

Spotlight on Empowerment



People have to empower themselves. Your role is to encourage and support the decision-making environment, and to give employees the tools and knowledge they need to make and act upon their own decisions

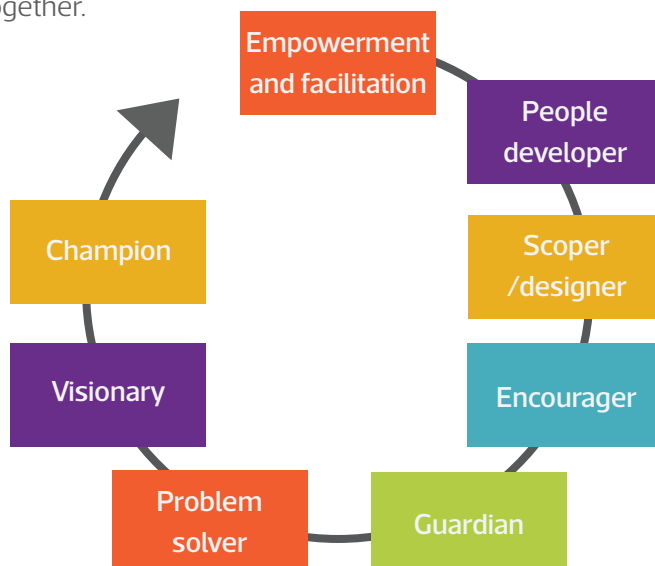
Marshall Goldsmith (2010)

The Need for Empowerment

To stay ahead, organisations need to innovate quickly. Old style “command and control” structures are no longer fit for purpose because decision-making in them is slow and relies on omnipotence from leadership which is at best unreliable and at worst dangerous. As a leader in a climate of constant innovation your approach will need to build empowered people and your style and skill will be as a facilitator. Empowerment is defined as an increase in workers’ sense of confidence in their own competence generally including greater spontaneous contribution to innovative practice and persistence in the face of setbacks and obstacles (adapted from Conger & Kanungo, 1988). As a leader your job is to encourage the development of an empowerment and an intrapreneurial culture (an entrepreneurial mindset within the bounds of an organisation). This change of organisational style means that your leadership style must change too, into facilitation.

Facilitation

Facilitation is the art and science of getting things done through the actions of others. It dovetails with the notion of organisational empowerment because a facilitating leader is skilled in getting people to engage with change and grow their potential. As a facilitating leader you create the fertile conditions in which people can think and grow. It can feel threatening at first, but you don’t have to be an expert in the domain knowledge of people who report to you. You do however need a skill set which enables you to design and manage the processes needed firstly, to build an empowered team, group or organisation and then bring people and plans together.



Empowerment and Facilitation in Leadership

A facilitating leader may have their own professional or technical discipline. But they also must be many other things too.

Firstly, they need to help their staff become empowered. They need to be a **people developer**. People need opportunities to grow but to achieve this they need support from the organisation, through training, mentoring, coaching plus they need the physical resources too, thus ensuring that they become all they need to be.

As a **scoper and designer**, a leader sets the parameters for innovation. A common function of leadership is managing projects and teams, putting the right people together and helping them design the innovation or solution required. Linked to this is a facilitating skill of **encouraging participation and idea sharing**. Such a leader will make sure that all people contribute, and the organisation is inclusive, listens and learns. Empowerment means people feel competent to share. If you facilitate well you will draw people out.

Linked to encouraging is the role of **guardian**, facilitating a sense of safety. Such a leader scaffolds the development of staff to take away fear of failure. People won't feel empowered or contribute if they don't feel safe to do so. A facilitating leader silences destructive criticism, encourages critical evaluation in a climate of openness and trust where the leader leads by example and sets the tone.

In any project or organisation problems arise. The facilitating leader will have skills in **dealing with problems** and as a skilled helper supporting people in their own plans to resolve issues. The facilitating leader does not necessarily have to have the answers but to find or empower someone who can, is the leadership skill they need. They may also mediate between competing ideas so that a team or group may move forward together.

Projects and teams can quite easily drift without support. A facilitating leader helps build a clear **vision** and by skilled intervention helps the team build or maintain **clarity in purpose**. Facilitating leaders ask good questions, listen well, mediate and support focus.

Lastly the leader **champions or supports** others to share the ideas and innovations of their team to stakeholders. They take responsibility for the process but share the glory of the outcome. By their language you will know them:

Facilitating leaders say....	Traditional leaders say..
we	me or I
us or ours	mine
together	alone
my responsibility for the team	they made a mistake

A facilitator shares credit, a traditional leader takes it.



Human beings are not things needing to be motivated and controlled; they are four dimensional – body, mind, heart, and spirit

Stephen Covey (2013)

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