

How To Turn Your Organisation Into An Empowered Workplace

("The Management Bible")



Viewpoint

"Participative management is just that: You ask for people's help. But empowerment is getting people to help themselves. That's really hard for supervisors and managers, because all their lives they've been trained to make decisions and solve problems for people. So you're asking them to do something that is very different – to be a coach to people, to help them solve their own problems."

- William Byham in *Zapp! The Lightning of Empowerment*



Here's An Idea

Just how do you empower other people?

- Allow staff to run meetings.
- Ask for input on issues and decisions.
- Say 'we' when discussing the work unit.
- Ask your staff what kinds of rewards they prefer.
- Include contributors' names on reports, memos, etc.
- Ask your staff to come up with ways they can have a greater impact on the organisation.
- Look for ways to collaborate, not direct.
- Collectively establish goals for teams and individuals.
- Delegate.

More frequently now, managers have to empower the workforce to reach new levels of performance. This means participative work practices and delegation of appropriate authority and responsibility. Empowerment, however, can't simply be conferred. It has to grow. To create it, conditions must be nurtured. Here's how you can foster conditions that will lead to empowerment in your organisation.....

1 - Tackle the barriers to empowerment.

One of the first steps in empowering staff is to deal with blockages to the empowering process and to overcome them. Examples of such barriers could include:

- Doubt that the system is sincerely committed to empowerment.
- Suspicion that 'empowerment' is simply another fad or buzzword. A feeling that 'what we do won't make any difference anyway'.
- Unhappiness with new roles that may be required. Reluctance to accept added responsibility without additional pay.
- Dislike of frequent meetings.
- Lack of time to take on the extra load.
- Unwillingness to give up authority and a preference for the comfort of routine.
- Concern that others may not carry their weight or share the increased workload.
- Fear of failure or, for some, success.

Many of these fears can be overcome if you strive to cultivate conditions that foster a climate of empowerment. But remember, as Ken Blanchard says: empowerment is not something you do to people, but *with* people.

2 – Develop a culture and climate of trust.

Trust is the mortar for the bricks of empowerment. You can't have empowerment without trust at every level of your organisation. Trust breeds a climate of mutual respect that is conducive to open, frank discussions. Set the example: build trust by keeping your word and discussing your concerns openly.

3 – Open up the channels of communication.

Communication is the key to empowerment. As an empowering leader you not only need to communicate well yourself, but you also need to facilitate communication among all staff. You must foster not only the movement of ideas and information to and from yourself, but also to, from, and between every other unit within the organisation. And by sharing feelings, goals, and information you ultimately build a sense of community within your group. So, practise empowering communication:

- Share your knowledge and skills.
- Offer and welcome constructive criticism or suggestions.
- Work with others in planning projects and initiatives.
- Respect the views of others by listening attentively.
- Form a network with others to hear and offer new ideas and information.
- Keep everyone in touch with news, ideas, suggestions, and information.
- Reduce the isolation of individuals and groups, a factor which can inhibit trust and empowerment.



How To Turn Your Organisation Into An Empowered Workplace

("The Management Bible")



Don't Forget

Empowerment means sharing

Empowerment doesn't mean giving up the power invested in your position – it means *sharing* it. Here's how:

- Delegate responsibility to the lowest level that can handle the task.
- Assist others in uncovering new opportunities for them to reveal their abilities.
- Encourage others to initiate projects or tasks that they think are important.
- Act as 'coach' as opposed to a 'player' when working with your staff members.
- Create a sense of ownership in those who do the work.
- Encourage your staff to take responsibility even when it has not been clearly assigned.
- Involve your people in the planning stages of all areas of activity within your organisation.
- Share your power in the interest of the overall organisational goal.
- Reward your staff for being innovative and for taking calculated risks.

Remember, however, that true empowerment always goes beyond 'participative management'. Your staff not only participate in decision making, but are also authorised to make decisions on their own without seeking approval from a higher level.

4 – Foster creativity and risk-taking.

Empowered people are willing to take personal and professional risks. By so doing, they gain new insights about themselves, meet challenges, stretch their limits, solve problems, and test their mettle. They grow in self-assurance and, in turn, are better able to empower others.

Listen to and support new ideas in your organisation. Creativity and innovation are likely to flourish when people feel they can experiment, receive encouragement, and be defended (not penalised) for making honest mistakes.

5 – Be aware of your changed role.

In sharing power, you may feel you are giving up long-held authority. But you are, in fact, increasing your power because power shared is power multiplied. In an empowered organisation, instead of 'controlling subordinates for the good of the organisation', you now embrace a consultative and consensus-building role. Individuals and teams within the organisation co-ordinate with and support each other, while you facilitate the process and intervene only when problems occur.

6 – Be supportive.

Show ongoing support for your staff:

- Focus on results and acknowledge personal improvement.
- Foster a climate in which people enjoy what they do and are recognised for their contributions to the organisation.
- Help staff succeed. Be tolerant, sympathetic, and encouraging.
- Ensure resources and readily available.
- Promote understanding and support of staff efforts by focusing public attention, through media, newsletters and ceremonies, on outstanding work.

7 – Encourage personal and professional development.

Knowledge and skills are power – so personal and professional development is important for empowerment. Consider such strategies as these:

- Consult with staff about the types of professional development and training they need and provide it, along with the necessary time.
- Give staff time to think, plan, share, and learn from each other.
- Involve staff in discussions about budgets, staffing, resourcing, and so on.
- Encourage them to share with others what they have learned from training courses and reading.
- Provide technology together with adequate training and technical support.

