AN OVERVIEW OF EMPLOYEE EMPOWERMENT INITIATIVE FOR TQM–AN HR PERSPECTIVE

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Abstract: *Employee empowerment is an addition to the involvement and participation initiatives that have been employed in Management practices. It is a management response to an increasingly complex and competitive external environment and its popularity has been enhanced by the quality movement in general, and by TQM in particular. The principles of TQM*

- *Customer focus*
- *Leadership*
- *Empowerment*
- *Process approach*
- *Systemic approach*
- *Continuous improvement*
- *Decisions based on facts*
- *Relationship with suppliers mutually beneficiary*

Empowerment is currently a popular topic on which consultants and management have focused in their desire to bring about increases in employee pro-activity, responsible self-organizing and self-management. The hypothesis has been that these changes in behavior will assist organizations in achieving their financial goals.

Top management leadership and employee empowerment are considered two of the most important principles of total quality management (TQM) because of their assumed relationship with customer satisfaction. As a result, many top management leadership and employee empowerment strategies and practices have been suggested in the management literature.

This is an empirical research which talks about TQM principles-

- *Leadership*
- *Empowerment*
- *Continuous improvement*

This research paper presents a simplistic understanding of the implementation of employee empowerment in IT companies. The article summarizes general views of management regarding employee empowerment .It also talks about the trends in employee empowerment. The aim of this research is to understand managers perception of the concept of empowerment. The paper is an attempt to understand the importance of empowerment in service sector like IT companies.

Keywords :

TQM and employee empowerment.

INTRODUCTION : Nowadays empowerment has occupied a central point in many organizations in the 21st century. There is need for employee empowerment in order to enable the organization to respond quickly to any changes in macro-environment. In a competitive environment in which organizations must be faster, leaner, provide better service quality, be more efficient, and more profitable, an empowered and proactive service worker is thought to be essential.

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However, delegation of authority for a long period of time in the past, dominated the management field. In fact, this view changed into the "empowerment" concept as it covers the participation and delegation of authority along with the motivation of the employees. Managers began to prefer a style, which liberates the creative and innovative "energies" and potentials of employees while benefiting shareholders, suppliers and customers as well.

Thus, the past three decades have been full of empirical and conceptual research dealing specifically with employee empowerment and autonomy. More than a decade ago, it was noted that the practice of empowering subordinates is a principal component of managerial and organizational effectiveness. Most of the researchers argue that empowerment need to be supported and nurtured by some prerequisites like incentives, skill, knowledge, communication and flow of information within an organization. The climate is to be conducive to employee empowerment in order to attain employee effective performance and job satisfaction.

In the 1990s empowerment became extensively discussed as the new business issue. The traditional view of leadership management is consistent of control and employees waiting to be directed. The new and more effective leadership is setting limits of authority and delegating responsibility.

Evolution of Employee Empowerment-

Empowerment is a concept that has been around since the dawn of mankind. However, the role it plays in organizations and its quest for understanding American business implementation has only been evolving for the past 50 years

1.3.1 The early 1950's-

In the early 1950's, Dr. W. Edwards Deming and Dr. Joseph M. Juran of the United States visited Japan to coach and mentor leaders, emphasizing quality of all the workers and not just of the people at the top of the organization. Through Quality Circles effective teamwork , empowerment and continuous improvement were enhanced . Building the quality in, was a core value change.

The call for Deming and Juran to help the Japanese was initiated because of the power the American economy held. In order to, Japan to be competitive, either the common American business practice of mass production and competition based on pricing could be implemented or some other competitive advantage must be discovered.

The Japanese found another way , compete on quality . In the American automotive manufacturing plants, assembly workers pushed themselves to complete as many products as possible with no concern of Quality . The assembly line only stopped when the supervisor found a sufficient cause, which was very rare. No employee on the assembly line had the authority to stop the line[3]

Worker Empowerment-

One of the significant differences, of the Japanese automotive manufacturers was the ability for any employee on the floor to stop the assembly line at any

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time. The idea was that when a problem was discovered in the product being assembled, the nonconforming piece of the product would be analyzed and fixed at the source so successive automobiles would not have the same problem.

The employees on the floor were empowered to ensure that the finished product met the standards of quality .By the 1960's, another distinction separated U.S. and Japanese businesses. Japan encouraged a more careful utilization of human capital and a more aggressive focus on learning at school and on the job. Japanese employees became part of the organization. They were considered fixed assets, and investments in training were expensed on the employees. The Japanese could not compete with the U.S. in the development of major innovations. Instead, great trust was given to the employees for the exploitation of new ideas.

By the 1970s the U.S. was losing market share in many industries and product lines despite superior productivity. By now the Japanese had turned their weaknesses into strengths. By pursuing quality, worker empowerment, variety, customization, convenience, and speed in getting to the market, they not only expanded the terms of competition beyond productivity but also found new routes to products as they were made.

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The training consisted of "making all management employees trained and aware of people and processes that made quality happen" The 1990's began to show a marriage of both the old and new economy. Innovative organizations captured the benefits from mass production (United States) and lean production (Japan). Organizations sought for volume and productivity as well as quality, variety, customization, convenience, and timeliness. The most noticeable difference in these new innovative organizations was that artisans and mass production workers were replaced by "empowered interdependent work teams."

1.4.Employee Empowerment in India-

Due to its sound foundation in Indian culture, empowerment has immense potential for effective implementation in the Indian context. It was practiced for the first time in the world by Homi Bhabha as early as 1944 at the Tata Institute of Fundamental Research. He also practiced it subsequently at the Atomic Energy Commission(1948) and the Atomic Energy Establishment(1954) . Thus Employee empowerment has been practiced for the first time in India both in scientific(1940s) and industrial (1950s) work settings.

The reason why employee empowerment is becoming so popular is simple. It makes good business sense. India ensures an environment of freedom, flexibility and trust and this is what engenders loyalty.

Objectives of Employee

Empowerment-

The Objectives Of Employee Empowerment Are:-

- To create an environment where people can work with freedom, within a framework of empowerment and accountability, vested with unparalleled powers to imagine, create and implement ideas-fully supplemented by investments in knowledge and technology
- To increase managerial and organizational effectiveness, job satisfaction and work productivity
- To facilitate application of advanced technology.
- To serve as prerequisite to quality focused organization, a core value of TQM effort.
- To act as a source of intrinsic motivator.
- To achieve full potential by allowing employees to stretch their minds, ingenuity and abilities.
- To generate entrepreneurship by driving decision making to self managed teams.
- To derive growth from all opportunities over time by fully allowing employees to increase their speed and enhance their creativity.
- To create value system for the organization.
- To provide platform for creation of intellectual property.

2.3.Definition of Employee empowerment-

The common dictionary definition of empowerment is "to give official authority to: delegate legal power to: commission, authorize".

Gandz (1990) writes, "Empowerment means that management vests decision-making or approval authority in employees where, traditionally, such authority was a managerial prerogative."

For the research purpose we will consider the following definition-_

Empowerment is defined as a process whereby: a culture of empowerment is developed, information is shared, competency is developed, and resources and support are provided. Each of the components of empowerment—culture, information sharing, competency development, resource provision, and support.

Objectives of Research.

- To study the present status of employee empowerment in IT companies.
- To study current key trends of employee empowerment.
- To understand general views of management regarding employee empowerment and its contribution to organization development.
- To get opinion of management about whether" The study of status of employee empowerment in IT companies will be worthwhile".

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Hypothesis-

1. There is a confusion amongst IT professionals about the concepts of employee empowerment and objectives of employee empowerment.
2. IT companies perceive the concept of employee empowerment as one of the methods of delegation and motivation.

Research methodology-

The researcher has used the information given by the respondents for fulfilling the objectives of the research. The data is collected through personal interview and questionnaire and is recorded, organized, analyzed and presented in a systematic way. The result is expected to be valid and accurate.

There were eight questions framed which covered importance of employee empowerment, meaning of employee empowerment, various employee empowerment initiatives, perception of management regarding employee empowerment and status of employee empowerment in the organization.

A) Research method mix-

I) Survey through questionnaire

II) Interviews

B) Sample size-

The sample size for the pilot study was 51 HR heads and CEOs of IT companies in Pune.

C) Tools used for analysis-

Weighted Average and percentages

IT companies perceive the concept of employee empowerment as one of the methods of delegation and motivation.

Q.1. Does your company has employee empowerment initiatives?

Responses	Percentage	Total
YES	100	100
NO	0	0

Interpretation- It can be observed from the responses that all the IT companies have employee empowerment initiatives.

Q.2 The Objectives of Employee Empowerment

Objectives of Employee empowerment	RANK					Total
	1	2	3	4	5	
To make best use of present potential	4	9	2	8	28	51
To unleash hidden potential	7	16	18	6	4	51
To show that we are concerned	13	7	9	16	6	51
To Increase productivity	10	16	11	10	4	51
To be able to the Face challenges of tomorrow	17	3	11	13	7	51

In order to know which objective of empowerment has the highest priority in IT sector, it was decided to find weighted totals. These are calculated as below. The weights are given as below.

Reponses/Rank	Weight
Not responded	0
5	1
4	2
3	3
2	4
1	5

Now from the responses the weighted totals are as below.

Objectives of Employee	Weights
To make best use of present potential	106
To unleash hidden potential	169
To show that we are concerned	158
To increase productivity	171
To be able to the face challenges of tomorrow	163

It can be observed from the responses that all the IT companies have employee empowerment initiatives.

It can be observed that according to the respondents the best thing about working IT sector in preference order is as below

Preference	Parameters
First	To increase productivity
Second	To unleash hidden potential
Third	To be able to the ace challenges
Fourth	To show that we are concern
Fifth	To make best use of potential

Interpretation - From the priority ranking it can be inferred that the IT companies look towards empowerment as a short cut to increase productivity. And there is confusion in the minds of IT professionals about the objectives of employee empowerment.

From the priority ranking it can be inferred that the IT companies look towards empowerment as a short cut to increase productivity.

Q. 3. Empowerment means-

Responses	Empowerment equals anarchy	delegation of authority is superior to employee	Employees can be empowered by simply	Empowerment means Manager addicates his	If a manager empowers his subordinates, he will be	Employee empowerment means flexible job design	Employee empowerment means Coaching, mentoring	Employee empowerment initiatives cannot be started
no answer						3		
strongly agree		3				11	18	
agree	3	2	10	2		16	16	14
neutral	15	25	9	11	8	8	12	
disagree	10	17	30	12	22	11	3	11
strongly disagree	23	4	2	26	21	2	2	18
Total	**51**	**51**	**51**	**51**	**51**	**51**	**51**	**51**

-It can be observed that the respondents-

1. Strongly disagree on the following statements-

1. Empowerment means manager abdicates his responsibility,
2. Empowerment equals anarchy,
3. If a manager empowers his sub-ordinates, he will be doing himself out of a job and
4. Employee empowerment initiatives cannot be started as Employees are not competent

2. Strongly agree on the following statements-

1. Employee empowerment means Coaching, mentoring, counseling and
2. Employee empowerment means flexible job design

3. They are neutral on the following statements -

1. Delegation of authority is superior to employee empowerment and
2. Employees can be empowered by simply Communicating with them

Interpretation-Though managers are neutral on the statement "Delegation of authority is superior to employee empowerment", they do not strongly disagree on this statement. This connotes that there is confusion even in the minds of the top management about the concept of employee empowerment.

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Q.4.Which of the following empowerment strategies you have in your organization?

Empowerment strategies	RESPONSES			
	(%) YES	(%) No	(%) Not Answered	Total
Suggestion Schemes	60.78	35.29	3.92	100
Formal recognition & reward system	88.24	11.76	0	100
Formal dispute, complaint, grievance system	56.86	43.14	0	100
Task Force	41.17	58.83	0	100
Self-directed teams	60.78	39.22	0	100
Joint labor management committee	5.88	88.24	5.88	100
Self -directed groups	33.33	66.66	0	100
Quality Circles	35.29	64.71	0	100
Small group activity	43.14	56.86100	0	100
Kaizen	7.84	92.15	0	100
Six Sigma	21.56	78.43	0	100
Others	7.84	7.84	84.31	100

It can be observed that and there exists-

- Suggestion Schemes, Formal recognition & reward system, Formal dispute, complaint, grievance system, and Self-directed teams are perceived and practiced as empowerment.
- Task Force and Small group activity are practiced in lesser number.
- The least- Joint labor management committee, Self–directed groups, Quality Circles, Kaizen and Six Sigma

Interpretation- Formal recognition & reward system, Formal dispute, complaint, grievance system and Joint labor management committee are not empowerment initiatives but no objection was taken on these parameters by the HR heads and CEO s and they treat these initiatives as empowerment initiatives. It can be said that there is no clarity on the empowerment strategies and no conceptual clarity on empowerment.

Q.5- Mangement's Perception about Employee Empowerment

(a) Employee empowerment is a passing fad

Response	Percentage
True	0
False	84.3
Can,t Say	15.7
Total	100.

(b) Empowerment is just a destination

Response	Percentage
True	7.8
False	78.4
Can,t Say	13.7
Total	100.0

© Empowerment is a journey.

Response	Percentage
True	88.2
False	00
Can,t Say	11.8
Total	100.0

(d) Employee Empowerment initiatives will be able to face the challenges of tomorrow

Response	Percentage
True	92.2
False	00
Can,t Say	7.8
Total	100.0

It can be observed that majority of the respondents feel that there is need for research on employee empowerment in IT sector. Hence the relevance of the study is justified.

Interpretation- The respondents feel that empowerment is not a passing fad or a destination but it is a journey which will help face the challenges of tomorrow.This data gives the hope that at least the IT professionals understand the philosophy of employee empowerment.

Q.6.Is there need for research on employee empowerment?

Response	Percentage
No Answer	3.92
Yes	82.35
Can,t Say	13.72
Total	100

Interpretation-It can be observed that majority of the respondents feel that there is need for research on employee empowerment in IT sector. Hence the relevance of the study is justified.

Q.7.Permission for research

Response	Percentage
No	82.35
Yes	3.92
Can,t Say	13.72
Total	100

Interpretation-The companies were not interested in the survey due to other priorities because of the initial inflation (retention challenges) and gradual slow down (cost reduction challenges).

Q.9.Current status of employee empowerment in the organization

The current status is 7.

LIMITATIONS

Considering the vast application of the topic and the efforts made by the researchers to have accurate and precise attitude towards different angles of the study, they had to restrict themselves to specific sector in order to complete the research project within a reasonable time. The research work , however has following limitations:

- Some data and statistics were found contradictory in different references. The researcher had to spend plenty of time to clear the contradictions.
- Small size MNCs are covered.
- Sample size is limited to 51.
- IT companies in Pune region are covered.
- As the research was carried out during the period of recession (2007-2009),organizations were reluctant to allow surveys as they faced different challenges of survival and had more important priorities

FINDINGS

1. All the IT companies have Employee empowerment initiatives.
2. Employee empowerment has been in these companies with the main objectives of increasing productivity..
3. There is confusion even in the minds

of the top management about the concept of employee empowerment.

4. Formal recognition & reward system, Formal dispute, complaint, grievance system and Joint labor management committee are not empowerment initiatives but no objection was taken on these parameters by the HR heads and CEO s. It can be said that there is no clarity on the empowerment strategies and no conceptual clarity on empowerment.

5. The management is of the opinion that employee empowerment is not a passing fad or is just a destination but it is a journey. The management agrees that Employee Empowerment initiatives will help to face the challenges of tomorrow.

Recommendations

1. The concept of empowerment needs to be polished and re discussed by the management of IT companies.

2. Managers and team leaders should look at empowerment not only as delegation of routine work but as the process which is directed towards self directed teams that take ownership of the process.

3. Managers and team leaders should be trained on philosophy and practice of empowerment so that they can act as coach and mentor and be involved in the process of empowerment.

4. Management should define empowerment properly for managers, team leaders and team members so that they get proper guidance while doing implementation.

5. (a)Management should form a steering committee for giving directions about empowerment initiatives and their implementation.

(b) A proper monitoring system should be laid down for the empowerment process. (c) Internal and external audits should be conducted.

CONCLUSION-

It can be concluded that the traditional empowerment initiatives which exists in manufacturing sector are missing in IT sector.

The philosophy of employee empowerment is known to the IT professional but it is not deep rooted in the IT companies. Hence is no conceptual clarity about employee empowerment at the top management level in IT sector. A discussion is essential on one common platform regarding employee empowerment philosophy and practice in IT industry

It can be concluded that the traditional empowerment initiatives which exists in manufacturing sector are missing in IT sector.

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