

Barriers to Delegation of Authority

Though delegation enhances efficiency of the organization by dividing work amongst organizational members (according to their capabilities), it is not free from obstacles.

Various barriers to delegation can be grouped in three main headings.

These are:

- I. Barriers related to superiors or delegator,
- II. Barriers related to subordinates or delegate, and
- III. Barriers related to organization.

I. Barriers related to Superiors:

Despite knowing how important it is to delegate, superiors sometimes do not delegate work to subordinates.

This is because of the following reasons:

1. Wanting to do things personally:

Some managers do not delegate because they feel they can do the work better than others. Since ultimate responsibility is that of the delegator, they prefer doing the work themselves rather than getting it done through others. This also helps in maintaining control over the activities assigned to subordinates. The delegator enjoys doing the work and makes his importance felt in the organization by showing his busyness in the office.

2. Insecurity:

If managers feel that subordinates perform better than them, they avoid delegation. The exposure of their inabilities to take good decisions creates a feeling of insecurity and, therefore, they fear to delegate. This happens in organizations where work procedures and methods are not sound. A weak operating system usually stops the managers from revealing their shortcomings to the subordinates.

3. Retention of power:

Some managers like to take responsibility, make their importance felt by everyone in the organization and want the subordinates to come to them to get their problems solved. Their desire to retain power and dominate is a hindrance to the effective delegation process. Such managers are usually autocratic in nature. They abstain from delegation and prefer to direct people personally.

4. Lack of confidence in subordinates:

The reward for risk is return. Unless managers assume the risk of subordinates not performing well, they cannot contribute to the development of skilled managers in future. A manager who does not take risk in subordinates and lacks confidence in them will not be able to delegate effectively. Delegation is based on trust between superior and subordinates. Negative attitude towards subordinates obstructs delegation as superior lacks confidence in the ability of subordinates.

5. Unwillingness to set standards of control:

Having delegated the duties, managers remain accountable for overall performance of the work. They supervise the activities of subordinates to ensure that actual performance is in conformity with planned performance. A manager who fails to establish standards of control will not be able to effectively delegate to subordinates.

6. Personal factors:

Autocratic managers usually do not delegate to keep tight control over the activities of subordinates. Democratic leaders prefer to delegate as they believe in participation of employees in the decision-making process.

Managers usually follow past precedents in creating an environment friendly to delegation. If their managers delegate to them, they also trust their subordinates in making delegation effective. If their managers did not trust them in delegating the tasks, they also do not delegate the tasks further.

II. Barriers Related to Subordinates:

Subordinates present the following barriers to effective delegation:

1. Lack of confidence:

Some subordinates do not want to take responsibility for the fear of not being able to perform well. They lack confidence and do not want to take any risk. They prefer to depend on their bosses to make decisions.

2. Fear of making mistakes:

Some subordinates fear that if they make mistakes in carrying out the delegated responsibilities, their superiors will criticize them for unfavorable outcomes. This fear dissuades them from taking added responsibility.

3. Lack of incentives:

Motivation (through financial and non-financial incentives) makes delegation effective. Subordinates are reluctant to accept delegation in the absence of incentives.

4. Absence of access to resources:

If subordinates do not have access to resources (financial and non-financial) to carry out their work, they will not accept delegation of responsibilities. This happens when there is delegation of responsibility without commensurate authority.

5. Convenience:

Sometimes subordinates prefer the work is done by superiors rather than assuming responsibility for the same, for the sake of convenience. They simply want their bosses to make the decisions.

III. Barriers Related to Organization:

The barriers related to organization structure are as follows:

1. Size of the organization:

A small-sized organization will not have too many jobs to delegate to subordinates. It is, thus, not responsive to delegation of tasks.

2. No precedent of delegation:

Merely because organizations have not earlier been following the practice of delegation sometimes makes them continue with the practice of not delegating the jobs.

3. Degree of centralization or decentralization:

Efficient delegation is affected by the degree to which organization distributes the decision-making power to various organizational units. A highly centralized organization is obstructive to the process of effective delegation.

Ways to Overcome Barriers to Delegation:

Barriers to delegation can be overcome through the following measures:

1. Accept the need for delegation:

When superiors are reluctant to delegate because they want to do everything themselves rather than allowing subordinates to do, they should realize the need for delegation. In fact, more the delegation, more successful will be an organization.

Delegation multiplies the capacity of managers. What can be delegated must be delegated. Managers should do things which subordinates cannot do. This develops their core competence and also the organization.

2. Develop confidence in subordinates:

Rather than feeling that subordinates are not capable of accepting responsibilities so that delegator does not take the risk of delegation, the delegator should understand that a man learns through mistakes and if he commits mistakes, he shall try to find out solutions to the problem also. If subordinates make mistakes, superiors should guide them rather than not delegate at all.

Trust towards subordinates develops their commitment towards superiors. Committed subordinates develop loyalty, dedication and positive contribution towards organizational growth. Delegation should be a continuous process.

Managers should appreciate the work of subordinates when they perform well. They should delegate them more tasks and express trust and confidence in them. This will boost their morale to perform better in future. Delegation will be effective in the system of rewards, not penalties.

3. Communication:

Where delegation becomes ineffective because subordinates do not have the information for making decisions, an effective system of communication should be developed so that information flows freely from superiors to subordinates. Well informed subordinates are an asset for the organization. They can contribute to effective organizational decisions.

4. Motivation:

Subordinates should be motivated to accept the responsibilities by providing rewards (financial and non-financial) like recognition, status etc. Assigning the whole job to one person can be motivating as it reflects confidence in the subordinate. It also gives a sense of pride and satisfaction to the subordinate who works to earn the credit for successful completion of that task. Non-commitment towards work has to be converted into commitment through motivation — creating zeal, enthusiasm, ability and willingness to work.

5. Effective system of control:

Since ultimate responsibility for the work assigned is that of the delegator, he must ensure that subordinates perform well by setting achievable standards of performance against which actual performance shall be measured. Delegator should keep check on the activities of delegates rather than not delegate at all.

Though control helps in monitoring the activities of subordinates, it should not be strict in nature. Moderately lenient control system helps to achieve standards by control through exceptions. Major deviations should be spotted by managers and minor deviations should be corrected by the subordinates themselves. Control helps in avoiding misuse of delegated authority.

6. Choose the right person for the right job:

Lack of confidence in subordinates should be overcome by dividing the workload into sub-units and assigning each sub-unit to persons most suitable for performing them. The person selected should be able to perform the task assigned. If required, training facilities can be provided to increase their understanding of the work. Wrong selection of delegates can put the organizational operations to halt.

7. Freedom to subordinates:

When managers accept the need for delegation, they must also give freedom to make decisions with respect to the delegated tasks. Rather than not delegating at all or delegating less responsibility, for the fear of subordinates making mistakes, managers should give them authority to find solutions to their problems and learn not to make mistakes in future.

8. Clarity of tasks:

The responsibilities or the tasks delegated must be clearly defined in terms of results expected out of those tasks. Knowing what is exactly expected of them will enable the subordinates perform the delegated tasks better. Delegation is not done without purpose. It has to be properly planned to the objectives desired to be achieved through delegation. Delegation should be done to achieve specific results.

9. Match job with the abilities of subordinates:

'Round pegs in the round holes' makes delegation effective as the right job will be given to the right person. The task assigned should match the ability and the capacity of subordinates.

10. Open communication:

Though delegates are given the authority to solve problems related to the assigned tasks, yet, they should be allowed to freely discuss the problems with their delegators. Open communication promotes delegation as both delegator and delegates can trust each other, explain their reservations, develop confidence and security and make the need for delegation felt important for both. Work is delegated and also performed well — to the best of subordinate's ability.

11. Monitor the critical deviations:

Subordinates may make mistakes, however efficient they are at work. The superiors should overlook minor deviations and monitor only major deviations in the tasks assigned. This promotes a sense of responsibility amongst the employees.