

## **Power in Groups and Organizations**

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This is a chapter about power in groups and organizations. In the following pages, we suggest that the analysis and exploration of the complexities of organizational power by managers and workers is both necessary and useful. We begin by discussing three of the prominent theoretical perspectives on power from the literatures of social and organizational psychology and critical management studies. We then outline some of the dilemmas and challenges faced by executives, managers and workers around empowerment, disempowerment and organizational democracy. Then, building on the seminal works of Follet, Deutsch, Tjosvold, Clegg, Mumby and others, we offer a framework of organizational power which views power as a multifaceted phenomenon; as thoughts, words and deeds which are both embedded within and determining of a complex network of relations, structures and meaning-making processes at different levels of organizational and community life. Such a framework enables us to understand the relational aspects of power and authority within the context of the macro structures and ideologies that give them meaning. It can also help identify those domains in organizations where the potential for sharing cooperative power is, in fact, not disempowering, but genuinely empowering for all concerned. The chapter concludes with a set of practical recommendations for managers that emphasize the benefits of multiple emancipatory initiatives within organizations when implemented with respect to the paradoxes of power.

## **Theoretical Perspectives on Power: Controlling, Cooperative, and Critical**

Power, like other essential organizational phenomena, has been studied through the years from a variety of theoretical perspectives. Each approach has contributed to our understanding of power and influence in organizations, however each is aspectual; focusing on particular aspects of power at the expense of our understanding of others. Below, we summarize the three primary paradigms of power: controlling, cooperative and critical.

### **Power-as-control**

**Morgan (1997)** claims that many organizational theorists derive their thinking on power from the definition of power offered by American political scientist Robert Dahl. **Dahl (1968)** proposed that power involves “an ability to get another person to do something that he or she would not otherwise have done” (p. 158). This ability is often linked with the capacity to overcome the resistance of the other. This type of definition has been influential with many eminent social theorists and researchers, past (Weber, 1947; **Lasswell and Kaplan, 1950**; Dahl, 1957; **Cartwright, 1959**, French & Raven, 1959) and present (Kipnis, 1976; **Pfeffer, 1981**; **Raven, Schwarzwald and Koslowsky, 1998**; **Hinkin & Schriesheim, 1989**; **Mossholder, Bennett, Kemery, & Wesolowski, 1998**; **Rahim, 1989**; **Schriesheim, Hinkin, & Podsakoff 1991**). Power, from this perspective, is seen as a special kind of influence or of A over B. This emphasizes the controlling and potentially coercive aspects of person-centered power (A) and views it as both a mechanism for maintaining order and authority and, when abused, a problem to be contained. As such, this perspective is consistent with the technical, mechanistic and

unilateral approaches to organizational life epitomized by Taylor's methods of scientific management.

The study of power-as-control has been immensely important. First, the need for management to maintain a reasonable degree of order and efficiency in organizations is obvious. Furthermore, under certain conditions even coercive power can be a necessary or practical tool. For example, when in conflict with unjust and unresponsive others, or in situations where subordinates are hostile or unmotivated to comply with reasonable demands. In addition, the prevalence in organizations of destructive forms of controlling power through the use of humiliation, fear tactics and oppression has warranted the need to better comprehend and thereby deter such practices. This approach to the study of power has also led to important advances in the measurement of individual differences such as authoritarianism (Adorno, 1950), Machiavellianism (Christie & Geis, 1970), and social dominance orientation (Pratto & Sadanius, 1999), as well as a useful typology of the resources of power often used when asserting power over others (French & Raven, 1959).

Nevertheless, useful as the power-as-control perspective may be, it is limited, conceptually and practically, and ultimately neglects other important aspects of power. Like all theories of power, this perspective contains a set of underlying assumptions and values about the nature of power, the nature of people, and the nature of power relations that limit its applicability (Coleman & Tjosvold, 2000). These include: 1) There is a limited amount of power that exists in any relationship; therefore the more power A has the less power available for B, 2) People use what power they have to increase their

power, 3) Power relations are unidirectional; power is located in A and moves from A to B, 4) Due to the scarcity of power as a resource, power relations are intrinsically competitive, and 5) Control of another through coercion is the essence of power. These assumptions, however valid at times, define only a limited view of power.

In practice, a predominantly controlling approach to power is likely to have harmful consequences; producing alienation and resistance in those subjected to the power (Deutsch, 1973). This, in turn, limits the powerholder's ability to use other types of power that are based on trust (such as normative, expert, referent, and reward power), and increases the need for continuous scrutiny and control of subordinates. If the goal of the powerholder is to achieve compliance *and* commitment from her or his subordinates, then reliance on a "power over" strategy will prove to be costly as well as largely ineffective.

### **Power through Cooperation**

Mary Parker Follett, writing in the 1920s, offered a different perspective on power. Follett argued that even though power in organizations was usually conceived of as "power-over" others, that it would also be possible to develop the conception of "power-with" others. She envisioned this type of power as jointly developed; co-active and non-coercive (see Follett, 1973). Cooperative power, then, is that type of power that brings about constructive outcomes for all. It motivates people to search out each other's abilities and to appreciate their contributions, to negotiate and influence each other to exchange resources that will help them both be more productive, and to encourage each other to develop and enhance their valued abilities. In fact, Follett suggested that one of the most effective ways to limit the use of coercive power strategies was to develop the

idea, the capacity, and the conditions that foster cooperative power. As such, she was able to rise above the dualistic power struggles between labor and management that had threatened the survival of many organizations during her time. She did so by encouraging both groups to see the value of working together to improve their mutual situation. This was Follett's attempt to temper scientific management practices with her own "science of the situation", where labor and management collaborated to define acceptable rates of productivity and social justice (Boje and Rosile, 2001). Thus, cooperative power was consistent with the values and intentions of the emerging human relations school of management.

The empirical research on cooperation and power, although not abundant, has largely supported Follett's propositions. In a series of studies on power and goal interdependence, (Tjosvold, 1981; Tjosvold, Johnson & Johnson, 1984; Tjosvold, 1985a,b) researchers found that differences in goal interdependence (task, reward and outcome goals) affected the likelihood of the constructive use of power between high- and low-power persons. Cooperative goals, when compared to competitive and independent goals, were found to induce "higher expectations of assistance, more assistance, greater support, more persuasion and less coercion and more trusting and friendly attitudes" between superiors and subordinates (Tjosvold, 1997, p. 297). Similar effects have been found with members of top management teams. In a recent study with 378 executives from 105 organizations in China, perceived cooperative goals were found to reinforce mutually enhancing interactions and promote team recognition of abilities, which in turn resulted in a strategic advantage for the company (Tjosvold, Chen, and Liu, 2001). Coleman (1997) found that people with both chronic and primed cooperative

cognitive orientations to power were more willing to share resources and involve others in decision-making processes than those with competitive orientations. In another experiment, powerholders who were led to believe that power was expandable in a given context (compared to a limited and thus competitive resource) developed cooperative relationships and provided support and resources to their subordinates, especially when employees lacked the ability rather than the motivation to perform well (Tjosvold, Coleman, & Sun, 1999). These studies support the assertion that, under cooperative conditions, people want others to perform effectively and use their joint resources to enhance each other's power and promote common objectives.

The underlying values and assumptions of cooperative power are in contrast to those of power-as-control. These include: 1) It is possible to create power and enhance everyone's situation through mutually cooperative efforts, 2) Under certain conditions, people will share their power with others, 3) Power relations are bi-directional and mutually interdependent, 4) Often, promotively interdependent goals exist between A and B, as does the opportunity for mutually satisfying outcomes to be achieved, and 5) People's power can be positively affected by harmonious relations with others and through their openness to the influence of others (Coleman and Tjosvold, 2000). Again, these assumptions define the boundaries and limitations of this perspective.

The cooperative perspective on power has not gone without criticism. From the realist camp, concerns have been voiced that this view of power offers us a well-intentioned pipe dream; an idealistic vision of something ultimately unattainable. Given the ruthless jungle of the marketplace and of most organizational environments, they argue, the possibilities for mutual enhancement through cooperative power are severely

limited. Even under the best circumstances, mutual power enhancement is a fragile process, highly susceptible to suspicion and ruptures in trust between the parties. And at their extreme, cooperative and participatory processes can be pathological; leading to inefficiency, irresponsible leadership practices, chronic consensus seeking, and nepotism (see Deutsch, 1985 for an extensive discussion of the problems of cooperation and equality).

However, it is the critical theorists and postmodernists that deliver the most scathing critique of the cooperative approach to power (see Alvesson and Willmott, 1992a, 1992b; Boje and Rosile, 2001; Townley, 1993). They raise four primary concerns. First, they argue that the power achieved through cooperative and participatory practices by those in low power in organizations is restricted to those practices that are instrumental to the enhanced achievement of organizational goals, which subordinates do not participate in determining, and the improvement of organizational performance. Thus, these practices restrict the experiences of autonomy and opportunities for development that would result in a genuine sense of empowerment for these individuals (see, for example, Ezzamel and Willmott, 1998; Barker, 1993; Ezzamel, Willmott, and Worthington's 2001). Second, because of the persuasiveness of the empowerment ideologies used to justify cooperative and participatory management practices, employees often abandon the need to critically reflect on and challenge the many injustices and inequities (such as sexual and racial discrimination) which pervade most organizations. This notion was preceded by Marx's concern over the development of a false consciousness among workers (Marx, 1844). In other words, emphasizing micro-level cooperative practices in organizations can often mask the pressing need for macro-level

reform (see Mumby and Stohl, 1991; Barker, 1993).

Third, some critics contend that the well-intended human relations and participative management initiatives often become appropriated by management and used as subtle forms of control. For example, Mumby and Stohl (1991) demonstrated how team-based work designs can construct the illusion of worker autonomy and draw the workers' attention away from the structure imposed on them by the management. As the structure becomes a given, conflicts among workers begin to be perceived by them as merely interpersonal ones and unrelated to management's policies and objectives. Norms are then established to govern each worker's obligations toward the team, and efforts are undertaken to enforce those norms, instead of reflecting upon and possibly questioning the agenda dictated from above. Thus, rather than offering workers more autonomy and discretion, such cooperative team-based work arrangements often result in more intensive monitoring than would have been possible under the traditional work arrangements. Instead of freeing workers from traditional vertical monitoring, improved management information systems have strengthened vertical control, and the new team-based arrangements add horizontal peer monitoring (Sewell, 1998; Sewell and Wilkinson, 1992), which can be a great deal more intrusive, coercive, and abusive than the traditional work processes (Barker, 1993; 1999). Finally, the critical and postmodern theorists argue, the overemphasis on the A to B relational power processes of both the controlling and cooperative perspectives tends to decontextualize the theoretical discussion of power, which is often largely predetermined by the historical and normative context of communications and meaning-making typically controlled by elites in organizations (Alvesson and Willmott, 1992a).

## **Critical Perspectives on Power**

Critical Management Studies (CMS) have sought to challenge the assumption that management is a neutral and value-free activity concerned with attaining the instrumental goals of organizations that serve a common good. Reynolds (1998) writes:

Managing is not a neutral or disinterested activity. The socially intrusive nature of managing means involvement in and having effects on the lives of others and on their future and the future conditions of wider society. The essential stuff of management is the construction of particular power relations through which these processes are instigated and maintained. (p. 190).

Although mainstream humanist approaches to management also aspire to foster more fair organizational practices, they generally focus on curbing more blatant abuses and do not question the taken-for-granted assumptions of management. CMS is concerned with the “questioning of taken-for-granted, both about practice and its social and institutional context.... Identifying and questioning both purposes, and conflicts of power and interest” (Reynolds, 1998, p. 192). It aims to expose and reform the mundane and frequently unnoticed practices that privilege some groups (and individuals) at the expense of others (e.g., how many seemingly neutral aspects of engineering work tend to privilege men over women, see Fletcher, 1999).

CMS’s critique targets not only managers (and others who create and sustain the kind of practices that CMS seeks to expose and reform) but also many mainstream management research projects. Critical researchers have pointed out that mainstream management research tends to take the managerial or pro-elite point of view. The aim of mainstream research is to help managers and elites attain their goals, such as overcoming

resistance to change or more readily attaining maximum productivity. Employees' needs are considered solely from an instrumental perspective. Furthermore, mainstream organizational scholars are criticized for assuming the privileged position of "objective" and disinterested purveyors of pure knowledge while in reality manufacturing knowledge that is political and serves those at the top of the hierarchy.

Critical Management Studies have taken seriously the role of language in shaping and maintaining social reality. Language is not viewed as a transparent or neutral carrier of meaning. In other words, language does not merely represent reality out-there but constitutes what we take to be reality out-there and opens and constrains the ways in which we act upon this reality (Gergen, 1992). CMS also contends that an orderly reality is not natural but is a result of power-plays that suppress the inherent contradictions, inconsistencies, and conflicts of interest in organizations. Power is embedded within the organizational structure, and mundane and taken-for-granted organizational practices both express and reproduce this power structure.

When organization is viewed as a conversation (Ford, 1999) – or a story (Boje, 1991; 1995), the critical question is: whose story? Wallemacq and Sims (1998) write: "Story-telling is not a universal privilege. A key indicator of power in organizations is who has the right to tell stories" (p. 123). Although the conversation that constitutes organization includes many voices, some voices are louder than others. Voices compete for dominance for the right – the privilege – to frame the organizational reality for others and to define meaning for all (Salzer-Morling, 1998; Wallemacq & Sims, 1998).

Clegg (1989) uses the pool-table metaphor to illustrate the difference between conventional theories of power and ones proposed by critical and postmodern theorists.

The former conceptualizes the players A and B playing on a carefully calibrated table, where neither party has an advantage (for example, A over B or A with B). The latter assume that the playing field is uneven. Players find themselves thrown into a game in which the playing field has been skewed to the benefit of one of the parties, and this privilege makes it easier for that party to accomplish its goals. In this view power does not reside solely within the A-B relation. Instead, the two are embedded within a predefined set of rules and meanings that have been fixed. That is not to exclude the possibility that social actors may be invested in maintaining the existing power relations (see Potter, 1996; Wetherell & Potter, 1992 for related discussions). Thus, as reality is not a given but is continuously constructed and reconstructed, so too are power relations, which cannot be separated from reality-construction. As Tsoukas (2000) writes, “social reality is causally independent of actors (hence realists have a point) and, at the same time, what social reality is depends on how it has been historically defined, the cultural meanings and distinctions which have made this reality as opposed to that reality (hence constructivists also have a point)” (p. 531). Since, it is argued that meanings do not inhere in situations but are assigned to them, as things are defined and assigned meaning, some people find themselves in positions of power, while others find themselves subordinated (Mumby & Stohl, 1991). Power then is not only a personal or a relational variable. More dramatically, it emerges as meanings are defined.

As the meaning of such things as what constitutes historical “fact, or the standards of fairness and value become fixed, alternative meanings and possibilities are suppressed. Mumby and Stohl (1991) described the case of a male secretary who was ostracized in his organization because he violated the notions of what it meant to be a secretary (i.e.,

necessarily a woman) and what it meant to be a man (i.e., necessarily an executive). Thus, a male secretary becomes an “impossibility” in such a setting because the meanings associated with “masculinity” and with the profession of “secretary” become fixed, and are seen as mutually exclusive (Mumby & Stohl, 1991).

Organizations oftentimes suffer from narrowly fixed meanings of “how work should be done”, which privileges some groups in relation to others. For instance, engineering firms tend to value problem-solving a great deal more than problem-prevention (e.g., Fletcher, 1999; Wright, 1996). These are stereotypically masculine ways of conducting work. Yet all that such practices accomplish is a constant operation in a crisis mode. At the same time the value of relational practices, such as organizational citizenship behaviors (OCBs) is overlooked (Fletcher, 1999). Performance tends to be assessed indirectly by measuring commitment, as expressed in willingness to work long hours and to put work above family, a masculine trait (Bailyn, 1993a; 1993b; Eaton and Bailyn, 1999; Van Maanen and Kunda, 1989). While penalizing many employees (female and male), who may need greater flexibility of work schedules in order to better meet their many obligations, this rigid insistence on long hours does not benefit organizations (Bailyn, 1993a; 1993b).

Like the two previously discussed power paradigms, CMS has not escaped its share of criticism. Whereas mainstream management research has been accused of taking the managerial perspective and of failing to address the needs of those with less power, CMS has tended to marginalize managerial interests. Both critical theory and postmodernism tend to take the workers’ point of view and to portray the needs of managers as illegitimate. Another criticism frequently directed at CMS is its

intellectualism and apparent impracticality (Alvesson and Willmott, 1992a; 1992b). It appears to see power and oppression everywhere, yet seems unable to locate it anywhere in particular. This leaves managers with a clear sense of the negative impact of current organizational arrangements, but with little sense of how to begin to create alternatives.

Nord and Jermier (1992) have pointed out that many managers find critical social science appealing. What has been neglected is that non-elites are not the only ones who are oppressed by the prevalent power arrangements. As Alvesson and Willmott (1992a) note, "Caught between contradictory demands and pressures, they [managers] experience ethical problems, they run the risk of dismissal, they are 'victims' as well as perpetrators of discourses and practices that unnecessarily constrain their ways of thinking and acting" (p. 7). McCabe (2000, 2002), for instance, offers two intensive case studies of an automotive plant and an insurance company, respectively, to show that not only do the managers exercise or attempt to exercise power over others, but that often their own identities are also constructed and constrained by these power relations. Thus, those with relatively higher power should not be viewed as exempt from the operations and consequences of power (see also Alvesson, 2002, Ch. 5 for a related discussion of leadership).

However, as a result of its frequently hostile tone and abstract and inaccessible language, CMS often appears irrelevant to managers. They often do not find it interesting, because it does not appear to be interested in them. If CMS is to be heard, it must adopt a more compassionate approach and seek to liberate all groups of people from oppressive social arrangements, rather than privileging the "underdog" (workers) while creating a new one (management). Furthermore, in keeping with its democratic ideals,

CMS must learn to communicate its concepts in a clear and less intellectualized manner and to demonstrate its practical relevance to a wider audience.

### **Two Powers?**

In reviewing the three perspectives on power, it becomes evident that there is much greater similarity between the power as control and cooperative power perspectives than between either of these perspectives and the critical one. The first two camps view power as relational, while the critical camp views relationships as embedded within and expressive of systems of meaning-making. Even the ontological and epistemological assumptions of these researchers and methodologies used are quite different. We suggest that rather than deciding which group is “right” or “wrong”, it may be more instructive to recognize that conventional (i.e., power as control and co-power) and critical researchers speak of different things when discussing power. We offer the distinction between *primary* and *secondary* power as a heuristic to illuminate that distinction.

*Primary power* refers to the socio-historical process of reality construction. This is the process by which our sense of reality, as we know it, is constructed.

As Chia (2000) writes,

Social objects and phenomena such as ‘the organization’, ‘the economy’, ‘the market’ or even ‘stakeholders’ or ‘the weather’, do not have a straightforward and unproblematic existence independent of our discursively-shaped understandings. Instead, they have to be forcibly carved out of the undifferentiated flux of raw experience and conceptually fixed and labeled so that they can become the common currency for communicational exchanges. Modern social reality, with its all-too-

familiar features, has to be continually constructed and sustained through such aggregative discursive acts of reality-construction. (p. 513)

Thus, primary power defines the domain. A manager is able to give orders and to expect them to be followed because the role of a manager has been historically constructed so as to include notions of order giving. It is important to recognize that the various sources of power (e.g., French & Raven, 1959) are not concrete but socially constructed. “Legitimacy”, for example is not objective but is created through management of meaning, and thus legitimacy requires power to be demonstrated (Hardy & Phillips, 1998). Only once the domain has been defined does it become possible for power as conceived of in conventional theories to be exercised (Hardy, Palmer, & Phillips, 2000).

*Secondary power* refers to the exercise of power in the conventional sense – the ability to get one’s goals met. This can take a coercive or positive form. However, it involves working in a domain that has already been largely defined. Thus, the various strategies that a manager may use to obtain their employees’ compliance or commitment would constitute secondary power. The manager indeed has a choice whether to attempt to sell her or his ideas to the employees or to force them to obey. However, it is primary power that has made entertaining the options possible.

The two forms of power then are interconnected. Primary power opens and constrains the possibilities for exercising secondary power. Secondary power can be seen as expressing and reproducing the primary power relations. Individuals' identities are constituted by primary power, and these identities determine how much secondary power these individuals can exercise. However, secondary power can also contribute to

transforming primary power. Revolutions or hostile take-overs are dramatic examples of secondary power being used in an attempt to transform primary power.

However, it is secondary power that most easily lends itself to the most popular management research methods, such as surveys and experiments. These methods carry a set of epistemological assumptions: there is an a-priori social reality that is independent of the researchers' methodology, research uncovers, rather than constructs reality, theory is a mirror, which putatively reflects the reality out-there. Thus, both power as control and cooperative power researchers have focused on secondary power. The processes by which secondary power is exercised are crucial to understand. However, it is also important to better understand the operation of primary power.

Critical researchers have to a great extent concentrated on primary power, which is better investigated by methods that carry a different set of epistemological assumptions: the world out-there cannot be separated from the research process, researchers are a part of the phenomena that they are investigating and as a result the research process constructs rather than uncovers reality, theory is better viewed as a lens, rather than as a mirror and should be evaluated not on how accurately it represents the world out-there but on what kind of insights it offers and what possibilities for action it opens up. Thus, most of CMS research uses ethnographies and case studies to collect data.

The primary/secondary power distinction helps us re-contextualize conventional and critical research on power in a more productive way, such that the merits of each can be appreciated.

### **The Paradoxes of Emancipation**

A serious limitation of many organizational approaches to empowerment, democratization and emancipation is their rather one-sided view of power-sharing as unquestionably “good”. When implemented, these initiatives often have unintended, often paradoxical effects and consequences. Costs to the emancipated individuals and groups as well as to the organizations and the larger society must be measured along with the gains (Deutsch, 1985; Alvesson and Willmott, 1992b). Thus, the following paradoxes of emancipation should be thoroughly considered when these practices are applied in organizational change initiatives.

First, it must be recognized that emancipation can be anxiety-provoking for many individuals. Alvesson and Willmott (1992b) write, “A critical questioning of beliefs and values might not only facilitate more rational thinking, recognition and clarification of neglected needs, ideas about fairness, and so on, but, in doing so, may estrange the individual from the tradition that has formed his or her very subjectivity” (p. 447). Thus, emancipation may result in a profound sense of identity loss, confusion, general distrust, and depression (Fay, 1987). Others have suggested that the disempowered, when made to recognize their oppressed state, feel a deep sense of humiliation and resentment towards those who brought-on such recognition (see Lindner, 2001). These difficult psychological experiences serve to exacerbate the more mundane anxieties associated with the fear of change, leading to an increased investment in the status quo (see Schein, 1993 for a related discussion).

Emancipation can also negatively affect organizational efficiency and productivity – at least temporarily – as individuals begin to question and challenge the duties, roles and expectations previously taken-for-granted. This questioning can lead to

a sense of ambivalence, role-confusion, and inefficient performance. Management may in turn penalize these employees, leading to further disruptions of work. In addition, the implementation of more inclusive decision-making practices and decentralization of authority may increase the time it takes to make important decisions (Whyte and Blasi, 1982; Coleman, 2002) and negatively impact the organization's bottom line. Thus, increasing the ecological consciousness, level of participation and free choice of employees, although beneficial, could ultimately result in bankruptcy and unemployment (Alvesson and Willmott, 1992b).

Another potential trap of emancipatory practices is that even if they begin by opening up understanding and encouraging reflection on taken-for-granted, they can end up locking people into another form of fixed, unreflective thinking (Alvesson, 1996). For instance, one of the main arguments of CMS is that those in the lower echelons of the hierarchy are often “duped” by those at the top into believing that they are empowered, while in reality still being controlled from above through ideology. However, there remains a possibility that in trying to relieve the oppressed of their false consciousness, CMS is merely replacing one ideology with another. How does a CMS inspired scientist or practitioner make people who think they are empowered realize that they are not? Does s/he not still bring this knowledge “from above”? Following its own ideals, then, CMS must refrain from “telling people what to do”, while at the same time attempting to alter the apparently natural way that people have been “doing things” – sometimes all their lives.

Furthermore, when focusing on the oppressive nature of dominant ideologies, structures and practices, it is sometimes easy to overlook the “loopholes” in the

operations of power that are available to those in low power. These are microemancipatory processes “in which attention is focused on concrete activities, forms, and techniques that offer themselves not only as means of control, but also as vehicles for liberation” (Alvesson and Willmott, 1992b, p. 446). Sometimes, managerial initiatives aimed at increasing cultural control “trigger suspicion, resistance, and critical reflections” (Alvesson and Willmott, 1992b, p. 446; see also Collinson, 1994). These initiatives, then, have the paradoxical effect of fostering the opposite of their objectives. For, example, a number of scholars (e.g., Collinson, 1994; Ezzamel, Willmott, & Worthington, 2001; Knights & McCabe, 2000) have documented how workers can and do often resist management’s initiatives designed to increase their control over workers.

Finally, it is crucial to also examine what drives the empowerment initiatives themselves. Many of the “new” approaches to management, such as just-in-time and Total Quality Management are, again, frequently driven by an economic, rather than emancipatory agenda. Although both concerns are certainly legitimate, the two should not be confused, and “empowerment” should not become a marketing ploy for selling a new financial strategy to employees, for as several researchers have shown, employees tend to be better at sensing the true agenda than managers think (Collinson, 1994; Covalleski, Dirsmith, Heian, & Samuel, 1998; Ezzamel et al., 2001; Knights & McCabe, 2000; McCabe, 2000).

The preceding cautions are not intended to dismantle the emancipatory and empowerment agenda of organizational scholars and practitioners. Instead, the aim is to encourage critical examination on the part of such initiatives, so they can better avoid the pitfalls that have characterized much of mainstream organizational research and practice

(Alvesson, 1996). In practice, however, this is a demanding task. As Deutsch (1985) writes,

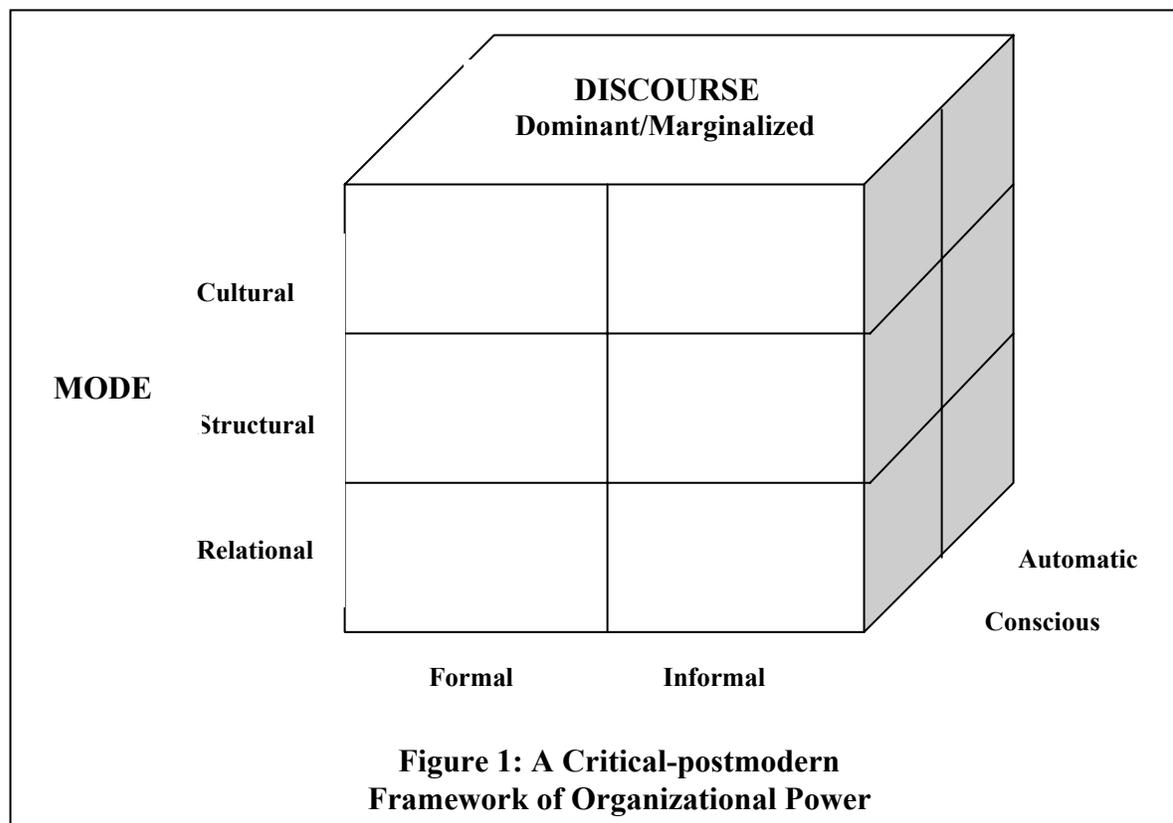
I am further persuaded that even the nearest thing to common visions of an earthly utopia – a small, well-functioning, worldly, cooperative, egalitarian community – has to work hard and thoughtfully on a continuing basis to preserve its democracy, cooperativeness and egalitarianism as well as to survive. The inherent tendency of such communities is to break down; it takes sustained effort to prevent this from happening (p. 244).

### **A Critical-postmodern Framework of Organizational Power**

In this section, we present a brief overview of our framework of organizational power that builds on the controlling, cooperative and critical perspectives in a manner that is mindful of the multifaceted and paradoxical nature of power and emancipation. The objective of such an approach is to offer a more comprehensive view of organizational power that is also concrete, useful and applicable to organizational phenomenon. The framework centers on an image of *power as exercised within a complex and contradictory network of relations, structures and meaning-making processes at different levels of organizational and community life*. It prioritizes the construction and management of meaning and ideology as a central mechanism of power (by defining what is good, normal, ideal, deviant, etc.), but heeds the important roles that structural and relational variables also play. The framework acknowledges both the destructive and constructive potentialities inherent in the exercise of power, but can help to identify targeted and concrete opportunities for democratization, emancipation and constructive change in organizational-community systems.

## Dimensions of the Framework

We begin by articulating the four dimensions of our Critical-postmodern Framework of Organizational Power (CFOP): Mutli-modal analysis, formal/informal activities, conscious/automatic activities, and oppositional discourses (ideologies and practices; see Figure 1). Each of these dimensions could be considered “meta-theoretical” because of their usefulness in enhancing the understanding of phenomena across different theoretical orientations.



Mutli-modal analysis. A variety of scholars interested in the study of power in social systems have approached it from a multi-modal perspective (see Foucault, 1980; Alvesson and Willmott, 1992b, Deutsch, 1973; Clegg, 1989; Boje & Rosile, 2001; Marshak, 1998). Each of these approaches have differed, but all have argued for the

value of conceptualizing complex power dynamics through different modes in social systems, as well as understanding the relationships between the modes.

The CFOP conceptualizes power in organizations through three nested modes: the relational, the structural, and the ideological (see Figure 2). Each mode can be affected by and can affect variables in the other modes, but each mode differs to the degree that it is associated with primary vs. secondary power.

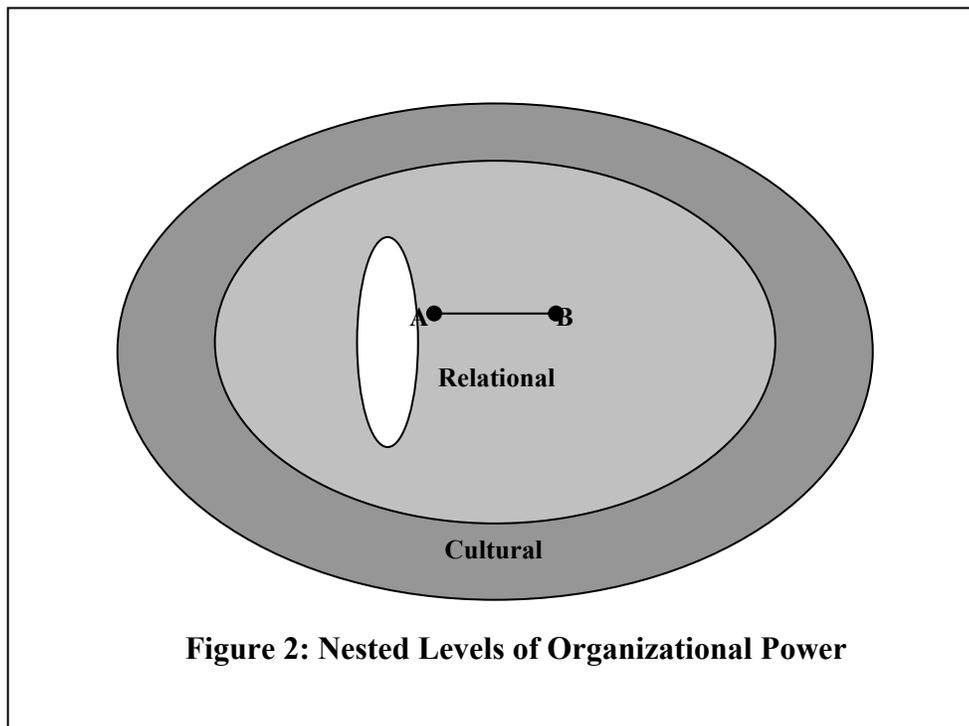
Power in the *relational* mode considers those factors and dynamics between people and between groups of people at the most micro level of work and interaction. This can include all nature of interactive exchanges and behaviors including verbal and non-verbal communication, the management of conflict, and interpersonal or intergroup attempts at control, counter-control and resistance. This is power as conceptualized by many power-as-control and cooperative power scholars and corresponds to our notion of secondary power.

Power in the *structural* mode is concerned with macro-level systems of strategy, technology, work and organization design, decision-making, reward and punishment. Power in this mode is a mixture of primary and secondary power, in that it reproduces primary power relations, but changes in a system through this mode (including changes in rules, policies, procedures, goals and incentives) can directly affect the character of the interactions in the relational mode.

Finally, power in the *cultural* mode considers those taken-for-granted aspects of organizational life: assumptions, ideologies, habits and practices, which construct, express and challenge the status quo of power in the system. These processes are

pervasive; operating at both micro and macro levels, and corresponds directly to primary power.

Thus, the power and authority relations between a manager and her subordinate will be affected by their unique relational dynamics (for example, the flexibility, temperament, and inducibility, of each party in relation to the other), which are to some degree shaped by contextual structures (cooperative goals and incentives, labor/management policies, decentralized decision-making designs), which are largely determined by the taken-for-granted meaning of such structures and relations in that organization (employees who are not “team-players” are problematic, strike-busters are scabs, women managers should be empathetic, etc.).



Formal/informal activities. Over the past few decades, there has been a trend in organizational life toward more egalitarian and inclusive structures and policies (Burke,

1986). For example, many organizations have attempted to decentralize authority and power and promote more delegation and participative decision-making. Similarly, there has been an ongoing attempt in organizations to implement diversity programs in order to meet EEOC regulatory standards and be more respectful and responsive to an increasingly diverse and “globalized” workforce and marketplace. However, many of these initiatives fail.

Current research on Organizational Citizenship Behaviors (Organ & Bateman, 1991) and emotional labor (Van Maanen & Kunda, 1989) has shed light on some of the obstacles these democracy and diversity initiatives face. This work has highlighted the central importance of *informal* or “extra-role” organizational practices for understanding and changing organizational processes and performance. Moghaddam (1997) contends that, despite the implementation of new decentralized and inclusive formal policies and structures, informal organizational practices often remain unaffected and ultimately hinder the desired changes in organizational culture.

Understanding the mechanisms through which these informal processes are sustained and affect power relations and intergroup dynamics can be extremely beneficial to executives, managers and workers alike. Such an understanding can help shed light on: a) the nature and value of the system’s resistance to the implementation of new policies, b) how their own actions may inadvertently perpetuate these undesirable informal practices, c) how informal practices sometimes benefit certain identity groups (e.g., racial or ethnic groups) over others and cause tension in the system, and d) how they can become more effective in implementing desired systemic changes.

Conscious/automatic activities. Contemporary research on social cognition has indicated that there are important forms of thought and action that are not under our control in that they are autonomous and detached from our will and intentions (Bargh, 1996). These thoughts and actions are believed to have been made cognitively accessible from previous experiences, and to be triggered by stimuli in the environment. For instance, stereotypes of low-power social groups (women, the elderly, ethnic minorities, etc.) have been shown to become active automatically in response to the perception of a group's distinct physical features in an individual (Fiske, 1993). In fact, there are very few research phenomena in mainstream social psychology that have not been shown to occur at least partially automatically (Bargh, 1996). Typically, however, these phenomena are considered to be affected by a combination of conscious and automatic processing. Current research on stereotyping (see Operario and Fiske, 2001; Devine, 1989), intergroup bias (Dovidio, Kawakami and Beach; 2001), attitudes and persuasion (Chaiken, Giner-Sorolla, and Chen, 1996), and even the management of death-related anxieties (Pyszczynski, Greenberg and Solomon, 1999) offer such dual-process theories. Thus, when analyzing the exercise of power in organizations, we must consider the role of both conscious and automatic processes in maintaining the status quo and creating change.

Oppositional discourses. We use the term *discourse* to refer to all processes of meaning-making in organizations, which are typically accomplished through self-reflection and interpersonal communication between people. Power operates through discourse by framing the reality of organizational members in particular ways. Before reality can be acted upon, it has to be defined, and power manifests itself – perhaps most

dramatically – in being able to define things (Alvesson, 1996), for certain definitions invite or even demand particular actions. For example, the emphasis on “teamwork” is becoming widespread in contemporary organizations. Although this notion is a social construction, it is often assumed to be a given; natural, and unproblematic. The reification of teamwork can obscure the systemic nature of power by emphasizing power at the relational level and encouraging power negotiations to occur between individual actors within the team (Mumby and Stohl, 1991). Group norms start emerging, certain individuals assume leadership, and team-based sanctioning mechanisms develop only after the reification of the notion that “teamwork is the way we do work here” has made such activities possible.

We will address two of the many aspects of discourse: ideology and what we call organizational power practices (OPPs). Ideologies are various competing meta-narratives that provide the frames of reference that individuals use to interpret reality. An example of such competing ideologies is what Sidanius and Pratto (1999) call “legitimizing myths”. These can be hierarchy-enhancing (e.g., racism, sexism, meritocracy) or functioning to reproduce inequalities and hierarchies, or hierarchy-attenuating (e.g., civil rights, feminism, egalitarianism) or functioning to promote equality and to flatten the various hierarchies.

The other aspect of discourse, the OPPs, operate in ways that are automatic and virtually imperceptible. This refers to mundane and taken-for-granted social practices, such as rules of politeness, the way work is routinely done, and so on, that appear neutral and natural but in fact systematically reproduce hierarchies based on gender, race, sexual orientation, and so forth. These practices will be discussed in a greater detail below.

Organizational cultures are often portrayed as monolithic and uniform systems of values, beliefs, attitudes, and practices. However, such coherence and integration is not natural but instead results from the suppression of alternative discourses, “where the managerial monologue seems to orchestrate the polyphony into one coherent voice... a process of homogenization of meanings” (Salzer-Mörling, 1998, p. 117; see also Alvesson, 1996). The process by which conflicting interests and contradictory values, beliefs, attitudes, and practices are suppressed and the illusion of consensus is produced is referred to as *discursive closure* (Alvesson and Deetz, 2000). Because ideological control is usually approached from an instrumental perspective – it is a much more efficient mode of controlling organizations than direct supervision (Deetz, Tracy, & Simpson, 2000) – discursive closure is not only common, but is often seen as desirable.

There are multiple reasons why this type of ideological control in organizations is problematic. First, it should be questioned on ethical grounds. Controlling another human being’s subjectivity is perhaps more abusive than direct coercion. Here employees end up controlling themselves on behalf of management, as was suggested in the critique of the phenomena of work teams above (see also Deetz, 1995; Deetz, Tracy, & Simpson, 2000). Second, it can have detrimental long-term effects on organizational well-being. Homogenization of meanings facilitates managerial control and reduces blatant conflicts, but it does little for organizational performance. There appears to be increasing evidence for Kenneth Gergen’s assertion that “if everything is running smoothly, the organization is in trouble” (1992, p. 223). Discursive closure achieves control at the expense of effective decision making, as dramatically illustrated by such fiascoes as the Bay of Pigs invasion (Janis, 1983) or the Watergate scandal (Deetz, Tracy,

& Simpson, 2000). As organizations are becoming increasingly diverse, many of them find it tempting to continue “doing business as usual”, or to use minorities and women to break into new markets instead of allowing diversity to change the organizational culture and work process (Thomas and Ely, 1996). As a result, such organizations fail to reap the benefits of diversity.

The final point against discursive closure is the practical impossibility of attaining a complete homogenization of meaning. As discussed before, every attempt at increased control can also facilitate resistance. Oppositional discourses may become marginalized, dormant or temporarily silenced, but never die. The suppressed voices can find outlet in ways that are detrimental to organization’s goals. For instance, Collinson (1994) shows how workers at an assembly plant resisted management’s attempts at ideological control through various subversive activities, such as using work time and equipment to produce products (car parts, sleds for their children) for their own use (for other examples see Ezzamel et al, 2001; Knights & McCabe, 2000).

Because ideological control tends to present certain values, interests and practices as “common sense”, those that do not endorse such values, interests, and practices come to be perceived as problematic and become marginalized by the dominant groups. Over time, polarized identities are created and sustained on both sides of these differences (Sampson, 1993a; 1993b), often leading to protracted social conflicts between groups.

### **Putting it All Together**

The four dimensions of the critical-postmodern framework of organizational power are presented in Table 1. To illustrate the four dimensions of power that comprise the framework, we present a brief analysis of a research workgroup in which we both

participate. The workgroup conducts research on conflict resolution and power and consists of one professor, four doctoral students and seven masters students. The group meets weekly for two hours to plan, review, and present research conducted by its members. Formally, it is designed to facilitate cooperative, team-based work; with positively interdependent tasks and goals. However, in practice the group members have a combination of competitive, cooperative, and independent goals. The following data were collected using detailed observations of group meetings for two weeks and conducting interviews with several members.

Table 1 presents some examples from the research group to illustrate the different dimensions of the CFOP. Space limitations do not permit us to discuss examples of all the dimensions in detail. Since this chapter has emphasized the importance of the cultural mode, we will briefly discuss the examples that illustrate that dimension.

		Mode						
		Relational		Structural		Cultural		
		Formal	Informal	Formal	Informal	Formal	Informal	
Oppositional Discourses	Dominant	Conscious	Professor establishes a vision for the research	Professor offers general academic advice to students	Inclusion of MA and Ph.D. students in workgroup	Professor encourages teamwork	Privileging theory over personal experience to make a point	Using intellectualized language
		Automatic	Connecting world affairs to research	Expressing concern for members who are ill	Professor opens and closes each meeting	Evaluation of fellow student's work	Professor summarizes and integrates conflicting strands of discussions	Ph.D. students interrupting others when speaking
	Marginal	Conscious	Students offering a marginalized theoretical interpretation (e.g. postmodern)	Students inviting professor to informal get-togethers	MA students initiating a project	Students expressing contrary opinions of the work to other students in hallway	Offering a personal experience to make a point	MA students changing the topic in the group

	Automatic	Cognitively disengaging (doodling) when in disagreement with speaker	Students chronically arriving late to meetings	Students meeting independently with other students to initiate new projects	Students sharing concerns with each other re: the work - independent of professor	Students presenting their work with air of confidence and independence	MA students interrupting others when speaking
<b>Table 1: 24 Types of Organizational Power</b>							

The cultural mode focuses on seemingly “normal” activities and seeks to understand how they function to construct and reproduce a certain version of reality that privileges some people at the expense of others. Looking at the top-right four cells, we observe that the group favors theoretical arguments over personal experiences as a strategy for contributing to the group (dominant/conscious/formal cell). In other words, members who are best able to use their knowledge of various theories to support their arguments – usually the professor and doctoral students – are more likely to be heard and to influence the direction of discussions. This is understandable in an academic research setting, however it is important to recognize that this practice tends to neglect the considerable value of the practical insight brought to the group by the experienced practitioners in the group. As such, psychological jargon and social science concepts are preferred over personal rumination (dominant/conscious/informal). Again, given their academic training, the professor and doctoral students in the group are more likely to be able to use this type of language than the masters students.

When seeking to move the discussion forward, the professor sometimes integrates conflicting points made by several students into a coherent narrative (dominant/automatic/formal), which allows him to move the discussion in his desired direction. Due to their relatively privileged position in the group, the doctoral students

tend to interrupt the other students when speaking more than the masters students (dominant/automatic/informal). Both of these practices have a negative impact on the MA student-practitioner's experience of autonomy and ability to contribute to the research.

As argued above, there are always oppositional discourses that can be more or less audible. Looking at the bottom-right four cells, we note the marginalized discourses in our group. Personal experience is not valued as highly as theory and research to make points (marginal/conscious/formal). Attempts at switching discussion topics made by masters students are rarely successful (marginal/conscious/informal). It is relatively uncommon for students who report the progress of their research not to seek reassurance from the professor. They typically make eye contact with him, leave pauses in sentences for him to fill in information, and so on. However on occasion, an elite member of the Ph.D. group may present his or her work with a greater sense of independence and confidence (marginal/automatic/formal). As common as interrupting by doctoral students may be, it is highly uncommon for masters students to interrupt others (marginal/automatic/informal).

Putting the examples together, it becomes apparent that despite the cooperative, team-based structure of the group there is a clear hierarchy and a dominant culture within the research group. We are not suggesting that finding an hierarchy in the research group is unexpected or undesirable. Given the normative expectation at universities, the resulting hierarchy and culture would be considered "legitimate". However, it is *where* and *how* the hierarchy manifests, is maintained, and the consequences of such a culture that is of interest. Our analysis allowed us to observe how practices that appeared

harmless on the surface, positioned the professor at the top of the hierarchy and claimed a privileged spot for the doctoral students and the academically trained at the expense of the masters students and practitioners in the group. This arrangement, although typical of university settings, was having unintended consequences for our work; shutting down some of the valuable insights from practice that could inform our research. Of course, explicitly identifying these processes, on this or other hierarchies of difference (such as those based on race, gender, sexual orientation, nationality, class, etc.) can come at some costs to the efficient functioning of the group.

### **Practical Implications**

We began this chapter with an image of power as a multifaceted phenomenon exercised within a complex and contradictory network of relations, structures and meaning-making processes at different levels of organizational and community life. Thus, any practical implications emerging from our discussion must address the same degree of complexity, contradiction and scope. We support the position that it is insufficient to conduct meaningful organizational change solely at the relational level (Boje and Rosile, 2001) or at either one of the more macro-levels (Deetz et al, 2000; Moghaddam, 1997). Instead, we advocate a program of *multiple emancipatory initiatives*, in which different groups of stakeholders at different levels attempt separate initiatives. These initiatives may combine controlling, cooperative and critical activities, and can serve as a safeguard against institutionalizing new interests at the expense of others. Ideally, a plurality of actions help ensure representation and voice for all stakeholders, including consumers, workers, investors, suppliers, host communities, the general society, and the world ecological community (Deetz, 1995). Social responsibility

and consideration of the stakeholders' well being is not only the "right" thing to do but is also important for the long term economic sustainability of the organization.

In service of such a program, we offer the critical-postmodern framework of organizational power (CFOP; see Figure 1 and Table 1) as an analytic and diagnostic tool for use in identifying organization-specific patterns and tendencies around power, dominance and change. However, like any diagnostic tool, the CFOP has the potential to be abused by members of both dominant and marginalized groups. Thus, we recommend that it be utilized through a process of participatory action research (PAR). PAR is a methodology that places social transformation and empowerment at the center of the research process (Brydon-Miller, 1997; Lykes, 1997). Originating from Kurt Lewin's action research methodology (Lewin, 1946), and the emancipatory work of Paulo Freire (1970), Marxists (Oquist, 1978), feminists (Maguire, 1987) and various critical theorists (Habermas, 1971; Comstock and Fox, 1993), PAR attempts to achieve positive social change by addressing the concerns of all stakeholders, which includes the fundamental causes of oppression. It is "at once a process of research, education, and action to which all participants contribute their unique skills and knowledge and through which all participants learn and are transformed" (Brydon-Miller, 1997, p. 661). When combined with the CFOP, PAR can facilitate an increase in awareness around power and dominance and an openness to learning and influence for all members of the organization.

However, we again stress that any emancipatory initiative must be implemented with an understanding of the paradoxical nature of such initiatives. This requires recognition of the merits and the trade-offs of both sides of emancipation. The needs for

stability, adaptability, and reform cannot be seen as mutually exclusive, but must be recognized as part of a dynamic whole. In other words, *a key to fostering constructive change processes in organizations is in managing these basic tensions and reframing them in a manner that influences their direction*. These processes will need to respond to resistance (closed mind-sets, vested interests, practices, structures, identities, etc.), but do so in a more balanced manner. Thus we must look for approaches that seek sufficient control *and* equal participation, that meet short-term *and* long-term objectives, and that create value for laborers *and* managers alike. Morgan (1997) suggests that this can be achieved through the creation of *new contexts* based on *new understandings* of paradox and *new actions*. He contends that the fact that these tensions are perceived as contradictory in the first place is germane to the problem. Thus, we need to develop new contexts and approaches that reframe the tensions between control and emancipation as natural and complementary, and respond to them with new actions (experiments, prototypes) which enable stakeholders to manage the tensions constructively.

The following are some examples of the types of initiatives that can be undertaken by separate groups of stakeholders within the relational, structural, and cultural modes of the organization to mobilize a program of multiple emancipatory initiatives.

### **Relational Initiatives**

Tjosvold (1991) provided a series of recommendations for establishing strong cooperative links and constructive power relations in organizations by developing: (a) a common direction and vision, (b) mutual tasks, (c) assessment of joint productivity, (d) shared rewards contingent upon success, (e) complementary responsibilities and roles that require collaboration, and (f) team identity and supportive culture (p. 297). Coleman

and Tjosvold (2000) added: (g) mutual recognition and appreciation of each other's strengths, (h) reciprocal exchange of resources, (i) openness to development and learning, and ideally (j) a shared value base that emphasizes human dignity, human equality, nonviolence, reciprocity, respect of diverse others, and a common good (Rawls, 1996; Deutsch, 2000). These are primarily structural and cultural interventions aimed at fostering promotively interdependent relations. Training in the knowledge, attitudes and skills necessary for cooperative work and constructive conflict resolution are also basic to promoting positive relational dynamics. These activities can create the conditions and capacities for cooperative power to develop where people want others to perform effectively and use their joint resources to promote common objectives. However, concerns over the disempowering effects of relational strategies must be addressed through additional co-power initiatives within the structural and cultural modes.

### **Structural Initiatives**

Boje and Rosile (2001) proposed two major democratization initiatives within the structural mode. Based on the works of Mary Parker Follett (1946) and Stuart Clegg (1989), they advocate co-power reforms in both corporate governance and at the organization-community interface (See also Deutsch (1985) discussion of worker capitalism and worker-owned collectives). First, they recommend cooperative forms of joint democratic governance for management and labor. They write:

Follett, however, favored workers' councils, including direct representation of workers on boards of directors and departments and the training of workers in the financial affairs of the entire firm. The cooperative and guild movements also stressed worker participation in the

governance of the whole firm; employees were to become co-owners of production, not just design participants. Empowerment through co-ownership is not the same as empowerment through participative approaches to work design that afford more team participation or worker control over the pace and layout of work.

Second, Boje and Rosile (2001) cite the value of the current charter movement; a grassroots movement to return control of local corporate charters back to the communities in which they are situated. This is an attempt to make corporations in this age of globalization more accountable for “spreading mass poverty, environmental devastation, and social disintegration...weakening our capacity for constructive social and cultural innovation” (Korten, 1995, p. 268). They argue for a movement to firms that are locally controlled and accountable to emphasize the need for corporations to serve public and ecological well being. They envision a global system of localized economies that celebrate and support local diversity, which ultimately enriches the whole. Both of these initiatives - corporate governance and corporate charter movements – situate the mechanisms of co-power within the macro-structural mode where their effects are profound and lasting.

### **Cultural Initiatives**

Emancipatory initiatives targeted at organizational culture are the most central to our framework, for it is within this mode that meaning, status, and dominance are constructed, maintained, and ultimately challenged. Although it is often difficult to determine how or where to intervene in a mode as pervasive and mercurial as culture, we suggest three methods: through the identification and discussion of organizational power

practices (OPPs), through training in critical reflection, and by creating a climate which values oppositional and marginalized voices.

Identifying and Exploring Organizational Power Practices. Not knowing whether or when to smile, to laugh out loud, or to nod in solemn agreement in a meeting can adversely affect one's status within that group. We call this type of taken-for-granted practice *organizational power practices (OPPs)* because they can serve to privilege some individuals in relation to others along important dimensions of difference. To be sure, it can be argued that all aspects of organizational behavior are to some extent structured by and reproduce power relations (Alvesson, 1996; Townley, 1993) – including the organizational members' emotional experience of work (see Hancock and Tyler, 2001, Ch. 5 for a review). However, because it is impossible and impractical to identify the many ways in which every action is connected to power, we offer OPPs as an analytic concept through which to better understand power relations. In other words, OPPs can help us to determine which social practices are most essential to power relations in a given context. Thus, *OPPs are the social practices that are most relevant to operations of power in a given context.* We offer several “rules of thumb” about OPPs.

*Point 1: OPPs are group-specific; what is an OPP within a certain group may not be an OPP within another.* For example, Collinson (1994) described a case where, in the spirit of a corporate culture campaign, management sought to de-emphasize hierarchy by encouraging workers to call managers by their first names. Thus, calling a manager by their first name was an hierarchy-attenuating OPP from management's perspective. However, the workers were determined to resist the corporate culture initiative, which they perceived as a management trick designed to increase productivity, and in order to

do so sought to distance themselves from management. Thus, from the workers' perspective addressing a manager by their first name did not constitute an effective OPP.

We can see here how the social practices within the cultural mode can resist attempts at reform within the relational and structural modes. Managers OPPs are attempts at creating a new organizational structure (structural mode), which is more in keeping with the ideology of "flat organizations" (cultural level). The workers' refusal to perform such OPPs prevents the desired structure from taking shape and fuels the oppositional discourse, such as "No, we are not all equal here".

*Point 2: OPPs can be conscious or automatic.* Sometimes people are conscious of the OPPs in a given system or subsystem and try to perform them. For example the various subversive activities in which the workers in Collinson's (1994) study engaged were for the most part performed deliberately and intentionally. However, many – if not most – OPPs are automatic and do not require much thought. OPPs are learned by living in a system and observing others perform OPPs that eventually become part of an individual's repertoire to be used in appropriate situations. People are usually efficient in reading the power relations in a particular context and acting as the situation demands. For instance, at a meeting we usually know whether or not and when to speak up and how to do it. Some people will not speak at all. Other people may interrupt others, while others patiently wait for their turn to speak.

*Point 3: OPPs can enhance current power relations or subvert the power structure – sometimes simultaneously.* Since most mundane practices are somehow linked to power, when engaging in any behavior that is seen as appropriate to one's position (e.g., superior giving a subordinate advice and the subordinate receiving it), the

status quo of power is maintained. However, some attempts at control from above backfire and stimulate awareness and resistance on the part of those below. Those with less power may then develop OPPs that revolve around subverting managerial control (Collinson, 1994). On the other hand, resistance can also reproduce the status quo. In Collinson's (1994) study the workers voluntarily distanced themselves from management and thwarted the potential for genuine improvement in their conditions through obtaining more information about the decision-making processes and attempting to influence them.

*Point 4: An individual's OPPs depend on her or his status relative to others in a particular group.* Fletcher (1999) discusses how in the engineering firm that she studied more "masculine" and aggressive patterns of behavior were valued. However, women who attempted to act "more masculine" in order to fit in were frequently informally sanctioned for not acting "feminine enough". Thus, different roles and statuses carry with them particular OPPs, and successful performance of OPPs is conditional upon the individuals' correct reading of their particular roles and statuses in any given interaction (Hardy et al, 2000; Voronov and Coleman, 2001).

*Point 5: The category of interest will drive which OPPs are noted and investigated.* Power hierarchies are often constructed around a wide range of social categories, such as gender, race, sexual orientation, and so on. Thus, which social practices are construed as OPPs will depend on the kind of power hierarchy one seeks to investigate. For example, when trying to uncover gender inequities in an organization, one may note the privileging of more masculine behaviors in a given situation (e.g., Fletcher, 1999). The OPPs here then would be the taken-for-granted social practices that construct and reproduce a gender hierarchy.

To sum up, OPPs are an analytic tool that allows us to see the links between the social practices within the cultural mode and the relational and structural modes. OPPs emphasize the importance of the informal and taken-for-granted social practices for the maintenance of the status quo of power. Thus, a successful culture change demands more than formal restructuring, the informal practices and communication must also express the new vision (Deetz. et al, 2000).

Training and Supporting Critical Reflection. Many human resource training programs utilize self-reflection as a mechanism to increase awareness of personal beliefs, values, attitudes, problem-solving strategies and other behavioral tendencies. However, very few such programs include *critical reflection* as an integral part of their curriculum. Critical reflection is distinct from self-reflection in four ways: 1) it is principally concerned with developing the capacity to question “common sense” assumptions, 2) its focus is social, political and historical rather than individual, 3) it pays particular attention to the analysis of power relations, hierarchies and privilege, and 4) it is concerned with emancipation and, as such, is ideological (Reynolds, 1998).

The ability to critically reflect is essential for all members of contemporary organizations. We understand that all employees may not be in the position to act upon the system to make it reflect critical-postmodern ideals. However, having learned to engage in critical reflection, they may be more likely to seize the available opportunities to change aspects of organizational functioning toward a more inclusive and democratic end – given the practical and political limitations that they face. The idea of OPPs can be particularly useful for such critical reflection training, because it offers a way to see the operations of power more concretely and without falling into the trap of many CMS

writings where dominance is thought to be everywhere but cannot be identified anywhere.

Fostering a Climate Favorable to Marginalized Voices. Engaging in participatory action research on OPPs and offering training in critical reflection can go a long way in assessing the value and consequences of the dominant system of power in any organization. However, we have repeatedly emphasized the need to be mindful of the costs and consequences of such emancipatory initiatives, as well as the reactive tendencies to close-out previously privileged discourses. Thus, we recommend viewing emancipation not as an outcome, but as an ongoing process of critical reflection, exploration, and restructuring. A commitment to a process of questioning the taken-for-granted in any organization can help establish a climate where all voices are valued and where the true value of diversity can flourish.

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