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The Art of  
**AUTONOMIZING**

A New Perspective on Delegation, Empowerment,  
and Organizational Intelligence

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# Extraits de l'introduction

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I will be suggesting answers to questions such as *What is autonomization? Why should I be interested in autonomizing competencies? What principles guide those who know how to delegate and autonomize others? How is collective intelligence developed, and how does one build a learning, more intelligent organization?*

Models in the social sciences are created by observing and describing those who succeed best in the tasks at hand. As it is the case with group facilitation, these are processes we engage in quite naturally, some of us more easily than others. One of the main purposes of social science models is to encourage awareness and modification of our behavior. Awareness of an ability promotes better, more precisely targeted action, as well as coherence among actions.

Chapters 1, 2 and 3 examine the three components of successful interventions in detail. They define what makes a good goal, an intervention's logical level and the attitudes that will facilitate progress towards autonomy in others. Chapters 2 and 3 are largely inspired by the work of Pierre-Marc Meunier (1997)<sup>1</sup>. As for Chapters 4 et 5, they tackle organizational development and the development of collective intelligence, resulting in what we may call a learning organization. In the appendices, I offer you concrete tools that will help you implement the concepts and strategies presented in these chapters. On my website you will find a hyperlink for accessing the PDF version of the appendices. For this, you may be required to produce proof of purchase.

## Premise and concepts

Premise : Each time I interact with others, consciously or not, I choose:

- \* A goal or objective and, it is at one of the nine logical levels of intervention;
- \* A stance, which translates into the combination you make of the three fundamental attitudes: the directive attitude, the supportive attitude and the activating attitude.

When your choice of objective and posture is appropriate, your influence is welcome and your interlocutors progress with you.

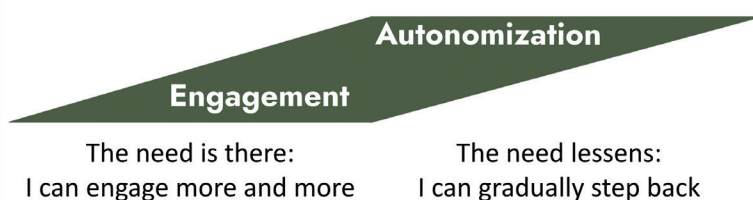
Whether in a professional or a personal context, **delegating** means helping an interlocutor, a person or team to reach a goal, play a role, take responsibility for something or succeed in a project.

When we look at the full spectrum from total dependence to outright autonomy, two phases stand out in people's experience and in the stances leaders take. In the first, or **Engagement phase**, I can detect various signals showing that my interlocutor is not yet ready or open enough for

me to begin gradually pulling back from delegating, the hallmark of the second phase. During this initial, Engagement phase, change agents mostly try to have a motivating impact and must take care to foster good communication and healthy relationships.

The second, **Autonomization phase** is the one characterized by my gradual

## 2 phases of delegation



<sup>1</sup> MEUNIER, Pierre-Marc, *Profession: patron*, Éditions Transcontinental, 1997, 148 p.

withdrawal from delegating, as my interlocutor becomes increasingly ready to pursue the desired goal. “Autonomizing” means helping others acquire autonomy over a subject, a role, a responsibility or an objective. Sometimes the delegator’s withdrawal can be simple and quick, while at other times it can be complicated and arduous. In all cases, progress comes about in successive steps. During the Autonomization phase, anyone promoting change will try to have an inspiring impact while taking care to deploy collective intelligence. Knowing how to autonomize is the key to effective delegation.

The French term for the second phase of this model, **AUTONOMI<sup>s</sup>zATION** *autonomisation*, neatly describes the process of rendering another person or persons able to function on their own: autonomous. You, my English reader, may wonder why I have chosen the term “autonomization” here, rather than “empowerment”, the term generally used by English dictionaries to denote the fields of change management and organizational development. My research and experience have convinced me that “empowerment” is over-used and often vague, while I find the term autonomization much more straightforward. It matches what I require: a concept that would serve the second phase of the delegation process, which sets out the ways in which one can build not only personal or team power, but true, sustainable autonomy in the workplace and elsewhere.

This is why I choose to broaden the currently rather limited usage that autonomization has in English. My aim is to extend its lexical wings to the workplace. This broader meaning mirrors my intention to help extend the wings of individuals, teams, and organizations towards collective intelligence.

### **The three fundamental attitudes**

To engage or autonomize, you observe how and on what the interlocutor positions himself and you choose your posture to best use his leadership. But... how do you choose the best stance? When we interact with others, whether we like it or not, each behavior inevitably reflects one of three attitudes. None is good or bad in itself; each has its advantages and disadvantages, it depends on the situation and the objectives you share with the interlocutor. Each attitude represents a third of your power of influence; it is therefore useful to know when and how to adopt or not adopt these three attitudes:

- \* Directive Attitude: Advising, suggesting, ordering, asking, commenting, , etc.
- \* Supporting attitude: Showing confidence; encouraging; valuing; showing recognition, reinforcing positive behavior, etc.
- \* Activating Attitude: Calling into question; inciting reflection; summarizing; mirroring, etc

### **What relationships come into play?**

There is almost always a way to contribute to collective intelligence by taking part in others’ development. This is the case in most relationships between professional resources and their clients. We can nearly always find ways to contribute towards others’ success, convenience and fulfillment. Most relationships lend themselves to autonomizing goals. Just think of parents and their children; of trainers and their athletes; of trades where specialists serve their clients; of medical personnel and their users; of teachers and their students; of mentors and their mentees: the list goes on and on.

Delegating calls upon several competencies on the part of the person delegating, such as technical or professional knowledge and communication and relationship competencies.

The person on the receiving end of such delegation must also have the same competencies. The relationship between people on both sides of delegation is the bedrock upon which autonomization competencies can multiply, and their beneficial effects can be felt by everyone else.

### **Must autonomy always be the goal?**

Delegating does not automatically specify the degree of autonomy sought; we do not necessarily hope to make our interlocutor fully autonomous. When I teach my daughter how to tie her shoes, I am hoping that she will learn to tie them all by herself. My expectations may be different for the colleague who manages our company budget. All depends on context, shared short- and long-term goals, and above all, on where my interlocutor stands with regard to the interaction's issues.

Persons or teams who are autonomous in carrying out a task or a responsibility are not in and of themselves independent or autonomous. It is crucial not to generalize to a person or a team what I observe with regard to a specific problem or situation. This will be addressed again and again in this book: autonomization requires adopting a situational. Everything is linked to goals, contexts and precise situations. A person or team can gain autonomy for a task or a goal and lack autonomy for another issue. I cannot say that my daughter "is autonomous" because she can tie her own shoelaces. It is often better to autonomize others...

- \* in areas where I am least effective;
- \* in areas where I am most easily replaceable;
- \* in specific areas where others are more competent than I am.

There are many motivations that justify autonomizing others. Peter Senge<sup>2</sup> is an influential thinker and practitioner who is well known in the fields of management and the creation of learning organizations. He suggests that organizations must work to autonomize individuals and teams in order to promote innovation, creativity and performance. According to Senge, when individuals and teams grant one another increased autonomy in decision making, problem solving and contributing positively to an organization, this leads to stronger employee motivation, improvement in quality and better organizational performance.

You cannot build a learning or intelligent organization if you do not know how to autonomize individuals and teams.



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<sup>2</sup> Peter Senge is the author of *The Fifth Discipline: The Art and Practice of the Learning Organization*, Doubleday Currency, 1990.

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**AUTONOMIZING**  
Mastering the art of delegating

Focuses on Part 1 of the book

**Learning goals are:**

Knowing how to fully engage and then autonomize individuals and teams

- \* choosing the best logical level of intervention
- \* adopting the best stance for each situation
- \* guiding gradual progress towards autonomy

**AUTONOMIZING THE LEARNING ORGANIZATION**  
The art of developing organizational intelligence

Focuses on Part 2 of the book

**Learning goals are:**

Knowing how to root your culture of a learning organization

- \* Recognize the current culture, its strengths, challenges and issues
- \* Manage and succeed a systemic change projects
- \* Perpetuate continuous improvement of organizational culture

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