

Employee Empowerment — doing it the right way.

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"You don't build a company, you build people, and then people build the company." --Zig Ziglar.

As most successful entrepreneurs will agree, a large organisation is built on individuals. Every organization is a social entity that is built around people. An organization may have the best of resources in terms of technological innovation, cost leadership or product quality- but without the glue that binds all of them together - a highly motivated and committed workforce, it can result in the downfall of even the best of organizations.

For an organization to remain competitive and sustainable in the long run, they must empower their employee's desire, competency, skill, philosophy, and opportunity to personally flourish in a way that would lead to the transformation of the individual as well as the organization. The ultimate task of leading any organization is to inspire and attract the hidden talents of all its employees to realize their full potential.

Empowerment is a relatively new term based on total quality management. It is the process of making employees more proactive and responsible by empowering them to make decisions and resolve work-related issues.

Employee empowerment is directly linked not only to efficiency in productivity, but also to retention and a greater sense of job satisfaction among employees. Empowering employees gives them a sense of independence in their work, making them more accountable and more determined to achieve operational results. Employee empowerment has a twofold objective. Firstly, from the point of view of the organisation, it results in a significant improvement in the quality of products and services, in the efficiency of companies and promotes innovation through quality management. From an employee's point of view, this allows them to become more inclined to change and increases their self-efficacy to be able to maximize their work potential. Empowering

the workforce instils a sense of ownership in the workers which ultimately results in humanizing the work environment so that management and employees can collaborate to enhance organizational efficiency and productivity and achieve greater personal and professional success. The ideology of empowerment is based on the premise that the human factor in an organization is of critical importance, and it can be added or subtracted from the bottom line.

Empowerment is a concept at the enterprise level and has a multitude of benefits. An organization's management can empower its employees through sound delegation of authority and decision-making and seek input into the design of the workflow process. Research has clearly shown that empowered employees demonstrate a higher level of trust in their superiors and positively affect employee creativity and citizen behaviour.

Employee empowerment may vary in intensity and scope and may penetrate different levels of the organization. The following are examples of how organizations can implement enabling processes:

- ***Changing the Job design:*** The ideology of employee empowerment primarily relies in the concept of job enlargement and job enrichment which are vital for creating a culture of accountability and shared ownership. Employment expansion is the process of expanding a job by expanding its reach by adding additional activities in the current role of an employee. Furthermore, career enrichment aims to make a job more creative by making it more diverse so that it becomes more inspiring for the employee.
- ***Creating a culture of shared information among Management and employees:*** *Involving the employees in day-to day work related decisions* through a systematic and well-designed system through which information can be freely shared helps to build a climate of trust between the management and workers thereby enhancing employee involvement and empowerment. Management should disseminate relevant and vital information to employees to assist them in making decisions which will help to establish an environment of mutual camaraderie between workers and management.
- ***Rearranging the levels of hierarchy in the organization to make it more customer centric:*** An important aspect of employee empowerment is to reshuffle the organizational hierarchy to make it more flexible, dynamic and customer focussed. Too many layers in the

organizational structure hinder growth by making the organization rigid, inflexible and slow to react to environmental requirements. Restructuring the organization by dismantling multiple levels of hierarchy helps to make it more customer centric.

- ***Developing a culture of accountability:*** Another important yardstick by which we can gauge the level of employee empowerment is by accessing the levels of increasing accountability and job enlargement displayed by the employees. Management should consciously create a culture of shared ownership and accountability whereby employee take the initiative to aspire for higher levels of achievements and take responsibility to deliver on those parameters.
- ***Ensuring organizational support :*** Another important aspect which the management should proactively engage to successfully manoeuvre an employee empowerment assignment is to ensure that the employees not only have the physical and intellectual resources to perform their assigned task; but they should also be directed to develop a sense of organizational citizenship behaviour, whereby they look beyond their assigned job responsibilities and try to fit in in the overall organizational dimension. Employees should consciously believe that the management is genuinely concerned about their growth by giving them access to the latest technology or gadgets or overhauling the work process to make it more employee friendly. This, in turn, will motivate staff and help them feel cared for.
- ***Creating a multi-purpose workforce: Employee empowerment also includes improving the skills of the existing workforce by investing more in employee training.*** This contributes to the creation of a more skilled labour force that can perform several tasks depending on the situation. Retraining employees in a variety of areas enhances their self-efficacy and can create a highly empowered team of employees that directly affects organizational efficiency.
- ***Ensuring a High-Performance Work system*** - As organizations are assessed in terms of their final product or services, so it is imperative that employee empowerment initiative should always initiate in strategy planning that concerns the overall mechanism to ensure quality. As highlighted by most of the Japanese TQM practices including the Kanban

system, the focus of all of these systems is to empower employees at the floor space level so that that could take decisions that affected their production levels directly. Involving the employees in planning and execution of their daily work is an effective way to instill a sense of ownership which helps them to engage in their work more actively. Consultation with workers in the formulation of a project charter and soliciting their opinion in collective decision-making strengthens employee empowerment.

- ***Active participation in the workforce planning process - Ensuring that employees actively participate in the formulation of an HR strategy has a positive impact on employee empowerment.*** If departmental level supervisors are involved in the hiring decisions, then the recruitment process will become a collaborative process which will aid to develop a team with good rapport among the members and the hiring process will become more efficient with higher job retention and an efficient mentoring system. Supervisor level employees should be actively involved in screening candidates and in the interview process.
- ***Ensuring a higher degree of employee involvement by encouraging employee volunteers:***
 - Another way of creating a highly empowered set of employees is by encouraging employees to volunteer for projects rather than imposing job assignments among them. When employees volunteer, it creates a sense of ownership as the employee would now be more committed in ensuring his hundred percent compliance in completing the project to the best of his potential.
- ***Creating a culture of continuous appreciation:*** A key aspect of creating an empowered group of employees is to ensure that performers are recognized in public and there is a clear message from the management in this regard. Designing an effective performance appraisal whereby competent employees are given fast tract opportunities to scale higher in their career can send the right message by making all the employees feel empowered that their work does not go unnoticed, and it is valued in the right context. Making these recognitions known to the entire organization naturally makes employees feel empowered in front of their peers and colleagues. Previous research has shown a very positive association between employee empowerment and organizational performance.

- ***Creating a culture of Flexible work timings*** - Another way through which employees can have a higher sense of empowerment is to have a work policy which is flexible as per the preferences of the employee as well as the requirements of the job. Designing a flexible work policy which is based on employee inputs results in higher efficiency as well as creativity as management need not closely monitor them all the time which may sometimes result in employee burnout. As employee performance does not remain constant over time, identifying an employee's work clock will enhance the creativity of the employee.
- ***Designing a system of information exchange with employees***: Employee empowerment can be successfully implemented if there is a well -designed formal as well as an informal system of communication from between the employees and management. Employees should have adequate opportunities to voice their opinions on issues that directly affect their work. If there is adequate management buy in, in terms of idea sharing with workers and involving the employees in designing the work schedule, they the employees will fell more empowered and will be proactively involved in achieving business excellence.

Conclusion

All organizations strive to create a work culture where the employees are genuinely concerned about the organizational profitability and have a sense of ownership so that they continually strive to produce better quality products and services. Research has shown that empowering employees significantly increases employee self-efficacy, which has a significant impact on their morale, which indirectly affects their productivity. Not only do self-employed employees feel valued, but they also have a direct impact on client service levels. In one of his studies Daniel Goleman has mentioned that “The Employee is a basic molecule of distributed leadership and basic unit in which you can change norms throughout the organization.” Thus, empowered employees tend to display higher levels of organizational effectiveness. As they display more proactive social behaviour like cohesion, mutual trust, loyalty, higher levels of self-efficacy, are more open to embrace change, so organizational leaders should make a directed effort to ensure they their employees are empowered in the true sense of the term so that the organization is able to catapult itself to the highest levels of organizational excellence.

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