Empowerment of employees has been promoted as a superior management approach in government for the past 30 years. This concept has come under the rubric of delegation, employee empowerment, self-control, self-efficacy\(^1\) and sense of coherence\(^2\) as well as workplace democracy, empowering participation,\(^3\) participatory management and quality improvement. Despite periodic efforts to increase employee empowerment, federal government employees do not seem to be empowered – staff do not feel managers are interested in them or their careers,\(^4\) half of staff feel overworked\(^5\) and executives become ill because they cannot exercise control in their daily functioning.\(^6\)

In 1999, the Government of Canada conducted an employee survey\(^7\) as an initial step toward doing something about this contradiction between management concept and practice. Senior staff have been asked to respond and a deputy minister committee on workplace well-being is developing a corporate action plan. Whether the response to the survey contributes to empowering staff will be determined by the learning that is gained as a result and what and how follow-up occurs. This article examines the concept of empowerment, reviews the current situation in the Government of Canada, describes the major empowerment models and recommends an employee empowerment strategy for implementation and evaluation.

**Understanding the concept of empowerment**

The notion of empowerment has been part of progressive movements for 150 years. The focus has been on empowering those who were disempowered – the least powerful, most exploited elements of society. In keeping with this interpretation, Kernaghan\(^8\) suggested that empowerment in the Public Service was about fostering individual and collective action by employees to the benefit of the government, its managers and employees – it was not about managers getting employees to act as managers would like them to act.

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**Eleanor Glor**, an executive with Health Canada, is currently leading a quality initiative in the Health Promotion and Programs Branch. Over the course of her career, Ms. Glor has worked for three levels of government, in a non-governmental organization and in the private sector. Several of her articles on values, government reform and innovation have been published, and she recently edited a book on public sector innovation published by Captus Press. Ms. Glor is president of The Innovation Salon and co-editor of The Innovation Journal.

* The opinions expressed in this article are those of the author and do not necessarily reflect official government policy.
Empowerment was also about making the best possible use of employees' knowledge and skills.

During the 1980s and 1990s, the term empowerment in some management circles became synonymous with delegation. Empowerment of managers was an integral part of the managerialism of the 1970s and the new public management that gained prominence during the 1980s. Empowerment in this interpretation became part of a package of changes to government that reduced the scope and funding of public sector programs. It empowered front-line managers to deal with the consequences and to find more efficient, and if possible, more effective ways to deliver services to clients.

In Canada, the need to empower managers through delegation and decentralization was identified as early as the Report of the Glassco Commission in 1962. Public Service 2000 (PS 2000) also emphasized empowerment of managers and employees. As well, the Government of Canada’s quality initiatives emphasized empowerment of both managers and employees.

According to Conger and Kanungo, empowerment is about power and control. As demonstrated in the Whitehall studies and a 1997 APEX study, power and control are, in turn, about health. Power and control can be conceived in different ways, and empowerment can be seen in at least three ways – relations, motivation and democracy.

**Empowerment as a relational construct – to delegate**

As a matter of relations, according to Conger and Kanungo, power is seen as “the perceived power or control that an individual actor or organizational subunit has over others.” In terms of social exchange theory, power is a function of the dependence or interdependence of people. “Power arises when an individual’s or a subunit’s performance outcomes are contingent not simply on their own behaviour but on what others do and/or on how others respond.... The relative power of one actor over another is a product of the net dependence of the one on the other.”

At the organizational level, a person’s power over an organization is based on “the actor’s ability to provide some performance or resource that is valued by the organization or the actor’s ability to cope with important organizational contingencies or problems.” At the interpersonal level, the main sources of power over others are office or structural position, personal characteristics, expertise and opportunity to access specialized knowledge/information and/or resources. Depending on the resources controlled, a basis of power can be legal (control of office), coercive (control of punishment), remunerative (control of material rewards), normative (control of symbolic rewards) and knowledge/expertise-based (control of information).

“Implied in these theories are the assumptions that organizational actors who have power are more likely to achieve their desired outcomes and actors who lack power are more likely to have their desired outcomes thwarted or redirected by those with power.” This orientation focuses on the source or bases of power and on the conditions that promote dependence. Resource allocation is treated in these terms as a method for increasing and reducing power.

Empowerment is seen in these terms as “the process by which a leader or manager shares his or her power with subordinates.” Power is interpreted as “the possession of formal authority or control over organizational resources” and the emphasis is on the notion of sharing authority and granting power – authorizing, delegating and decentralizing decision-making power. Empowerment is often used in this way in the management literature, and it is the way the term was used in the PS 2000 paper on renewal.

According to the delegation or structural version of empowerment, employees should be empowered by the granting of power and decision-making authority, stemming from hierarchical authority, control of resources and network centrality.

An emphasis on delegation does not address the nature of empowerment as experienced by subordinates. Nor does it address key questions such as: Does the sharing of authority and resources with subordinates automatically empower them? Through what psychological mechanisms does empowerment occur? Are the effects of an empowering experience the same as the effects of delegation?
Empowerment as a motivational construct – to enable

Unlike the management literature, the psychological literature treats power, control and empowerment as psychological states that are internal to individuals. All people are assumed to have a need for power, defined as an internal urge to influence and control other people. This more inclusive idea of a desire to control and cope with life events deals with issues of primary/secondary control, internal/external locus of control and learned helplessness. People’s power needs are met when they perceive that they have power or when they believe they can adequately cope with events, situations and people, but are frustrated when they believe they are unable to cope with the physical and social demands of the environment. Power refers to an intrinsic need for self-determination and a belief in personal self-efficacy. In this conceptualization, power has its base within a person’s motivation.

Management strategies that strengthen belief in self-determination or self-efficacy increase the sense of power, while strategies and techniques that weaken them increase feelings of powerlessness. Approached this way, to empower is “to enable” and implies motivating through enhancing the sense of personal efficacy and creating “intrinsic motivation.”

In the management literature, definitions of empowerment as “delegation” and “enabling” are often fused. Enabling implies creating conditions for heightening motivation for task accomplishment through the development of a strong sense of personal efficacy. Delegating or resource sharing is only one set of conditions among others that may empower or enable employees. The definition of empowerment as “enablement” used by Conger and Kanungo is a process of enhancing feelings of self-efficacy among organizational members through the identification of conditions that foster powerlessness and through their removal by both formal organizational practices and informal techniques of providing efficacy information.

Empowerment as a process – to participate

According to Mintzberg,23 power is the ability to affect organizational outcomes. Employees should thus be empowered by decentralizing, flattening the hierarchy and increasing participation.24 Participative management techniques such as management by objectives, quality circles and goal setting by subordinates should empower staff. In the management literature, employee participation is sometimes equated with empowerment.

The empowering participation movement took a somewhat different view of participation. This movement focused on empowering people to change their own work situations. By empowering staff, organizations were expected to increase employees’ autonomy, involvement and learning, and to use human resources more effectively.25

Elden distinguished empowerment as structure, for example the autonomous work unit, and empowerment as a process, wherein workers could study and change their own organizations. Participant control was distinguished from participation alone which could empower or could function as a powerful means of overcoming resistance and co-opting people while the inquiry and change continued to be controlled by managers or consultants. In participant control, employees are empowered to develop their own maps or local theories about their work places, which according to Elden have been shown to be more complex and sophisticated than the theories of either their managers or of external experts. Although workers normally lack the authority necessary to develop or act on local theory, when they have such authority they are able to design and redesign their own workplace in harmony with the larger organization as a system. The model attempts to increase the power of the relatively powerless through worker-controlled development of knowledge including problem definition, collection and analysis of data, and

Power refers to an intrinsic need for self-determination and a belief in personal self-efficacy.
use of the results of the research. The result should be worker-controlled inquiry and change.

**Contexts for empowerment and disempowerment in the federal government**

The Government of Canada has made some efforts to empower staff in the last few years, but it may also have created disempowerment.

**Empowerment in the Government of Canada**

Empowerment was identified as a priority for PS 2000 and the quality initiative. Central agencies directed public service managers to develop innovation as a core competency, to empower staff and to create citizen-centred service delivery.

Other factors can be expected to contribute to employees’ sense of empowerment. Salary increases, albeit modest, resumed in 1998-1999, and several female-dominated employee classifications received a pay equity settlement. The Privy Council’s emphasis on portfolio management and bigger spans of control for ministers, combined with horizontal approaches to issues, have increased ministers’ and staffs’ capacity to address issues more effectively. The Privy Council Office’s (PCO) focus on citizen engagement created the potential for increased empowerment of citizens – public servants’ ultimate clients. The government has dealt with the deficit and provided some new funding for programs that matter to employees. Enhancing the effectiveness of programs should also empower the public servants who develop and run them.

The Government of Canada has made some efforts to do positive things for staff. Substantial efforts and resources have been expended in providing better access to information through electronic systems. Employee recognition programs have been introduced. While there were initial indications that employees working close to senior management were receiving the most recognition, recent efforts attempted to recognize long-term, front-line and regional employees more effectively. Training opportunities are available, although finding time to take training is a problem.

How many of these actions are actually empowering for staff is not clear. Better access to information, better communication, more training and technical support, and flexible work arrangements should give staff better tools. Pay increases, performance pay and formal recognition may empower, but they are controversial ways to acknowledge staff, as competitiveness or resentment can develop in the workplace as a result.

Few of these top-down actions are contributing indisputably to staff achieving a feeling of empowerment. The government is, however, employing a bottom-up approach in seeking feedback from its staff.

**The 1999 Public Service Employee Survey**

In the spring of 1999 the Treasury Board Secretariat of Canada (TBS) surveyed all federal Public Service employees. Conducted by Statistics Canada, the survey was distributed to more than 190,000 public servants, of whom 104,416 returned a survey, a response rate of 54 percent. The survey provided both positive and negative feedback on how federal government employees feel about their jobs.

More than 90 percent of federal government employees believe their work is important, that their immediate supervisor allows them to determine how to do their work, and that they are treated with respect. Between 70 and 80 percent feel their immediate supervisors keep them informed about the issues affecting their work, that they can disagree with their immediate supervisor on work-related issues without fear of reprisal, that suggestions for improvement are taken seriously, and that they have flexibility to adapt their services to meet their clients’ needs. Sixty percent indicated that their work unit is open to new ideas about how they can improve the way they work, that their unit periodically takes time to rethink the way it does business, and that they could clearly explain to others the direction of their department.

While a number of policies have seemed empowering, and staff indicated a number of ways in which they feel empowerment, other policies may have supported the disempowerment of the Public Service.
Ideas for enhancing employee empowerment in the Government of Canada

Contexts leading to powerlessness: what is disempowering?

Many management theorists argue that specific contextual factors contribute to lowering self-efficacy or personal power in organizations. Bureaucratic contexts are seen to have authoritarian management and organizational goals that lack meaning for employees; these encourage powerlessness, foster dependency, deny self-expression and create negative forms of manipulation. Conditions that lowered self-efficacy were found during major reorganizations, in start-up ventures and in firms with authoritarian managers and demanding organizational goals. Organizational communication systems, network-forming arrangements, access to resources and job design can also contribute to employee powerlessness. Kanter noted in particular the disempowerment of accountability without responsibility, where those whose formal role gives them the right to command are held accountable for the results produced by others. However, they lack “informal political influence, access to resources, outside status, sponsorship or mobility prospects.” Such disempowerment, according to Kanter, is found among front-line supervisors, some staff positions, women and minorities.

Conger and Kanungo identified four categories of contextual factors that lower self-efficacy beliefs – organizational factors, supervisory style, reward systems and job design. They hypothesized that the organizational factors contributing to disempowerment include major changes or transitions, financial emergencies, loss of key personnel, labour problems, significant technological changes, acquisition or merger, major changes in organizational strategy, rapid growth and/or the introduction of significant new products or management teams. These factors can lead to major changes in organizational structures, communication links, power and authority relations and organizational goals, strategies and tactics. Uncertainty, or even disenfranchisement, may be experienced because some responsibilities are perceived to be diminished or subordinated to others. Transitions therefore produce a period of disorientation. Start-up and growth, bureaucratic (patriarchal) relationships and segmentalism, authoritarian management styles, some kinds of reward systems and job design can have similar effects. It is also disempowering if organizations do not provide rewards that are valued by employees for employee competence, initiative and persistence in innovative job behaviour.

Disempowerment in the Government of Canada

During the 1990s the federal government changed its management model. Two key initiatives were representative of these changes. Program Review reduced staffing and funding for government programs, transfers to individuals and transfers to other governments. Public Service Renewal developed special operating agencies (SOAs) and alternative service delivery (ASD) agencies, facilitated reductions in financial and human resource management controls and costs, decentralized decision making, delegated to managers and increased staff accountability.

Reduced resources and new management models have created challenges for employees. According to a 1997 report on organizational health conducted by the Public Service Commission, “The pressures of rapid change and economic restraint often lead to poor morale among employees and reduced productivity.” In addition, the Public Service is aging, due to high recruitment levels in the early 1970s, followed by low recruitment levels, recruitment at older ages, and limited student interest in Public Service employment in recent years.

At the same time as the size and scope of the Public Service have been declining, some human resource strategies risked contributing to a sense of disempowerment on the part of public servants – policies such as a seven-year salary freeze that created declining real incomes for public servants; the removal of $25-30B from the Public Service pension fund, in combination with increases in employee contributions; and the adoption of a new employment relationship that removed an (implied) commitment to lifelong employment and emphasized instead employees’ responsibility for their own careers and futures. Likewise, new forms of control – increased emphasis on accountability, responsibility and codes of conduct – may have disempowered some staff.
APEX findings on federal government executives

APEX surveyed the federal government’s senior executives in the fall of 1997. Compared to Ontario residents generally, it found that government executives were sicker. Compared to other public servants, APEX members took considerably less sick leave: an average of 3.5 days per year compared to a government-wide average of eight days. Executives were more likely to see a doctor than the Ontario population, and a surprising number had been diagnosed with serious illnesses such as heart disease in the previous year. They were also experiencing high levels of psychological disorders. While higher-level executives were healthier, lower-level executives were sicker.

Executives identified the following factors as contributing to various psychological and physical health outcomes:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Factors leading to psychological disorders</th>
<th>Factors leading to physical disorders</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Lack of control</td>
<td>Lack of control</td>
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<tr>
<td>Workload</td>
<td>Job insecurity</td>
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<tr>
<td>Role conflicts</td>
<td>Role conflicts</td>
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<tr>
<td>Job insecurity</td>
<td>Lack of supervisory support</td>
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<tr>
<td>Skill underutilization</td>
<td>Responsibility for others</td>
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<tr>
<td>Lack of supervisory support</td>
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<tr>
<td>Load variance</td>
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<tr>
<td>Intra-group conflicts</td>
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According to the study, the major contributor to both physical and psychological disorders was lack of control.³⁵

The 1999 Public Service Employee Survey

Some of the findings of the Public Service Employee Survey may reflect disempowerment as identified by Kanter and Conger and Kanungo. Half of employees felt that their work suffered because of fewer resources and did not feel they were classified fairly. Between 40 and 50 percent of staff felt their work suffered from constantly changing priorities and instability in the organization. Fifty percent of staff found their workload unreasonable. Twenty percent of staff had worked unpaid overtime in the past year, 35 percent of staff felt that they could not claim overtime for hours worked and that their work suffered from too many approval stages. Thirty percent felt their work suffered from unreasonable deadlines.

Half of staff felt that they only sometimes or rarely/never had a say in decisions and actions that impact on their work and in how work gets distributed. Eighteen percent of staff reported experiencing discrimination and 20 percent harassment in their work unit. Thirty-five percent felt they did not have opportunities to develop and apply the skills they needed to enhance their careers. Fifteen percent felt they did not have the initiative to develop the skills they needed to enhance their careers – a particularly startling indicator of disempowerment.

Thirty-five percent felt they were not able to get on-the-job coaching to help them improve the way they did their work, nor did they have a fair chance of getting a promotion, given their skills and experience. Fifty-seven percent would be reluctant to ask for a developmental opportunity and 17 percent had been denied developmental appointments in the last three years. Thirty percent were not satisfied with their careers in the Public Service. Fifty percent of staff felt that senior management did not do a good job of sharing information and that management would not try to resolve concerns raised in the survey.

Many of the contextual factors contributing to disempowerment that Conger and Kanungo identified exist in the Government of Canada, and the findings of the Public Service and APEX surveys suggest that the Government of Canada shows some signs of employee disempowerment. On the other hand, in recent years, departments have taken initiatives, including investments in employee learning and recognition, to renew their work environment. Public Service leaders promoted and conducted the employee survey, made the results publicly available, and asked departments to develop and report on action plans to respond to issues raised by
the survey. The stage may have been set for responding to concerns and developing greater empowerment in the federal government. To achieve empowerment, an empowerment strategy would be needed.

**How can staff be empowered?**

A number of possible models for creating greater empowerment are available.

**PS 2000 empowerment model: a delegation model**

As part of PS 2000, Treasury Board Secretariat (TBS) published a paper on empowerment which saw empowerment as a result, a service-oriented synergy, that happens when the right mix of environmental factors, individual qualities and leadership are brought together. Empowerment was a new kind of responsibility, exercised within a framework of public stewardship and parliamentary accountability. “Empowered individuals and organizations are able to accept responsibility for results; to ‘connect’ in a responsive way with clients and colleagues; to act with integrity and accountability; and to be innovative and find new ways to improve service.”

The report encouraged employees to be more results-oriented, more responsive, more accountable and more innovative. The conditions required to create these outcomes were identified as a share in the organization’s vision and plans, a clear understanding of public service accountabilities, shared ownership, appropriate organizational investment, respect for individual styles and differences, and a willingness, starting at the top, to try new ways of doing business. To a considerable extent, this paper looked at empowerment as delegation.

**National Quality Institute model: listening to and involving employees and clients**

The National Quality Institute (NQI) emphasizes the message that an empowering organization is one that listens to its employees. Its Employee Feedback Questionnaire assesses general job satisfaction, satisfaction with the organization and supervisors, employee coping, co-worker cohesion and employee commitment. The main focus in the NQI model is on responding to employees’ needs and desires; hence, it is an enabling model. The issues addressed in the questionnaire are outlined in Appendix I.

**Conger and Kanungo model: generating self-efficacy**

The central premise of this model is that jobs must be designed to provide challenge, meaning and role clarity, and avoid conflict and role overload if employees’ sense of efficacy is not to suffer. To rectify the sense of powerlessness among employees, Conger and Kanungo argue that this should be the focal point for diagnosis and intervention. For increasing empowerment in an organization, they have identified the following stages that address the psychological state of empowerment, its antecedent conditions and its behavioural consequences:

- **Stage 1:** Diagnose conditions within the organization that are responsible for feelings of powerlessness among subordinates, e.g., organizational factors, supervision, reward system, nature of job.
- **Stage 2:** Use managerial strategies and techniques such as participative management, goal setting, feedback systems, modelling, contingent/competence-based reward and job enrichment.
- **Stage 3:** Provide self-efficacy information to subordinates using four sources: enactive attainment (authentic mastery), vicarious experience, verbal persuasion and emotional arousal, and removal of conditions listed under Stage 1.
- **Stage 4:** Subordinates experience empowerment, producing strengthening of effort (performance expectancy) or increased belief in personal efficacy.
- **Stage 5:** Behaviour changes: subordinates initiate and persist more to accomplish task objectives.

This should not be a one-time process but a process to which an organization would return periodically to identify and deal with disempowerment that has grown up in the organization. According to the authors, the early stages have been implemented several times, but
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The other stages have not. It thus remains a theoretical model, not a tested one.

The Spreitzer model: increase intrinsic motivation
The Spreitzer model, based on Thomas and Velthouse, is also a motivational approach. It sees empowerment as increased intrinsic motivation, achieved in four ways: meaning (value of work goal or purpose), competence (self-efficacy), self-determination (autonomy in initiation and continuation of work), and impact (influence on work outcomes).

The leadership model
In this model the emphasis is also on energizing employees. Leaders energize and inspire subordinates to participate by creating an exciting vision for the future. Bennis and Nanus, Block, Burke, Conger and Neilson are proponents of the leadership approach. The Government of Canada’s Leadership Network, part of La Relève, reflects such an approach.

The Health Canada model: healthy workplaces
Following the groundbreaking work of the Whitehall studies, it is now clear that employees who lack control are sicker and more likely to die at a younger age than empowered employees. Disempowerment costs employers – in lost work time and in insurance costs, as well as creating a poor social environment and low morale. Empowerment, with its accompanying greater equality in status and power, creates happier, more effective and healthier employees.

A healthy workplace listens, provides social support to its employees, allows them power and choice, and recognizes them in a way that they find valuable. In 1998, Health Canada and the National Quality Institute announced the launch of a Healthy Workplace Award to acknowledge healthy workplaces. Nominees for the award are assessed on: leadership, planning, a people focus, process management and outcomes. To earn recognition, employers must demonstrate that employee health and well-being are an integral and strategic part of the way they do business.

Workplace democracy models: empowering participation
According to Elden “the central feature common to all workplace democracy models is a requirement that participants not merely participate but also have some power, control and authority over what they are involved in.” He suggests the common features among the four cases he reviewed were:

- the rejection of conventional organizational development as a source of empowerment;
- a skepticism of participation as potentially co-optive;
- the view that organization democracy and political democracy are not the same thing; and
- the view that empowerment as a learning process legitimizes new possibilities for action from the bottom and up.

In his view, “Without power, participation results in paternalism at best, and in a hidden managerial control strategy at worst.”

Assessment of the models
The models reviewed were substantively different and could be expected to have dissimilar results. The PS 2000 delegation model entrusts employees with additional responsibilities and places additional expectations on them, often without giving them much additional power/resources. If delegation is perceived as additional work without additional power, it would not likely result in employees developing an enhanced sense of power. While the NQI’s model is based on the excellent principle of seeking input from and acting on employees’ concerns, its focus remains on management taking these initiatives and retaining control. Those who have power and feel empowered may not change.

Models for generating self-efficacy, while speaking directly to self-empowerment issues, still describe the process largely from the perspective of managers. The role of employees in creating an empowered environment is not emphasized. Health Canada’s Healthy Workplace model requires that employee health and well-being be an integral and strategic part of the way an organization does business. It does not address the
power and choice issues, but it does consider the social environment in the workplace. The Healthy Workplace model does not address how to deal with social problems in the workplace, however.

Only the empowering participation model develops strategies specifically focused on empowering employees directly and addresses the unequal power that exists between management and employees in most workplaces. Quality initiatives, if conducted with a focus on satisfying employees and clients rather than on cutting costs, could also have the potential to empower. If successful, the empowering participation and quality service models would appear to have the most potential for empowering employees.

Results of previous evaluations

Some models of employee involvement have been evaluated. Although it can be argued that employees should be involved for ethical and health reasons, Cotton reviewed the results of a number of evaluations that addressed whether employee involvement improved productivity, job attitudes, costs, absenteeism or turnover. Most studies described what occurred as employee participation, which is less active than employee involvement. Studies identified key contextual variables in determining the success of experiments as individual differences, participation processes, the methodology used in the study, and the form that the employee involvement took.

Cotton conducted an in-depth analysis of all the studies. The weakest effects were found with quality circles which improved attitudes about programs but had little effect on productivity and employee attitudes, and representative participation which had little effect on productivity or employee attitudes. Intermediate effects were found in quality of work-life interventions, producing improvements in labour-management relations, with varying effects on productivity and employee attitudes; job enrichment, producing improvements in job attitudes, with varying effects on productivity; and employee ownership – cooperatives were linked to better job attitudes and productivity, and employee stock ownership plans had varying effects. Cotton found the strongest effects in self-directed work teams, involving improvements in productivity and job attitudes, and in gainsharing plans that directly reward employees for involvement, producing improvements in productivity and some effects on employee attitudes. The lack of productivity measures means these results are of limited use in the public sector, but improvements in labour-management relations and employee attitudes are relevant to empowerment.

The empowering experience

In individual terms

According to expectancy theory, people’s motivation to increase their effort in a given task will depend on two types of expectations: that their effort will result in a desired level of performance and that their performance will produce desired outcomes. Bandura refers to these as the self-efficacy expectation and the outcome expectation. “When individuals are empowered, their personal efficacy expectations are strengthened. However, their outcome expectations are not necessarily affected. They develop a sense of personal mastery or a ‘can do’ attitude regardless of hopes for favorable performance outcomes.”

Government actions that might contribute to increasing events that result in a desired level of performance and produce desired outcomes could include:

- facilitating staff attendance at courses they have chosen that increase their work-related skills, their sense of self-efficacy, whether they accomplish these objectives or not;
- supporting staff’s ideas and helping the ideas come to fruition; for example, Japanese companies assign former senior managers to work with staff who make suggestions for improvements, to help the individual move an idea through the system; and
- creating a positive feedback system.

Self-set goals with performance information enhance effort; self-set goals alone do not .... People are stirred to action by the prospect of valued outcomes, but by applying evaluative standards to their ongoing performances, they
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strive to perform successfully to please themselves as well.49

In organizational terms
To maximize empowerment, a context needs to be created in which employees control and direct the change and control resources to support the change. This context could also be expected to enhance health.

Some specific suggestions

Set the stage
The Government of Canada could build on the results of the 1999 Public Service Employee Survey by doing the following:

- an in-depth survey of employee health, desires and ideas for improvements to create a profile of how staff feel and what allows them to feel empowered;
- an organizational culture survey;
- an NQI Workplace Health Self-Assessment; or an NQI employee feedback questionnaire;
- by allocating resources and encouraging management commitment to an ongoing initiative.

Put in place an empowerment program
Most importantly, the Government could adopt the empowering participation and quality service models found in this review to have the most potential for empowering employees. The best approach would create participation with power and treat empowerment as the development of self-efficacy and empowered participation. The risks are that the Government of Canada will merely adopt a delegation model or respond too narrowly to employee concerns.

Some specific steps
Some possible components of the program adopted should be to:

- ask staff what would empower them;
- take action on difficulties and problems in the workplace that affect individuals and their health, e.g., overwork, lack of control;
- empower staff whenever and wherever it is possible to do so;
- act on recommendations of departmental staff committees;
- provide training for empowerment: skill building can be done to enhance self-efficacy; best benefits are derived from work units training together;
- put resources in the hands of front-line staff to research and act on their ideas; and
- involve unions.

What effects could be expected of empowerment?
Limited empirical work has been done on the results of empowerment, so it is difficult to say what specific outcomes to expect. According to Conger and Kanungo, the positive results that could be expected would include:

- reduced sense of powerlessness;
- sense of self-efficacy;
- more initiative and persistence in tasks;
- development of a self-efficacy expectation; and
- development of an outcome expectation: that performance will produce desired outcomes.

It can also be hypothesized that the following positive benefits would result:

- improved morale;
- better balance of work and home responsibilities;
- improved understanding by staff of how their work contributes to departmental and branch goals and objectives;
- less sick time;
- improved productivity;
- increased job satisfaction; and
- lower staff turnover.

Some potential negative effects might include:
- overconfidence or misjudgments on the part of subordinates;
- false confidence on the part of the organization, leading to persistence in weak tactics or strategic errors; and
• criticism that the purpose of government is not to empower employees but to provide good service to the public.\textsuperscript{50}

It might be possible to deal with potential problems by introducing a system of checks and balances or a system of risk management. Better still would be a willingness on the part of senior managers to treat empowerment as a learning experience that sometimes produces errors but whose positive impact is worth the benefits to staff, the department and the public.

**Measuring effects**

The expected benefits of empowerment will only be realized if employees actually experience empowerment. According to Menon,\textsuperscript{51} this requires three things: empowering acts and modification of structures; employee achievement of an empowered state; and desirable employee behaviours and outcomes such as satisfaction, involvement and organizational commitment. It is important to remember, as well, that some employees can feel empowered without empowerment initiatives.

Menon has developed a strategy for measuring empowerment from the perspective of the employee.\textsuperscript{52} According to him, an empowered employee is one who can say:

- “I have control over my work and work context.”
- “I have the personal competence to do my work.”
- “I am personally energized by the goals of the organization.”

The similarity of some of these statements to statements used in the PS Survey should be noted.

Menon developed measures for three aspects of psychological empowerment, from the perspective of the individual employee. He suggested looking for:

- the act of granting power to the person(s) being empowered;
- the process that leads to the experience of power; and
- the psychological state that manifests itself as cognitions that can be measured.

He suggests that nine questions can determine whether these outcomes have been achieved (Appendix II). Such an effective tool could be used at regular intervals to assess the empowerment of employees in government. Regular use of the Public Service Survey or the Healthy Workplace Questionnaire would also monitor employee empowerment.

Drawing on the empowering participation perspective, employee-developed change should also occur. Resources would need to be put at the disposal of staff trying to deal with issues which they have identified as important to their empowerment. Whether such tools had been created could be measured, as well as the delegation processes and feelings identified by Menon.

In each of these assessments, staff are asked to answer either yes or no, without any variations. Unexplored in this method is whether there are variations in empowerment and disempowerment, and whether some acts and approaches are more/less empowering and disempowering than others. Answers to multiple questions allow for identification of gradations within the experience of the individual. Menon explored which questions best identified the factors of goal internalization, perceived control and perceived competence. In my experience testing his questions, some staff reacted strongly to several, so pretesting should be done before using them. An attempt should be made to evaluate in an empowering manner.\textsuperscript{53}

**Conclusion**

The Public Service Employee Survey, its departmental reports and introduction of continuous learning in the Government of Canada offer important tools to support employee empowerment initiatives. Senior managers are paying attention to improving departments’ work environments. It is important to note, however, that to empower staff requires not only addressing specific issues raised by staff and delegation of authority and resources, but also creating processes and resources under the control of
employees and feedback processes. Such a package of changes could create both self-efficacy and empowering participation. They could be expected to contribute to employee satisfaction, good service, and an environment that would make the Government of Canada an employer of choice.

**Notes**

16. Ibid. p. 472.
17. Ibid.
18. Ibid., p. 473.
38. Ibid., p. 4.
Ideas for enhancing employee empowerment in the Government of Canada


45. Ibid., p. 250.


47. Ibid.


49. Ibid.


52. Ibid.


The employee feedback questionnaire assesses:

- General job satisfaction
- Satisfaction with the organization
- Satisfaction with supervisors
- Satisfaction with physical work environment
- Employee coping
- Communication flow with the organization
- Co-worker cohesion
- Internal quality
- Quality focus
- Training satisfaction
- Strategic leadership
- Recognition and reward of quality
- External job environment
- Employee commitment


Appendix I:
National Quality Institute employee feedback system

Appendix II:
A tool for assessing empowerment

Menon has developed an assessment tool for measuring employee empowerment. Tested in three workplaces, the best nine measures have been identified:

**Goal Internalization:**
1. I am inspired by what we are trying to achieve as an organization.
2. I am inspired by the goals of the organization.
3. I am enthusiastic about working toward the organization’s objectives.

**Perceived Control:**
4. I can influence the way work is done in my department.
5. I can influence decisions taken in my department.
6. I have the authority to make decisions at work.

**Perceived Competence:**
7. I have the capabilities required to do my job well.
8. I have the skills and abilities to do my job well.
9. I have the competence to work effectively.