

Human Resources Empowerment Strategies in Development Projects

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Abstract

Human resources are the most valuable assets in every development project since factors such as capital, material, machinery, and so on are dependent on human resources. Despite technical advances and new techniques still there is no substitute for manpower and human resources is a key factor in development projects. Thus, project managers should try to understand this asset well and develop its implicit talent and ability and mobilize it effectively in advancing the project aims. Hence, quality and potency of human resources is the main factor for survival and life of every project, and even projects owe their economic growth to empowering its employees. Human resources empowerment is a necessary managerial tool which can be used for directing human resources in order to increase efficiency of projects. To this end, empowerment causes that managers and projects achieve their goals faster and without wasting resources. In addition, training motivated and capable employees allows managers to response faster and better in dealing with dynamics of the competitive environment. Empowerment can be defined as capacity making in employees for playing the assigned role optimally, efficiently and effectively. Obviously realization of this goal requires knowledge, experience, entrusting and a useful factor called motivation. However, despite the great importance of empowering human resources, unfortunately various factors in Iran has led to lack of a specific mechanism defined for qualifying human resources or even overlooking such mechanism in development projects. Ambiguous projects goals, lack suitable definition for working relationships and personal relationships, lack of appropriate performance appraisal system, lack of defining appropriate indicators for human resources productivity measurement and some market-related factors resulting from non-competitiveness of the environment are among these factors. Regarding the fact that project qualitative development and creation of new opportunities realize if the project enjoys enabled human resources, thus this study aims at investigative factors affecting human resources empowerment process and analyze existing solutions with an analytical approach. To this end, different development workshops under construction were visited and project managers and employees were interviewed and their opinions and recommendations were used. Results show that human resources empowerment can bring positive performance and efficiency in development projects.

Keywords: human resources, empowerment, development projects

1. Introduction

History of the first definition of the term empowerment refers to 1788 in which empowerment was considered as empowering in organizational role which should be given to individual or it should be seen in his organizational role. Grew (1971) points to common definitions of empowerment which include delegated legislative power, delegation, mandate and empowerment.

Without empowerment, and project managers cannot be successful in the long run. Project managers are the most important factor in human resources empowerment because they influence directly and indirectly on all project factors. Project managers should provide necessary context for empowerment by delegating more power to employees, giving them independence and freedom, providing a collaborative atmosphere, creating a culture of teamwork, and eliminating conditions which lead to powerlessness of employees, since empowerment of human resources offers potential capacities for utilizing human resources abilities which are not used totally, and in fact, it creates a win – win situation between project managers and human resources.

2. Human Resources Empowerment Process

Human resources empowerment is a process by which a empowerment culture is developed. In such culture, goals, decision making borders and the outcome of effects and efforts are shared in the whole project. Human resources empowerment process can be summarized into three stages:

1. Information sharing: it allows human resources to recognize and analyze project situations. Information sharing is initiated with project confidence building and breaking down hierarchical thinking, and it results in increased human resources responsibility.

2. Autonomy and working independence all across the project boundaries: project boundaries are specified through the goal, values, regulations, target, roles, and project system and structure.
3. Replacing hierarchies with self-managed teams: when a group of human resources is selected with specific responsibilities for working process within project, they plan, execute and manage everything and responsibilities are divided equally. Advantages of self-managed teams include: providing occupational satisfaction, work commitment, better communication between human resources and project managers, more effective decision-making processes, work improvement and development, reduced project costs and project productivity.

3. Practical Practices for Human Resources Empowerment

- 1) Showing project management commitment through:
 - Strategic thinking regarding areas in which creativity leads to developed activities
 - Reorganization and integrating operations and increased coordination of activities
 - Creating an atmosphere of trust and honest communication
 - Targeted investments and providing incentives to facilitate change
 - Participation in project activities for testing project achievements
 - Using a performance feedback system with 360 degree rotation
 - Motivating and rewarding human resources involved in the project
- 2) Paying attention to human resources through:
 - Building trust in a collaborative environment
 - Participating human resources in decision making before a final decision
- 3) Human resources training to enhance knowledge, skills and abilities through:
 - Providing formal training for human resources
 - Training new methods of performing in team and team building
 - Paying attention to investment in education at any point of time
- 4) Using qualitative teams through:
 - Creating a team of human resources to take responsibility of activities at multiple levels
 - Assignment of responsibilities to the team and its members
- 5) Human resources involvement in planning and performance information sharing through:
 - Developing a mechanism to participating human resources in the planning process
 - Providing performance information throughout the project through various ways such as charts, graphs and so on
 - Providing performance information through meetings
 - Surveying human resources about change directions in project
- 6) Empowerment through:
 - Removing part of the regulatory categories
 - Providing enough time for project managers to focus on problems and issues and project policies
 - Creating a new position of appropriate and worthy authority and discretion project human Resources

4. Conclusion

Regarding this study, empowerment can be considered as a result and outcome of three main flows in the project: a. project managers' tendency to the level of human resources participation (participatory management), b. Transfer of authority to subordinates (power delegation), c. the reward paid to human resources for success in performing tasks (performance-based rewarding). In empowerment, therefore, the primary goal is human resources which following factors affect its empowerment in development projects:

1. Managerial strategies (delegation, group formation, independence, participatory management and information provision)
2. Project factors (access to resources, organizational structure, developing project goals and reward system)
3. Sources of self-efficacy (modeling, motivating and support).

5. References

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