



Is this the magic solution?

Greater empowerment ticks all the right boxes but isn't the default management style in many companies.

Michèle Moore, Director at engagementmore, argues that adopting this model can lead to success.

In my last article I explored how to return time and space to middle managers to focus on relationship building and suggested the first step is to “Invest in, educate and truly empower the front line”

It sounds expensive and potentially nerve wracking but it doesn't have to be a huge leap into the dark. I see so many organisations missing a simple step that requires relatively little (or no) investment and offers big returns in terms of employee engagement, productivity and customer satisfaction.

What is this seemingly magic solution? Involving the people who deal directly with the (internal or external) customer in discussing as a team how the job should get done, how to meet or exceed expectations and how to resolve issues.

Whilst it's hardly a new idea – it was one of the principles expounded by Dr. W. Edwards Deming back in the 1950s and is a cornerstone within customer centric companies such as Waitrose – it is still surprisingly rare to find it forming part of a deliberate strategy or management style. Deming is considered by many to be the master of continual quality improvement. He is held in high regard for significantly contributing to the dramatic turnaround of post-war Japanese industry, and their rise to a world economic power.

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very long way towards meeting all three and providing employees with a fulfilling and enriching role.

By regularly involving front line teams in problem solving and continuous improvement conversations:

- They gain confidence in their own skills and abilities
- They develop essential problem solving skills
- They share best practice and learn from each other. (We know that learning through discovery and peers is faster and more effective than any top down effort to dictate or persuade)
- They feel valued by their line manager and the organisation
- They develop their sense of ownership of the customer experience and their own outputs

This in turn prepares individuals and teams for greater empowerment as, in order to feel empowered, people typically need four things:

- skills
- knowledge
- support
- and the right attitude (i.e. they have to want to be empowered)

Great empowerment is a win-win-win: better service for the customer, greater employee engagement and more time for the manager to focus on the future instead of the day to day.

So why is this still not the default management style in more companies? It requires an understanding that the power of the leader or manager doesn't reside in holding all the cards (information, resources, decision making...). On the contrary, true power comes from sharing those cards with the team at every opportunity whilst maintaining ultimate accountability (hence the pay differential). The “command and control” era is over but middle managers or supervisors often lack a clear model of what the alternative looks like.