



Developing Empowered Teams

Empowered teams have increased levels of responsibility and authority over the work that they do, giving them the autonomy to plan and manage work, make their own decisions and solve their own problems – responsibilities that are traditionally owned by the team leader.

As someone who leads a team, you'll be used to being the decision-maker, problem-solver, planner, manager and instructor. In short, you're normally the one who's in control. So, empowering others is no doubt very different from what you are used to doing. It means handing over much of this control, along with many associated responsibilities, to your team.

If you're new to empowerment, it's only natural to feel a little anxious about this. You might feel that your role will become redundant. In fact, it's quite the opposite – your team needs you more than ever!

You may have handed over a great deal of control, but you're still ultimately responsible for the work of the team. Just because you've given power to others doesn't mean that you've lost it yourself. You're still the one who defines the goals and boundaries, and your team will still look to you for support, guidance and encouragement.

Course outline

Defining team goals

Your team still need to know what they should be aiming to achieve. Remember, you are the link between your team and the rest of the department/organisation, so your understanding of the wider context in

which the team operates will help you define goals that are in alignment with the department/organisation's objectives.

The goals that you set should be results-orientated (e.g. maintaining organised office systems) rather than task focussed (e.g. opening mail and filing). Results-orientated goals are more helpful than lists of routine tasks as they express only the outcomes that are expected, without dictating how they should be achieved. This gives people the freedom to define their own tasks, as well as a clearer understanding of why they should be doing them.

Setting boundaries

People need broad parameters to guide them towards the achievement of their goals. Although empowered teams have a great degree of freedom and autonomy over the way





in which they work, they still need guidelines or boundaries to help them understand what is expected of them, so that they can channel their efforts appropriately and work with confidence.

Providing information

In traditional teams, team leaders often keep a great deal of information to themselves. However, in an empowered team people can only be fully effective if they have all the information that they need. They must have an idea of the 'bigger picture' to help them understand why they are doing what they are doing, and also their limits and constraints.

You should aim to provide regular feedback to the team on how they are progressing towards their goals so that they can keep themselves on track.

Giving advice

You're the leader and expert, and people will look to you for advice. Make it easy for your team to approach you to ask questions and seek feedback. Let them know that you're happy to help.

Developing people's skills through coaching

Coaching is an empowering method of development, as it helps people learn for themselves. Coaches help people to learn by challenging their assumptions; encouraging them to explore new ideas and different ways of thinking; setting development tasks for learning; or simply by providing a different perspective. When coaching, you empower the learner by providing them with the tools to learn for themselves.

Encouraging people and boosting their confidence

Everyone needs to hear every so often what a good job they're doing, especially people in an empowered team who may be taking on many responsibilities that are completely new to them. Demonstrate your faith in their ability and build their confidence by highlighting and praising their key strengths and achievements. Some of the potential benefits of an empowered way of working are:

- Cost savings – as team members have the autonomy to improve the effectiveness and efficiency of working practices.
- Innovation and continuous improvement – in an environment that encourages ideas, creativity, and the questioning of established wisdom.
- Effective decision-making – the power to make decisions is given to those who need it most to get on with their jobs.





- Commitment – the increased autonomy gives team members a sense of personal responsibility and therefore more commitment to achieving team goals.
- Motivation – as team members have a clear sense of purpose and ownership of the team goals, opportunities for learning new skills and furthering personal development are increased.
- Increased productivity – as the culture created by empowerment is one of high performance in which team members take on personal responsibility for the achievement of team goals.

Teams are, of course, made up of individuals, so an empowered team will only be successful if the individuals themselves are ready and willing to take on the extra responsibilities that empowerment brings. Power isn't just another thing that you can delegate – it is an entirely individual choice. It will only be accepted if you create a suitable culture for empowerment in the first place.

