the authority levels and accountabilities for organizational employees so that they can make more and more decisions without consulting management. Along with this the employee empowerment will be effective in motivating employees, and creating more satisfying and meaningful jobs and quicker decisions. Employee empowerment could also be a term used to express the ways by which non-managerial staff can make autonomous decisions without consulting a boss or a manager. It also means leaving behind a number of facilities traditionally held by management, which suggests managers may also take up new roles and responsibilities. It doesn't mean that management relinquishes all authority totally, delegates decision-making completely and allows operations to run without accountability. It requires a major investment of time, energy and intention to develop mutual trust, assess and boost individuals' capabilities and develop clear agreements about roles, responsibilities, risk-taking and limits. Empowerment manifests when the power of deciding and the right to share the recourse is shifted to employees who then experience the possession and control over jobs to be performed. Empowered employees know that their jobs belong to them as they can decide about how things are to be done. They feel responsible, equipped and elated. Henceforth they start taking more initiative in their work and also luxuriate in the work more.

The Evolution of Employee Empowerment

Though the word, 'empowerment' in the management context has been coined recently, its roots in management roll back to many decades. In the Hawthorne Experiments, at Westinghouse where it had been shown that employee productivity improved when staff felt they were being paid attention to, dates back to the 1920s. After the Second war, the occupying forces installed Work Directors in major German companies but balked at the concept of taking the same medicine

treatment. It wasn't until the 1960s that the understandable backlash to the time and motion approach popular in the previous decade; and therefore the idea of greater job involvement came into force. It had been at now that variety of management scientists, notably Smith and McGregor, Drucker and Likert, began to question the role of individuals in new, highly automated workplace. This led to the concept of job enrichment, while repetitive motions is also the foremost technically efficient way of doing employment, a more varied job role may lead to greater motivation and productivity. In Scandinavia, during 1960s and 1970s, Einar Thorsrud and his colleagues at the Arbeidspsykologisk Institute, Oslo encouraged various companies to experiment with semi-autonomous work groups. In 1970s, technical advances in machine tools made possible to push concepts like group technology where production was focused on 'cells' and enormous tasks were undertaken by multi-skilled operators. At the same time, a few of radical European entrepreneurs like German Hauni, gave employees the authority to pick out their own managers and eventually, ownership of their own enterprises. Quality circles, imported from Japan, opened Western eyes to the potential contribution of individuals at operator level and therefore the popularity of Total Quality Management added to the impetus. Empowerment, altogether its forms, evolved slowly from of these ideas. In the late 1980's, however, trends in the business world began to quote it essential to delegate more widely and worthwhile work.

Principles of Employee Empowerment

Heathfield (2006) suggested variety of top principles for managing people in a very way that fundamentally reinforces employee empowerment in organizations. In suggesting these principles, Heath field found out that managers' goal is to create a favorable environment in which people are empowered, productive, contributing, and happy. Organizational managers are advised to embrace these principles in their endeavors of empowering employees. The principles are highlighted as below.

- Demonstrate value for people: Managers' regard for people shines through altogether of their actions and words. (Their face expression, visual communication, and words express what they're puzzling over the those who report back to them) The managers' goal is to demonstrate their appreciation for every person's unique value. Irrespective of how an employee is working on their current task, a manger's value for the worker as a personality's being should never falter and always be visible.
- Share leadership vision: Help people feel that they're a part of something bigger than themselves and their individual job. They will try this by ensuring they know and have access to the organization's overall mission, vision, and strategic plans.
- Share goals and direction: Share the foremost important goals and direction for group wherever possible, either make progress on goals measurable and observable, or ascertain that have shared an image of a positive outcome with the people to blame for accomplishing the results.
- Trust people: Trust the intentions of individuals to try to do the proper work, to take the correct decision, and to opt for such options which might not be exactly what they may decide but still work.
- Provide information for decision making: make sure that the people have access to any or all the knowledge they may require have to form thoughtful decisions.
- Delegate authority and impact opportunities, not just more work: Not only the delegate just drudge work but also a number of the fun stuff too. For example, they might delegate the important meetings, the committee memberships that influence development, deciding, and also the projects that folks and customers notice. The worker will grow and develop new skills.
- Provide frequent feedback: Provide frequent feedback so that the people understand how they're doing. Sometimes, purpose of feedback is reward and recognition. People deserve managers' constructive feedback, too, in order to further develop their knowledge and skills.
- Solve problems; don't pinpoint problem people: When a controversy occurs, ask what's wrong with the work system which caused the people to fail, not what's wrong with the people.

- Hear, learn and ask challenges to provide guidance: Provide an area in which people will communicate by taking note of them and asking questions. Guide them by asking questions, not by telling grown up people what they should do. People generally find the correct answers if they are given proper opportunity and guidance.
- Help employees feel rewarded and recognized for empowered behaviour: When employees feel under-compensated, under-titled for the responsibilities they handle, under-noticed, under-praised, and under-appreciated then don't expect results from employee empowerment. The fundamental needs of employees must be met for them to allow their discretionary energy, that extra effort which the individuals voluntarily invest in work. Osborne and Plastrik discerned that for a few employees, getting more control is its own reward. They will be excited about having the ability to create changes that affect them or about working in teams with peers instead of under constant management supervision.
- Communicating and consulting with employees: Employees have to be clear about why empowerment is going on and the way it'll meet the goals of the organization. They ought to have substantial input about how the organization will proceed with employee empowerment. And that they must have time and opportunity to adapt to new culture.
- Give employees information: nobody can take decisions without sufficient information. A company committed to empowering employees must make sure that they have the access to all the relevant information. There must be a well thought-out and effective way of information flow in the organization.
- Investing in employees: Most employees have little experience in taking different types of decisions like personnel management relate decisions or work process improvement or general management decisions among others that empowerment gives them. Usually, their skills at such work are underdeveloped. Empowerment without skill building or knowledge development may be a way to failure. Therefore, the empowering organization must confirm employees have an opportunity to succeed once they get decision-making authority.
- Reward employees: This principle relies on the old chestnut that "you reap what you sow". Therefore, in empowering employees, organizations simply get what they get hold of, whether the currency or recognition. Hence, various tools of performance management must be used to reward employees for taking up new challenges and responsibilities.

Conclusion

In this era of ever increasing competition, organisations leverage empowerment as a HRM strategy to realize competitive advantage. Strategic management of human resources through empowerment is simple to mention but very difficult to practice. Where employees suffer from inflated egos and highly self-centered behaviors, empowerment doesn't work. Many employees entertain the sentiments that they're subjected to, i.e. be led and to not lead. Empowerment has no appeal to such employees. When employees hunt for secured and not challenging jobs, empowerment sounds hollow. Empowerment is one among the effective managerial tool to unlock the potential of employees in every industry. When the industry is in a position to tap the potential of each employee through empowerment, it can effectively with stand the competition. The journey of empowerment from illusion to reality requires clear understanding of nature of the human system, organization climate, management practices and people. Empowering employees requires establishing an appropriate climate for empowerment and motivating people intrinsically in the organization. Delegation of authority is one among the most activities which change the behaviour of the people. Empowerment has become essential part not only to extend productivity but also to motivate and encourage workers. If empowered, even in the slightest degree, the talents of the individuals is sharpened and improved. This may enable the workers to attain both the individual as well as the organizational goals. The empowered employees exhibit better productivity and ensure business survival, growth and sustenance along with facing the challenges posed by globalization confidently. The managers should note that empowerment is an ongoing process but won't happen naturally in any organization rather it must be initiated and willfully supported.

References

1. Ananda Rao. T.V and Ashok Kari “Employee empowerment: Cultural determinants across public and private sector organisation”, GITAM Journal of management, Vol. 5 No 1, Jan –mar 2007, Pg. 83-92.
2. Bhargava, S. and Kelkar. A “Examining the relationship between organisational structure, job involvement, job satisfaction, and empowerment: implications for human resource development”, International Journal of Human Resources Development and Management, Vol. 1, No.2/3/4, 2001, Pg. 150-161.
3. Chandra Sekaran S.F and Anjaiah. P., “Employee empowerment in non – government organisation” Management and labour studies, Vol. 30, No. 4, 2005.
4. Dwivedi R.S., “Making empowerment happens”, Indian Management, May, 1995.
5. Eveliene Westgeest, Michaela Schippers and Peter van Baalen., “Employee Empowerment and its relation to Affective Commitment”, 2011.
6. Fuller, J.B., Morrison, R., Jones, L., Bridger, D. and Brown, V., “The effects of psychological empowerment on transformational leadership and job satisfaction”, The Journal of Social Psychology, 139 (3), pp. 389–391, 1999.
7. Gurvinder Kaur, “A Thesis on Employee Empowerment and Organizational Effectiveness: A Comparative Study of Public, Private and Foreign banks in Some North Indian States”, submitted to Thapar University, Punjab, November, 2013.
8. Jewel Ray-Chaudhuri “Engaging in conversations: A new tool for team “identity empowerment” Empowerment in Organisations, Vol. 6, No. 1, 1998, Pg. 13 – 18.
9. Kothari, C. R., “Research methodology: Methods & Techniques”. New Delhi: New Age International, 2004.
10. Menon, S.T., “Employee Empowerment: An integrative psychological approach”. Applied Psychology: An International Review.50 (1): 153-180, 2001.
11. Nail AHK Awamleh, “Enhancing Employees Performance via Empowerment: A Field Survey” Asian Journal of Business Management, 5(3): 313-319, 2011.
12. Sanjay T. Menon “Employee empowerment an integrative psychological approach” Applied psychology an international review, Vol. 50, No. 1, 2001, Pg. 153-180.
13. Venkatachalam and Veera Shanmugha Moni M “Employee empowerment A desire need for organisation excellence” ICFAI Journal of organisation behaviour April 2008, Pg. 6-11.

