

Employee Empowerment and Organizational Outcomes: An Overview

Abstract

Employee empowerment provides a sense of high self-esteem, high degree of involvement, and a greater sense of achievement. It has been observed that employee empowerment is the only influential factor for significant business growth. Hence success or failure of participative management will depend on clarity, caution and sensitivity with which they are dealt. Adequate preparations are required by way of developing mutual understanding on these issues before the schemes are launched. It is an important process in the organization to foster better decision-making, high job satisfaction, higher productivity, low absenteeism & labor turnover, better problem-solving through initiation of learning environment and opportunities for personal growth and development which in turn result into greater organizational effectiveness.

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Introduction

Organizations today need to change themselves by being more innovative, creative and by reorienting themselves toward people-based systems that focus on motivation, empowerment and freedom. Empowerment is a philosophy which believes in enriching people's jobs and giving power to exercise control over and take responsibility for outcomes of efforts (Venkat Ratnam, 2006). An empowering organization emphasizes on autonomy, proper information and individual participation for organizational excellence. In order to achieve empowerment, the executives must ensure that the employees are having the right mix of information, knowledge, power and rewards to work more enthusiastically (Singh, 2004). Empowerment thus helps to create autonomy for employees, allows sharing of responsibility and power at all levels, builds employee self-esteem and energizes the workforce for better performance. At the individual level the personal factors which are facilitating empowerment are: challenging jobs, enthusiasm, competence, maturity, self-esteem, etc. and most of these factors can be enhanced through training and development initiatives because these are playing catalytic role in promoting employee empowerment and involvement (Monappa & Engineer, 2003). Technology and competition are forcing both unions and managements to move away from more conflicting relations and forced them to move

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towards working together for a common purpose in a spirit of cooperation. Empowerment involves removing limits on, and recognizing the talents of employees in order to prevent employee dissatisfaction. This inspires change and increases the level of individual commitment which helps for achievement of organizational goal. The key inputs for positive results are training, education and counseling in order to create a new work ethos. One of the key responsibilities of the human resource department is to realize and give emphasis on the importance of empowering and involving people in the organization.

Literature Review

In the post LPG era there is need for employees' empowerment in organization so that employees will be in position to make quick decision and respond quickly to any changes in the environment. Organization that are committed to employee empowerment they are in a position to motivate and retain their employees, although it's a complex management tool which needs to be nurtured and handled with a lot of care. Employee empowerment is a motivational technique that is designed to improve performance if managed properly through increased levels of employee's participation and self determination. Employee empowerment literature identifies contextual factors and strategies that promote and support empowerment. Burke (1986) suggests that a way to empower employees is to express confidence in them together with establishing realistic high performance expectations for them. But creation of opportunities for employees to participate in decision making, and giving employees autonomy from bureaucratic constraints as empowerment strategies. Comparatively, Benis and Nanus (1985) suggest the setting of performance objectives for employees that are challenging and inspiring. Also, several researcher (Oldham,1976; Kanter,1979; Strauss,1977; Hackman,Oldham, Janson & Purdy, 1975) suggested performance-based reward systems and enriched jobs that provide autonomy and control, task identity, opportunities for career advancement and task meaningfulness as ways to empower employees. At the organizational level, however, McClelland (1975) and House (1988) suggest that empowerment could be achieved through employee selection and training programs designed to provide required technical skills together with a culture which encourages self-determination and collaboration instead of competition. Thomas and Velthouse (1990), have defined empowerment as an intrinsic task motivation that manifests itself in four cognitions (meaningfulness, competence, impact and choice or self-determination) reflecting an individual's orientation to his or her work roles. By intrinsic task motivation, they mean, a positively valued experiences that an individual derives directly from a task that produces motivation and satisfaction. *Meaningfulness* is the value of the task goal or purpose in relation to the individual's own ideals or standards, and *competence* is the degree to which a person can perform task activities skillfully. *Impact*, on the other hand, is the degree to which behavior is seen as making a difference in terms of accomplishing the purpose of the task, while *choice or self-determination* is the causal responsibility for a person's actions.

A practical and process oriented definition of empowerment was offered by Bowen and Lawler (1992). They have defined employee empowerment as sharing with front-line employees, information about an organization's performance, prevailing reward system, knowledge that enables employees to understand and contribute to organizational performance, and giving employees the power to make decisions that influence organizational outcomes. Mohammed and Pervaiz (1998) states that empowerment is a state of mind. An employee with an empowered state of mind experiences feelings of: control over the job to be performed; awareness of the context in which the work is performed; accountability for personal work output; shared responsibility for unit and organizational performance; and equity in the rewards based on individual and collective performance. The executives of an organization have played the significant role to provide guidance

on how empowerment and motivation strategies can be applied for employee motivation, commitment and loyalty are needed to accomplish the organizational outcomes. Employee empowerment is a tool to enhance teamwork in organization (Parker, 1994). The individual and members of the teams should be empowered, by so doing, the organization would be able to achieve its objectives and this will make the organization in question to be competing with others in terms of human resource utilization. Ketchum and Trist (1992) empowering teams should be a central concept for managers who wish to improve their organizational performance. Furthermore, Shipper and Manz (1992) argued that successful organization always strives to become one large empowered team. Employee empowerment offers advantages to the organization and to its employees. Most employees to a certain degree appreciate the greater responsibility and decision making as one way of empowering them. Employee empowerment increases organizational effectiveness and employee wellbeing. For instance empowering employees has shown to improve efficiency and reduces costs on the assembly line in a transmission plant (Suzik, 1998). Employee empowerment leads to job satisfaction, job involvement, loyalty, higher performance and faster service delivery to customers (Fulford & Enz, 1995). Blanchard, Carlos and Randolph (1996), for instance, argued that empowerment is not only having the freedom to act, but also having higher degree of responsibility and accountability. This indicates that management must empower their employees so that they can be motivated, committed, satisfied and assist the organization in achieving its objectives.

Singh (2003) has said mutual understanding comes through meaningful social dialogues and transparent communication system. Empowerment also makes a shift from the concept of employees are not managed by the traditional hierarchical control system, instead, out of their commitment towards shared organizational goals, as they enforce self-discipline to achieve them. This is possible when hierarchies are dissolved, internal political games are minimized, and organizations adopt performance based reward system and recognition of individual contributions. Again team organization and decentralization should be encouraged for effective empowerment and meaningful participation. For employees, empowerment provides a sense of high self-esteem, high degree of involvement, and a greater sense of achievement. It has been observed that employee empowerment is the only influential factor for the significant business growth and indicators of it are: achievement of business results through employee empowerment; development of unified work culture and better employee relations climate; and gratification of individual motivational needs (self actualization, job enrichment, etc.). Empowerment thus helps to create autonomy for employees, allows the sharing of responsibility and power at all levels, builds employee self-esteem and energizes for workplace commitment and better individual performance.

Objectives

The basic objective of this paper is therefore to fill the gap of what should be done to enhance the degree of employee empowerment in organizations and to maximize organizational outcomes. It specifically focuses on what is meant by employee empowerment, factors affecting, driving forces, reflections of empowerment and benefits arising out of it. In addition, an interacting and integrating model has been drawn based on different aspects of empowerment which highlights the practical approach on how to manage employee empowerment effectively in organizations towards successful organizational outcomes.

Overview of Employee Empowerment

Employee empowerment tended to revolve around issues of power and control, where empowerment was considered a management technique used to motivate employees by delegating or sharing of

power with them (Kanter, 1983). Ashcraft and Kedrowicz (2002, p. 89) have defined in their earlier study, empowerment as enabling relations of power through a perception and process that fosters both a sense of competence and control. It was reflected in sharing of power that those of staff members who were given power more likely to achieve the desired outcomes (Conger & Kanungo, 1988). It is an intrinsic motivation that involves positively valued experiences for which an employee derive directly from a task. The employees consider themselves as having freedom, autonomy and discretion, feel personally connected to the organization, and feel confident about their knowledge and skills of having an impact on the organization. The empowerment of employees can occur in ways that may not require giving the employees more power. The feeling of employee empowerment can be improved by listening and being more responsive to employee comments, providing necessary training, encouragement by management and fellow employees, providing adequate resources to do their jobs, allowing access to relevant information and matching employees to their tasks as per their level of competency and experience. Thus, upper management must be an active factor for building and implementing employee empowerment initiatives. According to the researchers, (Ripley & Ripley, 1992; Spatz, 2000), employee empowerment will bring the followings:

- Increase employees' trust and commitment
- Increase motivational level to reduce mistakes and individuals take more responsibility for their own actions
- Provide a forum though which employees can express their beliefs and innovative ideas about day-to-day activities
- Assist the continuous improvement of processes, products, and services
- Increase employee loyalty, while at the same time reducing turnover, absenteeism, and illness
- Increase productivity by increasing employee pride, self-respect, and self-worth
- Use peer pressure and self-managing team techniques for employee control and productivity
- Increase the bottom line by such methods as reducing waste and building quality, while meeting customer requirements
- Maintain and increase competitiveness and achieve long-term competitiveness with an ever increasing market share
- Increase trust and cooperation with management
- Increase communication among employees and divisions
- Enable employees to identify and solve problems so that they can improve their own performance
- Increase organizational commitment and organizational effectiveness; and
- Will build a healthy organizational climate and culture

Factors Affecting Empowerment

Employee participation is an opportunity to take part in the process; involvement is putting one's heart and soul into it; and empowerment is taking charge, exercise control and owning responsibility. In twenty first century the industrial organizations are more concerned about skilled and committed employees because they are real drivers of business success. The following factors need to be addressed for empowerment (Spreitzer, 1996) to be successful such as: role ambiguity, span of control, social support, access to information, access to resources, and participative environment.

- **Role Ambiguity:** It occurs when an individual is unsure about others' expectations of him or herself. Hence every organization has clearly defined tasks which are to be performed and to avoid confusion and frustration.

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- **Span of Control:** Individuals working under supervisors with narrow span of control are less intrinsically motivated than those working under wide span of control because their bosses specify much of their work behavior.
 - **Social Support:** Relevant support networks include an individual's boss, peers, subordinates and the members of his or her work group. Membership in support networks increases social exchange with key organizational constituencies and thus enhances a sense of personal power which can be manifested in enhanced feelings of both self-determination and impact.
 - **Access to information:** Basic information about workflow, productivity, external environment, and firm strategy which allows individuals to see the big picture and perceived empowerment.
 - **Access to Resources:** A lack of access to critical organizational resources (funds, raw materials, equipments, space, time and manpower) contributes to powerlessness and dependency.
 - **Participative Environment:** Participative organizational environment will enhance individual contribution and initiative rather than excessive command and control by the superiors.

An empowering organization emphasizes on autonomy, recognition, rewards, management support and encouragement, proper information and individual participation for organizational excellence. Empowerment thus helps to create autonomy for employees, allows sharing of responsibility and power at all levels, builds employee self-esteem and energizes the workforce for better performance.

Facets of Empowerment

Proactive management practices promote an organizational climate that is supportive, respectful and trusting of employees and where individual contributions are highly recognized are more likely to facilitate empowerment than only delegation of authority (Eisenberger et al., 1990). The most noticeable difference in present innovative organizations was that artisans and mass production workers were replaced by empowered interdependent work teams. The various facets of empowerment (Bushe, Havlovic & Coetzer, 1996) which are complimentary to workplace commitment are as follows:

- **Choicefulness:** Most of the employees appreciate the ability to exercise some degree of choice in their day to day work life.
- **Effort:** Self-efficacy and a sense of empowerment will arise when one believes that the more effort given to assigned work, the more successful he will be in achieving the outcomes.
- **Impact:** The facet of impact exists for employees when they can have impact on the organization that is when they are able to accomplish the tasks they have set out for them and disempowered when they cannot.
- **Self-system control:** The feeling like strong performance will translate into benefits or rewards, employees will feel empowered.
- **Meaningfulness:** People feel more empowered because the more meaningful the rewards they receive for their efforts.
- **Universal Justice:** When people are rewarded for their effort, regardless of outcomes, a form of empowerment called universal justice is present.

Reflections of Employee Empowerment

In the competitive environment, most of the organizations have successfully developed, executed, evaluated, refined and perused employee empowerment as a prime HR practice with business value (Kandula, 2004). The very success of empowerment practices have been reflected through the followings:

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- i) Business Mission: Customers satisfaction by taking appropriate measures through proper initiatives toward empowerment and involvement of employees.
 - ii) Divergent Human Resource: Strong work culture through empowerment and involvement to integrate workforce emotionally towards better performance.
 - iii) Employee Motivation: Mutual trust, confidence, and cooperation will foster participative culture in the organization and gratify employees' higher order need.
 - iv) Clarity and Understanding: Clearly defined objectives of various schemes of empowerment and involvement well acceptable by the parties.
 - v) Willingness by the Employers: Belief, attitude of employers towards participation.
 - vi) Willingness by the Employees: Encouragement of the employees through continuous dialogue towards empowerment and involvement.
 - vii) Skills for effective Participation: The following skills are required to be developed among both managers and employees before enforcement of various schemes: perception about the objectives; knowledge and expertise about the working of the function; interpersonal and communication skills; negotiating skill; accommodation of each other and degree of tolerance; and understanding the impact of environmental factors towards organization.
 - viii) Level of Participation: The degree of employee participation may vary from organization to organization depending on technology, products, processes and type of people. The various schemes of participation are works committee, joint management council, plant council, shop council, unit council, joint council, canteen committee, employees welfare association, safety committee, sports committee, cultural committee, quality circles, etc. which are creating participative environment.
 - ix) Role of Trade Unions: Realization of trade unions as strategic business partners for which they have extended their whole hearted support towards effective participation.

Most of the organizations in the present context have developed and implemented a number of key strategic drivers in a more planned and systematic way to empower the existing employees in order to increase the level of commitment for survival and sustainability of the organization. Several strategies which are exercised for this purpose are: delegation of authority; formation of bipartite committees; sense of trusteeship by the employees; employees' suggestion scheme; and interaction with top executives.

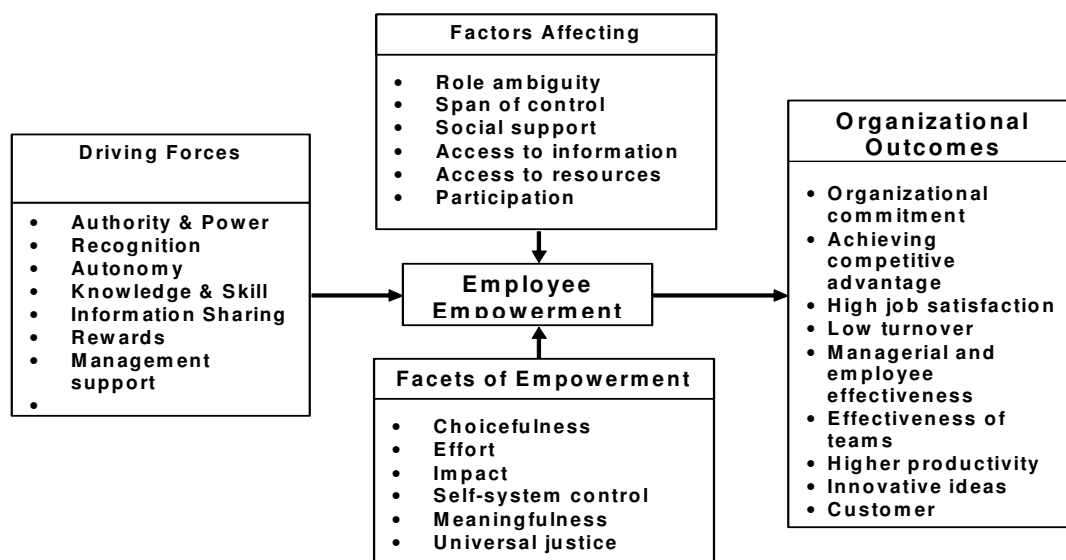
Empowerment and Organizational Outcomes

Employee empowerment is concerned with trust, motivation, decision-making, and breaking the inner boundaries between management and employees as 'them' verses us. This will lead to improving productivity, performance and job satisfaction (Nick, Sonny, Jack & Jean, 1995). In a free market economy where there is open competition, challenges to provide quality product and services, high degree of innovativeness and turbulent changes in the macro- environment, employee empowerment is needed. The employee empowerment literature highlights that empowered workforce will lead to achieving a competitive advantage (Conger & Kanungo, 1988; Forrester, 2000; Quinn & Spreitzer, 1997; Sundbo, 1999). Findings of earlier studies reflected that both employees and their organizations can benefit from empowerment. When people feel empowered at work, positive individual outcomes are likely to occur. The findings that empowered employees report high job satisfaction has been consistent across a large number of studies for both individuals (Aryee & Chen, 2006; Carless, 2004; Liden, Wayne & Sparrow, 2000; Seibert, Silver & Randolph, 2004) and teams (Kirkman and Rosen, 1999). Empowered employee also report higher levels of organizational commitment (Avolio, Zhu, Koh & Bhatia, 2004) and less propensity to turn over (Sparrowe, 1994). Mesch, Perry and Wise (1995), developed a model which describes a linear

relationship among these HRM design attributes and two other components, intermediate outputs and organizational and employee outcomes. The four dimensions of organizing principles are depicted as influencing both organizational processes and outcomes. Three intermediate outputs and two employee and organizational outcomes are identified. Among the intermediate outputs are personnel policy effectiveness, employee empowerment, and performance culture. Employee and organizational outcomes include job satisfaction and organizational effectiveness.

But empowerment is not only related to positive work attitudes, it has also been found to be related to positive work performance – more specifically, managerial effectiveness (Spreitzer, 1995), employee effectiveness (Spreitzer, Kizilos & Nason, 1997), employee productivity (Koberg, Boss, Senjem, Goodman, 1999), and newcomer role performance (Chen and Klimoski, 2003). Employees who feel more empowered are more motivated to perform effectively (Chen, Kirkman, Kanfer, Allen & Rosen, 2007). Empowerment also is associated with more innovation at work and with more organizational citizenship behaviors (OCBs) (Wat & Shaffer, 2004). Again, they found that different empowerment dimensions are related to different elements of OCBs: the meaning dimension relates strongly to courtesy; the competence dimension relates to both conscientiousness and sportsmanship; the self-determination dimension relates to altruism; and the impact dimension relates to conscientiousness. These results suggest that psychological empowerment likely enhances performance because people go above and beyond the call of duty and are more influential and innovative in their work. More empowered teams have better work-unit performance, productivity, team process improvement (Spreitzer, Noble, Mishra & Cooke, 1999), customer satisfaction (Mathieu, Gilson, and Ruddy, 2006) and team effectiveness (Kirkman, Tesluk, & Rosen, 2004). Empowered team members are also more proactive, satisfied with their jobs, and committed to the team and the organization. However, it makes employees feel that they are vital to the success of the organization. It is also a vote of confidence in the employee's ability to significantly contribute to the organization objectives in the long run and employees would be committed towards achieving organization objectives. Acceptance and ownership are basic human needs that are satisfied through the employee empowerment. Employee empowerment is critical for the success and survival of organization in the present scenario and significant benefits to the individuals and organizations as depicted in figure 1.

Figure 1 : Employee Empowerment



Conclusions

Employees' participation will foster the conditions where the individuals shall experience greater degree of freedom, responsibility and involvement (Pattanayak, 2005). Moreover participative management is one of the processes of empowerment to pass on adequate authority to the executives and employees along with proper information, knowledge, power and reward, to work independently. Employee empowerment is an important process in the organization to foster better decision-making, high job satisfaction, higher productivity, low turnover, better problem-solving through initiation of learning environment and opportunities for personal growth and development which in turn result into greater organizational effectiveness. In the highly competitive environment, employee empowerment is quite essential to be more competitive, productive and gaining competitive advantages for the all-round development of the organization. The empowerment practices in most organizations reflects- it is not practiced in true spirit and real sense as because of absence of positive organizational climate and culture that believes in trust, confidence, transparency and self development. Participative approach is a survival need of business and industries and they have to practice it on the basis of their own way of thinking, innovation and requirement. In order to achieve business objectives, the organizations have to create an open environment where both the parties must leave their traditional habits, narrow thinking and to develop broader outlook, prioritizing the interest of the industry for organizational excellence.

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