



Empowering Your Employees

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Agenda

- What does it mean to “empower your employees”
- Key elements of an empowered workforce
- Techniques and practices to create an environment that empowers everyone
- Risks and benefits of empowering programmers
- Discussion

What is Empowerment?

Empowerment is “the process of allowing employees to have input and control over their work, and the ability to openly share suggestions and ideas about their work and the organization as a whole.” (1)

An atmosphere of empowerment “is achieved by encouraging creativity, individuality, problem solving, and an open and honest exchange of ideas among all employees in a non-threatening environment.” (2)

Empowered workers are “Engaged, Motivated and Aligned” (3)

Where does it Start?

Ideally, employee empowerment is part of the company culture, endorsed and supported from the top down.

Empowering an entire workforce takes persistent effort and must be supported and implemented at all levels consistently to achieve the maximum benefit.

Realistically, empowering others starts with you!

What an Empowered Workforce Looks like

- Staff are engaged in their work and invested in outcomes
 - Understand their work has direct impact
 - Are held accountable for their decisions and work
- People ask questions and share ideas vertically and horizontally
 - Ask questions of / make suggestions to supervisors / leaders
 - Do the same with colleagues in other departments
- Staff empowered to make decisions independently and do so in alignment with company and management goals
 - Staff understand the larger framework of the world they're working in, and allowed to make decisions within it
 - Workers understand that it is ok to take some risk within workplace parameters, take pride in success and learn from failure

What an Empowered Workforce Looks like

- Staff willingly “step up” to help resolve issues and meet challenging timelines
 - Willingly give discretionary time and effort
- Staff actively look to improve and grow their skills
 - Personal growth is expected and rewarded
- Staff feel appreciated, have a sense of purpose, are satisfied with their jobs

Methods to Empower Your Workforce

OPEN COMMUNICATION – TOP DOWN

Department meetings

- Communicate broad goals, strategy and what it means to everyone if the goals are met (or not met)
- Share philosophy on not just *what* needs to get done, but *how* and *why* – provide *context* (*core values, purpose, direction*)
- Clearly define workplace policies so employees know the framework they need to work within
- Recognize individual/team accomplishments and contributions
- Solicit input/feedback on broad-based initiatives and/or challenges faced
- Example:
 - “Lunch and Learn” meetings where management can update everyone, individuals can present on relevant topics, and group discussion is encouraged

Methods to Empower Your Workforce

OPEN COMMUNICATION – TOP DOWN

Work Team meetings

- Explain how broader goals filter down to specific work teams
- Clearly define roles and responsibilities within the team, including expectations of cross-functional collaboration
- Give context for the specific project
- As the project progresses, discuss challenges and solutions
- Example:
 - Internal study kick-off meetings with representatives from all departments, discuss unique aspects of the disease state, data collection challenges and complexities in the data analysis

One-on-one

- Clarify expectations for individual performance – including their timely communication of issues and obstacles faced
- Hold individuals accountable by letting them know when they are and are not meeting expectations *in a timely manner*
- Discuss individual goals and path forward to achieving them

Methods to Empower Your Workforce

OPEN COMMUNICATION — ENCOURAGED FROM THE BOTTOM UP

Recognize contributions early and often

- Often just a “thank you” or “great job” goes far
- Make use of company reward programs
- Give credit where it is due

Provide positive feedback for communication

- Actively listen to employees and engage in discussion
- Express appreciation for sharing thoughts, even if you decide to go a different way

Methods to Empower Your Workforce

REWARD SELF-IMPROVEMENT

Set a plan for growth and reward advancement toward goals

- Provide opportunities
- Access to required tools

Support Independence

- Give opportunities to stretch on their own
- Allow for leadership / mentoring of others

Encourage Safe Failure

- Allow opportunities to try new things, but check in often, set milestone checkpoints
- Learn from failures rather than “pointing fingers” and dwelling on them

Compare the Options

Powerless behaviors

- Programmers just “program to the specifications”
 - Data issues are not found or communicated to others
 - Databases lock with issues, and eventually need to be unlocked after others review the output and discover problems
- Process improvements are left to a handful of leaders who have little time to develop them
- Junior programmers lack mentorship, do not seek help and fail to develop

Empowered behaviors

- Programmers proactively check that data fits analysis specifications
 - When data does not appear to fit expectations, they ask the data manager for clarification
 - After further discussion with the statistician and others, the result is additional edit checks are added to the data cleaning process
- Senior programmers notice a process that is repetitious and develop macros to make that process more efficient
- Junior programmers actively ask questions of senior staff and grow their “technical toolbox”

Look at the Potential...

Risks

- Programmers make poor decisions that cost time and money
- Leadership time spent on employee development rather than “billable” work
- Training time takes away from resources needed to produce deliverables within the timeline

Benefits

- Programmers develop more efficient processes that get more done, faster – not just now but for future work as well
- Entire team works collaboratively and everyone contributes to a higher quality end product
- Technical and personal growth leads to broader talent pool and higher productivity/capacity
- Staff feel valued and turnover drops

Reduce the Risks

Programmers make poor decisions that cost time and money

- Ensure programmers understand the framework they need to work within
- Coach programmers on how to balance speed vs. quality
- Set up checkpoints to ensure everyone is in alignment and on target

Leadership time spent on employee development rather than “billable” work

- One leader can enable an entire team to work more efficiently – 20% higher capacity from 6 people > 110% of one person
- Set a goal to reserve a percentage of your time to developing staff, this way YOU become the extra resource capacity in times of crisis
- Let senior technical people mentor junior staff = leadership opportunity for seniors while junior staff grow their capabilities

Training time takes resources needed to produce deliverables

- Online training courses – often more flexible and many will take the course on their own time if the company pays the tuition
- Mentoring by senior staff can be flexible to other priorities, but must also be a priority

Reap the Rewards

Programmers actively look to improve processes

- Everyone is on the lookout for places to add value, not just a select few
- More efficient processes = do more, faster with better quality

Entire team works collaboratively and everyone contributes

- Staff work together to problem solve for quicker results
- Collaborate with other functional areas to create solutions that help everyone

Technical and personal growth leads to...

- More staff willing to take more responsibility
- Programmers technically able to produce more complex output
- Direct experience leads to better decision-making on new challenges
- Ability to produce quality results more quickly

Staff retention

- Once people get that first job, it takes more than money to keep them happy
- Staff who have a purpose and feel valued are more likely to stay!

Final thoughts

Empowering your workforce isn't easy – if it was, everyone would be doing it.

Giving individuals the power to make decisions and have a voice does not mean work is a free-for-all – success requires a clear framework and strategy that is communicated freely and frequently.

Even if you provide a culture and opportunities that empower your workforce, not everyone will take full advantage of them – everyone has different personal/professional goals.

Ongoing support and guidance are required to allow everyone to realize their maximum potential while minimizing business risk.

Questions / Comments?

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