

Delegate responsibilities and go beyond the task

If people look beyond simply checking off tasks, and instead focus on each person's personal and professional development, this will bring benefits for the entire organization.



April 1, 2016

By [Carlos Garcia Pont](#) & J. Ignacio Canales

If you were the CEO of your company, would you let the managers below you make an important decision that would affect the future, not only of a certain division, but of a significant part of the entire company?

That was the question that I (Carlos García Pont) once asked a group of 180 executives of a multinational company with operations on five continents who had gathered to develop their plans for the next year. In the course of our discussion, it came out that they had spent the past three years trying to change a corporate culture that they felt was overly centralized. How could they get the management to delegate more?

They began to discuss an actual situation concerning a management decision that profoundly affected everyone. It was in that context that I posed my earlier question, to which half responded yes and half said no.

To those who said yes, I asked a follow-up question: "If you didn't like the decision the managers below you had made, would you subsequently change it?" Seventy percent said they would.

Then I took it further: "Would you like to work for someone who lets you make decisions but then changes them whenever those decisions are not to his or her liking?" Eighty-six percent said no.

To the other group of managers who had originally answered no, they would not delegate such important decision-making to lower-level managers, I asked them: "Would you like to work for someone who did not let you make important decisions on your own?" Seventy percent said no.

I have repeated this poll a number of times with various groups of executives, and the results are always pretty much the same, leading to the same overarching conclusion: essentially 70% or 80% of managers would not like to work for someone like themselves, which is another way of saying that most managers dislike their own management style. They don't think they could delegate precisely that which they themselves believe deserves to be delegated to people like them.

Unless you are at the top of the hierarchy, most managers will find themselves caught in this conflicting position. On the one hand, they know what it feels like to have to carry out the tasks delegated to them by senior management; on the other hand, they don't allow those below them any meaningful freedom of action. They are carefully monitored from above, yet when they have the chance to delegate to those below, they do so reluctantly, checking up

on them to make sure the action they take is the one they want, and changing it if it isn't. This position — of being both victim and instigator — raises dual sets of questions.

As professionals who must answer to those above us, how can we transform the situation we find ourselves in and go beyond the mere task we have been given? How can we claim some of the autonomy that we feel we deserve?

As managers responsible for people in our teams, what can we do to facilitate the same experience for our employees? How can we help them become masters of their own areas of responsibility, so that they end up feeling more motivated and engaged rather than deflated and undermined?

In either case, a fundamental change of management style is required. This article — based on research, teaching, consulting and a [TEDx Talk](#) delivered on the subject — will help point the way.

A version of this article is published in [IESE Insight Issue 29 \(Q2 2016\)](#).

This content is exclusively for personal use. If you wish to use any of this material for academic or teaching purposes, please go to IESE Publishing where you can purchase a special PDF version of “[Delegate responsibilities and go beyond the task](#)” (ART-2846-E), as well as [the full magazine](#) in which it appears, in English or in Spanish.

Thanks for reading  **IESE** insight
To continue reading this premium content,
please click below

www.iese.edu/insight