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Organizational Behavior (Mgt 502)
Semester: Spring 2009

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Leadership: The Art of Empowering Others

Jay A. Conger
McGill University

"One ought to be both feared and loved, but as it is difficult for the two to go together, it is much safer to be feared than loved. . . for love is held by a chain of obligation which, men being selfish, is broken whenever it serves their purpose; but fear is maintained by a dread of punishment which never fails."

The Prince, Niccolo Machiavelli

In his handbook, The Prince, Machiavelli assures his readers — some being aspiring leaders, no doubt — that only by carefully amassing power and building a fearsome respect could one become a great leader. While the shadowy court life of 16th-century Italy demanded such treachery to ensure one's power, it seems hard to imagine Machiavelli's advice today as anything but a historical curiosity. Yet, interestingly, much of the management literature has focused on the strategies and tactics that managers can use to increase their own power and influence. As such, a Machiavellian quality often pervades the literature, encouraging managers to ensure that their power base is strong and growing. At the same time a small but increasing number of management theorists have begun to explore the idea that organizational effectiveness also depends on the sharing of power — that the distribution of power is more important than the hoarding of power.

While the idea of making others feel more powerful contradicts the stereotype of the all-powerful executive, research suggests that the traditional ways of explaining a leader's influence may not be entirely correct. For example, recent leadership studies argue that the practice of empowering — or instilling a sense of power — is at the root of organizational effectiveness, especially during times of transition and transformation. In addition, studies of power and control within organizations indicate that the more productive forms of organizational power increase with superiors' sharing of power and responsibility with subordinates. And while there is an increasing awareness of this need for more empowering leadership, we have only recently started to see documentation about the actual practices that leaders employ to effectively build a sense of power among organizational members as well as the contexts most suited for empowerment practices.

In this article, I will explore these practices further by drawing upon a recent study of senior executives who proved themselves highly effective leaders. They were selected by a panel of professors at the Harvard Business School and management consultants who were well acquainted with them and their companies. The study included eight chief executive officers and executive vice-presidents of Fortune 500 companies and successful entrepreneurial firms, representing industries as diverse as telecommunications, office automation, retail banking, beverages, packaged foods, and management consulting. In each case, these individuals were responsible for either the creation of highly successful companies or for performing what were described as remarkable turnarounds. During my study of these executives, I conducted extensive interviews, observed them on the job, read company and other documents, and talked with their colleagues and subordinates. While the study focused on the broader issue of leadership styles, intensive interviews with these executives and their subordinates revealed that many were characterized as empowering leaders. Their actions were perceived as building confidence and restoring a sense of personal power and self-efficacy during difficult organizational transitions. From this study, I identified certain organizational contexts of powerlessness and management practices derived to remedy them.

In this article I will also illustrate several of these practices through a series of vignettes. While the reader may recognize some of the basic ideas behind these practices (such as providing greater opportunities for initiative), it is often the creative manner in which the leader deploys the particular practice that distinguishes them. The reader will discover how they have been carefully tailored to fit the context at hand. I might add, however, that these practices represent just a few of the broad repertoire of actions that leaders can take to make an empowering difference in their organizations.
A Word About Empowerment

We can think of empowerment as the act of strengthening an individual's beliefs in his or her sense of effectiveness. In essence, then, empowerment is not simply a set of external actions; it is a process of changing the internal beliefs of people.\(^5\) We know from psychology that individuals believe themselves powerful when they feel they can adequately cope with environmental demands — that is, situations, events, and people they confront. They feel powerless when they are unable to cope with these demands. Any management practice that increases an individual's sense of self-determination will tend to make that individual feel more powerful. The theory behind these ideas can be traced to the work of Alfred Bandura, who conceptualized the notion of self-efficacy beliefs and their role in an individual's sense of personal power in the world.\(^7\)

From his research in psychology, Bandura identified four means of providing empowering information to others: (1) through positive emotional support during experiences associated with stress and anxiety, (2) through words of encouragement and positive persuasion, (3) by observing others' effectiveness — in other words, having models of success with whom people identified — and (4) by actually experiencing the mastering of a task with success (the most effective source). Each of these sources of empowerment was used by the study executives and will be identified in the practice examples, as will other sources identified by organizational researchers.

Several Empowering Management Practices

Before describing the actual practices, it is important to first draw attention to an underlying attitude of the study participants. These empowering leaders shared a strong underlying belief in their subordinates' abilities. It is essentially the Theory Y argument;\(^8\) if you believe in people's abilities, they will come to believe in them. All the executives in the study believed that their subordinates were capable of managing their current situations. They did not employ wholesale firings as a means of transforming their organizations. Rather, they retained the majority of their staff and moved those who could not perform up to standard to positions where they could. The essential lesson is that an assessment of staff skills is imperative before embarking on a program of empowerment. This basic belief in employees' abilities underlies the following examples of management practices designed to empower. We will begin with the practice of providing positive emotional support.

1. The Squirt-gun Shootouts: Providing a Positive Emotional Atmosphere. An empowering practice that emerged from the study was that of providing positive emotional support, especially through play or drama. For example, every few months, several executives would stage dramatic "up sessions" to sustain the motivation and excitement of their staff. They would host an afternoon-long, or a one- or two-day event devoted solely to confidence building. The event would open with an uplifting speech about the future, followed by a special, inspirational speaker. At these events there would often be films meant to build excitement or confidence — for example, a film depicting a mountain climber ascending a difficult peak. The message being conveyed is that this person is finding satisfaction in the work he or she does at an extraordinary level of competence. There would also be rewards for exceptional achievements. These sessions acted as ceremonies to enhance the personal status and identity of employees and revive the common feelings that bound them together.\(^9\)

An element of play appears to be especially liberating in situations of great stress and demoralization. In the study's examples, play allowed for the venting of frustrations and in turn permitted individuals to regain a sense of control by stepping back from their pressures for a moment. As Bandura suggests, the positive emotional support provided by something like play alleviates, to some extent, concerns about personal efficacy.\(^10\)

For example, one of the subjects of the study, Bill Jackson, was appointed the head of a troubled division. Demand had outstripped the division's ability to maintain adequate inventories, and product quality had slipped. Jackson's predecessors were authoritarian managers, and subordinates were demoralized as well as paranoid about keeping their jobs. As one told me, "You never knew who would be shot next." Jackson felt that he had to break the tension in a way that would allow his staff to regain their sense of control and power. He wanted to remove the stiffness and paranoia and turn what subordinates perceived as an impossible task into something more fun and manageable.

So, I was told, at the end of his first staff meeting, Jackson quietly pulled out a squirt-gun and blasted one of his managers with water. At first, there was a moment of stunned silence, and then suddenly the room was flooded with laughter. He remarked with a smile, "You gotta have fun in this business. It's not worth having your stomach in ulcers." This began a month of squirt-gun fights between Jackson and his managers.

The end result? A senior manager's comment is representative: "He wanted people to feel comfortable, to feel in control. He used water guns to do that. It was a game. It took the stiffness out of the business, allowed people to play in a safe environment — as the boss says, 'to have fun.'" This play restored rapport and morale. But Jackson also knew when to stop. A senior manager told me, "We haven't used waterguns in nine months. It has served its purpose... The water fights were like being accepted into a club. Once it achieved its purpose, it would have been overdone."
Interview after interview with subordinates confirmed the effectiveness of the squirt-gun incident. It had been experienced as an empowering ritual. In most contexts, this behavior would have been abusive. Why did it work? Because it is a management practice that fits the needs of subordinates at the appropriate time.

The executive’s staff consisted largely of young men, “rough and ready” individuals who could be described as fun-loving and playful. They were accustomed to an informal atmosphere and operated in a very down-to-earth style. Jackson’s predecessor, on the other hand, had been stiff and formal.

Jackson preferred to manage more informally. He wanted to convey, quickly and powerfully, his intentions of managing in a style distinct from his predecessor’s. He was concerned, however, that his size — he is a very tall, energetic, barrel-chested man — as well as his extensive background in manufacturing would be perceived as intimidating by his young staff and increase their reluctance to assume initiative and control. Through the squirt-gun fights, however, he was able to (1) relieve a high level of tension and restore some sense of control, (2) emphasize the importance of having fun in an otherwise trying work environment, and (3) direct subordinates’ concerns away from his skills and other qualities that intimidated them. It was an effective management practice because he understood the context. In another setting, it might have been counter-productive.

2. The “I Make a Difference” Club: Rewarding and Encouraging in Visible and Personal Ways. The majority of executives in the study rewarded the achievements of their staffs by expressing personal praise and rewarding in highly visible and confidence-building ways. They believed that people appreciated recognition of their hard work and success. Rewards of high incentive value were particularly important, especially those of personal recognition from the leader. As Rosabeth Kanter notes, a sense of power comes “... when one has relatively close contact with sponsors (higher level people who confer approval, prestige, or backing).”11 Combined with words of praise and positive encouragement, such experiences become important sources of empowerment.

The executives in the study took several approaches to rewards. To reward exceptional performance, one executive established the “I Make a Difference Club.” Each year, he selects two or three staff members to be recognized for their excellence on the job. It is a very exclusive club, and only the executive knows the eligibility rules, which are based on outstanding performance. Inductees are invited to dinner in New York City but are not told beforehand that they are about to join the “I Make a Difference Club.” They arrive and meet with other staff members whom they believe are there for a staff dinner. During dinner, everyone is asked to speak about what is going on in his or her part of the company. The old-timers speak first, followed by the inductees (who are still unaware of their coming induction). Only after they have given their speeches are they informed that they have just joined the club. As one manager said, “It’s one of the most wonderful moments in life.”

This executive and others also make extensive use of personal letters to individuals thanking them for their efforts and projects. A typical letter might read, “Fred, I would personally like to thank you for your contribution to ______, and I want you to know that I appreciate it.” Lunches and dinners are hosted for special task accomplishments.

Public recognition is also employed as a means of rewarding. As one subordinate commented about his boss,

“He will make sure that people know that so and so did an excellent job on something. He’s superb on giving people credit. If the person has done an exceptional job on a task or project, he will be given the opportunity to present his or her findings all the way to the board. Six months later, you’ll get a call from a friend and learn that he has dropped your name in a speech that you did well. It makes you want to do it again.”

I found that the investment in rewards and recognition made by many of these executives is unusually high, consuming a significant portion of their otherwise busy day. Yet the payoff appeared high. In interviews, subordinates described these rewards as having an empowering impact on them.

To understand why some of these rewards proved to be so successful, one must understand their organizational contexts. In some cases, the organizations studied were quite large, if not enormous. The size of these organizations did little to develop in employees a sense of an “I” — let alone an “I” that makes a difference. It was easy for organization members to feel lost in the hierarchy and for their achievements to be invisible, for recognition not to be received for personal contributions. The study’s executives countered this tendency by institutionalizing a reward system that provided visibility and recognition — for example, the “I Make a Difference Club,” presentations to the Board, and names dropped in speeches. Suddenly, you as a member of a large organization stood out — you were special.

Outstanding performance from each of the executives’ perspectives was also something of a necessity. All the executives had demanding goals to achieve. As such, they had to tend to subordinates’ sense of importance and contribution. They had to structure reward systems that would keep people “pumped up” — that would ensure that their confidence and commitment would not be eroded by the pressures placed on them.

3. “Praising the Troops”: Expressing Confidence. The empowering leaders in the study spent significant amounts of time expressing their confidence in subordinates’ abilities. Moreover, they expressed their confidence throughout each day — in speeches, in meetings, and casually in office hallways. Bandura comments that “people who are persuaded verbally that they possess the capabilities to master given tasks are likely to mobilize greater sustained effort than if they harbor self-doubts and dwell on personal deficiencies when difficulties arise.”12
A quote from Irwin Federman, CEO of Monolithic Memories, a highly successful high-tech company, captures the essence and power of a management practice that builds on this process:

"If you think about it, we love others not for who they are, but for how they make us feel. In order to willingly accept the direction of another individual, it must make you feel good to do so. . . . If you believe what I'm saying, you cannot help but come to the conclusion that those you have followed passionately, gladly, zealously — have made you feel like somebody. . . . This business of making another person feel good in the unspectacular course of his daily comings and goings is, in my view, the very essence of leadership."

This proactive attitude is exemplified by Bob Jensen. Bob assumed control of his bank’s retail operations after a reorganization that transferred away the division’s responsibility for large corporate clients. Demoralized by a perceived loss in status and responsibility, branch managers were soon asking, "Where’s our recognition?" Bob, however, developed an inspiring strategic vision to transform the operation. He then spent much of his time championing his strategy and expressing his confidence in employees’ ability to carry it out. Most impressive was his personal canvass of some 175 retail branches.

As he explained,

"I saw that the branch system was very down, morale was low. They felt like they’d lost a lot of their power. There were serious problems and a lot of staff were just hiding. What I saw was that we really wanted to create a small community for each branch where customers would feel known. To do that, I needed to create an attitude change. I saw that the attitudes of the branch staff were a reflection of the branch manager. The approach then was a manageable job — now I had to focus on only 250 people, the branch managers, rather than the 3,000 staff employees out there. I knew I had to change their mentality from being lost in a bureaucracy to feeling like the president of their own bank. I had to convince them they were special — that they had the power to transform the organization. . . . All I did was talk it up. I was up every night. In one morning, I hit 17 branches. My goal was to sell a new attitude. To encourage people to 'pump iron.' I'd say, 'Hi, how's business,' encourage them. I'd arrange tours of the branches for the chairman on down. I just spent a lot of time talking to these people — explaining that they were the ones who could transform the organization."

It was an important tactic — one that made the branch managers feel special and important. It was also countercultural. As one executive told me, “Bob would go out into the field to visit the operations, which was very unusual for senior people in this industry.” His visits heightened the specialness that branch managers felt. In addition, Bob modeled self-confidence and personal success — an important tactic to build a sense of personal effectiveness among subordinates.14

I also watched Jack Eaton, president of a regional telephone company, praise his employees in large corporate gatherings, in executive council meetings, and in casual encounters. He explained his philosophy:

"I have a fundamental belief and trust in the ability and conscientiousness of others. I have a lot of good people. You can turn them loose, let them feel good about their accomplishments. . . . You ought to recognize accomplishment as well as build confidence. I generally do it in small ways. If someone is doing well, it's important to express your confidence to that person — especially among his peers. I tend to do it personally. I try to be genuine. I don't throw around a lot of b.s.”

This practice proved especially important during the transition of the regional phone companies away from the parent organization.

4. "President of My Own Bank": Fostering Initiative and Responsibility. Discretion is a critical power component of any job.15 By simply fostering greater initiative and responsibility in subordinates’ tasks, a leader can empower organizational members. Bob Jensen, the bank executive, is an excellent example of how one leader created opportunities for greater initiative despite the confines of his subordinates’ positions. He transformed what had been a highly constricted branch manager’s job into a branch “president” concept. The idea was simple — every manager was made to feel like the president of his own community bank, and not just in title. Goals, compensation, and responsibilities were all changed to foster this attitude. Existing measurement systems were completely restructured. The value-of-fundsgenerated had been the principal yardstick — something over which branch managers had only very limited control because of interest rate fluctuations. Managers were now evaluated on what they could control — that is, deposits. Before, branch managers had rotated every couple of years. Now they stayed put. “If I’m moving around, then I’m not the president of my own bank, so we didn’t move them anymore,” Jensen explained. He also decentralized responsibilities that had resided higher in the hierarchy — allowing the branch manager to hire, give money to charities, and so on. In addition, a new ad agency was hired to mark the occasion, and TV ads were made showing the branch managers being in charge, rendering personal services themselves. The branch managers even thought up the ad lines.
What Jensen did so skillfully was recognize that his existing managers had the talent and energy to turn their operations around successfully, but that their sense of power was missing. He recognized their pride had been hurt and that he needed to restore a sense of ownership and self-importance. He had to convince his managers through increased authority that they were no longer “pawns” of the system — that they were indeed “presidents” of their own banks.

Another example — this one demonstrating a more informal delegation of initiative — was quite surprising. The setting was a highly successful and rapidly growing computer firm, and the study participant was the vice-president of manufacturing. The vice-president had recently been hired away from another firm and was in the process of revamping manufacturing. During the process, he discovered that his company’s costs on its terminal video monitors were quite high. However, he wanted his staff to discover the problem for themselves and to “own” the solution. So one day, he placed behind his desk a black-and-white Sony TV with a placard on top saying $69.95. Next to it he placed a stripped-down version of the company’s monitor with a placard of $125.95. Both placards reflected the actual costs of the two products. He never said a word. But during the day as staff and department managers entered their boss’s office, they couldn’t help but notice the two sets. They quickly got the message that their monitor was costing twice as much as a finished TV set. Within a month, the manufacturing team had lowered the monitor’s costs by 40%.

My first impression on hearing this story was that, as a subordinate, I would be hard pressed not to get the point and, more important, I would wonder why the boss was not more direct. Ironically, the boss appears to be hitting subordinates over the head with the problem. Out of context, then, this example hardly seems to make others feel more competent and powerful. Yet staff described themselves as “turned on” and motivated by this behavior. Why, I wondered? A little history will illustrate the effectiveness of this action.

The vice-president’s predecessor had been a highly dictatorial individual. He tightly controlled his staff’s actions and stifled any sense of discretion. Implicitly, his behavior said to subordinates, “You have no ideas of your own.” He fired freely, leaving staff to feel that they had little choice in whether to accept his orders or not. By his actions, he essentially transformed his managers into powerless order-takers.

When the new vice-president arrived, he found a group of demoralized subordinates whom he felt were nonetheless quite talented. To restore initiative, he began to demonstrate the seriousness of his intentions in highly visible and symbolic ways. For example, rather than tell his subordinates what to do, he started by seeding ideas and suggestions in humorous and indirect ways. The TV monitor is only one of many examples. Through these actions, he was able eventually to restore a sense of initiative and personal competence to his staff. While these examples are illustrative of effective changes in job design, managers contemplating job enrichment would be well advised to consult the existing literature and research before undertaking major projects.16

5. Early Victories: Building on Success. Many of the executives in the study reported that they often introduced organizational change through pilot or otherwise small and manageable projects. They designed these projects to ensure early success for their organizations. For example, instead of introducing a new sales structure nationwide, they would institute the change in one region; a new technology would have a pilot introduction at a single plant rather than systemwide. Subordinates described these early success experiences as strongly reinforcing their sense of power and efficacy. As Mike Beer argues:

“In order for change to spread throughout an organization and become a permanent fixture, it appears that early successes are needed... When individuals, groups, and whole organizations feel more competent than they did before the change, this increased sense of competence reinforces the new behavior and solidifies learning associated with change.”27

An individual’s sense of mastery through actual experience is the most effective means of increasing self-efficacy.28 When subordinates are given more complex and difficult tasks, they are presented with opportunities to test their competence. Initial success experiences will make them feel more capable and, in turn, empowered. Structuring organizational changes to ensure initial successes builds on this principle.

Contexts of Powerlessness

The need to empower organizational members becomes more important in certain contexts. Thus, it is important to identify conditions within organizations that might foster a sense of powerlessness. Certain circumstances, for instance, appear to lower feelings of self-efficacy. In these cases, subordinates typically perceive themselves as lacking control over their immediate situation (e.g., a major reorganization threatens to displace responsibility and involves limited or no subordinate participation),29 or lacking the required capability, resources, or discretion needed to accomplish a task (e.g., the development of new and difficult-to-learn skills for the introduction of a new technological process).30 In either case, these experiences maximize feelings of inadequacy and lower self-confidence. They, in turn, appear to lessen motivation and effectiveness.

Exhibit 1 identifies the more common organizational factors that affect these self-efficacy or personal power beliefs and contribute to feelings of powerlessness. They include organizational factors, supervisory styles, reward systems, and job design.
Exhibit 1

Context Factors Leading to Potential State of Powerlessness

Organizational Factors:

- Significant organizational changes/transitions
- Start-up ventures
- Excessive, competitive pressures
- Impersonal bureaucratic climate
- Poor communications and limited network-forming systems
- Highly centralized organizational resources

Supervisory Style:

- Authoritarian (high control)
- Negativism (emphasis on failures)
- Lack of reason for actions/consequences

Reward Systems:

- Noncontingency (arbitrary reward allocations)
- Low incentive value of rewards
- Lack of competence-based rewards
- Lack of innovation-based rewards

Job Design:

- Lack of role clarity
- Lack of training and technical support
- Unrealistic goals
- Lack of appropriate authority/discretion
- Low task variety
- Limited participation in programs, meetings, and decisions that have a direct impact on job performance
- Lack of appropriate/necessary resources
- Lack of networking-forming opportunities
- Highly established work routines
- Too many rules and guidelines
- Low advancement opportunities
- Lack of meaningful goals/tasks
- Limited contact with senior management


In new venture situations, uncertainty often appears around the ultimate success of the company’s strategy. A major role for leaders is to build an inspiring picture of the firm’s future and convince organizational members of their ability to achieve that future. Yet, market lead times are often long, and tangible results may be slow in coming. Long work hours with few immediate rewards can diminish confidence. Frustration can build, and questions about the organization’s future can arise. In addition, the start-up’s success and responses to growth can mean constant change in responsibility, pushing managers into responsibilities where they have had little prior experience; thus, failure may be experienced initially as new responsibilities are learned. Entrepreneurial executives may be reluctant to relinquish their control as expansion continues.

Bureaucratic environments are especially conducive to creating conditions of powerlessness. As Peter Block points out, bureaucracy encourages dependency and submission because of its top-down contract between the organization and employees. Rules, routines, and traditions define what can and cannot be done, allowing little room for initiative and discretion to develop. Employees’ behavior is often guided by rules over which they have no say and which may no longer be effective, given the present-day context.

From the standpoint of supervision, authoritarian management styles can strip away subordinates’ discretion and, in turn, a sense of power. Under an authoritarian manager, subordinates inevitably come to believe that they have little control — that they and their careers are subject to the whims or demands of their boss. The problem becomes acute when capable subordinates begin to attribute their powerlessness to internal factors, such as their own personal competence, rather than to external factors such as the nature of the boss’s temperament.

Rewards are another critical area for empowerment. Organizations that do not provide valued rewards or simply do not reward employees for initiative, competence, and innovation are creating conditions of powerlessness. Finally, jobs with little meaningful challenge, or jobs where the task is unclear, conflicting, or excessively demanding can lower employees’ sense of self-efficacy.

Implications for Managers

Managers can think of the empowerment process as involving several stages. Managers might want to begin by identifying for themselves whether any of the organizational problems and characteristics described in this article are present in their own firms. In addition, managers assuming new responsibilities should conduct an organizational diagnosis that clearly identifies their current situation, and possible problems and their causes. Attention should be aimed at understanding the recent history of the organization. Important questions to ask would be: What was my predecessor’s supervisory style? Has there been a recent organizational change that negatively affected my subordinates? How is my...
operation perceived by the rest of the corporation? Is there a sense of disenfranchisement? Am I planning to change significantly the outlook of this operation that would challenge traditional ways of doing things? How are people rewarded? Are jobs designed to be motivating?

Once conditions contributing to feelings of powerlessness are identified, the managerial practices identified in this article and in the management literature can be used to provide self-efficacy information to subordinates. This information in turn can result in an empowering experience for subordinates and may ultimately lead to greater initiative, motivation, and persistence.

However, in applying these practices, it is imperative that managers tailor their actions to fit the context at hand. For example, in the case of an authoritarian predecessor, you are more likely to need praise and confidence-building measures and greater opportunities for job discretion. With demanding organizational goals and tasks, the practices of confidence building and active rewarding, an element of play, and a supportive environment are perhaps most appropriate. The specific character of each practice must necessarily vary somewhat to fit your particular situation. For instance, what makes many of the previous examples so important is that the executives responded with practices that organizational members could relate to or that fit their character — for instance, the television and squirt-gun examples. Unfortunately, much of today's popular management literature provides managers with tools to manage their subordinates, yet few highlight the importance of matching the practice to the appropriate context. Empowering is not a pill; it is not simply a technique, as many workshops and articles would lead us to believe. Rather, to be truly effective it requires an understanding of subordinates and one's organizational context.

Finally, although it is not as apparent in the examples themselves, each of the study executives set challenging and appealing goals for their organizations. This is a necessary component of effective and empowering leadership. If goals are not perceived as appealing, it is difficult to empower managers in a larger sense. As Warren Bennis and Burt Nanus argue: “Great leaders often inspire their followers to high levels of achievement by showing them how their work contributes to worthwhile ends. It is an emotional appeal to some of the most fundamental needs — the need to be important, to make a difference, to feel useful, to be part of a successful and worthwhile enterprise.”


A Word of Caution

In closing, it is important to add a note of caution. First of all, empowerment is not the complete or always the appropriate answer to building the confidence of managers. It can lead to overconfidence. A false sense of confidence in positive outcomes may lead employees and organizations to persist in what may, in actuality, prove to be tactical errors. Thus, a system of checks and balances is needed. Managers must constantly test reality and be alert to signs of "group think."

Some managers may be incapable of empowering others. Their own insecurities may prevent them from instilling a sense of power in subordinates. This is ironic, since often these are the individuals who need to develop such skills. Yet, as Kanter argues, "Only those leaders who feel secure about their own power outward . . . can see empowering subordinates as a gain rather than a loss."
Certain situations may not warrant empowerment. For example, there are contexts where opportunities for greater initiative or responsibility simply do not exist and, in some cases, subordinates may be unwilling or unable to assume greater ownership or responsibility. As Lyman Porter, Edward Lawler, and Richard Hackman point out, research “strongly suggests that only workers with reasonably high strength of desire for higher-order need satisfaction . . . will respond positively and productively to the opportunities present in jobs which are high in meaning, autonomy, complexity, and feedback.”

Others may not have the requisite experience or knowledge to succeed. And those given more than they are capable of handling may fail. The end result will be the opposite of what you are seeking—a sense of powerlessness. It is imperative that managers assess as accurately as possible their subordinates’ capabilities before undertaking difficult goals and empowering them to achieve.

Second, certain of the empowerment practices described in this article are not appropriate for all situations. For example, managers of subordinates who require structure and direction are likely to find the example of the manager “seeding” ideas with the television set an ineffective practice. In the case of a pressing deadline or crisis, such seeding is inappropriate, given its longer time horizons.

When staging playful or unconventional events, the context must be considered quite carefully. What signals are you sending about yourself and your management philosophy? Like rewards, these events can be used to excess and lose their meaning. It is imperative to determine the appropriateness and receptivity of such practices. You may inadvertently mock or insult subordinates, peers, or superiors.

In terms of expressing confidence and rewarding, both must be done sincerely and not to excess. Praising for nonaccomplishments can make rewards meaningless. Subordinates may suspect that the boss is simply flattering them into working harder.

In general, however, empowerment practices are an important tool for leaders in setting and achieving higher goals and in moving an organization past difficult transitions. But remember that they do demand time, confidence, an element of creativity, and a sensitivity to one’s context to be effective.
Leadership- the art of empowering others

Please select the right options and use the excel sheet (link available at vulms) as your solution file.

1. **Jackson was able to achieve which of the following purpose through squirt-gun fights?**
   - A. To find out the best shooter
   - B. To relieve a high level of tension
   - C. To eliminate employees' boredom
   - D. To recognize the high performers

2. **In this article, which of the following practice was recognized to reward exceptional performance?**
   - A. Praising the troops
   - B. Squirt-gun fights
   - C. I make a difference club
   - D. Giving star of the month award

3. **Which of the following organizational structure is required for the employees’ empowerment?**
   - A. Bureaucratic structure
   - B. Organic structure
   - C. Mechanistic structure
   - D. Matrix structure

4. **The subordinates of an authoritarian manager believe:**
   - A. They have more control
   - B. They have little control
   - C. They have ‘say’ in management decisions
   - D. They vote on the best course of action in a project

5. **In his role as bank executive, Bob Jensen exhibits all of the following functions for empowerment EXCEPT:**
   - A. Decentralized responsibilities
   - B. Allowed managers more control
   - C. Acted in his own best interests
   - D. Engaged in unconventional behaviors

6. **Too many formalities and low task variety leads to:**
   - A. Sense of powerlessness
   - B. Sense of satisfaction
   - C. Sense of independence
   - D. Sense of power
7. Empowerment may NOT be appropriate for enterprises with:
   A. Wide span of control
   B. High labors turn over
   C. Cross-hierarchal teams
   D. Open communication system

8. Which of the following empowering management practice can be most likely used to increase the performance of different branches of a national company located in different areas of country?
   A. Delegating powers to the head of branches
   B. Centralizing powers to the CEO
   C. Creating sense of belongingness
   D. Praising the employees performance

9. Which of the following statement is true regarding the achievement-oriented leaders?
   A. Give specific guidance as to how to accomplish tasks
   B. Show concern for the needs of followers and friendly behavior
   C. Set challenging goals and expect followers to perform at their highest level
   D. Consult with followers and use their suggestions before making a decision

10. Empowerment in itself is a macro approach which of the following is the part of this approach?
    A. Participative management and employees’ involvement
    B. Directive management and employees’ support
    C. Situational management and limited employees’ involvement
    D. Autocratic management and no employee involvement

11. Empowerment is a process of sharing with front-line employees which of the following organizational ingredient(s)?
    A. Knowledge
    B. Information
    C. Power and reward
    D. All of the above mentioned options

12. Which of the following can be the obstacles in implementing empowerment?
    A. Failure to respond employee recommendation
    B. Existence of open communication system
    C. Availability of Management attention
    D. Understanding of training and feedback

13. Employees’ empowerment is a key to:
    A. Intrinsic motivation
    B. Extrinsic motivation
    C. Self motivation
14. Which of the following power is used by the senior executives who communicate to large groups, represent the organization visibly in the exterior world, define stands on issues, provide leadership to task and problem solving teams, engage in and win battles around issues with organizational peers?
   A. Personality power
   B. Coercive power
   C. Expert power
   D. Referent power

15. The de-emphasis of hierarchical authority and control in organizational development is referred to as:
   A. Participation
   B. Power equalization
   C. Trust and support
   D. Respect for people

16. According to this article, which of the following is most likely to be the next step after identifying the conditions that are cause of creating feelings of powerlessness?
   A. To allow autonomy for the completion of tasks
   B. To praise and provide motivation to subordinates
   C. To provide self efficacy information to subordinates
   D. To implement empowering experiences and practices

17. “Great leaders often inspire their followers to high levels of achievement by showing them how their work contributes to the worthwhile ends”, is stated by:
   A. Bill Jackson
   B. Alferd Bandura
   C. Rosabeth Kanter
   D. Warrin Bennis & Burt Nanus

18. All of the below mentioned organizational factors lead to feelings of lacking power; EXCEPT:
   A. Centralized organizational structure
   B. Excessive competition pressures
   C. Poor communication system
   D. Competence-based reward system

19. For a supportive and empowering manager, which of the following skills are more appropriate to sustain his organization’s foundation?
   A. Planning, organizing, leading and controlling
   B. Facilitating, consulting, collaborating, and supporting
   C. Technical, mechanical, experimental and administrative
   D. Multicultural, manipulation, operational and controlling
20. Based on the knowledge gained from reading this article, suppose if you are appointed as manager operation in a bank, where you find demoralized employees because ex-manager style was autocratic; he was used to dictate his own ideas and discouraged employees’ participation. In this scenario what do you think which of the following step is immediately required to be taken?

A. Increase the fringe benefits of employees
B. Reward high performance employees
C. Introduce participative management style
D. Establish formalized rules and procedures