Identifying Organizational Empowerment and Supportive HRM

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Abstract

The study aimed to divide employee empowerment by level and to identify HRM activities that affect employee empowerment. The finding revealed that there were three levels of empowerment. Individual empowerment has been regarded in cognition and motivation of people, team empowerment concerned about the relationship between supervisors and subordinates, and organizational empowerment emphasized on organizational support; such vision setting, regulation, corporate structure, and resources. In addition to HRM activities, training would shape the employee attitude and guideline employee roles, employee recruitment and selection would enable employees to be self-responsibility, rewards would promote and encourage employee, and performance assessment would stimulate desired behaviors during employee perform tasks. Otherwise, the organizations must remind that there is no one best way for empowerment implementation.

Introduction

As the global business environment becomes ever more competitive, most organization emphasize on business process improvement and transformation. Beyond the organizational change, empowerment is an essential element (Yusoff and Abdullah, 2008; Division and Martinsons, 2002; Baird and Wang, 2010) that was described in the conjunction between organizational change and business process improvement (Division and Martinsons, 2002; Herbert, 2009) and critical to organization innovativeness and effectiveness (Baird and Wang, 2010; Herbert, 2009).

Regarding employee empowerment in manufacturing industry, empowerment is a part of the general move toward task flexibility and increase employees’ initiative and responsibility (Yusoff, and Abdullah, 2008). Further, the empowering management practices in service firm has been adopted frequently to achieved customer satisfaction (Klidas, Berg and Wilderom, 2007), but the impact empowerment in service firms was less than manufacturing firms (Yusoff and Abdullah, 2008).

In the 1990s, empowerment was considered and advocated as a means to liberate workers, encourage them to be more innovative, and thereby make them both happier and more productive. Remarkably, many proponents of employee empowerment seem to assume that employees will eagerly accept the responsibility for managing their own work, and the skill and knowledge development will enable employees to make decision effectively and efficiently (Division and Martinsons, 2002). These directly relate to employee performance, employee job satisfaction, employee commitment (Baird and Wang, 2010; Greasley and King, 2005; Herbert, 2009), and organizational loyalty (Greasley and King, 2005).

In previous research, there are many academic evidences shown the organizational support, such the corporate culture, corporate direction, and leadership role affected to employee empowerment behavior, and there are less studied about HRM activities in empowerment program. Thus, this study aimed to divide employee empowerment by level of support and to identify HRM activities that affect employee empowerment.

Empowerment

Empowerment is a modern management technique (Dimitriades, 2005; Kuo, Ho, Lin, and Lai, 2010) that the meaning of empowerment has tend to be associated with the concept of power, thereby implying that power is redistributed by senior position to subordinate position (Greasley and King, 2005; Kuo, Ho, Lin, and Lai, 2010). The notion of empowerment involves the employee with a greater...
degree of flexibility and more freedom to make decisions relating to work (Greasley and King, 2005), including enrich employees' work experience (Kuo, Ho, Lin, and Lai, 2010).

However, empowerment is formal when there are official norms or rules that force employee participation, and empowerment is informal when the influence on decisions is based on personal relationship between managers and subordinates (Yusoff and Abdullah, 2008). Generally, empowerment research is dominated by two approaches (Chan, Taylor and Markham, 2008; Yang and Choi, 2009). First, situational approach, sometime known as rational approach or management practice, emphasizes on the power delegation from executives to subordinates. Second, psychological approach focuses on intrinsic motivation and cognition of employees.

According to employee empowerment can be adopted at different level (Baird and Wang, 2010), and to understand difference level of empowerment would enable managers to design and implement a successful empowerment program (Yang and Choi, 2009). When considering the employee empowerment based on organizational behavior theory, we can divide empowerment into three levels as individual, group or team, and organization.

1. Individual Empowerment – regarding employee cognitions to describe employee empowerment base on psychological approach. There are four dimensions of employee empowerment at individual level (Spreitzer, 1995; Lee and Koh, 2001) that are:

   1) Meaningfulness – the meaning of a value of task goal or purpose judge related to an individual's own ideals or standard.
   2) Competency – an individuals' belief in their capability to perform task activities.
   3) Self-determination – refer to autonomy in the initiation and continuation of work behavior and process.
   4) Impact – the perception of the degree to which an individual can influence certain outcome at work.

2. Team Empowerment – refer to the supporting of team members that have difference role in empowerment program. For first-line employee role, they must concern efficacy in performing job tasks, improvement efforts in job tasks, effective collaboration, effort for improvement in the work group, and involvement at the organizational level outcomes (Boudrias, Gaudreau, Savoie and Morin, 2009).

   By supervisor role, they must delegate authority to the group members that is equal to their level of responsibility, foster subordinate to develop their skills, communicate relevant job information, give reward based on the level of performance achieved, and maintain positive relation with group member (Boudrias, Gaudreau, Savoie and Morin, 2009). Besides, leader should encourage employees to use their decision-making authority, guideline employee how to use their increased authority, and support them in performing new role successfully (Klidas, Berg, and Wilderom, 2007).

   Yang and Choi (2009) concluded components of empowerment affected team performance as follow:

1) Autonomy– the authority in making their decision, including initiation and continuation of work behaviors and process.
2) Responsibility– team empowerment can be affected by a responsibility for the outcome and team member enable to track their own performance. If team members are highly responsible, they willing to take risk and learn from their mistake.
3) Information– team empowerment needs necessary information when team members make decision.
Creativity – refer to the freedom to be creative on job. The employee would not be punished for unsuccessful attempts but be rewarded for trying.

Howbeit, there is often resistance to change from manager/leader and employee themselves because the employees may consider empowerment as management technique that use to exploit them. For leader, they may view empowerment as threat that reduces authority that associated with sense of job loss or status loss (Greasley and King, 2005). Thus, trust was identified as critical issue in a social exchange-driven process of empowerment program (Chan, Taylor, and Markham, 2008; Herbert, 2009).

3. Organizational Empowerment – refer to organization factors supported empowerment program. The organization must set shared vision, goal, and process to achieve goals; according to these would shape organizational direction (Wooddell, 2009). The new role of senior management is to set an overall strategic direction that supports worker rather than controls worker (Johnson, 1994).

Moreover, the organization must allocate the resources, such time off from regular duties, clerical support and budgetary, including facilitate employees in brainstorming, discussion, time management, and problem solving (Wooddell, 2009; Chan, Taylor and Markham, 2008). Similar to official channels, such norms and regulation will put empowerment into practice and guarantees employee participation (Pardo de Val and Lloyd, 2003, Chan, Taylor and Markham, 2008). Otherwise, organizational support; such as structure, information and culture, also are critical factors in this process (Chan, Taylor and Markham, 2008).

Employee empowerment relevance notion of decentralize that need extensive communication up and down in organization hierarchy (Baird and Wang, 2010). Relationship between managers and subordinates should less formal and reduce interactive control (Herbert, 2009). The organization must ensure that employees can contribute directly in the decision making process, instead of trough intermediates (Pardo de Val and Lloyd, 2003; Greasley and King, 2005). However, the practitioner must remind that if the people not feel empowered, the control systems still reflect the traditional top-down command (Herbert, 2009). Regarding barrier of empowerment, Dimitriades (2005) stated employee empowerment is the culture product of American culture. Thus, it has the limitation to embrace in different culture context that respect for priorities and seniority in the organizational hierarchy.

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<th>Organization Factors</th>
<th>Measurement</th>
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| Shared Vision        | 1. Vision setting  
2. Work process framework  
3. Regulation and norm | Johnson(1994); Wooddell (2009); Pardo de Val and Lloyd (2003); Chan, Taylor, and Markham(2008); |
| Resources            | 1. Time off from regular duties  
2. Clerical support  
3. Budgetary  
4. Facilitated in work participation | Chan, Taylor, and Markham (2008); Wooddell (2009) |
| Structure            | 1. decentralize  
2. Communication up and down in organization hierarchy  
3. Less formal relationship between leader and subordinates  
4. Reduce interactive control | Pardo de Val and Lloyd (2003); Greasley and King (2005); Chan, Taylor, and Markham (2008); Herbert (2009); Baird, K. and Wang, H., 2010 |
Human Resource Management and Empowerment

According to empowerment at organization level and new pattern of work, organization must change the way to deal with their employee to achieve maximum profit. Therefore, the role of human resource management (HRM) is moving from the traditional command and control approach to more strategic (Jarrar and Zairi, 2002). Although, human resource management becomes the major approach in empowerment program to help employee understand their role and to achieved employee involvement, there are less prior researches mentioned in this area. Besides empowerment literature review, there are HRM activities that associated with employee empowerment as shown in Table 2.

1. Training and Development – To develop employees in empowerment program can be accelerated through formal training or mentoring (Division and Martinsons, 2002). Employees should be trained to contribute more organizational performance and involved in management decision making (Bowen and Lawler, 1992), including role of participants in empowerment program will be reduced ambiguity.

2. Reward – Performance-related rewards will promote and encourage employee responsibility, creativity, initiation (Klidas, Berg and Wilderom, 2007) and organizational performance (Bowen and Lawler, 1992). Considering the kind of reward, intrinsic reward, such praise and panegyric, provided by informal is likely to be more effective than extrinsic reward, such incentives money, provided by formal incentive system (Klidas, Berg, and Wilderom, 2007).

3. Recruitment and Selection – Careful employee recruitment and selection will enable employees to have appropriated skill, knowledge, and attitude (Klidas, Berg, and Wilderom, 2007), such self-responsibility and good citizenship behavior. Further, experienced worker will advantage for organization and personality test should be used in selection process.

4. Performance Assessment – Empowering management style associated with controlling and company value that shaping employee attitude and stimulate desired behaviors during perform tasks. Moreover, empowerment requires non-blame culture wherein well-intentioned mistakes are discussed in supportive way (Klidas, Berg, and Wilderom, 2007), including informal assessment will be more efficient than formal assessment.

Table 2 HRM activities associated with employee empowerment

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3. Discussed mistake in supportive way
4. Emphasized on informal assessment

Results

1. Empowerment Level

According to previous literature review, the author categorized the employee empowerment into three levels that are:

1. **Individual Empowerment** – regarding employee cognition to describe employee empowerment base on psychological approach and associated with intrinsic motivation. The employee must recognize the meaning of work and their competent, including they have to perceive the influence certain outcome at work. Moreover, individual must have the autonomy to plan and decide their work.

2. **Team Empowerment** – refer to supporting of team members who have difference role in empowerment program. For employee role, they must concern efficacy in performing job tasks, improvement efforts in job tasks and work group, and involve in organizational activities. For supervisor role, they must delegate authority to group members that related to their responsibility, foster subordinate to develop skills, communicate relevant job information, and maintain positive relation with group members. For team empowerment, trust between supervisors and subordinates are very important, because is often resistance to change from manager/leader and employee themselves.

3. **Organizational Empowerment** – refer to organization factors supported empowerment program, such shared vision, goal, and process. The new role of senior management is to set an overall strategic direction for the enterprise and allocate the resources, such time off from regular duties, clerical support and budgetary, including facilitate employees in brainstorming, discussion, time management, and problem solving. Further, organizational support; such as structure, information and culture, also are critical factors in this process. Relationship between managers and subordinates should less formal and reduce interactive control.

2. Human Resource Management in Empowerment Program

Considering the human resource management in empowerment program, the author identified HRM activities that affect employee empowerment that are:

1. **Training and Development** – Developing employees can be accelerated through formal training or mentoring that would help employee understand their role and reduce ambiguity. Especially junior staffs might be trained the decision making skill and self-responsibility skill.

2. **Reward** – Performance-related rewards will promote and encourage employee responsibility, creativity, initiation and organizational performance. The organization must consider both intrinsic reward; such praise and panegyric, and extrinsic reward; such incentives money.

3. **Recruitment and Selection** – Careful employee recruitment and selection will enable employees to have appropriated skill, knowledge, and attitude in work process, such self-responsibility and good citizenship behavior. Therefore, personality tests have to use aligning with competency based interview in selection process.

4. **Performance Assessment** – Empowerment requires creating a non-blame culture wherein well-intentioned mistakes are discussed in supportive way, including informal assessment will be more efficient than formal assessment.
Conclusion and Limitation

The study aimed to divide employee empowerment by level and to identify HRM activities that affect employee empowerment. The finding revealed that employee empowerment has been divided into three levels; individual level, team level, and organizational level. Individual empowerment has been regarded in psychological approach that focused cognition and motivation of people, team empowerment concerned about the relationship between supervisor and subordinates, and also emphasized on the supporting of team member.

Considering organizational empowerment level, the organizations have to support resources; time and budgetary, including facilitated employees involve in work process by participated brainstorming, discussion, and problem solving. Moreover, the organization must set shared vision, goal, norms, regulation, and framework process to put empowerment into practice and guarantees employee participation. For organizational structure, decentralized structure that extended communication up and down in organization hierarchy, and reduced leader authority and controlling will appropriate.

In addition to HRM activities, training will shape the employee attitude and guideline employee roles. Careful employee recruitment and selection will enable employees to have appropriated skill and knowledge, such self-responsibility. Performance-related rewards, both intrinsic and extrinsic reward, will promote and encourage employee responsibility, creativity, initiation. Lastly, performance assessment is one of employee control methods that stimulate desired behaviors during employee perform tasks, and non-blame culture must use when employees fail in their decision-making.

Limitation of empowerment implementing, the organization must remind that there are no one best way for empowerment implement (Jarrar, and Zairi, 2002; Yusoff and Abdullah, 2008). Each organization should take the appropriate solution and build their own picture that drives them and their employee to be excellence (Jarrar and Zairi, 2002). Furthermore, future research needs to validate components of HRM activity and prove the relationship between HRM and individual empowerment. The result would be contributed new knowledge in HRM area and beneficial to practitioner.

References


