



“The single biggest problem with communication is the illusion that it has taken place.”

George Bernard Shaw

THE ELEMENTS OF EMPOWERMENT AND HOW TO ACTUALLY USE THEM

So you want to be an empowering leader? HOW? WHAT do you do? As a scientist, I need examples. Here's a specific tool to use to empower and engage your staff.

One way to empower others and increase their motivation and commitment is to allow them to take on added responsibilities. Some may refer to these added responsibilities as “stretch assignments” or “development opportunities.” Another way to empower your team and increase their engagement is to clarify their *existing* roles and responsibilities. Hours, days and weeks of confusion, misalignment and disengagement can be avoided by using the elements of empowerment. You can use the matrix on the next page as a tool to *discuss*, *define* and *clarify* the elements with staff and *agree* on roles and responsibilities.

To start the discussion, people need to understand the responsibilities they will assume.

Description – What are the responsibilities of this project or position?

Next, are the boundary conditions or parameters within which people fulfill their responsibilities. Boundary conditions include expectations, non-negotiables, authority level and time guidelines.

Expectations – What are the expectations or results of an individual that takes on these responsibilities? These expectations or results can be qualitative or quantitative.

Non-Negotiables – What is out of bounds? Non-negotiables define limits than can't be crossed in fulfilling a responsibility. For example, non-negotiables could include laboratory safety, regulatory requirements, specific policies and procedures.

Authority Level – How much authority should a person have in an area of responsibility? Authority is the level of autonomy that one has in executing a task and depends on experience and capability.

- Level 1 : Act when directed.
- Level 2 : Act after approval.
- Level 3 : Act after consultation.
- Level 4 : Act and report.
- Level 5 : Act autonomously.

Time Guidelines – What are the time constraints that guide the task? These generally consist of milestone events or completion of certain projects. They can also include the length of time a person assumes a particular role.

Information & Knowledge – What knowledge and/or information must people have access to in order to succeed? In many organizations, managers take for granted the knowledge and information they have that others do not. Share.

Skills – What skills or additional training do people need to successfully take on new responsibilities? For example, they may need to improve their presentation skills or proficiency in a software language.

Resources & Support – What are the human, financial, technical or organization resources available for people to fulfill their responsibilities? These resources could include tools and equipment or access to reports and technical experts. Support is letting people know that you trust their ability to handle a task and it's OK for them to make mistakes and seek advice.

Use the matrix template on the next page to discuss, define and agree on responsibilities.

