



IS DELEGATION ABDICATION?

One of the most common complaints of managers is that they have too much work to do and too little time in which to do it. This perception left unchecked, could lead to stress and its by-product, managerial ineffectiveness. And yet, there is a managerial tool that could be easily used to overcome much of this problem; delegation. Strangely, many managers in a Malaysian environment are not comfortable with the idea of delegating, and the usual reasons given are:

- “If you want to do something well, you have to do it yourself”.
- “It takes too long to explain and to ensure that the task is done well”.
- “My subordinates are incapable of doing tasks of this nature”.
- “If I delegate, my staff will think that I am passing over my work”.

There seems to be this perception that to delegate would be to abdicate from their role as a manager. These managers are conditioned to believe that everyone in an organisation is paid to do his or her job, and if there is a need for someone else to assist a manager in doing his job, then this will be a reflection of the manager's inefficiency.

This is outmoded thinking. Delegation is today considered a very important management tool to ensure that the organisation gets the best out of managers. In all organisations, there will be a need for repetitive and routine managerial work to be done on a daily basis. This is essential, but at the same time falls under the category of low-value work. Hence if this work can be delegated, it will leave managers with time to concentrate on higher value work like planning.

There is also a fallacy that delegation is task assignment i.e. assigning work to an individual within the duties and responsibilities of his/her position. This is not true. Delegation actually involves the manager giving someone the responsibility and authority to do something that is normally part of the manager's job. For example, manpower planning which is part of a Human Resource manager's formal designated tasks, can be delegated to a subordinate. As the nature of the task is not of an urgent nature, there could be checks done on a periodical basis, to ensure that it conforms to organisational objectives.

Delegation is also not a way of transferring work downwards, and therefore special care should be taken to ensure that the person delegated to does not think that unpleasant assignments are being 'dumped' on him or her. Otherwise, employees will resent doing what they incorrectly perceive as the boss's work. This is tied in very closely to the previously mentioned fact that delegation is not abdication. The manager still has the ultimate responsibility for the task given. That is why it is important that appropriate controls and checks are established to monitor progress at all times. Managers should give subordinates the appropriate authority or power to carry out the assignment. At the same time, clear boundaries and parameters are set to ensure that it does not get out of control. There should be enough information given for the person to do the job creatively. At the same time, there should not be too much of information such that the person doing the job becomes just an implementor; in which case the learning process becomes negligible.

For delegation to be effective, it must be complemented by coaching. Managers and supervisors must constantly help employees to develop the skills needed to get the job or task done. Effective delegation also requires good communication and a high degree of trust between the individual delegating and the individual to whom the task has been delegated to. There will initially be a little apprehension on the part of subordinates to accept 'difficult' tasks. With good coaching and feedback, these can be overcome.

Delegation benefits subordinates in that it assists in their development as they start to do work meant for their superiors. It develops their skills and gives them personal satisfaction and a sense of achievement, when these 'managerial' tasks are assigned to them. It also provides them with opportunities to be involved with decision making which in turn leads to more commitment and increased morale.

Malaysian managers would be wise to use delegation to improve the effectiveness and efficiency of the workplace, and at the same time, as a tool for developing their subordinates. Successful and efficient managers delegate. It is the insecure and ineffective manager who will toil away at his office after dark, doing repetitive, mundane, managerial work.