

# Empower the Future: a Culture of Empowerment – The Link to Organisational Effectiveness

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**Abstract - In a world where today's technology is yesterday's news, organisations will need to empower their employees to be nimble and to become organisational change enablers in order to ensure the organisation has the ability to manage and adapt to the huge competitive pressures. These pressures are further exacerbated by the rapid evolution of technological advances and the rapid deconstruction of global boundaries. Continued process improvement projects, business process re-engineering and escalating cost reduction pressures are now the normal cognitive activities which occupy senior managers in their day-to-day routines.**

*Keywords – Effectiveness, Empowerment, Psychological*

## I. INTRODUCTION

It is not just gloom and doom for organisations and their employees. With the rapid technological changes comes the availability of information, new innovative management methodologies and radical enhanced 'out of the box thinking' that will provide the foundation for analysing customer needs and assist the organisation to respond quickly to customer demands and future pressures. This article aims to review how one potential solution for these growing pressures; Employee Empowerment Practices and Principles, could provide the answers on how to manage these challenges. This article will explore the notion of empowerment; the way that management can regulate employee empowerment practices, its impact on workplace relationships and review different practical implementation models that could be utilised within an organisation. Any organisation's competitive advantage will be a temporary one; determined only by its flexibility and ability to utilise innovative ideas on how to compete more effectively. Increased competitiveness is pushing organisations to ensure that they fully and optimally utilise all their resources, particularly their human resources. Human resources hold the key to speed, service quality and productivity which ultimately provide the organisation with its competitive advantage [12]. Empowerment, a buzz word of the 90's, holds the answer [5]. A culture of empowerment through which leaders can utilise their employee skills, knowledge, experience and innovative ideas can provide a future competitive advantage. This same culture of empowerment which is built on the fundamentals of organisational effectiveness has the potential to ensure an organisation's future successes. Why then have empowerment practices not been implemented and why has it merely remained a buzz word

of the 90's? [5]. The answer to Cook and Macaulay's [5] statement could potentially be determined by the view that empowerment is complicated and that it is constructed from different elements within the organisation. Leadership styles, implementation methodologies and employee acceptance or rejection of these empowerment elements could lead directly to a successful or unsuccessful adoption of empowerment practices. The first fundamental step in the process of solving the conundrum that surrounds empowerment would be to define and clarify what it actually is.

## II. EMPOWERMENT

Empowerment, as defined by Business Dictionary [3], is a management practice through which management shares information, rewards employees and grants power to employees so that they can make decisions, solve problems and improve organisational service, quality and ultimately increase the overall business performance. This practice is based on a concept of improving employees' skills, providing them with the required authority and opportunities to become responsible and accountable for the outcomes of their own actions [3]. These practices will entail process re-engineering, technology driven job related tool implementations, employee competencies, self-determination, job significance, job involvement and operational governance guides to create the framework in which employees can function with freedom and have the ability to act and respond to customer needs [11]. Empowerment essentially means having a sense of personal power and freedom to make certain business decisions and that management supports and trusts the employees' decision-making abilities. Empowerment can be defined as a psychological empowerment that focuses on the personal emotional feelings which employees have experienced. Empowerment could also be a physical empowerment whereby employees feel empowered through the implementation of business processes and tools which improve work stream productivity. Empowerment practices demand that managers trust their employees and encourages that managers allow their employees to be more participatory and thus take ownership of their tasks [17]. Employees should be the M.D. of their own jobs; fully responsible and accountable for the efficiency and completion of their daily tasks [14]. Lashley [11] clearly defines employee empowerment as a management technique which produces a win-win situation for all. It is the empowerment of the individuals

and teams that will create the sense of ownership and ensure total commitment of the individuals towards obtaining the organisational goals and objectives which will ultimately impact on the organisational effectiveness. To ensure that individuals succeed, they would need full autonomy with regard to decision making concerning job design elements, problem solution implementations, budget management, and future recruitments [16]. This autonomy or sense of ownership must be granted by management, the organisational leaders, and it will be these leaders who must create the climate or culture which will support employee empowerment.

### III. LEADERSHIP STYLES AND EMPOWERMENT

The managers will be the key to the successful adoption of empowerment practices and it will be the managers who are challenged to change their old and outdated practices of control and discipline, a management style that they have relied upon to ensure their success. Jogulu and Wood [9] stated that there are two basic types of leadership, transactional or transformational leadership styles. The belief is that if the manager utilises a transactional style, they would prefer their employees to remain un-empowered, rewarding or disciplining them only on a work performance measurement. These managers perceive that success is only achievable through their own power to reinforce work standards and to ensure that employee focus remains within this predefined framework [9].

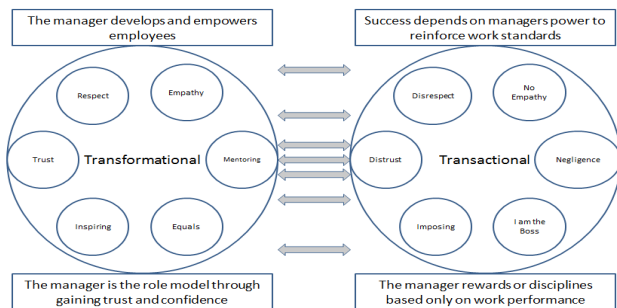


Fig 1. Leadership Styles (Adapted from Jogulu and Wood [9])

The constructs which make up the two styles are, Figure 1, visibly represented as a huge paradigm shift for managers to be able to create the empowerment within their employees. The transformational managers set themselves as role models by gaining their employee's trust and confidence as being good leaders. Transformational leaders believe in developing and growing their employees, empowering them to excel beyond their own abilities. The team dynamics visible, Figure 2, in an organisation which employs transformational leadership styles indicates the implementation of a matrix structure versus the more traditional hierarchical structure which focuses on the transactional style of management.

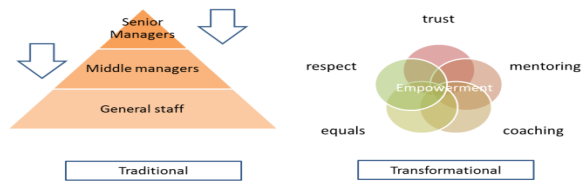


Fig 2. Traditional versus Transformational (author derived)

Empowerment practises demand that managers trust their employees and encourages that managers allow their employees to participate more and take ownership of their tasks [17]. Employees should be the Managing Director (M.D.) of their jobs and should thus be fully responsible and accountable for the efficiency with which they complete their daily tasks [14]. Traditional or transactional managers, manage by enforcing discipline and setting clear boundaries to ensure strict control over their employees. Future leaders must evolve into transformational managers where trust and freedom to act defines the manner of work [9]. Managers have the authority to change processes and to ensure process improvements but they are blind to the real issues and barriers which exist. Empowerment practises challenge the ingrained manager's beliefs and attitudes with regards to control and task execution. Managers must entrust the future organisational effectiveness and successes into the control of their employees. Organisational effectiveness can thus be increased by means of implementing employee empowerment practices which will also render an improvement in the quality of the work/life balance for employees [12].

### IV. PSYCHOLOGICAL EMPOWERMENT

Psychological empowerment leads to more committed and motivated employees through the creation of a sense of reason or meaning or purpose for why they do what they do. Spreitzer [15] defines four factors, Figure 3, which influences psychological empowerment in the individual and states that for an organisation to achieve psychological empowerment the organisation must address these factors.

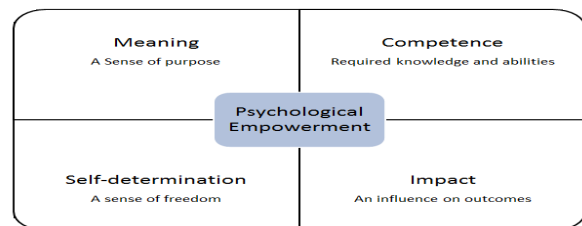


Fig 3. our dimensions of psychological empowerment (Adapted from Spreitzer; [15])

The model defines psychological empowerment as a construct which is made up of four cognitions: meaning, competence, self-determination and impact. These four dimensions combine additively to create an overall construct of psychological empowerment. Spreitzer [15] indicated that if a single dimension is lacking it would deflate the overall effect of the empowerment

experienced. The “meaning” dimension reflects a sense of purpose and provides the employees with the feeling of being connected to their jobs. The “competence” dimension indicates that individuals feel and believe that they have the required knowledge and abilities to complete their jobs successfully. The third dimension, “self-determination”, reflects a sense of freedom; a freedom which the individual has in order to complete their jobs in the manner which they choose. The last dimension, “impact” describes a belief that the employee has an influence on the outcomes and results of the organisation. If the organisation wants to improve its chances of success in the implementation of empowerment practices, which will render optimal business results, they must ensure that the practices are well supported. In order to ensure that employees are able to act empowered, they will need job performance related information, be rewarded accordingly as well as have the skills and knowledge to make decisions [7]. Kirkman and Rosen [10] state that an organisation could achieve individual psychological empowerment through the implementation of team psychological empowerment dimensions. Figure 4 illustrates these team empowerment dimensions.

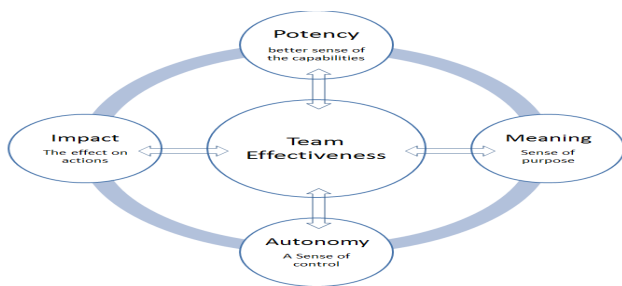


Fig 4. Four Dimensions of Team Empowerment (Adapted from Kirkman and Rosen [10])

An organisation could thus achieve individual empowerment through the implementation of these team effectiveness dimensions [10]. The four dimensions will provide the building blocks to render the individual with the feeling of psychological empowerment. The work team is defined as a group of individuals working towards a common goal and the individuals being mutually accountable for the outcomes [10]. The team members share information, support each other’s weaknesses, share knowledge and ultimately enable each member to achieve their full potential. The team members will then achieve the first dimension; a sense of potency or personal confidence. The second dimension, a sense of meaning, will be evident in the team’s strong collective commitment and focus to achieve their common goals. The team will now share the same understanding of their collective impact on the organisation and that the success of the team determines the successes of the organisation. Kirkman and Rosen [10] highlight that it is the level of autonomy that ultimately shapes the team’s sense of psychological empowerment. The team must have the

ability and freedom to act and control their activities. Psychological empowerment is the next step in the evolution of an organisational culture of empowerment. The organisation might implement informal and formal empowerment practices but if the individual does not have the sense of personal empowerment, these practices will fail.

### V. IMPLEMENTING EMPOWERMENT PRACTICES

There is no magic formula that will ensure empowerment. Hand [8] highlights some fundamental components which must be reviewed to assist the organisation with the successful implementation of empowerment practices. Rewards systems are critical to ensure that employees will be challenged to become empowered. The organisation can change the employee’s behaviour through recognising and rewarding employees if they behave empowered. The next component critical for empowerment is the organisational managers and how they motivate and support the empowerment practices. Employees cannot function in an empowered manner if the managers do not allow them the autonomy to do so. These managers are the future transformational managers and it will be they that will define the range of freedom, trust and individual levels of autonomy and ultimately create empowerment [9].

Blanchard, Carlos and Rando [1] denoted 3 keys for empowerment to ensure that the employees succeed and achieve the goals set for them. These keys are also critical to ensure that empowerment practices are successfully implemented within the organisation. Sharing of information, autonomy of the employees and organisational structures are the implementation keys for empowerment practices and without these elements employees will not be able to be empowered. The process of defining the employee’s competencies and the skills needed to be empowered must be based on their daily tasks and decision-making responsibilities. An organisation must focus on organisational development elements such as effective change management processes in order to succeed in implementing empowerment practices and initiatives. The organisation must ensure that their strategic business goals and objectives are aligned to the empowerment practices and programmes selected by them. The final element to ensure the successful implementation of these practices is to ensure that the correct framework is selected; a framework based on international best practices and relevant to the industry.

Organisations must also ensure effective levels of communication [8]. This will lead to openness, honesty and ultimately trust; the cornerstone of empowerment. Trust will ensure that the organisation removes the old forms of control and creates the desired environment of empowerment. Seibert et al. [13] provides a process (figure 5) through which an organisation could achieve empowerment based on the work of Blanchard [1]. The

framework consists of three multidimensional elements namely environment, cognitive state and behavior.

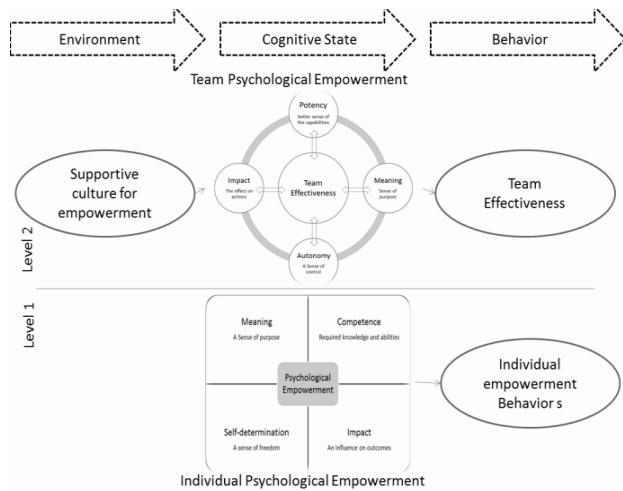


Fig 5. Multidimensional Framework (adapted from Siebert et al. [13], Kirkman and Rosen [10], Spreitzer [15])

The complexities and multidimensional elements of empowerment are now simplified in the conceptual model [13]. The model incorporates the creation of a culture which will support empowerment then focuses on the achievement of psychological empowerment of the employees, teams and their managers which will ultimately create the behaviours that the organisation wants. “Empowerment works best when there is an emphasis on organisational learning, incorporating the sharing of information and self-control according to performance feedback” [4]. Coleman (1996) [4] also provides a framework through which an organisation could achieve the implementation of empowerment practices. The Framework critically starts by identifying the driving forces which have an impact on the organisation and its competitive advantage. The framework then indicates potential empowerment design concepts including organisational design, job design theories, and psychological empowerment practices. The framework completes the cycle by highlighting the importance of information, trust and collaboration with regards to the employees.

Empowerment according to Duvall [7] must thus have the following components: the freedom to act, where the managers allow the employee to make their own decisions; then a level of commitment, where managers believe that the employees will be committed to their tasks and drive the successful execution of said tasks and lastly the sense of collaboration, whereby managers and employees must be simultaneously involved in ensuring the success of the processes. It will be through these components that the managers could create a supportive environment and ensure the successful implementation of empowerment.

## VI. A SUPPORTIVE EMPOWERMENT CULTURE

The first fundamental element is thus the creation of an environment or culture which will allow for the implementation of the empowerment practices. Brown and Harvey [2] state that the organisation must define jobs which will support the new culture of empowerment and that the organisation must analyse the following 5 core job characteristics to achieve this new environment.

- Task identification – the task must be clearly defined: where does the task begin and where does it end? The employee must know the range and responsibilities relevant to the task.
- Task significance – what is the impact of the task on the lives of other employees and which other processes are affected by these task activities?
- Skill variety – define the types of skills and competencies required to complete the task.
- Autonomy – the power to manage and action the task without referring decisions back to the manager.
- Feedback – managers must provide feedback on a regular basis to guide employees with regards to what they are doing well and what would require improvements. The information must be relevant and focused on the measurements related to the tasks [2].

Once the roles and jobs have been defined, the organisation must decide on the level of employee empowerment which should be implemented in order to support empowerment practises. Empowerment can be implemented on a suggestive, job involvement and ownership level [2]. Empowerment is not a quick fix for the organisation; it takes time, high levels of management commitment and it must be monitored. Empowerment does not mean that employees do whatever they feel like; it will need rules and governance. Brown and Harvey [2] recommended that organisations establish employee empowerment and highlighted that a shared vision is critical to ensure the successful implementation of these empowerment practices. Brown and Harvey [2] also focused on the human psychological elements such as; pride, self-respect, trust, responsibility and competencies. Dodge [6] indicates that the organisations should implement a culture of continuous learning and this will form the fundamental component of the establishment of an employee empowered organisation. Dodge [6] also perceives that employee learning should undergo a metamorphosis. Organisations should see employee learning and education as an investment and not as an expense thus allowing the organisation the opportunity to utilise the full potential power that individuals could provide. The employees must also receive the correct training and knowledge to be empowered. They must be given the necessary skills and competencies to be able to make the correct decisions and choices in their daily tasks. The success of an empowerment program will depend on how effectively the needs of employees are integrated into the organisational vision and goals Brown

and Harvey [2] defined genuine empowerment as the result in concern, commitment, interest and responsibility that the employees reflect in their day-to-day tasks. An organisation can create this level of integration through the alignment of their empowerment practices to the organisational vision and strategic goals. If the organisation can achieve this supportive culture for empowerment through the re-engineering of the job characteristics, the implementation of continuous learning and effective training interventions, the final step would be for the organisation to ensure alignment of these elements to their overall future vision and goals of the organisation.

## VII. CONCLUSION

The multi-faceted dimensions of empowerment are clear. The organisation must be willing to empower people and the employees must be willing to be empowered. It is this mixture of human and business practices which provides the potential answer to the mystery around why empowerment practices are not implemented in more organisations. An organisation has clear goals and objectives and if the human resource elements are not supportive of these goals, failure is imminent. Employees must obtain a sense of psychological empowerment through the trust and freedom given to them by their managers. The organisation must be the first to respond through its willingness to implement these practices. An environment which supports empowerment practices must be created; future managers must become transformational leaders and drive this change throughout the organisation. Once the culture is created, the cognitive state must be established. Employees must feel psychologically empowered. They must have the tools, managerial support and personal skills needed to make themselves feel empowered. Team effectiveness through a sense of team autonomy and a personal sense of self-determination must be established within the organisation. Empowerment practices do not simply mean that management can sit back and let the employee run the organisation. Clearly defined measurements and monitoring techniques are critical for success. Empowerment practices drive continuous process improvement initiatives and will provide the organisation with innovative ideas to ensure future success. Once the organisation has achieved the desired state of empowerment they need to institutionalise these practises through positive reinforcement. The organisation must implement new reward and recognition systems to create a supportive framework for empowerment. Organisations must ensure they drive the correct employee behaviours and that this creates the sense of "I am empowered" and not the sense of "I am in power". In conclusion, empowerment can be defined as a dynamic relationship between the organisation, its managers, its employees, its tools, its business processes and the common shared vision of the future. Empowerment is a relationship built through trust between all these elements within the

organisation and if one element is missing, empowerment will fail.

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