

Employee participation

Employee participation is the process whereby employees are involved in decision making processes, rather than simply acting on orders. Employee participation is part of a process of empowerment in the workplace.

Empowerment involves decentralising power within the organisation to individual decision makers further down the line. Team working is a key part of the empowerment process. Team members are encouraged to make decisions for themselves in line with guidelines and frameworks established in self managing teams.

Employee participation is in part a response to the quality movement within organisations. Individual employees are encouraged to take responsibility for quality in terms of carrying out activities, which meet the requirements of their customers. The internal customer is someone within the organisation that receives the 'product of service' provided by their 'supplier' within the organisation. External customers are buyers and users outside of the organisation. Employee participation is also part of the move towards human resource development in modern organisations. Employees are trusted to make decisions for themselves and the organisation. This is a key motivational tool.

Employee participation is also referred to as employee involvement (EI)

Examples of employee participation include:

- i. Project teams or quality circles in which employees work on projects or tasks with considerable responsibility being delegated to the team.
- ii. Suggestion schemes - where employees are given channels whereby they can suggest new ideas to managers within the organisation. Often they will receive rewards for making appropriate suggestions.
- iii. Consultation exercises and meetings whereby employees are encouraged to share ideas.
- iv. Delegation of responsibility within the organisation. In modern organisations ground level employees have to be given considerable responsibility because they are dealing with customers on a day-to-day basis often in novel situations. Such employees need to be trusted to make decisions for themselves.
- v. Multi-channel decision making processes. In such situations decisions are not only made in a downward direction, they also result from communications upwards, sideways, and in many other directions within the organisation.