

Delegation of authority



Delegation of authority is the process by which a manager passes on authority to their junior staff members with the aim of accomplishing certain assignments. This happens in situations where there is someone senior than the other i. e. superordinate and the other in a junior position referred to as subordinate. This can be done when a manager is busy with other tasks or when the manager wants to observe the subordinates ability to handle certain assignments. Delegation of authority has been found to have both positive and negative aspects.

It is for this reason therefore that top managers of different organizations and in different parts of the world differ on whether to use or not use this management tool. It is mainly absent where organizations have high power distance cultures. According to Thomson (1967) organizations with high power distance cultures are characterized by tight control mechanisms and usually exhibit hierarchical and bureaucratic structures. Levels of delegation vary between private and the public sectors as well as between different functions of the organization.

Enhance and Agarwal, 1975 said that in India for example, there is higher level of delegation of power in the public sector than with the private sector and also there is high degree of technical delegation and very low degree of financial delegation. Proponents of effective delegation of power as a management tool puts it forward that this practice can lead to improvement of job satisfaction, motivation, and morale of employees. It also helps in achieving for the employee, recognition, responsibility, freedom and autonomy.

When top managers delegate duties they are in essence recognizing the ability of their subordinates and this in turn raises the employee motivation for they will feel recognized by the organization. When employees are motivated, job satisfaction is enhanced and this may eventually lead to retention of high quality employees in the organization. By effectively delegating power it helps to foster the responsibility of subordinates. This prepares them to perform duties of their supervisors when they are not present. This also helps to prepare the subordinates for promotion to higher levels when the managers retire or leave the organization.

Further, delegation of power to lower level employees by the managers creates an atmosphere of freedom thus making the subordinates able to make decisions without necessarily having to consult the top level managers. This is sometimes advantageous because some decision need to be made fast without having to follow rigid bureaucracies. Other than positive effects on employees through delegation, the managers can also benefit through saving of time. Delegation saves a lot of time for the manger and he/she can use the time to do other important things.

This good utilization of time results in increase in productivity as the manager can be doing something else while the employee is performing duties the manager ought to be performing at that particular time. Delegation of power also results in provision of invaluable training to fellow managers or employees. To effectively delegate authority organizations management should create a structured environment where both the management and employees know the duties to be delegated and

expectations i. e. the skills and the resources required to carry out the tasks efficiently.

The supporters of delegation of authority strongly believe that this is the best way through which a successful organization can be created. The concept of delegation of power is not assumed to be the best approach in performing managerial functions in organizations. Opponents of it argue that it leads to loss of control. As said earlier this is common in highly bureaucratic organizations where there is high power distance cultures. This is the reason why for example, in India decision-making is concentrated at the top levels without a chance for the same at the lower levels within the organization (Mooddie, 1972).

Fear for loss of control can be equated with excessive love for authority. Those against delegation of authority also are driven by the desire to influence their subordinates. The reason for this is seen as their desire to stay longer in power without replacement. Opponents of this approach have low trust on subordinates' skills and efforts. Because they think they know everything they always doubt their employee subordinates. Personality factors of senior managers like having negative attitudes towards the subordinates as well as fear of being perceived as incompetent also contribute to such opponents avoiding delegation of authority.

Another weakness of delegation of authority is that it is challenging to the managers. This is because it is expected that for managers to delegate, they ought to have good communication skills, have the ability to motivate their employees, set goals and plan for behavioral changes in their organizations. Those against the practice also have a point in that it cannot succeed in

organizations such as in public sector which lack job clarity. This is true to some extent because the practice is more effective where the managers and subordinates both understand their roles and the duties to be delegated.