

Employee Empowerment: A Strategy towards Workplace Commitment

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Abstract

Employee empowerment starts with the concept of strategic fit between people, tasks, technology, information processes, rewards and organization structure for which all must be in alignment before the organization can work efficiently. Employees with strong organizational commitment are emotionally attached to the organization and have strong desire to contribute significantly towards organizational success. This leads to increased competitiveness, accountability, risk taking, highly innovativeness, low wastage, and the desire to improve overall job performance. Moreover, increased individual commitment and commitment to work groups or teams improves team performance, interpersonal interaction, and enhances individual performance and degree of satisfaction. Empowerment thus inspires change and increases the level of workplace commitment which increases the degree of individual employee commitment and helping for achievement of organizational goal.

Keyword: employee empowerment, strategy, workplace commitment, organizational commitment, individual commitment

1. Introduction

Empowerment is a philosophy which believes in enriching people's jobs and giving power to exercise control over and take responsibility for outcomes of efforts (Venkat Ratnam, 2006). In twenty first century the industrial organizations are more concerned about knowledge workers because they are the real drivers of business. An empowering organization emphasizes on autonomy, proper information and individual participation for organizational excellence. In order to achieve empowerment, the executives must ensure that employees having the right mix of information, knowledge, power and rewards to work more enthusiastically (Singh, 2003). Empowerment thus helps to create autonomy for employees, allows the sharing of responsibility and power at all levels, builds employee self-esteem and energizes the workforce for better performance. At the individual level the personal factors which are facilitating empowerment are: challenging jobs, enthusiasm, competence, maturity, self-esteem, etc. most of these factors can be enhanced through training and development as these are playing a catalytic role in promoting employee empowerment and involvement.

2. Employee Empowerment – A Theoretical Perspective

Employee empowerment tended to revolve around issues of power and control, where empowerment was considered a management technique used to motivate employees by delegating or sharing of power with them (Kanter, 1983). Ashcraft and Kedrowicz (2002, p. 89) have defined in their earlier study,

empowerment as enabling relations of power through a perception and process that fosters both a sense of competence and control. It was reflected in sharing of power that those of staff members who were given power more likely to achieve the desired outcomes (Conger and Kanungo, 1988). Empowerment is an intrinsic motivation that involves positively valued experiences for which an employee derive directly from a task. The employees consider themselves as having freedom, autonomy and discretion, feel personally connected to the organization, and feel confident about their abilities and capable of having an impact on the organization. The empowerment of employees can occur in ways that may not require giving the employees more power. The feeling of employee empowerment can be improved by listening and being more responsive to employee comments, providing necessary training, encouragement by management and fellow employees, providing employees with the necessary resources to do their jobs, allowing access to relevant information and matching employees to their tasks according to training and experience. Like most initiatives in organizations, “to be effective, practical, and achievable, empowerment and quality must start at the top”. Believe it or not, empowerment changes an organization’s model, whether it can be a restructuring or change in job responsibilities. Thus, upper management must be an active factor for building and implementing employee empowerment initiatives. According to the researchers R. Ripley and M. Ripley (1992) and Spatz (2000), employee empowerment will bring the followings:

- ◆ increase employees’ trust and commitment;
- ◆ increase motivational level to reduce mistakes and individuals take more responsibility for their own actions;
- ◆ provide a forum though which employees can express their beliefs and innovative ideas about day-to-day activities;
- ◆ assist the continuous improvement of processes, products, and services;
- ◆ increase employee loyalty, while at the same time reducing turnover, absenteeism, and illness;
- ◆ increase productivity by increasing employee pride, self-respect, and self-worth;
- ◆ use peer pressure and self-managing team methods for employee control and productivity;
- ◆ increase the bottom line by such methods as reducing waste and building quality, while meeting customer requirements;
- ◆ maintain and increase competitiveness and achieve long-term competitiveness with an ever increasing market share;
- ◆ increase trust and cooperation with management;
- ◆ increase communication among employees and divisions;
- ◆ enable employees to identify & solve problems so that they can improve their own performance;
- ◆ increase organizational commitment and organizational effectiveness; and
- ◆ build a healthy organizational climate and culture.

Proactive management practices promotes an organizational climate that is supportive, respectful and trusting of employees and where individual contributions are highly recognized are more likely to facilitate empowerment than only delegation of authority (Eisenberger et al., 1990). The most noticeable difference in present innovative organizations was that artisans and mass production workers were replaced by empowered interdependent work teams. The various facets of empowerment (Bushe et al. 1996) which are complimentary to workplace commitment are:

- **Choicefulness:** Most of the employees appreciate the ability to exercise some degree of choice in their day to day work life.
- **Effort:** Self-efficacy and a sense of empowerment will arise when one believes that the more effort given to assigned work, the more successful he will be in achieving the outcomes.
- **Impact:** The facet of impact exists for employees when they can have impact on the organization that is when they are able to accomplish the tasks they have set out for them and disempowered when they cannot.
- **Self-system control:** The feeling like strong performance will translate into benefits or rewards, employees will feel empowered.

- **Meaningfulness:** People feel more empowered the more meaningful the rewards they receive for their efforts.
- **Universal Justice:** When people are rewarded for their effort, regardless of outcomes, a form of empowerment call universal justice is present.

3. Factors affecting Degree of Empowerment

The following issues need to be resolved for empowerment (Spreitzer, 1996) to be successful such as: role ambiguity, span of control, social support, access to information, access to resources, and participative environment.

- **Role Ambiguity:** It occurs when an individual is unsure about others' expectations of him or herself. Hence every organization has clearly defined tasks which are to be performed and to avoid confusion and frustration.
- **Span of Control:** Individuals working under supervisors with narrow span of control are less intrinsically motivated than those working under wide span of control because their bosses specify much of their work behavior.
- **Social Support:** Relevant support networks include an individual's boss, peers, subordinates and the members of his or her work group. Membership in support networks increases social exchange with key organizational constituencies and thus enhances a sense of personal power which can be manifested in enhanced feelings of both self-determination and impact.
- **Access to information:** Basic information about workflow, productivity, external environment, and firm strategy which allows individuals to see the big picture and perceived empowerment.
- **Access to Resources:** A lack of access to critical organizational resources (funds, raw materials, equipments, space, time and manpower) contributes to powerlessness and dependency.
- **Participative Environment:** Participative organizational environment will enhance individual contribution and initiative rather than excessive command and control by the superiors.

4. Strategic Employee Empowerment

Most of the organizations in the present context have developed and implemented a number of key strategic drivers in a more planned and systematic way to empower the existing employees in order to increase the level of commitment for survival and sustainability of the organizations. Several strategies which are exercised for this purpose are:

4.1 Delegation of Authority

Organizations rightly spotted that through delegation of authority to the executives will nurture the hidden talents or competencies towards the business requirements in the areas like construction of new projects, operation and methods, effective employee engagement etc.

4.2 Formation of Bipartite Committees

The logic behind formation of several joint forums comprising of equal representation from both workers and management side at all the levels of organization will foster healthy employee relations climate and better organizational performance.

4.3 Sense of Trusteeship

Employers are the trustees for their respective employees because of rightly identifying and implementing several welfare measures for them and the prime reason behind this to motivate them for organizational achievements and gratification of individual desires and needs.

4.4 Employees suggestion scheme

This provides opportunity to all employees to influence the managerial decision-making and involve themselves in organization building activities as an employee is the best judge of the job, perhaps the best person to suggest changes for improving performance. The abilities of employees are utilized to the fullest extent by encouraging them to make suggestions and rewarding them.

4.5 Interaction with top executives

The chief executive officer (CEO) along with the board of directors addresses all employees at least once or twice a year in the meetings discussing the business issues of the company. This is the right platform where the employees can raise several issues, offering their views, and suggestions for survival and sustainability of the organization. The meeting followed by lunch or dinner hosted by the management to make the employees more emotionally attached with the organization.

In order to achieve empowerment, the executives must ensure that employees having the right mix of information, knowledge, power and rewards to work more enthusiastically (Singh, 2004). Empowerment thus helps to create autonomy for employees, allows sharing of responsibility and power at all levels, builds employee self-esteem and energizes for workplace commitment and better individual performance.

4. Workplace Commitment

Commitment is central to the understanding of both human motivation and system maintenance which is an indicator of a learning organization. Workplace commitment generally reflected through generating energy and activating the human mind, and optimum utilization of human capital towards better performance. It is also an important element of work behaviours and behavioural intentions (Lease, 1998) and a multifaceted construct consisting of three aspects such as affective, continuance, and normative. The affective commitment can reflect an attitude that focuses on employees' attachment to their organization and their emotional acceptance of its values and goals which can be termed as internal commitment. Continuance commitment corresponds to external commitment and reflected through material benefits and rewards to be gained by employees (Argyris, 1998), where as normative commitment is a sense of loyalty to the organization. Each and every facet of workplace commitment serves a useful purpose in the workplace as employees are internalize the values and norms of the organization and accepting its gains and losses as their own. Workplace commitment is consisting of organizational commitment, individual commitment, and possible outcomes of workplace commitment (figure 1).

4.1 Organizational Commitment

Organizational commitment is the measure of strength of the employee's identification with the goals and values of the organization (Mowday et al., 1982). It involves both organizational and supervisory commitment and is directed by organizational attributes such as values and human behavior at work (Morrow, 1993). Supervisory commitment is defined as the strength of identification with the supervisor and the internalization of the supervisor's values. Identification occurs when the subordinates are accepting the attributes of the supervisors such as attitude, behaviour, and accomplishments while internalization occurs as subordinates are adopting these attributes because supervisor's attitude and behaviour are congruent with the subordinate's value systems (Gregersen and Black, 1993).

4.2 Individual Commitment

Individual employee commitment is reflected by the attributes which are directly affect the person and to be defined as the psychological and emotional attachment of individuals to their jobs, work groups or teams, peers, and careers. Team commitment enhances social involvement and shared leadership towards goal attainment. Job commitment is the degree to which a person identifies psychologically with his/her work assignment. Career commitment has been defined as the magnitude of an individual's motivation, attitude, belief, and behavioural intentions toward an occupation or a job.

5. Antecedents of Workplace Commitment

Antecedents of workplace commitment are the specific actions or elements that cause commitment to occur. Employees are ready to contribute extra effort in performing their assigned duties that lie outside the boundaries of traditional job descriptions and all aspects of organizational commitment having an inverse

relationship with absenteeism, turnover, and dissatisfaction (Somers, 1995). The basic antecedents of it such as congruency, empowerment, clarity of purpose, challenging job, equity and fairness, feedback, and autonomy will bring organizational survival and effectiveness (Fornes et al., 2008).

- **Congruency:** As congruency exists between a person's interests, preferences, abilities and values, and organizational factors in the work environment, employees become more emotionally committed to the organization which leads toward better performance and satisfaction.
- **Empowerment:** Employees who are allowed to participate in decision-making and empowered to carry out their work are more committed to take initiative and contribute new ideas.
- **Clarity of purpose:** It gives a clear identification of the intentions, ideas, goals, plans and policies of the organization and proper communication about these to the employees. Supply of employee manuals, involvement in discussions of new policies and procedures, need based training programmes will provide a clear sense of direction consistent with organizational values.
- **Challenging job:** More challenging and rewarding jobs are quite significant for the organization and permits for utilization of skills and knowledge. Job characteristics such as skill variety, task identity, task significance, and degree of autonomy will foster individual employee commitment.
- **Equity and fairness:** It will maintain a balance between the organization and its employees. In order to achieve organizational commitment the organization must give emphasis on trusting environment, transparent policies to govern employment relations, and fair and equitable treatment to the employees by the supervisors.
- **Autonomy:** It refers to the degree of freedom, independence and discretion enjoyed by an employee with respect to the work assignment for scheduling work, determining procedures, operational decision-making and job involvement. High degree of autonomy will support organizational commitment, increased job satisfaction and performance outcomes.
- **Feedback:** Employees receive information continuously for better performance and operational excellence through regular feedback mechanism system. It fosters continuous improvement and proper communication with employees which lead towards enhanced organizational commitment.

6. Indicators of Workplace Commitment

In the competitive environment, most of the organizations have successfully developed, executed, evaluated, refined and perused employee empowerment and improvement as a prime human resource practice with business value (Kandula, 2004). So an employee empowerment and involvement organization starts with the concept of strategic fit between people, tasks, technology, information processes, rewards and organization structure for which all must be in alignment before the organization can work efficiently. Employee involvement can also result from providing employees with the skills necessary for decision making, problem solving, shared leadership and overall understanding of the business. The indicators of workplace commitment are the possible results derived from organizational and individual commitment. Employees with strong organizational commitment are emotionally attached to the organization and have strong desire to contribute significantly towards organizational success. This leads to increased competitiveness, accountability, risk taking, highly innovativeness, low wastage, and the desire to improve overall job performance. Higher degree of organizational commitment is associated with lower rate of turnover and absenteeism, and improved organizational effectiveness (Camp, 1993). Individuals who are more committed are highly motivated and will experience lower level of occupational stress, less emotional exhaustion and depersonalization (Jamal, 1990). Moreover, increased individual commitment and commitment to work groups or teams improves team performance, interpersonal interaction and group cohesion, and enhances individual performance and degree of satisfaction as shown in figure 2.

7. Performance Implications

The prime responsibility of line and HR professionals is to make sure the job and work environment is congruent with an employee's interest and abilities which enhanced level of commitment and performance.

On the basis of the constituents of workplace commitment such as organizational and individual commitment, possible situations like conflict, distress, and optimization have emerged and indicated some implications due to commitment are: the degree of job performance, satisfaction and motivation, and organizational performance (see figure 3).

8. Conclusion

Employee empowerment is closely related to employee involvement, a concept that is easily understood and more uniform throughout the organization. The process comes about by giving employees a combination of information, influence, and incentives (Hammuda & Dulaimi, 1997). Organizations today need to change themselves by being more innovative, creative and by reorienting themselves toward people-based systems those focused on motivation, empowerment and freedom. Empowerment involves removing limits on, and recognizing the talents of employees in order to prevent employee dissatisfaction. Empowerment thus inspires change and increases the level of workplace commitment which increases the degree of individual commitment and helping for achievement of organizational goal. The key inputs for positive results are training, education and counseling in order to create a new work ethos. One of the key responsibilities of the human resource development (HRD) department is to realize and give emphasis on the importance of empowering people in the organization.

Empowerment also makes a shift from the concept of employees are not managed by the traditional hierarchical control system, instead, out of their commitment towards shared organizational goals, as they enforce self-discipline to achieve these. This is possible when hierarchies are dissolved, internal political games are minimized, and organizations adopt performance based reward system and recognition of individual contributions. Again team work and decentralization should be encouraged for effective empowerment and meaningful participation which induces the climate of workplace commitment and significantly contribute towards organizational effectiveness.

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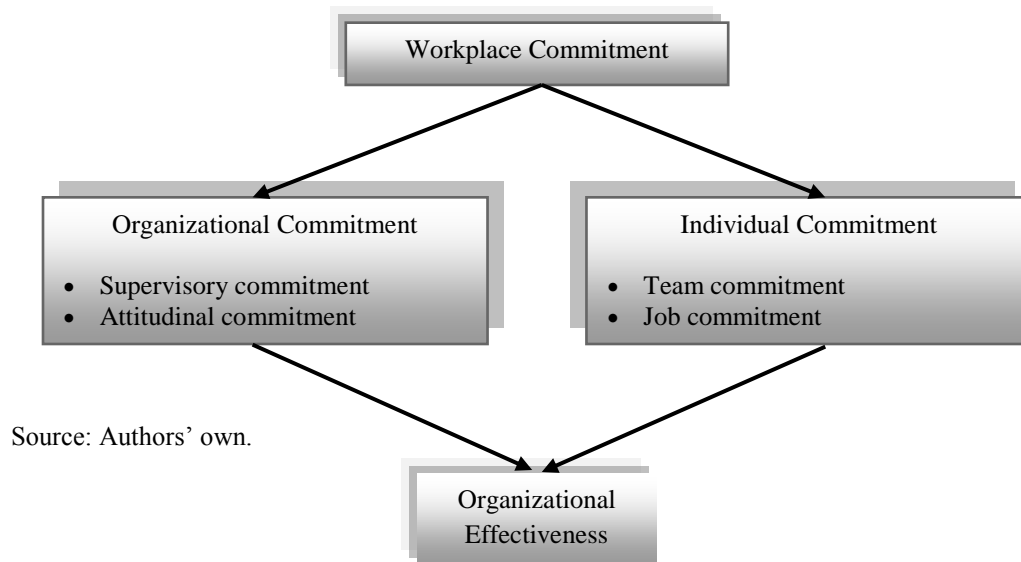
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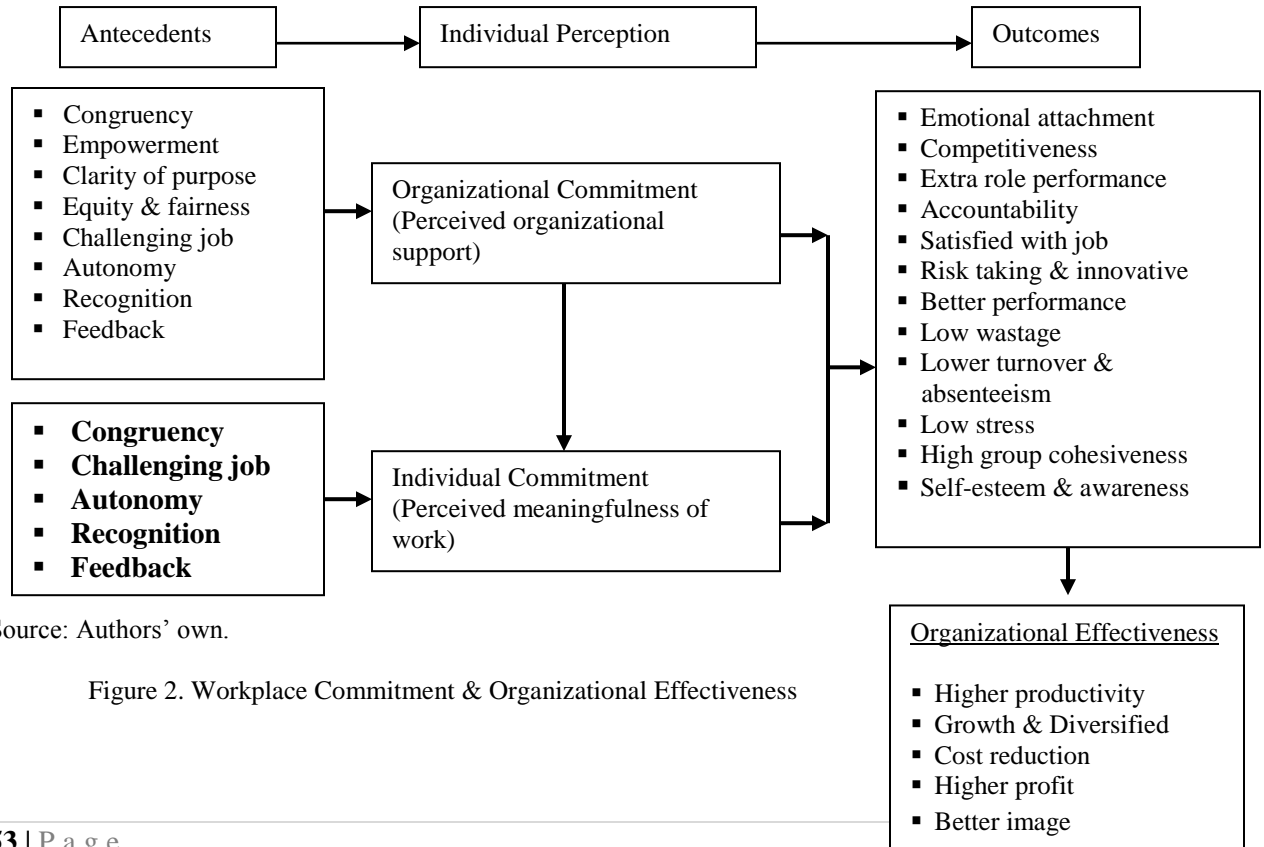
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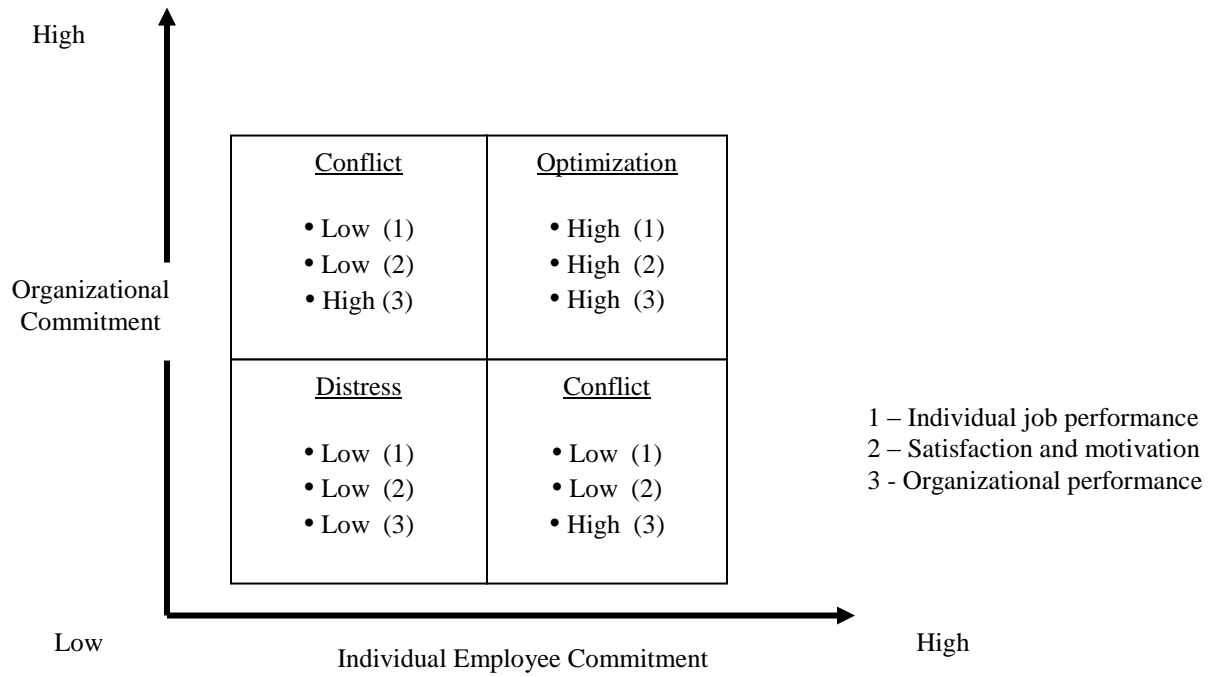
Source: Authors' own.

Figure 1. Structure of Workplace Commitment



Source: Authors' own.

Figure 2. Workplace Commitment & Organizational Effectiveness



Source: Fornes et al., (2008).

Figure 3. Performance Implications of Workplace Commitment

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