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Empowerment in organizations:
Autonomy as second-order capacity

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Abstract:
The aim of this paper is to show that the conception of autonomy as second-order capacity, i.e. the capacity to reflect on and change our personal motivational structures, e.g. preferences and desires, should be of particular interest to the scholarly debate on empowerment. Two major implications of the conception are discerned to support this claim. Firstly, this conception of autonomy can help to get the easily neglected issues of second-order reflection and procedural independence more into focus when empowerment is discussed. Secondly, this conception also makes it harder to neglect employee participation in the strategic decision making. **Key words:** Empowerment, autonomy, preferences, second-order capacity

Introduction

The word "empowerment" can without any doubt be referred to as one of the more widely used buzzwords in management and organization today (Hopfl, 1994: Collins, 2000). However, like many other managerial buzzwords, it is a word that can be used with a multitude of meanings or, indeed, almost without any meaning at all (Malone, 1997). Its ambiguity is enhanced by the fact that this buzzword has been taken up by a wide variety of frameworks and perspectives. At one extreme, "empowerment" can be used within frameworks with rather radical ideas about organizational democracy, at the other, it can be used within managerial frameworks where "empowerment" is supposed to be accomplished without really changing the existing power structures. Considering the many frameworks and the diversity of motives for the interest in empowerment, it is hardly surprising that this concept is an ambiguous one.

However, "empowerment" is not only an ambiguous concept, sometimes it is a *vague* one too. In particular, this seems to be the case when it is used for managerial purposes. Thus, it is "empowerment" as a *managerial* buzzword that Malone has in mind when he asks "Is empowerment just a fad?" and describes it as an almost meaningless cliché (ibid, p. 23). While the use of the buzzword indicates an interest in unleashing the employees and trusting them with being more involved in decision-making, the manager interested in empowerment may still be very reluctant to let go of the leash. Accordingly, the growing recognition of the need for unleashing people from the means of control that *directly* regulate their behaviour, such as instructions, rules and routines, has been paralleled by a growing interest in controlling the thinking, the values and the beliefs of people in the organization (e.g. Deal & Kennedy, 1982; Peters & Waterman, 1982; Kunda, 1992).

When more of the managerial interest is focused on controlling the mind, it becomes more important not to neglect the issue of *autonomy* for the employees. Although "autonomy" is another rather ambiguous term, for the moment it should be sufficient to say that in this paper the term is referring to the particular capacity to reflect on and change one's own preferences and desires. Thus, it is *not* just

referring to the freedom to do whatever one wishes. About the conception of autonomy that stresses this kind of freedom, it should be mentioned that scholars in the field of organization and management, like Chester Barnard and Herbert Simon, have pointed out that the act of joining an organization as an employee means to agree to the establishment of a limited "zone of indifference" (Barnard, 1938) or "zone of acceptance" (Simon, 1947), within which the person joining is giving up some of his or hers autonomy. Within the boundaries of this zone it is accepted that others may decide what the employee has to do.

Thus, there is a widely recognized and accepted contradiction between being an employee and being an autonomous individual in this sense. In contrast, the rather different conception of autonomy that stresses the capacity to reflect on and change personal preferences and desires does not seem to be incompatible with employment or any other kind of involvement in an organization. Moreover, as it becomes more interesting to management to control how people in the organization think and what they believe, conceptions of autonomy that goes beyond the mere issue of whether people make the actual decisions about their own doings at work to the issue of whether people *think for themselves*, are also getting more vital.

Especially for the continuing debate on empowerment, where employee input in decision making is in focus, this kind of conceptions seems to be much needed. Although the importance of some kind of autonomy has often been explicitly recognized from rather diverse perspectives (e.g. Blanchard, Carlos & Randolph, 1996, 1999; Pastor, 1996; Potterfield, 1999), remarkably little attention has been paid to elaborating the meaning of the autonomy concept and its implications for empowerment.

In this paper, the conception of autonomy developed by the philosopher Gerald Dworkin is in focus. Central to this is the idea that autonomy is basically a matter of second-order capacity, i.e. the capacity to reflect on and change our personal motivational structures, e.g. our preferences and desires. The aim of this paper is to show that this conception of autonomy should be of particular interest to the scholarly debate on empowerment.

In the next section, I shall briefly discuss the buzzword "empowerment". It is discussed as an ambiguous and vague concept that can stand for almost anything from plainly information from managers to workers to rather far-going employee participation in decision making. The third section is about the ambivalence inherent in the managerial interest in empowered employees. In short, management tends to be control-orientated, while empowerment is about unleashing subordinates. The discussion about the contemporary managerial interest in shifting the focus of control, from the behaviour of employees to their thinking and beliefs, leads to the conclusion that the issue of autonomy is important for meaningful empowerment. In the fourth section, the attention turns to the concept of autonomy. After some conceptual clarifications, the importance of the particular conception of autonomy that stresses the capacity for critical reflection upon one's own preferences and desires, developed by the philosopher Gerald Dworkin, is focused. In the fifth, and final, section, two major implications for empowerment of this conception of autonomy are discussed.

Empowerment: A concept devoid of meaning?

The buzzword "empowerment" is indeed used with a multitude of meanings. To make the matter worse some of these meanings are rather vague (e.g. Spreitzer, 1995). Writers with a critical interest in its faddish use as a management concept have stressed that it often seems to be almost devoid of meaning (Collins, 2000; Malone, 1997). In the words of Malone, it "has become an almost meaningless cliché" (ibid., p. 23).

To some extent, a multitude of meanings and a lack of conceptual clarity is to be expected from any social concept. However, for the concept of empowerment this "normal" elusiveness seems to be enhanced in at least two ways. Firstly, the word "empowerment" has been referring to different actors and contexts, e.g. the citizen in the democratic system or the worker in the industrial company, and it has been used from a multitude of perspectives (cf. Potterfield, 1999). Adoption of a concept tends to mean some kind of adjustment to situational factors, frameworks etc.

Consequently, the meaning of empowering the industrial worker can hardly be exactly the same as the meaning of empowering the citizen and empowerment of employees can be quite another thing if it is seen from a managerial perspective instead of the worker orientated industrial relations perspective. A plethora of popular management approaches, ready to take up current buzzwords in their vocabulary, are very likely contributing to the conceptual ambiguity. Thus "empowerment" has been taken up by several popular approaches, including those developed by Semler (1994) and Blanchard, Carlos & Randolph (1996, 1999). Notably, it has also been taken up by the BPR-framework (e.g. Hammer, 1990; Hammer & Champy, 1993; Hammer & Stanton, 1995). The incorporation in the BPR-framework has also attracted a considerable amount of critical attention (Grint, 1994; Wilmott & Wray-Bliss, 1996).

Secondly, the particular problems with integrating the idea of employee empowerment in a basically top-down orientated managerial perspective seems to contribute to the vagueness of the empowerment concept. Organizations are hierarchies and the concern with control is inherent in the manager's task. Accordingly, managerial interpretations of empowerment can be considerably *ambivalent*, which is recognizable in unwillingness to clarify their concrete meaning and implications. This is certainly an aspect of the managerial interest in empowerment that enhances the risk for taking up the word in the managerial vocabulary as an almost meaningless cliché.

Although the concept of empowerment in organizations is admittedly ambiguous, it is nevertheless possible to find at least some element of meaning shared by practically all the approaches. Empowerment has something to do with *involvement* or *participation* of employees at lower hierarchical levels. It should be noted that "participation" is the word with deeper historic roots in industrial relations studies and in the discourse on industrial democracy (Pateman, 1970; Brannen et al, 1976), which makes it strongly preferred by scholars in this tradition (Collins, 2000). For authors with a managerial approach, on the other hand, "involvement" seems to be the preferred synonym (Bowen & Lawler, 1992; Clutterbuck & Kernaghan, 1994). This term can be used for restricting the discussion on empowerment to issues like communication and delegation, instead of focusing on more extensive participation of employees (Collins, 2000).

Thus, involvement as empowerment tends to mean an emphasis on information from managers to workers rather than on workers representation in workplace decision making (ibid., p. 239). Although the meaning of empowerment can be reduced to information, this is indeed an extremely modest

interpretation of the concept. With such a modest interpretation, empowerment does not mean any employee input in decision making. In other words, it does not include any employee participation, only an involvement as a receiver of information. If we insist that empowerment should include some kind of employee input in decision making, this input can still take many different forms.

To describe the elasticity of the concept, Collins introduces a basic analytical distinction between *direct* and *indirect* forms of employee input into the decision making process (ibid. p. 235). The direct forms, explicitly focusing on the individual workers and the immediate work groups, include limited *delegation* of areas of responsibility, previously claimed to be managerial, to the workers. Semi-autonomous work groups and the devolution of responsibility for quality management tasks exemplify this kind of involvement. The indirect forms, on the other hand, are more concerned with worker *representation*, e.g. on management boards, consultative committees and trade union collective bargaining.

It is obvious that the buzzword "empowerment" is used for any kind of employee involvement and participation, from rather restricted information to the worker, over various forms of managerial worker consultations and worker representation in boards and committees, to semi-autonomous work groups etc. It is also obvious that empowerment can be approached with emphasis on information, as well as on representation and delegation. This means that the concept of empowerment is *multidimensional*, with information, delegation and representation as some of its more easily recognizable dimensions. Although this complexity can be dramatically reduced, for instance by defining the concept in terms of only one of the dimensions, it can safely be said that all three dimensions add something to our understanding of the essentials of empowerment. If we accept that empowerment means employee input into decision making, delegation/decentralization of decisions in work and representation on boards and committees are important means to accomplish this input. Still, without sufficient information, employees are very likely to have difficulties with contributing, no matter how well they are represented and how many decisions they are permitted to make in their work.

In this paper, the focus is on still another, mostly overlooked, aspect or dimension of empowerment: the *autonomy* of employees. This dimension seems to be as vital as the three dimensions discussed above for insuring that there really can be employee input into the decision making process. In the light of the increasing managerial interest in controlling how people in organizations think, it seems to be particularly important to pay attention to the issue of autonomy. In the next section, I shall discuss this development of managerial views on control and its relevance for empowerment.

Empowerment and managerial control

Although "empowerment" has become a managerial buzzword, it is clearly a word that can be interpreted in ways that are hard to accept for management. While management is basically a control-orientated function in an organization, the idea of empowerment, at least when it is not reduced to just informing the employees, is indeed suggesting that employees should be unleashed. The unleashing can be desirable for democratic purposes or just for improving the utilization of employees' knowledge, commitment and experience for the purposes of the organization. To this we can add that some empirical research indicates that personal control over work tasks reduces stress-related illness (e.g. Karasek &

Theorell, 1990). Whatever the purposes, employees cannot be unleashed without some loss of managerial control.

Surely, much of the managerial interest in empowerment is motivated by the recognized need for less managerial control and more responsibility with the employees. Such a reorientation can find extensive support in the management literature (e.g. Peters & Waterman, 1982; Kanter, 1983, 1989). Extensive managerial need for control is more in accordance with tayloristic and bureaucratic models of man than with more contemporary models that rather emphasize the potential contributions of the well-motivated employee, trusted with a high degree of freedom, than the need for surveillance. The well-known Theory X and Theory Y illustrates the different models rather well (McGregor, 1960). The complexity of modern organizations and the widely recognized uncertainty and unpredictability they have to deal with are other phenomena that are undermining the belief in the managerial capacity to exert detailed control (e.g. Burns & Stalker, 1961; Kanter, 1983, 1989).

Nevertheless, it should be recognized that to the extent that empowerment means unleashing the employee, it is an idea that can be rather precarious in basically control-orientated managerial frameworks. Consequently, manager's interest in empowering employees tend to be rather ambivalent, since they have to deal with the issue of unleashing employees without losing too much of the managerial control.

For the argument in this paper, the most interesting aspect of this ambivalence is that it creates an interest in shifting the focus of managerial control. While the extensive use of instructions, routines, direct supervision and other means of direct control of behaviour is easily associated with inflexible, rigid organizations, incapable of giving people freedom and responsibility, other means of control, focusing on controlling the mind rather than on directly controlling the behaviour, seem to have been more promising in this respect. This shift of focus is based on the assumption that if people think right they will also do things right. The need for supervision and detailed regulation of behaviour seems to be considerably less urgent if employees can be expected to adjust their own behaviour to the norms preserved in the organization.

During the eighties and the nineties, we have seen an increasing interest in management of meaning. To a high degree this is inspired by the much earlier work by Selznick (1957) on leadership and institutionalised values. The importance of strong organizational cultures, where people share the same beliefs, values, visions, mental models, myths, symbols etc. have been widely recognized, in the scholarly literature as well as in the popular management literature (e.g. Pascale & Athos, 1981; Deal & Kennedy, 1982; Peters & Waterman, 1982; Schein, 1985; Alvesson & Berg, 1992; Martin, 1992; Kunda, 1992; Pearn et al, 1998). Although the enthusiasm for the possibilities to manipulate employees is rather undisguised in much of the literature, it should be noted that some authors rather emphasize the importance of paying attention to how people can be manipulated in organizations (e.g. Kunda, 1992). Indoctrination and socialization into the way of thinking presupposed in an organization can be rather invisible means of control, particularly in comparison with instructions, rules, routines and undisguised supervision.

While this subtle kind of control seems to be admissible for achieving the complicated task of unleashing employees and still maintaining managerial control, it can also increase the risks that "empowerment" of employees, at least in the moulds acceptable to managers, becomes nothing more than an almost meaningless cliché. Thus, to the extent that the more visible means of control, focused on directly controlling the actual behaviour, are downgraded in favour of the more disguised means of

controlling how people think, it is clearly warranted that this shift of focus is taken into consideration when empowerment in organization is discussed. Although the importance of this matter may be judged differently from different perspectives, I do not mean that this is an issue of interest only for those concerned with the employee's interest and the industrial democracy aspect.

Also for the managerial concern with the utilization of the employees' knowledge, commitment and experience, it should be interesting to consider whether shared values and beliefs, instead of rules, routines etc., means that employees are sufficiently unleashed for making their best possible contribution to the organization. After all, the ability and willingness of employees to think for themselves might be the most crucial precondition for their creative contributions to the organization.

In the light of what is said above, the *autonomy* of employees seems to be an important issue for meaningful empowerment. The importance of autonomy for empowerment has often been explicitly recognized in the literature on empowerment (e.g. Blanchard, Carlos & Randolph, 1996, 1999; Pastor, 1996), but very little attention has been paid to elaborating the meaning of the autonomy concept and its implications for empowerment in organizations. In the next section, I shall discuss the concept of autonomy, with particular attention to the conception of autonomy as second-order capacity, developed by the philosopher Gerald Dworkin.

Autonomy as second-order capacity

The concept of autonomy is central to contemporary moral and political philosophy. The assumption of autonomous agents is an essential feature in the philosophical and eventually constitutional foundation of the liberal state (e.g. Ackerman, 1980). It is also, together with the assumption of rationality, fundamental to the Kantian conception of moral agents. Thus, the conception of a morally and politically autonomous individual, who is not just subject to the will of other people but capable of deciding for oneself what to believe and of weighing the reasons for alternative actions, must be considered as one of the fundamental ideas of modern society.

While the concern of this modern professional debate is with the autonomy of individual human beings, the word "autonomy" was not originally applied to individuals but to the Greek city state. Analytically, the Greek word *autonomia* can be divided into two other words; *autos* ("self") and *nomos* ("rule" or "law"). Applied to the city state, *autonomia* meant that the citizens made their own laws. In other words, the city was not under the rule of any conquering power (Dworkin, 1988, p. 12).

The last part of the word, *nomos*, clearly merits particular attention. It indicates that the concept of autonomy, at least in its original sense, is not referring to liberty or freedom in general. The central issue of autonomy is the freedom to decide about the rules you have to abide to, instead of abiding to somebody else's rules. The philosopher Stanley Benn has contributed with complementary concepts, that can be helpful in clarifying this point. Although his focus is on the autonomy of individual human beings, not on the autonomy of city states, he is still regarding *nomos* as crucial for the concept of autonomy. According to Benn, the autonomous person is guided by his or hers system of beliefs and norms. If people have the liberty to make their own choices, without having their own system of beliefs and norms to refer to, Benn prefers to talk about "autarchy", instead of autonomy. For the case that people are guided by rules imposed by others, he uses the term "heteronomy" (Benn, 1988).

The philosopher Gerald Dworkin has developed a conception of autonomy that seems to be particularly interesting for the purpose of this paper (Dworkin, 1988). This conception seems to be a rather "weak" one, in the sense that Dworkin has developed it by taking exception to any conception of autonomy that presupposes human beings with unlimited liberty, capable of acting in a vacuum, without consideration for influences from their social environment. It is an interesting conception here because of its applicability to the situation of the employees in organizations, but even more so because it turns our attention to important aspects of empowerment that tend to be overlooked.

Basically, the relevance for this paper of Dworkin's conception of autonomy is due to two particular reasons:

Firstly, Dworkin emphasizes that autonomy as a purely *formal* notion, i.e. a notion where the content of what one decides is irrelevant for whether this decision can be counted as autonomous or not, avoids some serious limitations of autonomy as a *substantive* notion, where the content of what one decides is highly relevant for any judgment upon its autonomy. The problem with autonomy as a substantive notion, is that it is categorically incompatible with doing what other people demand, regardless of the reasons for doing so. The claim to be autonomous in this substantive sense can only be sustained if the decision is arrived at under conditions of substantive independence, i.e. when the decision is not under the influence of other people than the one person making the decision. Thus we get a notion of autonomy as something that is in conflict with any kind of social commitment. As Dworkin describes this notion:

"So the person who decides to do what his community, or guru, or comrades tells him to do cannot… count as autonomous. Autonomy then seems in conflict with emotional ties to others, with commitments to causes, with authority, tradition, expertise, leadership, and so forth." (Ibid., p. 12).

Undeniably, society requires that we are willing to make commitments even if it means giving up some of our freedom. This insight leads Dworkin to the conclusion that the conception of autonomy that insists upon substantive independence cannot have a claim to be accepted as an ideal (ibid., p. 21). He explicitly states that the conception developed must be consistent with other values we hold (ibid., pp. 8, 21). The conception of autonomy as substantive independence fails to make autonomy consistent with values like loyalty, objectivity, commitment, benevolence, and love. Therefore, Dworkin argues, this conception must be given up for a conception that is purely formal in the sense that decisions with any particular content, *including the decision to let others decide*, can be counted as autonomous. To him, the conception of autonomy that insists upon *procedural* independence, instead of substantive independence, seems to be the purely formal conception that is needed.

The emphasis on procedural independence means a shift of focus from the content of our decisions to the *procedures* of getting to these decisions. While the originality of the content of our decision is irrelevant for the issue of autonomy, it is highly relevant that the decision is based on our own evaluations, not on anybody else's. Dworkin claims that the concept of procedural independence must be worked out in more detail. However, it seems to be rather clear what the critical issue is:

"We believe, prior to philosophical reflection, that there is a difference between a person who is influenced by hypnotic suggestion or various modes of deception and those who are influenced by true

information and modes of rational inquiry. In the former case, but not the latter, we think of someone else as responsible for his reasoning and his conclusions." (Ibid., p. 161)

Basically, procedural independence has to do with our responsibility as individual human beings for our reasoning and conclusions, i.e. the responsibility for our thinking. When our thinking is influenced by other people or circumstances in such a way that our reasoning and conclusions do not really reflect our own will but rather somebody else's deceptive or coercive hold on us, we have lost our procedural independence. Dworkin mentions hypnotic suggestion, manipulation, coercive persuasion and subliminal influence as examples of such influences that interferes with procedural independence (ibid. p. 18). When such an interference occurs, somebody else is actually taking over the responsibility for the reasoning and the conclusions of the person. In this particular sense he or she has lost autonomy.

   Considering our concern with the autonomy of employees in organizations, Dworkin's claim that we need to think of autonomy as procedural independence is very important. Although he is not discussing the particular situation of people in organization, it is no doubt that the conception of autonomy as substantive independence would be very problematic in this context. The very act of joining an organization means to agree to the establishment of a "zone of acceptance" (Simon, 1947) or "zone of indifference" (Barnard, 1938). Both these expressions are referring to the existence of a zone within which the person who is joining can be expected to follow orders. Anyone employed in an organization have some kind of commitment to that organization and would soon get in trouble if he consistently claimed to be autonomous in the sense that he cannot subordinate himself to organizational goals or to any kind of commands from his bosses.

   Such a strong conception of autonomy means that it is incompatible with the very acceptance of organizations. Thus, this conception might be useful for some radical humanist, anti-organization, approaches to the understanding of organization (Burrell & Morgan, 1979), but for most other approaches it would hardly be consistent with basic purposes or assumptions.

   In contrast, procedural independence can be fully consistent with accepting organizational goals and obeying orders. According to this conception of autonomy, it is possible to work for organizational goals without giving up personal autonomy. The conditions are that this is done by a person's own choice while this person can be counted as responsible for his or hers own reasoning and conclusions.

   Secondly, Dworkin also emphasizes that second-order capacity is crucial to autonomy. To him, this is what makes autonomy a separate notion, not just another synonym for liberty. An important aspect of autonomy, as he sees it, is that it can even include a person's deliberate choice to interfere with his own liberty. He uses the classic case of Odysseus and the sirens to illustrate this point:

"Not wanting to be lured onto the rocks by the sirens, he commands his men to tie him to the mast and refuse all later orders he will give to be set free. He wants to have his freedom limited so that he can survive…He has a preference about his preferences, a desire not to have or to act upon various desires…In limiting his liberty, in accordance with his wishes, we promote, not hinder, his efforts to define the contours of his life." (Ibid., p. 15)

Following Dworkin, we can say that even though Odysseus' liberty was considerably limited, he still retained his autonomy. By letting himself be tied to the mast, Odysseus prevented himself from being deceived by the sirens. The emphasis on deception as something that will put an end to autonomy can be

recognized from our discussion above on procedural independence. But this case also points out another important dimension of autonomy. Odysseus has a "preference about his preferences" or, as Amartya Sen (1982, p. 100) puts it, "rankings of preference rankings". In other words, he has some preferences that really represents his personal will and some other preferences that are imposed on him from the outside. Thus, if he wants to remain autonomous he must see to that he is lead by the preferences that are really part of him, not by the alien preferences.

The case of Odysseus and the sirens illustrates the difference between, in Dworkin's vocabulary, *first-order preferences* and *second-order preferences.* First-order preferences are our most immediate preferences. The first-order preference (desire, intention) for Odysseus, was to move his ship closer to the sirens. His desire not to be lured by the sirens is a second-order preference, a "superior" preference that Odysseus wants to be guiding his first-order preferences and actions.

The distinction between preferences of the first and second order is central to Dworkin's definition of autonomy:

"…autonomy is conceived of as a second-order capacity of persons to reflect critically upon their first-order preferences, desires, wishes, and so forth and the capacity to accept or attempt to change these in light of higher-order preferences and values. By exercising such a capacity, persons define their nature, give meaning and coherence to their lives, and take responsibility for the kind of person they are." (Ibid, p. 20)

Even if Dworkin is interested in the autonomy of individual human beings, not in the autonomy of the Greek city state or any other collective entity, this definition clearly shows how important *nomos* is for his conception of autonomy. Although the semantic meaning of his term "second-order preferences" (sometimes the more general "higher-order preferences" is used) is different from the semantic meaning of *nomos*, in Dworkin's conception of autonomy the second-order preferences are supposed to be guiding the first-order preferences and the actions. In other words, they are supposed to be a kind of personal "law" for how to live a meaningful and responsible life.

To Dworkin, autonomy means second-order *capacity*, i.e. the capacity to let your second-order (higher-order) preferences guide your first-order (lower-order) preferences. This capacity includes a capacity to reflect critically upon first-order preferences but also a capacity to *do* something about first-order preferences when they fail to meet the standards set by higher-order preferences. First-order preferences are to be accepted or to be subject to attempts to change them in the light of second-order preferences. Since the exercise of second-order capacity is a process of critical reflection, it is important to note that there is no autonomy unless this process is also subject to the requirements of procedural independence. If we have the capacity to reflect upon our first-order preferences and the capacity to accept or attempt to change these in light of second-order preferences that we are deceived or coerced to embrace, we are not autonomous.

By developing a conception of autonomy founded mainly on the ideas of second-order capacity and procedural independence, Dworkin seems to have come up with a conception that is applicable also to human beings in organizations. To be autonomous in this respect does not preclude the possibility of commitment to the purposes of an organization, obedience to commands or loyalty to organizations, working groups or colleagues. As long as an employee has second-order capacity and is procedurally independent he is still autonomous when he is carrying out working tasks as others have told him to.

However, there is no reason to take second-order capacity and procedural independence for granted. Not least in organizations people can be subject to leadership and control that threatens their autonomy.

For our purposes it is particularly interesting to consider the implications for empowerment of Dworkin's conception of autonomy. This is also the subject of our discussion in the fifth, and final, section of this paper.

Implications

In what way can the quest for empowerment in organizations benefit from a conception of autonomy that emphasizes second-order capacity and procedural independence of people? Before answering this question it is important to recall the ambiguity of the term "empowerment" and the fact that it has become a truly multiperspective buzzword. However, the conceptual mess does not seem to preclude the recognition of some implications that make Dworkin's conception of autonomy worthy of being considered in the empowerment debate in general. Especially, I want to make clear that I consider the implications below to be worthy of consideration, both in cases where the interest in empowerment is ultimately motivated by democratic reasons and in cases where empowerment is interesting as a means to enhance the contributions of the employees to the organization.

First, Dworkin's conception of autonomy can help to get the easily forgotten issues of second-order reflection and procedural independence more into focus when empowerment is discussed. It seems very important that approaches to empowerment are relating to these issues, particularly when much of the managerial interest in control is focused on getting people in the organization to share and let themselves be guided by the interpretations, beliefs and values that are supposed to be in the interest of the organization as a reified entity. While much of the interest in this kind of control is motivated by a desire to make instructions, routines, direct supervision and other means of direct control of behaviour less necessary, thereby actually allowing employees to make more decisions, it is important to consider the possibility that the increasing involvement in terms of discretion to make decisions may be balanced by a loss of autonomy, as Dworkin defines it.

It is important to ask how empowering it is to be allowed to make more decisions in working situations, if the other side of the coin is that the employee is expected to give up some of his or hers second-order capacity and procedural independence for being trusted with making those decisions. While the means for directly controlling behaviour impose restrictions on the employee's discretion to make decisions, the means to control behaviour indirectly, by controlling interpretations, beliefs and values, are actually more threatening to the autonomy of the employee, if we take Dworkin's conception of autonomy seriously. This is because the later kind of control is contesting the procedural independence of the employee's higher-order preferences, while the first kind of control leaves these higher-order preferences unaffected.

To the degree that the trust in people to do their work without being bounded by rules, routines and instructions presupposes that these people are socialized and indoctrinated into certain beliefs and values that are supposed to be guiding them in their work, it would be most correct to describe this change of control-orientation as an attempt to get people *less* autonomous. If people are well socialized and indoctrinated into the "right thinking" in an organization, chances are that their first-order preferences and actions will be guided by second-order preferences that are alien to these people. In other words, the

second-order preferences that are guiding the critical reflections upon first-order preferences and actions will be organizational rather than personal preferences.

In the case of Odysseus and the sirens, Odysseus could use *his own* second-order preferences to resist first-order preferences that fail to meet the standards set by the same second-order preferences. This is why he could claim to be autonomous. When personal second-order preferences are replaced by organizational preferences, or with any other kind of alien preferences, autonomy is lost. The "inner voice" of the employee, the vital capacity to question the legitimacy of orders, can get rather weak in this process. In extreme cases this can lead to loyalty and subordination to even the most horrifying organizational goals (e.g. Arendt, 1964; Bauman, 1989; Horkheimer & Adorno, 1973). The famous experiments conducted by psychologist Stanley Milgram for testing the subjects' willingness to obey the command to administer electric shocks to other people, clearly indicate that not only particularly "evil" or "amoral" people are likely to accept committing cruelties when these are authorized by "leaders" (Milgram, 1974).

It would be a mistake to assume that these matters only need attention when the interest in empowerment is basically for the sake of organizational democracy or for protecting the status of the employee as a moral agent. Undeniably, the distribution of power in the organization requires, at least to some degree, employees that are autonomous in Dworkin's sense. However, it is important to also consider the possibility that managerial approaches to empowerment which strongly emphasize socialization and indoctrination into the kind of thinking expected in the organization can result in too limited and streamlined contributions from the employees to the organization. Moreover, it is a considerable possibility that it will also result in the problem of "groupthink", with shared illusions and no expressions of differing opinions (Janis, 1972).

The second major implication of Dworkin's conception of autonomy that should motivate further attention from the empowerment debate is that the issue of employee participation in strategic decision making gets harder to neglect. In particular, managerial approaches to empowerment tend to neglect the need for employee participation in strategic decision making. As Collins (2000) points out, they thereby fail to accomplish what Pateman (1970) calls "genuine participation". When we are discussing empowerment with the issue of autonomy in mind, we can also claim that Dworkin's conception of autonomy requires the extension of employee participation to strategic decision making.

According to Dworkin, autonomy is basically the second-order capacity to reflect critically upon first-order preferences, desires etc. and the capacity to either accept or attempt to change these in light of higher-order preferences (Dworkin, 1988, p. 20). Although his conception of autonomy seems to be compatible with loyalty and commitment to other people and to collective entities, like organizations, Dworkin is still stressing the ultimate *personal* responsibility for the acceptability of preferences and actions. This personal responsibility does not end when people are starting to work for an organization (cf. Jaffe, Scott & Tobe, 1994). They are still responsible, as long as they are procedurally independent.

However, for an employee to take this responsibility it is hardly sufficient to only take an interest in how to execute the assigned tasks. It also requires that these operational considerations are complemented by and related to more strategic issues in the organization.
Employees have to ask themselves questions like "Are organizational values consistent with my personal values?" or "Are the aims of this organization sufficiently consistent with my higher-order preferences?" Thus, for being autonomous in Dworkin's sense as an employee, the capacity to reflect critically upon

personal preferences, values, desires etc. must be extended to include the aims and the strategies of the organization.

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