

# Framework Of Empowerment Practices In Organizations

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## Abstract

*To move hand-in-hand with the changing times, organizations have been taking all necessary steps to produce an environment which can assist the organizations in achieving their objectives. The thrust is on inculcating an enabling culture in the organizations which focuses on human motivational concepts. With this perspective in mind, the basic purpose of the study was to identify the empowerment practices being used in production organizations.*

**Keywords:** empowerment practices; conceptual framework; Indian production organizations; empowering.

## 1. Introduction

The buzzword of today's organizations is 'empowerment'. It has emerged as a new force in organizational life. Murrel and Vogt (1997) highlighted that empowerment is still in an embryonic stage; much of the literature is theoretical and has not been empirically confirmed. Even in this early state empowerment is having a significant impact on managerial and organizational thoughts and actions. Organizations are focussing upon 'enablement' of their human resources.

Empowerment is an 'enabling technique' of human resource management involving transfer of power and control from higher to lower levels throughout an organization, so that contribution of people as individuals and as members of a team is enhanced (Geralis et al., 2003).

There is a blurring between the roles of managers and workers. Decision-making is being pushed down to the operating level, where workers are being given the freedom to make choices about schedules, procedures and solving work-related problems. Managers are even allowing employees full control of their work. Self-managed teams, in which workers operate largely without bosses, have become the demand of the 1990s (Robbins, 1999).

In other words, managers are enabling employees. They are putting employees in charge of what they do. And in doing so, managers are learning how to give up control and employees are learning how to take responsibility for their work and make appropriate decisions.

'Enablement' involves the use of a number of empowerment practices, which focus on 'intrinsic task-motivation' (Tripathy, 1991), redefined 'role of responsibility' and 'accountability' (Roger et al., 1999) and 'liberating rather than controlling human energy' (Murrel et al., 1999) etc. The salience of 'information-sharing, training, planning and organizing' in empowerment practices has also been reported (Ankhoa et al., 2000). There is emphasis on 'team-building, communication, recognition of need for new style of effective leadership, usage of employing value-based systems, increased commitment of employees, provision for experiential life-long learning and building supportive environment' that produces an empowerment culture. Role of 'work-environment' has also been highlighted for effective implementation of empowerment practices in the definition given by Jawahar (1998). He defined empowerment as a set of cognitions shaped by a particular work environment. Clutterbuck (1994) and Foy (1993) also highlighted the importance of 'environment' for seizing opportunities for personal growth and self-fulfillment. Murrel et al. (1999) also recognized that implementation of empowerment practices is the responsibility of managers and leaders. A trilogy of (a) education and development of the self, (b) enhanced relationship between

and among dyads, groups and (c) transformation of organization is called the heart of the enactment of empowerment by Murrel (1997).

The changing world scenario emphasizes low cost, high production and best quality. To update their existing systems and provide an enablement culture to their employees have become a must for organizations to survive in this competitive era. The present piece of research proposed to explore the Empowerment Practices in production organizations.

## **2. Sample**

The incidental sample comprised of 262 managers working in five well-established, ISO- certified, production organizations of Lucknow. Out of these five production organizations, three were private organizations and two were public organizations. The size of managerial workforce varied from 86 to 1062. In terms of manufacturing technology, two organizations had mass-production technology while one each had small-batch production, flexible-cell production and continuous-process production types of technology.

## **3. Tool Used**

A Checklist of Perceived Empowerment Practices (Chitranshi & Agarwal, 2004)

An item pool of 103 empowerment practices was prepared on the basis of literature review. The characteristics were drawn from the available literature (Clutterbuck, 1994, Foy, 1993 and Murrel et al., 1997). Similar empowerment practices were grouped together.

The checklist had items pertaining to the practices of empowerment. There were 8 items of vision / goal, 7 items of Organization Development, 12 items of Job Description, 3 items of Performance Appraisal, 2 items of Feedback, 8 items of Reward Systems, 15 items of Climate, 17 items of Communication / Participation / Team and 31 items of Training and Development Programmes.

A five - point rating system was attached with each item. The higher was the score on one item, the greater was the use of empowerment practices.

## **4. Administration**

The checklist was administered on 262 managers of production organizations individually. The following instructions were given to the respondents:

“We are interested in knowing the orientations / actions of your organization. Certain actions are given against which there is a list of statements. Read each statement carefully and rate it on a five-point rating scale. Please write your rating in the space provided before each statement. There is no right or wrong response to the statements, since we are only trying to know your organization’s orientations / actions. Be honest. Do not hesitate to ask the researcher in case of any clarification.”

## **5. Results**

The analysis of data was done with the help of Principal Component Analysis. PCA - run showed that an Eigen value of 3.5 covered 55.47% of total variance. Rotated component matrix, which was produced through Varimax rotation, extracted five components of empowerment practices (Table 1.1) 90 items were found to have a variable-component correlation of .45 and above. The remaining 13 items were left.

**Table (1.1): Characteristics and Factor- Loadings of Principal Components of Empowerment Practices**  
**Principal Components of Empowerment Practices**

Characteristics of Empowerment Practices	Developmental Programmes and Functional Procedures	Participation	Quality Orientation	Communication	Reward and Appraisal Systems
	Programmes for enhancing self-reliance (.81)	Autonomy (.75)	Increased availability and access to resources (.74)	Communication-flow is circular / lateral (.70)	Benefit-packages reflecting a contract between company expectations and employee needs (.67)
	Taking responsibility for results (.81)	Determination of work-methods at employee's own location (.71)	Delegation of responsibility (.71)	Clear verbalization of issues (.69)	On-going self-appraisal through review of past (.61)
	Taking responsibility for mistakes (.80)	Decentralization (.67)	Horizontal disbursement of responsibility (.64)	Straightforwardness (.66)	Employee-assistance programmes (.60)
	Programmes for enhancing self-actualization (.76)	Creation of a shared vision (.65)	Clarity in goals of organization (.63)	Respect for physical environment (.66)	Promotions, special privileges, money, praise etc. (.59)
	Programmes to help people in recognizing their knowledge (.76)	Flattening of Hierarchy (.63)	Work-design where collaboration is possible (.61)	Authenticity (.65)	Job-rotation (.59)
	Taking responsibility for self and feelings (.75)	Employee participation in writing job-description (.62)	Appreciation of new ideas (.60)	Valuing individual-differences (.64)	Primary focus on social responsibility (.57)
	Programmes for enhancing self-esteem (.74)	Decisions are made at different levels (.62)	Loading of a variety of skills with same level of responsibility and difficulty (.58)	Responsiveness to external environment (.63)	An external assessment system (.56)
	Seeking increased responsibility (.74)	Training in interpersonal /group-skills (.61)	Smooth workflow-pattern that allows for quality (.58)	Clarity in expectations of organization from employees (.59)	Flexibility in tasks and roles (.54)

## Characteristics of Empowerment Practices

Programmes to help people in recognizing their expertise (.73)	Permissibility to adjust to situational requirement (.60)	Concern for task-excellence (.58)	Decreased feelings of threat (.59)	Publication of individual or group success (.50)
Programmes for self-motivation (.72)	Training in leadership skills (.57)	Feedback is seen as essential. (.54)	Clarity in ethical values (.57)	
Conflict-resolution skills (.70)	Mutual respect (.57)	Employees' views are fed into organizational hierarchy (.49)	Humanness and enjoyment (.57)	
Programmes to help people in recognizing their personal growth-activities (.69)	Enabling employees to be active participants (.57)	Appreciation of expertise (.47)	Continual scanning of the social, cultural, legal and technological environment for developments (.51)	
Existence of problem-solving skills for self and others (.67)	Programmes for improving listening-skills (.55)		Views are transmitted easily to the right level of management (.51)	
Existence of planned change-programmes (.66)	Authority and influence flow from persons who are experts (.52)		Partnership-orientation in labour-relations and union-negotiations (.49)	
Programmes to distinguish between 'self' and 'role' and to humanize both (.66)	Openness (.52)		Commitments are made public (.48)	
Stress-management programmes (.65)	Job-security (.52)		Communication is multi-directional (.46)	
Existence of coaching and counseling programmes (.65)	Periodic review of organizational structure (.51)		Smooth workflow-pattern that allows for innovation and creativity (.45)	

Characteristics of Empowerment Practices

Programmes on socialization (.64)	Emphasis on advice and information (.49)		Safe internal environment for taking risks and assuming responsibility (.45)	
Programmes on organizational orientation (.63)	Delegation of power (.48)			
Existence of role-modelling, mentoring programmes (.62)	Mutual goal-setting and planning (.48)			
Technical-education/reduction/informational programmes at all levels (.61)	Being direct and encouraging others to be direct (.46)			
Transient and temporary work groups (.61)				
Programmes on cultivation of skills to work without supervision (.58)				
Programmes on selection (.57)				
Programmes on training and development (.55)				
Individual career-development programmes (.53)				
Preference of employees to join groups (.53)				
Increment in system-knowledge (.52)				
Existence of self-directed teams (.52)				
First-line supervisory training (.50)				

## **6. Discussion**

The talk of the era is reshaping of the relationship between managers and the people they are supposedly responsible for managing. Empowerment is changing power relationships, the way work is designed and the way organizations are structured (Robbins, 1991).

In these changing times, it becomes essential for production organizations where some technology is also involved, to focus on the empowerment practices being used. Principal component Analysis redistributed the items and extracted five components of empowerment practices being used in production organizations. These are labelled as Developmental Programmes and Functional Procedures, Participation, Quality Orientation, Communication and Reward and Appraisal Systems.

Murrel et al. (1997) highlighted that developmental programmes and functional procedures prepare the members of an organization for actualizing the vision of the organization and therefore these programmes function as a vital link to empowerment. Besides the roots of empowerment lie in the efficiency and effectiveness of functional procedures. Present day production organizations are found to focus on programmes of motivation, knowledge, self-actualization, role-modelling etc. and on functional procedures such as selection, career-development, existence of self-directed work teams etc. Therefore the first component is labelled as Developmental Programmes and Functional Procedures.

When training programmes are conducted in organizations, they are arranged not only to orient the employees towards organizational philosophy and practices but also to enhance technical and interpersonal skills, personal growth etc. The conduction of these programmes results in increase in activities which revolve around (i) sharing of information about large picture of the organization, (ii) consultation and (iii) involvement of subordinates in planning and decision-making, (iv) inspiring and collaborative modes of leaders (v) considering subordinates' responses in evaluation and (vi) matching job and person for long-term success.

Thus it can be said that the developmental programmes are used by organizations to groom their human resources so that they grow and the organization is able to get the benefits of their full potential. Murrell et al. (1997) also illustrated the importance of developmental Programmes and Functional Procedures in empowerment Culture of organization and said, "The heart of enhancing empowerment lies in education and development of the employees".

Participation is one of the foundations of empowerment (Murrel et al. 1997). The purpose of participation is to ensure that people influence the organization and therefore are empowered. The present day production organizations have certain features like decentralization, delegation of power, mutual goal - setting and planning, cultivation of interpersonal and group - skills, mutual respect and openness etc. Therefore the second component is labelled as Participation.

In general, Participation refers to the fact that nobody's word is final till a consensus is reached. Schultz (2004) reported that workers must learn to participate in decision-making to determine how the work is best carried out. George & Jones (1994) remarked that the optimal amount of participation should be identified in an organization for successful functioning. Clutterbuck et al. (1994) highlighted that employees enhance their contributions as individuals, as members of a team, when their participation is maximum and it contributes positively to the empowerment culture of the organization. Venkatapathy (2000) also said that in empowerment a manager shares power with a subordinate and allows him to participate in the decision-making process as a way to empower. In times of rapid and dramatic change the emphasis of organizations is on productivity and quality. Luthans & Kreitner (1985) emphasized that for any efforts to improve quality and productivity, organizations must include employees. Employees will be a major force in carrying out changes and increasingly will participate actively in planning process.

"Quality should be the focal point of empowerment endeavours of an organization" as it is said by Murrel et al. (1997). It is the basic purpose of all organizational activities. The present day production organizations focus on increased availability and access to resources, application of new ideas and expertise, clear goals, concern for task-

excellence, feedback, importance given to view-points of employees etc. These characteristics emphasize upon quality - orientation, therefore the third component is labelled as Quality - Orientation.

The appreciations and concerns for excellence also result in seeking opinion of others while making a decision under time-pressures. The urge for perfection results in efforts of authorities to create the opportunities for getting the job done in the best way. Quite often, it is mentioned that the world has truly become a 'global village'. Organizations are no longer constrained by national borders. For survival and winning competitive edge, organizations have to improve their organization's productivity and the quality of products and services they offer (Luthans, 1985). The emphasis on quality affects planning, selection, placements, developmental activities, and motivation- all aspects of organization which focus on enablement of employees (Murrel et al. 1997). Organizations are implementing programmes such as quality orientation programmes, yearnings to grab quality certification and to adhere to the Business Excellence Models towards improving quality and productivity. Schultz (2004) also pointed out that today's employees want quality management. Dr J.J. Irani (1999), when he introduced TOP (Total Operational Performance), emphasized, "Ideas must be judged on the hierarchy of quality and not on the hierarchy of management".

Communication forms the base of empowerment. It is primarily associated with the transactional levels of human behaviour on the every day interactions and exchanges (Pfeiffer, 1997). Today's production organizations have open communication channels. They emphasize authenticity, respect, straightforwardness and responsiveness to external environment and creativity, innovation and ethical values in a safe internal environment. Therefore the fourth component is labelled as Communication.

Jones (1981) recognized the significance of communication as a 'structural correlate' while discussing the concept of 'Organizational Universe'. Murrel et al. (1997) also highlighted the importance of communication in empowerment when he said that communication lies at the root of empowerment. Debnath (2000) also emphasized that there should be open-communication between managers and team-members in an organizational change programme for introducing empowerment culture. Foy et al. (1993) termed communication as the bedrock underpinning any organizational change.

Reward and appraisal system is probably the most powerful determinant of individual and group behaviour and therefore has a very important place in empowerment. The ways of performance - monitoring and counselling of employees to improve their performance are salient parameters of empowerment (Murrel et al., 1997) Today's organizations focus on benefit-packages, promotions, special privileges, money, job - rotation, praise, publication of individual success, on-going appraisal system etc., therefore the fifth component is labelled as Reward and Appraisal systems.

Jones et al. (1996) pointed out that in organizations leaders are responsible for administering reinforcements and punishments. Leaders must engage in reward behaviour by acknowledging a good job with compliments, praise or more tangible benefits like a pay raise or promotion, which would positively influence the culture of the organization (Murrel et al., 1997). Lawson & Shen (1998) also highlighted that effective leadership is grounded in authentic and open relationship between leaders and followers that require leaders to be sensitive to the needs, expectations and perceptions of followers. Jones (1981) while describing his model of the 'organizational Universe' recognized the significance of reward systems as a 'structural correlate' and said that it is the most powerful determinant of individual and group success. Expectancy Theory (Nadler & Lawler, 1980) states that people behave in ways that they expect and produce outcomes that they value. Since today's workforce constitutes more of scientific and professional employees (Davis, 1999) who are qualified expect greater transparency, openness, information-sharing and rewards for their performance.

Thus it can be concluded that the existing empowerment practices of production organizations are Developmental Programmes and Functional Procedures, Participation, Quality Orientation, Communication and Reward and Appraisal Systems. The clustering of empowerment practices would help the organizations in quantifying the viewpoints of employees regarding the existence of empowerment practices. It would also facilitate the policy makers in strategic planning and decision-making.

## Implications of the Study

Today's organizations are experiencing fast-appearing environmental changes which are causing ripples in the overall industrial scenario and threatening organizational survival in response to any 'ifs and buts' on the part of the organization to adapt to these changes. The demographic profile of employees has also undergone tremendous change. As a result, 'controlling' as a management style is taking the back seat allowing 'empowering' to take the lead. A combination of empowering and controlling styles of management is the need of the hour.

Today's organizations are existing in a competitive environment where survival, profit and growth are based upon low costs, quality products, good customer service and time-based completion of projects. Plausibility of achievement of these goals increases with optimal use of human resource. Empowering human resource, therefore, appears to be the springboard of success for any organization. The empowering practices, in turn, create an empowerment culture in the organization. Developmental Programmes and Functional Procedures, Quality Orientation, Reward and Appraisal Systems, Communication and Participation are absolutely necessary to exist in the organizations of today.

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