

EMPOWERING PROFESSIONALS AS LIFELONG LEARNERS

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It is clear that initial certification is only the beginning of a process of lifelong learning for professionals who wish to remain abreast of developments in their field and thus retain, or expand, their competence over the course of a long career. Therefore, lifelong learning is not an option but a necessity in professional fields such as education, health, engineering and law. This fact has long been accepted, but it is increasingly the case that the pervasive and rapid change that is characteristic of our era has made lifelong learning a necessity in business and other walks of life as well. Thus, the question of how to inculcate the skills and dispositions of lifelong learning during pre-service training, and how to sustain it throughout a career, is vitally important in all areas of vocational education.

Of course, lifelong learning begins at birth and there is no more important period for developing the curiosity and the confidence that is fundamental to lifelong learning than in the pre-school years, when parental influence is a major factor in a child's developing personality. The second most critical period comes during elementary and secondary education when teachers also have a profound effect on students' emerging concepts of knowledge, learning and self. As an individual ages, patterns of thought and behavior become established, and thus the precious opportunity to lay a firm foundation for future learning is increasingly constrained and complicated. It is never too late to begin or to change, but failure to ensure that the skill and the will for lifelong learning takes root before a student enters post-secondary training is a serious problem, and arguably one that can never be fully corrected. Therefore, attention to these critical periods in childhood and youth should be a priority concern.

The next most critical period comes during professional training, when the obvious and essential fact that professional certification marks only the end of the beginning of learning for a professional person should make it clear that professional schools need to design their curriculum not only to teach traditional understandings but also to prepare their students for the challenge of maintaining and enhancing competence after graduation. Again, this observation is increasingly relevant in all areas of education. There is an enormous amount of work to be done to ensure that the foundations of lifelong learning are laid in the initial stages.

This chapter, however, will primarily confine its consideration of the conditions required to support lifelong maintenance and enhancement of competence for professionals in the world of work that follows initial professional certification. Moreover, we will specifically focus on the particular form of empowerment that results in enhancement of self-regulated lifelong learning in the professions, hoping and believing that the discussion will contain much of more general relevance but not wishing to dilute our focus by attempting to necessarily encompass that generality throughout.

What does it mean to be an empowered professional?

Empowerment is on everyone's lips these days, and seems to be universally taken to be a "good thing." Unfortunately, the very familiarity of the term can result in loss of meaning; that is, by being used so often, and to refer to so many things, it may lose much of its capacity for distinctive reference. The closely associated danger is that its universal acclaim can result in a degree of reverence that will suppress any critical consideration of its meaning. The net result is miscommunication and confused thinking that prevents progress in actually achieving the ideal. The first task, therefore, is to establish an explicit meaning for the term so that we may probe its possibilities and its pitfalls more clearly and accurately.

Let us begin by agreeing on what it does *not* mean. Empowerment is not simply another word for delegation of responsibility to subordinates, removal of constraints or even for provision of increased levels of authority. Clearly, empowerment would be irrelevant if there were no opportunity to exercise it, but merely creating the conditions for an individual to take broader responsibility, to participate more widely in decision making or to have more independence and influence within a work situation does not constitute empowerment any more than giving a student an excellent text book, a state of the art internet connection and access to an outstanding library constitutes learning (or even teaching for that matter). In either case it is helpful, but in neither case should supportive conditions be mistaken for the outcome itself.

Unfortunately, this confusion is fairly common in the literature on empowerment. Many authors have indicated that mere delegation of responsibility does not constitute empowerment, but then suggested that providing the resources and the authority to act independently does. This interpretation of 'em-power-ment' as redistribution of power to subordinates, although consistent with the basic dictionary definition of the term, misses the mark and provides an insufficient perspective on the complexity of the process. A much more useful interpretation is provided by Juha Siitonen (1999), who uses the term *voimaantuminen* as the Finnish equivalent. This term, which emphasizes an individual's intrinsic sense of competence, begins to move us beyond the *necessary* conditions towards the *sufficient* conditions for empowerment.

In a review of current uses of the term, Herrenkohl et al (1999) report finding descriptions such as the following: "redistributing authority and control," "employees and managers sharing equal responsibility for results," "maximizing employees' contribution to an organization's success," "full participation of workers and leaders in decision making," "pursuit of a shared vision and purpose through team effort," "self-motivation, which develops through a full understanding of responsibility and authority commensurate with those responsibilities," "the capability to make a difference in the attainment of goals," and "a synergistic interaction among individuals, which emphasizes cooperation and leads to expansion of power for the group." We see within this summary list a range of interpretations with a primary focus on the outcome or evidence of empowerment rather than a definition of the term, and a distinct lack of attention to precisely how it can be achieved.

Thomas and Velthouse (1990) define the state of empowerment as one of intrinsic *motivation* characterized by such cognitive constructs as meaning, competence, self-determination, and impact, and refer to it as *psychological* empowerment. Meaning is defined by the correspondence between the requirements of the work role and individual beliefs, values, and behavior. Competence is a question of one's ability and skill to perform work tasks. Self-

determination means regulation of one's actions based on choice and autonomy to decide on the initiation and continuation of work, effort, work methods, pace of work, etc. Impact is the opposite of learned helplessness, which determines the extent to which one feels able and inclined to influence strategic, administrative, and operative results at work. These cognitive constructs define an individual's orientation to work in a much more useful way, which brings to the fore the necessary psychological conditions for empowerment.

Both the state of *being* empowered and the process of *becoming* empowered are most productively approached in terms of motivation, with an emphasis on individual cognition, perception and emotion. From this perspective, empowerment involves belief in one's capability to control motivation, cognitive resources and the operations required by the task at hand. This requires, among other things, strong self-efficacy beliefs and outcome expectations. There are many questions one might ask about the process of achieving such a state of empowerment. To what extent is it possible to change deep-seated psychological factors such as self-concept? How can this best be done? Is it something one can only do for oneself or is there is any potential for empowering someone else? Is everyone equally capable of becoming empowered or should we begin to consider this capacity as a variable attribute rather than an absolute characteristic?

We will return to these important questions, but first let us recall that our topic is the empowerment of professionals to maintain and enhance competence throughout their career. It is clear from the preceding discussion that no matter what the forum for empowerment, the process of becoming empowered is a learning process in which an individual enhances his or her sense of competence, confidence and inclination to engage in some expanded range of activity in his or her personal or work life. Thus, psychological empowerment for professionals means two things, learning how to learn and developing the disposition to do so on an ongoing basis throughout a career. This personal capacity and inclination must then be accompanied by expanded opportunities in order for a psychological state of empowerment to translate into empowered action. Having declared this necessary condition as insufficient earlier in the discussion, it is important not to throw the proverbial baby out with the bath water.

An organization must ensure that the *psychological* empowerment of its employees is accompanied by their *technical empowerment* if it hopes to achieve new levels of engagement and productivity. Neither will suffice on its own. The former being the most often overlooked aspect, it is the focus of this discussion, but it is important to underscore the essential fact that employees must be provided with the authorization, resources and opportunities to engage in empowered action—that is, technical empowerment—if their psychological empowerment is to bear fruit.

A framework for the dimensions of what we are calling “technical empowerment” was developed by Herrenkohl et al (1999) as the basis for a questionnaire designed to measure the degree of empowerment in a high technology company in the United States. The study did not include any direct *consideration* of the degree of psychological empowerment of the employees, although it did imply some aspects of it in the consideration of “a set of dimensions that characterize an environment's interaction with persons in it so as to encourage their taking initiative to improve process and to take action,” which were: 1) shared vision, 2) organizational structure and governance supportive of taking and giving responsibility, 3) encouragement for employees to seek knowledge that could improve their performance, and 4) institutional recognition.

Shared vision involved sub-categories of goal clarity, goal achievement and customer orientation. Goal clarity involved clear expectations for employee performance, clear company goals and employee awareness of those goals. Goal achievement involved a sense of responsibility and commitment. Customer orientation involved knowing customer expectations and being committed to meeting those expectations.

Organizational structure and governance supportive of taking and giving responsibility involved sub-categories of responsibility, teams, risk-taking and customers. Responsibility involved the level at which decisions related to work activities and arrangements were made and who was responsible for the well being of the organization. The team sub-heading measured the effectiveness of work teams and their sense of responsibility for decisions concerning their own activities. The level of risk taking was determined by the employees' willingness to take risks in order to improve performance and whether the organization supported or punished risk taking. Finally, in this dimension there was an examination of whether employees were customer oriented and felt accountable to them.

Encouragement for employees to seek knowledge that could improve their performance involved sub-categories of change, skills and problem solving, trust and communication. The change category concerned organizational encouragement and support for learning and whether employees sought out new information that would benefit customers. Another important area was skills and problem solving: to what extent did employees enjoy new challenges, possess skills needed to do their work, and have opportunities to learn new skills. Trust meant that employees felt free to disagree with others, that they could learn from mistakes and that they would not be punished for failure. Communication was assessed on the basis of whether employees knew what customers needed and were confident that they would not be punished for delivering bad news.

Institutional recognition involved sub-categories of recognition and knowledge of the reward system. Recognition meant that the organization acknowledged the employees' accomplishments and the employees felt valued. Knowledge of the reward system involved employees knowing what is rewarded by the organization and specifically whether delivering value to customers would be rewarded.

This model for assessing the state of empowerment in an organization is not presented as an ideal, but as an example of a reasonably complete framework for considering technical empowerment. In any situation, attention must be paid to variables such as these to ensure that empowered action by employees is encouraged and is logistically possible. What is missing from this framework, and other similar discussions, however, is explicit attention to the challenge of psychological empowerment and consideration of how to achieve it.

The psychological empowerment of professionals as lifelong learners involves development of a range of characteristics that span the cognitive, conative and affective domains. The central issue, however, is conation, which may be subdivided into two parts: motivation and volition. Motivation is primarily concerned with an individual's pre-decisional state—that is, with what affects a decision to act—whereas volition is primarily concerned with the post-decisional state—that is, with what affects follow through on a decision once it is made. Motivation involves familiar notions such as internal and external goal orientation, self-esteem, self-efficacy, and various attributional interpretations. Volition, which is a less familiar term, describes notions such as persistence, will to learn, self-regulation, self-evaluation, and motivational

control. It is in many ways similar to what Goleman describes as “emotional intelligence,” at least in respect of the *intrapersonal* dimensions of that concept. (For a discussion of the sub-components of motivation and volition see Ruohotie 1994 and 1996.)

An adequate conceptualization of empowerment as an end state, however, is of interest only to the extent that it can enable us to achieve that state. Thus, finding a sufficient definition of empowerment is only a step along the road to the real goal, which is understanding the nature of empowerment as a process so that we may engage in it as individuals and within our institutions. For institutions, the challenge is to create a growth-oriented atmosphere that will induce and then support lifelong learning on the part of individual professionals within the organization. (The further challenge of creating a learning organization so that these increased individual capacities will translate into knowledge creation, improved collective competence and productivity is an important related question that will not be discussed here.)

Before we turn to a consideration of the process of empowerment, we should pause to consider whether even ideal conditions within an organization will induce such psychological change in individual professionals, and, if so, to what degree and with what reliability.

Is empowerment possible?

Psychological empowerment is a matter of developing new understandings, not merely acquiring new information, and such a personal transformation comes from thinking, not instruction. Thinking is an internal personal process that is entirely voluntary and thus developing new understandings of the world and of one’s self, and the personal growth that comes with such new understanding, may be invited, encouraged and supported, but not required and not coerced. Skillful teachers motivate more students and support them more successfully than poor teachers, but no teacher can overcome the fundamental fact that the learner must voluntarily commit him/herself to the thinking that begets learning and growing as a person. The same is true in supervising employees. Thus, in a very real sense it is not possible for someone to ‘empower’ another person, certainly not in the psychological sense. That is something one can only do for oneself.

Chris Argyris (1998) reminds us of this basic fact of life by distinguishing between external and internal commitment. External commitment (which really amounts to compliance rather than commitment) is contractual in nature and can be engineered and expected to a reasonable degree, whereas internal commitment is based on personal motivations and is purely voluntary. As Argyris notes, “the extent of participation in corporate goals and aspirations will vary with each employee’s wishes and intentions.” It can be greatly increased by involving employees in defining work objectives and planning how to achieve them, but the degree to which internal commitment can be achieved is fundamentally limited. Consequently, the degree to which employees can be expected to actively engage in the hard work of learning and growing in order to achieve enhanced levels of psychological empowerment is limited. Fortunately, it is possible to improve organizational performance without either having every employee display internal commitment or having every employee achieve high levels of psychological empowerment. As long as there is a critical mass of such employees, fertile conditions for them to display their heightened levels of empowerment and acceptance by others who may not yet be at that level, then significant organizational gains can be made.

It is also important to be aware that every employee will experience cycles and stages in his or her work life. Commitment can be expected to rise and fall as external circumstances change (marriage, having children, illness, marital stress, aging parents etc.) and also to vary according to career stages. At any particular point in time a certain proportion of employees will not display much internal commitment even if they are highly likely to do so in the future or have done so in the past. Employees will also have varying fundamental levels of personal capacity to learn and to achieve a state of psychological empowerment whatever their readiness and willingness to do so. These critical and inescapable facts sets limits on empowerment programs that should be considered in their design.

The situation is, however, even more complex and problematic than that. Psychological empowerment is a process that goes well beyond the acquisition of information or even the development of new cognitive structures. It requires adaptive learning, which Mezirow (2000, 8) describes as “transformative” in that it involves a change in one’s “frame of reference” in order to “act on our own purposes, values, feelings, and meanings rather than those we have uncritically assimilated from others” to gain greater control over our lives as socially responsible, clear-thinking decision makers.” This sense of personal agency is at the heart of psychological empowerment. Achieving the personal transformation that leads to an increased sense of agency requires both “objective reframing” critical reflection on the assumptions of others and “subjective reframing” critical self-reflection on one’s own assumptions. This is a very deeply engaging, and potentially disquieting process. “Subjective reframing commonly involves an intensive and difficult emotional struggle as old perspectives become challenged and transformed.” (Mezirow 2000, 23) While the end result may be emancipating and well worth the effort, the entry level costs, the activation energy for this change, is high, and it may well be difficult to convince individuals to engage in it and challenging to sustain their commitment to the inquiry. Transformational learning, Mezirow cautions, occurs only in an environment of freedom and trust, and even then it typically involves periods of retreat and back-sliding into the comfort of old perceptions and practices, so that sustained support is required in order for transformative learning to occur.

Robert Kegan, a developmental psychologist, raises the ante even further in his review of transformational learning (Kegan 2000). He points out that incremental *informative* learning is important and that not everything needs to be *transformative* in order to be significant. Learning that increases our body of knowledge and repertoire of skills by extending already established cognitive capacities within an existing frame of reference is a vital part of lifelong learning. However, it is only learning that goes beyond *what* we know to *how* we know it that is transformative. This is the learning that is required in order to become psychologically empowered, to develop new capacities for “intrinsic motivation characterized by such cognitive constructs as meaning, competence, self-determination, and impact” (Thomas & Velthouse 1990). From the perspective of constructive developmentalism, Kegan tells us, this involves a change in our subject-object relationships that he describes as the transition from a “socialized” mind to a “self-authoring” mind. This developmental step is not one that everyone will take in his or her lifetime. It does not come automatically with being an adult. In his book on the subject, *In over our heads: The mental demands of modern life*, Kegan (1994) suggests that most adults never make the transition to a self-authoring psychological state and that when they do make the change it typically occurs in mid-life as a result of accumulating life experiences. Only then do some people fundamentally alter their relationship to public authority and cultural

tradition in order to become the self-authoring masters of their lives. A sophisticated program of adult learning may well make it possible to achieve this stage of psychological development earlier, but the program for achieving it will have to match in sophistication what the transition involves in challenges.

Of course, one might imagine that empowering professionals, for all of its complexity, is not this fundamental. Surely, professionals can become self-directed learners without having to undergo a fundamental change in their psychological make-up. That depends on whether one truly wishes to help professionals become independent agents of their destiny with the full capability and established disposition for lifelong learning. Beairsto (2000, 55) argues that “in order to function effectively as a knowledge worker in a dynamic environment an individual requires not only the right intellectual tools and dispositions but also the right personality characteristics, and that the full range of these attributes is influential in determining one’s success as a lifelong learner.” The curiosity, persistence and courage that is required to be constantly reconstructing one’s knowledge, and to avoid the siren call of complacency as one continuously deals with the self-doubt that comes with never reaching a final understanding, is a matter of one’s fundamental psychological make-up. Developing this ability requires a transformation in one’s frame of reference to move beyond the well-socialized state in which most adults unknowingly permit the psychosocial surround to be the source of values and expectations that are uncritically internalized and thus circumscribe their interpretations and their actions.

Learning to be a lifelong learner is really a matter of learning to be a lifelong thinker who lives the questions of his or her personal and professional life through an open and curious orientation to the world. In other words, lifelong learning is not so much a skill or even an attitude as a way of being. Thus, the learning challenge of empowerment, fully conceived, does indeed involve the type of fundamental psychological development that Kegan suggests.

Beyond the complexity of the learning task, Argyris (1998) also points out other problems for empowerment initiatives. He suggests, for example, that change programs and practices often exhibit inner contradictions that inadvertently depress innovation, motivation, and drive. Management may even subtly undermine empowerment by talking about empowering employees while continuing to use the “command-and-control” methods with which they are most comfortable. Employees themselves may have an ambivalent attitude towards empowerment: it is a good thing as long as one need not take any personal responsibility. It should not be surprising that both managers and employees may be ambivalent towards empowerment because, if it is genuine, it challenges the familiar status quo, which for all of its shortcomings is at least understood. Better the devil you know, as the saying goes. For managers, empowerment of the workforce undermines their authority, and for employees it requires them to engage more deeply and share more responsibility for the complexities of organizational life and for the success or failure of the organization as a whole. Thus, empowerment, like all transformative learning, changes existing power structures and relationships. Argyris reminds us that we should expect some inertia and resistance on all sides, whether intended or unintended, conscious or subconscious, overt or subtle.

He saves his strongest criticism, however, for the commonly used model of organizational change. Changes are often implemented by following four basic steps: 1) define a goal, 2) create a strategy, 3) define work processes that will implement the strategy, and 4) define in detail

individual task requirements so that the work processes can be carried out efficiently. According to Argyris this four-step model works against empowerment. It seems rational, but it creates confusion. If all the steps in the change process are described in detail, change will actually create external rather than internal motivation. Thus employees' behavior will not be unconstrained and empowering; in fact, they are liable to react by limiting themselves to following the plan obediently. The four-step change program may lead to better performance in the short term by reducing mistakes and allowing employees to apply their skills more efficiently, but instead of internal commitment the program generates external commitment and is consequently self-limiting in the long term. In other words, this approach to change does not provide a source of inner inspiration and is not a good way to approach empowerment.

In fact, empowerment programs can actually poison an organization with mixed messages. People who are internally committed and acting according to the principles of empowerment prior to the change program interpret these messages as "do your own thing - the way we tell you" and become frustrated or even cynical. Externally committed people, on the other hand, are relieved because they believe that precisely detailed instructions protect them from having to take any personal responsibility. Thus, the basic contradictions between a traditional approach to change and the empowered state that is being sought through the change can actually prevent empowerment from occurring.

Given all of these factors, Argyris' conclusion in 1998 was that "the change programs that could create high levels of internal commitment and empowerment in corporations do not yet exist." Our goal in the next two sections of this chapter is, notwithstanding the inherent limitations to, and undeniable complexities of, change initiatives that intend to improve psychological and technical empowerment in organizations, to explore an approach that takes account of what we know and is liable to work.

How does empowerment occur?

If we agree that a state of empowerment involves a combination of technical and psychological factors, then the process of becoming empowered is the process of changing those factors so as to create more independent action.

Technical factors are, for the most part determined by the organization and can be changed relatively at will. The change process is one of administrative fiat. Of course, some things in the working environment, such as the degree of teamwork within an organization are more complex. It results both from organizational action to establish such teams and individual action to behave in a team-like manner. In these cases change is required in both the purely mechanistic organizational variables that are directly controllable and the social variables that are governed by individual and collective behavior within the environment. However, in the discussion that follows we will focus on the process of individual empowerment and assume, in what is acknowledged to be a simplification, that the social variables that influence individual actions and thoughts can be considered to be part of the organizationally imposed technical factors, which then act upon the individual by providing changed work experiences and planned learning activities.

Psychological factors are, for the most part, determined by the individual and are relatively difficult to change. The change process is one of learning. Learning is a personal act of meaning

making that is influenced by both “nature” and “nurture.” It has both visible consequences in individuals’ actions and invisible consequences in individuals’ thoughts and feelings. Moreover, the thoughts may be conscious or subconscious. They may be known to the individual or they may remain tacit even though a real cognitive or affective change has occurred. Both conscious and subconscious learning affects an individual’s frame of reference, worldview or psychological state of mind, which, once again has both conscious and subconscious aspects.

The interaction of technical factors with actions and experiences, which leads to individual thoughts and feelings that then affect psychological factors is illustrated in Figure 3.1.

A direct link is shown on the diagram between the Technical Factors of empowerment and the Psychological Factors, which would seem to contradict the basic premise, stated earlier, that Technical Factors are necessary but not sufficient to accomplish empowerment because providing the authority and resources necessary for independent action does not address the need for potential participants in that action to have a personal sense of efficacy and an inclination to take up the opportunities that are presented; that is, psychological empowerment. Does the environment directly affect one’s psychological state? Might the psychological state of empowerment not develop spontaneously if supportive conditions exist?

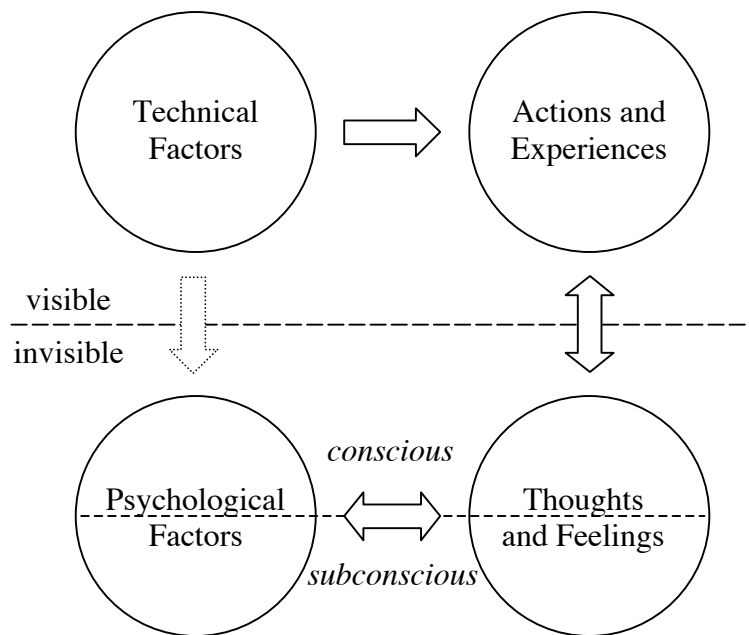


Figure 3.1

*Relationship of Psychological Factors of Empowerment
to Actions and Experiences*

Certainly it is the case that a person’s psyche is affected by the environment and Mezirow, for one, would argue that some learning is “mindlessly assimilative.” “Many beliefs are generalized from repetitive interactions outside of consciousness” (Mezirow 2000, 21). However, mindless assimilation of meanings from technical conditions and repetitive experience

is not a process to which one would want to entrust empowerment. For one thing, the process is very slow. Generally, it is not sufficient to simply wait for people to pick up cues from the environment and thus learn the lessons that they require to be empowered.

When Kegan (1994) explored the stages of adult development, he found the cumulative effect of life experiences to result in only some adults achieving a self-authoring state of mind, and then only after a long period of time. An intentionally structured environment might be more effective in this regard, but it seems unlikely that osmotic learning would be an adequate process for organizational development. Another reason for not depending on this process to produce empowerment is that it is unreliable in its effects. Individuals will draw very personal meanings and lessons from their environment that another person would not see and could not even predict. These may be similar to what is hoped for by the organization or entirely contrary, even if the environment is designed with care and appears to be exactly as it is intended, and, as Argyris (1998) reminds us, the environment is never exactly as we either intend or perceive it to be, and is quite likely to contain contrary influences and contradictions due to conscious or subconscious undermining of empowerment by managers who cling to a command and control style. So, the environment certainly does affect an individual's psychological state, but this influence is slow and unreliable, and it may just as easily be negative as positive for a particular individual despite our best conscious efforts to make it empowering.

While we cannot depend on the environment to change the psychological factors of empowerment, we equally cannot ignore its effect, and particularly not its harmful effect if the embedded messages in the environment contradict the change that is espoused. Therefore, careful attention should be paid to technical factors to ensure, insofar as that is possible, that they provide opportunities for empowered action and are free of negative influence. Ruohotie (2001; also Chapter 4) considers the prerequisites of empowerment and draws a parallel between them and the dimensions of a growth-oriented environment that nurtures the continuing development of professional qualifications and innovative practices in a workplace community. The support and encouragement of the management, the functioning of work teams, the incentive value of work, and the stress caused by work are all important factors that influence growth-orientation; the first three positively and the last one negatively.

- *Support and encouragement from management* occurs by rewarding competence, supporting the development of professional identity, supporting professional growth and career advancement, supporting personnel in their continuing professional growth, and building employee commitment to the organization.
- *Team work* is revealed by the willingness of team members to develop continuously, its members' ability to function and learn together, its team spirit, and its association with the organizational identity.
- The *incentive value of work* for professionals is determined by opportunities to learn, to have an impact and be acknowledged for one's work.
- *Work-related stress* can be an obstacle to professional growth. Ambivalence or vagueness of work roles, role conflicts, the mental burden caused by work, and demands for change may overtax individuals and suppress growth and development.

Growth-orientation is a characteristic of a work environment that would typically be considered to be an aspect of organizational culture, which is an important part of the Technical

Factors to be considered. Culture, which is a subtle metaphor and is variously defined, includes both visible procedural elements and invisible values and agreements that amount to a collective frame of reference. Therefore, one might modify Figure 3.1 to show the circle representative of Technical Factors extending below the line of visible elements and quite possibly even below the line of conscious elements. This has not been done because attempting to capture every nuance of the situation would complicate the diagram to the point that it would lose its communicative value in this context. However, it would be interesting, and probably profitable, to consider the process of empowerment from a collective rather than an individual perspective, in which case the cultural lens would provide a valuable perspective. Indeed, one might make interesting parallels to individual transformative learning when considering how cultural learning that alters a collective frame or reference occurs, how that process might best be promoted, what limitations there would be to it, and so on.

However, returning to our individual perspective on empowerment, we can conclude that while a supportive environment that encourages independent thought and action, provides opportunities for it, and acknowledges it when it occurs, is important, it is not sufficient to our purposes and thus intentional learning activities are required to stimulate a learning process that will accelerate the development of psychological empowerment beyond what might eventually occur naturally as an individual professional matures. Now, what might we say about this learning process?

Kegan and Lahey (2001) have described a “new technology” for personal learning in their book *Seven languages for transformation: How the way we talk can change the way we work*. Their approach employs four “languages” that break through the “dynamic equilibrium” that they see as working against the development of new frames of reference and three that sustain and extend new perspectives once they have emerged. This approach, which is based on 20 years of their research into developmental psychology and consulting work with many of the world’s major firms and institutions, represents one form of constructivism in action. Other consultants and academics have their own particular approach, which may be equally effective. Whatever the details of the particular approach to improving an individual’s state of psychological empowerment, it must attend to the need not only for incremental learning that enhances capacity within an existing frame of reference, but also for transformative learning that changes the frame of reference for individuals.

One interesting perspective on this process is provided by Argyris’ well-known conception of single and double learning. This idea is extended in Figure 3.2 to include a third loop. Argyris’ single loop learning may be equated to Kegan’s “socialized” mind operating in what he describes as a traditional frame of reference based on subjectivity and self-consciousness. Single loop learning would be described by Mezirow as occurring in an unconsidered and taken-for-granted frame of reference based on the psychosocial surround. We might describe this level of learning as competent, but not empowered. Argyris’ double loop learning may be equated to Kegan’s “self-authoring” mind operating in what he describes as a modern frame of reference based on self-regulation and self-formation. Double loop learning would be described by Mezirow as occurring in a transformed frame of reference that is self-aware, inclusive, differentiating, permeable, critically reflective of assumptions, emotionally capable of change, and integrative of experience. Double loop learning is what we are describing in this chapter as being required in order to achieve psychological empowerment. Triple loop learning may be equated to Kegan’s “self-transforming” mind operating in what he describes as a postmodern frame of reference

based on self-transformation and interpenetration of selves. This further stage of development, which is not discussed by Mezirow in his theory of transformative learning, represents a higher level of empowerment that goes beyond self-regulated learning and self-authoring actions to a state of democratic hospitality to alternative views that would fully embrace, indeed seek out as essential, opportunity for collaborative action with other self-authoring individuals.

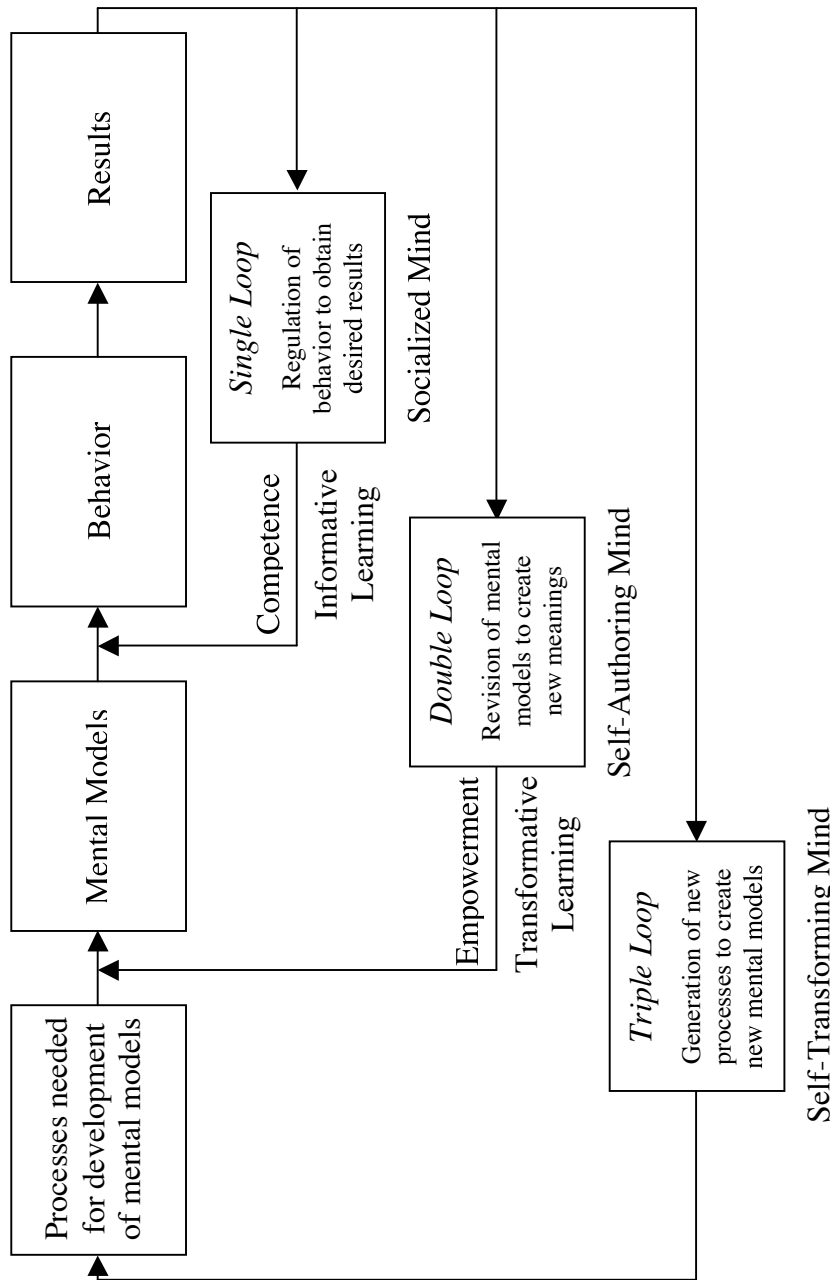


Figure 3.2

Single, Double and Triple Loop Learning

This particular confluence of theories is mentioned here only out of interest, and to suggest that psychological empowerment is itself a trait that will have inner structures and occur to various degrees and in various forms. Once initially achieved, it can continue to grow and there may be qualitatively higher levels of empowerment to be reached.

Returning to the generative question for this section, which concerns the process of empowerment, we conclude that it requires transformative learning, and that the complexity of transformative learning calls not only for sophisticated and sustained constructivist learning activities, but also for leadership that understands this complexity and provides the authority, opportunity, encouragement and support that it requires. Otherwise, not only will the learning be less likely to occur, but it may actually be undermined by contrary messages. It is to the topic of the conditions and actions that lead to empowerment that we will now turn our attention.

What administrative support does this process require?

Administration is described in Chapter 1 in terms of subcomponents of management and leadership. Management is a term with a long history of use and conceptual development in organizational and administrative theory that is generally well understood. Leadership on the other hand, like empowerment, is a relatively newer term in organizational theory and a much more enigmatic concept that is variously defined and, in general, does not enjoy a commonly held meaning. Therefore, before we begin to consider the administrative support that is required to promote the empowerment of professionals, we must pause to define these terms.

Management consists of those acts enabled by positional authority that are intended to ensure compliance to a job description and the rules and regulations of the organization. Management is based on rationality and mastery. It takes a mechanistic view of the organization as a bureaucracy and aims to be just, efficient and reliable. Leadership consists of those acts enabled by personal and professional influence that are intended to invite commitment to the values and purposes of an organization. Leadership is based on relationships and intimacy. It takes an organic view of the organization as a community and aims to be fair, effective and responsive.

The point of distinguishing between management and leadership is not to denigrate or elevate either. In particular, it is not intended to advocate leadership over management. Both are important and worthy aspects of administration without which organizations could not function. They are distinguished from each other as separate categories of action in order to increase the accuracy and precision of our thinking about organizational administration. Too often the terms are used as if they were synonyms, or as if leadership were simply a way of describing highly effective management practices. This careless use of terms leads to endless confusion in the literature on administration as well as in practice.

Management and leadership are complementary aspects of administration. However, they are also contradictory in various ways and this makes it difficult for one person to both manage and lead simultaneously with equal success (Beairsto 1999, see also Chapter 1). With respect to the process of empowerment that has been described previously, management actions are required to put in place the technical factors that will support empowerment. This is done by applying the authority of the manager's office to articulate the intention to empower, make the

necessary structural changes, provide the necessary resources and reward empowered actions when they occur. This is best done with care, tact and consultation, but it is fundamentally a matter of rightful authority to impose. Management actions are appropriate and effective for many purposes, but they are not well suited to eliciting the learning that will enhance psychological empowerment. This calls for leadership, which cannot be imposed or required in any way and is fundamentally a matter of invitation and motivation.

The leadership aspects of the administrative support that is required, being the more complex and less understood, are the focus of the discussion that follows. It is assumed that the management aspects, while they may present logistical challenges, are, for the most part, conceptually clear.

Our discussion of leadership in the process of empowerment will not consider the characteristics of leaders themselves, but the actions that administrators must take in order to provide the required leadership. However, as a preliminary comment, it must be noted that an administrator who has him/herself not yet achieved a psychological state of empowerment, or what Kegan (1994; 2000) calls a self-authoring mind, is liable to find it difficult to support others in making that transition. Ideally, of course, one would even like the administrator to have a self-transforming mind that actively seeks out and understands the necessity of contrary points of view in achieving understanding, but at a minimum one can say that a person with a socialized mind who is him/herself locked within an unconsidered frame of reference, that to him or her is “subject” rather than “object,” will find it difficult to motivate and support others in the conscious, critical reconsideration and reframing that is required in the transformative learning that leads to empowerment. Not only will administrators who are not themselves empowered be hard pressed to support the empowerment of others, they are probably at risk to sabotage empowerment efforts by continuing to use command-and-control strategies inappropriately.

In saying this, it is not intended to suggest that command-and-control strategies are entirely inappropriate and must not be used in an organization that aspires to empowered behaviors, but rather that such strategies, which are fundamental to management actions, should be used consciously and advisedly for appropriate purposes. Otherwise, they will be perceived as contradictory to the stated intention of empowerment and will work against that intention. (This is an example of the more general dilemma posed by the fact that organizational administration necessarily includes both management and leadership functions, even though they are contradictory in some ways. The challenge is to use each approach for the right purposes at the right times and with the understanding of all involved as to why that is the case.)

Having noted this serious problem, it would be nice to suggest a tidy solution, but the best advice we can give is to use an awareness of the issue to motivate a high level of conscious effort to providing as much scaffolding and supervision as possible to assist administrators in behaving in ways that do not detract from empowerment programs through unintended contradictions. The administrators themselves would be well advised to be very overt about their decisions to utilize authority or provide latitude for independent thought and action, and how and why they have selected either approach in each situation. In this way, employees will at least be clear about what is being done. Of course, they may disagree or second guess but they will not be confused and are therefore less likely to experience frustration or be cynical about the empowerment initiative. In fact, making administrative decision-making visible in this way may invite more critical reflection about it and also about the employee’s own beliefs and behaviors.

Now, having cautioned against actions that can detract from empowerment, what can we say about actions that will enhance empowerment? As previously noted, developing a state of psychological empowerment is a learning task, so the support that is required may be thought of as a teaching task. Teaching, like administration, involves both management and leadership. Management is required for the organizational aspects; lesson planning, record keeping, classroom routines and so on. The instructional aspects of teaching also involve management, primarily in the presentation of information and explanation of activities. However, a skillfully managed classroom is still a dreary and soul-less place unless there is some leadership at work. Leadership provides the inspiration and the excitement that fuels inquiry. It is a social act of relationship that breathes life into the structure that management creates and motivates students to be curious about the subject matter and confident in their ability to master it. Rote learning is possible without leadership, but real understanding is unlikely to develop without it. Management without leadership creates an empty shell of compliance without the commitment, confidence and creativity that are required to move beyond mere competence to excellence. Of course, leadership without management can easily be chaotic and self-indulgent without the focus or structure required for accomplishment, so both are required. As stated earlier, however, leadership is the more complex and challenging of the two aspects of teaching or administration and consequently that is the focus of our attention.

Lord and Smith (1999) have proposed a model for thinking about leadership as a social act of invitation and inspiration that leads to learning and growth as well as changes in behavior. An adaptation of their model is presented graphically in Figure 3.3. (It should be noted that this adaptation retains the general structure of the original but does not employ the detailed descriptions of factors employed by Lord and Smith. Moreover, the dynamics of the model have been adapted to the purposes of this discussion.)

This model is intended mainly to describe leadership in dyadic superior-subordinate relationships rather than at the unit or organizational level. Leadership was defined by Lord and Smith (1999, 195) as “a social perception, grounded in social-cognitive psychological theory, that produces an influence increment for the perceived leader.” The observation that leadership must be perceived in order to be experienced is an important one. Leadership is invitational and those who are being led are the ones who determine how much influence they will ascribe to the leader. In a sense, leadership is an attribute of the relationship rather than a quality possessed by the leader. The primary point, however, is that leadership is an influence relationship that is dependent on social perception. Thus, an administrator may be able to exercise more leadership with some people than with others. In fact, given the diversity of perspectives, understandings and needs amongst those who are being supervised, it should be expected that the degree of leadership that can be exercised will vary with the individual, just as a teacher is better able to inspire some students than others.

An important question, therefore, which the model is intended to answer, is how leaders can maximize their legitimacy and thus their influence and effectiveness in the social relationship with subordinates. Lord and Smith look to cognitive and affective processes within the subordinate to better understand his or her response to the relationship. Of course the leader is also a human being with an underlying psychology of perceptions and needs, so that fully understanding this relationship would require an examination of both parts of the dyad and how they interact. However, this discussion will be limited to the psychological dynamics of the subordinate.

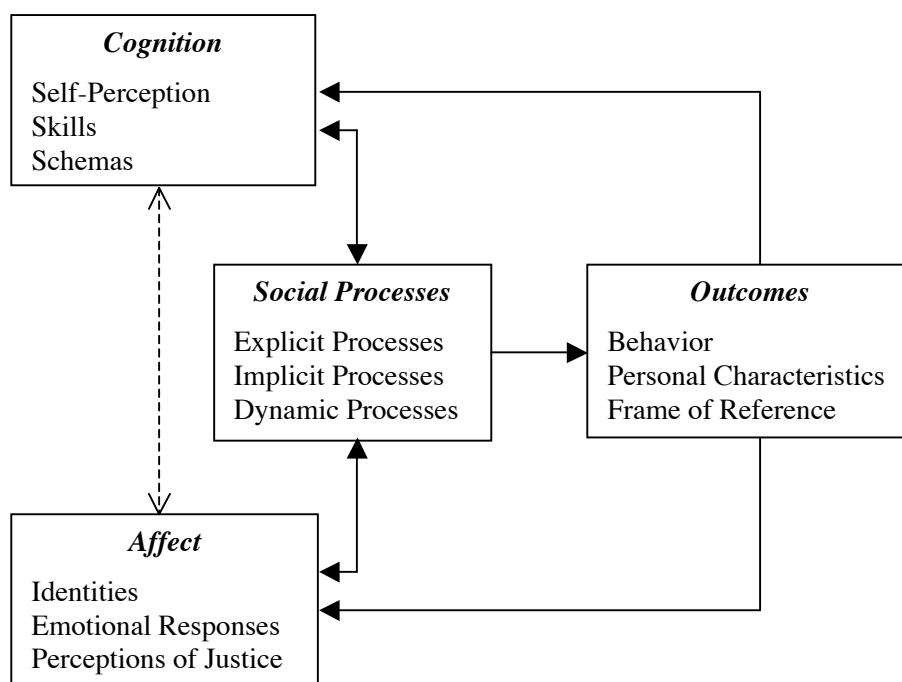


Figure 3.3

The Social Processes of Leadership
(Adapted from Lord & Smith 1996, 196)

Cognitive factors that affect the subordinate's perceptions, decisions and behaviors are clustered in terms of self-perceptions, skills and schemas. Affective factors are clustered as identities, emotional responses and perceptions of justice. The cognitive and affective factors are connected by a dotted line to acknowledge their interdependence.

Self-perceptions include all the psychological aspects of motivation and volition that affect self-regulated learning. Skills include both technical and social understandings and abilities. Schemas include worldviews related to personal background and experience as well as task-related schemas such as mental models and the general frame of reference that the individual brings to understanding personal and professional issues.

The individual's identities include personal identity, which is a self-categorization based on perceived similarities and differences with other individuals, and social identity, which is based on perceived similarities and differences with groups or social categories. Emotional responses may override rational assessment and are generally more determinant of social perception and relationships. Perceptions of justice are related to both procedural and distributive issues. Perceptions of procedural justice within a relationship are particularly important in establishing either authority-based or legitimacy-based relationships.

The subordinate's cognitive and affective characteristics, as briefly summarized in the diagram and described more fully in psychological theory, both shape and are modified by his or her social interactions, in particular by social interaction with a leader. Consequently, the lines

connecting them to the social interaction box run in both directions. This is the most important part of the model because it is in the social relationship between the supervisor and the subordinate that leadership is exercised. For this discussion the types of social interaction are classified as explicit, implicit or dynamic.

Explicit social interactions are all those perceived interactions that are the focus of policy and training by the organization and receive the conscious attention of the supervisor and the subordinate. Within these interactions it is the job of the administrator to win the respect of the subordinate in order to be able to influence him or her beyond what formal authority will permit, and thus to exercise leadership. Influence can be logically expected to accrue to the extent that the administrator is capable, fair, caring and helpful. However, there is no guarantee. The point of the model is to make it abundantly clear that the subordinate's responses and perceptions are a result not only of the administrator's actions but also of the subordinate's cognitive and affective response. The self-concept of the subordinate, his or her skills and the mental models and general frame of reference which he or she brings to the relationship are what will determine the meaning that is made, and therefore the reality that is perceived. It is the subordinate's perception that is the only reality of significance in determining the influence that he or she will accept or experience, and therefore the leadership that can be exercised. The subordinate's affective response based on his or her sense of identity relative to the supervisor, emotional response to him or her and perceptions of procedural justice in their interaction will also condition the response and therefore the relationship. Indeed, these affective factors may dominate in some cases.

Relationships are bilateral, but the message here is that the subordinate's response is dependent on cognitive and affective factors that lie outside the control, and largely outside the knowledge, of the administrator. A detailed analysis of this issue would require consideration of the same factors within the administrator, as well as the larger social context within which the relationship exists. That detailed psychological analysis is not, however, required to understand the point. Leadership is an influence relationship and influence is something that must be won. It is voluntarily granted by one person to another and cannot be coerced or required.

Needless to say, coercive influence may be exercised by using either incentives or sanctions but this type of influence will not be effective in the leadership task we are discussing, which is assisting subordinates in transformative learning that will cause them to change their frame of reference and achieve a self-authoring psychological state. The learning task that is required will be stimulated only by invitation, never by insistence. Expectations, accompanied by high levels of encouragement and support, are appropriate and generally effective, but coercion is counter-productive to learning. Honest feedback is helpful if it is given within the context of a supportive relationship and it is provided in constructive ways along with the resources required for it to be utilized. Consistent acknowledgement and encouragement helps the subordinate to receive critical feedback, as does a generous dose of positive feedback given at the same time.

Even highly skilled administrators who take great care in every respect and who have proven themselves to be successful leaders in the past may fail to exert much leadership over some employees because they are unable to establish the necessary relationship of trust and regard within which they can exercise influence over the individual's learning and growth. This may be purely a matter of circumstances and imply no flaw or fault on either side. Skilled administrators and willing subordinates should succeed much more often than they fail, but it would be

unrealistic to expect leadership to be possible all the time. Compliant competence may be all that can be achieved in some supervisory relationships at some times. Empowerment may be a bridge too far.

The complexity of this explicit social interaction is only exacerbated when one considers the range of implicit processes that occur below the level of consciousness of either party. Moreover, the dynamic interaction between explicit and implicit aspects of the social relationship adds further complexity, particularly when the cumulative effect of these variables over time is considered.

So, the message is clear. Leadership is an influence relationship based on social perceptions that result from personal interpretations and attributions that arise due to a complex array of cognitive and affective factors. Leadership influence can be won and freely granted, but it cannot be demanded or required, and thus it will not always be possible.

Now, in the case that leadership is successfully exercised, what types of outcomes can there be. The first possibility is behavioral change, particularly increased enthusiasm, application and creativity. Effective leadership stimulates personal commitment that carries employees beyond mere compliance. The second possibility is that the subordinate may change his or her cognitive and affective factors in ways that make future leadership more likely. The third possibility, and the goal of leadership within an empowerment program, is that the subordinate will be caused to critically reflect on his or her frame of reference and thus become more self-aware and self-authoring, with the result that he or she is enabled and encouraged to think independently and to have the confidence to act independently; that is, to become more psychologically empowered.

Evidence of such a change may be found by observing behaviors such as those proposed by Herrenkohl et al (1999) for the assessment instrument mentioned earlier in the chapter— particularly the team, risk taking and trust sub-categories— but a more detailed personal psychological assessment would be required reveal that the subordinate has increased metacognitive ability with respect to self and context in a way that truly indicates psychological empowerment. If Kegan's (1994; 2000) constructive-developmental theory is correct then there may be a personal paradigm shift for the individual at some point that is quite distinct, but that does not mean that once such a qualitative change has occurred there is no room and need for continuing attention and growth. Psychological empowerment is an attribute rather than an absolute characteristic and thus individuals should be expected to continue to develop this attribute over the course of their career.

Conclusion

In this dynamic information age, professionals and others need to continue learning throughout their lifetime in order to retain and enhance their competence. Consequently, organizations should endeavor to empower their professional staff to be lifelong learners. Empowerment requires technical support and opportunities, but these necessary conditions are not sufficient. Psychological empowerment that includes the capability and inclination to engage in lifelong inquiry and learning requires an individual to move beyond a socialized psychological state to a self-authoring state through a transformative learning experience that causes him or her to develop a new and empowered personal frame of reference. Such learning cannot be left to chance. It requires sophisticated programs of learning activities based on constructivist

approaches that will stimulate reflection leading not only to incremental learning but also to changes in an individual's basic assumptions and perceptions. This learning experience cannot be required or coerced, but it can be stimulated and encouraged through a social leadership process that is based on a freely granted influence relationship between an administrator and the other members of an organization.

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