

Jane Smith. *Empowering People*. New Delhi: Kogan Page India (Pvt.) Limited. 2002. 119 pages. Indian Rs 140.00.

Managing organisations and managing people in our ever-changing and complex environment is a tough task, which requires integration on the part of the management and the workforce. Empowerment is a buzzword these days, and almost all organisations are focusing on using empowerment as a means of adapting to an environment of fast-changing business world. Empowerment does not only benefit the organisation but also the individuals involved. In the process, both those who are empowering and the ones who are being empowered share decision-making. Thus, empowerment is a mutual process, which is vital to the success of the organisation and all those linked to the organisation directly and indirectly. It is surely one of the most common business trends, and certainly an issue which all good managers should be aware of.

This book is a quick lesson in management on the issue of empowerment. It comprises six chapters, which have been well-written and comprehensively cover the concept of empowerment. Jane Smith, the author, presents a simple success formula for empowering people:

motivating and rewarding people;
building a committed team;
improving productivity and performance.

In the first chapter, “The Need for Empowerment”, the author introduces the readers to the concept of empowerment and explains the need for empowering the workforce. She cites the changing business environment and changing people as the main factors which necessitate this process. As the chapter progresses, the author highlights the benefits of empowerment, the barriers to empowerment, and the steps which the management can and should take in order to ensure a smooth transfer of power. The author stresses the need for the managers to lead from the front and to set a vision and mission for the entire organisation.

The second chapter is titled “Back to Basics”. The chapter looks into the question of how to bring about a change in culture, which would then facilitate in empowering the workforce. The author focuses on the need to develop effective work relationships and to develop a clear vision about other people. It is pointed out that it should be the manager to set the example so that the others follow suit. This will then lead to a smooth transition towards empowerment. So, empowering the workforce involves not only a change in thinking but also an overall change in the organisation’s culture, and a change among the people.

“Knowledge is Power,” is the third chapter in the book. This builds on what has been discussed in the previous chapters and the importance of providing and presenting the workers with important information is emphasised, so that they feel

that they are an integral part of the organisational set-up. Additionally, the author points out that effective communication is indeed a two-way process, which encompasses good listening and intelligent questioning. The need to make meetings and briefings more meaningful is also discussed in the context of empowerment, autonomy, and participation of the workforce.

Chapter four, "Helping People Learn", is aimed at highlighting the importance of facilitating learning in the workforce. *It is important to learn yourself, but it is equally important that you make sure that the people working for you learn as well.* The best way to ensure that is to facilitate this learning process. Learning is a dynamic, two-way process. The learner must know his/her responsibility and the person who is teaching/instructing or facilitating the learning process must be responsible at his end too. The author also explains that people have different ways of learning and thus the manager must be aware of the how an individual learns best and then should accordingly arrange the learning process. Issues pertaining to group learning, coaching, mentoring, etc., have also been discussed, so that the manager can understand how best to implement the learning process in the workforce. Simply, the manager should involve the workforce in the learning and development process as the activity has mutual benefits, which are essential for the success of the organisation.

Motivating and rewarding the staff is indeed a vital component of the empowerment process. Chapter five is titled, "Accentuating the Positive", and it highlights the need on part of the management to reward and motivate the employees. All employees value recognition and positive reinforcement. Thus, the author states that in order to work as a successful team, you need to make people believe that they are winners. The managers should focus on the positives so as to motivate the workforce and to encourage them to be committed. Although the focus is on positive reinforcement and feedback, yet at times negative feedback and reinforcement may be required. But generally the manager should accentuate the positive aspects. Another major issue addressed by the author is that of conflict. The author states that one should learn to love conflict because, if properly managed, conflict leads to creativity and innovation and can be a success factor.

The last chapter of the book deals with the implementation side of the issue and is thus titled "Act Now". The chapter begins with a discussion on the issue of influencing people and the strategies available to influence them (such as the pull and push strategy). Also discussed is the need to establish team-work and to get people involved in evaluation and decision-making rather than keep them isolated from the critical issues. The author asserts that rather than just thinking of empowerment as a one-time thing, it should be incorporated completely into the organisation and should be made a way of life.

The book is very useful for professionals, managers, students, teachers, researchers, and general readers interested in modern organisations. The book is

succinct and comprehensive at the same time, though written in simple language. The self-evaluation exercises, checklists, and case studies add to the usefulness of the volume. The material presented is easy to follow and apply.

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