



Participational Empowerment

By

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Participational Empowerment is the process of enhancing the capacity of individuals or groups to make choices and to transform those choices into desired actions and outcomes. Central to this process are actions which both build individual and collective assets, and improve the efficiency and fairness of the organizational and institutional context which govern the use of these assets.

According to Gallup Research, organizations utilize less than 20% of their employee's potential. To develop employee potential requires an organizational culture that inspires employees to learn, grow and give their very best. In such a culture innovations which require new employee behaviors be adopted can take root. Employees choose to go the extra mile expending their discretionary energy for the sake of the organization. Employees choose to invest themselves in the organization rather than be available to the highest bidder. For most organizations developing this untapped employee potential is their key competitive advantage for competing in the marketplace or retaining top talent.

An analogy to help understand whether an organizational culture supports learning, growing and the adoption of new behaviors is a garden. Will new seeds/ behaviors take root because the soil/culture is fertile or will they die or wither on

the vine due to unfertile soil? Many change interventions wrongly assume that an organization's learning and growing capacity is inherent, and all that is needed is to train the employees and they will adopt the new behaviors. Anyone who has managed a large scale organizational change process will attest that it is hard to change engrained behaviors and more efforts fail than succeed.

An empowering organization audit enables an organization to learn about the current capacity of its employee's to adopt new behaviors. It evaluates the organizational culture on six core values critical to empowering employees to learn and grow. The outcome of this assessment determines the current fertility of the cultural soil for adoption of new behaviors. With this knowledge the organization can make informed culture change adjustments.

Symptoms of a disempowering organizational culture often include:

- Employee's don't feel that their Organization is serious about real empowerment.
- The employee's fear of making decisions within the Organization.
- Lack of participation in decision making.
- New ideas not taken seriously.
- Leaders versus employee's mindset.
- Distrust and cynicism.
- Apathy and burnout through micro management and over control by Supervisors.
- Thoughts or feelings not freely expressed for fear of repercussion.
- Learning and growth opportunities not being actively pursued.
- Gossip and back biting poisoning work environment.
- People feel unappreciated.
- Lack of recognition for contributions.
- Top talent leaving for better opportunities or work environment.

The following six values with corresponding practices are imbedded in an organizational culture developing the full potential of its employees.

1. Self Responsibility: Individuals take responsibility to have their job, team, function, organization, the way they wish it to be. This is the counterpoint to being a victim within the organization.

2. Authentic Communication: Individual communication is open, honest, transparent, and vulnerable. Individuals are talking about the real issues going on in the organization.

3. Trust: Individuals feel safe enough to try out new behaviors and take risks without fear of reprimand or put down by their superiors or colleagues if they make mistakes. There is a genuine sense of good will that pervades the organization.

4. Personal and Group Process Skills: Individuals and the organization have established protocols and developed skills which are regularly deployed to resolve interpersonal issues that come up in project management. Issues are resolved quickly and cleanly.

5. Learning and Growing: Individuals are encouraged to work on the real growth issues necessary for professional and personal development within the framework of the organization. Individuals are ever challenging themselves and supporting each other to develop and grow.

6. Caring: The organizational leadership demonstrates in tangible ways concern for individual employee well being. Employees feel valued and are inspired to give their very best effort on behalf of the organization.

Empowering Organization Audit

This questions provides a base line for developing a culture change intervention to enable learning, growing and the development of full employee potential.

Employees evaluate their group or department and organization as a whole based on the six values described above. Each is rated on a scale of 1-10 with 1 being seldom and 10 being consistently.

1. Self Responsibility _____.
2. Authentic Communication _____.
3. Trust _____.
4. Learning and Growing _____.
5. Personal and Group Process Skills _____.
6. Caring _____.

Large System Transformation Strategy

Creating an organizational culture fertile for learning and growing is the first step.

The next, is determining the new seeds/behaviors that need to be planted and building the organizational capacity to cultivate these behaviors over time. It has four stages.

Stage 1: Determine behaviors with corresponding practices to be adopted by the organization.

Stage 2: Design culture/behavior change program and accountability system.

Stage 3: Build capacity of organization to implement behavior change program either internally or externally.

Stage 4: Design and implement program diffusion strategy, evaluate and adjust as needed.

Finally, it is this writers opinion that in order for an Organization to empower its employee's and vice verse I might add, the organization will need to develop the creativity that employee's already have and perhaps aren't fully utilizing. You want to get people to a place where they feel able to suggest and offer new ideas rather than waiting to be told what to do. This kind of organizational empowerment is defined as active participation. The crucial element present within **Active Participational Empowerment** are; Involvement, Accountability, Encouragement, Setting Boundaries and Expectations, listening to and acknowledging people's ideas.

Organization Leadership In Economic Tough Times