

**From: The power of empowerment
David Clutterbuck and Susan Kernaghan
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Summarised by Andrew Gibbons

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P 7 “All too often, empowerment can simply mean shouldering more responsibility for less reward”. In these cases, employees rarely find themselves empowered to say ‘no’ “.

P 8 They suggest empowerment should help people to:

- * take more control over their jobs and working environment
- * enhance the contribution they make as individuals and members of a team
- * seize opportunities for personal growth and self-fulfilment.

P 9 “Four critical characteristics of success:

1. Having a clear concept of what you mean by empowerment (or whatever name you give the empowerment objective) and articulating that concept clearly and widely to employees at all levels - and, in many cases, to customers too.
2. Being totally honest about the reasons for investing time and resources into what in most organisations will be a major change of culture, systems and infrastructure.
3. Being realistic about the amount of effort and commitment it will take and the length of time needed.
4. Genuinely wanting these changes to come about - recognising and fervently believing that they are essential to the long-term viability of the organisation”.

P 12 Some definitions:

“Encouraging and allowing individuals to take personal responsibility for improving the way they do their jobs and contribute to the organisation’s goals. It requires the creation of a culture which both encourages people at all levels to feel they can make a difference, and helps them to acquire the confidence and skills to do so”.

Richard Carver, Managing Director, The Coverdale Organisation.

P 13 “Other definitions we have found helpful include:

- * Finding new ways to concentrate power in the hands of the people who need it most to get the job done - putting authority, responsibility, resources and rights at the most appropriate level for each task.
- * The delegation of responsibility for decision -making as far down the management line as possible.
- * The controlled transfer of power from management to employee in the interest of the business as a whole.
- * Creating the circumstances where people can use their faculties and abilities at the maximum level in pursuit of common goals, both human and profit-oriented.
- * The psychological energy that activates us.

P 14 “Thomas Stewart, associate editor of *Fortune* magazine on power: ‘where does power accumulate when hierarchies are flattened or when an organisation is decentralised? The tyrannical chief executive may be on the way out; the new boss is a nicer guy. But is he less powerful?’”.

Stewart suggests there are five basic kinds of power:

1. The power to reward.
2. The power to punish.
3. Authority: power that goes with the job, the power to veto, the power to sign thousand pound cheques.
4. Expertise.
5. Referent power, which attaches to a leader because people admire him.

P 15 Stewart again: "Real power comes from giving it to others who are in a better position to do things than you are".

"In an empowered organisation, one of the aims is to ensure that power is never 'locked up' in one or two parts of the organisation, and is able to flow where and when it is needed".

P 18 "Empowerment is not: 1. Delegation. 2. Responsibility. 3. A cost-cutting exercise.

P 20 "Empowerment is needed in order to:

- * make organisations more responsive to the market-place
- * de-layer organisations in order to make them more responsive and cost-effective
- * get employees of various disciplines to collaborate with minimal supervision, by communicating horizontally, rather than vertically up and down the hierarchy
- * get CEOs and top management to step back and do more strategic work
- * tap all resources that can help maintain and improve competitiveness
- * fulfil the higher expectations of an increasingly well-educated workforce.

P 24 "Another important aspect of empowerment is that it releases people's creativity and commitment. Indeed, many companies perceive this as the primary corporate objective of empowerment programmes. This may also be why these programmes so often fail, for the other side of the equation - the cost of persuading employees to give their creativity and commitment freely - is the genuine transfer of power and influence, and that is often too high a price to pay".

P 29 "...many employees are not prepared to take on more work and responsibility simply for the pleasure of feeling more in control. Too many empowerment programmes are presented as a devolution of power, responsibility - and work - from management to staff, with little thought about what is really in it for the people at the sharp end".

"Promotions are even less likely to occur in empowered organisations than in unempowered ones, because of their flat structure".

P 39 The authors suggest the following relating to the scope of discretion people have over how tasks are done:

1. Fully prescriptive.
2. Guided prescriptive.
3. Regulated.
4. Guided.
5. Goal-focused.
6. Capability-focused or self-defining.

P 41 "The degree to which an organisation, or part of one, can tolerate discretionary power depends on a number of factors, including the importance of process control".

P 42 "Organisations with low emphasis on individual or team outcomes and high emphasis on process control leave very little room for discretionary decision-making".

"Organisations with high emphasis on outcomes, but low emphasis on process controls typically set people targets and let them decide for themselves how to achieve them. Success is well rewarded; failure frequently means parting company".

“Organisations with high emphasis on both process controls and outcomes can become schizophrenic. It is possible to set tough targets and to be very prescriptive about how people achieve them, but the likelihood is that creativity of response will be a casualty of this dual emphasis”.

P 42 “The resolution to the problem appears to be in part to emphasise processes not process controls”.

“Organisations with have low emphasis on both process control and outputs are unlikely to be high-performers”.

P 47 “If people are to be empowered, you can’t expect them to take responsibility then feel insecure about their actions. You have to accept that sometimes employees will make mistakes”.

P 51 Jay Finnegan suggests that an empowered organisations look like this:

- * They invest a lot of time and effort in hiring, to make sure new recruits can handle workplace freedom
- * Their organisational hierarchy is flat
- * They set loose guidelines, so workers know their decision-making parameters
- * Accountability is paramount - results matter more than process
- * High quality performance is always expected
- * Openness and strong communication are encouraged
- * Employee satisfaction is a core value

Richard Carver says empowered organisations should reflect these characteristics:

- * Everyone in the organisation is valued and encouraged to make a personal contribution
- * Individuals are continually aware not only of what they are seeking to achieve, but also why they are seeking to achieve it and how it fits with wider corporate goals
- * The culture is likely to be co-operative and purposeful, rather than blame-oriented
- * Individuals have a willingness to take personal responsibility for their own success, the success of the team in which they work and the organisation as a whole.

P 56 “There are few, if any examples of truly empowered organisations operating with a traditional hierarchical structure...many companies, however, attempt to implement an empowerment strategy with their existing structure largely in place or only partially adapted. This is not surprising. Leaving organisational buffers in place violates a basic tenet of change: structure must follow strategy”.

P 58 “The best shape for empowerment then, is whatever allows and encourages people to take responsibility”.

P 62 “The most obvious (and, in truly empowered companies, the most superficial) aspect of empowerment is a lack of outward signs of status and hierarchy”.

P 64 “In an empowered culture, it is made clear in day-to-day interactions that everyone’s work and ideas are looked for and rewarded”.

P 67 “Companies are cutting back on middle management ranks to cut costs, while empowering their subordinates to take up the decision-making slack. All of which begs the question: which came first? Are we sacking managers because staff are more empowered, or empowering staff because we need someone to do the work?”.

P 68 “A flat but empowered organisation risks having trained, motivated and capable people with no opportunity for advancement”.

P 78 “Restructuring alone will not empower an organisation. It will only help make empowerment possible by removing some of the barriers to it”.

- P 87 “At its essence, ‘empowerability’ is the willingness of individuals, under the right circumstances, to take on personal responsibility for improving the situation in which they find themselves”
Richard Carver.
- P 95 “Supervisors and managers will face more change from the introduction of self-directed teams (as an element of empowerment) than the team members themselves”.
- P 102 On rewarding team performance: “In many cases management divides the bonus equally among team members, although occasionally teams decide how to distribute the bonus amongst themselves”.
- P 108 “Managers at all levels will readily acknowledge the benefits of empowering their workforce. Most will just as readily resist it”.
- P 112 “According to John Burdett, Vice-president of the Canadian packaging conglomerate, the Lawson Mardon Group: ‘the traditional approach to power assumes that if someone gets more power, someone else must lose power. It is exactly this notion and the insecurity behind it that prevents many executives, and often at senior levels, from encouraging and supporting employee involvement initiatives”.
- P 115 Six roles for the empowering manager:
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|-------|---------------------------|-----------------------|--------------------------|
| | 1. Articulator of vision. | 2. Goal definer. | 3. Creator of challenge. |
| P 116 | 4. Developer of talent. | 5. Resource obtainer. | 6. Leader. |
- P 118 “Walking the line between management and the shop floor, supervisors are ideally placed to be agents of change. They are equally well-placed to block it - something that firms often fail to anticipate”.
- P 119 “Much is asked of supervisors anyway. More is expected after an empowerment initiative, and many find the change to be stressful, challenging, and threatening to their power and security.
- “Companies put a lot of effort into winning the acceptance of the shop floor, and almost none into carrying along those who supervise them”.
- “The role of supervisor needs to shift from controller, to motivator, planner and enabler. This is not an easy adjustment for many front-line supervisors to make. Many reached management positions on the basis of their technical competence, not their motivation to lead and manage others. Some may not want to make the change and will prefer to return to team member positions or to become technical experts in a particular skill or process, rather than team facilitators and coaches”.
- P 125 “Empowerment demands a whole new set of behaviours, which have to be cascaded down the managerial structure. It starts with having a board that actually thinks and behaves like a board. Instead of concerning itself with a multitude of operational activities, the board confines itself to the strategic issues, which are the essence of effective direction”.
- P 127 “All managers should be rewarded for their ability to release the potential of their subordinates in measurable terms; and appraisal and evaluation should be done not just by the boss, and not just on short-term performance, but over the long term by colleagues and subordinates as well”.
- P 130 “Empowerment can be a frightening prospect for managers at all levels. But if they worry about their job security and satisfaction in an empowered organisation, they may have more to worry about in an unempowered one. Not only are empowered organisations arguably more competitive, and thus likely to survive in the long term, but the job of a manager in an empowered organisation can be immensely more satisfying than in a comparable command and control role”.

“Instead of playing policemen, empowering managers can share ideas with and learn from their employees”.

P 134 “Our definition of a learning organisation is one which helps individuals develop an appetite for beneficial change. Empowerment is a tool that can help bring about a learning organisation, but only through the learning of individuals - after all, organisations can’t learn, only individuals can”.

P 136 “Most empowerment initiatives come as part and parcel of a major, often painful, change programme, such as organisational restructuring, redundancies, job redefinitions and the like. Thus the first step in making an empowerment initiative take hold at an individual level is to gain employee commitment to the idea of change in general”.

P 137 “For many organisations, gaining acceptance of change is complicated by employees’ unhappy experiences with false starts in the past”.

P 139 “Even if employees can be made to see that empowerment is in their best interests, there will invariably remain some individuals who feel it is not for them”.

P 151 “It is both ineffective and unfair to expect more input from employees without giving them the skills and techniques they need to do what’s expected of them”.

P 155 “Many empowerment initiatives fall flat, despite extensive training because organisations fail to give employees access to the information they need to make use of their new-found skills”.

P 160 “Yet empowerment in the service industry is a risky business. If, for example, an empowered sheet metal worker wants to try a new procedure, he can do it in a controlled environment, at the cost of some time and raw materials. Service workers, however, must experiment in real time, in front of real customers. If they get it wrong, there is no safety net”.

P 162 ‘One of the biggest worries with empowering customer-facing staff is the risk, or at least the fear by management, that staff will be more accommodating than necessary, to make life easier for themselves - that they will, in short, give away the shop. That is why providing front-line staff with guidelines, and clearly defined limits within which they can use their discretion, is essential in empowering front-line service staff”.

P 164 “Bowen and Lawler describe the bottom-line gains possible from empowering service employees:

- * Quicker responses to customer needs during service delivery.
- * Quicker responses to dissatisfied customers during service recovery.
- * Empowered employees can be a great source of service ideas, word-of mouth advertising and customer retention.

P 166 * Employees feel better about their jobs and themselves.

“There are, however, a number of costs to empowering service employees:

- * Empowered staff generally need more training than those who follow strict procedures.
- * Empowered staff cost more to employ.
- * Empowered staff may provide slow or inconsistent service delivery.
- * Empowered staff may violate customers’ perceptions of fair play.

‘Many customers associate sticking to procedures with being treated fairly’ write Bowen and Lawler. Customers may be more likely to return to a business if they believe that their complaint was handled effectively because of company policies, rather than because they were lucky enough to get a particular employee”.

P 170 “A growing number of service managers are finding it far easier - and more effective - to recruit naturally service-minded people than to try to train staff whose personalities do not lean that way”.

P 179 “In chapter 1 we looked briefly at what is probably the most fundamental truth about empowerment: no-one can be empowered by another person; individuals must empower themselves”.

“This leads us to the second fundamental truth about empowerment. Regardless of the circumstances, empowering yourself is neither easy nor quick. It calls for some fundamental changes - though of course the degree of change needed will depend on an individual’s starting point - in attitudes and behaviours, communication styles, and even one’s self-image”.

P 180 According to Graham Oddey of KPMG, empowered people “are confident and assertive. They don’t need supervision. They are willing, able and highly motivated. Empowered people challenge their bosses, they also tend to be tenacious. Empowered people are energetic. They enjoy themselves and their effectiveness means their bosses have more time to devote to bigger issues, and are not bogged down in a mire of irritating little problems which their staff really ought to be able to fix themselves”.

Chairman of BA Sir Colin Marshall suggests that an empowered person:

- * has lots of energy, and a desire to excel.
- * is totally willing to commit themselves emotionally.
- * has the ability to take delight from the successes of others.
- * has a genuine liking for people.
- * has a positive self image.
- * appreciates, but is not dominated by, the need for analysis.
- * believes in the ultimate business efficacy of probity - that being truthful pays off.
- * has a usually alert and curious mind with a fair degree of common sense.

The authors say empowered people are:

- * well trained and confident.
 - * enthusiastic, motivated and committed.
- P 181
- * able to use their natural creativity.
 - * able to take responsibility.
 - * able to communicate needs, successes, problems and ideas.
 - * able to work on their own or in a team.
 - * flexible, both in what they do and how they tackle new situations.
 - * able to make decisions when needed, but know when to involve others.
 - * proud of their work, their team and the organisation.
 - * trusting of and trusted by colleagues.
 - * comfortable about questioning the status quo.
 - * able to understand the context and consequences of their work.
 - * able to set their own priorities and manage themselves.
 - * able to make process improvements at their own initiative.
 - * knowledgeable about how well they are performing.
 - * clear about who their customers (internal or external) are, and what they require of them.
 - * empowered outside the workplace as well.
 - * still learning and developing.

P 183 “A number of skills are necessary to reach the point of interdependence:

Develop trust in your colleagues, and help them trust in you.

Understand your strengths, weaknesses and limits.

P 184 Try to see your job in the context of the business, and not just your part of it.

P 185 Develop the confidence and self-image that allows you to take responsibility.

- P 189 “Empowered people also give others credit and praise and send signals of recognition”.
- P 191 “Peter Martin suggests a quick acid test: ‘would an outsider looking at you and your colleagues decide that what you do is essential to the survival of the organisation? How would what the customer buys be harmed if your job did not exist?’ “.
- P 192 “Empowered people question, argue, and disagree when necessary. They stand their ground - not to be bloody-minded, but to arrive at the best solution. They shout when something is wrong, and they know the difference between consensus and acquiescence, and they can smell groupthink at 60 paces. Unempowered people, on the other hand, prefer to agree with the boss and the experts, however wrong they may be”.
- P 201 “The most successful people often have the most difficulty learning says Chris Argyris, because they have rarely experienced failure, and have thus never learned how to learn from failure. ‘So,’ he says, whenever their learning strategies go wrong, they become defensive, screen out criticism, and put the blame on anyone and everyone but themselves. In short, their ability to learn shuts down at the moment they need it the most’ “.

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