First Line Management CMI Level 3

Session 10

Delegation

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Delegation

Delegating authority skills, tasks and the process of effective delegation

Delegation is one of the most important management skills. These logical rules and techniques will help you to delegate well. Good delegation saves you time, develops you people, grooms a successor, and motivates. Poor delegation will cause you frustration, demotivates and confuses the other person, and fails to achieve the task or purpose itself. So it's a management skill that's worth improving. Here are the simple steps to follow if you want to get delegation right, with different levels of delegation freedom that you can offer.

This delegation skills guide deals with general delegation principles and process, which is applicable to **individuals** and **teams**, or to **specially formed groups of people for individual projects** (including **'virtual teams'**).

Delegation and SMART, or SMARTER

A simple delegation rule is the acronym SMARTER. It's a quick checklist for proper delegation. Delegated tasks must be:

- Specific
- Measurable
- Agreed
- Realistic
- Timebound
- Ethical
- Recorded

Traditional interpretations of the SMARTER acronym use 'Exciting' or 'Enjoyable', however, although a high level of motivation often results when a person achieves and is given recognition for a particular delegated task, which in itself can be exciting and enjoyable, in truth, let's be honest, it is not always possible to ensure that all delegated work is truly 'exciting' or 'enjoyable' for the recipient. Whereas the 'Ethical' aspect is fundamentally important for everything that we do, assuming you subscribe to such philosophy.

The steps to successful delegation

1 Define the task

Confirm in your own mind that the task is suitable to be delegated. Does it meet the criteria for delegating?

2 Select the individual

What are your reasons for delegating to this person? What are they going to get out of it? What are you going to get out of it?

3 Assess ability and training needs

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Is the other person capable of doing the task? Do they understand what needs to be done. If not, you can't delegate.

4 Explain the reasons

You must explain why the job or responsibility is being delegated. And why to that person? What is its importance and relevance? Where does it fit in the overall scheme of things?

5 State required results

What must be achieved? Clarify understanding by getting feedback from the other person. How will the task be measured? Make sure they know how you intend to decide that the job is being successfully done.

6 Consider resources required

Discuss and agree what is required to get the job done. Consider people, location, premises, equipment, money, materials, other related activities and services.

7 Agree deadlines

When must the job be finished? Or if an ongoing duty, when are the review dates? When are the reports due? And if the task is complex and has parts or stages, what are the priorities?

At this point you may need to confirm understanding with the other person of the previous points, getting ideas and interpretation. As well as showing you that the job can be done, this helps to reinforce commitment.

Methods of checking and controlling must be agreed with the other person. Failing to agree this in advance will cause this monitoring to seem like interference or lack of trust.

8 Support and communicate

Think about who else needs to know what's going on, and inform them. Involve the other person in considering this so they can see beyond the issue at hand. Do not leave the person to inform your own peers of their new responsibility. Warn the person about any awkward matters of politics or protocol. Inform your own boss if the task is important, and of sufficient profile.

9 Feedback on results

It is essential to let the person know how they are doing, and whether they have achieved their aims. If not, you must review with them why things did not go to plan, and deal with the problems. You must absorb the consequences of failure, and pass on the credit for success.

Levels of delegation

Delegation isn't just a matter of telling someone else what to do. There is a wide range of varying freedom that you can confer on the other person. The more experienced and reliable the other person is, then the more freedom you can give. The more critical the task then the more cautious you need to be about extending a lot of freedom, especially if your job or reputation depends on getting a good result. Take care to choose the most appropriate style for each situation. For each example the statements are simplified for clarity; in reality you would choose a less abrupt style of language, depending on the person and the relationship. At the very least, a "Please" and "Thank-you" would be included in the requests.

It's important also to ask the other person what level of authority they feel comfortable being given. Why guess when you can get the other person's view? You don't necessarily need to agree, but you should certainly take account of the other person's opinion. Some people are confident; others less so. It's up to you to agree with them what level is most appropriate, so that the job is done effectively and with minimal unnecessary involvement from you. Involving the other person in agreeing the level of delegated freedom for any particular responsibility is an essential part of the contract that you make with them.

1 "Wait to be told." or "Do exactly what I say." or "Follow these instructions precisely."

No delegated freedom at all.

2 "Look into this and tell me what you come up with. I'll decide."

This is asking for investigation and analysis but no recommendation.

3 "Give me your recommendation, and the other options with the pros and cons of each. I'll let you know whether you can go ahead."

Asks for analysis and recommendation, but you will check the thinking before deciding.

4 "Decide and let me know your decision, but wait for my go ahead."

The other person needs approval but is trusted to judge the relative options.

5 "Decide and let me know your decision, then go ahead unless I say not to."

Now the other person begins to control the action. The subtle increase in responsibility saves time.

6 "Decide and take action, but let me know what you did."

Saves more time. Allows a quicker reaction to wrong decisions, not present in subsequent levels.

7 "Decide and take action. You need not check back with me."

The most freedom that you can give to another person when you still need to retain responsibility for the activity. A high level of confidence is necessary, and you would normally assess the quality of the activity after the event according to overall results, potentially weeks or months later.

8 "Decide where action needs to be taken and manage the situation accordingly. It's your area of responsibility now."

The most freedom that you can give to the other person, and not generally used without formal change of a person's job role. It's the delegation of a strategic responsibility. This gives the other person responsibility for defining what projects and tasks are necessary for the management of a particular area of responsibility, as well as the task or project, and how it is to be done and measured, etc. This amounts to delegating part of your job - not just a task or project. You'd use this utmost level of delegation (for example) when developing a successor, or as part of an intentional and agreed plan to devolve some of your job accountability in a formal sense.

Contracts - 'psychological contracts', 'emotional contracts'

Variously called 'contracts' or 'psychological contracts' or 'emotional contracts', these expressions describe the process of agreeing with the other person what they should do and the expectations linked to the responsibility. It all basically means the same, whatever you call it. The point is that people cannot actually be held responsible for something to which they've not agreed. The point is also that everyone is more committed to delivering a responsibility if they've been through the process of agreeing to do it. This implies that they might have some feelings about the expectations attached, such as time-scale, resources, budget, etc., even purpose and method. You must give the other person the opportunity to discuss, question and suggest issues concerning expectations attached to a delegated task. This is essential to the contracting process.

Certain general responsibilities of course are effectively agreed implicitly within people's job roles or job descriptions or employment contracts, but commonly particular tasks, projects, etc., that you need to delegate are not, in which case specific discussion must take place to establish proper agreement or 'contract' between you and the other person.

Tannenbaum and Schmidt - model of delegation and team development

The Tannenbaum and Schmidt Continuum is a simple model which shows the relationship between the level of freedom that a manager chooses to give to a team, and the level of authority used by the manager. As the team's freedom is increased, so the manager's authority decreases. This is a positive way for both teams and managers to develop. While the Tannenbaum and Schmidt model concerns delegated freedom to a group, the principle of being able to apply different levels of delegated freedom closely relates to the 'levels of delegation' on the delegation page. As a manager, one of your responsibilities is to develop your team. You should delegate and ask a team to make its own decisions to varying degrees according to their abilities. There is a rising scale of levels of delegated freedom that you can use when working with your team. The Tannenbaum and Schmidt Continuum is often shown as a simple graph:
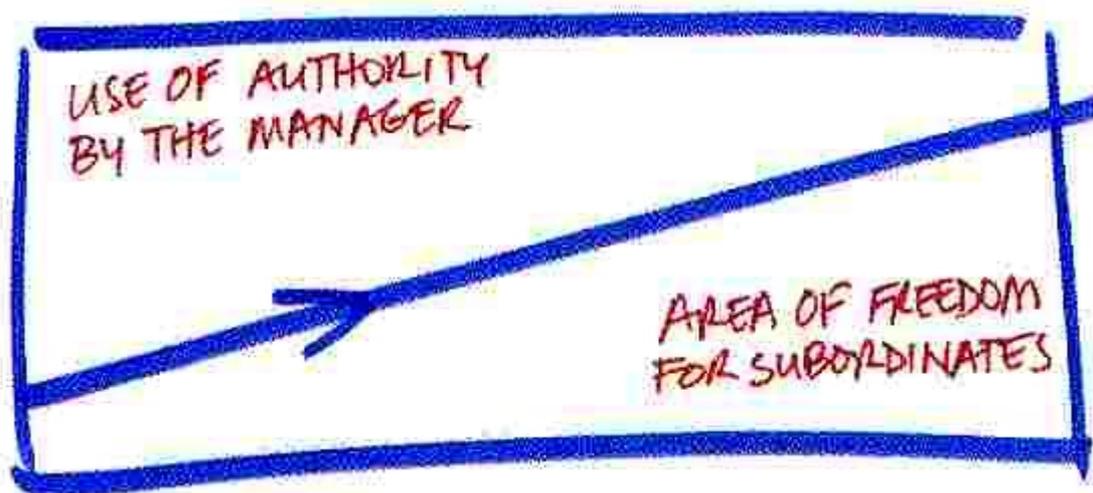
Over time, a manager should aim to take the team from one end to the other, up the scale, at which point you should also aim to have developed one or a number of potential successors from within your team to take over from you. This process can take a year or two, or even longer, so be patient, explain what you're doing, and be aware constantly of how your team is responding and developing.

When examining and applying the Tannenbaum and Schmidt principles, it's extremely important to remember: **irrespective of the amount of responsibility and freedom delegated by a manager to a team, the manager retains accountability for any catastrophic problems that result. Delegating freedom and decision-making responsibility to a team absolutely does not absolve the manager of accountability. That's why delegating, whether to teams or individuals, requires a very grown-up manager. If everything goes well, the team must get the credit; if it all goes horribly wrong, the manager must take the blame. This is entirely fair, because the manager is ultimately responsible for judging the seriousness of any given situation - including the risks entailed - and the level of freedom that can safely be granted to the team to deal with it. This is not actually part of the Tannebaum and Schmidt Continuum, but it's**

vital to apply this philosophy or the model will definitely be weakened, or at worse completely back-fire.

Here are the Tannenbaum and Schmidt Continuum levels of delegated freedom, with some added explanation that should make it easier to understand and apply.

1. The Manager decides and announces the decision.

The manager reviews options in light of aims, issues, priorities, timescale, etc., then decides the action and informs the team of the decision. The manager will probably have considered how the team will react, but the team plays no active part in making the decision. The team may well perceive that the manager has not considered the team's welfare at all. This is seen by the team as a purely task-based decision, which is generally a characteristic of X-Theory management style.

2. The manager decides and then 'sells' the decision to the group.

The manager makes the decision as in 1 above, and then explains reasons for the decision to the team, particularly the positive benefits that the team will enjoy from the decision. In so doing the manager is seen by the team to recognise the team's importance, and to have some concern for the team.

3. The manager presents the decision with background ideas and invites questions.

The manager presents the decision along with some of the background which led to the decision. The team is invited to ask questions and discuss with the manager the rationale behind the decision, which enables the team to understand and accept or agree with the decision more easily than in 1 and 2 above. This more participative and involving approach enables the team to appreciate the issues and reasons for the decision, and the implications of all the options. This will have a more motivational approach than 1 or 2 because of the higher level of team involvement and discussion.

4. The manager suggests a provisional decision and invites discussion about it.

The manager discusses and reviews the provisional decision with the team on the basis that the manager will take on board the views and then finally decide. This enables the team to have some real influence over the shape of the manager's final decision. This also acknowledges that the team has something to contribute to the decision-making process, which is more involving and therefore motivating than the previous level.

5. The manager presents the situation or problem, gets suggestions, then decides.

The manager presents the situation, and maybe some options, to the team. The team is encouraged and expected to offer ideas and additional options, and discuss implications of each possible course of action. The manager then decides which option to take. This level is one of high and specific involvement for the team, and is appropriate particularly when the team has more detailed knowledge or experience of the issues than the manager. Being high-involvement and high-influence for the team this level provides more motivation and freedom than any previous level.

6. The manager explains the situation, defines the parameters and asks the team to decide.

At this level the manager has effectively delegated responsibility for the decision to the team, albeit within the manager's stated limits. The manager may or may not choose to be a part of the team which decides. While this level appears to gives a huge responsibility to the team, the manager can control the risk and outcomes to an extent, according to the constraints that he stipulates. This level is more motivational than any previous, and requires a mature team for any serious situation or problem. (Remember that the team must get the credit for all the positive outcomes from the decision, while the manager remains accountable for any resulting problems or disasters. This isn't strictly included in the original Tannenbaum and Schmidt definitions, so it needs pointing out because it's such an important aspect of delegating and motivating, and leadership.)

7. The manager allows the team to identify the problem, develop the options, and decide on the action, within the manager's received limits.

This is obviously an extreme level of freedom, whereby the team is effectively doing what the manager did in level 1. The team is given responsibility for identifying and analysing the situation or problem; the process for resolving it; developing and assessing options; evaluating implications, and then deciding on and implementing a course of action. The manager also states in advance that he/she will support the decision and help the team implement it. The manager may or may not be part of the team, and if so then he/she has no more authority than anyone else in the team. The only constraints and parameters for the team are the ones that the manager had imposed on him from above. (Again, the manager retains accountability for any resulting disasters, while the team must get the credit for all successes.) This level is potentially the most motivational of all, but also potentially the most disastrous. Not surprisingly the team must be mature and competent, and capable of acting at what is a genuinely strategic decision-making level.