

“Employee Empowerment-Silhouetted”

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Abstract—Empowerment became a corporate buzzword of 1990's. It has provided a solution to the problem of bureaucratic workplace and initiated the employees to take decisions which tend to give a sense of ecstasy to self empowered employees. There is no magic pill that can empower employees in an organisation; rather we need to focus on certain key areas to achieve gestalt sense of empowerment. This paper is an attempt to outline the key areas of empowerment which needs to be understood during empowerment process to gain competitive edge in today's turbulent corporate world.

1. INTRODUCTION

Empowerment has gained immense popularity in management language (Collins, 1994; Cunningham et al., 1996; Hennestad, 1998; Wilkinson, 1998). Empowerment has been recognized as a significant factor in the phenomenal success of organization (Benson, 1991; Byham, 1992; Conger and Kanungo, 1988; Forrester, 2000; Quinn and Spreitzer, 1997; Sundbo, 1999). Research indicates that there is consensus in the available literature that to survive in this turbulent competitive environment, empowerment plays a significant role (Bernstein, 1992; Shannon, 1991). The term empowerment is frequently used and seen through different lenses depending on the viewpoint taken. The Oxford English Dictionary defines "empowerment" as "the action of empowering; the state of being empowered". Genuine willingness is required on behalf of management and employees to work in collaboration so as to achieve success in the empowerment process.

Nesan and Holt, 1999 defined empowerment as:

“The process of giving employees the authority to take decisions, relating to their work processes and functions, and within the limits provided by management, but requiring them to assume full responsibility and risk for their actions”.

2. EMPLOYEE EMPOWERMENT APPROACHES

Two distinct approaches on empowerment have evolved by different management researchers and practitioners after extensive review of literature. The first approach focuses on structural empowerment and second on psychological empowerment. Structural empowerment refers to organizational policies, structure and practices that grant power and decision making authority to employees at their

work place (Liden and Arad 1996, Eylon and Bamberger 2000, Mills and Ungson 2003). Conger and Kanungo (1988) were among the first to define empowerment from a psychological perspective. Conger and Kanungo (1988) stated empowerment as a motivational concept of self efficacy. This notion claimed that delegation of authority in organization leads to individual motivation and innovative behavior at work place. Thomas and Velthouse (1990) extended this approach by developing a cognitive model of empowerment. They defined empowerment as increased intrinsic motivation and outlined four cognitions: sense of impact; competence; meaningfulness; and choice.

3. KEY AREAS OF EMPOWERMENT

In this era of globalization, employee empowerment is considered as an essential contributing factor to the success of the organization. The benefits out of empowerment can be classified into two categories: benefits for the organization; and benefits for the individual. It makes employees feel that they are vital to the success of the organization. To increase efficiency and productivity, global competition and turbulent business environment leads to organization change. This change can be met by unleashing the creative energy of employees and by providing inspiring, empowering and nurturing culture. There are certain key areas discussed based on reviews which need to be understood in empowerment process to gain competitive position in today's corporate world.

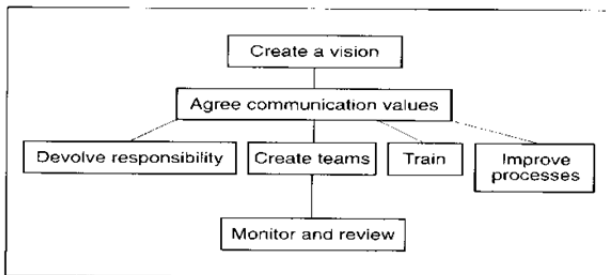
1. Value the Employees

The management need to ensure that regards for employees should shine through employer's action and behavior. Rightly quoted by Susan M. Healthfield, “No matter how an employee is performing on their current task, your value for the employees as a human being should never falter and always be visible.” Time should be spent to capitalize the strength and adequate attention should be given to overcome their weaknesses.

2. Sharing Vision

According to the Business Dictionary, Vision is an “aspirational description of what an organization would like to achieve or accomplish in the mid-term or long-term future”.

Ozden (2014) posited that vision summarizes where the firms wants to be in future and outlines the future dreams desired by the organization. Vision has proven to be a veritable tool in achieving organizational effectiveness. Employees need to understand the vision and goals of senior management and that the organization places a strong emphasis on the need of communication (Quinn and Spreitzer, 1997). Fig1.explains the empowerment process through vision, values, and management roles in a kaleidoscopic manner, in which the former plays a role of facilitator, team workers, trainers and process improvement makers, that are to be reviewed at the end of the process.(Cook, 1994).



Source: Cook, S., "The cultural implications of empowerment", *Empowerment in Organizations*, 2(1), pp. 9-13, 1994.

Fig. 1: The empowerment process

Aghdaie & Dibachi (2014) found a positive and direct relationship between the level of empowerment and possession of clear goals.

3. Decision Making

The key aspect of empowerment is involvement of employee in decision process (Mitchell, 1973; Vroom and Jago, 1988; Cole *et al.*, 1993). The collaboration in decision process is a full process (Ford and Fottler, 1995). It encompasses different stages- problem identification, intelligence stage, conception stage, choice of the decision, implementation and follow up which helps to take operational, tactical and strategic decisions.

4. Communication Skills Training

In the realm of empowerment, communication skills training place a crucial role. In the organization environment, management sets the vision and tone, for which communication skills training is required at each level starting from management to employees (Pastor, J.). During organization change, continuous communication in between management and employees make them feel more included and pulled together whole team for the betterment of the organization.

5. Task Autonomy

Task autonomy is known as self managing teams which involve restructuring of work. Wall and Martin, 1987 suggested that such teams can work autonomously for task allocation, scheduling, safety issues, managing flow of

production and for setting improvement targets. These teams help employees to accept organizational changes and overcome certain crippling effects like tight supervision with assistance of communication. The major drawback is such structures remain confined to operational decisions rather than strategic decisions.

6. Information Sharing

Information sharing is a core component in empowerment process. This will help the employees to gain deeper insight in taking business related decisions that will result into commitment on behalf of employees. In recent years, there is a great deal of management interest for upward communication to discuss the views and grievances of employees, apart from their task related problems (Wilkinson, 1997). At the point of production and service delivery, employees need to deal with production problems or customer related issues. So autonomy, responsibility and suggestion involvement (Bowen and Lawler, 1992) help in resolving issues and further lead to improvement.

7. Leadership

In the leadership approach, leaders energise and empower their subordinates to act by providing a sparkling vision for their future (Bennis and Nanus, 1985; Block, 1987; Conger, 1989). "Facilitative" style of leadership is a veritable tool to get good suggestive inputs from the team. Listening skills are equally important for an effective leadership in the organization. Leadership model was developed by Simmons, 1993 and this model creates a desired empowering and unifying culture.

Table 1: Leadership Model

- Develop an inspiring vision of the future – invite others to do likewise
- Learn to love change and uncertainty
- Decide to appreciate the whole situation and see that everything goes well – implies listening to a wide range of people
- Become a leader of leaders, release intelligence and initiative
- Create an environment of appreciation, high expectations and support
- See yourself as a life-long apprentice
- Develop high self-esteem
- Learn to listen with complete respect and ask empowering questions. Teach others this key leadership skill
- Put an end to complaining and blaming
- Develop concrete plans and review them regularly

Source: Nixon, B., "Facilitating Empowerment in Organizations", *Leadership & Organization Development Journal*, 15(4), pp. 3-11, 1994.

8. Trust

In constructive human relationship, trust plays a very important role in promoting individual and organizational effectiveness. A climate of trust contributes benefits to the organization. Culbert and McDonough, 1986 suggested that,

“empowerment is the key to understanding trust and trusting relationship in an organization”. Research suggests that there is a positive association between trust and empowerment.

9. Power

Empowerment is mainly considered as power sharing notion. The use of the term power in definition of empowerment is used throughout by academicians. Legge (1995) argued that structural empowerment can be viewed in terms of redistributive model, whereby power equalization promotes trust and collaboration. Pastor, 1996 defined empowerment as “it is part of a process or evolution- an evolution that goes on whenever you have two or more people in a relationship, personally or professionally”. Conger and Kanungo, 1998 focused on power as the core element of empowerment, “either to strengthen this belief or to weaken belief in personal powerlessness”.

4. CONCLUSIONS

Ken Gilliver rightly said that “Empowerment is not a verb. It is more a state of mind & way of working”. In this paper effort has been made to study the available literature on empowerment and its key areas. There has been ample amount of work done by academicians and researchers, but only the relevant part has been studied and quoted in the paper. Based on review of prior literature, this paper provides an insight on outlining key areas of empowerment process like value employees, sharing vision, decision making, communication skills training, leadership, informational sharing, task autonomy, power and trust.

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