The Seven Levels of Delegation

Many managers see delegation as a simple choice: either they decide, or the team decides. Jurgen Appelo, the creator of Management 3.0, describes it differently. In his book Management 3.0, published in 2011, he shows seven levels of delegation between full control and full freedom. The levels are tell, sell, consult, agree, advise, inquire and delegate. Choosing the right level for each decision helps teams grow, while leaders keep the risks under control.

1. A Scale, Not a Switch

Delegation is not one big decision, but many small ones, each with its own level. A manager may fully delegate the choice of tools, while keeping more control over budgets. The right level depends on the team's experience and on the risk of the decision. A clear level avoids frustration when a team thinks it may decide, but the manager only wanted ideas.

Example: Parents use different levels at home: they tell a young child the bedtime, but they delegate the choice of clothes. As the child grows, more decisions move to higher levels.

At work: Fares, a new IT team leader, notices that his team is confused about who decides what. He lists key decision areas, such as tools, holidays and budgets, and gives each one a delegation level. The confusion disappears.

2. Tell and Sell

At level one, tell, the manager makes the decision and simply announces it. At level two, sell, the manager still decides, but explains the reasons and tries to win support. These levels fit urgent situations, legal rules and decisions with high risk. Used too often, however, they stop people from thinking for themselves.

Example: During a fire alarm, a teacher uses the tell level: everyone leaves the building at once, with no discussion. The class is outside in two minutes.

At work: A new security law requires stronger passwords, so Fares uses the sell level. He decides the rule, then explains the law and the risks. The team accepts the change without complaint.

3. Consult and Agree

At level three, consult, the manager asks the team for input and then decides. At level four, agree, the manager and the team discuss the matter and reach a decision together, as equals. These levels build commitment, because people help to shape the result. They take more time, so they fit decisions where the team's knowledge matters.

Example: A family uses the agree level to plan a holiday: parents and children discuss the options and decide together. Everyone enjoys the trip more.

This document is a property of Asaseeyat Academy - © Copy Right Protected.

At work: Fares uses the consult level to choose new project software: he asks every developer for an opinion, and then he decides. Their input reveals a problem with one tool that he had missed.

4. Advise, Inquire and Delegate

At level five, advise, the manager gives an opinion, but the team makes the decision. At level six, inquire, the team decides first and then informs the manager. At level seven, delegate, the team decides fully, and the manager does not even need to know. These levels give teams ownership and speed. They work best when the team is experienced and the risk is clear.

Example: A student chooses a university course, and the parents use the advise level: they share their views, but the student decides. Feeling responsible for the choice, the student works harder.

At work: Fares moves the team's working hours to the inquire level: the team agrees on a schedule and then informs him. Everyone is happier, and Fares saves hours of planning.

5. Delegation Poker and the Board

Management 3.0 offers two tools for agreeing on levels. In delegation poker, each person secretly picks a card from one to seven, and then everyone shows their card at the same time. Different cards start a useful talk about expectations. A delegation board then shows each key decision area with its agreed level, so that everyone can see it.

Example: A sports club committee plays delegation poker about who chooses the new kit, and the cards range from two to six. After a short talk, they agree on the advise level: the committee advises, and the players decide.

At work: Fares plays delegation poker with his team about hiring new developers, and the cards show very different expectations. They agree on the consult level and add it to the delegation board.

Conclusion

In summary, delegation is not a simple yes or no, but a scale of seven levels: tell, sell, consult, agree, advise, inquire and delegate. Each key decision area can have its own level, based on risk and experience. Delegation poker and the delegation board make the levels clear for everyone. As trust grows, decisions can move step by step to higher levels.

Sources

- Management 3.0: Delegation Poker and the Delegation Board – https://management30.com/practice/delegation-poker/
- Appelo, J. (2011). Management 3.0: Leading Agile Developers, Developing Agile Leaders. Addison-Wesley (the seven levels of delegation).

- Note: Management 3.0® is a registered trademark. This summary is independent and not endorsed by Management 3.0.

This document is a property of Asaseeyat Academy - © Copy Right Protected.