

Chapter 14

Organisational control and power

Work organisations are complex systems of formal and social relationships. An underlying feature of organisational behaviour is the nature of control and power.

Learning outcomes

After completing this chapter you should have enhanced your ability to:

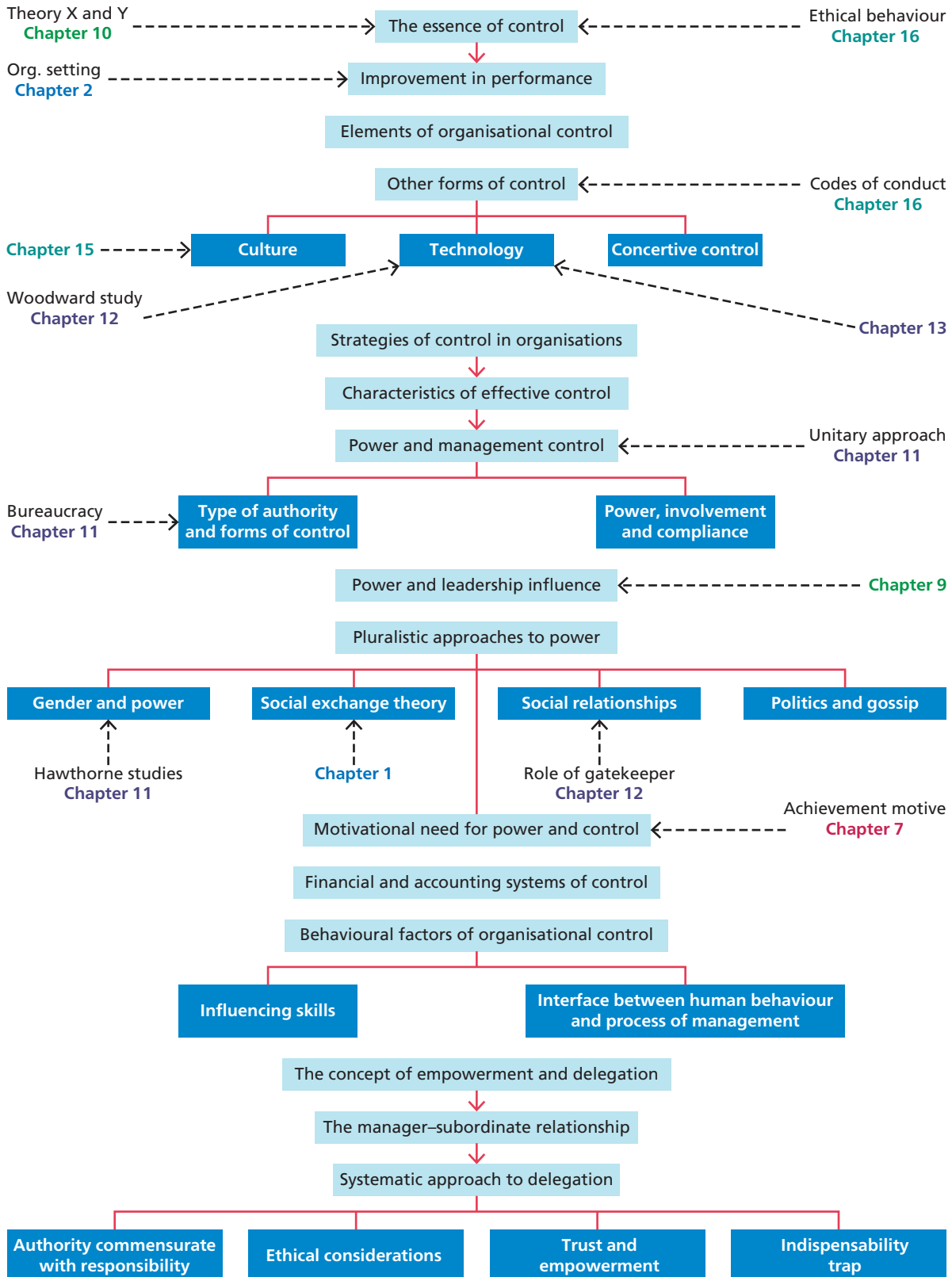
- explain the nature and importance of control in work organisations;
- detail functions and essential elements of organisational control;
- review different forms, strategies and characteristics of control;
- assess management control, leadership influence and pluralistic approaches to power;
- debate the nature and importance of behavioural factors of organisational control;
- explore the concept of empowerment and the manager–subordinate relationship;
- examine the process, benefits of and concerns about delegation.

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Overview topic map: Chapter 14 – Organisational control and power





Exercising control and power



Before commencing to read this chapter think honestly about how YOU react when you hear the words 'control' and 'power'.

The essence of control

As discussed in **Chapter 10** control is generally acknowledged as part of the essential function of management. Control systems exist in all spheres of the operations of the organisation and are a necessary part of the process of management. What is important is the manner in which control is exercised and nature of the manager–subordinate relationships as the basis of improved work behaviour and organisational performance.

Feature of organisational behaviour

By their very nature, control systems are concerned with the regulation of behaviour. Unfortunately 'control' often has an emotive connotation and interpreted in a negative manner to suggest an indication of authoritarian management, the giving of orders, and a means of exerting pressure and maintaining discipline.

Child suggests that although control is an essential process of management, it is strangely neglected by many writers on organisation. Among possible reasons for this is that 'control has a sinister ring to it, associated in people's minds with power and manipulation. As a result, there may be some reluctance among many business school writers to discuss control, in order to avoid embarrassment'.¹

Traditional views of control

Traditional views of control placed emphasis on the need for conformity of activities with the organisation and a prerogative of management. *Tannenbaum*, for example,

sees control as an inherent characteristic of the nature of organisations. The process of control is at the centre of the exchange between the benefits that the individual derives from membership of an organisation and the costs of such benefits.²

Individual responses and behaviour

According to *Cloke and Goldsmith*, many employees have grown up in hierarchical organisations and become accustomed to external authority and the dead weight of organisational history.

Many employees actually prefer being told what to do by autocratic managers and are willing to accept being treated like children in exchange for irresponsibility and reduced stress. They are willing to blindly obey hierarchical authority and keep silent before their superiors in exchange for job security. It is easier by far to be an unthinking drone who obeys orders from above than a self-managing team member who is responsible for results.³

(You may wish to remind yourself of the discussion on Theory X and Theory Y management in Chapter 10.)

There is however far more to control than simply a means of restricting behaviour or the exercise of authority over others. Control is not only a function of the formal organisation and a hierarchical structure of authority: it is also a feature of organisational behaviour and a function of interpersonal influence. With both control and power, **discussed later**, it is important to remember they are the *perceived* influences over other people. It is the way in which people are seen rather than the actual control or power they are in a position to exercise.⁴

Concern for the regulation of behaviour and improvement in performance raises questions as to the ethical nature of control. (Ethical behaviour in business is discussed in Chapter 16.)

As *Wilson* reminds us, individuals are not just passive objects of control: 'They may accept, deny, react, reshape, rethink, acquiesce, rebel, or conform and create themselves within constraints imposed on them.'⁵

Watson points out that although process-rational thinking recognises the aspiration of those 'in charge' of work organisations to achieve control over work behaviours, it also recognises two other things.

- Only partial control can ever be achieved. This is because organisations only exist through human relationships, and human relationships never allow the total control of some people over others. Power is rarely uncontested and, to a greater or less extent, attempts at control are typically resisted.
- Whatever control is achieved over work behaviour is brought about as much through processes of negotiation, persuasion, manipulation and so on, as through system 'devices' like rules and official procedures.⁶

Behaviour factors of organisational control are discussed later in this chapter.

Improvement in performance

From an organisational perspective, control completes the cycle of managerial activities. It involves the planning of work functions, and guiding and regulating the activities of staff. The whole underlying purpose of management control is improvement in performance at both the individual and organisational level **(see Figure 14.1)**. According to *Zimmermann* an organisation without control is

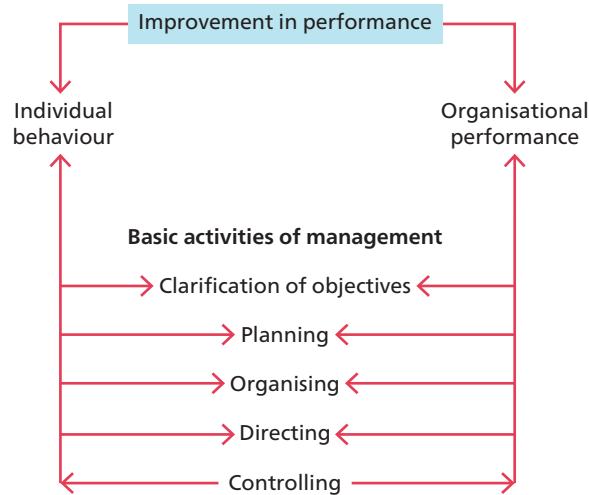


Figure 14.1 The nature of management control

impossible. Control systems are about influencing the behaviour of individuals in the interest of the corporation. Control systems measure the effective translation of decisions into results and goal achievement of the organisation.⁷

Features of poor organisational performance can even lead to the collapse of a company.⁸ A major international report undertaken by Proudfoot Consulting found that poor management in terms of inadequate planning and control and insufficient day-to-day supervision of work is still the largest single reason for lost productivity.⁹

Expression of managerial behaviour

The nature of management control is an organisational variable. Recall the discussion on the organisational setting in **Chapter 2** and consider likely variations in the extent and form of control among a range of diverse organisations. While the need for some form of control is constant, the extent and manner of control is variable. The exercise of control is an expression of management systems and styles of behaviour. What is really important is what control is intended to achieve and the manner in which it is exercised.



To what extent do YOU accept the need for some form of control as a prerequisite for improved individual and organisational performance?

Function of control systems

Control is far-reaching; it can serve a number of functions concerned with general results or specific actions and can be manifested in a number of forms. For example, controls can be concerned with:

- observance of legislation, standing orders and policies and procedures;
- day-to-day operational activities that call for more specific standards of performance and speedy corrective action;

- health and safety of all members of the organisation or people in contact with the organisation;
- the structure of the organisation and role relationships;
- type of production system and use of technology;
- measurement of inputs, outputs, processes or the behaviour of people;
- recruitment and selection, socialisation, training and development;
- performance of the organisation as a whole or with major parts of it.

Elements of organisational control

Whatever the nature of control, whatever form it takes or whoever is responsible for its implementation there are five essential elements in an organisational control system (see Figure 14.2):

- planning what is desired;
 - establishing standards of performance;
 - monitoring actual performance;
 - comparing actual achievement against the planned target; and
 - rectifying and taking corrective action.
1. **Planning what is desired** – clarification of aims to be achieved. It is important people understand exactly what is required of them, and objectives and targets are specified clearly, particularly key activities. Planning provides the framework against which the process of control takes place.
 2. Related to planning is the **establishment of defined standards of performance**. This requires realistic measurements by which achievement can be determined. Whenever possible measurements given some measurable attribute and stated in quantitative terms. Reasonable time scales should also be specified. Planning and measurement are prerequisites of control.

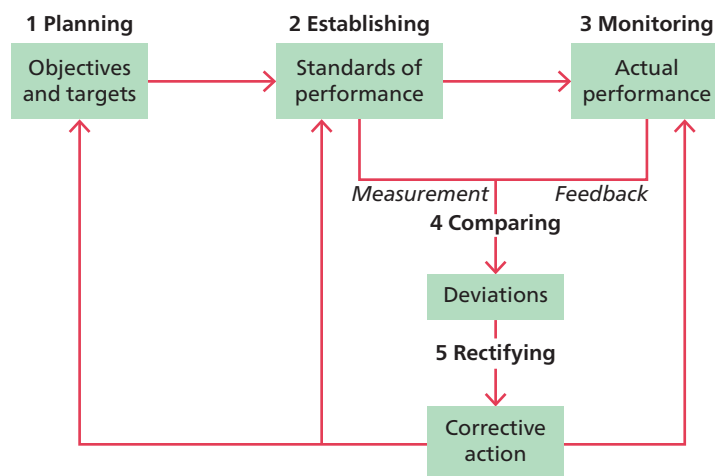


Figure 14.2 The five essential stages of organisational control

3. **Monitoring actual performance** – requires clear channels of communication and feedback, a system of reporting information that is accurate, relevant and timely. Feedback also provides the basis for decisions to adjust the control system, for example the need to revise the original plan.
4. **Compare actual performance against planned targets** – requires a means of interpreting and evaluating information to give details of progress, reveal deviations and identify probable causes.
5. **Taking corrective action to rectify** the situation that has led to any failure to achieve objectives or targets, or other forms of deviations identified. This requires authority to take appropriate action to correct the situation, review the operation of the control system and make any necessary adjustments to objectives and targets or to the standards of performance.

Other forms of control

More recent approaches question the extent to which **culture is a means of organisation control**. For example, *Ray* suggests that managers view organisational culture as an effective control tool¹⁰ and *Egan* refers to culture as the largest organisational control system.¹¹ **(See the discussion on organisational culture in Chapter 15.)**

According to *McKenna*, organisational codes of conduct **(discussed in Chapter 16)** can constitute another form of control:

Developing and distributing a code of conduct is a form of control that sets out the rules of behaviour and values with which an organisation's senior managers expect their subordinates will conform. Such a code will only be accepted if subordinates observe that managers at all levels live this code in their actions, beliefs and involvement in collective learning.¹²

Technology and control systems

From a further analysis of the data collected from Woodward's South Essex study of 100 manufacturing firms **(discussed in Chapter 12)**, clear links emerged between the original classification of technology and managerial control systems. From the analysis, Reeves and Woodward suggest that control systems may be the underlying variable that links organisational behaviour and technology. The classification of control systems they propose might provide a better means of predicting certain facets of organisational behaviour than the classification of technology.¹³

Wilson points out that technology is not just about devices and machines but also about social relations that encourage some form of interaction. Technology is a human, political and social activity. 'The locus of control cannot always be moved from workers to managers during technical change nor from managers to workers. Control does therefore ultimately lie with management – although workers may resist it.'¹⁴

Information communications technology

Previous chapters have referred to the impact of developments in information communications technology and these developments will also have a significant impact on organisational control systems. Processes of communication are

increasingly linked to computer systems with the rapid transmission of more information to more people including immediate access to other national or international offices. Information technology and office automation are changing the nature of the workplace and the way in which people work. For example, advances in telecommunications have resulted in a significant growth in telecommuting, with staff working from home with a computer network, telephone and fax. This has many potential advantages but also raises questions of self-motivation, security and systems of management control. Another interesting situation arising from the increasing use of information technology is the legal position on organisations monitoring staff emails and internet usage. **(A more detailed discussion on technology, work and organisational behaviour is included in Chapter 13.)**

Concertive control

Barker refers to a change from hierarchical, bureaucratic control to concertive control through the interaction of members in self-managing teams. **Concertive control** is not exerted by managers but by the value consensus of the team to a system of normative rules. Workers form their own cultural norms rather than bureaucratic rules and develop means for their own control.

I don't have to sit here and look for the boss to be around; and if the boss is not around, I can sit there and talk to me neighbor or do what I want. Now the whole team is around me and the whole team is observing what I'm doing.¹⁵

However, *Wright and Barker* refer to the need for some form of functional self-control as an element of teamwork but research has identified concertive control as a factor constraining teamwork. Teams can struggle with the collective manner in which teams control their own behaviours. Concertive peer enforced control can create powerful constraining or oppressive systems. Negative implications can arise within a team when a concertive control system is either too constraining or too loose and which parallel disadvantages of external control systems.¹⁶



Do YOU believe concertive control is a realistic way in which to monitor the behaviour and performance of self-managing teams?

Strategies of control in organisations

Six significant strategies of control in organisations are explained by *Child* (see Figure 14.3):

1. personal centralised control;
2. bureaucratic control;
3. output control;
4. control through electronic surveillance;
5. HRM control; and
6. cultural control.¹⁷

1. Personal centralised control

- 1.1 direct supervision of people's activities
- 1.2 centralised decision-taking
- 1.3 personal leadership: founded upon ownership rights, charisma, and/or technical expertise
- 1.4 reward and punishments reinforcing conformity to personal authority

2. Bureaucratic control

- 2.1 breaking down of task into easily definable elements
- 2.2 formally specified methods, procedures and rules applied to the conduct of tasks
- 2.3 budgetary and standard cost-variance accounting controls
- 2.4 technology designed to limit variation in conduct of tasks, with respect to pace, sequence and possibly physical methods*
- 2.5 routine decision-taking delegated within prescribed limits
- 2.6 reward and punishment systems reinforcing conformity to procedures and rules

3. Output control

- 3.1 jobs and units designed with responsibility for complete outputs
- 3.2 specification of output standards and targets
- 3.3 use of 'responsibility accounting' systems
- 3.4 delegation of decisions on operational matters: semi-autonomy
- 3.5 reward and punishment linked to attainment of output targets

4. Control through electronic surveillance

- 4.1 speed and quality of work recorded and assessed remotely via information and communication technology (ICT)
- 4.2 employee's performance assessed against that of other employees and trends
- 4.3 such monitoring of performance used to reward and discipline employees

5. HRM control

- 5.1 use of selection methods to ensure that new recruits 'fit' the profile of attitude, behaviour, and capabilities desired by management
- 5.2 training and development designed to reinforce this desired profile
- 5.3 assessment procedures and reward systems used to encourage conformity

6. Cultural control

- 6.1 development of employees' personal identification with management goals
- 6.2 strong emphasis on the collective and mutually supportive character of the organisation - e.g. analogy with the 'family'
- 6.3 employment characterised by security of tenure and progression within the organisation
- 6.4 semi-autonomous working: few formal controls

*Some authorities distinguish this as a separate control strategy. For example, Richard Edwards (1979), *Contested Terrain: The Transformation of the Workplace in the Twentieth Century*, New York, Basic Books.

Figure 14.3 Strategies of organisational control

Source: Child, J. *Organization: Contemporary Principles and Practice*, Blackwell Publishing (2015), second edition, p. 154. Reproduced with permission from Wiley-Blackwell.

- **Personal centralised controls** – Often found in small owner-managed organisations and characterised by centralisation of decision-making and initiative around a leadership figure. Control consists largely of personal supervision

and inspection. The authority of the leader will usually rest upon the rights of ownership, special personal qualities (charisma) or technical expertise.

- **Bureaucratic control** – Familiar in public sector organisations and many other types of large organisations. It is based on the specification of how members should behave and carry out their work. There is an attempt to ensure predictability through formal job descriptions and procedures, and the specification of standard methods for the performance of tasks. The bureaucratic strategy also permits delegation without loss of control. Compliance can be rewarded by upgrading, improved status, favourable employment benefits and job security.
- **Output control** – Relies upon the ability to identify specific tasks having a measurable output or criterion of overall achievement – for example, an end-product, a part manufactured to agreed standards, batch production or a sub-assembly. Rewards and sanctions can be related to performance levels expressed in output terms.
- **Control through electronic surveillance** – The essence of control is that the speed and quality of work is recorded and assessed remotely through the use of ICT without reliance on personal supervision. Monitoring of performance can be used readily as the basis for reward and discipline. Control through electronic surveillance is applied to many types and levels of activity. A common example is call centres.
- **HRM control** – HRM procedures can be used both to develop people at work and to control their behaviour and performance. Systematic selection techniques are designed to ensure new recruits fit the profile and technical competencies required by management. Performance evaluation and appraisal provide feedback to both management and employees. Appraisals should provide the basis for reward and for an assessment of the need for further training or development.
- **Cultural control** – Moves away from conventional forms of organisation and is based on maintaining control through internalised compliance rather than external constraint. The basis of cultural control is the acceptance and willing compliance with the requirements of management and belief of the organisation. Despite criticisms of cultural control, it is in tune with the increasing number of professional and knowledge workers and is consistent with self-managing units or teams working with only limited formal controls.



Nelson Mandela's cell at Robben Island – a form of cultural control?

Characteristics of effective control

Whatever the nature or form of control there are a number of characteristic features of an effective control system. Control systems can have positive as well as negative effects. It is important therefore that they are designed and implemented in a constructive and rewarding way. An effective control system should:

- **Be understood by those involved in its operation.** The purpose of the control system and the information it provides must be fully comprehensible to those who have to act on the results.
- **Draw attention to the critical activities important to the success of the organisation.** Careful control must be maintained in key result areas and in those activities that are crucial to the success of the organisation.
- **Conform with the structure of the organisation and be related to decision centres responsible for performance.** Information should be supplied to those managers who have the responsibility for specified areas of activity and presented in a form that shows clearly when corrective action is necessary.
- **Be consistent with the objective of the activity to which it relates.** The control system should be sophisticated enough to indicate ways in which performance can be improved. For example it may not be sufficient just to know that expenditure has been kept within the budget. It would be more helpful to know in what areas expenditure has been incurred.
- **Report deviations from the desired standard of performance as quickly as possible.** Ideally, indications of likely deviations should be discovered before they actually occur. For example, information that the budget is likely to be overspent should arrive in sufficient time to enable those responsible to avoid drastic last-minute action.
- **Be flexible** and yield information that is not influenced by other factors unconnected to the purpose of the control system. For example, a control system which specifies that reports to top management should be made whenever expenditure exceeds the same set amount means high-spending departments may be subject to excessive control and low-spending departments not monitored closely enough.
- **Subject to continual review** to ensure they are effective and appropriate in terms of the results they produce. They should not be too costly or elaborate, but should satisfy the characteristic features suggested above.



How far can YOU identify the effectiveness of these characteristics with control systems in your university?

Power and management control

Work organisations are not only systems of hierarchical structure, they are also systems of intricate social relationships, status and power. **Power** is a complex and dynamic concept and difficult to define easily. **At a broad level, power can be interpreted in terms of control or influence over the behaviour of other people with or without their consent.** Sometimes power is interpreted in terms of the

extent of the influence which can actually be exercised over other people, and sometimes it is taken to include influence over objects or things as well as people. Like the meaning of control, power can have an emotive connotation.

However, power is an inherent feature of work organisations and is often the underlying reality behind the decision-making process. It is central to the framework of order and system of command through which the work and activities of the organisation are carried out, and the implementation of policies, and procedures. Lack of power and influence, and office politics, are among the main sources of managerial stress within organisations.

Caulkin points out that visible or not, power shapes everything. Hierarchy occurs everywhere in the natural order.

Yet for all the words devoted to 'official' topics such as strategy, leadership, shareholder value and customer focus, the truth is that the drive to win and keep power is the 'invisible hand' that yanks the strings which determine much of what happens in business.¹⁸

The view of power as of functional importance is in keeping with a unitary approach to organisation, **discussed in Chapter 11**. Management control is the predominant means by which the activities of staff are guided towards the achievement of organisational goals. The exercise of power is that which comes from a position of formal authority within the management structure of the organisation and which legitimises control over subordinate staff.

Types of authority and forms of control

In one of the earliest studies of formal organisations, *Weber* distinguished three types of authority: **traditional**, **charismatic** and **legal-rational**.¹⁹ These types of authority are based on the form of control regarded as legitimate by subordinates and their acceptance of the power of superiors. The three types of authority relate to different types of organisations.

- In **traditional organisations**, authority is legitimised by custom and a longstanding belief in the natural right to rule, or is possessed by traditional ('proper') procedure. Examples would be the authority of the pope, kings or queens or a paternalistic employer.
- In **charismatic organisations**, authority is legitimised by belief in the personal qualities of the leader; authority is based on the leader's strength of personality and inspiration. Winston Churchill might be quoted as an example. On the impending demise of the charismatic leader the movement might collapse unless a 'legitimate' heir is found. This process tends to transform a charismatic organisation into either a traditional organisation or a bureaucratic organisation.
- In **legal-rational (legitimate) organisations**, authority is based on the acceptance of the law of formal rules and procedures, and on impersonal principles. Bureaucratic organisations are associated with legal-rational authority which stems from a legitimate hierarchical position in the organisation and not from personality. Examples are the armed forces, authority of government ministers or a university chancellor.

The concept of legal-rational authority is of most interest to us because most business organisations, particularly large-scale ones, tend to be of the bureaucratic type of structure, although there are variations in degree. Bureaucracy, as applying

to certain structural features of organisation, is the most dominant type of formal organisation. **(Bureaucracy as a form of structure is discussed in Chapter 11.)**



To what extent do YOU accept the idea of legal-rational authority and the exercise of legitimate power from the position in the formal organisation structure?

Power, involvement and compliance

From a comparative analysis of complex organisations, *Etzioni* provides a classification of organisational relationships based on structures of control and the use of power resources as a means of ensuring compliance among members.²⁰
Power differs according to the means by which members of the organisation comply.

- **Coercive power** relies on the use of threats, or physical sanctions or force, for example, controlling the need for food or comfort.
- **Remunerative power** involves the manipulation of material resources and rewards, for example, through salaries and wages.
- **Normative power** relies on the allocation and the manipulation of symbolic rewards, for example, esteem and prestige.

Involvement is the degree of commitment by members to the organisation.

- **Alienative involvement** occurs where members are involved against their wishes. There is a strong negative orientation towards the organisation.
- **Calculative involvement** occurs where attachment to the organisation is motivated by extrinsic rewards. There is either a negative orientation or a low positive orientation towards the organisation.
- **Moral involvement** is based on the individual’s belief in, and value placed on, the goals of the organisation. There is high positive orientation towards the organisation.

When considered together Etzioni suggests that a particular kind of power usually goes with a particular kind of involvement **See Figure 14.4:**

- coercive power with alienative involvement – typified, for example, by prisons;
- remunerative power with calculative involvement – typified, for example, by business firms;
- normative power with moral involvement – typified, for example, by churches.

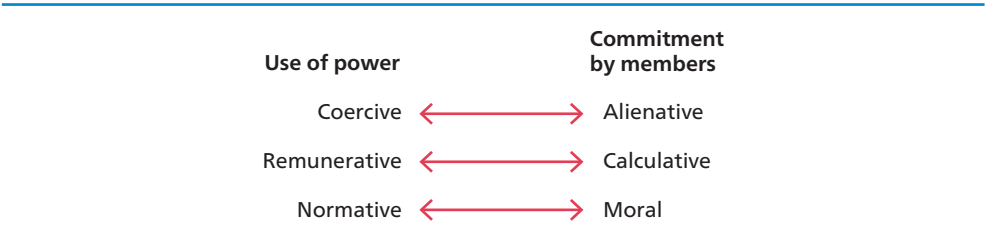


Figure 14.4 Etzioni’s considered best fit between use of power and kind of involvement

The matching of these kinds of power and involvement is congruent with each other and represents the most common form of compliance in organisations. Etzioni suggests that organisations with congruent compliance structures will be more effective than organisations with incongruent structures.

Power and leadership influence

Leadership influence is a social process and may be seen in terms of the type of power that the leader can exercise over the behaviour and actions of others.

(Leadership is discussed in Chapter 9.) An early view of social power upon which the influence of the leader is based have been identified by *French and Raven* who identify five main sources: reward power, coercive power, legitimate power, referent power and expert power.²¹ We shall consider these in terms of the manager (as a leader) and subordinate relationship. It is important to note that these sources of power are based on the subordinate's perception of the influence of the leader, whether it is real or not.

- **Reward power** is based on the subordinate's *perception* that the leader has the ability and resources to obtain rewards for those who comply with directives; for example, pay, promotion, praise, recognition, increased responsibilities, allocation and arrangement of work, granting of privileges.
- **Coercive power** is based on fear and the subordinate's *perception* that the leader has the ability to punish or to bring about undesirable outcomes for those who do not comply with directives; for example, withholding pay rises, promotion or privileges; allocation of undesirable duties or responsibilities; withdrawal of friendship or support; formal reprimands or possibly dismissal. This is in effect the opposite of reward power.
- **Legitimate power** is based on the subordinate's *perception* that the leader has a right to exercise influence because of the leader's role or position in the organisation. Legitimate power is based on authority, for example that of managers and supervisors within the hierarchical structure of an organisation. Legitimate power is therefore 'position' power because it is based on the role of the leader in the organisation, and not on the nature of the personal relationship with others.
- **Referent power** is based on the subordinate's *identification* with the leader. The leader exercises influence because of perceived attractiveness, personal characteristics, reputation or what is called 'charisma'. For example, a particular manager may not be in a position to reward or punish certain subordinates, but may still exercise power over the subordinates because the manager commands their respect or esteem.
- **Expert power** is based on the subordinate's *perception* of the leader as someone who is competent and who has some special knowledge or expertise in a given area. Expert power is based on credibility and clear evidence of knowledge or expertise including 'functional' specialists such as the management accountant or systems analyst.

French and Raven point out that the five sources of power are interrelated and the use of one type of power (for example, coercive) may affect the ability to use another type of power (for example, referent). Furthermore, the same person may exercise different types of power, in particular circumstances and at different times.

Yukl suggests that a further relevant source of power is **control over information**.²²

We can distinguish between **legitimate (organisational) power**, which derives from a person's position within the formal structure of the organisation and **personal (informal) power**, which derives from the individual and is in the eye of the beholders who believe that person has the ability to influence other people or events and to make things happen. For example, charisma or personal power as a feature of transformational leadership.



What form(s) of control and power are featured here?

Pluralistic approaches to power

Power arises not only from sources of structure or formal position within the organisation but from interpersonal sources such as the personality, experience, characteristics and talents of individual members of the organisation. **See Figure 14.5.**

We can distinguish between **legitimate (organisational) power**, which derives from a person's position within the formal structure of the organisation and

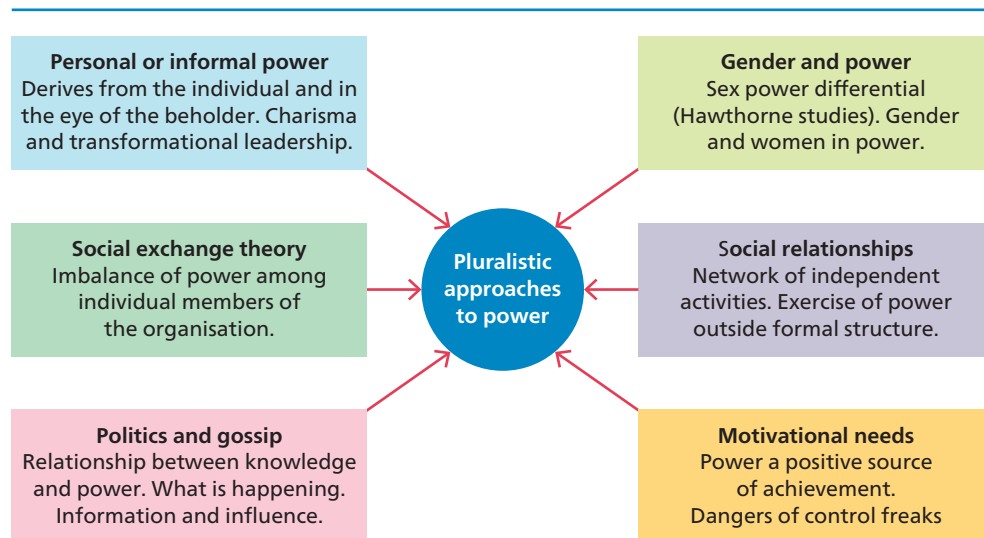


Figure 14.5 Pluralistic approaches to power

personal (informal) power, which derives from the individual and is in the eye of the beholders who believe that person has the ability to influence other people or events and to make things happen. For example, charisma or personal power as a feature of transformational leadership.

The exercise of power is, then, a social process that derives from a multiplicity of sources and situations.²³ This suggests a more pluralistic approach and recognises power as a major organisational variable. Many different groups and individuals have the ability to influence the behaviour and actions of other people, and in a number of different ways. This is not a new concept, however. In the 1920s the renowned management writer Mary Parker Follett focused on a human behaviour aspect, rejected the notion of domination and the exercise of power over other people, and argued for developing power with others in the organisation to make things happen. Effective control over work processes and social relationships would be achieved through group power and co-operative management. Follett advocated the replacement of personal power with the authority of task or function, and successful management based on the 'law of the situation'.²⁴

Gender and power

You may recall the suggestion of the sex power differential between the all male group and all female group as part of the evaluation of the Hawthorne experiments (**discussed in Chapter 11**). An example of gender and power is given by the Equality and Human Rights Commission who report on a survey on women in positions of power and influence. The survey found noticeable examples of the lack of women in senior positions of power, including those in the senior civil service, top management, judiciary, health service, directors of FTSE companies, Members of Parliament, and senior appointments in the armed forces and the police force. Where women do find positions of power and influence it is more likely to be in the public and voluntary sectors.²⁵

Social exchange theory

Social exchange theory, **discussed in Chapter 1**, can give rise to an imbalance of power among individual members of the organisation. Social exchanges are influenced by a web of power relationships and are not always equal. Individuals will seek to achieve a positive balance for themselves by maximising benefits and minimising costs of exchanges. Those with more power are likely to fare better in their dealings with others. As an example, part-time or casual staff often feel they have less power than their full-time colleagues. *Bloisi* suggests that one negative outcome is when ethnic minorities or women are confined to the low end of the power spectrum, caused in part by their fewer numbers and by token dynamics. *Bloisi* also suggests that in some cases, language is used as a power tactic to put down a minority or to be condescending.²⁶

Network of social relationships

Organisations function on the basis of networks of interdependent activities. Certain jobs or work relationships enable people to exercise a level of power in excess of their formal position within the structure of the organisation. A classic example is someone, perhaps a personal assistant or office manager, who fulfils the role of gatekeeper to the boss (**discussed in Chapter 12**). Another example is with information technology problems where comparatively junior members of staff with particular technical expertise may have a way of ignoring the normal chain of command.

Many people within organisations also have the ability to grant or withhold 'favours' within the formal or the informal interpretation of their job role – for example, caretakers, security staff and telephonists. Staff may exercise negative power – that is, 'the capacity to stop things happening, to delay them, to distort or disrupt them'.²⁷ Negative power is not necessarily related proportionately to position and may often be exercised easily by people at lower levels of the hierarchical structure.



What examples can YOU give of people outside the formal hierarchical structure who have been in a position to exercise power over other people?

Politics and gossip

A reality of organisational life is the vagaries of social relationships including power, office politics, and also the grapevine and gossip. *Misselhorn*, for example suggests that:

Power is often seen as a dirty word. Yet it is a reality of human experience. We all use power in one way or another. We are also strongly influenced by our values. Then we draw on both our values and our power in what we believe to be our rational thinking about a problem situation. The difficulty we have is that 'power' and 'values' are mostly hidden forces which are at work from international politics to shop floor problem solving.²⁸

Although a difficult topic to pin down, *Mann* refers to the key role that gossip plays in power relationships and knowledge production in organisations and maintains that 'There is an undeniable relationship between knowledge and power which lies at the root of gossiping.'²⁹

Hazlehurst refers to the hoary old question of office politics. Although supposed to abhor it, power games are instinctive and most people enjoy at least a modest level of politicking – either as players or amused spectators. *Hazlehurst* also refers to *Sheryl Sandberg*, COO of Facebook who 'retains that most traditional symbol of corporate power, a corner office'.³⁰

Alexander suggests that although office politics has a bad press you cannot sit it out and suggests it is reframed as 'office dynamics' or 'office relationships'. The author quotes a framework which distinguishes politics aligned with game-playing; and political awareness with integrity. There are also the non-political, principled and hard-working employees; or the game-playing employees who see themselves as power players but are usually outmanoeuvred.³¹

Yew and Gregory maintain that although rumour and gossip are often viewed as misbehaviour they are important in the workplace as they involve detailed knowledge of not just what is happening but who is doing what, with whom, how and why.³²

Motivational need for power and control

Power can be a positive source of motivation for some people (**see the discussion on achievement motivation in Chapter 7**). There is often a fine line between the motivation to achieve personal dominance and the use of social power. It has to be acknowledged, however, that there are some people who positively strive for and enjoy the exercise of power over other people. Some managers seek to maintain absolute control over subordinates and the activities of their department/section, and welcome the feeling of being indispensable. The possession of power is an ultimate ego satisfaction and such managers do not seem unduly concerned if as a result they are unpopular with, or lack the respect of, their colleagues or subordinate staff.

Kirwan-Taylor discusses control freaks who exist in every office and are capable of making everyone's life a misery. Control freaks try to dominate the environment by establishing order on what they perceive as chaos and attempting to control how other people think and behave. At one end of the spectrum are motivated and organised employees and at the other end obsessional, temperamental bullies. Sometimes, however, being a control freak is considered a positive attribute and key to success. Although control freaks function to a high standard, few people can bear to work with them.³³



Be honest – do YOU see yourself as a control freak? If so, does it concern you? How do you feel about working closely with others you believe are control freaks?

Financial and accounting systems of control

Management control systems are frequently thought of in terms of financial and accounting systems. The reasons for this are easy to understand. The stewardship of financial resources is of vital concern to the majority of organisations. In both private

enterprise and public sector organisations there is an increasing need to demonstrate value for money expended. Results are measured and reported in financial terms. Money is quantifiable, a precise unit of measurement and often used as a common denominator and as a basis for comparison. Financial limits are easy to apply as a measure of control and easy to relate to. For example, as part of the process of delegation, **discussed later in this chapter**, a measure of control might permit the subordinate to incur expenditure on certain items up to a given financial cost limit.

Accounting systems and human behaviour

However, accounting statements focus on only a limited area of activity. Management control embraces far more than just financial or accounting considerations. It is concerned with the whole process of management: with the extent to which organisational aims are achieved and with improvement in performance. Accounting control systems such as internal audit, management by exception and budgetary control tend to operate in a negative way and to report only on the unfavourable, or on favourable variances which may have adverse consequences, for example less spent than budgeted. 'Success' for the accounting staff may be equated with the 'failure' of other staff. As a result there is no specific recognition from management and little if any positive motivation.

There is, of course, nothing wrong with the use of accounting systems of control that have positive as well as negative effects. But, as with other forms of control, accounting systems should be designed and implemented in a constructive and rewarding way. To do this, they must take account of individual, social and organisational factors that determine people's patterns of behaviour.

Hilton suggests that the modern manager often lacks any feel for the unique culture of a business and therefore has an insufficient understanding or appreciation of the true drivers of its success. Unlike most developed countries UK boardrooms are dominated by people with a financial background. The problem is that financial control is not enough. Conventional risk control systems can cover hard data, technical know-how, systems and strategies. What they don't do is handle softer issues such as management style, employee motivation, shared values and corporate culture.³⁴

Behavioural factors of organisational control

Most people show ambivalence towards control. While they may not wish to have them applied by other people to their own performance they recognise (even if reluctantly) the need for, and usefulness of, control systems. Individuals may feel a sense of unease with what they perceive as lack of control over disruptive or anti-social actions or behaviour of work colleagues.

Control systems can help fulfil people's needs at work and their presence may be welcomed by some members of staff. Under certain conditions, individuals may actually desire greater control over their work performance. Whenever a person inquires 'I would like to know how well I am doing', this can *arguably* be seen as asking for control in the form of improved feedback. Members of staff want to know what is expected of them and how well they are progressing towards their objectives. Control can stand for reliability, order and stability. It is a basis for training needs, for the motivation to achieve standards and for the development of individuals.

Often, however, control systems are perceived as a threat to the need satisfaction of the individual. Even when control systems are well designed and operated they may be viewed with a certain amount of suspicion and possible resentment by members of staff. Control over behaviour may be resented and provoke an emotional response from those affected including a dislike of those responsible for its operation.

Influencing skills

Clearly some degree of power, in whatever form, is needed to get work done. As Owen points out power skills are becoming more important because the nature of the manager's job is changing.

It is now normal for managers to find that their responsibilities exceed their authority. In the past, the art of management was getting things done through other people, whom the manager controlled. Now managers have to get things done through other people whom they do not control. The lack of control changes everything. New skills are required to make things happen when you lack formal authority.

These skills include:

- building networks of trust and influence;
- creating alliances to make things happen;
- dealing with conflict;
- shaping the organisation's agenda to meet your needs;
- dealing with organisational conflict and resistance;
- managing ambiguity and uncertainty;
- finding the right assignments and projects to work on;
- discovering the real rules of survival and success in your firm.³⁵

Yukl suggests that rather than focusing exclusively on power as a source of potential influence more attention is being given to specific types of behaviour used to exercise influence.

Rational persuasion – the use of logical arguments and factual persuasion

Apprising – explaining the personal benefits or career advancement

Inspiration appeals – to values and ideas or attempt to gain commitment

Consultation – seeking support and assistance by asking for assistance

Exchange – incentives or willingness to reciprocate

Collaboration – providing relevant resources and assistance in exchange for proposed change

Personal appeals – based on friendship or personal favour

Ingratiation – use of praise or flattery

Legitimizing tactics – establish legitimacy or verify authority

Pressure – use of demands, threats, frequent checking

Coalition tactics – seeking the aid or support of others³⁶

Jimmy Wales, founder of Wikipedia, suggests a redefinition of management and a change to the usually quoted functions of command and control to 'inspiring and coaching'. Management is inspiring people to do what needs to be done. Managers need new skills including delegation and allowing more autonomy for teams to be



How good are YOU in influencing other people? What parts of your influencing behaviour are in need of further development?

more agile. There is no longer the luxury of communicating up the old command and control hierarchy: organisations need to be nimble at the end points.³⁷

Interface between human behaviour and process of management

The manner in which control is exercised and the perception of staff will have a significant effect on the level of organisational performance. Control systems provide an interface between human behaviour and the process of management. There are a number of factors, **discussed in other chapters**, that can affect the successful implementation of management control systems, including the following.

- **Attitudes and response of staff.** Perception of reasons for, and methods of control. Consideration by management to the influences of diversity and inclusion. Extent to which control may help as a learning and development experience.
- **Motivation.** Motivation is a function of the relationship between effort expended and perceived level of performance. Recognition for a satisfactory level of attainment coupled with a suitable reward system, as integral parts of control, can do much to motivate staff and encourage improved performance.
- **Groups and the informal organisation.** Membership of a harmonious and effective work group can be a source of motivation and job satisfaction. Socialisation can help create a feeling of commitment to the group and reduce the need for formal management control. With the development of autonomous work groups, members have greater freedom and wider discretion over the planning, execution and control of their own work. Informal group 'norms' and peer pressure can be one of the most powerful forms of control.
- **Leadership and managerial style.** The style of managerial leadership is a function of the manager's attitudes towards people, and assumptions about human nature and behaviour – for example McGregor's Theory X and Theory Y. The balance between concern for production and for people.
- **Consultation and participation.** If staff are committed personally to particular objectives they are more likely to direct themselves and exercise self-control over their level of performance.

- **Organisation structure.** Organisations with a mechanistic structure are more readily suited to the operation and implementation of traditional systems of control. In organic structures the effectiveness of control is more dependent upon individual involvement and commitment to the aims of the organisation. Increased flexible working arrangements and homeworking call for greater trust from managers.

The concept of empowerment and delegation

Discussion on the balance between control versus autonomy, draws attention to the importance of empowerment. Despite general movement towards less mechanistic structures and the role of managers as facilitators, there appears to be some reluctance especially among top managers to dilute or weaken hierarchical control.

Empowerment is generally explained in terms of allowing employees greater freedom, autonomy and self-control over their work, and responsibility for decision-making. However, there are differences in the meaning and interpretation of the term. For example, how does it differ in any meaningful way from other earlier forms of employee involvement? Is the primary concern of empowerment getting the most out of the workforce? Is empowerment just another somewhat more fanciful term for delegation? Some writers see the two as quite separate concepts while other writers suggest empowerment is a more proactive form of delegation.

Attempting to distinguish clearly between empowerment and delegation is not always clear. However, empowerment is viewed generally as the more embracing term that describes a management style and granting of genuine additional power to other members of staff. Empowerment is viewed as the more embracing process. **It is the process of empowerment that gives rise to the act of delegation.**

At the individual (or personal) level, **delegation** is the process of entrusting authority and responsibility to others throughout the various levels of the organisation. It is the authorisation to undertake activities that would otherwise be carried out by someone in a more senior position.

According to *Mills and Friesen*, 'Empowerment can be succinctly defined as the authority of subordinates to decide and act.'

It describes a management style. The term is often confused with delegation but, if strictly defined, empowerment goes much further in granting subordinates authority to decide and act. Indeed, within a context of broad limits defined by executives, empowered individuals may even become self-managing.³⁸

Skill of empowerment and delegation

Empowering other people is a matter of judgement and delegation is not an easy task. It involves behavioural as well as organisational and economic considerations. Effective delegation is a social skill and requires reliance on other people, confidence and trust, and courage. It is important that the manager knows what to delegate,

when and to whom. Matters of policy and disciplinary power, for example, usually cannot legitimately be delegated.

Extreme forms of behaviour

The nature of delegation can have a significant effect on the morale, motivation and work performance of staff. In all but the smallest organisation the only way to get work done effectively is through delegation, but even such an important practice can be misused or over-applied. There are two extreme forms of behaviour that can result.

- At one extreme is the almost total lack of meaningful delegation. Subordinate staff are only permitted to operate within closely defined and often routine areas of work, with detailed supervision. Staff are treated as if they are incapable of thinking for themselves and given little or no opportunity to exercise initiative or responsibility. This can be exemplified by the expression 'If you want something done properly, do it yourself'.
- At the other extreme there can be an excessive zeal for so-called delegation when a manager leaves subordinates to their own resources, often with only minimal guidance or training, and expects them to take the consequences for their own actions or decisions. The expression 'slopping shoulders' is often used to explain this form of behaviour. These 'super-delegators' misuse the practice of delegation and are often like the Artful Dodger, and somehow contrive not to be around when difficult situations arise. Such a form of behaviour is not delegation; it is an abdication of the manager's responsibility.

Either of these two extreme forms of behaviour can be frustrating and potentially stressful for subordinate staff, and unlikely to lead to improved organisational effectiveness.



How far do YOU honestly believe you would be capable of avoiding either of these two extreme forms of behaviour?

The manager–subordinate relationship

Delegation is not just the arbitrary shedding of work. It is not just the issuing and following of orders or carrying out of specified tasks in accordance with detailed instructions. Within the formal structure of the organisation, delegation creates a special manager–subordinate relationship. It is founded on the concept of:

- authority;
- responsibility; and
- accountability (ultimate responsibility).

Authority is the right to take action or make decisions that the manager would otherwise have done. Authority legitimises the exercise of empowerment within the structure and rules of the organisation. It enables the subordinate to issue valid instructions for others to follow.

Responsibility involves an obligation by the subordinate to perform certain duties or make certain decisions and having to accept possible reprimand from the manager for unsatisfactory performance. The meaning of the term 'responsibility' is, however, subject to possible confusion: although delegation embraces both authority and responsibility, effective delegation is not abdication of responsibility.

Accountability is interpreted as meaning ultimate responsibility and cannot be delegated. Managers have to accept 'responsibility' for the control of their staff, for the performance of all duties allocated to their department/section within the structure of the organisation, and for the standard of results achieved. That is, 'the buck stops here'.

The subordinate is responsible to the manager for doing the job, while the manager is responsible for seeing that the job gets done. The manager is accountable to a superior for the actions of subordinates.

Authority commensurate with responsibility

Delegation, therefore, embraces both authority and responsibility. It is not practical to delegate one without the other (see Figure 14.6). Responsibility must be supported by authority and by power to influence areas of performance for which the subordinate is held responsible. Authority can be delegated readily, but many problems of delegation stem from failure to delegate sufficient authority to enable subordinates to fulfil their responsibilities. For example, if a section head is held responsible to a departmental manager for the performance of junior staff but is not empowered (given authority) to influence their selection and appointment, their motivation, the allocation of their duties, their training and development, or their sanctions and rewards, then the section leader can hardly be held responsible

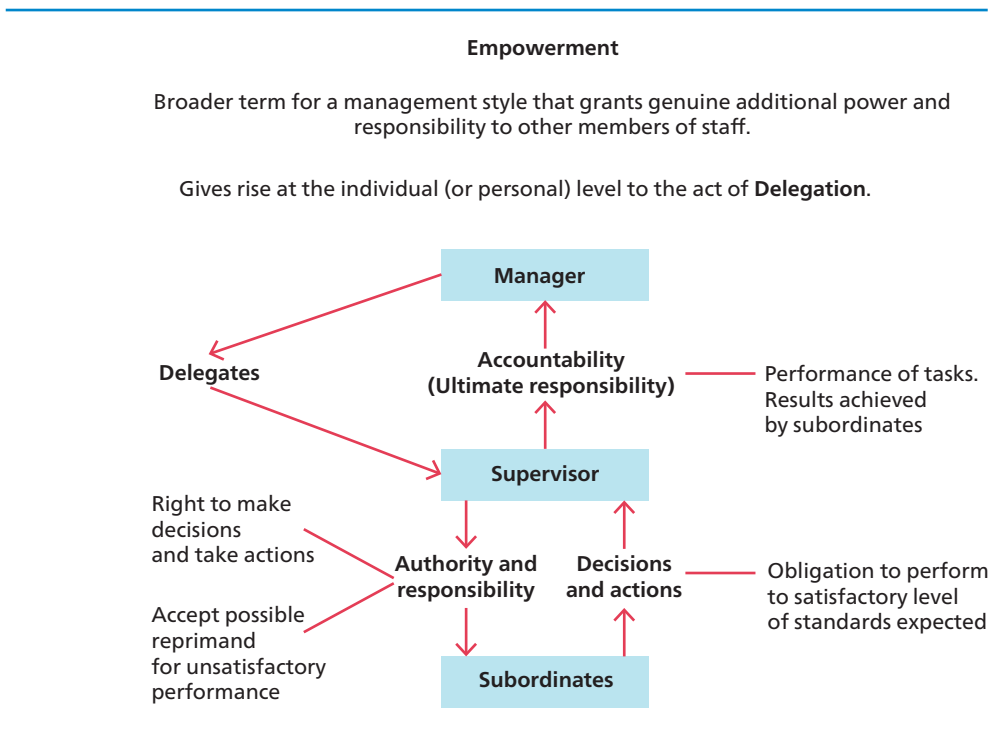


Figure 14.6 The basis of empowerment and delegation

for unsatisfactory performance of the junior staff. To hold subordinates responsible for certain areas of performance without also conferring on them the necessary authority within the limits of that responsibility is an abuse of delegation.

The manager should accept the blame as the person **accountable** for the performance of the department/section, and obligated to see that the task was completed satisfactorily. It is necessary to maintain the organisational hierarchy and structure of command. Managers should protect and support subordinate staff and accept, personally, any reprimand for unsatisfactory performance. It is then up to managers to sort out things in their own department/section, to counsel members of staff concerned and to review their system of delegation.

Bushe emphasises the continuing importance of authority.

Contrary to popular images and poorly thought through books on the subject, collaborative work systems do not decrease or eliminate authority even if they do flatten hierarchies and reduce command and control – quite the contrary. Authority and hierarchy are two separate things. Authority is the power to make and enforce decisions. Collaborative organizations create much more authority than command and control systems do because in collaborative organizations, authority is dispersed widely . . . But collaborative organizations still require hierarchy for focus and direction.³⁹

Ethical considerations

Properly handled, delegation offers many potential benefits to both managers and staff. Delegation should help make the best use of time, provide a means of training and development, and lead to improved morale by increasing motivation and job satisfaction. Effective delegation results in optimum use of human resources and improved organisational performance.

Moorcroft suggests that although delegation is a useful business tool it needs only occasional use and is one that demands strong ethical issues, for example:

- managers may be overwhelmed with work but it is what they get paid to do;
- some larger consultancy companies 'selling' the consultancy through senior staff but then sending junior staff;
- using the argument of 'development of staff' to delegate tasks beyond the level of the subordinate with an unrealistic timescale hoping that the subordinate will fail and reinforcing the status of the manager.

When delegation does occur, it is important to establish ethical rules relating to agreement on responsibility for outcomes, effective training and recognising credit for success.⁴⁰ Mistakes will inevitably happen and the subordinate will need to be supported by the manager, and protected against unwarranted criticism. The acceptance of ultimate responsibility highlights the educational aspect of the manager's job. The manager should view mistakes as part of the subordinate's training and learning experience, and an opportunity for further development. 'Even if mistakes occur, good managers are judged as much by their ability to manage them as by their successes.'⁴¹

Trust and empowerment

Empowerment is also a matter of confidence and trust – both in subordinates and the manager's own performance and system of delegation. In allowing freedom of

action to subordinates within agreed terms of reference and the limits of authority, managers must accept that subordinates may undertake delegated activities in a different manner from themselves. This is at the basis of the true nature of trust. However, learning to put trust in other people is one of the most difficult aspects of successful delegation for many managers, and some never learn it.

As *Stewart* points out, managers who think about what can be done only in terms of what they can do, cannot be effective. Managing is not a solo activity.

Managers must learn to accept their dependence upon people. A key part of being a good manager is managing that dependence. Managers who say that they cannot delegate because they have poor staff may genuinely be unfortunate in the calibre of the staff that they have inherited or been given. More often this view is a criticism of themselves: a criticism either of their unwillingness to delegate when they could and should do so, or a criticism of their selection, training and development of their staff.⁴²



To what extent would YOU welcome having delegated authority and responsibility or would you be concerned about the ethical considerations?

The indispensability trap

Jolly comments on the 'curse of knowledge' – those individuals who have demonstrated technical expertise, worked hard, and developed skills and competence. Your skill has become automatic and when moving into management you are faced with supervising people who not know how to do what for you is obvious. If you have then managed to demonstrate your expertise and ability to supervise others, you're too good at your current job and risk getting stuck in it. You have become indispensable and too important to promote. To be an effective executive you need a strong desire and ability to control and this focus on control leads to 'I don't have time to delegate'. Delegation feels like losing control and takes valuable time. Hence the instinct to control can increasingly become a liability rather than an asset.⁴³

Systematic approach to delegation

In order to realise the full benefits of empowerment without loss of control, it is necessary to adopt a planned and systematic approach. Setting up a successful system of delegation involves examining five basic questions.

- How can I make better use of my time and expertise?
- What tasks could be performed better by other staff?
- What opportunities are there for staff to learn and develop by undertaking delegated tasks and responsibilities?
- How should increased responsibilities be implemented and to whom should they be given?
- What forms of monitoring control system would be most appropriate?

Delegation is not an irrevocable act and can always be withdrawn. In order to set up an effective system of delegation, subordinates should know exactly what is expected of them, what has to be achieved, the boundaries within which they have freedom of action, and how far they can exercise independent decision-making. It is possible to identify six main stages in a planned and systematic approach to delegation (see Figure 14.7).

- **Clarification of objectives and suitable patterns of organisation** in order to provide a framework for authority and responsibility.
- **Agreement on terms of reference and acceptance of authority and responsibility** with emphasis placed on end results rather than set of detailed instructions.
- **Guidance, support and training, and patterns of communication** including where they can go for further help or advice.
- **Effective monitoring and review procedures** including time limits and system to monitor progress and provide feedback.
- **Freedom of action within agreed terms of reference** and leaving the subordinate alone to get on with the job within the boundaries established.
- **Related reward system** including opportunities for promotion, personal development or further empowerment.

A summary of delegation, authority, power and responsibility is given in the concept map set out in Figure 14.8.



Figure 14.7 Main stages in the process of delegation

Delegation, authority, power & responsibility

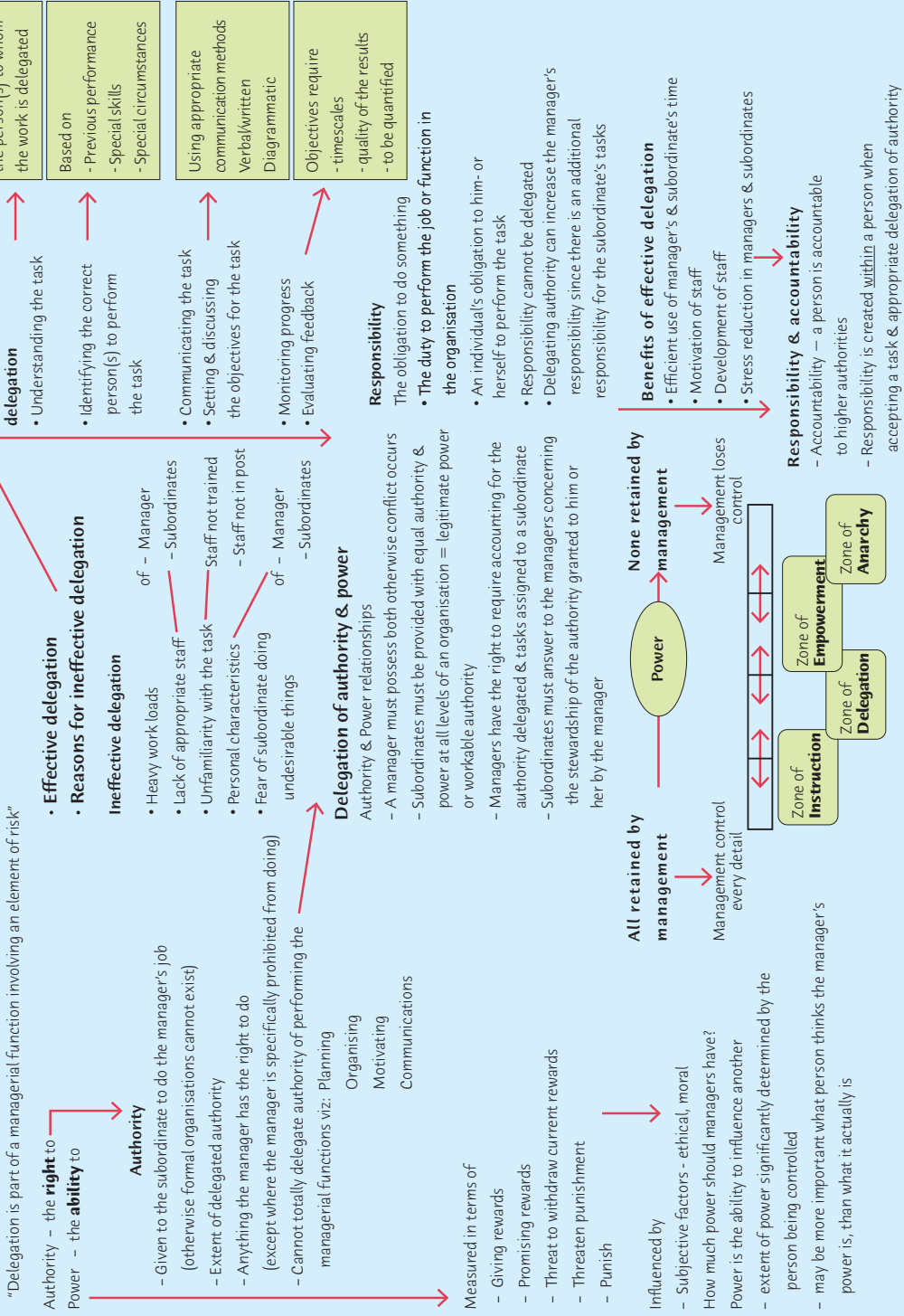


Figure 14.8 Delegation, authority, power and responsibility
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Control versus autonomy

Whatever the extent of employee empowerment, there is still a requirement for some form of management control and this gives rise to a number of important behavioural considerations. From their study of top-performing companies in the 1990s, *Goldsmith and Clutterbuck* refer to the sharing of power, and to the balance between control and autonomy. They question how companies manage to balance giving people maximum freedom against exerting controls to ensure the benefits of size and a common sense of direction. To exert the most effective control, Goldsmith and Clutterbuck suggest it is limited to the few simple, readily understandable processes. Autonomy is, in essence, an absence of formal control: once clear goals are set, there is greater or lesser freedom to determine how they will be met. There are still controls in place, but they are much less obvious or intrusive. Control and autonomy are therefore two sides of the same coin.⁴⁴



How do YOU view the importance of empowerment and delegation, and maintaining the balance between controls versus autonomy?

Critical Thinking Zone

Reflections on Employee Empowerment



In this zone, we critically discuss the construct of employee empowerment and evaluate whether it is managerial rhetoric or organisational reality.

According to Cunningham *et al.*,⁴⁵ the 1980s and 90s witnessed a rise in the implementation of employee involvement schemes, such as employee participation, participative management and participative decision-making,⁴⁶ with the intent of increasing individuals' commitment to their jobs and employer while engendering a culture of inclusion and flexibility. They argue that employee empowerment is a contemporary manifestation of involvement and typifies a conscious move away from the philosophy of Taylorist scientific management control to augmenting commitment as a strategy to enhance organisational performance. Appelbaum *et al.*⁴⁷ and Honold⁴⁸ profess that employee empowerment is a constantly evolving, multidimensional concept, which is subject to multiple interpretation and application, depending on the context, corporate culture and organisational actors involved. They thus attest that these factors conflate to make defining empowerment inherently problematic.

Defining Employee Empowerment

Although theorists have made progress in developing the employee empowerment construct, Fernandez and Moldogaziev⁴⁹ profess that disagreement is still rife among the research community about what it means and how it translates, in practical terms, in organisations. With its intellectual roots planted firmly in the human relations movement, employee empowerment is defined by Ghosh⁵⁰ (p. 95) as 'the process of shifting authority and responsibility to employees at a lower level in the organisational hierarchy. It is a transfer of power from the managers to their subordinates.' In a similar vein, Conger and Kanungo⁵¹ (p. 473) suggest it is 'the process by which a leader or manager shares his or her power with subordinates.' In this context, power is 'interpreted as the possession of formal authority or control over organisational resources' which, they argue, emphasises the notion of both parties sharing authority between them. The Oxford Living Dictionary Online⁵² also likens empowerment with the assignment of authority and power, but also relates the concept to delegation, authorisation and entitlement. However,

its definition of delegation does not suggest the relinquishing of power from one person to another. Although empowerment is often used interchangeably with delegation, one could argue that empowerment can be delegated, but delegation is not empowerment. Power is a key theme running throughout the vein of these definitions and importantly, Greasley *et al.*⁵³ advocate that assignment of this power is intended to ascribe individuals with a greater level of responsibility, flexibility and freedom to make work-related decisions and implement them, without the shackles of Taylorist control. Such empowerment, according to Greasley *et al.*, encourages autonomy and heightens job satisfaction. Lee and Koh⁵⁴ view empowerment as a paradigm shift from, but not a substitute for, motivation schemes, such as job enrichment⁵⁵ (see Chapter 7: Work Motivation and Satisfaction).

Perspectives of Employee Empowerment

Extant literature proffers that there are two distinct, and one could argue, competing perspectives of employee empowerment: structural and psychological, which Greasley *et al.* attest appears to have been researched as separate rather than complimentary concepts. First, structural empowerment encompasses a redistribution of power from managers to individuals via enabling organisational structures, policies and practices that are intended to engender collaboration and trust between parties in the people–organisation relationship through power sharing. While it may be a positive move by the organisation to be more inclusive and give individuals the opportunity to be involved in managing its business operations, Greasley *et al.* and Mills and Ungson⁵⁶ suggest that structural empowerment poses a quandary for managers. Its successfulness is dependent on their ability to alleviate the tension between relinquished control, and a certain amount of power, with the important task of achieving congruence between individual and organisational goals.

Second, psychological empowerment centres on an individual's emotional state and their cognition of, and the meaning they assign to, the completion of work tasks.⁵⁷ The perspective encompasses four aspects. First, the fit between their work roles and personal values. Second, their competence in, and belief in their ability to, perform the job. Third, self-determination or perception of autonomy on the job, and fourth, impact or the sense of influence they may have over job outcomes. Peccei and Rosenthal⁵⁷ point out that overarching this is the individual's belief that

they have the requisite skills and abilities to complete the tasks for which they have been empowered. On this point, Dainty *et al.*⁴⁶ caveat that an individual can only feel empowered if they *believe* they have been empowered. Therefore, perceptions that are subjective and socially constructed, play a major role in the empowerment experience. Managers need to bear this in mind when implementing structural empowerment programmes and ensure that the rhetoric of empowerment is translated to reality and psychological issues are not overlooked.⁵³

The Espoused Benefits of Empowerment

Greasley *et al.* posit that the espoused benefits that can be derived from employee empowerment appear to be heavily skewed towards the organisation, which may, arguably, suggest that managers have implemented such initiatives for the organisation's benefit, not the individual.⁴⁵ Employee empowerment benefits individuals by increasing their motivation, skill utilisation, job satisfaction levels, capacity to innovate and loyalty to the organisation.⁵⁸

Critical Perspectives of Employee Empowerment

Foster-Fishman and Keys⁵⁹ espouse that management efforts to implement employee empowerment is doomed to fail unless the organisation's culture engenders inclusion and trust, encourages and tolerates risk taking and supports its staff to 'take delegated power' and exercise control over the work to be undertaken. This includes giving them discretionary choice in how the work is done and appropriate access to information, knowledge and resources. Honold⁴⁸ (p. 210) contends that 'employee empowerment will not happen naturally in organisations' as too many disabling and 'disempowering structures have been built into them over the years.' Arguably, this suggests that a culture of disempowerment is institutionalised and inherent within the organisation's culture.

Mills and Ungson profess that the organisation's need to foster greater commitment among the workforce through empowerment is juxtaposed with the necessity to coordinate and control. The authors suggest that this juxtaposition can be overcome via two mechanisms: organisational constitution and trust. First, organisational constitution is a 'set of agreements and understandings that define the limits and goals of the group. . . as well as the responsibilities and rights of participants'⁶⁰ (p. 225). These are the tacit, implied, unwritten work rules

that operate through the organisation's culture. Rather than stifling empowered individuals, it moderates the relationship between the expectations of the empowered and organisational requirements of empowerment itself.⁵⁶ Second, trust, which the Merriam-Webster Dictionary Online⁶¹ defines as 'assured reliance on the character, ability, strength or truth of someone or something ... to place confidence in. ...' It relates trust to faith, acceptance and integrity. Mills and Ungson profess that trust, in its various interpretations, is imperative within empowerment as it enables those empowered to enact their imbued authority and, ostensibly, power, with ability, discretion and confidence and without the need for contracts and formal control mechanisms.

One could argue that parallels can be drawn between organisational constitution and trust with aspects of the relational psychological contract, which is also based on trust, mutual obligations and attitudinal and emotional commitment^{62,63} that are unwritten and inherently perceptual and subjective. As such, both parties in the 'empowerer-empoweree' relationship face risks. Managers place trust in individuals to act with discretion when making decisions and take risks that will not be injurious to the organisation. Equally, individuals face comparable risks in accepting imbued empowerment because, as Mills and Ungson⁵⁶ (p. 148) caveat, 'he or she may fail.'

Implications for Organisational Behaviour in the Workplace

To conclude, Honold contends that employee empowerment goes far beyond managers delegating power to their direct reports. That, she claims, is a rather

outdated, one-dimensional perspective. She advocates viewing the construct through a multiplicity of lenses and suggests it therefore involves the ways in which leaders lead, how individuals react to their leadership and how peers interact with each other and their leaders. Ultimately, it involves the structuration of the organisation's work-related processes, culture and management philosophy that enable empowerment to become an organisational reality rather than managerial rhetoric. Holt *et al.*⁶⁴ concur and conclude that turning rhetoric into reality involves cultural change and a holistic rationalisation of the organisation's business operations, rather than a token gesture of managers relinquishing control and calling it 'empowerment.'

Questions

Based on the above, answer the following questions:

1. Theorists suggest that employee empowerment is a regurgitation of previous employee involvement initiatives. With reference to theory and practice, *to what extent* do you agree?
2. *Critically analyse* the differences between empowerment and delegation.
3. It could be argued that parallels can be drawn between structural and psychological empowerment and the relational psychological contract. *How* can organisations marry these concepts closer together, as part of implementing their employee empowerment initiatives?

Summary – Chapter 14 'Organisational control and power'

Control systems exist in spheres of all organisations as part of the process of management with the purpose of improvement in performance. By its very nature, control is concerned with the regulation of behaviour. Often it has an emotive connotation and interpreted in a negative manner. There are important elements, characteristics and strategies of effective control systems. Work organisations are not only systems of hierarchical structure: they are complex systems of social relationships, status and power. Leadership influence may be seen as a type of power over the actions of other people. Control systems are frequently thought of in terms of accounting or financial systems, but consideration must also be given to social considerations. Pluralistic approaches recognise power as a social process that derives from a multiplicity of interpersonal sources, social relationships and realities of organisational

life. Most people show ambivalence towards control and under certain conditions their presence may be welcomed. Control is the interface between human behaviour and process of management. Discussion on the balance between order and flexibility draws attention to the nature of empowerment and delegation and greater freedom for staff.

Delegation creates a special manager–subordinate relationship based on the concept of authority, responsibility and accountability.

Group discussion activities

Undertake each of these activities in small groups as indicated by your tutor. Before you start your discussion establish a non-threatening environment within the group and confirm confidentiality will be honoured.

First, form your own views and then share and compare in open critical discussion with colleagues. Reflect honestly on the extent to which: (i) you influenced the thinking and ideas of your colleagues; and (ii) you were influenced by your colleagues.

To what extent was your group able to reach consensus?

Agree one of your members to produce a brief written summary of the discussion and prepared to present in a plenary session.

Activity 1

To what extent do you agree:

- (a) The changing nature of the workplace with flatter structures, a diminishing hierarchy, empowerment, remote working, demands for flexibility and working from home have all contributed to the loss of effective organisational control over the actions and behaviour of people at work.
- (b) It is a poor manager who relies on the exercise of formal power and position within the hierarchy for the maintenance of order and control. Personal influence is the only truly effective way to ensure members of staff act and behave in the manner expected of them.

Activity 2

On a scale from 1 (least) to 5 (highest) rate yourself in terms of the degree of influence you believe you exercise over your colleagues for each of the following three headings:

- * **Expertise power:** Will others see you as someone who can exercise influence because of your expertise, skill or knowledge?
- * **Charismatic power:** Will others see you as someone who can exercise influence because of your personality and extent to which are liked, admired or respected?
- * **Administrative power:** Will others see you as someone who can exercise influence because of your ability to change the way things appear or are done to advantage?

Activity 3

- (a) Stewart points out managers who think about what can be done only in terms of what they can do cannot be effective.
- (b) Managers are encouraged to empower staff with greater authority and responsibility but still held accountable for their actions and performance. It is only right they should continue to exercise close supervision and control.
- (c) Reasons for lack of effective delegation are easy to understand. It is faster and easier to do the work yourself. The main problem is that few people ever learn how to put trust in other people or are coached in the skills of empowerment.

Organisational behaviour in action case study

The police custody officer and empowerment



The Police Service has statutory responsibility for the treatment of persons detained by them (and other agencies such as HMRC which brings people into a police station). These people must be treated in accordance with the Police & Criminal Evidence Act 1984 (PACE) that was enacted in January 1986 and any code of practice issued under the Act.

Section 39 of PACE specifies that these duties should be the duty of the custody officer at a police station. The same section goes on to declare:

*where an officer of **higher** rank than the custody officer gives directions . . . which are at variance with any **decision** or **action** taken by the custody officer in the performance of a duty imposed on him under this Act the matter **shall** be referred at once to an officer of the rank of Superintendent or above who is responsible for that police station.*

There is statutory backing for the decisions and actions taken by custody officers in the performance of their duties.

PACE sets out the provisions regarding the appointment of custody officers (Section 36). Custody officers are appointed to designated police stations, which are effectively police stations equipped to receive and house detained persons in the conditions that PACE requires. Subject to limited exceptions all detained persons must go to a designated police station. Custody officers are appointed by the Chief Officer of Police for that area or by an officer directed by that Chief Officer

of Police to do so. Importantly no police officer may be appointed a custody officer unless at least the rank of sergeant, and significantly none of the functions of a custody officer shall be performed by an officer who is involved in the investigation of an offence for which the person is in detention (and there is case law that identifies what being involved in an investigation entails).

Most forces have adopted the sergeant rank as the best suited to the custody officer role (custody officers no longer have to be a police officer). On appointment training is given in the role of sergeant and specifically custody officer duties. Custody officers, though they work for the same organisation, have an element of impartiality through the statement that they must not be involved in the investigation of an offence for which that person is detained. This allows for their decision-making to be non-partisan. There is an argument perhaps that for the decision-making to be completely impartial custody provisions should be independent of the police service but in practice it is argued that custody officers value their impartiality and their decision-making is reflected in this.

The Act clearly defines the process for any challenge to custody officers' decision-making and that is by appeal to the station commander, a Superintendent. As well as providing support for custody officers in their decision-making it also affords protection for them from **rank pulling** in a hierarchically structured organisation such as the police.

Custody officers deal with people's liberty and determine whether they enter the prosecution process. The decision to detain is a serious business and in practical terms it is taken very seriously. In the case of a person detained on the suspicion of committing a criminal offence, their decision-making in this process is subject to periodic review. In the first 24 hours of a person's detention that review is undertaken at the 6-, 15- and 24-hour stages. Any detention beyond 24 hours requires the authority of a Superintendent and any detention beyond 36 hours requires a warrant from a court. The custody officer's decision-making is subject to close scrutiny through the training process, accreditation process and local inspection processes. Most importantly, it is a legal requirement now that all designated custody centres are subject to visual and audio recording, which is perhaps the ultimate scrutiny. The arrival of visual and audio recording in custody centres was welcomed by custody officers as it saw a corresponding fall in the number of complaints against them in the charge room process.

In practical terms it is rare that decisions of a custody officer are challenged by a more senior officer (a Detective Chief Inspector). The fact that these occasions are so rarely reported is evidence of the seriousness and professionalism adopted by custody sergeants in their decision-making process. **A process that would only work with empowerment.**

(With thanks to Sergeant Keith Poultney, Hampshire Constabulary for providing this information.)

Tasks

1. Discuss critically the extent to which you believe this case illustrates the importance and potential benefits of empowerment.
2. How would you relate this case to the concept of authority commensurate with responsibility?
3. Explain the importance of protection from rank pulling in any other hierarchically structured organisations.

Chapter 14 – Personal skills and employability exercise

Objectives

Completing this exercise should help you to enhance the following skills:

- * Review honestly and reflect upon features of your own personality.
- * Assess the extent to which you are in danger of becoming a control freak.
- * Sensitivity to your reaction towards control and power.

Control in its many forms is an inherent and essential feature of organisational behaviour. However the manner in which control is exercised is a variable dependent upon the extent to which an individual either prefers or believes it necessary to use positional power to maintain control. For some people power can be a positive source of motivation.

Exercise

Working in small self-selected groups, individually record honestly the extent to which you agree with the following ten questions. If necessary think how you would be likely to behave in a given situation. Then compare and discuss responses with your colleagues.

1. I enjoy and strive for power over other people. It is a natural human characteristic.
2. I am generally happy to put my trust in others to get work done on time and to a good standard.

3. Charisma and personal power is the most effective source of control.
4. I am happy to accept that other people often have better ideas than me.
5. If you are put in charge of a group project or assignment it is only natural to expect obedience based on your formal authority.
6. Office politics, manipulation and the grapevine should be accepted as realities of organisational life.
7. I believe that I am right most of the time.
8. Control over employees through electronic surveillance is nothing more than an unwelcomed invasion of privacy.
9. Financial and accounting systems are the most reliable and fairest forms of control.
10. If you want a job done properly then do it yourself.

Discussion

- * Do you think you have controlling issues or can you exercise flexibility?
- * How can you attempt to develop charisma and the use of personal power?
- * To what extent has this exercise provoked further thoughts on your attitude towards organisational control and power?

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