



From the **Chapter 1: Authority of the book:**

INVITING LEADERSHIP from Daniel Mezick and Mark Sheffield

Dynamic Authorization and De-authorization

By definition, self-organizing teams are informal authority systems. They routinely authorize one or more individuals to inform decisions, influence decisions, and make decisions as needed. Informal authority moves fast. It can be quickly offered and received, and just as quickly revoked. As you think about this, you may notice these dynamics in your own working life, inside the teams and groups where you have membership. High-functioning teams exhibit extremely flexible and fluid authority-distribution behaviors.

When seen in this light, we can safely say that self-organization is actually the dynamic sending and receiving of authority, and supporting information related to it. This allocation of authority tends to be responsive, highly adaptable, ... and highly efficient. It is the informal authorization system. The formal authorization system (the one represented by the org chart) is no match in a contest of speed and adaptability with a self-organizing system. It's not even close.



Figure 1.4: Authorization Always Involves a Send and a Receive

The informal system of dynamic authority distribution changes moment by moment as needed to respond to conditions. The formal system does not do this, and might be up to 1000 times slower than the informal authorization system which is dynamically and continuously adjusting to changing conditions.

High-performing teams authorize and de-authorize their members to do specific kinds of work and make specific decisions depending on the current needs of the team. Authority moves around from one team member to another, sometimes with lightning speed. One consequence of this is that all the team members tend to be highly engaged as they participate in this dynamic process of sending and receiving informal authorization.

Authority can be granted, and it can be rescinded. Hiring is a form of authorization. Firing is a form of de-authorization. This formal authorization process takes much longer to send ...and much longer to receive. It is in your best interest as a formal leader to make the most of the leverage that informal authorization provides.



Responding to Change

Consider the situation where a person in a formal leadership role is not being effective. The formal process to remove them must comply with employment law and be followed carefully. This takes time. Lots of time. Compare that to what happens in the informal system of authority distribution, the “self organizing” system. If a person previously held in high esteem suddenly demonstrates a complete lack of judgment, the informal system can de-authorize (effectively “demote”) them almost immediately.

The formal system simply cannot move this fast.

Leaders who want to increase their organization’s capacity to sense and respond to change must first recognize the power of this informal system of authorization.

The informal system has several advantages:

- It is self-managing and therefore cheaper to operate
- It moves and adjusts to change very quickly
- It taps the collective intelligence of the group
- It rapidly identifies and authorizes effective leadership

In any organization, “who is authorized to do what” has both formal and informal dimensions. The work of making decisions that affect the whole group is the most important work that can be done in that group. The authorization to do this work originates formally from the organization and informally from those who are affected by these decisions.

The future of work is about better understanding and leveraging the “always-on” system of informal authority distribution. The differences between formal and informal authority are profound.

These differences include:

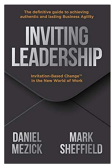
- **Speed of authorization and de-authorization:** Formal authority takes time to send and receive. It also takes time to rescind. We are all familiar with the “progressive discipline” process of formally de-authorizing a person and potentially removing them from their role in the organization. On the other hand, informal authorization is very fluid and dynamic. It is several hundred times faster than the process of formal authorization. This fact has profound implications on efficiency and productivity in the organizations.



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- **Acceptance by the group:** Since informal authorization originates with the group, there is agreement from the beginning that the person is the right one for the role. The group chooses leaders they would like to follow.

Notes to the reader:



1. Additional samples from from the book *INVITING LEADERSHIP* can be found at the book's web site, <https://invitingleadership.com>.
2. You can purchase the book [INVITING LEADERSHIP on Amazon](#).
3. Much more content on the eight Patterns of Open Business Agility can be found at the Open Leadership Network web site, <https://openleadershipnetwork.com>