

Review Article

EMPLOYEE EMPOWERMENT THROUGH TRAINING: A LITERATURE REVIEW

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Abstract

This paper examines the topic of employee empowerment and seeks to provide a tool for its implementation which addresses needs identified in the literature but insufficiently addressed previously. Empowerment is defined as a process whereby: a culture of empowerment is developed, information is shared, competency is developed, and resources and support are provided. Each of the components of empowerment—culture, information sharing, competency development, resource provision, and support—is examined in detail as addressed in the literature. The benefits of employee empowerment are noted, and objections to it are addressed. Theoretical foundations of employee empowerment are examined in an extensive literature review. A model for understanding and implementing employee empowerment is provided based upon the precepts of training. The training model suggests that employees be viewed first as apprentices while their skills and knowledge within a given task set are developing, then as journeypersons through continued development, and finally as masters of their craft.

INTRODUCTION

Employee empowerment is one of those terms that everyone thinks they understand, but few really do. Ask a dozen different people and you'll get a dozen different answers to the question, "What is employee empowerment?" In fact, research a dozen organizational theorists and you'll get as many answers to the same question. This paper seeks to answer that question in a way that it can be understood by a greater number of people. Some writers indicate that empowerment consists of sharing power and authority. Others say that empowerment occurs when the organization's processes are set-up to allow for it. If you keep in mind the secondary dictionary definition of "to give faculties or abilities to: enable" (Grove, 1971, p.744), with all that this word implies, then you will be on the right track for the purposes of this paper.

This paper also seeks to answer the question above in such a way that people who work within organizations can apply the information to enhance employee empowerment. "Why would we want to enhance employee empowerment?" you may be asking. That detailed answer will be provided in the literature review section under the heading "benefits of employee empowerment". However, it has been shown that employee empowerment results in increased employee satisfaction, increased productivity, and increased customer satisfaction. "Aren't there some strong objections to the

implementation of an empowerment program which must be overcome if we are to receive these benefits?" The short answer is yes. Empowerment, if it is to be implemented effectively, calls for a culture change for the typical organization. Leaders must learn to be visionaries who can provide an idea to which employees will want to dedicate themselves. Supervisors must change their ways of supervising and learn to be coaches and mentors. All members of the organization must dedicate themselves to sharing information and to training. Each of these issues will be addressed in turn. Since this is an academic paper, I would be remiss if I did not include a section on the theoretical foundations upon which the concepts of employee empowerment are built. While there are few theorists who have delved very deeply into what makes up empowerment, what they have mined is rich. There are more researchers who have attempted to provide a framework for what they have observed; their ideas which have merit will be addressed. Implementation of empowerment programs seems to be the biggest challenge organizations face. The popular press often writes about "failed" empowerment efforts. What has become evident to me is that there are some speed bumps on the road to empowerment; often these so called failures are only rough patches which will be overcome. However, it is also evident that the implementation often takes years, especially if