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## **WORKING PAPER SERIES**

Towards a Typology of  
Empowerment

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# **Towards a Typology of Empowerment**

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## Towards A Typology of Empowerment

**ABSTRACT** The idea of empowering employees so that they may be more effective and efficient, form a stronger bond of commitment to the organisation, or take a greater level of responsibility for quality assurance is a recurrent theme. The relevant literature presents no consistently used definition of empowerment and some writers do not provide a definition, preferring instead to use the term in a 'taken for granted' way. The term empowerment is used in a broad range of management approaches and discussions of the employment relationship; this ubiquitous nature has rendered the understanding of empowerment unclear. This paper will provide clarity to the understanding of empowerment by outlining some of the ways that empowerment has been discussed and from those discussions develop a typology of empowerment.

**Keywords:** *(Empowerment, Power)*

The idea of empowering employees so that they may be more effective and efficient, or form a stronger bond of commitment to the organisation, or that they may take a greater level of responsibility for quality assurance is a recurrent theme in such management approaches as Socio-technical Systems (STS), Lean Manufacturing, Total Quality Management (TQM) and Human Resource Management (HRM) (see for example Deming 1982; Beer et al. 1984; Womack et al. 1990; Hammer and Champy 1994; Legge 1995). The concept of employee empowerment has also been associated with constructs of Industrial Democracy (ID) Employee Involvement (EI) and Employee Participation (EP) and in this context flows from philosophical theories of rights and social justice, albeit that the lineage is clearer with ID than it may be with some approaches or forms of EI or EP (Collins 1994, p.14).

The term empowerment is ubiquitous; literature relating to Human Resource Management (HRM), Total Quality Management (TQM), Business Process Reengineering (BPR) and Lean manufacturing contains reference to empowered employees (Deming 1982; Beer et al. 1984; Womack et al. 1990; Hammer and Champy 1994; Legge 1995). Despite the term empowerment being pervasive, the literature presents no consistently used definition of empowerment and some writers choose not to provide a definition, preferring instead to use the term in a 'taken-for-granted' way as though it was universally understood and unambiguous (Wilkinson 1998). Some writers have suggested that contemporary empowerment practices are actually disempowering (Collins 1994, p.4), or, following Pateman's (1970) discussion of participation, are chimerical, representing only a pseudo form of empowerment.

However, this ubiquitous nature has tended to render the understanding of empowerment less clear. This lack of clarity has implications for the use of the term empowerment in policy development as well as the potential for operational confusion when using the term empowerment in the context of implementing various TQM, HRM, and Lean Manufacturing techniques within organisations. As will be discussed in a following section, the language of empowerment may also raise expectations that, if unmet, may lead to unforeseen negative consequences. This paper will attempt to provide clarity to the understanding of empowerment by exploring the various categories and types of empowerment discussed within the literature, and from them develop a typology of empowerment.

In broad terms these definitions of empowerment are derived from three major perspectives; the managerial perspective, the critical perspective and the postmodern. Each of the definitions of empowerment discussed in this paper will be presented within one of these perspectives. In the final part of this paper a matrix framework for the classification of types of empowerment will be developed. The matrix of empowerment types will be developed by drawing together the definitions presented in the first part of this paper. The framework also draws upon the classification of empowerment presented by Wilkinson (1998) and the typology of participation presented by Teicher (1992) to synthesise a typology of empowerment.

### ***Different Views Of Empowerment***

Empowerment seems to have as many definitions as it does writers providing them. According to some writers, initiatives "... to involve employees in organisational decision-making are as old as industrial democracy ... and as recent as team building, participation and total quality management" (Hardy & Leiba-O'Sullivan 1998, p. 451). The recent literature relating to Human Resource Management (HRM), Total Quality Management (TQM), Business Process Reengineering (BPR) and Lean Manufacturing contains some reference to empowered employees (Deming 1982; Beer et al. 1984; Womack et al. 1990; Hammer & Champy 1994; Legge 1995; Hardy & Leiba-O'Sullivan 1998). However, few discussions of empowered employees actually define empowerment (Wilkinson 1998).

A simple definition of empowerment can be found in the Australian edition of the Collins Concise Dictionary where it is defined as 'to give power or authority to, to authorise... to give ability to; enable or permit'. This simple definition has an intuitively attractive utility in discussions of organisations and organisational activities. In the dictionary definition empowerment implies the act of giving power to a person who was hitherto power-less, and also implies that the act of empowering others can only be undertaken by an individual, or organisation, who has power to distribute. Empowerment in this sense can be seen as synonymous with delegation of the authority to make decisions, and in that context has been coopted by the language of Human Resource Management (HRM) and Total Quality Management (TQM). Kanter (1979) also sees empowerment in this manner and posits a continuum from the powerless to the empowered.

### ***From a Managerial Perspective***

Discussions of empowerment have attempted to trace the development of the term in management literature (for example Collins 1994, 1996, 1997a, 1997b; Wilkinson 1998; Hales & Kilidas 1998; Holden 1999). In the 1960's the gathering focus on finding meaningful work for employees alienated by the Taylorist design of work brought about empowerment through job enrichment and job (re)design. These management techniques achieved empowerment for employees by providing for a degree of control over task level decisions (Buchanan 1979). Wilkinson (1998, p. 41) argues that the Human Relations school saw intrinsic motivation as the vital ingredient in job satisfaction, a critical determinant of job performance, and to achieve intrinsic motivation jobs were to be enriched through the act of reintegrating conception and execution by allowing shop floor workers some decision making capacity. Clegg and Dunkerley (1980, p.135) argue that the Human Relations school laid the foundations for industrial democracy and employee participation through the development of an ideological apparatus of normative control for the management of organisation.

Conger and Kanungo's view of empowerment holds that it is "... a process of enhancing feelings of self-efficacy among organizational members through the identification of conditions that foster powerlessness and through their removal by both formal organizational practices and informal techniques of providing efficacy information" (Conger & Kanungo 1988, p. 471). The implication of this view is that power within organisations is part of a non-zero sum game. It would seem that power is simply 'gained' through empowerment without it being given up or lost from elsewhere or shared with the original holder of the power (Conger and Kanungo 1988). Working from the assumption that power is part of a zero sum game and that there is a distributive nature to power within organisations other writers have also viewed empowerment in terms of the transfer of decision-making power from one, usually more senior group or individual, to another, such that the location of decision making is moved (Baldacchino 1995; Kanter 1979; Wilkinson 1998).

The "distributive" aspect of delegated authority and power to act also equates empowerment with participation. For example Conger and Kanungo (1988) state that "... if we consider empowerment in terms of [a] relational dynamic [of power], it becomes a process where a leader or manager shares his or her power with subordinates. Power, in this context, is interpreted as the possession of formal authority or control over organisational resources. The emphasis is primarily on the notion of sharing resources." However, they go on to argue that empowerment is more than a redistribution of authority, it is, they argue, "a technique for motivation." (Conger &

Kanungo 1988, p.470). Empowerment has also been discussed in terms of employees achieving intrinsic motivation or behaving as if they were 'self employed' (see Nykodym et al. 1994; Collins 1994; Lashley and McGoldrick 1994; Coleman 1996; Lashley 1997). Conger and Kanungo (1988) have pointed to the similarity between the manner in which power and empowerment are discussed in this taken-for-granted way. Following the work of French and Raven (1968) power is frequently discussed as residing in discrete 'sources of power', such as 'formal authority', 'expertise', 'control of organisational resources' and so on (see for example Robbins et al. 2001; Bartol et al. 2000). This approach carries with it an implicit message that power can be understood by learning the various sources of power, that is to say by learning the contextual framework of power relationships. However, there are certain implicit frameworks of understanding and logic associated with such an approach. It is implicit that the rules of social and organisational hierarchies are known and understood by observers as well as participants of the power relationships described by French and Raven, and this knowledge and understanding facilitates the understanding of power relationship. Thus, power is based upon a 'taken-for-granted' understanding, an understanding that is not considered consciously.

Simply providing opportunities for employees to take or accept power may not be enough to satisfy the definitions of empowerment provided above; employees must also choose to accept the power offered. If power is not taken or accepted by those it is bestowed upon, there is no empowerment (Honold 1997). Honold also states that empowerment is an act of building, developing and increasing power by working with others, which she refers to as "interactive empowerment". Honold also talks of having the ability to influence one's own behaviour, which she refers to as "self empowerment". Another definition of empowerment from this individual perspective is provided by Menon (1995), where empowerment is said to be "... a cognitive state [of] perceived control, perceived competence and goal internalisation" (p. 30).

Collins (1997) argues that the managerial interest in empowerment implies an attitude on the part of managers who empower employees, specifically; "... that those who work directly on any production process, or directly with any client or customer, will tend to understand the requirements of the job better than those who operate at some distance from the immediate requirements of the job. It follows, therefore, that those on the front line should be allowed some scope to make changes to their work practices as they deem appropriate ..." (Collins 1997, p.24). The interest in empowerment represents an acknowledgement that workers are perhaps more intelligent than managers have previously accepted and that, in certain circumstances, managers may be prepared to change patterns of control within the organisation so that larger business goals may be achieved (Collins, 1995; 1997). Hardy and Leiba-O'Sullivan (1998, p.470) suggest that "... business empowerment does not strive to invert the power balance between employers and employees, nor produce conflict by encouraging employees to resist the status quo, not question the fundamental legitimacy of organisational goals ... most managers and management theorists have no desire, intention, or expectation in that way". As will be shown in the following section, this benign and neutral view is not the one shared by critical theorists.

### ***From a Critical Perspective***

In the 1970s the concept of employee empowerment came to be bundled up with the discussion of Industrial Democracy and Employee Participation, for example the language of writers such as Clegg and Dunkerley (1980) Emery and Thorsrud (1976), Emery (1974) and Pateman (1970) discuss empowerment implicitly as participation in decision making, participation in works councils or as part of wider job design principles. Contrasting a critical conception of political empowerment with that of "mainstream" management Hardy and Leiba-O'Sullivan (1998, p.470) state that; from a "mainstream" view "...empowerment is intended to facilitate achievement of organisational goals and any increase in employee power should not provide any increase in conflict", where as from a critical view "...empowerment is intended to produce resistance to prevailing power distribution and may result in conflict as subordinate actors gain power if dominant actors fail to respond".

Wilkinson (1998) suggests that empowerment is "... generally used to refer to a form of employee involvement initiative which was wide spread in the 1980s and focussed on task-based involvement and attitudinal change..." (p. 40). Wilkinson states that empowerment differs from industrial democracy in that there is no central idea of workers having a 'right' to the authority or power granted to them, this empowerment is given at a time, place and to an extent that is determined by management. This again returns to a language akin to that of delegation mentioned above and points to the unbalanced distribution of power within organisations. Wilkinson also points to the wide range of practices that are titled 'empowerment' and states that there is a significant variation amongst them in terms of the amount of power actually exercised by employees. Some, Wilkinson argues, are specifically designed not to give employees a significant or meaningful role in decision making, rather they are intended to maximise the contribution of the employee to the organisation. This type of empowerment takes place within the context of a strict management agenda according to Wilkinson (1998, p.40).

By the 1980s participation and empowerment remained in the management literature. However, they were now not discussed principally as part of models of co-determination or overt changes to the system of social order. The language of HRM and TQM, with an emphasis on team based approaches with employees capable of making operational level decisions employs the concept of employee empowerment as a pivotal part in models of efficiency and effectiveness. The point of difference in the way the use of the term empowerment developed from the 1970s is that the later version no longer challenges the prerogative of management. Empowerment is prescribed by clearly defined boundaries set by management (Ackers et al. 1992; Marchington et al. 1992). Wilkinson (1998) suggests that it was in the late 1980s that empowerment emerged in its modern form. The social and political changes that had taken place in Britain, continental Europe and the USA with moves towards a more right wing, 'enterprise culture', exemplified by the Thatcher government in Britain and the Reagan administration in the USA, were reflected in the enterprise rhetoric of HRM and TQM (Legge 1995).

Babson (1995) states that if employee empowerment is successful, unions could become unnecessary since their role of mediating between employees and management is no longer needed. His thesis as to the anti union goal of employee empowerment as it is manifest in Lean Manufacturing is premised on the preamble to the constitution of the United Automobile Workers which he quotes as stating; "Working men and women...are often in the best position to participate in making intelligent, informed decisions, at the same time, we oppose efforts by companies to use democratic sounding programs as a smokescreen designed to undermine collective bargaining and workers' rights." (p. 2). Babson argues that employee empowerment has the potential to be nothing more than a new form of exploitation, placing demands on worker's mental capacity as well as their physical capacity while failing to deliver any real control of the work. Babson (1995) asserts that in order for employee empowerment to be real, "rather than a gift bestowed, power devolves to those who have the capacity to take hold of it" (p. 5). Following a similar theme Parker and Slaughter (1988, 1995) suggest that employee empowerment is an integral part of the management-by-stress approach that pushes people and systems to the breaking point by increasingly forcing workers to do more with less.

The critical view is one that is to some extent predicated on the identification and protection of "rights", implied or explicit, within the framework of an employer/employee relationship. Within this view the language of empowerment, be it through team building, participation or TQM, creates beliefs about equity and justice. This "psychological contract", once broken, can lead to declining employee commitment and failure of the project within which the language of empowerment is used (Hardy & Leiba-O'Sullivan 1998, pp. 470-471). The critical view is one that presents power and empowerment as a zero sum equation, the distribution of power through empowerment practices to one group or individual will cause the diminution of power available to another group or individual. "Critical approaches illuminate the contradictions of business empowerment, namely, that while the language of empowerment *promises* the acquisition of power in exchange for the different kinds of effort and responsibilities that such programs engender, practice *limits* the devolution of power to subordinates. It is in this discrepancy that the

seeds of failure of business empowerment may lie” (Hardy & Leiba-O’Sullivan 1998, p. 470 emphasis in the original).

Clegg and Dunkerley (1980) have cautioned against attempting to define power (and thus empowerment) within a ‘taken-for-granted framework’; “...the focus of investigation [of power] is defined in terms of deviations from the formal structure. This formal structure then appears in the analysis only in so far as it frames the initial state of rest, of equilibrium, from which the power deviation is to be measured. In itself it is not a topic for investigation or explanation. The topic becomes the ‘exercise’ of power from within an initial equilibrium position, where that exercise is premised on possession of some resource(s) by the power holder. ... Defining the topic in this way has at least two important consequences. First, it can lead to analyses of power which take the formal structure so much for granted that the author(s) frequently forget its existence in their zest to explicate the causal bases of power ...” (Clegg & Dunkerley 1980, p.434).

### *From a Postmodern Perspective*

While not the only postmodern philosopher to engage with a discussion relating to power and empowerment Michael Foucault has been presented by a number of writers as an exemplar of the postmodern view (Gardner and Palmer 1997; Hardy & Leiba-O’Sullivan 1998; Appelbaum, Hérbert & Leroux 1999). Foucault has highlighted the problems associated with taken-for-granted meanings. Foucault’s analysis of power as a function of relationships and essentially tied up with the construction of knowledge, emphasises the need to analyse the cultural assumptions about power, interests and objectives that set the context in which all management processes take place (Gardner & Palmer 1997 p.238). Foucault resisted any normative orientation and would therefore resist providing recommendations for empowerment practice (Hardy & Leiba-O’Sullivan 1998; Appelbaum, Hérbert & Leroux 1999). A Foucauldian view would accept that business empowerment could be positive for some who experience it. “... might not many of the practices of empowerment - those that grant autonomy, provide variety and challenge, relax formal controls, enhance the opportunity for personal initiative, generate an emotional attachment to collective goals – constitute subjects who believe themselves more highly valued, who feel more excitement and passion in their work and who derive a more rewarding work experience?” (Hardy and Leiba-O’Sullivan 1998, p.467).

Rather than cynically dismissing empowerment as in the case of the critical view, a Foucauldian postmodern view of empowerment emphasises the complexity and ambiguity of empowerment as the lived experience of those who are empowered. This discussion of the postmodern view is brief and does not fully explore the complexity of the perspective (as indeed the preceding discussion management and critical perspectives did not present a deeper exploration of the complexity of those perspectives) it does draw the differences between the postmodern, critical and what Hardy and Leiba-O’Sullivan (1998) termed the mainstream management view to the fore. The Foucauldian postmodern view of empowerment is derived from that philosopher’s conception of power. Hardy and Leiba-O’Sullivan (1998) present this view as a “Forth Dimension” of power. The forth dimension of power presents the view that power is a network of influence embedded in the system, power is manifested as local struggles and is given meaning to the actors in the local struggle by the prevailing discourse of power. The field of ‘discourse’ is unclear and presented in often imprecise ways, it is informed by a wide variety of disciplines and encompasses a number of approaches (Appelbaum et al. 1999, p.3). Discourses do not just provide a narrative to describe things. “Discourse is both socially constituted and socially constitutive as it produces objects of knowledge, social identities and relationships between people” (Appelbaum et al. 1999, p.4). Hardy and Leiba-O’Sullivan (1998, p.432) define discourse as “sets of texts, statements, practices etc., which bring an object into being. When talking about empowerment and the act of empowering the discourse of empowerment constitutes an “object”. Hardy (1999, pp. 5-6) presents the argument that discourse is not an abstract mental activity, but that it is better understood as an object that derives from “real, material social structures”. Discourse is not produced without context and cannot be understood without taking context into consideration. Discourse recognises an absence of universal “truths” in human situations and encourages a reflection on the sources of power and influence that affect the decisions and events inherent in the change faced by managers. Discourse empowers individuals to define and control

their environments rather than merely accepting them as a subject or a “discipline” which needs to be responded to objectively. The table reproduced below summarises interpretations of empowerment in terms of a mainstream management view, a critical view, and a postmodern view and uses Hardy and O’Sullivan’s (1998) concept of four dimensions of power.

#### Empowerment and the Dimensions of Power

	First dimension	Second dimension	Third dimension	Fourth dimension
<b>Power of A over B</b>	Management of resource dependencies	Management of decision- making processes	Management of meaning	None, power is embedded in the system
<b>Interaction between A and B</b>	Overt conflict	Overt or covert conflict	Apparent cooperation	Local struggles
<b>Reason for B’s failure to influence outcomes</b>	B is aware of the issue and able to get it to the decision arena, but is unable to use power effectively to influence outcomes	B is aware of the issue but unable to get it to the decision arena	B is unaware of the issue and, so, has no will resist	Both A and B are prisoners of the prevailing discourses of power although A may derive greater advantage from them
<b>Empowerment of B requires</b>	Acquisition of resources and ability to mobilize them	Ability to gain access to the decision arena	Consciousness raising and “delegitimation” strategies to create the will to resist	Empowerment in the sense of freedom from power effects is not possible although local struggles may produce more positive experiences

(Derived from Hardy and Leiba-O’Sullivan 1998, p.462)

The following section uses these definitions and views of empowerment to develop a classification matrix framework.

#### ***A Framework For The Classification Of Empowerment***

The breadth of definitions of empowerment, and the various ways it has been coopted by management techniques like HRM, TQM, BPR and Lean Manufacturing, has prompted Wilkinson (1998) to suggest a scheme for the classification of types of empowerment. Working with the political theory literature of such writers as Pateman (1970), Wilkinson has posited that there are five main types of empowerment; Information Sharing, Upward Problem Solving, Task Autonomy, Attitudinal Shaping and Self Management.

*Information sharing:* Wilkinson states that information is a central component for employees to be empowered. He cites the rise in recent years of intra-organisational communication techniques, such as newsletters and team briefings, which are designed to increase downward communication. The logic of these communication techniques is to present the management point of view on organisational activities or changes without the mediation or interpretation of either the union or ‘rumour mill’. Wilkinson argues that “... such schemes [that] incorporate workers and/or bypass trade unions ... [are] ... not designed to provide better information ... [or] ... to empower workers but convince them of the logic of management action and hence reduce the scope for genuine empowerment, i.e. the opportunity to influence or change decisions” (1998, p.47). This echoes the ‘management of meaning’ discussed above (Hardy & Leiba-O’Sullivan 1998) and is similar to the pseudo participation posited by Pateman (1970) in that employees have no real participation in decisions, information is ‘spun’ by management with little or no opportunity for questions to be asked or alternative paths explored.

Upward communication is also argued by Wilkinson (1998) to be a significant form of empowerment, “... [for workers] ... to be able to express their views and grievances openly and independently” (p.47) and could extend empowerment beyond task related problem solving. Trade union representation, collective bargaining, and other more traditional forms of formal grievance resolution could provide ‘voice’ to employee suggestions, concerns and grievances, but these are overtly displaced by managements’ preferred communications feedback approach of



individualism. Thus, argues Wilkinson, the rhetoric of empowerment within recent management techniques circumvents formal collective mechanisms for giving employees 'voice' within the organisation.

*Upward problem solving:* Closely related to TQM and Lean Manufacturing techniques Wilkinson (1998) defines upward problem solving through illustration. "A typical example in manufacturing would be workers having the ability to halt the line because of production problems or defective material. In services employees may be able to make customer related decisions (e.g. replacing defective products). In short there may be greater autonomy and responsibility at the point of production or service delivery" (1998, p.48). In a less direct mode Wilkinson suggests that upward problem solving can be seen in employee suggestions schemes, albeit that management chooses which suggestions are accepted and/or rewarded. This is similar to the Quality Circles (QC) teams concept, however, with QC teams the scope of problems addressed and the implementation of solutions are more commonly determined by the QC team in consultation with management, and so are less arbitrary than suggestion schemes.

*Task autonomy:* The concept of task autonomy as used by Wilkinson is not different in any significant way to the definition of task autonomy presented by Hackman and Oldham and others of the Human Relations school. Task autonomy is said by Wilkinson (1998) to provide empowerment through enabling workers to make decisions about the tasks they have to undertake within their job role. This is seen in terms of "skill discretion" and "means discretion".

*Attitudinal shaping:* Wilkinson states that attitudinal shaping is "... empowerment as a psychological process ..." and that it is "... most often seen in the service industry ..." (1998, p.48). Within this type of empowerment Wilkinson suggests that there is no change to the organisational structure or to the way in which work is undertaken. Employees are made to "feel empowered" through education and training. This can be observed in the 'team' structure of fast food chains where employees are told they are empowered to make customer service decisions, provided with a range of discretionary responses to customer questions (e.g. via scripted service interactions '... would you like fries with that?') yet their behaviour is rigidly bounded by standard operating procedures, policy statements and team leader supervision.

*Self management:* Wilkinson argues that this type of empowerment tends to be fairly rare in any real sense. He goes on to say that "... [c]learly self-managing work groups are a limited form of ... [empowerment] ... , but are constrained by working within certain limits set by senior management (e.g. self-managing in relation to a set of work tasks)" (Wilkinson 1998, p.49). Citing Ricardo Semler (1989) Wilkinson suggests that "ideally self-management should involve divisions between managers and workers being eroded and decisions, rules and executive authority no longer set by the few for the many ..." (1998, p.49).

These five types of empowerment may also overlap as many initiatives incorporate several of these dimensions. It can be argued that information is important to empowerment in general and not just as a separate form or type of empowerment. Similarly, a change in attitude and self-efficacy is seen by some writers as at the core of any form of empowerment (Conger and Kanungo, 1988).

#### *A multidimensional typology of empowerment*

Following the approach of Teicher (1992), who drew upon the work of Wang (1974) and Pateman (1970) to develop a typology of participation, and using the five types of empowerment described by Wilkinson (1998), a multidimensional typology of empowerment can also be developed. This typology can be used to classify the type of empowerment introduced with an organisation, and thus help to interpret the value or intent of the use of the technique, or to choose the most appropriate approach to empowerment in a given set of circumstances.

*Level of empowerment:* Teicher (1992), citing the 1974 work of Wang, argues for a four level model for his typology of participation. This four level approach is said by Teicher to be more desirable than Pateman's 1970 differentiation of levels of participation into only two levels as he argues that Pateman tends towards confusing the level of participation with the form of

participation. However, the current trend amongst organisations is one of “de-layering” (Womack et al. 1990; Hammer & Champy 1994; Legge 1995), that is to say reducing the number of levels of management between the operational or line level and the decision making apex. In the light of this it is perhaps more appropriate to posit a three level model of empowerment, with empowerment having influence at the operational or line level, the middle level (equivalent to a functional department, branch manufacturing facility or office depending on the size of the overall organisation) and the corporate or organisation wide level.

The three level approach would yield a model where levels at which empowerment can take place are “Line”, “Middle” and “Corporate Organisation Wide”. The Line is the level at which operational empowerment takes place, and is the location of task autonomy described by Wilkinson (1998). Skill discretion and means discretion are exercised by employees at this operational level of the organisation. Empowerment at this level relates to the empowerment of an individual employee to exercise discretion and to make decisions that impact directly on their own work or the work of co-workers they work with directly. Discretion and decision making are about immediate issues, with a planning horizon of a day or week. The Middle is the level at which empowerment relates to the exercise of skill and means discretion, and decision making which involves or impacts upon a subsection (department, branch or office) of the organisation. Discretion and decision making are still focused on mainly operational issues and planning horizons are short to medium term (up to 12 months). The Corporate Organisation Wide is the level at which empowerment related to means discretion and decision making which involves or impacts upon the whole organisation. Following Teicher (1992) the Corporate Organisation Wide is the level where empowerment relates to policy formation and the ability to shape the overall strategy of the organisation. Planning horizons are medium to long term (longer than 12 months).

*Form of empowerment:* The two forms of empowerment, “Direct” and “Indirect” follow Teicher’s (1992) forms of participation and Wilkinson’s description of “upward problem solving”. Wilkinson (1998) defines upward problem solving with the following illustration. “A typical example in manufacturing would be workers having the ability to halt the line because of production problems or defective material. In services employees may be able to make customer related decisions (e.g. replacing defective products). In short there may be greater autonomy and responsibility at the point of production or service delivery” (1998, p.48). This can be seen as direct empowerment in that the empowered employee acts personally to exercise the power granted to him or her to intervene in the production process. In a less direct mode Wilkinson suggests that upward problem solving can be seen in employee suggestion schemes, albeit that management chooses which suggestions are accepted and/or rewarded. Teicher (1992) talks of representative participation (Indirect) and participatory (Direct). Indirect participation exists when the actors taking part in the decision do so obliquely, as representatives of others (be they managers representing the interests of management or union delegates representing the interests of workers), that is to say when the outcomes of the decisions made do not necessarily impact upon them directly. With ‘Direct’ participation actors taking part in the decision making process do not do so obliquely, they are inextricably linked to the immediacy of the outcome, that is to say the decisions made impact upon them directly. Similarly, empowerment can be expressed as either a “Direct” or an “Indirect” form when the discretion over skill and means for decision making is either exercised through representative structures or enacted personally through direct participation.

*Type of empowerment:* By integrating Wilkinson’s (1998) descriptions of upward problem solving, self managing and task autonomy into the two dimensions of Direct and Indirect empowerment his classifications of empowerment can be reduced to the trio of Information Sharing, Attitudinal Shaping and Problem Solving. Information sharing is described by Wilkinson (1998, p.47) as being similar to the pseudo-participation described by Pateman and used by Teicher in his typology of participation. Wilkinson states that attitudinal shaping is “... empowerment as a psychological process ...” and that it is “... most often seen in the service industry ...” (1998, p.48). Within this type of empowerment Wilkinson suggests that there is no change to the organisational structure or to the way in which work is undertaken, employees are made to “feel empowered” through education and training. There is a limited amount of

empowerment, bounded by organisational limits which are imposed through training and adherence to policy, yet tightly prescribed levels of skill discretion and task discretion are still present. In this respect Wilkinson's (1998) attitudinal shaping is similar to Teicher's (1992) partial participation in that it represents a limited form of empowerment. The term problem solving has been used to capture the sense of empowerment that is implicit in Wilkinson's upward problem solving and self management. The combination of skill discretion, task discretion and decision making that are combined in the process of problem solving suggests a type of empowerment that is similar to Pateman's (1970) and Teicher's (1992) full participation. Pateman (1970, p. 71) states that "... each member of a decision making body would have the power to determine the outcome of a decision ...", the implication of this is that the employee is fully empowered to address situations where choices have to be made and that the process of arriving at that choice is through deductive or inductive problem solving.

Using the example of the socio-technical team described by Trist and Bamforth (1951), the marrow group, the type of empowerment granted to the team would be Direct, Line, Problem solving. A top management team might be expected to have granted to it empowerment that was Direct, Corporate Organisation Wide and Problem Solving. Whereas a shift team in a fast food chain might be expected have granted to it empowerment that was Direct, Line and Attitudinal Shaping.

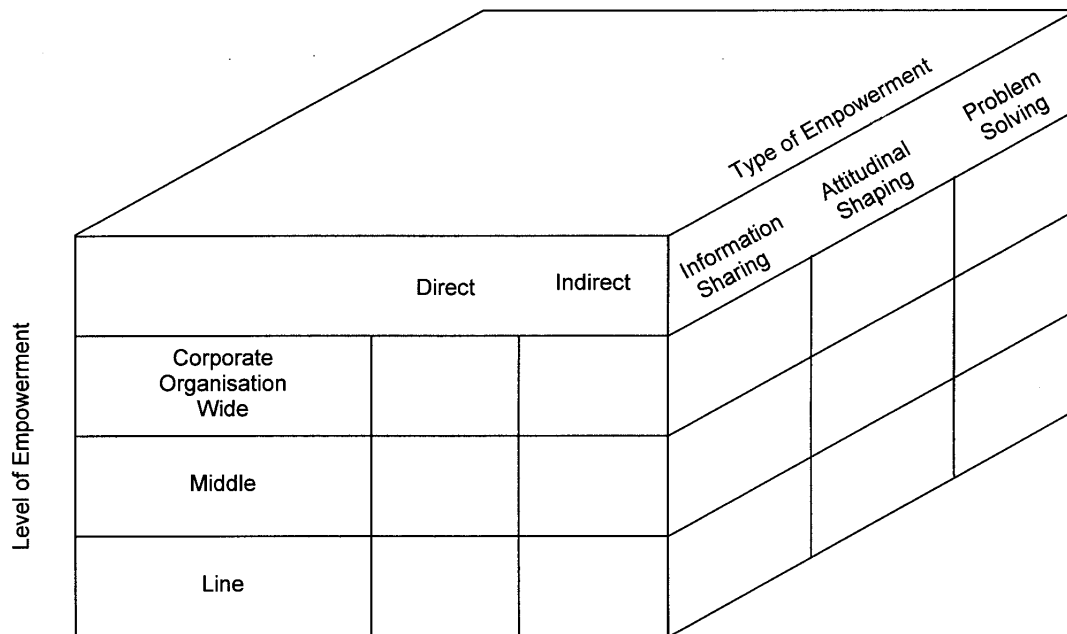


Fig. 1 Typology of Empowerment

### Conclusion

Empowerment is a term which is used liberally and despite the term being ubiquitous in the literature of Human Resource Management (HRM), Total Quality Management (TQM), Lean Manufacturing and Business Process Reengineering (e.g. Deming 1982; Beer et al.1984; Womack et al. 1990; Hammer and Champy 1994; Legge 1995) this literature presents no consistently used definition. Similarly, some writers choose instead to use the term in a 'taken for granted' way as though it were universally understood and unambiguous. The mainstream management literature tends to speak of empowerment in an uncritical 'taken for granted' way and is accepting of empowerment as a way of improving motivation and employee commitment to the organisation. The critical literature questions the underlying motive for the introduction of empowerment projects in organisations, and, due to the chimerical nature of the promise of a redistribution of power within an organisation that such projects entail, rejects empowerment as negative and disempowering. A Foucauldian postmodern view would accept that empowerment could be

positive for some who experience it. Rather than dismissing empowerment as in the case of the critical view, a Foucauldian postmodern view of empowerment emphasises the complexity and ambiguity of empowerment as the lived experience of those who are empowered. It is perhaps in this approach of seeking to understand the discourse of empowerment, within the discourse of power, expressed in the narrative of the lived experience of organisation members who are part of empowerment projects that a more subtle understanding of empowerment practices can be gained.

This paper set out to develop a matrix framework for the classification of types of empowerment by providing a range of definitions from the current literature. The matrix of types of empowerment was developed by drawing upon the classification of empowerment presented by Wilkinson (1998) and the typology of participation presented by Teicher (1992) to synthesise a typology of empowerment. The typology provides a system of classification for empowerment approaches and practices that can help to locate the way term is used within management approaches such as HRM, TQM, Lean Manufacturing and BPR. By locating the type of empowerment within the matrix framework it can be used as a reference point for understanding the context and history of the empowerment discourse within that empowerment project.

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