

How to delegate

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INTRODUCTION TO THE GUIDE ON HOW TO DELEGATE

One of the hallmarks of democracy is the old war cry of the French revolution: “Government of the people, by the people, for the people!” Since coming into power in 1994 the South African government has worked hard to give effect to this dictum. One of the ways this has been done is to devolve responsibility for public service delivery to the lowest levels of government, for example, by devolving service delivery from national government to provincial government and local authorities.

Thus, health care, for example is the responsibility of provincial departments of health. So too, have the responsibility for housing and education been devolved to the provinces. And within the provincial service delivery departments such as health, housing, education and welfare, the authority for service delivery has been devolved to institutions such as hospitals and schools and frontline offices such as home affairs for the issue of identity documents and passports.

This devolution of service delivery has been based on the precept that the authority for service delivery should not be vested in autocratic, central institutions, far removed from the actual interface with the consumers of services, but that it should be decentralised and placed in the hands of those closest to the end-users.

The diagram, titled “The Machinery of Public Service Delivery”, (fig 1) illustrates this devolution of service delivery from central government to provincial departments and institutions. Implicit in this diagram is the need for provincial government departments to align their strategic objectives with the provincial priorities and with the strategic objectives of their national counterparts.

Thus, while the authority for service delivery has been devolved to provincial and local authorities, this has been done within national policy frameworks, which ensure that the strategic objectives of the relevant national government departments are simultaneously cascaded down through the various levels of government to the points of actual service delivery.

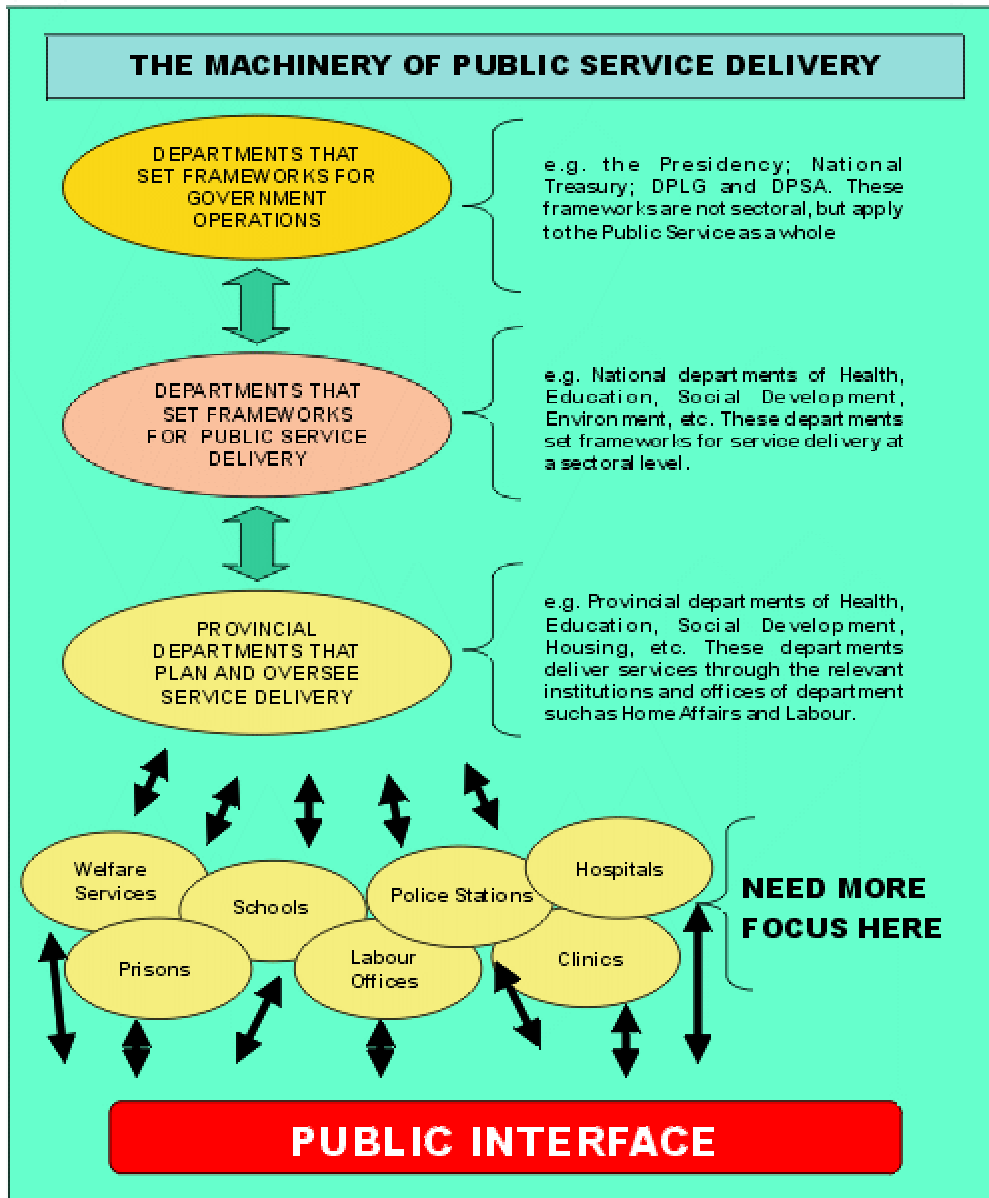


Figure 1: Citizen Interface

HOW TO USE THIS GUIDE

This guide is designed to help you delegate tasks effectively to subordinates. It:

- ❑ defines what delegating is and highlights the importance of delegating;
- ❑ explains how delegating can be used as a learning opportunity;
- ❑ provides you with guidelines on how to delegate;
- ❑ outlines the objectives, outcomes and key performance indicators of delegating;
- ❑ explains the links to legislation and the *Batho Pele* White Paper;
- ❑ suggests some of the possible challenges and responses to delegating;
- ❑ takes you through a step-by-step guide on how to delegate;
- ❑ offers some key considerations to think about during the process; and
- ❑ refers you to additional resources and training opportunities that are available in this field.

WHAT IS DELEGATION?

Devolution and Delegation

The terms “devolution” and “delegation” are often confused. They are very similar, but there is an important difference. “Devolution” means “a handing over of powers” while “delegation” means “to entrust or commit” or “to send as a delegate”. Another word for “delegate” is “depute” which means to “send as a deputy”.

In simple terms, in the case of “devolution” power is handed over and the person or organisation to whom power is handed, has the authority and responsibility to handle that power. On the other hand, when one delegates a task to someone, one remains responsible for ensuring that the person to whom one has delegated can and does perform the relevant task. One always retains responsibility. Delegation is not abdication.

We do not wish to labour the point, we simply wish to point out that there is a difference between the two words and that for the purposes of this guide we need to understand very clearly what is meant by “delegation”.

Delegation is a skill. It is something that a manager has to learn. Unfortunately, delegation is often used as an excuse for dumping failure onto the shoulders of subordinates. Properly understood and deployed, it is a dynamic tool for motivating and training your team to achieve their fullest potential.

Most people hear about delegation in the cradle as a mother talks earnestly to the baby-sitter: “Feed him at seven, if there is any trouble just call me”. The mother has delegated the task of feeding the baby to the baby-sitter, but she has retained responsibility for her baby’s wellbeing by asking the baby-sitter to call if there is a problem.

Delegation is primarily about entrusting your authority to others. This means they can act and initiate independently and that they assume responsibility with you for certain tasks. But if something goes wrong, you remain responsible. The buck, as they say, always stops with you.

As the one who delegates, you “carry the can”. You are responsible for any mishaps and you have sort out any problems if things go wrong. The trick is to delegate in such a way that things do not go wrong. The best way to do this is to make sure that the persons to whom one delegates tasks have the necessary competencies (skills, knowledge and attributes) to perform those tasks. If they do not have the necessary competencies, they must at least have the potential to be trained to perform the tasks and it is your responsibility to see to it that they get the necessary training, otherwise you are simply abdicating your responsibilities.

Delegation is a manager’s key to organisational effectiveness. It is considered a critical, unending management competency and to achieve the best results, managers must be aware of its benefits and recognise the barriers that can hinder its success.

Delegation can be viewed as an effective way of offering development/career pathing to employees. It empowers people and affords them the opportunity to test their ideas, exercise innovation and to develop their understanding and confidence.

“When a business owner thinks he or she is the only person who can do anything, you wind up with decision paralysis,” says human-resources consultant and career coach Rose Mihaly, of Bristol Associates in Bristol. “The result is a demoralised, under-utilised staff and a business that’s stuck at its present level of growth”. To move the organisation forward, managers must manage their human resources optimally by recognising and nurturing potential through skilful delegation.

For transformation and improved service delivery to become a reality, managers must recognise and develop the effectiveness of their team members.

DELEGATING AS A LEARNING OPPORTUNITY

Delegating is a learning opportunity for both the person doing the delegating, the delegator, and the person to whom a task is delegated, the delegate.

In the case of the delegator, he or she will learn:

- what responsibility means;
- what the strategic relevance of a task is;
- how to plan effectively;
- how to communicate effectively;

- ❑ how to trust other people to deliver;
- ❑ what being accountable means;
- ❑ what the responsibilities of leadership are;
- ❑ how to identify and develop potential; and
- ❑ more about his or her own strengths and weaknesses.

The delegate on the other hand will learn:

- ❑ how to accept responsibility;
- ❑ how to take better decisions;
- ❑ how and when to use his or her own judgement and discretion
- ❑ what the delegated job or task entails;
- ❑ the skills required to perform the delegated task;
- ❑ what his or her own limitations, strengths and weaknesses are;
- ❑ how to keep to agreed deadlines;
- ❑ how to communicate effectively;
- ❑ how to be a useful team member; and
- ❑ more about the organisation.

Delegating can be used as a tool to facilitate an employee's growth through training and it affords them the opportunity to test their own ideas, improve their understanding of the organisation and the job and build their confidence.

GUIDELINES ON HOW TO DELEGATE

We shall discuss the following guidelines on how to delegate:

- ❑ Access to information.
- ❑ Provide limited authority.
- ❑ Define timeframes.
- ❑ Stagger tasks.
- ❑ Know what you are delegating.
- ❑ Communicate widely.
- ❑ Be objective.
- ❑ Monitor.

Access to information

The process of delegating can only be successful if the person doing the delegating ensures that the person to whom he or she is delegating has full access to all the information required to perform the task being delegated.

It frequently happens that the person delegating holds on to key information because it gives them power over others. We all know information is power. However, key information,

necessary to complete the delegated task is not shared with the delegate, the work will not be done and both parties will suffer. This is a lose-lose situation. To create a win-win situation, managers must ensure that when they delegate work, the persons to whom they delegate have ready access to all the relevant information so that they can take informed decisions within the level of authority given to them in terms of the delegation.

Managers who are afraid or reluctant to share key information will never delegate effectively.

Provide authority

When delegating a task one should always be careful to ensure that one provides the delegate with the necessary authority to do the work. For example, if one delegates the security function for a particular event to a colleague, one must ensure that the security personnel are aware that he or she has the authority to brief them on security matters for that event.

Similarly, if one delegates a particular task that requires payments to be made against approved budgets, one must ensure that the delegate is able to authorise payments and budget draw-downs, otherwise he or she will become frustrated if permission has to be obtained each time payments have to be made. This will not only delay proceedings, but it will demotivate the person to whom the task has been delegated.

Clearly, the authority should be limited to the needs of the particular task that has been delegated, otherwise it could be abused.

Define timeframes

Timeframes within which the delegation is effective must be defined and communicated. If we take the above example of delegating the co-ordination of security arrangements for a particular event to someone, it should be made clear that the authority to deal with security matters has only been delegated for this particular event, otherwise there could be abuse of powers.

If the delegation is semi-permanent, for example, in the absence of a security manager, one might delegate authority for security matters to someone indefinitely, this should be made clear to all interested parties and stakeholders. In such instances care should be taken to put in place regular feedback sessions to ensure that abuse of authority does not occur.

Stagger the tasks

If one has to delegate a range of tasks, it is wise to do so in “bite-size chunks” – in other words do it gradually over time, making sure that the person to whom the work is being delegated can cope with the added responsibility. If one simply dumps the whole lot on him or

her all at once, it may appear that one is doing just that, namely, dumping and shedding responsibility.

The golden rule in delegating is that delegation is not abdication. The ultimate responsibility for the work delegated will always vest with the person doing the delegating. Thus it is absolutely critical that when one delegates something, the person to whom one is delegating is able and competent to do the work. It may be necessary to provide suitable training before delegating work to ensure that the delegate has the required competencies (skills, knowledge and attributes) to perform the tasks delegated to him or her.

Know what you are delegating

People often delegate tasks simply because they cannot do them themselves and are thus unable to delegate effectively because they do not know what is required to do the work. Make sure you know what you are delegating and that your expectations are realistic.

It is not necessary that one should be absolutely proficient in a task before one can delegate it. On the contrary, one should delegate tasks if one is not very proficient at doing them oneself. But, one must know what the significance of the task is and one should have a very clear idea of what skills and resources are required to do the work effectively, before one delegates.

For example, a manager may very well delegate a highly technical piece of work to a specialist in the field, but the manager must understand how this particular task fits into the bigger picture and what resources in terms of time and money are required to perform this task effectively and efficiently.

Communicate widely

As mentioned above, all interested and affected parties must know about the delegation – to whom authority has been delegated; what the limits of delegated authority are; for how long the delegation will be effective, etc.

This information must be clearly and well communicated to all concerned. There is little more frustrating and demotivating than to be given a particular challenge or opportunity to demonstrate one's ability, only to find that no one knows about it and it is thus impossible to perform.

In communicating the extent and nature of the delegation, staff and other roleplayers must be asked to support the delegate and offer assistance where needed.

Be objective

Delegation should be done in accordance with agreed standards. Be wary of setting standards unrealistically high at the beginning. Allow the delegate to gain expertise and confidence before increasing standards. Avoid the inclination to set standards initially at levels that you might expect of yourself or even higher. Discuss the standards with the delegate and agree on realistic and acceptable standards, using an incremental approach to raise standards over time.

It is very annoying to be asked to do something and then to be constantly reminded by the person delegating the task that he or she could have done it much better and faster.

The object of delegations is organisational effectiveness and improved service delivery. It is not an end in itself and it certainly is not an opportunity to blow one's own trumpet.

Monitoring

As mentioned before, delegation is not abdication. Thus, when one has delegated a task to someone, one must monitor carefully, without being patronising, to ensure that the work is going according to plan.

Appropriate monitoring enables you to identify lapses and mistakes before it is too late and while there is still time and opportunity to rectify matters. Failure to do this could be very embarrassing and to say that the delegate should have done better, is no excuse. If the person to whom you have delegated something fails, the failure is yours.

A good approach is to set up regular feedback sessions right from the start so that one is able to keep one's finger on the pulse and track progress without interfering or getting in the way.

OBJECTIVES OF DELEGATION

The main objective of delegating is always to improve organisational effectiveness and service delivery. Within this broad objective there are others, namely to:

- create time and space to focus on essential management functions such as strategic planning;
- build a more competent and effective workforce by empowering staff;
- enhance job satisfaction;
- improve team spirit;
- enhance organisational culture;
- expedite decision making;
- stimulate growth and create a learning environment;
- utilise human resources more effectively; and
- generate commitment by motivating and involving people.

LINKS TO LEGISLATION

As mentioned at the outset, one of the main tenets of the transformation of the public service has been the devolution of service delivery to the lowest appropriate level.

Thus, government has encouraged the use of delegations to help the public service move away from prescriptive, bureaucratic procedures, governed by rules and regulations, realising that effective delegation can cut through much of the red tape associated with public service delivery.

The White Paper on Human Resource Management (WPHRM)

The White Paper sets out the future goals for managing people in the public service and sees as its vision: "Human resource management in the public service will result in a diverse, competent and well-managed workforce that is capable of and committed to delivering high quality services to the people of South Africa"

The WPHRM states that both national and provincial departments will be responsible, within nationally defined parameters, for planning and managing their human resources to meet their own strategic and operational needs.

Delegating is a means of managing human resources more effectively so that staff feel empowered and confident to perform functions/duties that are delegated to them.

Public Service Regulations

Part 11 of the Public Service Regulations provides for a head of department to manage his/her department effectively and efficiently and allows a head of department to empower employees in the department by means of appropriate delegations and authorisations, where necessary.

If the Regulations confer a power or impose a duty on a head of department, he or she may, subject to the Act:

- a) delegate the power to an employee or authorise an employee to perform the duty;
and
- b) set conditions for the exercise of the power or performance of the duty.

The Regulations further state that an executing authority shall record a delegation or authorisation in writing and may incorporate it in an employment contract for a head of department.

Skills Development Act

The purpose of the Skills Development Act is to:

- ❑ improve the quality of the life of the South African workforce, to improve the quality of life of workers, their prospects of work and labour mobility;
- ❑ encourage employers to use the workplace as an active learning environment and to provide employees with opportunities to acquire new skills; and
- ❑ ensure the quality of education and training in and for the workplace.

Effective delegations can help achieve all of these objectives.

LINKS TO BATHO PELE

The *Batho Pele* White Paper states that a transformed South African public service will be judged on one criterion above all; its effectiveness in delivering services that meet the basic needs of all South African citizens. The White Paper places emphasis on specifically improving the efficiency and effectiveness of the way in which services are delivered.

Managers have a key role to play in delivering services through proper work organisation. One way of organising work efficiently is through the effective delegation of functions.

However, the most important link to *Batho Pele* is perhaps the implicit respect shown for the dignity of others by delegating tasks to staff to help them realise their full potential.

KEY PERFORMANCE INDICATORS

- ❑ Improved team spirit and staff morale.
- ❑ Efficient work organisation as tasks are delegated.
- ❑ Enhanced staff development.
- ❑ Achievement of strategic objectives.
- ❑ Less overtime worked by senior staff and management.
- ❑ More time for managers to focus on essential management functions.

OUTCOMES

The most obvious outcome of effective delegations will be improved service delivery as staff outputs are maximised and human resources are optimally deployed.

Another important outcome will be evidence of respect for one another and a broad culture characterised by the spirit of *Batho Pele* as staff start to work as a unit, each one doing his or her best to maximise the team effort and support each other.

A third outcome will be clear evidence of improved management expertise as managers have more time to focus on strategic matters. When the workload is streamlined through effective

delegations, the amount available for essential managerial tasks increases, allowing managers to look ahead, to plan more effectively and monitor progress.

As the process begins to work, stress levels decrease across the workforce, which leads to improved organisational health.

CHALLENGES AND RESPONSES

Challenge:

Managers may find it hard to “let go”. This is often based on negative feelings of insecurity and mistrust.

Response:

Create a healthy organisation. Encourage managers to understand that the development of people is part of good management. Build it into their key performance areas and reward them for effective delegation. Let them see the benefits to themselves, to the organisation and to the customers.

Of course, some times people refuse to delegate or to delegate effectively because they wish to retain power and perceive delegation as losing control. Once they understand that quite the opposite is true and that effective delegation, while retaining responsibility, enhances managerial control, they will embrace delegation as a win-win situation.

Challenge:

Functions are delegated without the necessary authority or support.

Response:

Explain the importance of providing relevant authority and support structures to make delegation successful. And ensure that this is clearly communicated to all concerned.

Challenge:

“My way is the only way!”

Response:

Others are bound to do things differently from you. They are also likely to get things wrong and may seem slow to pick up certain skills as a result of past imbalances and not being afforded learning opportunities. Understand that new ideas and fresh approaches may actually improve performance and service delivery.

Challenge:

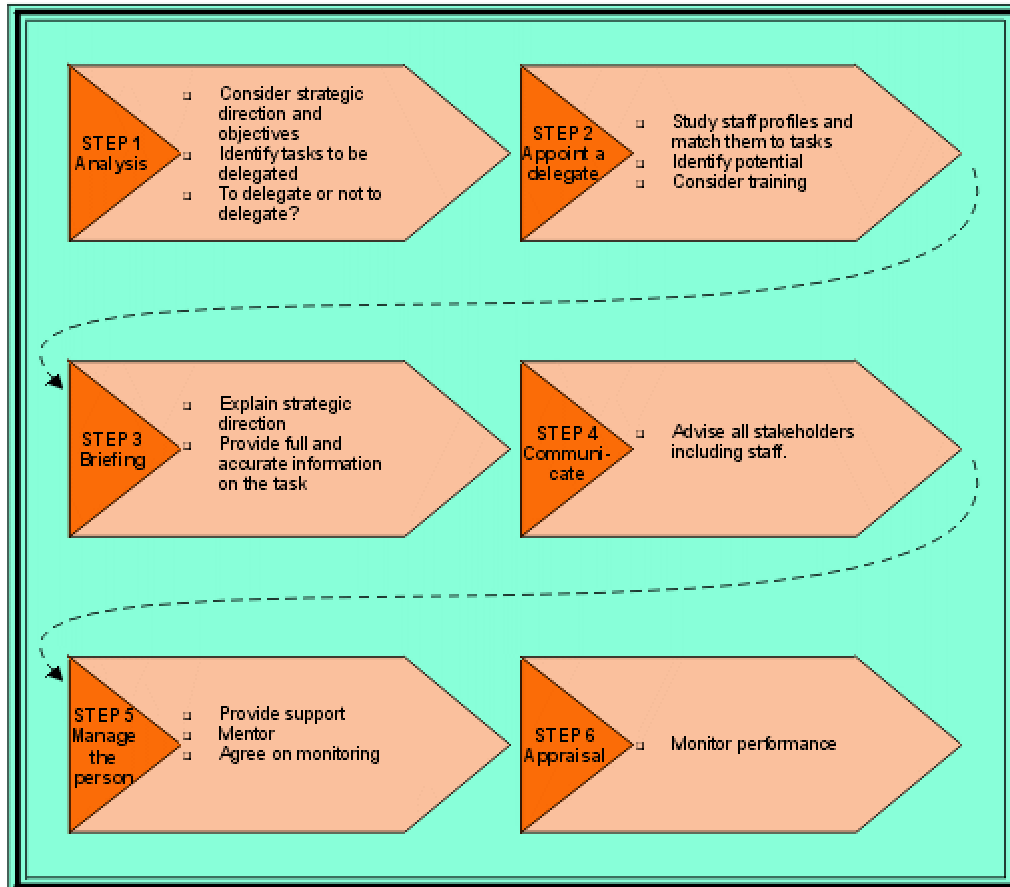
Delegating becomes an act of simply dumping responsibility on someone else.

Response:

Explain that delegation is not abdication and incentivise managers by rewarding them for effective delegation.

STEP-BY-STEP GUIDE TO DELEGATING

The following is a step-by-step guide to effective delegating.



STEP 1**ANALYSIS**

The process begins with an analysis of what you as a manager could and should delegate and what you should do yourself. Visit your strategic plan, look at your strategic objectives and key performance areas. Now identify those activities you can delegate and those which you must undertake personally. The latter tasks will tend to entail some form of strategic input. The tasks to delegate are those which are fairly straightforward, self-contained and which have clear, measurable standards.

The easiest and simplest tasks to delegate are those with which you are very familiar, having performed them often yourself at a more junior level. These tasks will be easy to explain and you will have a good idea of the competencies/training required to do them well.

Use your experience to ensure that the task is done well, rather than actually to perform the task yourself.

What to delegate

Delegate tasks that might be tedious for you and time consuming, but which could serve as a challenge to other less experienced staff. This will stimulate innovation and provide an opportunity for staff to demonstrate creativity and the ability to rise to the occasion.

The task of a manager is to manage and not to get bogged down in technical detail, so delegate work that will set you free to manage effectively.

Examples of obvious functions that managers can delegate include:

- ❑ Administrative tasks – e.g. making logistical arrangements for meetings and focus groups, collating information, setting up data banks and office routines such as filing and maintaining records;
- ❑ Some communication tasks – e.g. daily correspondence, letters, telephone calls, acknowledging receipt of applications, organising functions, producing publications;
- ❑ Time consuming tasks – e.g. research.

Delegate to increase the strength and capacity of your group or team. Try to distribute mundane tasks as fairly as possible and allocate the more exciting ones as widely as possible.

What not to delegate

Do not delegate tasks:

- ❑ of a strategic nature that relate to policy, security or confidential matters;
- ❑ that involve managing or disciplining senior staff or peers; and

that are beyond the experience and competence of the person concerned, unless you

STEP 2

APPOINT A DELEGATE

This is a critically important step. If the wrong person is chosen, the delegation will fail.

Having decided what to delegate, consider the following:

- What knowledge, skills, behavioural attributes and experience are necessary for the task?
- Whose profile best matches the above-mentioned competencies?
- What further training or support would be necessary?

Look for people's interest in work they have not done before. They may have shown some aptitude in unusual circumstances, such as filling in for someone else or coping in crisis situations. Look for abilities that are exercised elsewhere even if this is outside the work environment, for example serving on community or sports committees.

Discuss the prospect of delegating the task with possible candidates to get their response. See how they respond to the challenge – this can take place at the appraisal interview. Begin with positive reinforcement, by highlighting the potential you see in them, point to jobs well done to build their confidence, Explain why you are delegating in terms of your needs, of the jobholder's development and of the imperative to improve service delivery.

To be fair and to exercise good human resource practices, make it known to the delegate that he or she has a choice of responses, he or she can:

- choose to accept and make a commitment to the request;
- decline the offer without fear of subsequent discrimination – explain that a request is not an order and in terms of fair labour practice he or she is entitled to decline the request. However, the person should understand that this is an opportunity to demonstrate his or her worth and ability;
- commit to accept later – where the person is given a chance to reflect on the proposals and inform the manager at a later stage; or
- make a counter-offer; such as I am not ready to do X, but I am willing to do Y and take one step at a time.

Never underestimate a person's potential. Delegate slightly more than you think the person is capable of handling. Expect him or her to succeed and you will be pleasantly surprised more often than not. But understand that you will have to provide training and support.

When choosing a delegate, assess whether the person is capable of performing the tasks within the available resources. And, having appointed a delegate, ensure that he or she has sufficient authority to perform the task.

STEP 3

BRIEFING

Having accepted a newly delegated responsibility, the delegate must be fully briefed on the following:

- ❑ the strategic direction and organisational mandates;
- ❑ the objectives of the task, the service standards (standards should be S.M.A.R.T – see the guide on Setting Service Standards), targets and performance indicators;
- ❑ the performance appraisal system;
- ❑ the policies, guidelines and regulations within which the tasks must be carried out;
- ❑ the limits of authority – these are critically important. The delegate must clearly know:
 - the limits of his or her authority – how far it extends and where and when it ends;
 - what powers he or she has to hire new staff or deploy existing staff;
 - his or her budgetary authority;
 - the resources available;
 - what access to information he or she has and the power to take decisions without referral/consultation; and
 - the channels of communication.

One must be careful that when delegating one does not simply throw the chosen delegate to the wolves and then blame him or her afterwards for failing. A clear and detailed briefing, with the assurance that the delegate can back at any time to clarify issues, is critically important to the success of delegating.

STEP 4

COMMUNICATE

A mark of good management is good communication, both internal and external. And internal and external communication are two of the four pillars of the *Batho Pele* revitalisation programme. Making sure that all stakeholders, including staff, customers and other interest groups are well informed at all times is an integral part of respecting their dignity and of a sincere commitment to improved service delivery.

Delegating cannot hope to be successful unless all stakeholders know:

- ❑ that the task has been delegated;
- ❑ to whom it has been delegated; and
- ❑ and what the limits of the delegated authority are.

This communication should not be left to chance. It must be carefully structured, using available resources such as circulars, newsletters, staff briefings and community consultation forums. In exceptional cases it may be necessary to involve the mass media, especially if the delegation affects people in remote rural areas who are difficult to reach.

It is important to remember that, when planning the delegation, provision must be made for the resources, including costs, required for effective communication of the delegation.

STEP 5

MANAGING THE INDIVIDUAL

It is important to give the delegate full support throughout the term of the delegation, but especially in the initial stages, so that he or she can develop an acceptable level of confidence to drive the process. Make it clear that you will:

- provide all the support that has been agreed between the parties;
- provide any training and development that may be necessary;
- set up a mentoring programme for the individual, if considered necessary and desirable;
- be available for consultation or advice on a personal basis; and
- advise all stakeholders of the functions and authority that have been delegated.

As the person becomes more confident, allow him or her to think about issues and questions before raising them yourself. Request that the person provides you with alternatives, perceived pros and cons and recommendations for action. This will help boost the delegate's confidence and is a good exercise in decision making, while secure in the knowledge that you will be there to check the outcome.

If you disagree with the person, discuss it frankly and without aggression or making the person feel inferior. Discussion is always a learning opportunity for both parties.

Agree on a monitoring or measurement procedure that will keep you informed as to progress on the project, because you will remain ultimately responsible for it and will need to know that it is progressing as it should. A good rule of thumb here is, if you can't measure it, do not delegate it because you will not be able to monitor it effectively.

Some useful tips

- Show confidence in the person to whom you have delegated the task, but at the same time keep an eye on him or her.
- Do not simply cast someone adrift.
- Always keep a life belt handy.
- Avoid wandering up at odd moments and asking for progress reports.
- Allow people space to work and learn.

STEP 6**APPRAISAL**

Performance appraisal is a useful management tool to monitor the performance of people to whom one has delegated work. It is objective and the standards would have been agreed in advance. If properly executed, it is a non-threatening experience and should be conducive to the development of the individual being appraised.

If the person has done well – congratulate him or her. If things have not gone as smoothly as planned or did not work well, be frank and discuss possible reasons. Offer alternatives, based on best practices. During the appraisal, get the person to talk about his or her experiences, successes and areas of difficulty and how things might have been done differently.

At all times be sensitive to the delegate's predicament and avoid a high handed attitude and taking decisions that the person is quite capable of handling.

KEY CONSIDERATIONS

- ❑ Delegating can often take on a whole new role – the delegate can experience job satisfaction and reward in the areas prescribed by the delegation. It gives the jobholder the opportunity to broaden his or her experience and skills in positions of greater responsibility.
- ❑ Managers have a key role to play in circumstances where delegates find difficulty in returning to their original posts, if they have been in an acting capacity. Re-entry needs careful planning and sympathetic management.
- ❑ Consider giving as many members of staff an opportunity to develop within the scope of delegations.

USEFUL REFERENCES

- ❑ Connecticut Business and Industry Association: Do it yourself? Or delegate? *Bonnie Kreitler*
- ❑ Starting to Manage: The essential skills; *Gerard M Blair*
- ❑ How to be Better at Managing People; *Alan Barker*
- ❑ The Seven Habits of Highly Effective People ; *Steven Covey*
- ❑ Essential Managers: How to Delegate; *Robert Heller*

TRAINING OPPORTUNITIES

- ❑ Courses offered by business schools on Human Resource Management