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## Towards empowerment in liberal democratic society: the developmental consequences of consultative management in the workplace

Rosemary Reglar  
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# TOWARDS EMPOWERMENT IN LIBERAL DEMOCRATIC SOCIETY:

## THE DEVELOPMENTAL CONSEQUENCES OF CONSULTATIVE MANAGEMENT IN THE WORKPLACE



A thesis submitted in fulfillment of the requirements  
for the award of the degree

Doctor of Philosophy

from

UNIVERSITY OF WOLLONGONG

by

ROSEMARY REGLAR  
B.A. (Hons.) Flinders University

Department History and Politics  
1995

I certify that this thesis does not incorporate without acknowledgment any material previously submitted for a degree or diploma in any University; and that to the best of my knowledge and belief it does not contain any material previously published or written by another person except where due reference is made in the text.

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Rosemary Reglar

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## *LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS*

ACOSS	Australian Council of Social Security
ACTU	Australian Council of Trade Unions
ALP	Australian Labor Party
AMC	Australian Manufacturing Council
AMWU	Australian Metal Workers Union
ATEU	Australian Telecommunication Employees Union
AUSTRADE	Australian Trade Commission
AWIRS	Australian Workplace Industrial Relations Survey
BOS	Basic Oxygenated Steelmaking
BCA	Business Council of Australia
BHP	Broken Hill Propriety Company Limited
CAI	Confederation of Australia Industry
CC	Consultative Committee
DEET	Department of Employment, Education and Training
DEIR	Department of Employment and Industrial Relations
DLI	Department of Labour and Industry
EEC	European Economic Community
EPAC	Economic Planning Advisory Committee
ETM	elaborately transformed manufactures
ETU	Electrical Trades Union
FIA	Federated Ironworkers Association
FIMEE	Federation Industrial Manufacturers and Electrical Engineers.
GATT	General Agreement on Tariff and Trade
GBE	government business enterprise
GDP	gross domestic product
HRM	Human Resource Manager
HRO	Human Resource Officer
IAC	Industries Assistance Commission
IC	Industry Commission
NESB	non-English speaking background
NEPSC	National Employee Participation Steering Committee
NSW	New South Wales
OECD	Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development
OEM	original equipment makers
OH&S	Occupational Health and Safety
PIMS	Production Improvement Management Services
PSA	Public Service Association
QCC	Qantas Consultative Council
QWL	quality of work life
R and D	Research and Development
SCDEP	South Coast Development Employment Project
SES	socio-economic status
SIA	Steel Industry Authority
SIDA	Steel Industry Development Agreement
SIA	Steel Industry Agreement

SPPD	Slab and Plate Products Division
STS	sociotechnical systems
TAFE	Technical and Further Education
TCC	Telecom Consultative Council
TCF	textiles, clothing and footwear
TOP	Total Operation Performance
TPM	Total Production Maintenance
TQC	Total Quality Control
TQM	Total Quality Management
TUTA	Trade Union Teaching Authority

## ABSTRACT

The focus of this thesis is empowerment in contemporary liberal democratic society. It concerns the potential for empowerment through the developmental consequences of employee participation in consultative management. As such it is an expansion of Carole Pateman's thesis that by democratising the authority structure in the workplace, employees will develop a 'democratic personality' characterised by a sense of political efficacy and competence.

To test Pateman's claims I study the developmental consequences of employee participation in consultative management. From slow beginnings in the 1970s, some Australian enterprises adopted consultative management as part of a new workplace culture towards the end of the 1980s. Two contrasting enterprises at the cutting edge of this development, namely BHP's Port Kembla Steelworks and a small heavy engineering business WGE are chosen for the study. An analysis of the data drawn from a questionnaire survey, non-participant observation and semi-focused interviews indicates the prerequisites for participation extant in both enterprises and suggests support for Pateman's thesis. The developmental consequences of workplace participation are demonstrated in the learning of intersocial skills and enhanced senses of personal and political efficacy. The developmental consequences are more evident for committee delegates, hitherto unused to discretion in the workplace, than for staff representatives and for those participating in both workplace committees and in voluntary associations outside the workplace. Such suggests additional support for Pateman's claims.

But a participatory democracy with its communitarian politics of a substantive concept of the good described by Pateman is at odds with a liberal democratic framework where individual rights and interests are prioritised. Thus it might be expected that the positive developments for worker empowerment might not transcend the workplace boundaries and moreover, might even be negated by the counteracting values of economic rationalism, which characterises the contemporary liberal democratic society. A consideration of such issues cannot simply be inferred from empirical or behavioural studies alone, as at the heart of the problem lies a clash of ontologies. I draw on contemporary theorists Rawls, Skinner, Taylor, Walzer, Gould and Mouffe in order to address these issues and to show how the importance of the individual as a bearer of rights and interests is not necessarily lost when assuming the role of the participant in the public sphere.