Leadership Bites:
Empowerment
LEADERSHIP LEARNING IN 20 MINUTES

NHS
Leadership Academy
South East

Introduction

Empowerment. What is it, and how do we know we have it? Can we actually give it to others? When thinking about empowerment many people often consider it a tangible thing, something that can be physically given or taken away.

The reality though is that empowerment is a feeling and the result of several factors affecting an individual or team. For example, the conditions a person experiences when they work, which we will discuss in more detail later, and a person's own beliefs about themselves.

In this guide, which is relevant for individuals and leaders of a team, we will explore simple yet impactful techniques to super-charge empowerment in yourself and others.

> **Empowerment can not be given to others. All a person or team leader can do is create the conditions for greater autonomy, trust and clarity.**

What empowerment is

The first point to understand about empowerment relates to the fact that it is completely subjective and relative to an individual. What might be just the right for one person may feel scary and uncomfortable to another, or over-managed by someone else. This illustrates the importance of talking about what individuals need from their working environment to get the best from them.

To give empowerment a form we can think of it as a formula, a set of factors working together.

Empowerment = Direction X Freedom X Confidence

When we break down empowerment into its ingredients, we can better understand the conditions that need to be true for individuals to experience it more often.
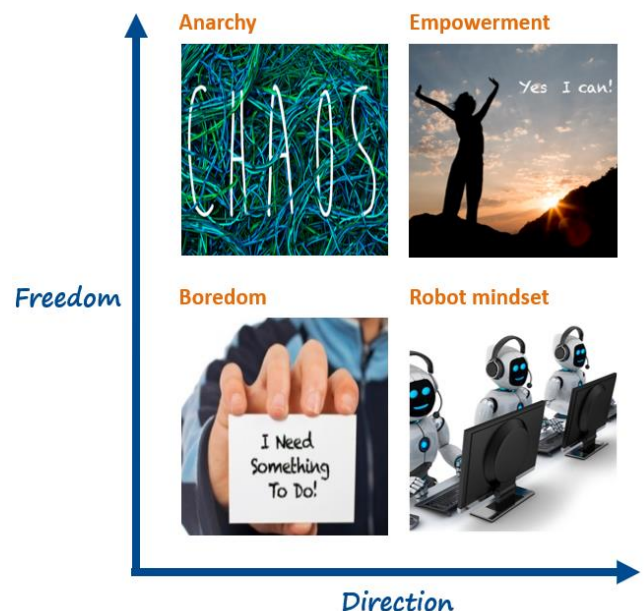
Direction is a demonstration of clarity. For example:
- Where are we going?
- What are we trying to achieve?
- What are our priorities?
- How does our work add value?

Freedom is an expression of personal control.
For example:
- Skills to do what is needed
- Space to manage own work
- Tools and processes to do the work

Confidence is a measure of personal safety and certainty. For example:
- Trusted, respected, and valued
- Feedback supports own view of the world
- Psychological safety

When these areas [direction, freedom, confidence] are nurtured empowerment develops in a person and a team. When they are undernourished or ignored empowerment can whither and fade away.

What does this mean

As mentioned earlier. Empowerment is not a tangible item that can be given or taken away. It is the result of a set of conditions, and each person will have their own empowerment sweet-spot, which is relative and unique to them, and guess what, it will change over time!

There is no doubt that greater empowerment is a win-win outcome. For individuals, greater empowerment becomes a virtuous cycle leading to increased satisfaction, productivity, and willingness to take accountability.

For a leader having an empowered team offers space to lead the team rather than manage the team and is a step towards the shift from busy manager to effective leader. With more personal time a leader has opportunity for strategic thinking and working, as well as creating even more empowering conditions for the team.

Give it a go

Individual empowerment
If considering this topic for yourself, reflect on the conditions of empowerment. Score each of them on a scale of 1-10. If you were to work out your own empowerment formula, what would it score?

With this insight it is possible to build a simple 3-step plan to increase personal empowerment by choosing one action to increase each of the conditions: direction, freedom, confidence. It can be helpful to share this plan and your intention with your line manager. Not only does it allow them to support you, it also provides your manager with insight into the conditions that allow you to be your best self.

Team empowerment
If empowerment in this context is more relevant for the team, take some time to contemplate the environment you create for others. Is the team's direction as clear to the team as it is to you? When delegating work to others do you show conviction in that person, or do you closely monitor and micro-manage activity? How do you engender confidence in team members, and support their strengths?

It is a useful activity to talk about empowerment with the team. By using the empowerment formula, a team will have a common language to discuss the topic and agree simple changes that can be made.

Perhaps there is a specific individual in the team that would benefit from a conversation about empowerment, and what changes they require to feel more empowered.

Suggested Reading

Turn the Ship Around by David Marquet, 2015
Ditching Imposter Syndrome by Clara Jose, 2019
The Science of Self-Empowerment by Gregg Braden, 2019

Further learning …
For further information and learning, as well as suggested activities, feel free to visit the **People.NHS.uk** website or our **South East Leadership Academy site.**

Time to reflect...

Take some time to note down your thoughts on what you have learned.

What resonated?

What has made you curious?

What small changes could you make to start having an impact differently and quickly?

What might you need to share with your team, and commit to 'testing and learning' together?