Empowerment

Introduction

Empowerment is the act of releasing control to another person or group of people to make decisions and choose the outcome. Empowerment is a give and take situation. One person or group of people relinquishes control over the situation, while the other person or group of people gains the power and authority to control the situation. Empowerment provides a person with a sense of control over his or her fate.

In the business world, empowerment is a staple required for good management practices. Empowerment enables the employee to gain control over his or her destiny, resulting in better performance and productivity. Empowerment provides employees with job enrichment and learning opportunities that can benefit not only the manager but also the organization as a whole.

To strengthen our understanding of empowerment in the business context, let us take a closer look at the concept of empowerment within organizations.

Organizations and Empowerment

In organizations, most people think of empowerment as the act of a manager or person of authority granting power to another person. However, this description is only one part of empowerment. Empowerment requires a manager to release control, while a person seizes the opportunity and takes control of the situation. Empowerment requires a person to take the initiative and have the desire to step in and make decisions in the best interest of the organization. Both parties have to actively participate in the releasing and gaining of power in order for empowerment to be successful. Empowerment often begins with a person being proactive but also requires the manager to support employee empowerment.

In order to solidify your understanding of empowerment in an organization, let us review some concrete examples of employee empowerment.

- John works for a medium-sized accounting company. His current job function is a junior level accountant, but he desires to work his way up to be a senior level accountant. Instead of John waiting for his manager to approach him about his future career path, John feels empowered to initiate a conversation regarding his future career goals with his manager.
John presents a career plan and asks for his manager’s help in outlining what skills and experience he needs in order to be a senior level accountant. John sets a timeline for his goal and asks his manager to include this in his employee development plan.

- Working for a large IT company, Sophia is responsible for leading a team of Web developers. She often has to hire new developers as new projects arise. Instead of taking on the sole responsibility for soliciting and interviewing new candidates, Sophia asks for volunteers from her team to share this hiring responsibility. Two members of her team volunteer to be a part of the hiring team. These two candidates are empowered by this opportunity, welcoming the increased responsibility to determine the newest member of the team.

- Kelly works as a teller at a local bank. She is responsible for handling daily customer transactions including bank deposits, check cashing, and cashier checks for personal accounts. One day, a commercial teller decides to leave the bank in order to pursue another job opportunity. This act opens up a commercial teller position at the bank. Kelly takes advantage of the opportunity and tells her boss that she can juggle both her job and the commercial teller job until someone is hired for the position. Kelly’s empowerment enables her to learn a new position and demonstrate her willingness to help the team and be flexible.

Empowerment is a sought-after management practice. Empowerment enables a person to think, act, behave, and make decisions in independent ways. In the modern business world, employees, wanting to have control over their lives and have a say in day-to-day decisions, require empowerment. Employees no longer want to sit back and wait for their manager to tell them what to do; they want to be a part of determining their own fate as well as the company’s fate.

Next, we are going to explore ways an organization’s culture influences employee empowerment.

Organization’s Culture and Employee Empowerment

An organization’s culture can significantly influence employee empowerment. If the culture is rigid, structured, and risk-adverse, an employee may feel discouraged to take control or initiate decision-making. Managers may be unwilling to let go of control,
presenting a threat to employees who want to take on risks and challenges. In this type of stifling culture, employees learn to give up and let go of their desire to be empowered, or they opt to leave the company in pursuit of an empowering culture.

Many people think of traits such as openness, adventurousness, flexibility, and acceptance to describe an organization's culture that supports empowered employees. Under these conditions, employees feel energized and encouraged to act in empowered ways. The employees trust that the organization is going to support their underlying desire to control their fate and contribute to the organization's success. It is up to the organization to remove barriers that prohibit employees from stepping out and taking charge.

Many times, a manager’s role changes in an employee-empowered organization. In this type of environment, people no longer view managers as the primary decision-makers or ones with sole discretionary power. Managers take on the roles of coaches, mentors, facilitators, catalysts, and advisors. Managers in an empowered culture may lose their identity as authority and power figures, but they may also gain their identity in shaping and developing people around them. As managers transition into these new roles, an organization's culture changes to permit employees to act in empowered ways.

Finally, we are going to investigate the importance of employee empowerment in organizations.

*Importance of Employee Empowerment*

Employee empowerment gives people a sense of satisfaction and fulfillment in determining their work destiny. As employees feel more satisfied, they become more efficient and effective at their jobs. These feelings fuel the organization’s ability to increase performance and productivity, resulting in increased profitability. Employee empowerment positively influences the very thing most businesses are trying to improve: their bottom-line.

In addition, empowerment builds strong leaders. Employees permitted to take on decision-making and problem-solving responsibilities are able to advance their leadership skills. For example, employees volunteering to lead special workgroups are able to practice problem-solving and decision-making, which expands their leadership capabilities. Empowerment provides employees with the freedom to grow and to develop as facilitators, coaches, mentors, advisors, trainers, and eventually, leaders.
The significance of empowerment cannot be overlooked by organizations in today’s world. Every business strives to become more creative, efficient, productive, and profitable. Every business needs leaders. Empowering employees enables organizations to accomplish these goals and achieve long-term success.

**Summary:**

- By definition, empowerment is the act of giving another person or group of people the power to make decisions and choose the outcome.
- Empowerment is not reactive, but it is proactive, allowing a person to take charge in decision-making and problem-solving.
- Empowerment is a sought-after management practice since employees in the modern business world want to have control over their lives and have a say in day-to-day decisions.
- An organization’s culture can significantly influence employee empowerment.
- If an organization’s culture is too rigid, structured, and risk-adverse, an employee may feel discouraged from stepping up and taking control.
- A culture should be open, adventurous, flexible, and accepting to encourage employees to act in empowered ways.
- In a culture where employees are empowered, managers lose their traditional authority identities and become coaches, mentors, facilitators, catalysts, and advisors.
- Employee empowerment positively influences an organization’s performance, productivity, and profitability by making employees happier.
- Empowerment builds strong leaders by enabling employees to improve their decision-making and problem-solving skills.