

# Making Empowered Delegation Work

## Creating Successful Culture Change

By David Rodgers

At some time or another, each of us has been in the position where we have decided that delegating to a team, sub-team, or individual is the best way to approach a particular decision. We begin by chartering the group or individual to create a proposal for the rest of the organization. We do all the right things to get them started; we determine the outcomes, communicate the boundaries and provide the resources. We establish the project milestones, the team rolls up their sleeves and takes their best shot at the task. So far, so good – Right?

Unfortunately, what happens next typically causes a great deal of frustration for both sides. From the leadership team point of view, it seems that the project team did not consider the impact that their recommendation will have on other projects, the leadership team sees the information as incomplete, or the recommendation doesn't align with the business strategy. The leadership team then feels that they have to rethink the whole thing.

The project team then gets frustrated as the leadership team or sponsor picks the plan apart or reinvents it on the spot. Sometimes there is little support for the suggestion. Other times, the project team doesn't get a response as their input is pushed back by immediate crises. When the approval process is stonewalled, the project team quickly discounts the team approach, concluding that they were never really empowered.

In working with these teams, we've discovered three very simple, but critical, steps that people tend to omit from the process of getting approval. Let me explain it this way.

What the project team is actually doing is developing their **idea** or solution for the assigned issue; they do this without input from either the sponsor or key influencers. They then bring it to the sponsor for **approval**. The problem is, there is almost no way to approve an idea or solution unless you know the strategy for implementing it. It is only by knowing the strategy that you can assess the impact on your group and the organization as a whole.

For instance, let's say my team came up with a proposal that suggested moving everyone in our group to Windows'98 in order to solve a compatibility problem we have with sharing information. If we go straight to our leadership team to get approval, we can run into all sorts of obstacles. Some of the managers will react negatively based on past software updates that have reduced their productivity. Others will question the soundness of the decision and the list can go on and on. The component missing from the proposal is the strategy for implementation. If I don't know the implementation plan, I can't determine how much it will cost in time, money and training. Also, I don't know how to get input into the process if the decision isn't working out. Therefore, I can't really agree or disagree before I know how it will be implemented.

There are two major keys for making empowered delegation work. First, the team needs to map out a **Strategy** for implementing their decision. This way, they can see the impact of their solution on others and actually determine if it is practical and doable.

Secondly, the team needs to review the strategy with the members of the organization or leadership team that will be impacted by the proposal. By getting their **Support** and feedback up-front, any revealed roadblocks and concerns may be blended back into the strategy. This "Feedback Loop" can be repeated until the strategy is refined enough to be accepted. Once this completed, you already have the support of those major players. By the time your team presents the proposal for approval, it will be well thought out and only the issues that need to be discussed in the dynamics of the whole group will need to be covered.

Accountability for this process lies on both sides. The team or individual making this recommendation should take the necessary steps to ensure that their proposal is sound. In the same way, the sponsoring group needs to make it clear that this is the process and be available for the one-on-one discussions. If the presenting team does not take this approach, the sponsoring team should simply request that they complete the process before coming forth to make the overall presentation.

By setting this expectation at a leadership level you can actually create a change in how your culture approaches getting approval. The unique part of this approach is that it doesn't take additional training and development; it simply takes communication how the organization makes decisions, coupled with the accountability to follow through.

The final step happens during the approval discussion after approval has been given. This is the step of **Accountability**. Once the approval has been given, the project and the leadership teams need to agree on:

- follow-up,
- measurement
- support procedures (to see that the decision is communicated, implemented and reviewed for effectiveness).

When these three missing steps (**Strategy, Support, Accountability**) are in place, you will make better decisions, faster, and will more support. More importantly, you will spend more time implementing and learning from decisions, rather than arguing about them in meetings!