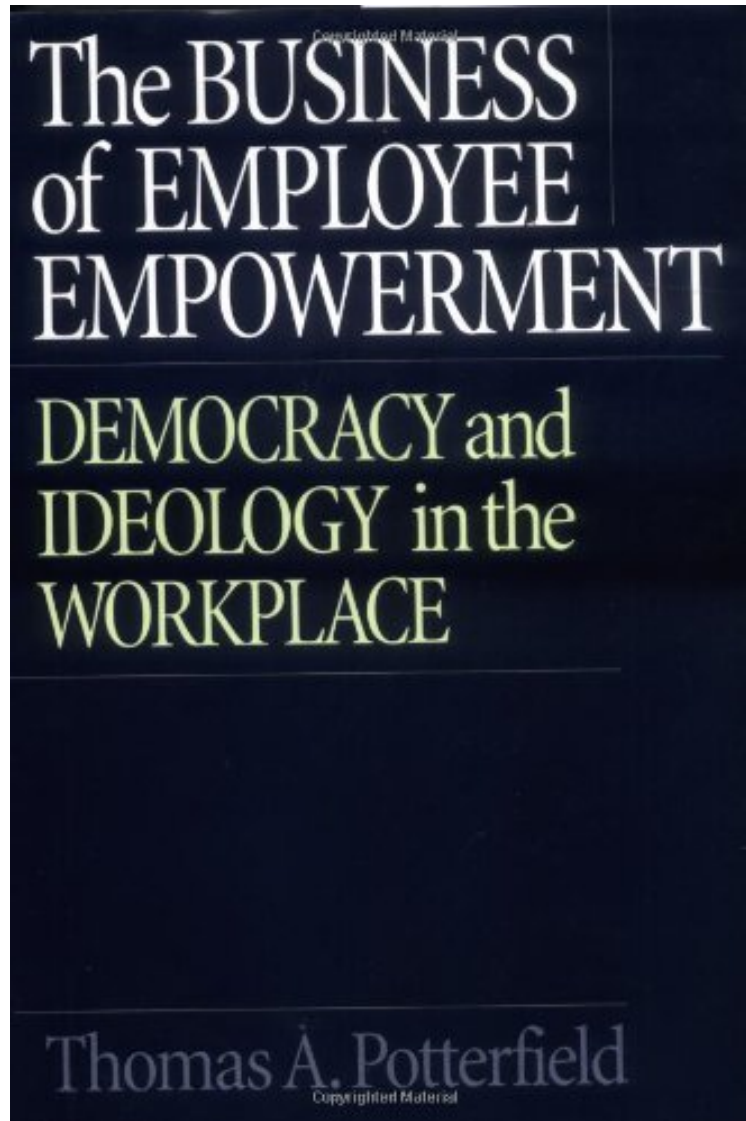


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The Business of Employee Empowerment: Democracy and Ideology in the Workplace

Thomas Potterfield

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Thomas Potterfield : The Business of Employee Empowerment: Democracy and Ideology in the Workplace before purchasing it in order to gauge whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised The Business of Employee Empowerment: Democracy and Ideology in the Workplace:

The popular and influential concept of employee empowerment may have the emancipatory potential its supporters

claim, but it also is subject to constraints and inhibitions. Potterfield calls for actions to cut through the ideological inhibitors at the corporate level and also for ways to alter the prevailing socioeconomic structure, ways to enhance the relative strength of employees in various types of organizations. His book provides a synthesis of major empowerment theories and viewpoints, a discussion of its historical and intellectual roots, an inquiry into empowerment practices at a Fortune 100 company, and a discussion of both the emancipatory potential and ideological constraints in empowerment theories and practices. With specific recommendations for corporate and societal action, Dr. Potterfield's book will be important for professionals, teachers, and students in management, organizational studies, human resources, and organizational change. Potterfield begins by situating empowerment in the larger historical context of long-standing effort to provide more participatory work environments. He reviews the social and intellectual roots of the empowerment concept, including basic contours of modernity such as the rise of capitalism, and examines the development of the concept within the realm of social action movements during the 1950s, 1960s, and 1970s. He provides a detailed explication of the essential dimensions and core elements of empowerment as it is espoused by leading organizational theorists and management experts, then looks at the actual practice of empowerment in a Fortune 100 company that has a major, ongoing commitment to the empowered workplace. With this as a foundation he discusses ways in which these theories and practices either advance the cause of democracy and freedom in the workplace or reinforce corporate organizational power and worker dominations. He concludes with concrete suggestions for overcoming ideological influences and facilitating the emancipatory potential of empowerment.

"Thomas Potterfield gives a penetrating and even-handed account of participatory management in general, and specifically the practice of "empowerment," situating these approaches historically and providing an illuminating case study of empowerment at a Fortune 500 company. This is a first-rate guide for those who would explore and develop participatory management with their eyes open."-Donald Rothberg Chair of Faculty Saybrook Graduate School-San Francisco

"Dr. Potterfield's work presents us with a well-supported argument that "empowerment" means feeling good about one's impotence while being blinded to the realities of corporate self-interest. Dr. Potterfield has done employees, but, more importantly, democracy a very great service by revealing in a scholarly and morally grounded way this form of exploitation. We are in his debt."-Tony Stigliano Professor of Human Science and Psychology Saybrook Graduate School

"The history of American management is littered with "fads" that promised to reconcile democratic values with corporate profits. However, to date the political economic context surrounding these fads has limited their success. Inattention to this context by students of organizations has prevented us from understanding why the efforts failed. In this book, by keeping the larger context before us, Potterfield's research on empowerment helps us understand why this seemingly promising approach may follow a similar course."-Walter Nord Professor of Organization Theory and Behavior University of South Florida

"Tom Potterfield has got to grips with the notoriously slippery concept of empowerment. Combining the experience of an executive [with] the analytical expertise of an academic he has produced an accessible yet penetrating study. The idea of empowerment is set in its historical context, detailed empirical illustrations of its application are discussed and a sustained critique of its contradictions and emancipatory potentials is delivered. Anyone who is intrigued, baffled or just plain irritated by talk of empowerment should read this book."-Hugh Willmott Professor of Organizational Analysis Manchester School of Management

"Thomas Potterfield's book, *The Business of Employee Empowerment: Democracy and Ideology in the Workplace* is an acute analysis and critique of currently trendy and influential theories and practices of employee "empowerment" in North America. The book skillfully examines the social and intellectual roots of the concept of empowerment and creatively assesses both the emancipatory potential of and the ideological constraints on authentically democratic strategies of employee empowerment. It is essential reading for both organizational and critical theorists."-Charles P. Weibel Executive Faculty Saybrook Graduate School San Francisco

About the Author THOMAS A. POTTERFIELD is an organizational theorist with more than 20 years of hands-on corporate experience. Currently a division manager for a multinational corporation based in Tucson, he devotes his research time to the study of contemporary business practices, with a special interest in applying critical social theory, poststructuralist theory, and socially engaged spirituality to the study of organization life.