

Delegation: Leadership Development in Africa – Part 2

February 10, 2010 ·



Lex Lindeman



Dr. Paul Rono

Authors:

Lex Lindeman – HR Boosters

Dr. Paul Rono – Kenyatta University (Nairobi)

In our previous post [Leadership Development in Africa – Part 1](#), we explored the characteristics of effective leaders and the way to develop them. One of the important competencies of effective African leaders is delegation. In many African public and private companies, management asks us to focus on delegation during workshops we conduct for their staff. It seems to them that African managers, especially, need to learn to delegate more than they do already.

Delegation

The main purpose of delegation is to make organizations possible. Just as no one person in an organization or enterprise can perform all tasks necessary for the accomplishment of group purpose; so is it impossible, as an organization grows, for one person to exercise all the authority for making decisions.

If managers delegate poorly it will cause demotivation, frustration, slow decision making and the manager will have no time for his or her subordinates. Good delegation will save time, ensure a better distribution of workload, and ultimately lead to better decisions.

And, effective delegation will help to *develop, empower* and *motivate* subordinates.

Why Managers Don't Delegate

Some managers think that no one else can do the job the way they want it done, how they want it done and when they want it done. They think it's easier and more efficient to do it on their own, and they believe that they can do it better than their employees. These assumptions are incorrect!

Managers are not sure how to do delegate correctly. Here are some of the excuses I've heard over the years:

- “My team members lack the experience.”
- “It takes more time to explain than to do the job myself.”
- “A mistake by a team member could be costly for my project.”
- “My position enables me to get quicker action.”
- “There are some things that I shouldn't delegate to anyone.”
- “My team members are specialists and they lack the overall knowledge that many of my decisions require.”

I came across this small quote in *New African*, June 2009 by Akua Djanie:

“I don't know what it is about Africans, but we are afraid of, and shy away from, the idea of delegating someone to take our place when we are unavailable, is it because we think the person we delegate to will do a better job than us? Is it because we want to be seen as the one in charge; the one that can make or break the company, the project or the team? It is unbelievable, but from our post offices, to our small-scale businesses, and to the multinationals, it seems that everyone in Africa is scared to delegate.

Delegation shows the effectiveness of teamwork, because no matter how wonderful someone is at their job, no person is an island. And no project or company can function with only an individual. What delegation shows is that even if a particular person is unavailable, the project, team or company can still proceed because that person has put mechanisms in place to ensure the smooth running of operations. So rather than see delegation as a threat to their positions, Africans should embrace delegation as a strength. It simply does not make sense for everything to come to a standstill because one person is not available or one person is trying to do everything by him- or herself.”

But delegation is not only an issue in Africa; in institutions in the rest of the world, managers struggle with the same issues.

The Organization

Every position in a formal organization has a specified set of tasks or “position responsibilities, authorities and accountability.” Tasks should be delegated (assigned) to the lowest level in the organization at which there is sufficient competence and information for effective task performance.

The three concepts of *responsibility*, *authority*, and *accountability* are the major variables in the theory of delegation:

- **Authority:** Superiors delegate authority – permission and encouragement to take action – but they do not delegate responsibility, which they share with their subordinates. Thus responsibility, as accepted by the one to take action exists and

is shared from the point of acceptance upward, level by level, to the top of the organization.

- **Responsibility:** Responsibility is an obligation owed and cannot, therefore, be delegated. No superior can escape, through delegation, responsibility for the activities of subordinates, for it is he who has delegated authority and assigned duties. Likewise, the responsibility of the subordinate to his superior for performance is absolute; once he has accepted an assignment and the power to carry it out, no superior can escape responsibility for the organization activities of his subordinates.
- **Accountability:** Since authority is the discretionary right to carry out assignments and responsibility is the obligation to accomplish them, it follows, therefore, that authority should correspond to accountability. From this logical analysis emerges the principle that the accountability for actions cannot be greater than that implied by authority delegated, nor should it be less.

Advantages of Delegation

Delegation is a powerful management tool. Some advantages of delegation include:

- **Efficiency:** The more a superior is able to delegate, the more time he has for thinking, planning, etc.
- **Better Decisions:** The person who is close to the scene of action should be better able to make decisions than a distant superior.
- **Initiative:** Delegation encourages initiative on the part of subordinates so that the organization can use their skills more fully. Initiative in turn improves morale, because people take increased interest in their work if they are given an opportunity to use their own judgment.
- **Timeliness:** Delegation improves timing of decisions, because it minimizes the necessity for sending recommendations up the chain of command to decision makers several levels above the point where the recommendations were initiated.
- **Speed:** A do-it or-else order eliminates the time-consuming dillydallying of feedback. But speed may cost accuracy and morale.

Barriers to Delegate

Many managers will find a 'good' reason not to delegate; here are some pretexts which can be found in any work environment:

- **The need to be needed:** A superior who has an intense desire to make or keep subordinates dependent will find it difficult to give sincere recognition for job achievement by them.
- **Fear of losing control:** When superiors delegate, they run a risk of the subordinates not doing the job well, and losing control of the performance for which he is accountable.
- **Fear of surrendering authority:** Whenever you delegate, you surrender some element of authority (but not of responsibility!) This is inevitable. By effective

delegation, however, you get the benefits of adequate time to do YOUR job really well.

- **Perfectionism:** Just as you have to develop staff to do jobs quickly without your involvement, you will have to let people make mistakes, and help them to correct them. Most people will, with time, learn to do jobs properly.
- **The Desire for Reward:** Many managers enjoy the rewards and self-fulfillment associated with achievement of doing work. Delegating to subordinates necessarily means that the subordinates will get the reward.
- **Fear of Competition:** Other managers are afraid that if they assign work, and their subordinates develop, they will someday outperform them, overtake the manager in the hierarchy of the company.
- **It's a Effort:** Delegation takes time. In the early stages, managers need to invest time in training their people to take over tasks. When coaching and checking are taken into account, it may even initially take longer to achieve the desired outputs. In time however, with the right people, your coaching investment will pay back handsomely.

It is common for people who are newly promoted to managerial positions to have difficulties delegating. Often they were promoted because they were good at what they were doing. This brings the temptation to continue trying to do their previous job, rather than acting as a manager, and focus on developing their new subordinates.

How to Overcome Weak Delegation

Here are ten tips for you to help you to delegate more easily:

1. Define assignments in the light of expected results.
2. Select the right person to which to delegate.
3. Open up the lines of communication with your subordinates for consultation and counseling.
4. Establish proper controls for proper use of authority.
5. Reward effective delegation and successful assumption of authority.
6. Be willing to give other people's ideas a chance (never say: "Yes but..." This means NO!)
7. Be willing to release the right to make decisions (we call this empowerment).
8. Allow others to perform even though they make mistakes.
9. Trust your delegated junior. Delegation implies a trustful attitude between the two.
10. Establish and use broad controls. Responsibility is not delegated, hence the need for you to establish a means of feedback to assure yourself that the authority delegated is being used in support of the organizational objectives.

Conclusion: Weak Delegation in Africa?

As I said earlier, delegation is a global problem. But a very positive aspect is that Africans are very keen to learn and to try things out. This attitude toward change allows

Africans to learn to adopt delegation faster and easier. Studies in Africa show that Africans are ready to accept delegation of duties more easily than in the western world. Many managers in Africa learn easily to delegate and delegation is readily accepted, respected and honored. Demonstrate how important the jobs, the expectations, the goals and tasks are, and the African is keen to accept.

Mike Boon (2007) stated that accountability is one of the key area that must be stressed when delegating tasks to an African manager:

“Through this accountability, they become leaders and others will follow them.” When a manager or leader encourages accountability through delegation, the result will be growth and progression.”

More About the Authors

More About Lex:

- [Lex on LinkedIn](#)
- [HR Boosters](#)
- [Contact Lex](#)

More About Paul:

Dr. Rono is a lecturer at [Kenyatta University](#) in Nairobi. He is an authority on leadership development, and has published various articles related to leadership development in Africa with a progressive yet adoptable and realistic view. Watch for his new website coming soon!