

# Empowerment participation and involvement



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I shall start this essay by discussing what is meant by the term Employee Empowerment. I shall give a clear outline of what is meant by this term and how this term has become such a buzz word in the business environment. The term Employee empowerment has been around since the 1980s, if not longer but in recent years it has grown in importance as this management has been implemented in both private and public sectors. Ratnam defines empowerment as a philosophy which aims to enrich jobs and gives power to exercise control along with taking responsibility for outcomes of efforts[1]. Employee's involvement and participation plays a great role in the functioning of the modern business. The employee's participation and involvement affects both the employees and organization positively and negatively. So we shall look into this in further to create a strong idea. The second part of the essay shall present a clear view of how the empowering of employees affects the functioning of the work-place decision making and I shall present both the advantages and disadvantages faced. Finally I will conclude the essay with a brief summary.

## **What is Empowerment, Participation & Involvement?**

Until recently the owner of a company or the CEO made the final decisions and maybe at times delegated some power to other workers to get tasks done. The idea of reducing the level power and hence control was seen as a sign of weak leadership and hence companies engaging in this were considered unpredictable, unstable company. But along with the economic downturn, those CEOs and owners were suddenly proven horribly wrong about their decisions, and they needed to find a new source of enthusiasm and new perspectives to keep their companies running. This resulted in the

birth of Employee Empowerment and by the 1980s managers all over the world aimed to develop systems that invite and encourage worker involvement in workplace decision-making. Employee empowerment has grown in recognition as an important subject in management. To achieve empowerment, the directors must make sure that employees have the right mix of knowledge, power, information as well as rewards to work more eagerly.[2]Empowerment creates autonomy for the workers, improved performance; due to increased self-esteem and energized workforce. Empowerment also means sharing of power and responsibility at all levels, this occurs when employees say in the decision making process increases. This can occur for individuals or particular groups or at times for the entire organization.

Now that, we are aware of what empowerment is and to gain a better idea how it works, we move onto participation. Farnham (1997) states, that employee participation is one of four policy choices for managing the employment relationship. Here Farnham states ‘...an employee has the right to question and influence organization decision making’ and ‘.... this may involve representative workplace democracy.’[3]

According to Ackers, Wilkinson & Dundon[4], employee participation is a process in which decisions in an organization are shared among individuals who are otherwise hierarchically unequal. When implementing this management style, it involves managers and their subordinate staff problem solving, sharing information about the working process, and taking decision making actions. McCabe and Lewin[5]defined employee participation, to consist of two elements. First is the expression of grievances or complaints in <https://assignbuster.com/empowerment-participation-and-involvement/>

a work context by employees to the top management of the organization. The second element is the participation of employees in the decision-making processes of the company or organization. This hence implies that employee participation is not only involved in improving the productivity of the business but rather improving the overall well fare of it.

But at the end, there are three key problems which come to mind when we attempt to define participation and/ or involvement. The key terms used to describe them are value-laden, in other words, they are ' good in themselves' and hence making it difficult to question them or to take a critical interest in them. At the same time the terms are characterised by ' semantic elasticity'. The terms hence at the end remain ambiguous, but not uncertain.

#### The Impact on the workings of the organization

Employee involvement has grown in importance in recent years, as is said to affect employee productivity, employee commitment level and job sanctification. These factors all have a great impact on the business performance and the running of the businesses. This statement is also backed by Wilkinson, Dundon, Marchington, & Ackers[6]work, where participation is said to reduce the risks of industrial disputes. This occurs as participation results in reduced poor communication amongst staff and management. At the same time this improved decision making processes, increased creativity, reduced employers' stress; ensures better use of time and resources.

Employee empowerment and participation just like everything else has its own positive and negative points.

The Take (2004)[7] shows how the business benefits from an organizational perspective through Employee Empowerment. As shown by the workers in Zanon ceramic factory, the workers who had lost their factory and then took over themselves and ran it, discovered there is greater job satisfaction, motivation, increased productivity and reduced costs. Job Satisfaction has potential long term benefits for the employees over the long term, as they feel more in control and hence independence encouraging them to feel and to assume responsibility for continuous improvement. Employee Relations imply that employees face regular contact with managers motivates employees to think strategically about how to improve performance and make the company stronger. Excluding this, it also leads to improved creativity and thus innovation since the employees have the authority to act on their own. There were also sign of increased efficiency in employees because of increased ownership in their work. Even though other businesses may not have the full freedom present in Zanon factory, they benefit from similar factors. Along with this, businesses have reduced need of supervision and delegation. Empowerment also leads to increased focus on quality from the level of manufacturing till the delivery of goods or service. At times empowered staff becomes more entrepreneurial and as a result takes risks. Greater risk leads to greater chances of success.

Even though Empowerment has various benefits, there are drawbacks as well. At the individual level employee empowerment may lead to egotism or arrogance in the workers as they are an integral component of the

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organization. Worker arrogance can create problems for their managing supervisors. There may also be problems in delegating work. Another problem which may arise is lack of security. As information is shared by all, there are high risks of critical data leakage. Creativity and innovation has major drawbacks, as with risk bearing there are equal chances of success and failure. Workers usually lack the expertise that the entrepreneurs have and this can have major consequences. Another drawback is Industrial Democracy. As workers and Labour unions are empowered they misuse their power. As a result, strikes and lock outs become more frequent habit. At the same time unions gain insights into management.

## **Methods Used to Obtain Empowerment**

Participation is at times considered an alternative to trade unionism, but at the end, the two are often more complementary. So along with the pressure of unions pressuring increased employee involvement, there are various other types of mechanisms used to involve employees in corporate decision-making. A mechanism which maybe used to obtain this empowered more involved employee is via TQM( Total Quality Management)and its Quality circles, Kaizen, JIT (Just In Time).

## **Is Empowerment all that it seems?**

From all this, we have developed a clear view of what is employee empowerment, but the question still lies whether they are empowered at work when they are given opportunity to engage directly in work-place decision making. As we have seen from the advantages of empowerment, it does have a positive effect on the business performance, but similarly we have seen from the disadvantages, there are drawbacks which exist for the <https://assignbuster.com/empowerment-participation-and-involvement/>

business. So this does mean its not exactly what we perceive it to be. Argyris states " Empowerment is still mostly an illusion "[8]. While Hales and Klidas carried out in a sample of five star hotels supports this notion too when they state : '...the overwhelming impression to be gained from the literature is that empowerment entails some additional employee ' choice' at the margins of their jobs, rather than any substantial increase in employee ' voice'[9].

At the same time Ramsay's work challenges the ' managerial' accounts of participation. Managerial accounts of participation suggest that the management policy changes what workers do and how they do it. But Ramsay's work suggests that the managerial interest in worker participation is a response to worker challenge. So this suggest in the end that schemes like empowerment' - are actually an outcome of subordinate action and not a cause of it.

## **Conclusion**

In the end, I finish by stating that empowerment is a term which is ambiguous and hence this makes it hard to state weather employees are truly empowered by