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# Control in an Age of Empowerment

*Robert Simons, Harvard Business Review, 1995*

How to give people freedom without losing control of the business.

## The big idea

Simons argued that managers face a constant tension between letting people use their initiative and keeping the business on track. His answer was four levers of control. Two of them free people up and two keep them in check, and the art is using all four together.

## The famous example

Simons' four levers, two that free people up and two that rein them in.

| BELIEF SYSTEMS | BOUNDARY SYSTEMS | DIAGNOSTIC SYSTEMS | INTERACTIVE SYSTEMS |
|---|---|---|---|
| **Inspire** | **Limit** | **Measure** | **Discuss** |
| Purpose and values | What not to do | Targets and KPIs | Where to go next |

A clear set of rules on what's off limits can actually give people more freedom, because they know where the lines are.

## Why it matters

Pricing guardrails are a good example. Set clear boundaries and track the right numbers, and you can trust sales teams to make decisions without every deal needing sign-off.

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**Read the original**
Simons, R. (1995). Control in an Age of Empowerment. *Harvard Business Review*, 73(2), 80–88.

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