

THE KEY TO GLOBAL EMPLOYEE EMPOWERMENT



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Introduction

How important is **employee empowerment** to the success of your organization?

Not so many years ago, it was an ideal only a few companies truly aspired to. But in a global business world where multi-national, remote teams are becoming increasingly common, modern companies can no longer afford to ignore it. In fact, it's become an operational imperative.

As **McKinsey reports**, decision-making is one of the biggest time sinks for managers, demanding as much as **70 percent** of their time. When employees are engaged, empowered, and motivated, they make better decisions and resolve problems faster. At the same time, they're likely to stay with your business for longer, reducing your overheads and recruitment costs, and making a real impact on your bottom line.

For that reason, a coaching management style that encourages employee empowerment has become increasingly effective for global businesses. As the world economy responds to a series of shocks—and deals with the impact of an impending recession—

it's important to remain agile, focus less on the small details, and embrace new ways to keep your teams connected.

People who feel disempowered at work can tell you what the causes are—endless checks and balances, feeling a lack of ownership, and deference to hierarchy—whereas those who are empowered will benefit from:

- Some level of autonomy
- A sense of control over their day-to-day activities
- Being in an agile team with less oversight from upper levels
- An opportunity to contribute to decisions and discussions
- The chance to feel a real sense of place, purpose, and relevance at work

With many global businesses now embracing a **remote model**, managers simply no longer have a choice but to enable and empower their employees. By embracing those changes, and putting a renewed focus on the employee experience in your management style, you can help drive your organization's success.

The benefits of employee empowerment

Firstly, empowering your employees has a measurable impact on retention. McKinsey recently found that **31 percent of employees quit their previous jobs due to a lack of meaningful work**, and a failure to invest in purpose-driven engagement can have a serious impact on your performance in the recruitment market.

Even during a recession, **empowering employees increases retention**, and so stripping back unnecessary bureaucracy and fostering a culture of greater connection can make a big difference. For global teams, it's even more important, because working remotely across different time zones can create a deeper sense of disconnection and disengagement without appropriate management practices.

This means:

- Encouraging regular communication between colleagues, such as via an instant messaging platform
- Embracing asynchronous workflows that allow multi-national teams to work most efficiently
- Making sure team members are up to speed with the **everyday challenges of remote work etiquette Scheduling**
- Scheduling frequent team check-ins and one-on-ones, at a time that suits everyone
- Celebrating wins and achievements across the whole team
- Enabling team members to make smarter decisions, and supporting them when they do

Empowerment has the added benefit of maximizing the value of your workforce. In a world of increasingly restricted budgets, it's important to optimize the resources you currently have, and to ensure you're laying the foundations for effective **succession planning**. When HR professionals focus on employee development and career growth, they're making a smart, low-cost investment in the future success of the business.

There is a clear link between employee empowerment, job satisfaction, job performance, and organizational commitment, and empowerment can also increase productivity.

The Wharton School cites a study from Zenger Folkman which found that only 4 percent of employees are willing to give extra effort when empowerment is low, but 67 percent are willing when empowerment is high. As the recession starts to bite, the question isn't **"can we afford to empower our people?"** but rather "can we afford not to?"

Empowerment or disempowerment?

When trying to empower employees, managers may have the best intentions, but their efforts and approach can have the opposite effect when poorly handled. Consider this scenario: A remote employee is a new project manager, and their manager asks them to take complete control of implementing a new instant messaging system to be rolled out company-wide.

 **"I know you have what it takes to get the right system in place,"** says the manager.

The employee is thrilled by this opportunity to demonstrate what they can do and to find a solution for people to connect, even while working remotely. They ask about a budget and timeline.

 **"I trust you and am behind whatever you recommend,"** says the manager.

The employee meets with subject matter experts, holds the

project kick-off, and sends their manager an email with an update, including their initial recommendations.

“Thanks for this update. Unfortunately, leadership said we need to limit expenses right now. We can't purchase an instant messaging app after all. I need you to draft a list of five other recommendations please.”

What began as an empowering project for this employee has quickly dematerialized, and the resulting feelings of disempowerment will likely have a direct impact on their **happiness at work**. As a result, the employee will lack motivation and may lose interest in the project altogether.

By moving the goalposts and mismanaging their communication, the manager in this example has caused serious damage to their employee's satisfaction with their role, which is sure to have a knock-on effect on their longevity in the job. As a remote worker with colleagues all over the world, they will also feel that the company is failing to prioritize key lines of communication that allow them to connect with one another and perform effectively as a team.



Four keys to empowerment

It's easy to talk about and grasp the value of employee empowerment, but making it a reality requires more than intention. It requires action. There are four keys to effectively empower your employees.

1) Ensure you demonstrate and reinforce empowerment

People look to their supervisors as role models for what type of behavior is acceptable. And **team members look to their managers** to gauge the amount of autonomy and empowerment they can expect. If they voice their opinion or make a decision, will they be rewarded or rejected? Are you likely to celebrate independence, or do you resort to a style of micromanagement that suppresses innovation?

Research shows that empowerment improves significantly when a group manager invites and accepts ideas and opinions from team members.

In addition, a **Harvard Business Review (HBR)** analysis found that employees were more likely to trust leaders whom they perceived as empowering. For international teams, consider the needs of their specific time zones and work patterns, and empower them to find the most efficient way to best perform their roles.

Ensure you work to empower your people each and every day. When you encourage, recognize, and celebrate them for taking the initiative, you'll experience the powerful ripple effects of improved engagement and widespread trust.



2) Create opportunities for employees to take action

“One definition of employee empowerment states that it is **defined as the ways in which organizations provide their employees with a certain degree of autonomy and control in their day-to-day activities.**”

This means employees need opportunities to make decisions, delegate, and - if they get it wrong - navigate the way to learn from their mistakes. According to experts, empowering leaders set goals and benchmarks, but allow employees to decide how to go about reaching them.

Be sure to gauge the appropriate level of empowerment for each employee during each stage of their career journey. In **one study**, researchers found that when attempting to empower employees, some leaders **“burdened their employees and increased their level of job stress. The leaders who observed better performance on routine tasks were the ones who developed good relationships with their employees and were more trusted.”**

Providing opportunities for employees to take action helps inspire creativity and encourages them to pursue and contribute ideas that will benefit your organization. Given a chance to demonstrate their skills and abilities, employees will also get more personal satisfaction from work, which leads to better engagement and results.

At the same time, accountability is important, especially when planning for larger, collaborative projects. Caroline Wong writes in **SHRM**: **“In evaluating a process, defining and documenting the roles and responsibilities for team members is often a valuable exercise. For example, asking different team members to enumerate the actual steps in a process, and to name who is responsible for what at different phases along the way, can be illuminating. Sometimes, the accounts of different team members do not match.”**

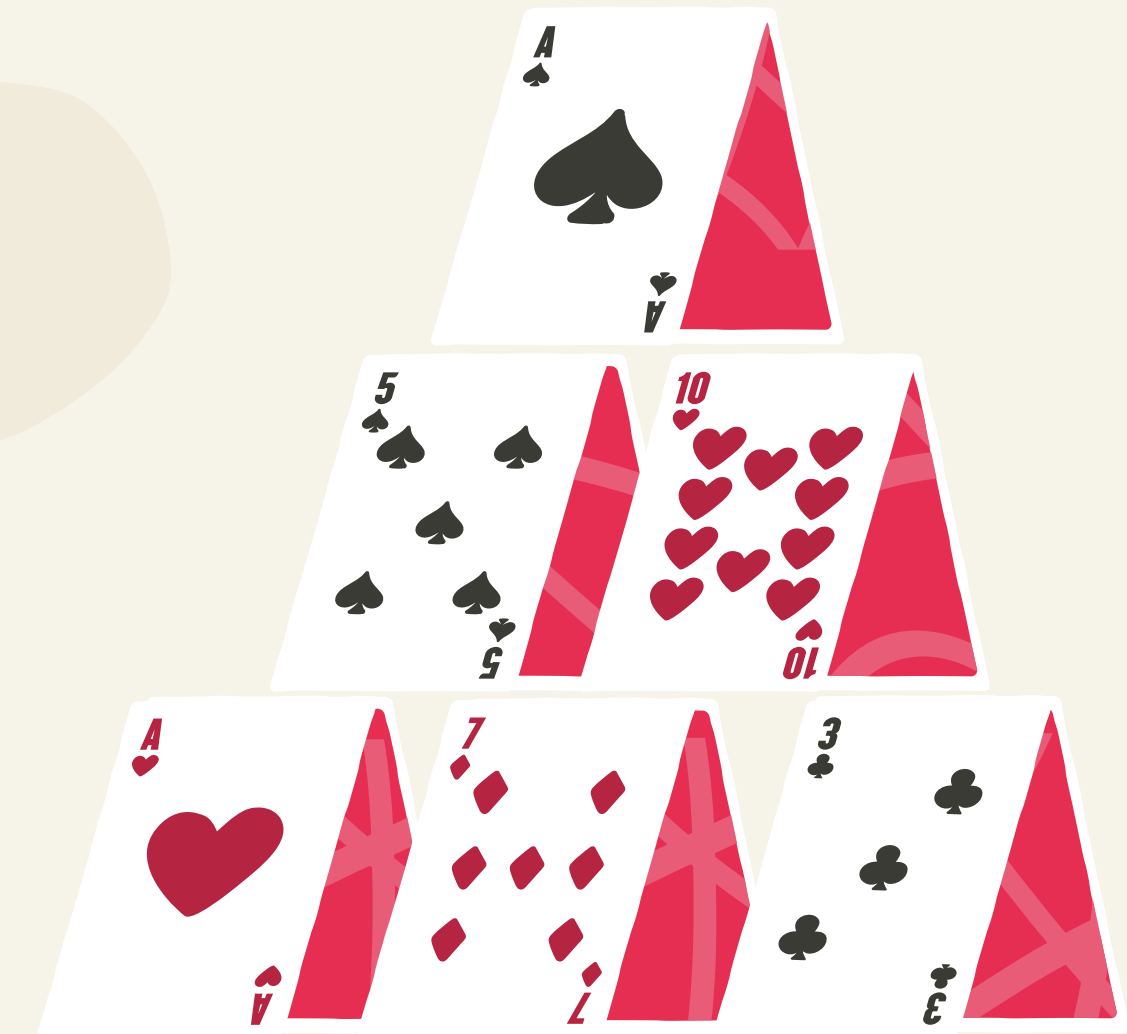
3) Provide intentional ways for employees to connect with your mission

An important part of empowerment is individual alignment with an organization's mission, values, **and goals**. That alignment with your mission drives engagement that contributes to your overall success.

People are your business' most strategic asset, and making sure they feel truly empowered to contribute to your company's mission to drive value for customers has never been more important. Engaged and empowered employees are likely to provide a better service, increasing customer satisfaction and delivering tangible benefits for your organization.

To ensure people connect with the "why", they need access to information that helps them understand the organization's goals. They need time and discussion devoted to helping illustrate why their work matters.

You can provide time for them to connect to your mission through town hall meetings, regular one-on-ones, and deep-dive discussions that help make sure everyone is working with the same information. Training and development programs that focus on the foundational truths of the business will also make a big difference to building connection.



4) Establish a framework for ongoing feedback

Employees crave and appreciate constructive feedback about their work. Not only does feedback help build their confidence and improve their decision-making abilities, but it also creates a clear path for empowerment. People want to know what they're doing well, but they also want to understand how they can develop and grow. Even in the case of negative feedback, if it's delivered appropriately, it will help improve performance. When everyone feels comfortable sharing their work and asking for and receiving feedback, the **entire organization benefits**.

Consider establishing a **360-degree review** and think about exactly **how and when** to check in with your people. By shifting the emphasis from a single **performance review** every year to ongoing discussions about professional growth, you can transform your feedback into a process that facilitates a culture of development and opportunity.

There are a variety of feedback models you can use. The most important thing is to understand how to provide practical, helpful feedback and communicate it in a way that makes the process empowering. Instead of avoiding giving feedback, remember that it's an opportunity for growth—for everyone involved.



Are you empowering your employees? Answer these five questions.

Employee empowerment exists on a spectrum, and it's possible for employee motivation to differ across, and even within, teams. Use these five questions to assess what's working in your organization and to identify areas for improvement.

1. Are employees considered part of the company's vision?

Your organization has a vision, and for employees to embrace that vision, they need to see themselves as an integral part of it.

Delta Airlines' vision statement provides an excellent example:

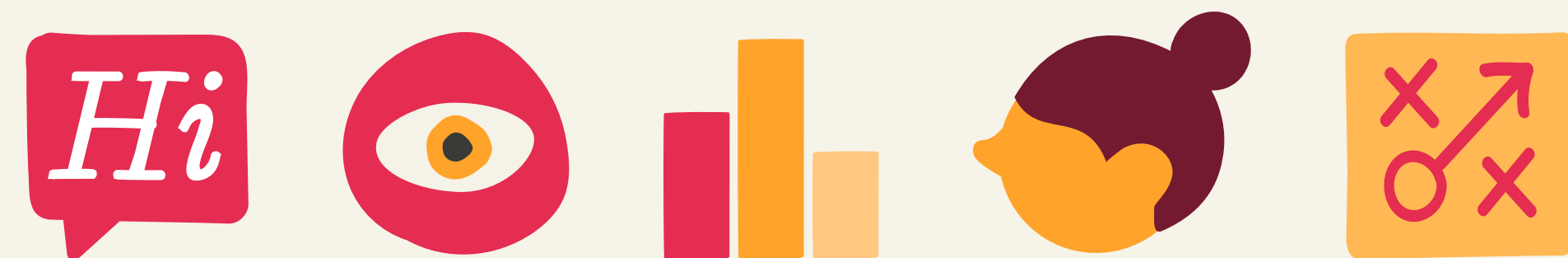
“**We—Delta's employees, customers, and community partners together form a force for positive local and global change, dedicated to bettering standards of living and the environment where we and our customers live and work.**”

Not every vision statement will specifically refer to employees. However, it should be understood and implied that people are at the heart of the company's mission.

2. How do you set expectations?

Setting expectations that an employee can use to guide their work is a critical step in empowerment. People feel empowered when they **know what is expected of them**, have the tools to do their assignments, and can ask for help if they need it.

As you examine employee empowerment in your team and across the organization, ensure you know how you establish your own expectations. With team members spread across the world you'll need to vary your approach, but however you go about it make sure they are documented and ideally tracked in your **HRIS** (like Bob) so that everyone can feel confident that they know what is expected.



3. How do employees receive feedback?

One way to ensure feedback becomes part of your operational model is to establish a framework that meets your needs. For example, it may be easy to use, promote sharing, or have an element of fun. Regardless of the specifics, a feedback framework should encourage dialogue and coaching.

A robust HRIS can help you create your own culture around feedback. When your system is tailored to your company and your people, feedback becomes part of daily activities that you can use to improve your employee performance.

4. Do you delegate?

Take a close look at your past workflows and identify whether you're delegating tasks effectively. If you and other managers are stressed or overworked, you might not be delegating enough or allowing employees to take action.

Also, consider team representation in cross-functional meetings and on projects—is the manager or leader always present? That may indicate a manager's reluctance to share responsibilities with their team members.

As part of your annual **employee survey** or regular check-ins, ask employees to rate the level of autonomy they have on projects. If managers aren't delegating, there may be a need to train them to create opportunities for independence.

5. How does recognition occur?

When you're empowering employees, you want to reinforce their efforts. That will keep the trend going and build a strong foundation. You can strengthen their efforts by recognizing and rewarding employees when they take empowered actions. If they take on new responsibilities, thank them and celebrate their achievements.

Take a look around your organization to assess if recognition is happening. Is it taking place in individual teams? Are leaders making the time to thank their people and acknowledge them for their work? Do you have systems in place that make it easy for peers to celebrate one another's accomplishments? Recognition works in two ways—it reassures those who are being recognized and encourages others who witness the recognition. It may serve to inspire them to take the initiative in their role as well.

It's clear that employee empowerment not only benefits staff members; it ultimately benefits the entire organization. Use these questions and identify areas of opportunity. Talk to your employees—gather their input and use it as the insight to drive empowerment forward.

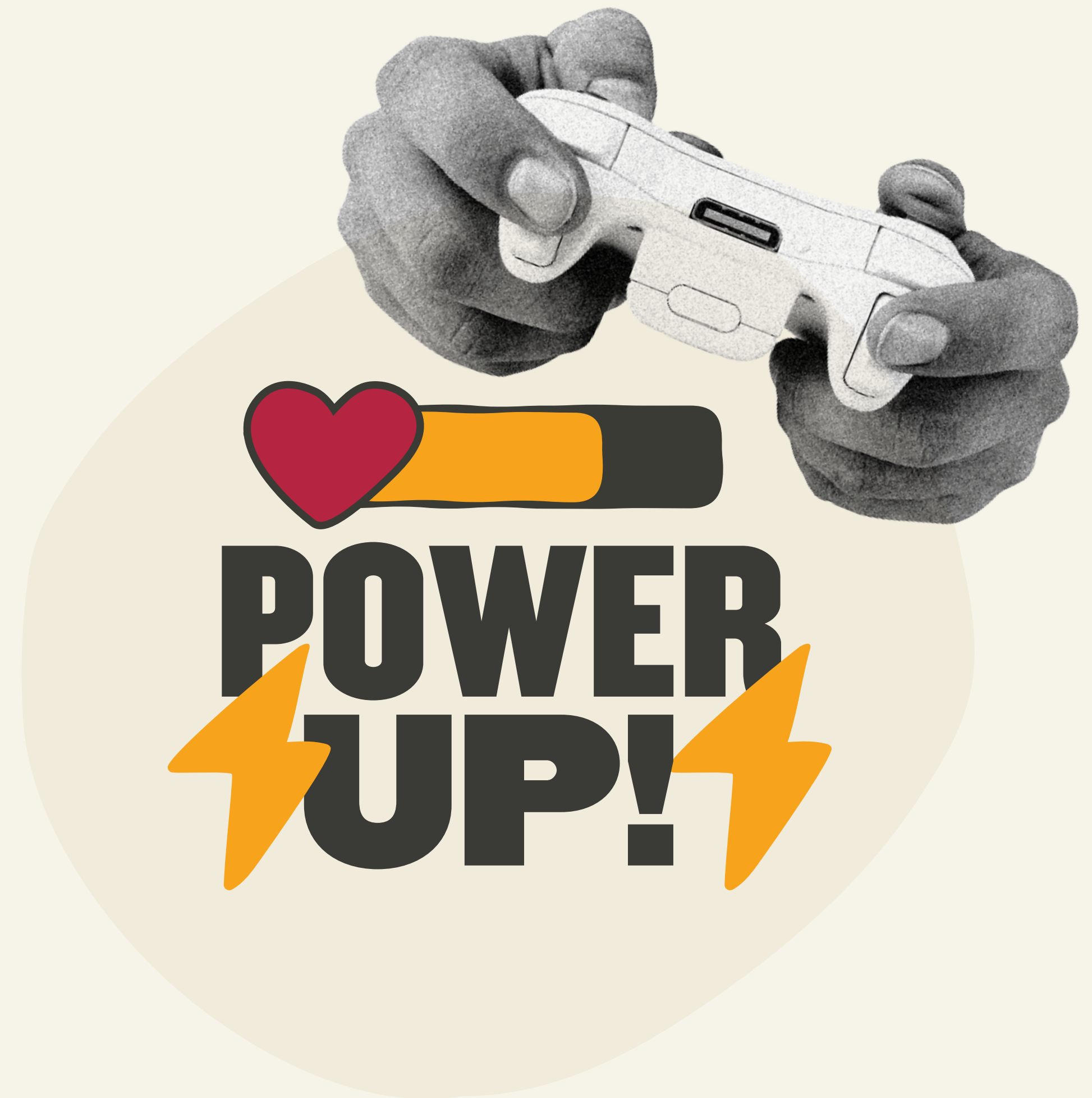


Power up your teams

If we think of empowerment as only an aspiration or an ideal, we miss the point. When employees have a sense of autonomy, it can improve **job satisfaction**, which can decrease overtime costs, reduce turnover rates, and enhance the overall employee experience.

But the benefits don't stop there. A longstanding **Gallup** study found that businesses with highly motivated and engaged workers are 21 percent more profitable—so it can have a real, tangible impact on your bottom line.

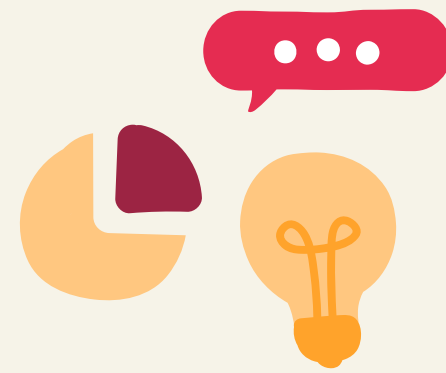
To support your organization as it charts a course through economic recession, and to compete effectively in the global marketplace, your practices, systems, and processes need to evolve toward a more empowering approach for employees. When you reduce micromanagement and extensive oversight, you unleash the potential of an empowered workforce.



Meet Bob

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For HR

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