

Role of the Leader/ Manager

By Brian Ladden

The role of the manager is crucial to the successful introduction of empowerment. The development of empowerment requires support from the top. Without top management support employees will not have the confidence to take responsibility and accountability. Managers must create the climate where empowerment can flourish. This includes creating a shared vision, providing clear top management support, creative use of role models, coaching, mentoring and developing appropriate reward systems.

The following figure highlights some of the different roles a manager in an empowered organisation might adopt:

Role of Manager in empowered organization

- Coaching, in which skills and knowledge are transferred on the job
- Acting as a sponsor for subordinate projects.
- Facilitating suggestion programmes or quality circles
- Mentoring, in which managers offer guidance to more junior employees in a way which is more involved than a straightforward coaching role.
- Facilitating self-directed work teams, where the manager offers the benefit of his/her experience and expertise without directing the team's activities.
- Facilitating training events, more formal as a method of skills transfer than on-the-job coaching, but still aiding the process of passing knowledge down the line.
- Setting up job rotation schemes to broaden the experience of junior employees.
- Giving accreditation to front-line staff on the acquisition of specific competences
- Facilitating business-planning teams
- Taking ownership of their staff's development

Management's job is to create a clear vision of where the company is going and what empowered will look like. Managers must provide positive feedback, information, resources, supportive policies, and a low-stress working environment.

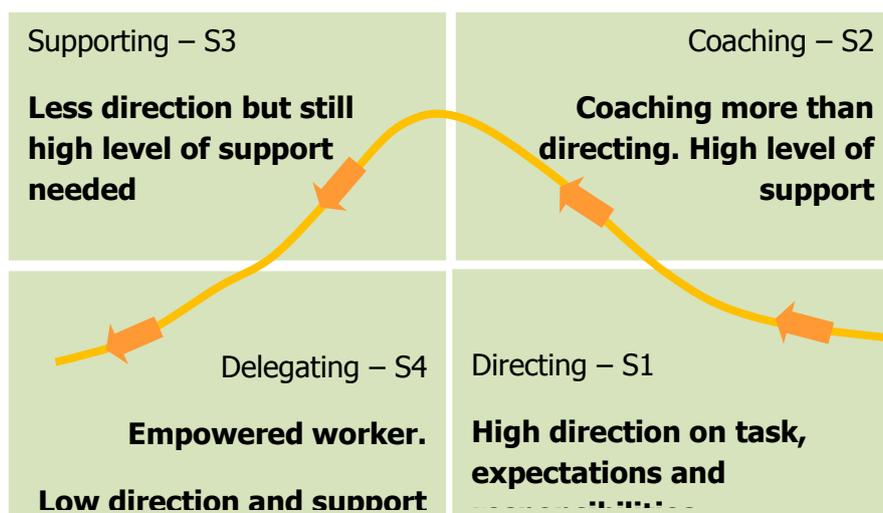
An important role of a manager in an empowered organisation is managing the process of sharing power and authority. This is not a simple as just giving responsibility and authority

to the workers. Workers must be ready and able to accept power. Employees may be at different stages of readiness to accept responsibility.

Blanchard, Carlos and Randolph (1999), advise on the use of situational leadership as a means of matching the individual’s developmental level on specific goal or task and the level of empowerment that the manager applies. When the Situational Leadership Model is applied an understanding of how and, more importantly, when to empower and build accountability is developed.

The Situational Leadership Model suggests that employees develop over a long period of time by building on the two components of competence (skill and ability) and commitment (desire and motivation) to do the task. Only when the employee has the competence and commitment can they be fully empowered. According to the model, employees typically move along a continuum of development that includes these four stages:

Situational leadership style – Hersey and Blandchard’s situational theory



Empowerment should be introduced gradually into an organisation. The main role of the manager is to remove any barriers the employee may experience. Many organisations have built up structures over the years that prevent employees from assuming responsibility. Managers must articulate vision, values, strategies and goals; align policies, practices and business plans; improve processes; organisation, communication and “walk the walk”, and removing barriers that prevent outstanding performance.

Structure

Managers must provide an organizational structure that emphasizes flexibility and autonomy. Empowerment requires a flatter, decentralized structure with fewer layers of authority. Flexibility and collaborative work practices allow decisions to be made as close to source as possible. Managers should adopt a supportive rather than a controlling role. Empowered organisations require strong leadership because lack the definite structures, procedures and policies of traditional organisations.

For employees to be empowered they must have the knowledge and skills to make important decisions that affect the company. In other words they must not only have the desire to be empowered but must have the competence as well.