



Research Paper

The essence of the principle of delegation of authority

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ABSTRACT: *The basic concept and principle of the hierarchy, that is, scalar factor, binds together the different units and levels of the organisation with a continuous chain of authority; and the essence of this principle is the delegation of authority*

Keywords: *delegation, hierarchy, scalar factor, different units and levels, organisation, and chain of authority*

I. INTRODUCTION

J. D. Millet, one of the leading organisational scientists, maintains that delegation of authority means more than simply assigning duties and responsibilities to others in more or less detail. The essence of delegation is intended to confer discretion upon others, to use their judgment in meeting specific problems and challenges within the frame work of their duties.

II. PURPOSE OF THIS ARTICLE

The purpose of this article is to *define, describe and demonstrate* the basic concept in organisational theory and practice. All these aspects constitute the subject – matter of this article.

III. DELEGATION OF AUTHORITY

The principle of hierarchy (scalar principle) binds together the different units and levels of the organisation with a continuous chain of authority. The essence of this principle is the delegation of authority.

1.1 Definitions

The following definitions bring out the meaning of delegation:

Mooney: delegation means conferring of specified authority by a higher to a lower authority

Terry: delegation means conferring authority from on executive or organisational units to another

Millet: delegation of authority means more than simply assigning duties to others in more or less detail. The essence of delegation is to confer discretion upon others, to use their judgement in meeting specific problems within the frame work of their duties

In addition to the above definitions of *delegation of authority*, Professor William and Professor Ivan Meyer [1995;34-34], two leading social scientists, at the School of Public Management of the University of Stellenbosch, South Africa, make the following scholarly contributions:

- a. **Delegated authority:** action in which an individual or institution transfers his or its political or legal authority to a subordinate individual or institution for execution or application. Only the execution or application is transferred, as the individual or institution to which the authority was originally granted retains all of the original authority.
- b. **Delegation of power:** when powers are assigned, the authority and duty to exercise them is transferred partly or in full. The power to delegate does not automatically exist, but be provided for, either expressly or by implication.
- c. **Delegation:** the passing of duties and rights (responsibility and authority) from a superior person or unit to a subordinate person or unit.

1.2 Features

As excellently analysed by Mohit Bhattacharya, a scheme of delegation has four features:

- i. assignment of duties by the *superior (delegator)* to the *subordinate (delegate)*.
- ii. granting of authority by the *delegator* to the *delegate* to facilitate the work assigned to him.
- iii. creation of an obligation, that is, the delegatee becomes duty bound to complete the work.
- iv. no further delegation of the obligation by the delegate to his subordinates.

It must be clarified here that a *scheme of delegation* is subject to the *supervision and control* of the delegator. Further, authority once *delegated* can be *enhanced, reduced, or taken back* by the delegator. While *delegating authority*, the *delegator* neither transfers his *final authority nor abdicates his ultimate responsibility*.

To sum up, *delegation* stands for the grant of authority by a superior to a subordinate for the attainment of a specific assignment. The delegator still retains the delegated authority but its exercise is permitted to the delegatee. Thus, *delegation has a dual character*. In this context, G. R. Terry observes, it is something like imparting knowledge you share with others, who then possess the knowledge; you still retain the knowledge too. However, *M. P. Follet* considered the concept of delegation as a mere myth of organisational (administrative) theory. She believed that *authority* belongs to the job and stays with the job. Hence, one who does the job, must have the authority whether his superior likes it or not. As authority belongs to the function (job), it cannot be delegated. The term *delegation of authority* is thus an absolute expression. She asserted, authority must be functional and functional authority carries with it *responsibility*.

1.3 Related Concepts

Delegation is different from *decentralization, devolution and deconcentration*, which also imply transfer of authority. In the words of Muttalib, *deconcentration* is based on administrative action, *devolution* on *political and legal and decentralization* on political, legal and administrative action. For example, Panchayati Raj signifies *decentralization* while, the office of district collector *deconcentration*. The transfer of authority from the *centre* to the states *implies devolution*.

3.4 Typologies

3.4.1 Downward, upward and sideward

According to *G. R. Terry*, *delegation* is not necessarily downward; it can as well be upward or sideward. It is further explained below:

- a. *Delegation* is downward when a higher authority delegates to a lower authority. Example – a sales manager delegating to a salesman
- b. *Delegation* is upward when a lower authority delegate to a higher authority. Example – shareholders delegating to their board of directors
- c. *Delegating* is sideward when it is at equal levels. Examples – delegation between African tribal chiefs and their central tribal authority

3.4.2 Outward Delegation

Delegation is outward when authority is granted to an outside body which is not under the direct control of the delegator. For example, Delegation to ad – hoc committees set up for specific purpose

3.4.3 Permanent and Temporary

Delegation is permanent when authority is conferred forever while it is *temporary* when authority is granted for a short period. Usually, *delegation is temporary*.

3.4.4 Full and Partial

Delegation is full when complete powers are granted to the delegate to take final decisions and actions while it is partial when the delegate has to consult the delegator on important aspects of the job assigned to him.

Normally, *delegation is partial and full delegation* is rarely found, as for example, when a diplomatic representative is sent abroad with full powers to negotiate. *Full delegation* is known as *alter ego*

3.4.5 Conditional and Unconditional

Delegation is conditional when the decision and action of the delegate is subject to control and confirmation by the delegator while it is unconditional when the delegate is free to take decision and act without any reservation.

3.4.6 Formal and Informal

Delegation is formal when based on written rules and orders, while it is informal when based on customs and conventions

3.4.7 Direct and Intermediate

Delegation is direct when no third person is involved, while it is intermediate (indirect) when it is made through a third person

Usually, *delegation* is direct (immediate) and intermediate (indirect or mediate) delegation is rather rare. But, *Mooney* have two instances of such delegation; the election of the President of USA by the people through Electoral College and the election of the Pope by the congregation through council of cardinals.

3.5 Advantages

Delegation is a functional imperative for all kinds of organisation. It is needed for the following reasons

- a. To reduce burden on the superior
- b. To avoid delay in administrative process
- c. To have proper adjustments of policy and programme to local conditions
- d. To train the subordinates in the art of sharing responsibility and making decisions
- e. To develop second line of leadership
- f. To overcome complexity in procedures, that is, delegation to specialists
- g. To increase the sense of responsibility and interest in the employees
- h. To overcome congestion of work at the top level

3.6 Limits

Even though delegation is essential and advantageous, no superior can render himself superfluous by delegating entire authority vested in him. He has to retain some important powers to exercise effective control over the functioning of the organisation. Thus, the extent of delegation depends upon the nature of the case, the circumstances and the responsibilities involved. As identified by M. P. Sharma, the following powers are usually not delegated:

- i. The power to supervise the work of first line or immediate subordinates
- ii. The power to sanction expenditure above a specified amount and the power of general financial supervision
- iii. The power to sanction new policies and departures from old policies
- iv. The power to make rules and regulations the power to make specified higher appointment
- v. The power to hear appeals against the immediate subordinates decisions

3.7 Hindrances

Hindrances to delegation can be grouped into two kinds namely, organisational and personal

3.7.1 Organisational Hindrances

- i. lack of well established organisational methods, procedures and rules
- ii. unstable and non –repetitive character of work
- iii. lack of effective means of internal communications
- iv. centralization requirements of special programmes
- v. smaller size and narrower geographic coverage of the organisation
- vi. lack of effective means of internal coordination
- vii. lack of well defined positions in terms of responsibility and authority
- viii. incompetency and low caliber of lower level personnel;
- ix. the lesser age of the organisation due to few precedents
- x. the constitutional, legal and political restriction
- xi. the crisis situation faced by the organisation
- xii. lack of effective means of work control

3.7.2 Personal Hindrances

According to *J. M. Pfiffner*, the following are the personal hindrances to delegation

- i. persons who rise to position of hierarchical leadership have more than normal egotism
- ii. they are afraid that others will not make proper decisions or carry them out in a desired manner
- iii. they fear that disloyal or subversive power centres will develop among strong subordinates
- iv. in public administration, political considerations often make delegation difficult
- v. the cultural heritage of man has been one of authoritarian, patriarchal leadership; thus, the practice of delegation is partly dependent on cultural change
- vi. the act of delegation required an emotional maturity which apparently is rare, even among successful persons

- vii. the symbols of leadership (those personal qualities and traits which attract the attention of others) are inconsistent with the philosophy of delegation. Those striving to succeed must make themselves prominent.
- viii. Persons who desire to delegate do not know how. They do not know how for at least two reasons (a) *the science of organisation and management is immature* and (b) *their work experience* has not taught them to delegate because most organisations fail to practise delegation.

3.8 Principles

The observance of following principles makes *delegation* of authority effective:

- i. Delegation should be specific and written
- ii. Delegation should not be made to an individual but to a position
- iii. The competence of the subordinates should be taken into consideration
- iv. Authority and responsibility should be coterminous and coequal
- v. Delegation should be properly planned
- vi. Delegation should follow the usual chain of command
- vii. Well defines policies, regulations and procedures should be adopted
- viii. The communication system should be kept free and open, and systematic reporting system should be maintained
- ix. Delegation should be followed by a performance appraisal system
- x. Delegation should be based on the principle of unity of command
- xi. Delegation should be backed by adequate resources.

IV. CONCLUSION

According to available literature on the basic concept and principle of *delegation*, delegation may be *complete* or *partial*. *Delegation is full* when *complete powers* are granted to the delegated to take final decisions and actions while it is *partial* when the delegate has to consult the delegator on important aspects of the job assigned to him. Normally, delegation is *partial* and *full delegation* is rarely found when a diplomatic representative is sent abroad with full powers to negotiate. Full delegation is known as *alter ego*.

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