

Execution *focus*

The success of an organization depends on its ability to convert its plans into reality. One of the important components is the ability of its leaders to decentralise execution of their goals by delegating work effectively.

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Delegation

Barriers, benefits and how to delegate

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The heading of one of Harvard Business Review paper's reads "To Be a Great Leader You Need To Delegate Well". The paper then goes on to also state that "One of the most difficult transitions for leaders to make is the shift from doing to leading" (Sostrin,2017, HBR)

Delegation refers to the transfer of responsibility for specific tasks from one person to another (Landry,2021). Delegation is a management skill needed for effective execution of one's goals. It would help leaders reach their potential as it involves letting go of routine tasks and focussing on more strategic ones. If a leader delegates effectively, it is not only a win-win for him but for his entire team.



A manager feels that once a task is assigned, they have delegated but delegation is not just assigning a task to an employee. It involves assigning a responsibility together with the authority to do what is needed to meet the goals (Lloyd,2012). If only leaders understand that, they can expand possibilities, with every employee they empower, helping them contribute towards their common goals. On the other hand, the leader's power decreases with every job they unnecessarily hold on to (Sostrin ,2017).

Delegation fortunately can be learnt and we at Metis, in our endeavour to help leaders execute effectively and achieve their goals and strategies, have developed the Leadership Execution Quotient. This is to assess the important skills of a leader that are needed for effective execution and delegation is one of them. We have defined it as “entrusting others with responsibility and trusting their capability to perform”.

“To raise the ceiling of your leadership potential, you need to extend your presence through the actions of others,” (Sostrin,2017)

Barriers to Delegation

If leaders sense that they are not delegating and doing a lot of work themselves, they just need to ask themselves this question to find out: If you took a an unexpected week off work, would your initiatives and priorities move forward in your absence? (Sostrin,2017)

If no, then they have their answer! Another red flag could be that a leader is always tired and seems to have no time to engage in building strategy or do business and employee development.

In such instances it would imperative to sit back and understand what prevents them from delegating and understand how they can, to be able to be the leader they are capable of. “To raise the ceiling of your leadership potential, you need to extend your presence through the actions of others,” (Sostrin,2017).

Managers could be experiencing one of the following below, as reasons for not delegating the work to their employees.

- 1) The leader may feel that he is better off doing the task himself as it may delay the task if he has to explain it to an employee
- 2) The leader may feel guilty delegating a task as he feels he is just passing off work
- 3) The leader may feel guilty that he is adding more work to an employee's already long list of tasks
- 4) The leader wants to feel important and indispensable to the team by keeping specific knowledge with oneself
- 5) The leader does not trust or have confidence in the specific employee to whom the job has to be delegated to
- 6) The leader believes s/he is the only one who can do the job correctly
- 7) The leader is worried about letting go
- 8) The leader enjoys doing some projects and thus does not delegate it
- 9) The leader may not trust the employee's commitment to quality
- 10) Two unconscious biases that prevent a leader from delegating
 - Self enhancement effect: the belief of managers that a work product is much more important as they were involved in its production
 - Faith in supervision effect: the feelings of employees that the work done under the supervision and control of a manager, is done better than without their involvement

Sources: Lloyd (2012);Conti (2017)

How to effectively delegate

Harvard Business Review quotes a Gallup Study, which showed that CEOs who excel in delegating generate 33 percent higher revenue (Landry,2021). They also have employees who feel empowered, whose morale is boosted, whose productivity is high and who feel more engaged as they have more autonomy.

The following are some suggestions that leaders can start with:

1) Leaders should have a delegation attitude and know that they can't accomplish everything

Ask oneself frequently: "Who else could do this?" The leader should question every task, particularly those they have done for years.

Gallup in their article on delegating (Badal &OTT, 2015) illustrates the differences between those who have high delegator talent versus those that have limited or low delegator talent. Delegators know that they can't accomplish everything so let go of routine tasks to focus on more strategic ones that lead to higher returns. On the other hand non-delegators focus on routine tasks ignoring those that will help in their organization's growth.

2) Leaders need to be aware of the tasks that need to be delegated

Most leaders are not aware of which tasks to delegate. Tiny tasks that take small amounts of time and those that maybe an assistant can do should be delegated. Tedious tasks that are mindless and don't require much skill should be delegated. Time consuming tasks call for breaking it up into smaller segments and some of them being delegated. Tasks that a leader may not be good at for e.g., designing graphics should be delegated to people who are better equipped. Time sensitive tasks could be handled by a leader, but parts need to be delegated if there is a chance it won't be done on time and finally tasks a leader like doing but is no longer part of his job need to be delegated too.

3) Leaders need to play to their employees' strengths and choose the right person for the right job

Delegators take time to understand their employees and their strengths and assign tasks that play to their strengths, helping them succeed. This helps them build the team's capacity. However non delegators set their employees up for failure by not giving attention to the person job fit.

4) Leaders need to define the expected outcomes and explain why they are delegating and provide the right instructions

According to Gallup, delegators focus on the outcomes not the process. They set clear expectations about time, budget, goals while supporting, guiding, and boosting morale. Non delegators on the other hand micromanage and don't set clear expectations, leaving their employees frustrated.

5) Leaders need to provide the right resources

Gallup highlights this provision of necessary resources as important and indicates that delegators make sure employees have the necessary tools, people and training required to do their job while those who are non-delegators don't pay attention to these details and don't have the patience for it.

6) Leaders need to create a clear communication channel

Leaders need to have a mechanism where employees can come back to them if they need help or advice. They need to have a way to check progress and have regular check-ins, without micromanaging.

7) Leaders need to be tolerant of mistakes and failures

Leaders who are perfectionists struggle with delegating as they feel they are the best person to do the job. However, while employees may not fail, one should be open to delegating as it encourages new ideas and creative ways of doing things.

8) Leaders need to be patient

Leaders need to be patient with their employees. They may be able to finish tasks faster than some of their employees as a result of their experience, but they need to understand that with time the employees will also do it more efficiently and quickly.

9) Leaders need to give and take feedback

Leaders who delegate, give and take regular feedback. They ask for suggestions on what to change and involve their team in making decisions. They give a lot of positive reinforcement and provide guidance when required thus creating a psychological safe environment.

10) Leaders need to acknowledge and thank the employees

Those leaders who delegate recognise employees for the job well done while those who don't tend to, are quick to find fault, creating an unpleasant team atmosphere. It's important to thank the employee for doing the delegated job successfully.

11) Leaders need to provide the employees the necessary autonomy and level of authority to accomplish tasks

Delegators encourage employees to take ownership and give them the autonomy to accomplish goals. They encourage them to come up with new ideas to accomplish them. Non-delegators feel only they can accomplish the task thereby making all decisions, hindering employee growth.

12) Leaders need to identify the lessons learned

Leader's need to identify the new things learned. An employee may have done a job more efficiently or used a better method than the leader would have. These should be documented and shared.

Sources: Lloyd (2012), Badal &OTT (2015); Conti (2017); Landry (2021)

Communicating Delegation

Once the leader has decided who the task will be delegated to, the next step will be to meet and communicate it. This also involves planning and needs to be done well. Lloyd (2012) illustrates four steps:

*The leader is “assigning responsibility for producing outcomes—not just performing tasks”
Lloyd (2012)*

1) Meet face to face

It is necessary to schedule a face to face meeting as this indicates the importance this communication deserves. The leader needs to explain to the person, the job and the desired outcomes and why s/he has been assigned it. The leader is “assigning responsibility for producing outcomes—not just performing tasks” Lloyd (2012)

Timelines and processes and who is in control of what needs to be decided. A leader should encourage a dialogue. We at Metis believe that while it’s important to identify the right people and delegate the tasks, getting employee buy-ins is extremely crucial for the delegated tasks to be successful. The employee will then be more committed to making sure the delegated task is done successfully.

2) Confirm employees understanding and commitment

A lack of this is an issue that leads to many problems. The leader needs to ask the employee to paraphrase what he understood so he can be sure he understood it right without making the employee feel his or her listening and understanding abilities are being questioned.

3) Define employees’ authority level

The leader needs to understand what kind of authority the employee needs. It is important to make sure others know he or she has been given that authority and commit to supporting and cooperating with whatever is needed.

4) Follow up and provide coaching and guidance

The leader should not abandon the person once the job has been delegated. Providing help to the person when needed, especially if they are facing resistance from others is crucial. It is important to provide feedback by letting them know if they have made mistakes and what they can do while making sure they are meeting timelines.

Benefits of delegation

There are multiple benefits to a leader or manager who delegates.

1) Decreases the workload

It lightens the load for the manager, freeing up time to do tasks that will have greater impact on growth and returns

2) Empowers the team

Delegation of tasks with the necessary authority empowers the team to make decisions and try out new and creative approaches to reach their goals.

3) Increases their trust

Delegation tells the employees that the leader trusts in their ability to get the task done and this feeling of trust leads to more employee engagement and higher productivity

4) Helps in professional development

Each task that the leader delegates is an opportunity to develop for the concerned employee. We at Metis believe that it is an opportunity for the leader also to grow, develop and push personal boundaries as he can now take on bigger, more strategic and challenging tasks.

5) A leader learns about the strength of his team members to handle projects

Doing an audit of the skills and strengths of each employee before delegating tasks helps the leader understand the employees better and what each is capable of.

6) Prepares team members to take on more responsibilities in the future

As they add more tasks to the list of things they do, they are also learning new skills and this will prepare them for future roles

7) It improves the image of the leader in their employees eyes

A research study showed how delegation improves the image of the leader in the eyes of the employees. They perceive the leader to be have increased ability and their job satisfaction also increases (Drescher,2017)

Something to Try

A leader can try this method to assess if s/he is delegating enough to the activities that matter.

Write down all your tasks two weeks ahead and two weeks before and assess how much time you have and are delegating to each in hours. Then rank each of them on a 10-point scale to assess which are the most important for the team's overall success. If you feel you are not spending much time on the most important tasks and more on the not so important tasks, it's time to reassess and let go of some tasks, that allow you more time to do what is important (Sostrin, 2017).

Delegation is easier said than done! However, if managers understand its importance and consciously take time out to hone this skill, they will become better and more successful leaders, leading successful and engaged teams

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