

Employee Empowerment

Using the Brain Power of all Employees

The following Fact Sheets are available on line at www.aofp.ca:

1. Becoming an Employer of Choice
2. Employee Turnover
3. Using the Turnover Calculator
4. Fostering Employee Commitment
5. Keeping your Good Employees
6. Employee Engagement
7. Essential Skills
8. Workforce Diversity
9. Managing a Family Business
10. Rewards
11. Recruiting Foreign Workers
12. Orientation
13. Employee Empowerment
14. Introducing Technology
15. Effective Appraisals

How can this Fact Sheet help me?

When implemented effectively, empowerment is associated with:

- Increased employee job satisfaction.
- Increased employee loyalty to the organization.
- Increased commitment to and identification with organizational goals.
- Enhanced employee problem-solving and problem-prevention capabilities.
- Increased risk-taking and entrepreneurial behaviour.
- Enhanced coordination between functions.
- Warmer and more enthusiastic interaction with customers.
- Increased customer satisfaction and retention, fewer customer complaints, higher number of customers.
- Better organizational performance (e.g., increases in sales and profit, cost reduction, increased effectiveness).

Case Study

Woolwich Dairy Inc. has found that by making its policies clearer, first-line supervisors feel more comfortable implementing them. They have also begun sharing performance data and involving them more in human resource decisions such as selection of new workers.

Challenges and Opportunities

Empowerment is the extent to which employees are informed about and involved in decisions that affect their work and the work of their organization. Empowerment increases people's sense of competence and confidence in their ability to accomplish their work.

Empowered employees understand the priorities and challenges of the business, and how their role can help strengthen the organization's success. They are provided with essential operating data to help prioritize and adjust tasks on a weekly or daily basis. Finally, they are given the opportunity to express their concerns and make suggestions for improvement.

Empowerment may fail when:

- Management is unwilling to delegate or to give up some of their decision-making authority.
- Senior management fails to involve middle managers and supervisors and does not clarify the responsibilities of managers and employees.
- Employees do not receive the necessary training to develop skills that help them analyse work processes, use problem solving tools and techniques, and make decisions.
- Employees do not receive the necessary training to develop the interpersonal and communication skills they need to resolve conflicts with their team members, present their suggestions, participate effectively on teams, or constructively express their emotions.
- Work systems and processes don't work properly and are not corrected.
- Communication is poor.
- Supervisors and managers have an authoritarian style of management.
- Employees are not rewarded based on their level of competence or performance.
- Work involves highly established routines and jobs lack variety or challenge.
- There is a lack of meaningful work goals.
- There is a lack of appropriate organizational goals and values to support a culture and philosophy of empowerment.
- Employees are unsure about their responsibilities and the extent of their authority.
- Increased and clear lines of accountability are not accompanied by empowerment.

The following support empowerment:

Ensuring that employees are well connected to relevant organizational peer groups and networks.

Adopting goals and values employees find intrinsically motivating, such as product quality or innovation.

Solutions

1. Train managers and supervisors.

Train in areas such as communication, team building and delegation. Management must communicate the vision of the organization and clearly explain expectations.

2. Hold managers and supervisors accountable.

Management must show effective leadership skills, encourage initiative, and support a culture of empowerment within their work units.

3. Make sure the rules, procedures, and boundaries for empowerment are clearly understood by employees.

Employees must know which decisions they can make on their own and which decisions require additional input or approval. Managers must allow employees to work within the established boundaries, rather than stepping in and micro-managing.

4. Give employees the training they need.

Employees need to learn to make decisions effectively and to work collaboratively with others in an empowered environment. This includes training in decision-making, problem-solving, open communication, and teamwork.

5. Remove barriers that prevent empowered behaviour.

This step could include ensuring that the proper tools, time, training, teams and financial resources are in place to support the behaviour, as well as providing access to other employees and coaching.

6. Reward, recognize and praise employees for initiating the improvement of work processes and for the contributions they make to the organization.

7. Design jobs for empowerment.

Encourage the development of supportive peer groups. Delegate authority through formal job responsibilities. Build autonomy and accountability into jobs at all levels, particularly for issues related to work processes.

8. Hire the right people for the right job.

Make sure that employees brought on board are capable of and interested in assuming greater responsibilities, comfortable with considerable discretion, have high self-esteem, and possess values and goals that are consistent with those of the organization.

References

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The following Fact Sheet may be helpful:

4. Fostering Employee Commitment

This resource is available on line at www.aofp.ca under Workforce Development.

How do I start?

1. Make sure that you are ready to hand over some decision making power to employee teams.
2. Determine where team empowerment could be most helpful to your organization and select a project.
3. Select employees to work on this project.
4. Give the team clear guidelines on goals, scope of the project and limits of authority.
5. Train the team and provide support as required.
6. Hire and socialize employees who show initiative, take risks, embrace innovation, and are comfortable dealing with uncertainty.

ADVANTAGES OF BEST PRACTICES

- More qualified job applicants
- Better trained and informed employees
- Better health and safety practices
- More engaged and productive employees
- Fewer line interruptions
- Fewer product quality problems
- Easier implementation of new technology
- Lower absenteeism and employee turnover
- Higher sales per employee
- Higher market value to book value