

**LEADERSHIP AND EMPLOYEE EMPOWERMENT:
FREEING EMPLOYEES' PSYCHOLOGICAL
RIGHTS TO GROW ON THE JOB**

KAY PAYNE

JOSEPH P. CANGEMI

HAROLD E. FUQUA, JR.

Western Kentucky University, Bowling Green

RHONDA MUHLENKAMP

*Nishikawa Standard Company
Fort Wayne, Indiana*

ABSTRACT

The transformation of the American business landscape since the turn of the century from an agrarian society to an industrial environment, to a technological and scientific service environment staggers the imagination. Producing more highly educated employees, plus an increasingly complex and competitive environment has caused organizations to rethink their former strategies of leadership. Leaders now must empower their employees, authorizing and enabling them to do their jobs. Empowered employees need to plan their own work. They require the tools necessary to do their jobs; they need to be given discretionary decision making authority to do their work. Visionary leaders create an environment which enable employees to experience support, training, shared authority, and decentralized decision making. Visionary leaders communicate highly important and desirable values of high quality, good service, and general excellence. As leaders and members operate in an empowered culture they express trust between one another through open communication. Effective communicators use an open style, understand effective procedures for conducting problem solving and decision making meetings, and effectively listen to understand and provide feedback. These aspects of empowered organizations usually facilitate employee satisfaction, improved quality and higher productivity.

The proliferation of complex organizations and the vast worldwide competitive landscape have made it necessary for companies to find new ways to become more responsive to change. As visionary leaders bring their organizations into the twenty-first century they will need to respond quickly to change, with adaptable structures that can shift to fit new situations. We've all heard about organizations that frustrate us, exploit us, and throw us away. We also know of organizations where students learn little, products fail to work, patients remain sick, and policies make things worse rather than better. Organizations that empower their employees enable them to perform to the best of their ability because they feel personally rewarded for their efforts. Leaders who create workplace environments that empower their employees realize the importance of strong leadership, trust, culture, and communication. This article focuses on those aspects of empowerment.

Today, more than ever, individuals experience relationships with their employers that broadly influence their lives. Jamieson and O'Mara believed by empowering employees the workforce has a greater opportunity for personal choice and freedom, with the opportunity for recognition associated with achievements and accomplishments [1]. Also, they believed, empowered employees felt a sense of corporate ownership and personal organizational commitment.

LEADERSHIP

Traditionally, managers planned, organized, directed and controlled. But, the role of leader changes with an empowered workforce. Leaders who empower others need to create a vision and create environments of support, transfer the ownership and reasonable authority by funneling the decision making down to those who perform the jobs. Leaders will no longer need to dictate to employees how to handle situations or solve problems. Empowered workforces experience more autonomy and supervise themselves. The most important role of the empowering leader involves understanding what motivates people to excel. For example, people generally *want* to do a job well, experience success, advance, and contribute suggestions and ideas; they also desire respect and increasing responsibility.

Leaders who empower employees in today's organizations reap positive results across all areas of the workforce. When leaders empower employees it involves "passing on authority and responsibility" [2, p. 22] and giving up control [3]. These leaders need to learn less hands-on, more supportive leadership styles that nurture and reward good ideas and provide challenges to employees [3]. Reward and recognition programs offer evidence of a shifting corporate philosophy from a culture of entitlement to one of personal responsibility and performance-based rewards. Leaders who empower others do so with words of encouragement, immediate verbal feedback, and other forms of social persuasion [4]. *They recognize employees have lives outside work and work with them to solve personal*

problems. They show respect for employees, providing mentors to bring them along. They look for the right balance between direction, discipline, and individual freedom. Leaders who empower others act more as colleagues than as “bosses” and rely on influence, respect, and relationships in working with employees.

One of the most important aspects of job satisfaction involves helping employees know what they are working toward and understanding how their work affects other parts of the company. Continuous education and skills upgrading, control of the resources needed to make improvements, and measurements for feedback and reinforcement help to establish a sense of meaning in an organization. Ongoing positive reinforcement involves celebrating successes, which causes employees to *want* empowerment as a style from their leaders. Eastman Chemical used elaborate plans for positively reinforcing group achievement. When a group of mechanics met an important goal, management publicly washed their cars. When employees generated one million dollars in cost savings, management invited employees to come to a bank where they displayed one million dollars so employees could see what it looked like [3].

Leadership under the empowered work group will require a broader range of training. No longer controlling and directing, leaders facilitate a much wider range of activities, many of which will be new to them. Organizations must constantly be learning, training, and encouraging throughout the empowerment process [5]. To remain successful, leaders must learn fast and keep learning, be responsive to the everchanging environment or be left behind. Crucial to success, continued learning keeps leaders and employers on the cutting edge [6].

To be competitive in the future, companies must be prepared to constantly adapt to change as an important imperative. The most innovative companies will encourage their employees to look at problems thoroughly and come up with creative solutions. Leaders with empowered employees will not only need to make sure day-to-day processes are functioning as they should be, but will need to ensure all the new technologies are being pursued. Leaders will not have to do all the work themselves; they must encourage creativity, learning, and adjustment to new ideas from the workforce.

Conger and Kanungo argued the need to empower subordinates becomes critical when subordinates feel powerless [4]. Identifying conditions within organizations that foster a sense of powerlessness among subordinates is the first step in removing them. Leaders who empower employees share authority with their subordinates and recognize and reward them for their ideas, contributions, and achievements, giving credit for creativity [1]. Leaders who empower their employees encourage input and involve them in decision making. Decisions in such organizations occur by consensus, encouraging leaders to give up sole authority for decision making [7]. In these organizations, planning and development considers all ideas, which, in turn, generates a synergy of creative genius. To help employees generate ideas, leaders provide empowered employees with

information about the business; they give skills training, goal-setting information, and ongoing feedback on how they met those goals. In other words, *they treat their employees like adults rather than rebellious children.*

Nonempowering Leaders

On the other hand, nonsupportive leaders display poor interpersonal skills, which means focusing on the negative rather than the positive. They give poor direction, focus on hours of work rather than output, show lack of respect for employees, and do not empower them. For example, communist leadership styles used blatant authoritarian systems that told employees what to do, denied creativity, and ignored innovation. The communist regime lacked trust, did not reward employee initiative, and created workers who were not lazy, just uninspired [8].

Power, the capacity to influence and the essential currency of leadership, increases as leaders create conditions whereby their associates have the opportunity to develop it and utilize it. Bass said distributing *authority* increases job satisfaction and performance of employees [9].

Hackman and Johnson described five reasons why employees prefer empowerment [10]. *First*, people enjoy their jobs more, appear more concerned with work innovation, and take greater pride in their work when empowered. When employees feel powerless (they have no influence) they often respond by becoming defensive, cautious, critical, negative, and paranoid. *Second*, sharing authority with employees fosters cooperation, which in turn develops group accomplishment. Uncooperative group members often withhold information, refuse to participate, and may even sabotage efforts of the group. On the other hand, combining individual efforts to achieve group goals generates combined genius beyond the capability of one person. Krouse and Posner claimed enabling others, or releasing the creative power of employees, describes a truly great leader [11]. *Third*, empowering others means a group survives rather than fails. One of the best ways to remain competitive in a global economy involves developing organizational structures that distribute decision-making authority to lower-level leaders. Decentralizing decision-making structures releases employees to think for themselves. Consequently, employees can move quickly to meet the challenges of fast-paced market conditions, as well as develop creativity and innovation. *Fourth*, empowering others stimulates employees to become mature, responsible individuals. When employees tackle new challenges, learn new skills, and find greater fulfillment, they experience job satisfaction and commitment. The individual grows, and the group gains a more committed and skilled member. *Fifth*, Hackman and Johnson believed authority should be shared with subordinates to prevent authority abuses. Authority in the hands of a few people generally tends to corrupt and usually causes them to focus on their self-interests and take advantage of employees by oppressing them. Leaders who trust their

employees enough to share authority with them become the essence of *servant leadership* [10].

Employee Regard in Other Countries

A sampling of some human resource practices in other countries that demonstrate a high regard for employees might be unbelievable to American leaders. Caudron provided examples of new ways to think about providing respect for employees [3]. For example, in Mexico, labor law requires employees to receive full pay for 365 days a year. In Australia and Brazil, employees with one year of service automatically receive thirty days of paid vacation. Some jurisdictions in Canada have legislated pay equity—known in the United States as comparable worth between male- and female-intensive jobs. In Japan, levels of compensation are determined using the objective factors of age, length of service, and educational background, rather than skill, ability, and performance—and performance does not count until after an employee reaches age forty-five. In the United Kingdom, employees are allowed to take up to forty weeks of maternity leave, and employers are required to provide a government-mandated amount of pay for eighteen of those weeks. In 87 percent of large Swedish companies, the head of human resources serves on the board of directors.

The objective in looking at what companies in other countries do for their employees in no way reflects a desire to provide a new entitlement program. Rather, the objective involves seeking new and better ways to enable employees to think about work when they are on the job. Helping reduce the obstacles that get in the way of accomplishing life problems energizes employees for work. For example, some companies provide a florist, cleaner, bank, restaurant, and travel agent on company property to eliminate some of the everyday hassles of life.

Employee Empowerment and the Twenty-First Century

The twenty-first century, like the twentieth century, will demand numerous and significant changes from companies and other organizations if they plan to survive. The twenty-first century will require the leadership in organizations to transform from:

- domination-oriented to cooperation-oriented;
- control-oriented to involvement-oriented;
- coercion-oriented to commitment-oriented;
- compliance-oriented to vision-identified-oriented;
- command-oriented to motivation-oriented;
- developing threatening and fear-oriented work cultures to developing secure, satisfying, and growth-oriented work cultures; and
- thinking in terms of the manager vs. the managed.

To create these more positive work cultures, leaders of the twenty-first century will need to master the art of developing trust for subordinates—the capability of letting go [12]. The easiest thing for a leader to do is to take full control of an organization and command it. As one general responded to the following question, posed to him by one of the authors of this article, the concept of domination, control, coercion, compliance, and fear becomes ever so clear: “General, what is your definition of leadership?” The general’s response was “Giving orders!”

It is clear this kind of leadership style will not lead organizations to the peak of competitiveness in the twenty-first century, especially now that U.S. businesses are in competition with the rest of the world. Organizations today need leaders who bring out the best in associates, who encourage them to risk, to think, to create, to harmonize, and to contribute maximally *to the organization’s goals and success. Domination of any sort works against the better development and maximum growth and contribution of associates.* The result of dominating, threatening, fear-oriented leadership behavior is seen quite remarkably in the movie *The Bedford Incident*. The captain of the U.S.S. Bedford, a naval ship, believed the best way to develop subordinate leaders is to constantly “put them down”—show them who’s boss—demand full and total compliance with no back-lip. His leadership philosophy was: the tougher you are on subordinates the tougher and stronger they become. To see how tough most people become and what the results are under such leadership behavior, it would be advisable to rent the movie, now in video format, at one of the video rental locations nationwide. The same leadership behavior and similar results will be found in viewing the video *The Great Santini* and, in a more domestic version of autocratic behavior (a husband dominating and putting down his wife), see the video *Shirley Valentine*. The end result in each of these situations is similar—the recipients of these bullying behaviors either developed incredibly low-level confidence and poor self-esteem—or they rebelled *big time*. Is this what leaders want from associates in the twenty-first century? How will their organizations compete and survive? How will associates keep their eyes and commitment on the organization’s vision and goals when their minds and hearts are on protecting themselves from further psychological damage? How do associates give their best when they are fearful—not necessarily fearful of losing their jobs, but fearful of being put down, humiliated and hurt psychologically, especially in front of their peers?

Alfred Adler: Life Is a Search for Significance

The eminent psychiatrist, Alfred Adler, has stated: all human beings hunger to feel significant; life is a continual search for significance [13]. The bully-type leader finds a sense of significance in being able to dominate and abuse others. But this leader is very shortsighted. While his/her sense of significance is being bolstered (temporarily), consideration of the consequences of this type of leadership style on subordinates is rarely considered—and, more usually, not thought

about or even cared about. The consequences are usually disastrous! Such behavior often is the prelude to employees seeking association with a third party to protect them—a union, for example, or other forms of limited compliance on their part, often cleverly concealed from the “know it all” leadership.

Twenty-first century leaders must understand Adler’s admonition; they must create an environment where subordinates feel significant, important, and appreciated and where their incredible talents and capabilities can be freed to pursue organizational goals with a strong sense of personal commitment. Evidence suggests an empowered workforce is the end result of the creation of a positive work environment, where threats and fear are rare experiences for the majority of the workforce. On the contrary, the typical experience of the empowered workforce is one whereby employees feel encouraged to solve their own problems in cooperation with peers (teams), thereby developing a sense of strong capability, self-assurance, and self-confidence, which leads to the development of Adler’s “sense of significance.” A sense of significance, according to humanistic psychologists tends to open up and free human beings to create, to risk, to think, to invent, and “to see possibilities” where others typically see obstacles [14]. In such an empowered workforce, *leaders usually see themselves as partners and coaches with their associates*, as opposed to their “bosses.” Bosses usually stifle creativity, risk-taking, and thinking; they usually demand and get deference and compliance, to the detriment of the organization.

Case Study: From Total Control to Involvement, Commitment—and Empowerment

Dr. J. P. Cangemi, one of the authors of this article, had an interesting experience in observing, firsthand, the effects of transition from bullying, dictatorial leadership behavior to employee empowerment in the same facility with essentially the same personnel. Under autocratic leadership behavior, which was the previous leader’s typical behavior in the facility mentioned here, the organization had significant absentee problems with associates—including salary employees—high turnover, terrible quality problems, behavioral problems, and not much financial return on investment. All this led to a morale problem within the facility. An example of the bullying behavior people had to live with in this facility was what this leader was heard to say to many associates, at one time or another, after they asked a question or made a comment: “Shut up and sit down” or “Mind your own f—— business.” To say the least, people related confidentially their strong distaste for this leader and his behavior. Eventually, top corporate leadership got wind of what was happening in this facility and made the decision to remove this leader. He was replaced with a more secure, people-oriented, trusting leader whose basic philosophy was “How can we help you to succeed?” “What can we do to help you?” “We’re not here to get in your way—we have confidence in you to go out and do your jobs and solve, in your

work teams, your own problems.” “Come to us if there is anything we can do to lend a hand—but we believe you know how to do your jobs if we, the leadership, support you and get out of your way. We’re here as a resource for you—and so are the rest of the leaders.” That was how the new leader began his responsibilities over this low-morale, defeated, unsure-of-itself facility.

Nine months later, the proof of the advantage in the difference in leadership style was in the results. There was almost 100 percent increase in profits, turnover was drastically reduced, and absenteeism was curbed. The attitudes in the facility unmistakably transformed into optimism, encouragement, “can-do” cooperation and involvement, and job satisfaction. People said they now enjoyed the experience of coming to work in this facility—in the past they hated it.

On a follow-up survey, associates were asked how they were able to produce such drastically positive results in less than a year. Their collective response was:

- Associates were encouraged to take risks.
- Associates were told the leadership believed in them to make the right calls, the right decisions concerning safety, quality, and productivity.
- Associates were assured there would be no punishment if there was an error—just to go ahead and do what was thought to be right. *The fear was taken away.*
- Associates were told working together was an opportunity to learn from each other and were *encouraged* to work together and think together.
- Associates were encouraged to ask each other in work groups, What do we need to do to fix this problem? How can we make this better? What’s wrong here? How do we help each other?
- Associates at all levels were encouraged to come up with new ideas—to step *outside* the box.
- Associates felt free to think, to make decisions, because they knew *there would be no job loss if they made a mistake*. On the contrary, mistakes were now viewed as opportunities to learn and improve.

The results of this more dignified, positive, empowering leadership behavior are remarkable—as expressed through action research conducted with samples of all associates from this facility. This facility is now the shining light among a whole host of similar facilities in this important *Fortune* 500 corporation—yet, nine months earlier it had been at the bottom of the barrel.

EMPOWERMENT THROUGH TRUST

The concept of *trust* includes the notion of placing oneself within the care or keeping of another. It also includes permission to stay or go, or to do something without fear or misgiving. It includes an assured reliance on the character, ability,

strength, or truth of someone or something. *People place their confidence in someone they trust.* Trust involves expectations, which in turn become relevant in assessing the status of the trust [15]. When organizations transform themselves and empower their employees, *fear of the unknown* surfaces among even the most stable people. During the transition, *which may last for several years*, employees need the reassurance that enables them to continue toward their goals. Employers and employees alike cannot form a complete picture of their expectations in advance. Unexpected opportunities and disappointments may produce situations that increase or decrease trust as each observes the response of the other [16].

Talk about empowerment often brings fear to both leaders and employees. Leaders must create environments that reduce fear so employees can learn [17]. Leaders can lower the level of fear through two-way communication, consistently recognizing desired levels of performance, having an open-door policy, providing clear information, clarifying roles and responsibilities, encouraging creativity, providing training, stomping out rumor mills, and creating a personal/family environment of open, encouraging communication [18]. Often, traditional leaders are reluctant to empower employees and are leery of sharing information they possess. Leaders fear a change in organizational structure. Once leaders get accustomed to a hierarchical structure, it gives them comfort and allocates authority to them. It also defines their role as leaders. A combination of paternalistic leadership and attachment to an established structure provides a defense against anxiety, which, in turn, creates fear of change for current leaders [19]. Essentially, it gives leaders a sense of dependency on the hierarchical structure, *which leads to a fear of empowering employees.* Leaders of empowered employees need to understand that opening up the workforce will not necessarily abolish their established position; leaders will still be accountable [20]. Their role will be to assist teams so *team members do not fear their own jobs will go away.* Workers have been dependent on their leaders to control and direct them. They are not traditionally encouraged to accept new responsibility. *The role of the leader will be to address that fear and turn it into trust.* Fear is a normal response when employees are treated with little or no appreciation for their work, when there is no interest in input from them, when their leader is always right, when almost all communication is downward, rarely upward, when there is consistent rejection of ideas, and when little respect and dignity is shown them [21]. *Fear of authority usually can be predicted to destroy trust in leadership.*

An organizational culture that can be characterized as trusting and supportive tends to utilize good communication practices. An aura of open communication offers opportunities for candid expression of ideas and feelings. Even when people make mistakes in a trust-oriented culture, others tend to forgive them, to cover for one another, and to compensate for their errors. A miscommunication from associates may be viewed as an opportunity to learn from mistakes, rather than as an occasion for punishment. Effective communication will do much to reinforce and enhance a trusting climate [22].

Developing reciprocal trust during times of turbulent change requires open communication by both the organization and its members. In American companies leaders often prefer to keep information “close to the vest.” However, a willingness to informally share information usually increases trust. Also, continuous learning should be enthusiastically embraced. In fact, team leaders need to be teachers, coaches, or facilitators. A team leader needs to be seen as someone who helps the people around him or her learn. Whenever subordinates are being trained, the leader should be there providing support and encouragement. Additionally, monitoring roles in companies helps new members receive the experience and wisdom from more established employees. Helping new employees integrate into the company culture, helping them find their own way, enables new employees to understand their internal customers, their suppliers, and/or where to go for certain kinds of information [23].

Trusting team members to operate their departments as small businesses, assuming both the responsibility and the pride of ownership, helps employees gain a sense of ownership and control over their jobs [24]. Empowered individuals own their jobs and take an active role in decision making, resulting in employee initiative, greater productivity, and job satisfaction [2]. Block saw empowerment as a state of mind, not the result of job titles, policies, and practices [25]. In organizations that empower people, anyone, irrespective of rank, can volunteer ideas and make suggestions. Brainstorming, thinking outside the box, asking questions not asked before, encouraging employees to answer questions in ways that benefit the company, all translate into higher productivity and increased trust.

CORPORATE CULTURE

A corporate culture is a pattern of basic assumptions developed by a given group that has worked well enough together to know what works best in their organization. Because it is considered valid, employees believe it should be taught to new members as the correct way to perceive, think, and feel in relation to their problems and tasks [26]. Empowered employees need leaders with a vision who can communicate the corporate culture. The visionary leader establishes a pattern of values within the company that members pass on to one another. The same set of values must be shared by all the organizational members to instill a strong corporate culture. But, similarity regarding organizational values, while necessary, is not enough. The set of organizational values must be regarded as important and desirable. Therefore, visionary leaders must communicate the shared values in such a way as to depict them as not only desirable but of primary importance. *The idea of a group value as opposed to an individual value produces a connection between members.* As group values become congruent with top management’s values, those departments, or teams, become more influential because they will be seen as “like us” and, therefore, worthy of trust. As an

entire organization begins to hold congruent values with visionary leaders, the whole workforce moves in the same direction, thereby increasing a cohesively strong culture.

To make empowerment successful, leaders need to make sure a strong corporate culture exists either *prior* to the empowerment or *during* the installation of empowered employee teams. The culture should provide direction from the leaders to steer the work of the teams in the desired direction. A strong culture reduces the chance of mixed signals, provides the basic values on which to base all decisions, and reinforces the basic theme of the corporate vision statement. Empowered employees, guided by training and a corporate culture, will deliver consistent products with the corporate goals in mind. A strong culture not only encourages employees toward success in their own job responsibilities, but in the corporation as well. A culture consistent with empowering employees encourages communication, ensures trust, aids in assuring the necessary resources to meet the desired goals, encourages learning, personal growth, and creativity. Leaders who empower others encourage a company culture of pride [27].

Members of organizations can learn the company culture by watching how the culture reacts to events, applies meaning to those events, and interprets what might be seen as ambiguous and uncertain. Observers can watch leaders to see what they pay attention to, measure, and control. They can observe how the leader reacts to critical incidents and organizational crises. As leaders reinforce certain role models, certain strategies for teaching, coaching, or facilitation, members can determine organizational values. How leaders allocate rewards, status, and scarce resources says a great deal about what the leader wants to enculturate. His/her criteria for recruitment, selection, promotion, retirement, and termination help members determine cultural values. Because the messages transmitted by these mechanisms will often be implicit, conflicting messages may be received by organizational members. Additionally, important secondary messages received by organizational members come from the organizational design and structure, systems and procedures, design of physical space, stories, legends, myths, parables about important events and people, and formal statements about the organizational philosophy [26]. In diverse organizations, the opportunity for miscommunication of the organizational vision must be carefully monitored.

Why diverse organizational members misunderstand the corporate culture may be embedded in their native cultural traditions. These traditions may range from collectivist (communitistic) to individualistic (democratic) native systems of understanding organizational culture and empowerment. Cox, Lobel, and McLeod discovered groups composed of people from collectivist cultural traditions displayed more cooperative behaviors than groups composed of people from individualistic cultural traditions [28]. Even though all participants resided within the United States, national cultural traditions from their country of origin influenced their behavior. Earley found individualists performed better when they worked alone and found support confirming "social loafing" or sluffing off at

work among cultures reflecting individualism [29]. What then causes the United States and Great Britain, which place a higher value on individualism than do other cultures, to believe they can effectively empower employees? One answer may revolve around the concept of "power distance" defined by Hofstede [30].

Power distance involves free will, control, and dominance over the environment [31]. Implemented since the '70s, American companies strive toward more participative organizational systems, which value the assumptions that people want a say in the decisions that affect them, want to determine their future, believe in personal efficacy, want control over their own circumstances and, to a degree, their environment [32-34]. While free will is not solely a U.S. value, it does differentiate the U.S. from other cultures [35], as well as permeate American management theories. Consequently, leaders should look carefully at the applicability of those theories to other cultures that hold different values. Leadership styles that reflect local cultures can produce equal levels of productivity independent of whether leaders empower their employees or operate under centralized, autocratic control.

Structural and political views of culture often focus on structure, goals, roles, power, conflict, and the allocation of scarce resources. Cultural aspects of empowered organizations focus on the facts humans have chosen to construct—based on the messages received from their visionary leaders. Leaders can communicate strong empowered cultures as the basis for optimism about the possibilities of organizational change. Empowered organizations create worlds where employees can manage or resist change with greater comfort [36].

COMMUNICATION/COMMUNICATORS

Effective organizational communication links formal communication with informal communication. If highly effective communication operates within work teams and among leader-employee relationships but employees feel alienated from the organization, then somehow *the process of empowering employees has failed*. Regardless of the formality, the needs of the organization and the needs of the individual must dovetail to produce a healthy communication climate. A healthy communicator openly expresses his/her wants and needs, satisfaction and dissatisfaction. An unhealthy communicator gratifies his/her basic needs through self-centeredness, devoting his/her energies to satisfying security needs, acceptance from others, or achieving social status. Typically, such a person distracts the organization from fulfilling its mission. Healthy communicators make use of open communication with discretion. Because of the nature of the working environment, a healthy communicator selectively picks and chooses when to be open and when to control the amount of information released to others. Open communication involves a two-way, regenerative process. The more people experience open positive communication, the more positive their sentiments about each other become.

The relationship a person develops with his/her supervisors and peers becomes the most important aspect of organizational life. They act as sources of information and support, feedback and news. As individuals participate in empowered groups, they may play a variety of group communication task-and-maintenance roles. *Group task roles* include information requester, information giver, procedure facilitator, opinion requester, opinion giver, clarifier, and summarizer-evaluator. *Group maintenance roles* include those of social support, harmonizer, tension reliever, energizer, leader, follower, compromiser, and gatekeeper. *Self-centered roles*, which tend toward destruction of groups, include those of blocker, dominator, attacker, and clown. Interpersonal effectiveness can be achieved through active listening, positive descriptive language, message ownership, development of effective messages that contribute to goals and objectives, developing structure, and providing feedback [37].

Listening, a fundamental group skill for empowered employees, includes the processes of hearing, assigning meaning, and verifying interpretations. It begins with the attitude about one's role in the organization. A positive, active, listening attitude begins with a genuine concern for understanding what others intend for one to hear, and to sense meaning from another person's point of view. This attitude includes *empathy* for others and a willingness to override one's own emotions to facilitate mutual understanding. Active listeners attempt to control mental arguments, avoid jumping to conclusions, and carefully avoid stereotyping others. They stop talking long enough to hear what others have to say. They provide feedback to speakers by paraphrasing what they said to confirm meaning. They use questions for meaning clarification and *rarely interrupt* to explain their own ideas or positions. Active listeners summarize main points and evaluate facts and evidence before responding. These skills play just as important a part when communicators disagree as when they agree [38].

Another important communication skill among empowered employees involves the processes of problem solving and decision making. Groups that make decisions and problem solve need an awareness of individual predispositions, strategies, and tactics in a variety of circumstances, and knowledge and sensitivity for the processes. Having a structure for conducting problem-solving or decision-making tasks encourages work groups to operate more effectively through these deliberations. Conducting effective meetings enables people to exhibit productive individual behaviors and avoid behaviors destructive to effective communication. Often employees who have not received training in problem solving or decision making fail to recognize the importance of the general principles for structuring effective group discussions, such as focusing on the problem, preparing a statement of the problem, brainstorming, avoiding group-think, implementation, and follow-up, to name just a few [39]. Empowered organizations need to be certain individuals receive communication training in problem-solving and decision-making skills.

In traditional plants, most workers experience only downward communication (not upward), enabling them to know only what they need to know to get their jobs done. Even the horizontal flow of information across different work cells seldom occurs. Unfortunately, when information does not flow in all directions, distrust may develop and grapevine communication may begin that often carries untrue or distorted information. Leaders in traditional settings tend to hold on to information, fostering their own power and establishing their dominant position. *With an empowered workforce leaders must change these communication styles.* They must enhance and further build their ability to effectively communicate. Not only do they have to open up and share their information, they must learn how to communicate to others with better written, verbal, and nonverbal skills.

Empowered workforce leaders must help to facilitate and increase an open communication flow. All information employees need to do their jobs effectively must be available to them to enable them to make sound decisions. An individual without information cannot take responsibility; an individual who has information usually cannot help but take responsibility—or at least is encouraged to do so.

Traditional styles of communication slow down information flow, the information flow often becoming bogged and distorted. Varied channels of communication encourage abundant opportunities to experiment with new, easier methods of communication between people. Some effective communication techniques include: informal informational sessions with top leaders, message boards, notes posted in frequented employee areas, electronic display boards, regular employee meetings, and free-standing computer terminals for accessing internet channels and e-mail. Leaders and employees in an empowered workforce must be computer literate to access corporate databases and other information when they need it. New visionary leaders must stay on the cutting edge, enable employees to access information, coach employees, and help them find all the information they need to do their jobs.

Empowered organizations often do not reflect orderly, rational, objective communication structures. Rather, they act as loosely coupled systems [40], with problems needing solutions, and/or people selling their pet ideas (or solutions), chance opportunities for actions, and sets of resources which could be marshaled. Conflict abounds! When leaders and work teams take action, often it results not so much from planned problem solving but rather from the confluence of the right opportunities, available solutions, people who advocate for a particular solution or use of a resource [41]. The internal state of the communication system often is the result of “organized chaos.”

CONCLUSION

In summary, leaders who empower their employees authorize and enable them to do their jobs. Empowered employees plan their own work, receive training,

receive the tools necessary to do their jobs, and use their broader authority to work. They become empowered because visionary leaders create an environment that enables them to experience support, training, shared authority, and decentralized decision making. Visionary leaders communicate highly important and desirable values. Members and leaders share these values in a commitment to high quality products, good service, and general excellence. As leaders and members operate in an empowered culture they express trust between one another through open communication. Effective communicators use an open style, understand effective procedures for conducting problem-solving and decision-making meetings, and effectively listen to understand and provide feedback. These aspects of empowered organizations usually facilitate employee satisfaction, improved quality, and higher productivity [24].

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Dr. Kay Payne taught part time, is tenured at Western Kentucky University and intends to apply for a full professorship in the fall of 1997. She has authored several books and co-authored journal articles.

Dr. Joseph Peter Cangemi has been a member of the Psychology Department at Western Kentucky University in 1968. He is author or co-author of numerous books and published articles and has served as an editor of a professional journal.

Harold E. Fuqua, Jr. has been an Associate Pastor at Trinity Fellowship church in White House, Tennessee. He is author or co-author of two published articles with several more approved for publication in a variety of scholarly journals.

Rhonda Muhlenkamp is Manager, Human Resources, and past Controller, Nishikawa Standard Company (NISCO), Ft. Wayne (New Haven), Indiana.

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Direct reprint requests to:

Dr. Joseph Cangemi
Western Kentucky University
Department of Psychology
Bowling Green, KY 42101-3576