Is it justifiable for managers of organizations to delegate duties and responsibilities at all times?

- Oyat Christopher -
Short Communication

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Delegation is an interesting subject matter among several contemporary scholars and management practitioners. The study appreciates that effective delegation of power is as old as the biblical era of prophetic ministry of evangelism; and yet there have been some managers who have not paid heed to what it means to effectively enforce the ethos of delegating power and authority. To this extent, this research paper delves deeper, and on the basis of experience gained overtime by the researcher, to underscore the need and benefits of effective delegation of duties and responsibilities if an expanding organization is to be successful in executing its mandatory obligations. The study notes that effective delegation of duties and responsibilities should not just be taken for granted, it should an inbuilt process in an organization which should be nurtured and enabled to be part and parcel of an organization’s culture.

Key words: Delegation, duties and responsibilities.

INTRODUCTION

Background

Experience has shown that it is important for organizations to explore ways and means of creating the best possible balance between control from the centre and delegation throughout the rest of the system in management. It is known that delegation and empowerment are centred on issues of authority, responsibility and power. According to Cole (1996), delegation is essentially a power-sharing process in which individual managers transfer their legitimate authority to subordinates or team members, but without passing on their own ultimate responsibility for the completion of the overall task which has been entrusted to them by their superiors. It is argued that the fulfillment of practically every task in an organization requires a certain amount of authority or the right to act in a certain way (Drucker, 1985).

Delegation may also be looked at as the practice of assigning jobs to people and giving them the authority to see the job done. It is the act of assigning formal authority and responsibility to subordinates. Responsibility comes along with accountability. The delegated remains accountable to the one who delegates (College of Professional Manual, 1996).

Urwick (1952) argues that insecure managers or persons will tend to delegate at the lower end. This may be basically because of fear that the most immediate staff member may perhaps take over the mantle of power over time because of better performance always exhibited. However, there are ways in which delegation can be made safer for managers. Even confident and experienced managers will not want to take unnecessary risks of delegation. Good practice of delegating in situations where either the team is newly formed, is likely to include the following principles:

- Ensure that the objective is made clear;
- Indicate the standard of performance that is required;
- Decide what level of authority to grant;
- Allocate adequate resources in terms of staff, funds, equipment/facilities and expense;
- Ensure that clear reporting arrangements and lines are made;
- Encourage subordinates to request further help if needed;
- Inform subordinates that early mistakes will be used as learning opportunities;
- Ensure that the task is completed according to agreed standards;
- Provide any advice or further resourcing that may be required if the task has proved to be difficult than anyone had first anticipated; and
- Thank the individual for the efforts made (Peters, 1988).
Case scenarios on delegation for reflection

Moses and delegation
Delegation is considered to be as old as what is cited in the Good News Bible. The principles and practice dates as far back as 6,000 years ago! The case of Moses in the Old Testament reading is reminiscent of this notion. The testament ethos asserts that on the morrow, Moses sat to judge the people, and the people stood about Moses from morning till evening (Good News Bible, 1976). When his father-in-law came and found him executing his duties and responsibilities, he said:

"What is it that you are doing for the people? Why do you sit alone, and all people stand about you from morning till evening?" And Moses said to his father-in-law, "because the people come to me to enquire between a man and his neighbor, and I make them know the statutes of God and His decisions".

After a moment of reflection, Moses’ father-in-law said him to as follows:

"What you are doing is not good. You and the people will wear yourself out, for the thing is too heavy for you; you are not able to perform it alone. Listen now to my voice; I will give you counsel, and God be with you! You shall represent the people before God, and bring their cases to God; and you shall teach them the statutes and the decisions, and make them know the way in which they must walk and what they must do. Moreover, choose able men from all the people, such as those who fear God; men who are trustworthy and who hate a bribe; and place such men over the people as rulers of thousands, of hundreds, of fifties, and of tens. And let them judge people at all times; and every great matter they shall bring to you, but any small matter they shall decide themselves; so it will be easier for you, and they will bear the burden with you. If you do this, and God so commands you, then you will be able to endure and all these people also will go to their places in peace" (Exodus, 18-13-27).

Eventually Moses paid heed to the voice of his father-in-law and did all that he could as suggested. Moses chose competent men out of Israel, and made them heads over people; rulers of thousands, of hundreds, of fifties and of tens. And these leaders were able to judge people at all times; hard cases could be referred to Moses for appropriate action, and small matters could be decided by appointed leaders. With this delegation of power and authority, Moses became a relieved man!

Dr Bruce Duncan and delegation
In his article “To Delegate” – the bête noire of Entrepreneurs” (in Veritas, Journal, Vol.2, No.3, August 2011), Duncan argued and alluded to the notion that entrepreneurs must not fall prey to business astigmatism, navel gazing and self adulation that ignore the delegation of power and authority to others. He vehemently argued that a short sighted and ego-centric approach to business entrepreneurship is counterproductive and creates the tombstone heralding an early organizational death in the wake of immeasurable collateral damage. He concluded his views by emphasizing that delegation of power and authority tend to revolutionize lives, and above all lift the frustration of many who have to wait in the wings whilst one person does everything and, more often than not, does a second rate job! He emphasized that delegation is bound to bring changes in organizations for the better.

Business expansion and delegation
Let us assume that a given business is successful and that the owner decides to expand it, or that the circumstances force the owner to do so. Such an expansion may necessitate moving to larger premises or opening a branch or making some internal changes. It is unlikely that the owner or manager of a given business enterprise will himself or herself be able to cope with the increased workload; and so it will be necessary for him or her to engage others to assist in the management process.

Let us further imagine that the business owner works as a full time person to check every tiny item of work performed by every member of staff employed by him. This means that he might have no time left to concentrate on more important activities which only he/she may have the necessary experience or expertise to perform. So how does he cope up with this new situation of business expansion and development? (College of Professional Management Manual, 1996). What he may do is to entrust the performance of certain activities to one or more others whom he or she can trust to perform the activities without having to be constantly supervised and checked by him or her. In this regard, what he or she has done is to delegate to others the responsibility for the effective and efficient performance of business activities. He/she can still maintain control by issuing instructions and guidelines, by checking the performance from time to time, and by encouraging those concerned to approach him for any advice or guidance they may need (Ibid).

Lessons for contemporary organizations and managers
The three case scenarios portrayed have vital messages to organizations and managers in the following major ways:

As a business enterprise expands, there reaches a point where one person may find it difficult to singlehandedly manage. The business owner will simply not be in a position to attend to the needs of the expanding organization. In this regard, the need for engaging more manpower becomes necessary so as to enable a manager be in a position to attend to other functional needs of the organization.

As business enterprise expands, the complexity of the work to be executed escalates. Many business owners or managers are generalists who lack the ability and
inclination to attend to all the technical details involved in operating a growing business. To this extent, it makes good sense to engage men and women of relevant skills, experience and the requisite knowledge to execute attendant duties and obligations of an expanding business entity.

If a manager is interested in developing his or her subordinates, then it is beneficial to delegate duties and responsibilities as frequently as possible. In fact it is an acknowledged matter that all management development and seminars will be of little value if authority is only partially delegated!

Preparation for replacements is another valid reason for delegating authority. Managers who delegate wisely will have competent managers ready to move on as flag bearers overtime especially when the current manager retires from active duties and responsibilities.

**Benefits of delegating**

1) By delegating duties and responsibilities, a manager is able to save his or her precious time for other important tasks to be executed. This means that he or she is relieved to concentrate on other obligations.

2) Delegation has the potential of increasing outputs as more hands and talents are involved to execute assignments.

3) Delegation is known to increase the degree of human and technological efficiency in terms of inputs utilized. Costs of production may go down, for example in terms of administration and use of other resources.

4) Delegation enables staff members to learn through on-the-job training. How can a manager expect his or her subordinate to learn and gain experience if no opportunity is given to learn by doing?

5) Delegation has the power and potential of increasing a staff member’s level of motivation due to the impetus of additional assignments bestowed on him/her. In this regard, a subordinate is able to learn more in respect to challenging tasks and obligations that come along with this additional assignment.

**CONCLUSION**

It is important that organizations and managers should first of all assess and recognize the ability of different staff members before delegating duties and responsibilities. This involves a good manager taking some considerable period of time to study and evaluate the degree of competence of staff members; assessing their respective strengths and weaknesses. When a manager finally delegates an assignment or duty to a staff member, it is important that such a kind of delegation should be exhibited with complete trust so as to inspire confidence to achieve desirable and expected results. Learn to trust the delegated person! It is equally important that a manager should have and nurture a continuous desire to develop his or her staff members if sustained motivation at work place is to be guaranteed.

Finally, a manager should know and appreciate that there are some staff members who may afford to do better work than the manager himself or herself. Recognize such individuals; encourage as well as promote them to work even better.

**REFERENCES**


