

Assessment of Employee's Empowerment

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Abstract

This research aims to discuss one of the modern concepts in management field in general especially human resource management part, it is employee empowerment concept. It has been shown that empowering employees is very important and benefit for organizations. Also the main issue discussed is the necessary conditions to apply empowerment in effective manner. They are culture of empowerment, information sharing, training, reward system and organizational trust.

Key words: employee empowerment, A culture of empowerment, information sharing and trust.

Introduction

In the world of business, the need for change becomes more important and necessary especially in the beginning of 21st century. This world is characterized by globalization and openness and fast development in many areas which they lead organizations to adapt themselves with these realities.

The best managed organizations that success to survive in this world have been concerned more about human resources management as they concern other resources. The reason is that human resources in any organization may lead to success or may lead to failure, so it is very important for this organization to seek for how to manage their staff effectively.

Many issues associated with human resource management such as the right selection of employees, training and developing programs, using web site recruiting and reward system used to motivate employees, and so on. One of these issues that are occurred recently in management field is employee empowerment. Therefore more debate still between authors about its definition and its implementation in organizations, but all research encompass that empowerment is concerned about redistributing authority within organizations, and providing their staff with more discretion and to be free in doing their work, also allowing them to contribute in decision making process. Also, many

researchers agreed about the benefit of employee empowerment which helps organizations to improve their performance and provide them more opportunities to develop themselves.

The importance of research

Empowerment is a modern managerial concept that occurred in 90th, so many researchers said that many organizations need to learn more about empowerment and understand its benefits. Also, employee empowerment is important driver of organizational effectiveness and performance.

Empowerment is related to the main issues that concern organizational success, like TQM, reengineering, team work and learning organization. Also this research can be benefit to the company where researcher wants to discuss employee empowerment in it.

Objective of research

The research aims to provide a theoretical background about employee empowerment, and explain it in the light of these theories.

Also, explaining different conditions and ingredients which are necessary to success in applying empowerment in such organizations.

Research question

Many researchers discuss empowerment concept from various viewpoints such as empowerment indicators, its measurements, its ingredients and conditions. This research is focused much on one of viewpoint from those. The problem addressed in this research is *assessing employee empowerment in term of its conditions and ingredients that support empowerment implementation in such organization*. The researcher tries to discuss four conditions which she thinks they are the most important for empowerment.

Hypotheses:

H1: organizational culture is important ingredient to implement empowerment in organizations.

H2: information sharing and communication is required ingredient in implementing empowerment concept in organizations.

H3: training and reward system is important support to implement empowerment in organizations.

H4: trust play important role in applying empowerment in organizations.

Methodology

Because the research aims to define the empowerment of employees and tries to know what are the main concepts contribute in achieving it, researcher uses deductive methodology based on important theory and studies that concerning this topic. Also the researcher tries to describe many things that may associate with empowerment.

The discussion will be as following:

- Introduction.
- Theoretical Framework of empowerment.
- Conclusion.

Theoretical Framework

Empowerment as we know in recent literature is result of many theories and studies that concerned human in business. Many theories and studies criticized Tylorism and bureaucracy which they deal with workers as machine. Some of these theories is the work of Elton Mayo and Human Relations school, theory of needs by Maslow and Theory X and Theory Z by McGregor. (Melhem, 2006).

Since our research is about empowerment, we concentrate on the main theories that treat this concept, they include:

1- Psychological empowerment Theory:

This theory was presented by Thomas and Velthouse (1990). They defined psychological empowerment as a motivational construct, manifested in four cognitions specific to one's task or work role. These dimensions are: (1) Meaning or the value of the work goal or purpose judged in relation to one's own deals and standards. (2) Competence, or one's work efficacy or personal mastery. (3) Self-determination, or an individual's sense of choice or autonomy in initiation and regulation of actions or work behaviors and processes; and (4) Impact, which refers to individual's perceived degree of influence over outcome in one's work environment. (Spreitzer, 1995).

It is important to say; the work of Thomas and Velthouse (1990) was pioneered and many researchers use it as theoretical base to their studies, such Spreitzer (1995) as we will see later.

2- Kanter's Theory of empowerment:

Rosabeth Moss Kanter argues that people react rationally to the situations in which they find themselves. When situations are structured in such a way that employees feel empowered, the organization is likely to benefit both in terms of the attitudes of employees and the organization's effectiveness. The organizational structures that Kanter believes particularly important to the growth of empowerment are: having access to information, receiving support, having access to resources necessary to do the job and having the opportunity to learn and grow.

Access to these empowering structures is facilitated by formal job characteristics. That is, jobs that are visible and central to the organization's goals and that allow the employee flexibility enhance empowerment.

According to Kanter, the mandate of management is to create conditions for work effectiveness by ensuring employees have access to the information, support, and resources necessary to accomplish work and are provided ongoing opportunities for employee development. Having access to these structures results increase levels of organizational commitment, feelings of autonomy, and self-efficacy. Consequently, employees are more productive and effective in meeting organizational goals. (Laschinger and his colleagues, 2001)

Defining employee empowerment

The common dictionary definition of empowerment "to give officially authority to; delegation legal power to; commission, authorize" (Grove, 1970), it is the most understood by most people. But this definition is narrow to explain empowerment as integrative process, because it means a great deal more than delegation. It is for this reason that many authors provide their own definitions.

Block (1987) describes empowerment as "a state of mind as well as a result of position, policies and practices. To feel empowered means several things; we feel our survival is in own hands... we have an underlying purpose... we commit ourselves to achieving that purpose, now" (John Fox 1998).

Bowen and Lawer (1992) indicate "we define empowerment as sharing with front line employees four organizational ingredients: (1) Information about the organization's performance, (2)

Knowledge that enables employees to understand and contribute to organizational performance. (3) Rewards based on the organization's performance and (4) Power to make decisions that influence organizational direction and performance. The authors go to note that "if any of the four elements is zero, nothing happens to redistribute that ingredient, and empowerment will be zero" Bowen and Lawer (1995). (John Fox 1998)

Another author uses this type of combination of concepts to define empowerment, Congo and Kanungo (1988) found that empowerment is... a process of enhancing feeling of self efficacy among organizational members through the identification of conditions that foster powerlessness and through their removal by both formal organizational practices and informal techniques of providing efficacy information. (Spreitzer 1995).

The most comprehensive definition of empowerment in the literature can be found in Thomas and Velthouse's 1990 article entitled "Cognitive elements of empowerment: An 'interpretive' model of intrinsic task motivation". The definition they provide is: *To empower means to give power to. Power, however, has several meanings...authority, so that empowerment can mean authorization. . . .Capacity. . . .However, power also means energy. Thus to empower also can mean to energize. This latter meaning best captures the present motivational usage of the term.* (Spreitzer 1995).

Finally we can say that the word empowerment has become popular because it provides a label for a nontraditional paradigm of motivation. . . .Change has forced a search for alternative forms of management that encourage commitment, risk-taking, and innovation. . . .The newer paradigm involves relaxed (or broad) controls and an emphasis on internalized commitment to the task itself. . . .We use the word empowerment to refer to the motivational content of this newer paradigm of management. Also, we can see all definition of empowerment imply providing employees more power and discretion in their work.

The Benefits of employee empowerment

Implementation of empowerment seems to be the biggest challenge organization face, when an organization implements it effectively, it can benefit its business. Empowerment has a positive impact on both the organizations and their employees. These benefits are:

- Job satisfaction and quality work life, when employees feel discretion and have autonomy and contribution in improving organizational performance, they will be satisfied and do their jobs effectively.

- Empowerment achieves employees' commitment and increases their loyalty to their organizations.
- Powerful benefit of empowerment is increasing trust in the organization, when employees trust that the company is not out to suck their blood and is providing a competitive product or service, they will respond positively. (Laschinger 2001).
- Also empowerment leads employees to become increasingly knowledgeable about how their work can best be done. This happens because employees have autonomy to make ongoing improvements and adjustments in work process. (Ahearn and their colleagues, 2006).
- Another benefit is that the individual through empowerment finds satisfaction in initiating and achieving change in an organization. Such empowerment makes individuals believe themselves to be force for the changes and behave accordingly to achieve them.

Conditions to apply employee empowerment

As we see in many definitions of empowerment, many literature reviews emphasis on the existence of organizational components to empowerment process, or conditions required to apply it I an organization. Our research focuses on: A culture of empowerment, information sharing, human resource practices, and organizational trust. (John Fox 1998).

The culture of empowerment: an organizational culture is a complex thing, not easily described. Edgar Schein defines organizational culture as, a pattern of basic assumptions—invented, discovered, or developed by a given group as it learns to cope with its problems of external adaptation and internal integration—that has worked well enough to be considered valid and, therefore, to be taught to new members as the correct way to perceive, think, and feel in relation to those problems. Organization's culture for empowerment must be developed; because the culture is a foundation that empowerment is built on. "Empowerment must be defined in terms of fundamental beliefs and personal orientations" (Spreitzer, 1997), which is an apt description of organizational culture.

In study of Grandz (1990), which he notes " a set of shared values is needed... beliefs about the way things should be done, the standards of behaviors that are appropriate, the ethics of organizational actions...such values compel and propel behavior", these are cultural artifacts, which will lead to empowerment. Managers who understand how empowerment integrated with organizational culture are motivated to lead employees, and help them internalize the values and traditions of empowerment. (John Fox 1998).

So, it should be clear that organizational culture is important to employee empowerment. If an organization' culture does not already support empowerment, it must be change and developed to achieve successful implementation of empowerment.

Information sharing: The empowerment process necessitates the sharing of information and knowledge necessary to enable employees to contribute in organizational performance. Some authors suggest that employees must be in possession of the requisite information upon which they can base their decisions. Randolph (1996) and others note that the first key in applying empowerment is to share information with everyone... people without information cannot act responsibly. Bowen and Lawer (1995) said "information shared is zero, nothing happens to redistribute... and empowerment will be zero.

Another author notes "Communication and information are the life blood of empowerment" people who have information about current performance levels will set challenging goals... and when they achieve those goals they will rest the goals at higher level" information sharing should be about goals and effective communication about the organization's plans, successes and failures. Also information about mission is an important antecedent of empowerment because it helps to create a sense of meaning and purpose and it enhances individual's ability to make and influence decisions that are appropriately aligned with the organization's goals and mission. Also managers must help employees understand their work is directly aligned with strategic goals. They can use formal and informal ways to communicate their staff. (John Fox 1998) Information sharing has also been shown to be significantly correlated with organizational trust and organizational commitment, because honest and frequent communication generates this perception.

Human resource practices: This includes:

Training: Providing the skills and abilities that individuals need to feel competent is critical for enhancing empowerment. A company's commitment to adequately train employees in skills necessary for effective decision making and other important job behaviors is likely to have a positive effect on an employees' perceived support to exercise authority effectively. Better trained employees are more likely to understand the specific demands of the job and in turn, are more inclined to perceive that they have the support needed to effectively exercise their power and authority (Robbins 2002). Perceived incompetence, as a result of the transfer of decision-making authority, may occur if the organization does not provide training adequately to the new job requirements. Training can prevent this sense of incompetence if it ensures that the employee will perceive him or herself as having the support required by the job.

Gandz,(1990) indicates that among the "Characteristics of an empowered organization" are, "Empowering leadership/training. . . .Job and technical skills/training. . . . Interpersonal and problem-solving skills/training, . . .Front-line customer service skills/training. . . .Empowering support groups/training". Training may be perceived as an investment by the company in the employee, and in turn can contribute to an employee's commitment to the organization. (John Fox 1998)

Reward systems: The types of reward systems that are necessary to gain meaningful commitment have been suggested to be an important issue that warrants considerable future attention (Robbins 2002). Many reward systems are based on beliefs that employees have individual worth, a capacity for growth, and learning, and the ability to contribute significantly to company success. If, in fact, employees perceive these systems as implying such, these systems should positively influence commitment to the organization. Rewards and discipline are also likely to play a role in influencing psychological empowerment by providing feedback about the range of behaviors that are accepted on the job. If, in fact, rewards are provided for autonomous behaviors, employees are more likely to trust management and believe that they have a choice in the behaviors they employ on the job.

Organizational trust: Trust in management has become an increasingly important element in determining organizational climate, employee performance, and commitment to the organization. (Robbins 2002). Trust is defined as the extent to which one is willing to ascribe good intentions to and have confidence in the words and actions of other people. Trust has a significant impact on important organizational factors such as group cohesion, perceived fairness of decisions/organizational citizenship behavior, job satisfaction, and organizational effectiveness. Mistrust results when information is withheld, when resources are allocated inconsistently, and when employees have no support from management (John Fox 1998).

According to Kanter, trust evolves from a mutual understanding based on shared values and is essential for employee loyalty and commitment. Organizational trust is defined by Gilbert and Tang' as the belief that an employer will be straightforward and follow through on commitments. Trust refers to employee faith in organizational leaders and the belief that ultimately organizational actions will prove beneficial for employees. (Lascinger2001). The open communication, sharing of critical information, sharing of perceptions and feelings, and greater worker involvement in decisions facilitate trust in organizations. Butler"* identified 11 conditions of trust: discreteness, availability, competence, consistency, fairness, integrity, loyalty, openness, overall trust, promise fulfillment, and receptivity.

Challenges face employee empowerment

- Management' fear of letting employees make decisions which can impact the profitability of the organization.

- People don't want to share power with those they look down on, that managers fear losing their own place and special privilege in the system. (Nielson 2003)

Also empowerment may lead to overconfidence and, in turn, misjudgments on a part of subordinates. (John Fox 1998)

- Empowerment breaks down barriers to communication between individual workers and organization's management, they reducing the role of union. This lead to union objection.

- Employees, too, sometimes object to empowerment effects. The reason may be employees don't want any responsibility than they already have. This is weak to happen.

Conclusion

As it is appeared in this research either in theoretical framework that the assessment of employee empowerment can be shown in the term of its conditions which they are culture of empowerment, information sharing and human resource practices and organizational trust. So it is important to conclude that the companies must make efforts to enhance the level of empowerment for their employees through building and improving the level of conditions achievement within it. Also we can conclude some results such:

- *Companies should provide more authority and participation, which are done in unfairly manner, they will have strong power to compete.*
 - *The culture of company included some positive indicators that permit management to develop them and to build culture of empowerment*
 - *In general, if management has good communication with their staff; which share some types of information, it is more likely to empower them.*
- Training program is important to develop the abilities of employees to participate in decision making process. And so on when we talk about reward system.*

Finally we say that the topic of empowerment is broad and needs more research and concern. It was mentioned in theoretical part of this research that there are many approach to explain employee empowering and in different ways

Other researchers can use Spreitzer (1990) study, which it was “Psychological Empowerment, which he based on four dimensions, (Meaning, Competence, Self-determination and Impact) to measure employee empowerment. It can be use to discuss the reality of this concept in our Arabic organizations.

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