About Empowerment

Eleanor D. Glor,[1]

Editor-in-Chief

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eglor@magma

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[1] Any views expressed in this article are personal.

About Empowerment

Eleanor D. Glor,

My purpose in writing this piece is to reflect upon a series of conversations in which I participated on the subject of empowerment over the past year. I believe that empowerment is key to innovation. For me, the essential aspect of the paper is my personal attempt to sort out why it is that employers, service providers and governments say they want to but do not reliably create empowerment in employees, clients and citizens. The answer to this question is, I believe, related to the different perspectives on empowerment. Each actor is trying to achieve his objectives. From the perspective of those who have control over tools, resources and authority–employers, intrinsically (self-) motivated individuals, governments–empowerment is usually considered a technique for securing *buy-in*, *engagement* and *commitment* from others to support their goals and objectives. From the perspective of employees, the extrinsically motivated, and citizens, it is more about having sufficient skills, tools, resources, authority and will to set goals and objectives jointly with those who have power.

My experience is based on three types of conversation on empowerment: innovation salons, citizen-government dialogues, and personal conversations and reading. The Innovation Salon is a dinner meeting held in Ottawa, Canada about six times per year to discuss public sector innovation. During 2003-04 (the schedule is posted at: www.innovation.cc under Salon), its discussions focussed on employee, client and citizen empowerment. The citizen-government dialogue was a series of meetings held in Ottawa during 2003-04 on the theme "the citizen is responsible for her/his government" (not the other way around). Many but not all of my personal conversations grew out of the first two discussions.

What is empowerment, and whose empowerment are we discussing? These key questions are explored in this paper. Typically these questions are not addressed directly. I believe people mean a number of different things by the term empowerment, and have previously described empowerment as a flexible term that reflects the beliefs of the speaker. As a consequence, the speakers think it can be achieved in (at least) three quite different ways: as delegation of authority and accountability, as psychological empowerment, and as power sharing (Glor, 2001a). I have organized my thoughts in this paper around three types of targets for empowerment–employees, clients, and citizens–and I have used the typology of delegation, psychological empowerment and power sharing that I developed to reflect upon what was said in the conversations referred to above.

Employee Empowerment

I do not describe employee empowerment as a manager defined it for me this year, as letting employees do what(ever) they want. Nevertheless, autonomy is an important issue in empowerment. Autonomy or what Don de Guerre of Concordia University called "elbow room" at the Innovation Salon is one of his six criteria for productive human activity and is an intrinsic motivator. Lack of autonomy decreases production and increases error rates. However, too much autonomy is as bad as too little. Doing whatever one wants he calls the lack of organization or laissez-faire.

In my opinion, the manager's apprehension probably reflects one of two possible assumptions. It either indicates a belief that disengaged employees would use empowerment to run amok, sluff off or, even worse, to sabotage the employer, or it suggests that front-line employees would not meet the objectives and conditions set by the employer if they were empowered. While these fears may be connected to the manager's fear of loss of power, they may also recognize potential (or more likely an actual) lack of commitment on the part of employees. The manager's scenario would be more likely to arise, I believe, in a context in which staff were not empowered and were not engaged with their work or committed to it.

Don de Guerre suggested to the Innovation Salon that an open systems model is most appropriate for understanding workplaces, as it recognizes the multiple relationships people experience. He indicated neither individual job enrichment (robbing Peter to pay Paul) nor industrial democracy (consultative committees, round tables) nor human relations (warm, friendly supervisors) nor skills development (training in Total Quality Management [TQM], Just in Time [JIT], Business Process Re-engineering [BPR]) lead to employee engagement. Rather, the only known route to produce employee commitment is through employee empowerment, dignity and respect, which in turn leads to multi-skilling and sustainable improvements in quality and productivity. Dr. de Guerre identified six criteria for productive human activity: elbow room (autonomy in decision-making), continual learning on the job, variety, mutual support and respect, meaningfulness, and a desirable future.

The lack of some of these characteristics may have been reflected in the Government of Canada's 2002 Public Service Survey results. The poorest results in the survey were for employee empowerment. Don de Guerre explained this result in part as growing out of the bureaucratic design principle, where formal legal responsibility for control and coordination rests with the levels above where work is done, thus consistently building a non-empowering environment.

I believe employee empowerment is discussed in such ways as to suggest that employee empowerment can be achieved in three different ways–through delegation of authority, psychological empowerment, or power sharing.

Employee Empowerment through Delegation

Distrust of employees can reflect an employer perspective that identifies the purpose of empowerment not as mutual benefit for the employee and employer but rather as a self-interested strategy for securing greater buy-in, engagement and commitment. This often seems to be what management seeks through empowerment and can be referred to as empowerment through delegation. It usually leads to harder and more work for employees.

Most examples of employee empowerment that I have been able to discover (I invite the reader to share others with me) have occurred when organizations have been under stress. In some cases employers have imposed greater power for implementation on employees. In these contexts, front-line and supervisory levels have been empowered to take relatively minor financial and human resource decisions that they previously only had the power to recommend to their supervisors. At the same time, employers have almost always reduced the resources available for implementation.

One example is IBM's imposition of a fifty per cent reduction on its world-wide workforce during the early 1990s. It used employee-involving quality processes to streamline and revamp processes and also created competition among employees for the opportunity to retain their jobs. This meant that employees collaborated in the elimination of their colleagues' jobs, and sometimes their own, but offered them an opportunity to increase their chances of survival. The employer thus set the objectives, while employees were empowered with flexibility to find ways to carry them out. This is empowerment through delegation of previously supervisory roles.

Delegation does not necessarily create empowerment. In some cases this approach is paramount to speeding up the pace of work and expecting increased productivity. One of those increased expectations–requirements–is commitment and engagement with the employer's goals and objectives, and their implementation. In these cases it is just downloading work and responsibility. According to Towers Perrin consulting, the biggest workplace stressor is "workload" and being told to do things (delegation) without the time & resources to get them done.

While delegation does not necessarily create empowerment, the same time, increased delegation can increase empowerment. Another organization in trouble, Semco Corporation, delegated management power to the front line, also without any employee request or agreement to do so. In this non-union environment employees were offered the opportunity to share profits, to set salaries, to be involved in recruiting their managers and front-line staff, and to control financial resources. In this case, the most resistance came from middle and senior managers, and a number of them lost their jobs as a result of the changes (its president, Ricardo Semler, claimed to have eliminated nine levels of management). Semco Corporation grew enormously after it introduced this very flat structure, according to Semler. Unfortunately, we have not heard about the experience from the employees, only from the owner/president of the corporation, who introduced the changes (Semler, 1993). The Semco version of delegation suggests that empowerment must have increased value for both employees and employers, not just for employers.

Employee Empowerment as Psychological Empowerment

While employer intent is important with delegation and power sharing approaches to employee empowerment, it is probably least important with psychological empowerment. The idea of psychological empowerment is about personal psychological makeup, perspectives and choices. The employee who chooses to be empowered and positive is more engaged and feels better. Employers who offer employees choices, for example in courses, benefits and hours of work, support those who have chosen to focus on personal choices and opportunities. In these circumstances, the employer's intent may be self-interested–to increase the skills of the workforce, to save money and to help employees be healthier, primarily so they can be more productive–but the psychologically empowered employee feels personally supported. At the same time, both are seen as attempting to maximize self-interest. The risk for the employee who maximizes self-interest (focuses on his/her own needs and situation in isolation from those of co-workers) is that other employees will do the same. In that case, the employee could cooperate in being misled, in some employees losing benefits, and in overall empowerment declining. The risk in taking a consistently suspicious position, on the other hand, is that the positive aspects of

such steps will not be recognized. A psychologically empowered employee needs to be capable of recognizing both positive and negative aspects of an employer's intent and actions, but is less likely to be so. She risks being labelled a "management lackey", or "deserter"and there will be peer pressure to join the rest of the group.

One problem with empowerment as positive thinking is that it tends to become prescriptive. Notably, the management capacities in the Government of Canada now require "self-confidence" and the personality characteristic of "creating enthusiasm and motivation for employees to pursue targets". Also, developing a positive life outlook and cheery attitude is not necessarily related to empowerment. It may be based on having a great spouse or family, for example, or having created a small private enterprise on the side, that gives the employee satisfaction, and not be job-related at all.

Employee Empowerment as Power sharing

While the delegation and psychological approaches to empowerment emphasized self-interest and individuals, the idea of power sharing emphasizes the processes and group relationships in an organization. The notion of power allows discussion of employee empowerment to move away from a focus on the individual–the level of delegation and individual psychological styles–to the level of the whole organization and decision-making in the organization. It recognizes patterns in the way power is allocated. Any discussion of power needs to occur at this level.

Don de Guerre emphasized the structure of supervision as key to empowerment. The structures he defined were democratic rather than hierarchical. A democratic design principle both builds in redundancy of functions, and places formal legal responsibility for control and coordination with the level where work is done. De Guerre identified two models of democratic organization, a Democratic Modified Model where specialized people manage and control at the strategic level (large organizations typically have non-specialists at this level) but responsibility for coordination rests in the group, and a small Knowledge Work Organization where there is only one level of decision-making, that is, the whole organization is a decision-making body, composed of temporary, overlapping project teams. For de Guerre, the best way to address power is through hierarchy.

What is power? A thorough discussion of power would take more space than is available in this article. Let me therefore offer only one definition. Conger and Kanungo suggest that organizational actors who have power are the ones who are more likely to achieve their desired outcomes, while actors who lack power are the ones who are more likely to have their desired outcomes thwarted or possibly redirected by those with power" (Conger and Kanungo, 1988, p. 472). While Conger and Kanungo focus on the power of individuals, their definition helps to emphasize patterns. An organization that shares power with employees therefore shares elements of organizational decision-making and process definition with employees. Which ones is an important question, as empowerment requires employee input to the direction and policies of the organization. Such changes cannot help but affect the organization as a whole, not just individuals. The challenges of power sharing are thus not only questions of power and hierarchy, but also of the nature of the organization. Such changes involve managers and owners as well as employees.

Semler's changes addressed these issues. He introduced reductions in supervision, increases in front-line worker autonomy and increases in employee control over company resources and hiring decisions including input to recruitment of supervisors. While his changes were introduced in a hierarchical manner, he changed the role of employees from that of objects of management decisions to subjects of those decision

Employee empowerment as delegation is often imposed, and an example of imposed power sharing was offered. My thoughts had suggested that choice was essential in empowerment, that employees themselves need to have the opportunity to choose to become more empowered, either subjectively through their belief in their own greater power or objectively by securing more power to make decisions in the workplace. I was struck by the fact that none of the examples I identified were initiatives of employees or unions. They were, rather, initiatives of the already powerful. Moreover, there was no formal mechanism in any of the organizations studied through which employees could put forward their ideas. Semco was the exception, once the changes were implemented. Put another way, all of the decisions studied occurred in a subject-to-object manner, although Semco may eventually have introduced a subject-to-subject environment.

Just as the nature of the relationship–a subject-to-object (adult to child) relationship or a more equal subject-to-subject (adult to adult) relationship–is important in employee empowerment, it is also important in client and citizen empowerment.

Client Empowerment

Government faces an interesting challenge in the complexity of its relationships with its clients. Citizens relate to government in numerous ways, not in one, simple way. A client of the private sector typically deals with a company around one or a few issues. A client of government, who often feels like the object of rules, regulations and interviews, is nonetheless still a citizen, a subject in relation to government.

The Citizen-client

I explored the idea of the client as citizen in two ways last winter. At the Innovation Salon we explored the notion of empowerment of client-citizens with Dr. Lorne Sossin of the University of Toronto. He identified the need for a change in the relationship between what he called citizen-clients and bureaucrats. Rather than the current object-subject relationship, he suggested a more appropriate relationship was one of subject-to-subject. Moreover, he suggested that this could potentially be a relationship of intimacy, in which the client and the bureaucrat told each other about, and the truth about, their subjective experience in their relationship. Dr. Sossin described a case study where an immigration officer kept notes about her/his impressions of, thoughts about, and beliefs concerning a client. The case was rare because the public servant's notes were made public on appeal of the decision to Citizenship Court. Sossin argued these thoughts should be revealed more often in the citizen-client to public servant relationship (Sossin, 2002).

My sense is that such a change would be difficult for bureaucrats, whose Weberian bureaucracy is fundamentally meant to be based on rules, objectivity and impartiality. Sossin argued that rules are only part of the interaction among government clients and public servants.

To the extent that decisions are based on relationships rather than rules, the relationships should be made explicit. At the same time, in the current environment, the relationship having greater impact on the public servant is that between the junior bureaucrat (who interacts with the client-citizen), and that person's supervisor. Sossin's proposed change, if successful, could therefore not only increase the power of the citizen-bureaucrat relationship, it could also reduce the power of the currently more powerful junior bureaucrat-supervisor relationship. In the latter relationship rules and regulations are an important factor, but values are also important. Most citizen-clients experience relationships with public servants as being unequal and hierarchical, because of the client and the bureaucrat's lack of information (about unknown and unexplained rules), the power of rules in all parties' minds, and the strength of the bureaucrats' relationship. Better and more accurate communication about beliefs and feelings, but also about rules and relationships, might help the citizen-client and the public servant to create a more equal subject-to-subject experience. Such a change could thus involve both a change in the nature of the supervisor-employee relationship (greater delegation, leading to a subject-to-subject relationship) and the citizen-bureaucrat relationship (subject-to-subject).

The Citizen-stakeholder

At least rhetorically, increased public participation has been another forum in which governments have offered citizens the opportunity to advise governments directly. Again, a key question is, about what? While governments' objectives in this relationship have usually been the securing from stakeholders of advice about implementation, and of commitment and buy-in, stakeholders have often been more interested in governments sharing decision-making power about policy. Approximately five years ago, the Government of Canada introduced a policy requiring public servants to conduct consultations with stakeholders about significant new policies, changes in policies, and implementation decisions. Often these consultations are open to the public as well, but in a more peripheral way. One of the most open consultations was that of the Canadian Department of Foreign Affairs and International Trade (DFAIT), that conducted an open, Internet-based consultation on foreign policy. Both well-informed and poorly-informed citizens responded concerning Canada's current policy and what it could be. Such involvement should create opportunities for citizens to become subjects not objects.

Consultation on new health protection legislation. As a way to understand these experiences better, the Innovation Salon participated with the Ottawa Creative Thinking Group in a consultation organized by Health Canada concerning its proposed new health protection legislation. The Innovation Salon experience was both frustrating and promising. It was frustrating for three reasons. Firstly, participants were asked to register for the consultation on the Internet, which required them to register as a member of a stakeholder group. Those who attempted to comply found it difficult to find a category into which they fit. Some did not necessarily want to fit into a category. Requiring them to do so may reflect a corporatist environment. In this case, citizens were described as stakeholders, or at least listed with stakeholders, rather than being recognized as being at a different, overarching director-level, with the broadest interest and power. Secondly, the web site indicated limitations on participation that were discouraging, defining several deadlines that had already passed and that would have disqualified participation. Yet participants were told the citizen participation component of the consultation was only about to begin (it was later cancelled because of an impending federal election and was not rejuvenated after the election).

Thirdly, it was not clear that the organizers valued the input that was provided. They continually attempted to "educate" the participants about the concrete details of the legislative proposals that had been developed. Although the participants, most of whom were conceptual thinkers, were asked the level at which they wished to participate, comments at the conceptual level were seemingly not well received. The judgement that the participants needed education was both true and untrue. While the participants did not understand the details of the issues and the proposal, they often had perspectives on the broader principles that underlay the recommendations being made. They were interested in issues such as how much risk is appropriate, and the meaning of the proposed approach to risk. One participant, for example, identified the approach as one that puts the onus on industry, but could make it much harder for citizens to secure redress if there are problems, because the government would no longer be available as an intervener. Participants were clear on the importance of the issues being discussed and showed interest in them, but the organizers did not seem to want input about policy; rather, they seemed interested in input about implementation of policy. This was not made clear either before or during the consultation, however. Moreover, as often happens in consultations, people with some expertise attended, and the inside experts were somewhat uncomfortable with them. Overall, the process seemed targeted more to informed stakeholders than to citizens, which we considered ourselves to be. In this case, I felt like an object of participation rather than a subject who determined the level, context and content of participation. The organizers did not follow up to inform the participants of the final process or outcomes or whether any of their ideas were incorporated into subsequent steps.

The move to treat citizens as clients of participation that was reflected in this consultation is a notable outcome of current efforts to create greater stakeholder engagement with government. It has an aura of the citizen as an inferior, poorly-informed stakeholder. Consultation with stakeholders has not necessarily created buy-in by citizens, the outcome hoped for by elected officials and the public servants responsible for the consultations. Put another way, this is not really participation, as it tends to define citizens as objects rather than subjects in the consultation process.

The Government of Canada sought to overcome this weakness by involving the voluntary sector in setting policy. It treated the sector as a subject, not an object of policy.

The Voluntary Sector Initiative. The Government of Canada and the voluntary sector, using a corporate approach, that is, through the representation of organizations, not individuals, created a new model of stakeholder participation through the national Voluntary Sector Initiative. Following major cuts to national voluntary organization (NVO) funding during the mid through late 1990s, the Government of Canada sought to rebuild its NVO relationships and policies in partnership with NVOs. With funding for five years, the national Voluntary Sector Initiative was created to involve the voluntary sector. The Government described the Initiative as follows: "The Voluntary Sector Initiative... is a unique undertaking between the Government of Canada and the voluntary sector to enhance their relationship and strengthen the sector's capacity. Over the five year [sic] initiative they are working together to address issues including funding practices, policy dialogue, technology, voluntarism and research about the sector." (http://www.vsi-isbc.ca/eng/index.cfm)   The Government of Canada and the voluntary sector committed to "engage in an open, inclusive and ongoing dialogue through the various stages of

the public policy process, including issue identification, agenda-setting, policy design, implementation, monitoring and impact assessment." (http://www.vsi-isbc.ca/eng/policy/policy_code.cfm#context)

More specifically, the Government of Canada committed to:

- develop ways (e.g. a voluntary sector lens) to ensure that all departments and agencies recognize and consider the impacts and implications for the voluntary sector and voluntary sector organizations of new or modified legislation...;

- develop ways to engage in regular dialogue to listen to concerns and issues identified by voluntary sector organizations, and to make these methods of dialogue known; ...

- draw on the full range of methods to engage in a dialogue with the voluntary sector at the various stages of the public policy process, including methods such as written consultations, opinion surveys, focus groups, user panels, meetings and various Internet-based approaches;

- respect and seek out the expertise and input of the voluntary sector and include it in the analysis and design of policy initiatives;

- make every effort to plan and co-ordinate policy dialogue with the voluntary sector on related topics, avoiding overlapping requests for participation in the same time period;

- ensure that policy initiatives capture the fullest spectrum of views and give due consideration to all input received, paying particular attention to those likely to be most affected by policy proposals;

- include opportunities for the voluntary sector to discuss the rationale for and implications of decisions, thereby building understanding and trust; ...

The voluntary sector and its organizations committed to:

- develop and strengthen knowledge and policy capacity in their areas of expertise;

- develop a better understanding of the Government of Canada's formal and informal policy development process;

- take specific steps to ensure that diverse groups within the sector are given an opportunity to consider issues and provide input;

- perform an intermediary role on behalf of sector organizations by: using a range of methods to extend the dialogue's reach; canvassing an organization's members/users/volunteers before presenting views on its behalf; and including a summary of the views of the groups consulted and the methods of consultation used;

- identify and maintain contact with policy-makers and actively seek opportunities to share policy ideas with them; and

- pursue opportunities to identify and raise emerging issues to the attention of the Government of Canada, including issues of local concern.

Finally, the Government of Canada encouraged voluntary associations to elect their representatives to the policy development process, while the Government of Canada sought volunteer public servants for its representatives

These are good principles to guide input and mutual dialogue between public servants and citizen-stakeholders. Doubtless discussions occurred as well over the potential for co-optation of the voluntary sector through this joint process. The proof, of course, is in the pudding. We do not know whether any significant consultations arose from the framework created, nor whether the recommendations were actually approved by the Minister and implemented, to the satisfaction of each sector, voluntary and government.

I was interested to discover recently that Health Canada has published a *Policy Toolkit for Public Involvement in Decision-Making* (Health Canada, 2000). It lays out for public servants five possible levels of public involvement. Level 1 is informing or educating the public, level 2 is gathering information or views from the public. Level 3 is discussing or involving the public, while Level 4 is engaging and Level 5 is partnering with the public. The criteria for level 5 included government wanting to empower citizens and groups to manage the process, their accepting the challenge, government being ready to assume the role of enabler, an agreement to implement the solutions generated, and policy and programs developed in partnership. Computer-assisted participation such as DFAIT created is defined as level 3, while the National Voluntary Initiative is an example of level 4. I was impressed by the paper's honest acknowledgement that the higher levels of consultation were not possible unless there were opportunities for shared agenda-setting and the options generated would be respected. While Discovery of this document led me to wonder whether the Health Protection consultation discussed earlier had been defined by the department as a lower level consultation, while we had wanted it to be a higher level consultation. We may not have understood the framework created for the consultation by the department; that is, we may not have understood the intent.

A more fundamental problem with this pluralist analysis of the issue of relative power of government and the voluntary sector is that it is based on the premise that organized interest groups can fairly represent the body politic. Fashionable in the 1950s and early 1960s, this idea has been discredited in the academic world. Stakeholder analysis ignores relative power.

This section dealt with client empowerment from two perspectives, that of the citizen-client and that of the citizen-stakeholder being consulted on the acceptability of options offered. The outcomes of such discussions are often the same as the inputs, perhaps with some tweaking of the details. In these contexts, the citizen-client and the citizen-stakeholder can still be treated as objects. The next section outlines two different cases, in which citizens defined themselves as or were treated as subjects.

Citizen Empowerment

If citizens have not reliably felt like subjects as clients of government or through stakeholder consultation or through public participation, has anyone succeeded in creating citizen empowerment? This section outlines two approaches to empowering citizens that seem to hold promise: citizens taking the initiative in assuming responsibility for government, and citizens, not stakeholders, participating in policy formulation at the invitation of government. They represent two different techniques for involving citizens in policy development.

The Citizen Responsible for Government

While citizen-based social movements are known to have been effective in changing

government policy, this paper is about more modest efforts by citizens and public servants to pay attention to citizen wishes. The citizen-government dialogue chose to adopt an unusual perspective, that the citizen is responsible for her/his government, that is, that the persons responsible for government are not elected officials or public servants, but citizens themselves. Specifically, the group convened to discuss the assumption that:

> In democracies the citizenry is fully responsible for its own self-governance including primarily the maintenance and evolution of its informal customs and practices but also for its formal institutions of self-government

The focus of the discussions was agreed to be, "what would follow from this perspective"?

Given the need for a successfully self-governing community of humankind, what might usefully be done about the citizen-government relationship in Canada?

The basic assumption underlying these issues has rarely been part of public dialogue about the relationship between citizens and their government in Canada, although it is enshrined in the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms.

After meeting eight times to explore the theme of citizen responsibility, the participants concluded that they had not been able to assume the position defined. They found:

> Our discussion on citizen-government relations exposed one striking phenomenon. Despite the fact that the participants could be termed "futurists", experienced in tackling a number of policy issues in non-conventional ways, it proved impossible to go beyond current assumptions about leadership and responsibility, and to come at the issue from a different angle. The time spent deploring far exceeded that expended on the possibilities of an informed citizenry exercising leadership and responsibility for our governments. Instead, the discussion remained embedded in the conventional assumption that governments were sovereign, though they may perhaps solicit comments from citizens.

A self-organized group of citizens in Ottawa with the intent to do so could not psychologically assume responsibility for their government. The participants expressed anger, a desire to go back to previous political environments, anxiety, sadness, disorientation and depression. William Sheridan's notes on employee empowerment (http://www.innovation.cc/salon/notes-on-previous-salons.htm) and William Bridges' (2003) work on transition suggest these could be symptoms of grieving the loss of the old and psychological adjustment to social change. The group repeated old conversations rather than creating new ones. This may suggest that the participants in the citizen-government discussions were not yet ready to move on to find new solutions. The risk with such psychological states is that those who are ready with solutions– strong leaders, authoritarian vanguards–could take over the vacuum of will. On the other hand, perhaps the ideas presented were not practical enough that people could engage with the concept of the citizen as responsible for her government. Alternatively, the participants could not see the potential for real empowerment. Once again, the ephemeral nature of self-empowerment became apparent.

Bridges' analysis emphasizes psychological states. It does not speak to objective power relationships. Yet the responsible citizen discussions suggested that empowerment may not only

be about intent and psychological states. They left open the question of when and under what conditions citizen self-empowerment is possible, and whether it is possible in the current environment.

The Citizen Policy-formulator

If neither clients of government nor participants in public consultations nor participants in self-initiated dialogue felt like subjects, are there any examples of citizens as the subjects of policy formulation? The key to such participation is whether the policies recommended by the participants are accepted; that is, whether power is actually shared.

Political parties. The traditional political process is an avenue for citizen input to government. In Canada, political parties that are out of power tend to emphasize policy, while political parties that are focussed on securing power tend not to emphasize policy. The latter are the parties that usually win elections; hence, the empowered tend to be reinforced for a focus on power. In this context, members do not participate in political parties as citizens focussed on the public good but as partisans of a particular party and possibly of a particular platform. If those with well-developed policies are elected, which usually occurs at the time of a change of government, there is a good chance at least some of the policies will be implemented.

Because of the limited potential for policy development and implementation through the political party process, those interested in policy often seek other routes to provide input to government.

While the previous section emphasized stakeholders as citizens, the Innovation Salon explored an alternate and innovative approach to involving citizens, that combined the representational and power sharing approaches: the Brazilian participative budget process.

Participative Budget Process. Following reintroduction of democracy in Brazil in 1985, and the election of the Workers Party in the City of Porto Alegre in 1988-89, the participative budget process was invented and introduced. It has now been implemented in eighty Brazilian cities, including Sao Paolo, one of the largest cities in the world.

As described to the Innovation Salon by Clive Doucet, Ottawa City Counsellor, the participative budget is a city budgeting process that can change priorities and policies, in contrast to the current Ottawa process, that holds the City to existing (under-funding) patterns. Mr. Doucet indicated Ottawa is locked into the worst of all possible priorities, namely, high cost smog growth–despite an Official Plan that favours a green and healthy city. Ottawa lacks a mechanism (process) for connecting plans, priorities and costs to spending (the budget). The focus of Ottawa City Council budget discussions is on what to cut rather than what to fund (Doucet, 2002, 2004).

In a general context of substantial corruption and cronyism, the city council of Porto Alegre sought citizen definition of City priorities for expending the flexible part of the budget, in the order of 15 to 18 per cent of the budget. Initially at the neighbourhood level, citizens discussed what the priorities should be. They developed recommendations and elected representatives to a next level of discussion. Priorities were identified again and representatives elected at the district and then again at the city-wide level. The final recommendations for

priorities were presented to City Council, which accepted and applied them.

The outcome from introducing participative budgeting in Porto Alegre, a city of approximately one million people (about the same size as Ottawa), was the credible definition of a new set of priorities. The process created consensus about spending more money on three priorities: public transit, day care, and suburban sewer and water pipes. Most importantly, twelve years later, the policy changes had been implemented. The City transformed an adequate transit system into a world-class one (including service to the barrios outside the city). It has gone from two to 120 city-run day care centres. Water and sewage service had previously been available to one quarter of residential buildings in the suburbs and now serves 85 per cent. On the other hand, over ten years, Porto Alegre built a total of ten kilometres of new road, while Ottawa built 1000 kilometres. In Ottawa transit is funded 50-50 by the users and the property tax, while roads are 100 per cent funded by the property tax. During seven of the same years, Ottawa did not have a property tax increase, or a spending increase, so all additional operating costs for the new roads were funded by reducing other services. By law, cities are not allowed to run deficits in Canada, so this was a zero-sum (win-lose) game. In a context where the City had defined its priorities as a green city, its realized priorities were more roads and accommodation of greater vehicle traffic.

Limited success was demonstrated in the Government of Canada's consultations and the failure of Ottawa city budgeting to reflect city values. The citizen-government discussions were similarly disempowering. The outcome of the national voluntary initiative is unknown. The introduction of a participative city budget process in Brazil, on the other hand, appears to have successfully empowered citizens, since the citizens' objectives were democratically derived, and their recommendations were implemented (Wampler, 2000).

Discussion

This paper discusses empowerment from the perspective of employees, clients, and citizens. From the employee perspective, even when autonomy was offered, responsibility was delegated, certain kinds of choices were offered or power was shared, decisions were sometimes made in disempowering ways. Employees were often not allowed to participate in the decision, or if they were, very little real choice was available. While greater control over implementation was beneficial for empowerment, having input to setting the framework was even more beneficial. Clients often felt treated as objects and disempowered. Stakeholders frequently felt they had been delegated a role in responding to proposals for implementation but that they had not been consulted about objectives, priorities and decisions. In certain circumstances, citizens, too, felt disempowered both in terms of their ability to have an impact and to be heard. They were most empowered when they had significant input to setting the context, as with participative budgeting.

Three major themes emerged. To create empowerment, these conversations emphasized the context for the issues over which people had been empowered, the relationships created and whether input was about important issues and mattered.

Context

This paper highlights three aspects of context: intent, choice and process. The cases

varied from one to another in terms of the intent and objectives of the empowerment, the methods employed to empower, the process used to create empowerment, and the amount of power shared.

Intent. An important determinant of actual empowerment is the employers' intent in empowering employees, and the employees' intent in empowering themselves. These vary. On the other hand, the context in the last two decades has often been the same. With companies and governments in trouble–usually financial trouble–the employer's overriding concern and objectives were to save money and save the organization. Solutions were imposed by those at the top of the organization in an environment of competitiveness or scarcity. In stressful environments, because of the magnitude of the problems, and the emphasis on survival, maintaining relative status and hierarchy became less important. Management or owners were more willing to make changes and share power. The ethics of the relationship were not always what they should have been, however. While speaking of empowerment, employers sometimes meant increased delegation and demands on employees. Employees were treated as objects, not mutual subjects.

When employees were represented through unions on the Potash Corporation's Board of Directors, on the other hand, the intent was to hear and take account of the employee perspective and needs and more generally to secure employee agreement and engagement. Both employer and employee shared the same intent or goal to preserve the company but their objectives may have been somewhat different. The potential was created, with union participation in decision-making, to create a somewhat broader and longer-term perspective. Put another way, they could have found common ground on which they could jointly collaborate while maintaining their disagreements in other areas. Each could treat the other as a subject. Was the relationship more empowering or just more adversarial? I don't know.

Choice. Empowerment is also about having meaningful choices. Two well-known examples of employee empowerment involved non-voluntary empowerment. In the Grameen Bank, limited employee and client freedom was offered. Employees were hired out of school and educated to the Grameen way of doing things (culture), clients were required to commit to the 16 principles and to work in groups. While these requirements were put in place for good reasons–to counter the effects of corruption in the workplace and the low status and powerlessness of their clients–they also reduced autonomy. While the rules made other things possible, they did not teach people how to deal with full autonomy. As a result, only certain kinds of autonomy were available (see Holcombe, 1995) In Semco Corporation, as well, managers and front-line employees were not given the option of turning down the rules created or the increased autonomy defined by the president. Both presidents felt their employees and customers were thereby empowered but did not offer them choices about whether and how they would be empowered. In much of the change management literature, the emphasis is on how to deal with "resistance" to this kind of exercise of power. Because the President of the Grameen Bank created the Bank, and only hired staff straight out of school, there were no previous conditions to which people remained attached and hence little resistance among employees. The President of Semco experienced greatest resistance from managers, who were losing power, rather than from workers, who were gaining autonomy.

While employees were not given options in the Grameen Bank and Semco, in two

innovation examples from the public sector that I have described elsewhere (Glor, 2001b), employees were given options. The choices were less real in one case than in the other. Ship Repair Atlantic, part of the Department of National Defense of the Government of Canada, received yearly cuts to its budget during the early 1990s. In this environment of duress–major, imposed budget cuts, predicted lay-offs, possibly privatization–employees agreed to a new streamlining strategy. Because this was a unionized environment, the employer could not impose the changes, and so offered employees choice about whether to agree to them. In the Canadian Customs section of Revenue Canada, customs officers were given the option of saying "no" but said "yes" to more work, for a good cause–finding lost or abducted children.   The citizen-government dialogue was a self-initiated, implicit effort to apply the notion of self-empowerment (making the choice to be self-empowered) to the citizen-government relationship. Participants implicitly turned down the option or did not believe it truly existed.

An Empowering Process.   In the cases of Grameen Bank and Semco, employees did not have choices. They had choices in Ship Repair and Customs– very limited choice in the case of Ship Repair, more choice in the case of Customs but with no implications in the latter case for power sharing. When given choices, employees said "yes" to changes, and thus may have felt more psychologically empowered by the process than employees of Grameen Bank and Semco did initially. Given choices, however, employees will not always say "yes", and only after careful consideration. When asked to participate, their first questions will be, "In what, why, and with which intended results?" If people are seriously going to commit their productive, creative efforts they will want to know it will count. For most people, this is all they have to give. Herein lies a difficulty for employers, who can offer little assurance that the context or their own minds will not change. As a consequence, most employers are unwilling to accept this uncertainty and such a climate.

On a continuum of empowering processes, I would rank the examples as follows. The Semco Corp. and Grameen Bank presidents were not empowering in terms of how they dealt with their employees initially. The two Government of Canada examples and the Saskatchewan Potash Corporation were unionized environments, where employees had more rights. In the citizen-government dialogue participants had full freedom of choice, but did not choose it because they did not believe in the concreteness of the possibility being discussed, even if they believed in the integrity of the process.

William Bridges (2003) has offered guidelines for making transitions and implementing change in organizations. He outlines the steps needed in the psychological transition process as having three phases: ending the old, entering the neutral zone, and beginning the new. He does *not* suggest, however, that employees be offered the option of turning changes down or a role in identifying what the changes should be. In Semco Corporation, employees were not given choices initially, but had a major role in operational decision-making once the new model was implemented.

The process by which people are empowered, whether delegation is voluntary, and whether a democratic context is created and reinforced are important to empowerment but are not typically addressed in the management, change management and innovation literature. Rather, the process for implementing the change and business results are emphasized. What is not addressed is how these are achieved and the impact of that process. In a truly democratic

organization changes would be voluntary not imposed.

Relationships

While Don de Guerre found a human relations approach, by itself, was insufficient to create empowerment, relationships nonetheless had a substantial impact on empowerment. Empowerment did not do well in hierarchical environments, but rather required autonomy and collegial, democratic decision-making.

Autonomy. Increased employee autonomy supports empowerment in most workplaces. While the manager mentioned at the beginning of this paper seemed to assume that autonomy was the same thing as control, perhaps it is not. Autonomy may have two aspects: ones' relationship with oneself (self-empowerment) and also ones' capacity to direct ones' own work. University research on empowerment has shed some light on reactions to autonomy. Professors who offered students choice about more autonomy for self-direction of their courses and projects found that about half of students rejected the option because the academic system might not recognize the value. Likewise, about half of nurses refused the offer of more autonomy because they thought doctors would not recognize and respect it. The students' and the nurses' decisions were based upon the lack of support for the changes from the wider organization, and the lack of changes in requirements, hierarchy and accountability (Elden, 1986, pp. 248-250). In other words, they felt those suggesting autonomy could not really offer it.

The process by which greater autonomy is introduced is likewise important. Imposed autonomy is not likely to produce the benefits of psychological empowerment, especially initially, even when it creates greater delegation and power sharing. Creating power sharing by exercising power in a top-down, hierarchical manner is an odd concept. The books written about it are consistently written from the perspective of those who imposed it, and those who were the recipients of it did not write books. As a result, we only have one of two perspectives recorded and available for consideration. In both imposed delegation and imposed power sharing, employees are objects, not subjects with free will and choices (my discussion of the top-down innovation environment may be of interest here [Glor, 2001b and c]).

Hierarchical relationships in organizations tend to maintain their shape over the long term and therefore are predetermined from the individual employee perspective. Reporting, approval and accountability processes are typically hierarchical. In fact, they are almost medieval in their lack of autonomy: Hierarchical relationships are reinforced in organizations by oaths of office, mutual obligations, and law. Such hierarchy has recently been reinforced in government by legislated codes of conduct. While the expressed intent of codes has been to increase the accountability of public servants to elected officials, codes have also increased and formalized the responsibilities of employees without a concomitant increase in the responsibilities of employers. Employers have thus changed power relationships in organizations and changed the working climate as well, while reinforcing hierarchy. In this sense employers are not acting fully within a medieval context, as the serf-master relationship, while not free, had mutual obligations. Imposition of greater autonomy, responsibility and accountability for tasks by exercising power and hierarchy is consistent with empowerment as delegation. It retains power at the top of the organization, and thereby attempts to empower individuals without changing power relationships and without changing the organization in any fundamental way. The employee remains an

object. Employee empowerment as power sharing goes against this grain because it treats employees as subjects in the organization. From the client and the citizen viewpoint, they are often treated as objects and are not empowered.

Collegial/Democratic Relationships. Lorne Sossin suggested some ways to create a citizen-client and to make the citizen-client's relationship with public servants more empowering for the citizen-client. From a second viewpoint–that of the citizen-stakeholder, the citizen can feel she has been delegated a role in decisions about implementation but not about objectives and priorities. While the citizen has more responsibility, she may still feel like an object of policy and is unlikely to feel either empowered or that power has been shared. At the same time, she may feel there has been movement in the right direction.

The Voluntary Sector Initiative, on the other hand, attempted to involve NGOs in policy setting. From this perspective, citizens were treated or defined themselves as subjects or initiators of policy who had a mandate secured through election. Even when a citizen responds within a specific process or framework in the context of specific governmental policy formulation, as long as the citizen is able to provide thoughtful input, the input is given due consideration, and the input is acknowledged or reflected in the end product, s/he is likely to feel like a subject, empowered, and that power has been shared. When a group of self-selected citizens initiated discussion as subjects, however, without a framework and a specific policy impetus to structure the exchange, and in a generally disempowered climate, the challenge was much greater. In this case, it was not possible to create self-empowerment. The most democratic case reviewed was that of Porto Alegre, where citizens were given the opportunity to set goals and objectives, first on a self-selected basis, and then as elected representatives. It was done in a democratic environment, and their changes in direction were implemented in the long term. Moreover, the citizenry was involved each year, and in any changes to the agenda.

There is great power is having control over the context–the agenda, structure and process. While the Voluntary Sector Initiative created the potential for NVOs to have input into the issues, we had no information on whether an excellent framework had actually met its potential to create significant consultation and empowerment. There is also great power in hierarchy, the institutionalization of dominance. While the ideas presented to the Innovation Salon raised hopes for empowerment, none was a sure thing. Of note were the cases of non-hierarchical empowerment–customs officers' search for missing children, the citizen-government dialogue, the Voluntary Sector Initiative, and Porto Alegre. Only one of them seemed fully successful.

Content: Significant, Concrete, Adopted Policy

While appropriate context and relationships are necessary, they are not sufficient to create empowerment. Rather, the issues also need to be significant and to be likely to lead to action in order to create empowerment. This was the problem, I believe, with the citizen-government dialogue: There was no sense that the discussions would lead to action–no urgency, no reality. To feel and be empowered, people need to be having an impact on something that matters to them.

This was one of the ways in which empowerment has a power component. Whether it is employees having a say over issues that matter to the company (their company), clients securing

the information they need and having their perspectives truly considered, or citizens collaborating on issues that matter in substance and that have a good chance of being implemented, the significance of the issues matters. This is more likely to occur in consultations about policy than those about implementation decisions.

As the Health Canada (2000) Toolkit makes clear, consultation is only empowering of citizens at the highest of its five levels.

Conclusion

This paper explored impressions, learning and meaning derived from my conversations and reading over the past year about innovative techniques for creating empowerment. It was not a comprehensive survey of attempts to empower, but factors emerged that seemed to contribute to or to detract from empowerment.

Don de Guerre described empowering workplaces as ones in which employees have continual learning on the job, variety, mutual support and respect, elbow room (autonomy in decision-making), meaningfulness, and a desirable future. Lorne Sossin emphasized the importance of the nature of the client-bureaucrat relationship. The Voluntary Sector Initiative focussed on mutual commitments. Ship Repair Atlantic and Saskatchewan Potash emphasized power sharing, with the former involving employees in formerly exclusively management decisions, and the latter involving unions as a minority in formerly owner- and director-only boards of directors. While all of the examples of empowerment involved some form of empowering content, all did not involve changes in relationships. In addition, while participation in setting goals and objectives (intent) was important, the citizen-government dialogue suggested they were not enough by themselves. Rather, the empowering content and relationships must be anchored in significant action. Employee, client or citizen recommendations must be implemented, and if not, the failure to do so explained.

A remarkable aspect of many of the examples of power sharing highlighted in the literature or described here is that they were not achieved through collegial or democratic relationships. Rather, like many changes in administration and service, they were imposed on workers, clients and citizens by owners, managers and elected governments. In Semco Corp. and the Grameen Bank, for example, owners imposed responsibility for solving corporate problems on employees. While the content of power sharing was created, the necessary relationships were not, at least initially. Semco may have created a more democratic workplace in the long term, however. Porto Alegre (especially), and the Voluntary Sector Initiative (potentially) looked and felt more like more collegial/democratic relationships, but the decisions were subject to agreement by elected officials.

The difference between delegation (hierarchical) and power sharing (democratic) raises issues such as the need for truthful communication, for clear intent to empower, for choice, for appropriate processes, and the need to connect these with outcomes through relationships. Clearly, an important element in empowerment is trust. The citizen-government dialogue raised questions about whether citizens can empower themselves when no real power is at stake. The Voluntary Sector Initiative has not yet made clear whether the policy advice provided through its process was actually used and implemented. This would have been a key element of its success.

Don de Guerre's prescriptions for democratic workplaces and the Saskatchewan Potash Corporation union membership on the board looked more like traditional models of power sharing, within the existing division of labour. This division of labour is one in which the Board is legally responsible and accountable, it delegates responsibility for strategic planning to management, and the how is determined by front-line employees and supervisors.

The examples presented also revealed that power sharing and democracy do not necessarily lead to the same thing. While the impact of power sharing is limited to the workplace (and emphasizes content), democratic workplaces combine democratically achieved decisions with implementation, and lead to additional spin-offs. They are thus not only important because they contribute to the efficiency and effectiveness of work and the health and productivity of employees. They are also important because of the impact they can have on the health of the polity. While much is made of western democratic electoral systems, choice is only offered every four or five years through elections and sometimes through consultation on implementation of specific programs or policies. It is a periodic, representational system.

The current electoral system exists within a broader social and political context, much of which is not democratic. Hardly any corporations are run democratically, many churches are not, some voluntary associations are not, most families are not. A democratic political system needs to exist within and be supported by a democratic social order. The risk of a non-democratic social order is hat when problems develop, people will turn to strong leaders with solutions. As Paula Tiihonen, secretary to the parliamentary Committee for the Future in Finland (a country that has been showing up regularly as "first" in country comparisons) said: "It will not suffice for simply the highest-level state organs to meet the conditions of democracy." (Personal correspondence with the author).

If employees had the opportunity to practice democracy in the workplace, they could become more collegial and more effective leaders in other organizations in the rest of society. Given the opportunity to function as subjects in more of their lives, they would also become better citizens, able to assume responsibility for their governments and better parents, able to pass these skills to their children. Elections could become matters not just of "support or punish" but of clear, positive policy choices that lead to action.

The relationship between direct democracy (such as referenda, plebiscites, recall and polling) and citizen participation need to be clarified in this discussion. Citizens participating directly in government decision-making are to some extent participating in direct democracy. Direct democracy and government consultation are similar in that they tend to address one issue at a time. NVO participation in policy-making and Brazil's participative budgeting process, on the other hand, addressed the complexity of many competing issues that elected politicians must also address.

In the Voluntary Sector Initiative and community cases, representatives were elected. This raises the question–which was also raised at the Innovation Salon–whether citizen participation usurps the role of elected officials. The willingness of the politicians in Brazil to accept the credibility of the priorities recommended by citizens would seem to indicate that politicians remained relatively comfortable with the role of citizen processes in developing city priorities. At the same time, these politicians were seeking change, so the processes served their

purposes. Elected officials who had benefited from elitism and inequality might not have been as comfortable.

Delegation, self-empowerment, form without substance, and relationships in which participants are treated as objects do not produce empowerment reliably. Substantive issues, implementation, power sharing, and collegial, democratic relationships in which participants are treated as autonomous subjects seem to produce both the feeling and the reality of empowerment, and to reinforce democracy more generally. These are also the conditions that make innovation and risk-taking possible.

About the Author:

Eleanor Glor is a public servant who has worked for three levels of Canadian government. She has published extensively on public sector innovation, including: Innovation Traps: Risks and Challenges in Thinking About Innovation. *The Innovation Journal: The Public Sector Innovation Journal.* 2003. Vol 8(3). www.innovation.cc

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