

CHAPTER 5

MANAGING POWER AND POLITICS IN ORGANIZATIONS

Resistance, Empowerment, Ethics

Objectives and learning outcomes

By the end of this chapter, you will be able to

- Appreciate that the central task of any manager is to manage people and that managing people means managing power relations
- Understand how power is played out in organizational structures
- Evaluate what might be bases for authority in organizations
- Grasp some of the central ethical issues involved in managing power and authority relations



SERVICES TOILET
BUILD AND MANAGE BY
THE COMMITTEE FOR THE CONTROL AND
MONITORING OF POLICE ADMINISTRATION OF
CHANASONGKRAM POLICE - STATION



Outline of the Chapter

Setting the Scene

Central Approaches and Main Theories

Sources of Power

Organizations as Political Arenas

Power and the Politics of Resistance

Critical Issues: Soft Domination and Hegemony

Soft Domination

Electronic Surveillance

Empowerment?

Barker on Concertive Control

Organizational Hegemony in the International Monetary Fund

The Fine Print: The Extremes of Power

Total Institutions

The Ethics of Organizational Obedience

Managing with Positive Power

Summary and Review

One More Time . . .

Additional Resources

Before you get started . . .

A famous thought by Lord Acton:

“Power tends to corrupt and absolute power corrupts absolutely. Great men are almost always bad men, even when they exercise influence and not authority: still more when you superadd the tendency or the certainty of corruption by authority.”

—Lord Acton, letter, 5 April 1887,
to Bishop Mandell Creighton (Acton 1972)

OUTLINE OF THE CHAPTER

Organizations are made up of formal and informal rules that coordinate actions of different people. But how can organizations make sure that people—who have diverse backgrounds, particular interests, and different understandings—comply with these rules? Raising these questions means addressing the fine line between the exercise of power and ethics. *Power* is the concept that encompasses the mechanisms, processes, and dispositions that try, not always successfully, to ensure that people act according to the rules of the game. Hence, power is one of the central concepts in both management practice and theory. Ethics, on the other hand, is concerned with doing the right things in the right way. Of course, the whole issue of ethics depends in the first place on the ethicality of the business proposition that underlies the organization. Is it ethical, for example, to build a business on cheating?

Researchers in organization theory and management in the era after World War II had developed a set of expectations about the exercise of power in organizations that they had derived from the formal structure of bureaucratic authority (Bennis, Berkowitz, Affinito, and Malone 1958). However, a number of case studies refuted these expectations. Surprisingly, these case studies discovered bases of power outside the formal structure of authority and described the games they sanctioned and the rules that made them possible. More recently, interest in discussions of power has shifted to issues of resistance—how people in organizations resist formal organizational authorities. However, perhaps of more pressing concern is not the question of why people resist but why they might obey, particularly where there are ethical issues attached to what it is that they are obeying, issues that come into particular focus when considering examples of extreme organizations that are known as *total institutions*. Although we can learn a great deal from the concentration of power that occurs in total institutions, in fact, most organizational power is neither so total nor so hard edged. Instead of making people do what they wouldn't otherwise do, this power is subtler—it operates through modes of *soft domination*.



Image 5.1 *Ethics at work?*

SETTING THE SCENE

We spend at least one third of our adult lives working in organizations. Another third disappears in sleep and replenishment, and a further third in things we choose to do. Therefore, for one third of our lives, we cede control to others and enter into complex relations of power that range from others getting us to do things we would not otherwise do, to us doing the same to others. We will spend that third of our lives in different organizations. At best, these will be warm, friendly, welcoming, open places in which we can do our jobs with pride, growth, and achievement. At worst, however, they may be akin to places of concentrated power that frames and shapes our hours there.

As organization theorists began studying the empirical workings of organizations rather than simply constructing abstract models, they noticed that some members of organizations were able to exploit and use seemingly impersonal rules for their own ends. The prevalent conception of organization hierarchy identified it with legitimacy; thus, when actions were identified that seemed to subvert or bypass the official hierarchy of authority, they were labeled “illegitimate”—they were not authorized. In this way, power came to be seen as illegitimate, whereas authority was legitimate. Certain resources within organizations seemed to provide bases for illegitimate expressions of power.

At various times, several key resources have been promoted as the basis for expert power in organizations. The most pervasive basis for arguing a special relationship between power and a specific resource relate to the ability to control uncertainty in bureaucratic organizations. More recently, there has been a shift in focus from bureaucracy to consideration of more empowered alternatives. But, as we shall see, empowerment is not necessarily all it is cracked up to be—it can mean even tighter control.

The world of organization power is complex—full of shifting alliances, words that mean something other than they say, and actions that do more than they proclaim. It is impossible to escape power in organizations, if only because organization means yoking together people with multiple and complex interests whose search for satisfaction is structured through a set of organizational relations with people that one would not necessarily choose to spend time with. If you had a choice, would you spend eight hours a day with the passing parade of megalomaniacs, incompetents, and cruelly brutal gossips that people most offices and other organizations? When the boss tells you that he wants everyone to work as one happy family, look around. Would you choose any or all of these people as partners with whom to make a family?

Power is more profound than just the push and pull of attraction and repulsion, command and control. It also involves the structuring of dispositions and capacities for action as well as action itself. We explore these themes in this chapter, looking at the good, the bad, and the ugly in power relations. We take care to concentrate not only on the negatives but also to accentuate the positives. After all, if power is inescapable, we might as well learn how to use it wisely.

CENTRAL APPROACHES AND MAIN THEORIES

Sources of power

If an organization makes people do things they normally wouldn't do, power must be the central issue. Many potential sources or bases of power have been listed, including information; expertise; credibility; stature and prestige (Pettigrew 1973); uncertainty (Crozier 1964); access to top-level managers and the control of money, sanctions, and rewards (French and Raven 1968; Benfari, Wilkinson and Orth 1986); and control over resources (Pfeffer and Salancik 2002). We consider some of the more important of these bases of power in this section.

Legitimacy

Power works best when it is seen least. Power as legitimation needs to do nothing to secure its will if people already want to do what is expected of them. If legitimacy can be created for individual actions, it greatly reduces the

Power works best when it is seen least.

chance of opposition to them because it creates a meaningful context in which they can be accepted and justified (Edelman 1964; 1971). Legitimation lowers the probability of resistance, as Blau (1964: 199) recognized when he noted that “stable organizing power requires legitimation. . . . The coercive use of power engenders resistance and sometimes active opposition.” Legitimation is achieved through what Pettigrew (2002) called the “management of meaning”—a double action because it seeks both to create legitimacy for one’s initiatives as it simultaneously seeks to delegitimize those it opposes.

Some of the main sources of legitimacy are symbolic. Images can represent a great deal of power in simple ways. For example, the law is often portrayed as an institution that impartially weighs justice in its scales. That the common symbol of this power is blindfolded while holding the scales of justice is meant to represent it as a legitimate authority; it shows that an impartial judiciary resides over a mass population that is weighed equally in the scales.

One of the most potent sources of power and its symbolism are the many remnants of imperialism that dot the globe. We have chosen one from our city, Sydney, where one of the most famous nineteenth century buildings is a beautiful old structure that now contains some of the most popular and best retail outlets in the city. The Queen Victoria Building is named after the monarch who, during the latter half of the nineteenth century, was Queen of Britain and all her colonies, as well as Empress of India. When the building was renovated during the 1980s into one of the city’s premier retail sites, an appropriate statue was found and placed immediately in front of it. Once upon a time, there were thousands of similar monuments scattered around what used to be the British Empire. What is interesting about this particular statue is that it was acquired and unveiled in Sydney in 1987, so the statue and the building enjoyed unrelated biographies until that point.

When the City of Sydney was searching for a spare statue of the building’s namesake, Ireland was the logical place to look because it had been a colony and had become a free state. The statue used to stand in Dublin outside the Parliament Building. Such statues, especially in the contexts in which they were originally placed, made power that was remote and abstract present and material in a symbolic sense. (Which is perhaps, why the Irish got rid of it. Having been a republic for some time, the Parliamentarians presumably had little present use for it.)

Of course, although Queen Victoria was the monarch of the colony of New South Wales (NSW) and the colony of Ireland, she did not rule in person. In NSW in the nineteenth century, the governor ruled on her behalf. But in NSW’s limited parliamentary democracy, he did not really rule. There was considerable uncertainty about the governor’s exact powers, given their derivation from an abstract authority that he served at such a distance.

Such a situation of rule was not at all organizationally unusual. Weber (1978) noted the uncertainty that the elected members of a legislative assembly had in



Image 5.2 *Queen Victoria, imperial symbol of authority*

terms of parliamentary, budgetary, and other procedures of rule compared to the far more detailed and certain knowledge of their senior permanent public servants. He saw the uncertainty—a lack of knowledge of the precise rules of the bureaucracy—of elected politicians as their undoing in power terms when compared with permanent civil servants. However, the generation of empirical researchers in organization theory after World War II reversed this analysis. For them, uncertainty increasingly became seen as a source of power rather than a constraint on its exercise.

Uncertainty

As we have seen, uncertainty and power are not strange bedfellows, and their proximity has been much explored in organization theory. The view for the last fifty years has been that when an organization experiences uncertainty in areas of organizational action, if a person has organizational skills that can reduce that uncertainty, he or she will derive power from such expertise. In other words, this view states that despite formal hierarchies, prescribed organizational communications, and the relations that they specify, people will be able to exercise power when they control or have the necessary knowledge to master uncertain zones in the organizational arena.

One of the earliest proponents of these views conducted research in one of the most clearly prescribed of organizations: a military bureaucracy. Thompson (1956) researched two U.S. Air Force bomber wing commands comprising both flight and ground crew personnel. The flight crew had greater formal authority, but the role of the ground crew was central for the safety of the flight crew. Their need for safety conferred a degree of power on the ground crew that was not evident in formal authority relations. Their technical competency vis à vis safety issues put them in a strategic position to secure their own interests—to exercise “unauthorized or illegitimate power” (Thompson, 1956: 290), which they were able to rationalize in terms of a need for safety. Hence, the maintenance workers controlled the key source of uncertainty in an otherwise routinized system.

In a study conducted by Michel Crozier (1964) in a French state-owned tobacco factory, uncertainty also proved to be a central resource. The female production workers, at the technical core of the organization, were highly central to its workflow-centered bureaucracy. The male maintenance workers were marginal, at least in the formal representation of the organization design. The production workers were paid on a piece-rate system in a bureaucracy designed on scientific management principles. Most workers were effectively de-skilled. The bureaucracy was a highly formal, highly prescribed organization, except for the propensity of the machines to break down. The effect of them doing so was to diminish the bonus that the production workers could earn. To maintain earnings, the production workers needed functional machines.

Work stoppages made the production workers extraordinarily dependent on the maintenance workers, whose expertise could rectify breakdowns. Consequently, the maintenance workers had a high degree of power over the other workers in the bureaucracy because they controlled the remaining source of uncertainty in the system. Management and the production workers were aware of the situation, and they had made attempts to try to remedy it. Management had introduced planned preventive maintenance to be done by the production workers, but manuals disappeared and sabotage occurred. Maintenance workers were indefatigable in defense of their relative autonomy, privilege, and power. Through their technical knowledge, they could render the uncertain certain and the nonroutine routine. The benefit of maintaining routine was a degree of autonomy and relative power for the maintenance workers in excess of that formally designed. There was also an issue of gender; the male maintenance workers used their expert knowledge as a masculine device over and against the female production workers.

Crozier’s (1964) study was a major landmark. He had taken an underexplicated concept—power—and attached it to the central concept of uncertainty. After this study, the field developed rapidly. A theory called the “strategic contingencies theory of intra-organizational power” (Hickson, Hinings, Lee, Schneck, and Pennings 2002) emerged; it sought to build a theory from existing ideas, particularly that power was related to the control of uncertainty and

that, following Tannenbaum (1968), it could be measured. Tannenbaum had developed a measurement of power, the *control graph*. The graph maps the means of the perceived power of each level in the formal hierarchy of an organization by averaging the sum of the perceptions of people in the organization of the amount of power vested at various levels within it. In this way, inter-subjective measures of power may be achieved. It became apparent that power was not something that was fixed—it could be increased. Organizations that were quite similar structurally could design power quite differently.

Strategic contingency theory

Hickson et al. (2002) sought to measure power in organizations. One of their theoretical innovations was to use a formal model. The organization was conceptualized as being composed of four functional subsystems or subunits. The subunits were seen as interdependent. Some were more or less dependent and produced more or less uncertainty for other subunits. What connected them was the major task of the organization, coping with uncertainty. The theory ascribes the differing power of subunits to imbalances in the way in which these interdependent subunits cope with and handle uncertainty. The most powerful are the least dependent subunits that cope with the greatest systemic uncertainty, although there are certain qualifications—namely, that the subunit is not easily substitutable with any other subunit and that it is central to the organization system. Note the absence of a vertical dimension and the assumption that each subunit is quite contained and unitary.

To conceptualize an organization as composed of subunits is to flatten out the normal hierarchical representation of it as a “structure of dominancy,” to use Weber’s (1978) terms. This perspective views the organization on a horizontal rather than vertical axis. To view organizations as more horizontal than vertical is to make a number of assumptions about the unitary and functionally cohesive nature of subunits. In reality, each subunit is typically a hierarchy with a more or less problematic culture of consent or dissent. For it to be treated as if it were unitary, there needs to exist some internal mechanisms of power that allow for such a representation. In other words, there must be a hierarchy of order that is effectively reinforced through everyday organizational actions.

Strategic contingencies theory assumes that management’s definitions prevail. Indeed, sometimes they do, in which case management has exercised power. When they do not, management is outmaneuvered. Being outmaneuvered is a fate that most managers are familiar with. Thus, the strategic contingencies theory of power unfortunately explains very little that is important in understanding hierarchical power. Indeed, it refrains from such an explanation, given its tacit assumptions. And these tacit assumptions mean that it explains very little that is useful because it is assumed that the organizational configuration will be simply bureaucratic. Indeed, in the later empirical analysis

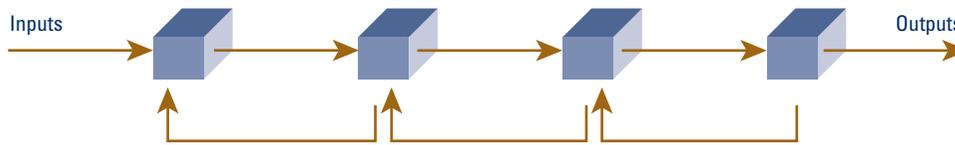


Figure 5.1 *An organization conceived as made up of subunits*

conducted using the framework, the researchers deliberately sought out a simple and tightly regulated bureaucracy to test the theory (Hinings, Hickson, Pennings and Schneck 1974). It worked.

Resources

Similar to strategic contingencies theory is the resource dependency view, derived from the work of social psychologists such as Emerson (1962) and related work by French and Raven (1968). All resource dependence theorists view a certain resource as key in organizations, but they differ in which resource is regarded as key.

Pfeffer and Salancik (2002) argued that power could be both vertical and horizontal in organizations, and their focus, like Hickson et al.'s (2002), was on subunit power. They hypothesized that power would be used in organizations to try to influence decisions about the allocation of resources (Pfeffer and Salancik 2002). Subunits may be thought of as departments in the organization. To the extent that subunits contributed critical resources, including knowledge, that the organization needs, other subunits submitted to their demands and ceded power to them.

The similarities to strategic contingencies theory are striking. Using archival data on university decision making in the University of Illinois, they confirmed their hypotheses, suggesting that power is a positive-sum game for those that have control of critical resources—using the power these resources bestow, they can acquire yet more resources, to leverage more power. Those that have resources attract more resources and thus more power. From this perspective, power is often conceptualized as if it were a zero-sum game in which, rather like being on a seesaw, more resources on the part of one party outweigh those of another party because they can be gained only at the expense of the other party. It is assumed that there is a fixed amount of power to go around.

Crozier subsequently revisited the links between power and uncertainty as a critical resource (Crozier and Friedberg 1980). Members of an organization meet each other in spaces that offer relatively open opportunities for control of rules and resources. People do not adapt passively to the circumstances that they meet; they use these circumstances creatively to enhance the scope of

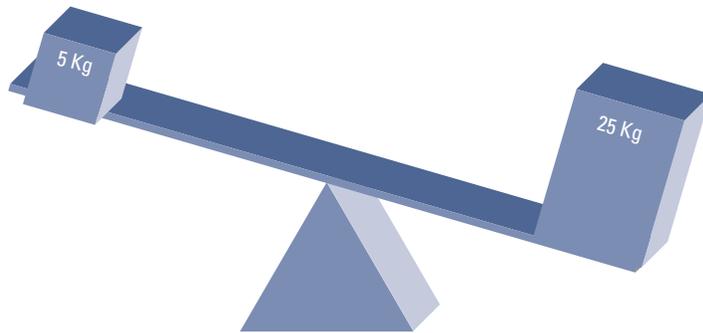


Figure 5.2 *A zero-sum conception of power*

their own discretion, through shaping and bending rules and colonizing resources. Power is still seen in terms of the control of uncertainty as it is played out in daily struggles over the rules of an uncertain game.

Contexts for power games

There is no doubt that uncertainty—as well as the other contenders for strategic resource status—can be a source of power, but not in a context-independent way. What counts as a resource can be made to count only in specific contexts. For instance, box cutters, which are used for cutting paper and cardboard, are not usually thought of as powerful resources—or at least they were not until September 11, 2001. Then, in the hands of determined terrorists, they were responsible for what has now passed into history as 9/11. So, if information, uncertainty—or box cutters—are to count as resources for power, they will do so only in specific contexts.

To the extent that specific resources are related to power in a general way, without regard for context, they are not very helpful. Anything can be a resource in the right context—the context is what is important. Thus, possessing scarce resources is not enough to deliver power over and above that formally authorized; one also needs to have an explicit knowledge of context (Hickson, Butler, Cray, Mallory and Wilson 1986; Pettigrew 1973, 2002) and how to use resources accordingly.

Politics

The process of mobilizing power is the process of politics. Given the stress on authority and formal organization in the literature, politics are what happens when members of organizations behave in ways that are potentially authoritatively illegitimate. Pettigrew (2002: 45) sees the mobilization of power as what happens when either individuals or subgroupings within organizations

make a claim against the extant resource-sharing system of the organization. As Pettigrew suggests, power is central to the strategy process in organizations because decisions about what strategy to maintain or innovate will always be political. Such decisions are “likely to threaten the existing distribution of organizational resources as represented in salaries, in promoting opportunities, and in control of tasks, people, information, and new areas of business” (Pettigrew 2002: 45). These politics are generated by the following:

- *Structural cleavages* in the organization between different component elements and identities, and the *different values, affective, cognitive and discursive styles* associated with these
- The *complexity and the degree of uncertainty attached to the dilemma* (as we have seen from previous theory)
- The *salience of the issues* for different actors and identities in the organization
- The *external pressure coming from stakeholders or other actors or organizations in the environment*
- The *history of past politics* in the organizations in question

Consequently, power and organizational politics are absolutely central to a great deal of what normally goes on in organizations. This would have to be the case because, according to Pettigrew (2002: 47), organization politics fundamentally concern the management of meaning, as protagonists in these politics seek to legitimate the ideas, values, and demands that they espouse while simultaneously denying or decrying those that they seek to oppose. Hence, power ultimately is deployed in games of organizational symbolism, wrapped up in myths, beliefs, language, and legend—the stuff of organizational culture. As we will see later, whenever discussion switches to organization culture, organizational politics are not far behind (see also pp. _____).

The most crucial issue, as Lord Acton noted at the outset of the chapter, is the potential for power to corrupt those who have it. Another way of addressing this issue is to ask, “Who controls the controllers?” These are not just academic issues; in many countries around the world, the ethicality and controllability of major and politically important public sector organizations is very much at issue. How clean is your police force? Does it use symbolic reminders, such as those in Images 5.4 and 5.5, of the necessity for local communities and other organization members to maintain eternal vigilance against the possibilities of corrupt behavior?

Organizations as political arenas

In Mintzberg’s (1983a; 1984; 2002) terms, the organization is a political arena, one in which the system of politics comes into play whenever the systems of authority, ideology, or expertise may be contested in various



Image 5.3 *The community policing the police in Bangkok*



Image 5.4 *Fighting corruption in a public sector organization in Mexico*

political games—that is to say, almost always. Mintzberg identifies various commonly occurring political games, including the following:

- *Insurgency games*: Played by lower-status participants against the dominant elites.
- *Counter-insurgency games*: Played by the dominant elites against the insurgents.
- *Sponsorship games*: Played by patrons and clients.
- *Alliance-building games*: Played among peers who implicitly seek reciprocal support.
- *Empire-building games*: A political actor or subsystem seeks to capture others and enroll them as subordinate to its interests.
- *Budgeting games*: The objective is to secure resources.
- *Expertise games*: The games of strategic contingency.
- *Lording games*: Relatively powerless players seek to “lord it” through using their legitimate power over those supplicant or lower in status.
- *Line vs. staff games*: Each side uses legitimate power in illegitimate ways in games of rivalry.
- *Rival camps games*: Alliance or empire-building games develop into rival blocks that face each other in zero-sum games.
- *Strategic candidate games*: Those in power seek to ensure the succession of preferred candidates as vacancies arise.
- *Whistle-blowing games*: Participants, usually lower-status ones, seek to expose malfeasance or illegitimacy outside the organization to effect internal policy or strategy changes.
- *Young Turks games*: Organizational authority is preserved, but a coup unseats its present incumbents to institute a regime change

In organizations, politics are normal and serve many orderly functions. They can be the harbinger of a need for realignment (Donaldson 1999), the midwife to change (Pettigrew, Ferlie, and McKee 1992), the source of refreshing innovation (Frost and Egri, 2002) or, sometimes, the instrument of death (Havemann 1993). Thus, political games are to be expected—they are neither aberrant nor deviant. The types that Mintzberg specifies are not mutually exclusive, of course, and may often overlap and interlink, but they typically find expression in four major forms in the political arena:

- *Confrontation*: Characterized by intense, confined, and unstable conflict, as in a takeover or merger
- *Shaky alliances*: Characterized by conflict that is moderate, confined, and relatively stable, as in professional organizations subject to public accountability, such as public hospital or education systems
- *Politicized organizations*: Characterized by conflict that is moderate, pervasive, and relatively stable, such as large public sector bodies or regulatory agencies

- *Complex political arenas*: Characterized by intense, pervasive, and brief unstable conflict, such as organizations riven by major fault lines of factional and doctrinal division, both internally and in terms of external alliances and relations.

Political games are to be expected—they are neither aberrant nor deviant.

Social democratic political parties with strong external sponsors, such as the union movement, are examples of complex political arenas. Traditionally, these parties represented organized labor. However, in many countries (such as the United Kingdom and Australia), the labor movement is considerably less significant than it used to be, with most employees not being union members except in a few sectors. For those parties that had once relied on union-friendly policies, a new recipe for success needed to be found. New recipes have to be acceptable to the old sponsors, or else the parties need to find new sponsors. Britain's old-style Labour Party, before "New Labour" emerged from its ashes, would be a case in point. We can also think of examples from religious organizations. The Uniting Church in Australia, the Episcopal Church in the United States, and the Anglican Church in the United Kingdom, as they struggle to develop doctrine that acknowledges the existence of homosexual clergy yet remain united, are also good illustrations. Political parties and churches split by doctrinal issues exemplify a general proposition: People in organizations that cannot manage their power relations, because they cleave around fundamentally opposed worldviews, will end up spending more time fighting each other than seeking to find common purpose against competitor organizations. Only very large organizations or those with no competition can survive sustained complex politics for long.

Power and the politics of resistance

Resistance is a term that has long been a part of the vocabulary of students of organization. Coch and French (1948) noted that resistance to change is normal. Because power in organizations rarely if ever flows effortlessly as pure authority—because its legitimacy is often contested—power is typically not free of friction. And where there is friction, there must be resistance. To use these metaphors betrays the origins of the terms—they derive, of course, from physics. They are rather mechanical terms, as is so much of the vocabulary in organization and management theory. However, resistance need not be simply a question of physics—it can be more organic and dialectical. *Dialectics* refers to the contradiction between two conflicting forces, where each shapes the other, often against the pressure that is being exerted. A picture says more than a thousand words.

Resistance is "a reactive process" whereby people embedded in power relations actively oppose initiatives enacted by others (Jermier, Knights and Nord



Image 5.5 *The dialectics of nature: power and resistance*

1994: 90). Often, resistance has been researched in terms of industrial relations conflicts at work between management and workers, especially where the latter are collectively organized in unions (Clawson 1980). More recently, researchers have focused on subjectivities of resistance as these are constituted through memories of a fairer time or better work, perhaps, or through social organization, such as familial or local community networks, or solidaristic organization, such as trade unions (Clegg 1994; Knights 1990). A number of studies provide graphic examples of how resistance may be variably organized. In the next section, we highlight one study in particular because it demonstrates the ways in which power and resistance, culture and meaning, are densely interconnected.

Resistance by distance

Collinson (1994) presents a case study of a factory in northwest England in which the management had traditionally treated the workers as if they were commodities, easily hired and fired, who were marked by decidedly second-class employment in terms and conditions. The organization, recently taken over by an American firm, applied some current management ideas, such as a corporate culture campaign and a collective bonus scheme, in their dealings

with the men—there were no women—on the shop floor. The workers resisted these moves because what management said symbolically did not tie in with what the workers experienced in day-to-day practice. The corporate culture campaign was resisted as “Yankee bullshit” and “propaganda.” The bonus scheme made the workers more economically oriented toward work, more closely tied to the cash nexus than to a corporate culture. The workers, regarding themselves as objects of contempt by management, found an alternate system of values in the camaraderie of their masculinity that was expressed in hard, dirty shop-floor work. Securing themselves in this identity, they distanced themselves as much as possible from what, in terms of their values, was the culturally strange—and comparatively “soft”—foreign world of (Yankee) management. They resisted promotion from the shop floor as selling out to the other side. In fact, what they did was turn the world of work as seen from the heights of management on its head. They devalued the clean, white-collar world of the office in favor of the harder-edged and “blokey” masculinity of the shop floor as an authentic sphere of real knowledge grounded in experience rather than theory. Collinson termed this phenomenon “resistance through distance.” The workers distanced themselves from management by asserting that it was “management’s right to manage” and something they wanted no part of. They resisted through keeping their distance.

The use by management of collective bonus schemes meant that when faced with layoffs, the shop stewards in the union argued for wage cuts rather than layoffs, which many of the men, in need of the higher wages, resisted. So although the resistance strategies might have appeared to be based on a collective identity, it was one that was fragile and easily ruptured. It was also highly reactive; it resisted through reacting to the authority attempts of management. Like many studies of resistance, Collinson shows both how resistance creates space for employees in organizations and how those spaces serve to further secure their incorporation within the organizations. Resistance is a two-edged sword.

Resistance, whatever form it takes, is always *against* something. Organizationally, those resisted against usually seek to construct or construe the resistance that they encounter as illegitimate, as something outside authority. To the extent that initiatives and actions are given sanction by organizational authorities, then, by definition, resistance to them *must* be illegitimate. In cases in which whatever is being resisted is represented as being normal, rational, and desirable (e.g., “we need to change periodically to regain market share”), any opposition can easily be regarded as lacking legitimacy.

Resistance is undoubtedly part of politics. The definition of political activity offered by one of its foremost students is that it is “activity . . . undertaken to overcome some resistance or opposition” (Pfeffer 1981: 7). The vocabulary makes it clear: Politics are what you get when you don’t get your own way. In other words, when there is opposition, there is politics.—or, as we might as well say, the presence of politics points to the absence of tyranny, for if there

were no opposition or resistance, there would be no politics. Looked at this way, organizational politics seem better than the alternative.

CRITICAL ISSUES: DOMINATION AND HEGEMONY

Hardy and Clegg (1999: 375) suggest that “organizational structures and systems are not neutral or apolitical but structurally sedimented phenomena. There is a history of struggles already embedded in the organization.” The paradox of power seems to be that you have power only if you are in a superior position in the organization and are opposed in what you want to do by others who are at the same or a lower level; when you want to do something against the resistance of these others, it is termed *authority*. When they want to do something against superordinate will, it is considered *resistance*. Authority is seen as legitimate; resistance is seen as illegitimate. Organizational politics become defined as the unsanctioned or illegitimate use of power to achieve unsanctioned or illegitimate ends, as Mintzberg (1983a; 1984), Mayes and Allen (1977), Gandz and Murray (1980), and Enz (1988) all argue. From this perspective, organizational life reduces to a morality play about efficiency: Either members do what they are scripted to do in their formal organization roles in the terms that authorities determine for them, or, if they do not, they are behaving illegitimately. Being moral and being efficient become coterminous in a well-designed system.

Organizations should never be seen just as systems, as engineering that is more efficient when there is less resistance, in the analogies of physics. Organizations always have vested within them traces of the past, as something recurrent, shifting, taking on new meanings, shaping the future. In Weber’s terms, organizations already incorporate a “structure of dominancy” in their functioning. The relations that they encompass are invariably saturated and imbued with power. It is distilled deep in the structure, culture, and history of the organization, which often “normalizes” power relations so that they hardly seem like power at all. One of the major strategies of normalization is to practice empowerment. Thus, much recent management theory has been written in praise of teamwork and against bureaucratic hierarchies, because it is believed that this is the way to minimize the expression of power. In the next section, we show that neither the presence of teams nor the absence of hierarchy means an end to power. First, we look at power structured through soft domination, where hierarchies seem to be blurred by project teams, and then consider the role power plays in teams.

Soft domination

The central tension in organizations, when viewed through a power lens, is between resistance and obedience (Courpasson 2002). On the whole, from the

perspective of management control, the latter is a far more productive result of policies than the former. Excessive use of coercion and force invites resistance; therefore, power as a hard instrumentality, a presence as unsubtle as a billiard ball ricocheting around the table, will, on the whole, be declined in favor of more subtle mechanisms. One theorist who has explored such methods is Steven Lukes (1974), who built on debates in political science to analyze power not only in terms of its mechanics but also its underlying dimensions. The main insight was that power could be used to prevent conflict by shaping

perceptions, cognitions, and preferences in such a way that [people] accept their role in the existing order of things, either because they can see or imagine no alternative to it, or because they view it as natural and unchangeable, or because they value it as divinely ordained and beneficial. (Lukes 1974: 24)

Power is able to achieve these effects to the extent that it is effectively subsumed through legitimation within an integrated system of cultural and normative assumptions. Given the integrated system of cultural and normative assumptions and an efficient organizational apparatus, goals can be achieved. Hence, analysis of power in organizations needs also to focus on the subtle mechanisms through which obedience is produced—soft domination. *Soft domination* is characterized by the administration of rules that give managerial discretion to managers while reinforcing the strength of centralized authorities, because those who are delegates know that their obligation is to act creatively within the systems of authority (Courpasson 2002). Authorities create legitimated rules reinforced by clear and credible threats to career, rewards, status, employment, and so on. What sustains senior management and limits organizational members, ultimately, is the political concentration of the power of control over the deployment of human resources in the hands of a minority combined with the regular use of credible sticks (e.g., formal warnings) and carrots (e.g., performance-related pay) deployed within clear rules. Soft domination is based on the appearance of equality in the organization among peers and the reality of a pervasive system of controls, chief among which are instrumentally legitimate techniques used by the entire management community, such as human resource management, audit, and holding managers accountable to plans. These are modern modes of making people responsible, of rendering them surveyable, and of exercising surveillance over them.

More often than not, these forms of accountability and surveillance become the basis for the games people play at work (Burawoy 1979). People conceive of the workplace as a game in which they are “survivors.” There are many things to survive—for example, a performance appraisal, not losing face over a policy or procedural conflict, not being downsized and made redundant, and not getting a promotion. Above all, these people are skilled game players—they know the rites and the rules of the games inside out and constantly use the spaces that they can create from these to exercise whatever discretion they can produce and to rationalize that which they cannot.

Electronic surveillance

A number of writers, including Poster (1990), Lyon (1994), Bogard (1996), and Sewell (2002), see modern electronic forms of surveillance as replacing the apparatus of power laboriously constructed by bureaucracy. Extended electronic surveillance has been seen as the hallmark of high modernity, of a world in which surveillance is insidious, making the majority of people increasingly transparent to others who may not be transparent to them (Robins and Webster 1985).

Zuboff (1988) introduced the “Information Panopticon” as a key term. The *Information Panopticon* privileges organizational elites by making it possible to consolidate various sources of electronic information about the many who serve the organization (Robey 1981). Sewell (2002) argues that electronic surveillance supplements, rather than replaces, earlier forms of surveillance. Its basic thrust is to make people in organizations more accountable and less autonomous. However, it is often used in conjunction with policies whose avowed purpose is quite opposite to these intentions. Sewell concentrates on teamwork.

Teams operate with two dimensions of surveillance: vertical and horizontal. Vertical surveillance focuses on the aberrant: aberrant waste, time, quality, and so on. To define the aberrant, you must first define the normal, which is usually done by establishing performance norms on a statistical basis that enables the aberrant to be immediately transparent—it stands out as a deviation from the norm of time taken, quality produced, or waste accumulated. Electronic forms of monitoring of performance make the norms more transparent and are supported by peer review through horizontal surveillance. Although electronic and traditional forms of surveillance reinforce the vertical dimension, which seeks to make the subject of surveillance his or her own monitor, the horizontal dimension causes us to monitor each other. Panopticism explains only some vertical aspects of this group scrutiny (Hetrick and Boje 1992).

Empowerment?

Teamwork is not usually thought of as a mechanism of power, but recent theory has suggested that it is (Sewell 2002; Barker 2002). Indeed, as Sewell notes, teamwork is usually associated with the rhetoric of empowerment, trust, and enhanced discretion. Sometimes it is even referred to as “giving away” power. There is a flood of popular management books whose message is cast in terms of this normative rhetoric, as analysis by Barley and Kunda (1992) demonstrates. These books often espouse single-answer solutions for harried managers; TQM (total quality management), organizational learning, lean production, and BPR (business process reengineering) are among the recipes that Sewell notes. What all of these methods have in common, he suggests, is a reversal of the highly individualistic approach to the employee that earlier



Image 5.6 *The eye in the sky: an example of an Electronic (or Information) Panopticon*

perspectives such as scientific management had championed. Rather than isolate, observe, and individually measure the times taken by individuals for doing standardized tasks and discouraging them from communicating with others while doing so, the new approach encourages communication and sociability. No longer are employees to be set competitively against each other; instead, they work together as members of teams that have been designed to cope better with more flexible manufacturing methods and to provide opportunities for more intelligent organization of work (Clarke and Clegg 1998), where there is greater distributed intelligence of systems and discretion. However, teamwork does not abolish politics but relies on what Barker (2002) terms “concertive control” as its horizontal mode of surveillance. The forms of

power at work help create the types of subjects that work there (Foucault 1983; Knights and Vurdubakis 1994; Townley 1993, 1994).

Barker on concertive control

Barker begins his account with a brief snatch of interview data with an employee called Ronald, who is reported as saying that he is more closely watched under a new team-based work design than when he was closely supervised by a manager. The team is a stricter supervisor than his supervisor had been! Barker calls this situation one of “concertive control,” something that occurs where there is “a substantial consensus about values, high-level coordination, and a degree of self-management by members or workers in an organization” (Barker, 2002: 180).

Concertive control, argues Barker, is what occurs when organizations become post-bureaucratic, when they adopt decentralized, participative and more democratic designs, a strategy that has long been promoted by more liberal management theorists such as Follett (1941) and Lewin (1951). Recently, the trickle of liberal management writing has become a flood as theorists increasingly have sought an alternative to bureaucratic models (see also pp. _____). What characterizes these arguments is a stress on a new age of post-bureaucratic liberation, in which control by formal rules and hierarchy is abandoned in favor of consensual and values-based action by organization members. Popular writers such as Kanter (1990), Peters (1988), and Drucker (1998) promote the benefits of “unimpeded, agile authority structures that grow out of a company’s consensual, normative ideology, not from its system of formal rules” (Barker 2002: 183). The argument is that “cutting out bureaucratic offices and rules” will “flatten hierarchies, cut costs, boost productivity, and increase the speed with which they respond to the changing business worlds” (Barker 2002: 183). Employees collaborate to develop the means of their own control. The Panopticon sought to make each worker the governor of what they did at work, aware as they were of the supervisory gaze, and concertive control reinforces this awareness through the discipline of teams (see also pp. _____).

Under the new forms of concertive control and soft domination, power is refined into ever more subtle techniques using instrumental means to make employees accountable and transparent. For example, there may be a vision statement that states, “We are a principled organization that values teamwork” (Barker 2002: 183). On this basis, team members agree that being principled means that they all arrive at work on time—and they ensure that they do, using norms that they have enacted from the agreed-upon value statement to structure the systems of their own control. Authority shifts from the hierarchy and formal rules to the team and socially created and generated rules.

One arena in which teamwork can be seen to great effect is in collaborations between national defense forces in peacekeeping and related operations.

Here the normal relations of command and hierarchy, which flow within the national military, have to be combined with collaboration across organizations, between different national defense forces.

Teamwork is now seen to have a much wider utility. It is not just a means of producing collaboration between distinct organizational units; it is also a way to enhance the effectiveness of members of the same organizational unit. One researcher who has looked closely at teams that have been designed to be self-managing is James Barker, himself an ex-military man and now a professor in the service of the U.S. Air Force Academy. He charts the shifts in management style from more hierarchical to self-managing teams; see Table 5.1.

One reason that many organizations are designed in terms of self-managing teams is that such teams are supposed to cut costs by laying off front-line supervisors and gaining productivity benefits from better motivated and more committed employees (Mumby and Stohl 1991; Orsburn, Moran, Musselwhite, and Zenger 1990; Wellins, Byham, and Wilson 1991). In Barker's case study of ISE Communications, he observed that a shift away from hierarchy and formal rules led to a tighter form of control based on peer surveillance. Empowered organizations not only provide new means for control, as Barker (2002) suggests, but also make opportunities for the everyday negotiations and games of power more difficult. It is more difficult to negotiate when the people that you work with, rather than a supervisor, impose the limits. It is much easier to steal some

TABLE 5.1 Barker's self-managing teams

Hierarchical Management: Hierarchically Ordered Supervision	Team Management: Shift to Self-Management
The supervisor has precise supervisory responsibilities.	The supervisor is replaced by a team of 10 to 15 people, who take over the responsibilities of their former supervisor.
The supervisor gives instructions.	Self-managing employees gather and synthesize information, act on it, and take collective responsibility for their actions.
Management relies on formal rules and authority expressed in terms of disciplines that seek reinforce this authority.	Management provides a value-based corporate vision that guides day-to-day actions by being a reference point from which employees infer appropriate action.
The supervisor checks that instructions have been followed.	The self-managing team guides its own work and coordinates with other areas of the company.
The supervisor ensures that each employee fulfills his or her job description.	The self-managing team is responsible for completing a specific well-defined job function for which all members are cross-trained. All members of the team have the authority and responsibility to make essential decisions, set work schedules, order materials, and coordinate with other teams.

time from a supervisor or manager with whom you do not share any obvious interest, other than a necessity to work, than it is from colleagues. You all depend on each other—and that is the subtlety of concertive control. Everyone is empowered to speak—but with the same agreed-upon voice.

Organizational Hegemony in the International Monetary Fund

Organizational hegemony occurs when one point of view is predominant. It is marked by a strong organizational culture and an absence of countervailing points of view, because almost everyone has come to accept the dominant views (Lukes 1974). The best way to guard against hegemony in organizations is to develop *polyphony*—exposure to and tolerance of many voices. Polyphonic organizations, theoretically, are incipiently democratic and deconstructive. In this section, we consider a case in which the absence of polyphony has been crucial for a very significant global organization.

Joseph Stiglitz (2002) provides an account of the International Monetary Fund (IMF). (Stiglitz, a Nobel Economics Prize winner and ex-World Bank economist, is someone both well enough placed to make a diagnosis and someone hardly likely to be dangerously radical in doing so.) The IMF is an organization that was established in the late stages of World War II with the express purpose of minimizing the harm from—and, if possible, preventing—global depressions. Its mandate was to maintain international liquidity through loans to economically distressed countries that had insufficient economic resources to stimulate aggregate economic demand domestically. It is a global organization funded by taxpayers around the world. Yet it is not responsible to them, nor does it have their views represented to it. Instead, it hears, represents, and reflects the views of national finance ministries and central bankers, over which one country—the United States—has effective veto in its deliberations. Its contemporary policies champion “market supremacy with ideological fervour . . . the IMF typically provides funds only if countries engage in policies like cutting deficits, raising taxes or raising interest rates that lead to a contraction of the economy” (Stiglitz 2002: 12–13). These policy positions were the outcome of a hard-fought battle in the IMF that occurred in the early 1980s, when it became dominated by free-market economists who were under the thrall of the fashionable prescriptions associated with the governments of President Reagan in the United States and Prime Minister Thatcher in the United Kingdom.

Stiglitz (2002: 15) argues that the IMF has functioned in what is sometimes called, after a medical metaphor, an “iatrogenic” manner—its policies have exacerbated the very problems that they were supposed to solve, rather as a surgical procedure might complicate an underlying condition it was designed to cure. Rather than contributing to global stability, they have made the international economy less stable, more crisis-ridden, and indebted countries

poorer. Why and how has that been possible? Central to the argument is the absence of polyphony and the presence of homogeneity.

Stiglitz sees two main factors contributing to the absence of *polyphonic reason* (debate between opposing viewpoints): first, a problem of *governance*, and second, a problem of *representation*. Governance addresses the question of who decides. Commercial and financial interests from the wealthiest countries in the world dominate the IMF. Its policies reflect these interests—hence the market emphasis—because why would the suppliers of capital let the state do something that they believe markets cannot only do better but certainly more profitably? These suppliers are the dominant commercial and financial interests in the wealthiest countries. Institutions such as the IMF, as well as the World Bank and the World Trade Organization, intervene in the economic management of poorer countries. But those intervening are always representatives of the most developed countries, are chosen by those developed countries behind closed doors, and do not necessarily have any experience of the developing world. As Stiglitz (2002: 19) says of these institutions, they are “not representative of the nations they serve.”

Raising the problem of representation addresses the issue of who speaks for the countries in need of assistance. The answer is simple: “At the IMF it is the finance ministers and the central bank governors” who “typically are closely tied to the financial community; they come from financial firms, and after their period of government service, that is where they return” (Stiglitz 2002: 19). Such people “naturally see the world through the eyes of the financial community” in the advanced economies. It is not surprising that the IMF policies have been addressed more to the interests of commercial and financial power rather than those of poor peasants or hard-pressed local businessmen trying to pay off the taxes that the IMF imposes. Taxation without representation is what Stiglitz calls it. Classic political sociology suggests that when people are taxed without political representation, they resist through nonrepresentational means—they take to the streets, riot, and rebel. Ever since the WTO met in Seattle in 1999, the rebellions in the developing world have been echoed in the heartlands of the global institutions, as idealistic and impassioned opponents of the dominant consensus about globalization have rioted to try and have their alternative views broadcast (see also pp. _____). In organizations designed to be more polyphonic through more inclusive governance and representation, there would be less need for illegitimate means of resistance.

THE FINE PRINT: THE EXTREMES OF POWER

We can bring polyphonic organization into sharper relief if we contrast it with its antithesis—organizations that are *total institutions*, those in which hegemony is reinforced by the totality of the organization’s everyday practices. There are two extremes to power, which we can characterize as negative and

positive. Whereas negative power is constraining, positive power is enabling. First, we take a look at some extremes of negative power and consider some of the ethical questions they raise. Then, we return to the question of polyphonic, positive power and of how you, as a manager, might manage in such an environment.

Total institutions

Organizations always place constraints on freedom of action, which people sometimes resist. However, a more important question about power in organizations is not why people sometimes resist but why, much of the time, they do not. Obedience, in fact, is a far more fundamental question than resistance. One way of researching the mechanism of obedience is to look at some extreme cases. The rationale for doing this is that in extreme cases, the normal tendencies of everyday organizational life are more obvious because they are more concentrated.

The Canadian sociologist Erving Goffman used anthropological research to investigate how authority was configured in extreme contexts. He chose extremes because the everyday mechanisms of authority and power were much more evident there than in the world of the corporate “organization man” (Whyte 1960). Goffman (1961) initiated the discussion of extreme organizations when he coined the term “total institution.” *Total institutions* are organizations that contain the totality of the lives of those who are their members. As such, people within them are cut off from any wider society for a relatively long time, leading an enclosed and formally administered existence. In such contexts, the organization has more or less monopoly control of its members’ everyday life. Goffman’s argument is that total institutions demonstrate in heightened and condensed form the underlying organizational processes that can be found, albeit in much less extreme cases, in more normal organizations.

Total institutions are often parts of a broader apparatus, such as a prison or detention center. Total institutions do not just include organizations that make people inmates against their will, however. They can also include organizations founded on membership contracted on voluntary inclusion—for instance, a professional army, a boarding school, a residential college, or a religious retreat, such as a monastery or nunnery. Several types of organization can be a total institution:

- Places to put people that the state deems incapable of looking after themselves (these people, who vary historically and comparatively, have included the “feeble,” the “lunatic,” or the “disabled”)
- Restrictive organizations that institutionalize people who pose a threat to others, such as people with communicable diseases of contagion who are legislatively contained in sanitariums for the duration of their disease



Image 5.7 *Lock them up and throw away the key?*

- Punitive organizations, such as prisons, gulags, concentration camps, reform schools, prisoner-of-war camps, or detention centers for asylum seekers
- Organizations dedicated to a specific work task, such as boarding schools, military barracks, and vessels at sea, or remote company towns
- Retreats from the world, such as monasteries, abbeys, convents, or growth and learning centers

What do these very different types of organizations have in common that make them total institutions?

- Each member's daily life is carried out in the *immediate presence* of a large number of others.
- The members are very *visible*; there is no place to hide from the surveillance of others.
- The members tend to be strictly *regimented*.

- Life in a total institution is governed by *strict, formal rational planning of time*. (Think of school bells for lesson endings and beginnings, factory whistles, timetables, schedules, and so on.)
- People are not free to choose how they spend their time; instead, it is *strictly prescribed* for them.
- Members lose a degree of autonomy because of an all-encompassing demand for *conformity to the authoritative interpretation of rules*.

The depiction of life in the Army Boot Camp in the 1987 Stanley Kubrick film *Full Metal Jacket* is a good cinematic representation of one type of total institution. In the film, identities are stripped through organizational means: the arbitrary assignment of nicknames and numbers; the loss of personal characteristics, such as haircuts, under the Marine razor; total conformance is demanded with instructions that are almost always shouted at recruits, often at close range, sometimes associated with physical violence to the person so that they are intimidated into obedience; the person is “remade” through rigorous discipline and physical exercise; an esprit de corps, based on the new identity as Marines, is developed.

But what does *Full Metal Jacket* have to do with being a member of an organization that is not a total institution? If we accept Goffman’s analysis, it becomes evident that the essential core of organization is power—organizations exert power over their members by making them do things that they would not otherwise do. Think about it; organization members may have to dress up in uncool uniforms, have haircuts that are not trendy, and pretend to be interested while doing stupid things. Of course, the uniforms can vary from an explicit uniform to one that is implicit: the black suits, white shirts, black ties of the earnest Mormon; the almost de rigueur pants suit and contrasting T-shirt of the corporate woman worldwide; or the pinstripe suit of London businessmen. Even the boys from a neighborhood skater gang have a dress code, and becoming a part of their gang means learning their ways of behaving, doing, and thinking, and often speaking (using certain slang words and listening to certain music).

If organizations necessarily exercise power over their members, what are the ethical implications of the ways in which they do so? A short trip into history can help answer this question by looking at one of the twentieth century’s most extreme cases of systematic abuse of power and ethics on a large-scale, organizational basis.

The ethics of organizational obedience

Adolf Eichmann was one of Hitler’s deputies, the Head of the Department for Jewish Affairs. He led the Reich’s effort for the Final Solution, efficiently organizing the roundup and transportation of millions of Jews to their deaths at infamous camps such as Auschwitz, Treblinka, and Bergen-Belsen. After World

War II, Eichmann escaped capture and lived in Germany for five years before moving to Argentina, where he lived under an alias for another ten years. Israeli agents finally captured him in 1960, and Eichmann was tried for crimes against humanity. Eichmann's defense was that he was just a bureaucrat who had to obey because he was just following orders. (Hannah Arendt [1994] wrote an account of his trial, in which she coined the memorable phrase "the banality of evil" to register her interpretation of the events she reported, in which evil was delivered through a punctual and efficient railway timetable.) Although Eichmann was subsequently found guilty and executed, his defense was important because it posed the question of the extent to which a person who is obedient to organizationally legitimate authority can be held accountable as an individual for his or her actions. In the context of an inquiry into the nature of the Holocaust, the renowned sociologist Zygmunt Bauman (1989) extensively addressed such questions.

Bauman's answer is interesting for management scholars; essentially, he notes how central aspects of organizations contribute to the ease with which organizational malfeasance can occur. At the heart of the moral question is the interpenetration of power and ethics. Why do ordinary people in organizations do morally bad things when asked to do so? What aspects of an organization make unquestioning obedience feasible? It has been suggested that three organizational attributes, at a minimum, make this phenomenon more probable (Kelman 1973):

- *When the highest authority sanctions the organizational action in question:* That a strong leader tells you to do things might be a good reason to actually do them, because he or she is the leader whose will is usually fulfilled. Eichmann's commitment to Hitler as a strong authority figure shaped his behavior.
- *When the actions that enact the organizational action in question are routinized:* Work in an organization is often repetitive. You see only a small part of the whole organizational chain when accomplishing your task; you cannot see where and how your task fits into the big picture, nor can you see its consequences. This setup is another way of cutting off ethical responsibility and organizational effects.
- *When those who are the victims of the action are dehumanized:* When ideological definitions and indoctrination convince organizational members that the victims are less than human, it creates distance between organizational members and people who are affected by its action. Representing victims as numbers rather than people also makes it also easier to forget the ethical consequences of actions.

Techniques of power

When we master a technique, our skill has its own charm, aesthetics, and beauty, and we can take sheer delight in using it, irrespective of its moral effects:

Technical responsibility differs from moral responsibility in that it forgets that the action is a means to something other than itself . . . *the result is the irrelevance of moral standards for the technical success of the bureaucratic operation.* (Bauman 1989: 101[emphasis in original])

When technique is paramount, action becomes purely a question of technical power—the use of means to achieve given ends. For instance, as a master of logistics, Eichmann was enormously proud of his achievements in the complex scheduling of trains, camps, and death.

Organizational power that makes you technically accountable and responsible for results expressed in a purely quantitative form has two profound effects. First, it makes you *utterly transparent*—you either achieve your targets or you do not. Second, *it relieves you of moral indeterminacy*—if you are authorized to do something and given targets to achieve by superordinates guiding strategies and plans, obedience surely is appropriate, and authority should be served.

Organization work is a ceaseless round of activity. Most organizational members are in the middle of organizational chains whose links are not always clear. People are not always aware of the consequences of what they do and do not do—after all, most of the time, they are just doing what they are told (shred those files, write those checks, dispatch those troops, maintain those train schedules). Divisions of labor in the complex chains enable us to keep a distance from effects; we can represent them in terms of intermediary forms of data (kill rates, efficiency statistics, and so on). Our labor moves minute cogs in a bureaucratic machine necessarily intermeshed with so many others that we are just one small element in the overall scheme of things. We don't even have to try to understand the totality. The system of which we are a part is responsible, not us.

Especially when actions are performed at a distance on people defined as administrative categories, the people are effectively *dehumanized* (Kelman 1973). The more dehumanized they are, the easier becomes the application of pure technique to their cases. When whatever is being worked on can be represented quantitatively, as a bottom-line calculation, it is so much easier to make rational decisions (cut costs, trim fat, speed throughput, increase efficiency, defeat the competition) without concern for the human, environmental, or social effects of these decisions.

“The department’s strategy is to keep asylum seekers dehumanised”

In Australia, the Coalition government led by Prime Minister John Howard was re-elected in 2002 on the back of a concerted campaign against asylum seekers, under the motto “We will choose who will come here.” Australia had become a destination point for organized “people smugglers” operating from Indonesia who were seeking to land asylum seekers on Australian territory. A few thousand asylum seekers, mostly from the Middle East, who had arrived

in Australian waters were rounded up and placed in detention centers, either in Australia or in neighboring and extremely impoverished Pacific Island states, such as Nauru. These countries were paid to place the asylum seekers in camps as part of the Australian government's "Pacific solution." At the same time, the government made it impossible for any asylum seeker to ever become a legitimate refugee by changing the laws. If asylum seekers had spent more than seven days in a country or countries other than the place that they had fled (including Australia), they were disqualified from application. Look on a map and work out how difficult it would be to get from the landlocked Middle East to Australia without spending some time in another country for seven days. Almost all asylum seekers would be ineligible based on that criterion.

Into this institutional environment came a number of unaccompanied male minors from the Hazara people of Afghanistan, who had been persecuted by the Taliban and conscripted to fight against the Northern Alliance because of their minority Shia Muslim faith. Many of their families sold their belongings to smuggle the boys out of Afghanistan to a safe haven; a number of the boys ended up in Australia. There they were subject to bureaucratic processing. They were considered "illegal asylum-seekers" who could obtain only temporary visas for three years; they were not "real refugees" who had applied through the Australian High Commission for asylum. (There was no such way for the boys to contact this organization from Afghanistan, where it had no offices.) The boys who ended up in Brisbane were fortunate to find a small number of middle-class people with access to resources who wanted to assist them. They did so by helping the boys form a soccer club, which gave the asylum seekers an introduction to the everyday life of Australia. After a series of "good news stories" about the soccer club appeared in the local press and on TV, the federal government's Department of Family and Community Services contacted the soccer club mentors with the instruction that refugees under 18 came under departmental control and were not to talk to the media. As an ex-Immigration Department staff member said, "The department's strategy is to keep asylum seekers dehumanised. . . . That means not letting people see their faces or hear their voices" (Robson, 2002, p. 36). And what their soccer success had done was to "give them a voice, their own voice, and put their faces before millions of Australians via their TV sets" (Robson 2002, p. 36).

How ordinary people can use authority to do extraordinary things

Ordinary people do extraordinary things, as an experiment by Milgram (1971) shows. Milgram's research question was quite simple: He asked to what extent individuals are inclined to follow the commands of figures perceived to be in authority. His answer demonstrated that the kind of situation in which people are embedded determines, in part, how they will act. He designed an experiment in which white-coated scientists instructed ordinary people (whom we call the subjects) to do cruel and unusual things to other people

(whom we call the participants) as part of an experiment in a laboratory. In a nutshell, the subjects were instructed to administer increasing levels of electric shocks to the participants as part of a behavioral learning program. They did so under a range of circumstances. When participants gave incorrect answers to test questions, they were to be administered a shock, with each one to be higher than the one before. (No shock was actually administered—the participants, unbeknownst to the subjects, were actually actors who performed the responses that, physiologically, would be the normal reaction to the levels of shock being administered.) When the subjects were face to face with the participants and told to administer the electric shock directly to their hands, using force if necessary, only 30% of the experimental subjects did so. When the subjects could still see the participants but used a control lever that administered the shock instead of having to force the hands of the participants onto the plates administering the shock, 40% did so. When the subjects could no longer see the participants but could only hear their distress as the current surged, 62.5% were able to apply the current. Moving the others out of earshot marginally improved the rate to 65%.

The more distance—both physically and psychologically—there was between the controllers and the controlled, the easier it seemed to be to do seemingly inhumane and cruel things. The closer the relation between the controller and the supervisor, and the more removed the subject, the easier it became to continue. Obedience flows more easily when the subjects of action are at a distance. When these subjects can be transformed into objects in the controller's mind, obedience flows even more easily.

Another factor facilitating the application of current was its incremental thresholds—once someone had committed to the action, each increase in the threshold was just a small step, just another slight increase in pain to be endured. It is not as if they started out to kill another person or cause them irretrievable injury. They just did what they were instructed to do, only they did a little bit more of it each time. Where such action should stop, once started, is not at all clear. And after someone has committed to the action, especially if others are complicit, what Milgram (1971) termed “situational obligations arise. In other words, people felt obliged to do what they were asked to do in a specific situation, which tended to override more general and abstract moral principles that they might also hold. In organizations, with complex divisions of labor, sequential action invariably makes us complicit with many others, in many interactions.

Milgram (1971) made one crucial change to the experiments to test out a further hypothesis: that plurality produces space for reflection and pause for consideration. In the experiments reported thus far, there was only one expert giving instructions. He introduced another expert and instructed them to disagree with each other about the command being given. The disagreement between authorities paralyzed the capacity for obedience of the research subjects—out of twenty subjects in this experiment, one refused to go further before the staged disagreement; eighteen broke off after it, and the remaining

subject opted out just one stage further. *Polyphony*—the presence of competing and conflicting voices—increases the probability that people will think for themselves rather than just do what they are told. Thus, strong organizational cultures that suppress value difference are more likely to produce unreflective and sometimes inappropriate organizational action than more democratic and pluralistic settings.

This discussion leads us back to total institutions. It is in these, precisely, that we would least expect to find polyphony and difference. As Bauman (1989: 165) suggests, “*the readiness to act against one’s own better judgement and against the voice of one’s conscience is not just the function of authoritative command, but the result of exposure to a single-minded, unequivocal and monopolistic source of authority*” (emphasis in original). *Total institutions*—organizations that presume to exercise strong cultural control over their members, to the extent that they diminish pluralism—squeeze the space in which civility, reflection, and responsibility can thrive. As Bauman (1989: 166) urges, “The voice of individual moral conscience is best heard in the tumult of political and social discord.”

Even in times and circumstances that are considered normal, you might find powerful total institutions at work, which the following case demonstrates. Again, the absence of polyphony is one of the preconditions for the establishment of total institutions. Haney, Banks, and Zimbardo (1973) designed an experiment that resonates with government practices that are accepted as normal and routine in many societies. The researchers divided a group of male American college students into two types of people: guards and inmates. They created a mock prison in a laboratory basement, using as subjects twenty-one healthy male undergraduate volunteers. Each person was to receive \$15 a day for two weeks. Nine were randomly selected to be “prisoners,” with the remainder designated as “guards” who were to supervise the prisoners in a rotating three-shift system. Each wore the symbolic garb of the role. Prisoners were given unflattering uniform clothing and tight caps to simulate shaven heads. Guards were put in a militaristic-type uniform and given L.A. cop sunglasses. Names were suppressed with norms of impersonality, and complex rules and penalties for their infraction were promulgated. Then the experiment began.

The experiment had to be aborted after less than a week. No sense of solidarity developed between the two groups, and almost all of their conversation centered on the roles assumed in the experiment. An escalatory chain of events occurred; the construed authority of the guards was enforced by the submissiveness of the prisoners, tempting the guards to further and increasingly illegitimate displays of the power that their authority allowed them to exercise, leading to further humiliation of the prisoners (Bauman 1989: 167). Bear in mind that the subjects were all normal, well-adjusted people before the experiment began but that after one week they were playing their roles with such conviction that the experiment had to be abandoned because of the real possibility of harm to the “prisoners.”

Managing with positive power

One consequence of the insight that power is a normal feature of organizations is that managers must learn how to manage with power on a daily basis in ways that are enabling, genuinely empowering, and positive rather than merely constraining, smart but unethical, and largely negative. To be a good manager means knowing how and when to use what kind of power wisely to manage polyphony so that it is neither anarchic nor stifled. Modifying Pfeffer (1992) somewhat, we can note that there are seven steps to the effective use of power:

1. Decide what your goals should be and what you are trying to accomplish in consultation with direct stakeholders in your organization.
2. Diagnose patterns of dependence and interdependence; which individuals both inside and outside the organization are influential and important to achieving these goals?
3. What are the points of view of the important people likely to be? How will they feel about what you are trying to do?
4. What are the power bases of the important people? Which of them is the most influential in the decision?
5. What are your bases of power and influence? What bases of influence can you develop to gain more positive control over the situation?
6. Which of the various strategies and tactics for exercising power seem most appropriate and are likely to be effective, given the situation you confront?
7. Based on Steps 1 through 6, choose an ethical course of action to get something done.

When using power to manage others, always remember that those you are seeking to manage probably also will be trying to manage you with power, so the old adage “do unto others as you would have others do unto you” is worth recalling. Although you may think of their response as resistance, to do so presumes a value legitimacy that may not be justified on your part. They are trying to manage your management of power through their management of the power that they can enact in the situations in which they find themselves or that they can create. Power is nothing if not creative. Crucially, your managing with power means achieving common definition, a genuine accord, on which to base strategies, tactics, and actions. Positive uses of power make things happen that wouldn’t otherwise have happened—not by stopping some things from occurring, but by bringing new things into creation, involving less force and more listening, working with, rather than against, others.

Managing with power does not always mean seeking to impose a specific meaning on an uncertain context because it entails arbitrary structuring of others realities. In contrast, the alternative model is often seen as one where people advocate bottom-up decision making, seeking to listen to what others in



Figure 5.3 *Seven steps toward a more positive use of power*

the organization have to say. From *empowerment* (the giving of voice to those frequently unheard), organizations that use this model seek to enhance the overall systemic powers of the organization, to mobilize resources, and to get things done. This use of power frequently means giving way in the organization conversation, not claiming a special privilege because of title or experience, and not being selectively inattentive to others, but listening and attending to them.

The challenge for future power theory, as Pfeffer (1992: 340) suggests, is “to manage with power,” where you recognize, diagnose, and respect the diversity of interests and seek to translate and enroll members within organizational courses of action, while at the same time listening to what others are saying, modifying your position accordingly, and choosing the appropriate strategies and tactics to accomplish whatever is chosen. Sometimes, after taking all that into consideration, it still means making others do what they would not otherwise have done, against their resistance. Power can be like that. Yet, it does not have to be so. Coercive power should be the refuge of last resort for the diplomatically challenged and structurally secure, not the hallmark of management’s right to manage.

Organizations may listen or may not, may work with the creativity and diversity of people’s identities or work against them. The politics of power can be based on active listening rather than assertive denial through the instrumentality

and ritual of established power. To build such organizations—ones that seek to extend the organization conversation rather than to exploit its lapses—would seem to be one of the more pressing aspects of the agenda for future managers.

SUMMARY AND REVIEW

The pervasiveness of power is the most central aspect of organizational life. Much of the time, it is wrapped up in the velvet glove of authority, but inside that velvet glove is an iron fist. This fist has control of the levers of power that authority confers—the power, essentially, to determine policies and practices within the organization, most fundamentally expressed as whom the organization chooses to employ and whom it chooses not to employ. Many organizations shape whether we work and how we are employed if we do; thus, these types of organizations have power over most of our life chances as wage earners. For this reason, it is important to understand the limits of power and authority, resistance and obedience. In organizations, we have to put up with people and situations while doing the work we have to do or choose to do. It is important that our choices in how we equip these duties can be defended ethically. Fundamentally, power is shaped by what we know and how we know what to do. Organizationally, it is easy for this knowledge to be applied questionably, which is why it is important that organizations always be polyphonic rather than totalitarian spaces. Being able to articulate organizational dissent should be a normal and essential bulwark of civil liberty.

ONE MORE TIME . . .

Getting the story straight

- Why is there more to understanding power than listing its most common bases?
- In what ways are organizations similar to power games?
- In what way is managing with power positive?
- Are power and resistance inseparable?

Thinking outside the box

- Who gets empowered through empowerment strategies?
- What common features do total institutions and (seemingly) normal organizations share?
- Where is the border between use and abuse of power in management?

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

1. Many people have written about the topic of managing power in organizations, and finding just a few suggestions for further reading is hard. One place to start would be Steven Lukes' (1974) slim volume, *Power: A Radical View*, if only because of its brevity—fifty pages—as well as its elegance and lucidity.
2. If you find the previous resource interesting, you might want to try Stewart Clegg's (1989) *Frameworks of Power*, although it is not written for the introductory student.
3. The work of Michel Foucault is important and notoriously difficult. A good introduction is Phillip Barker's (1998) Michel Foucault: An Introduction.
4. Probably the most interesting case study of power in and around organizations in recent years is Bent Flyvbjerg's (1998) *Rationality and Power: Democracy in Practice*, researched in the arena of urban planning in the town of Aalborg in Denmark.
5. A good introduction from a managerial point of view is Jeffrey Pfeffer's (1992) *Managing with Power: Politics and Influence in Organizations*.
6. An example of the power of distance can be found in the novel *Atonement* by Ian McEwan (2002: 202), where a character involved in the British retreat to Dunkirk reflects on

the indifference with which men could lob shells into a landscape. Or empty their bomb bays over a sleeping cottage by a railway, without knowing or caring who was there. It was an industrial process. He had seen their own RA units at work, tightly knit groups, working all hours, proud of their discipline, drills, training, teamwork. They need never see the end result. . . .

7. We would like to recommend the definitive episode of *Yes, Prime Minister*, "The Key" (Lotterby 1986), in which Permanent Cabinet Secretary Sir Humphrey Appleby's authority is questioned and then undercut. The doors to government are literally closed to him as he makes a frantic attempt to retain his vanishing power. From this point on, Sir Humphrey never controls Prime Minister Hacker with the same effectiveness as he had in earlier episodes. His undoing is the result of gender politics, in the form of the prime minister's ruthlessly efficient female political adviser, Dorothy Wainwright, whom Sir Humphrey wishes to banish because she offers advice contrary to the interests of the Civil Service. Her office is moved to the outer reaches of Number 10 Downing Street. She fights to retain her place—opposite the men's toilets—from which vantage point she can see all the comings and goings of the cabinet as they meet to plot against the prime minister. The episode is a wonderful illustration of how different

resources can come into play in power games. We have heard it said that this episode was inspired by the fact that British Prime Minister Thatcher, who had an all-male cabinet, would only allow them to leave cabinet one at a time to use the bathroom to prevent them plotting against her—but this may well be an apocryphal myth.

8. The classic film about a total institution and organizational power is Milos Forman's (1975) *One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest*. McMurphy is a prisoner who has been assigned to a mental institution because of his persistent rebelliousness in prison. After he gets there he is assigned to Nurse Ratched's ward, where a series of power games occur. The most memorable are the group therapy scenes, with Nurse Ratched practicing what she calls "therapy" on the group of patients. McMurphy (played by Jack Nicholson) sets out to undermine her domination of the ward. The ward is organized and controlled through a rigid set of rules and regulations, which McMurphy questions.

The contest of wills with the nurse is played out as a struggle, with McMurphy trying to win over the other inmates to a spontaneous and independent style of thinking rather than one stuck in the routines that the nurse reinforces because they make the ward more manageable. In the first of the two group therapy scenes, McMurphy butts in and tries to get the nurse to switch on the TV set so they can watch the World Series. This suggestion is put to the vote—she clearly disapproves, and her domination is such that only three inmates vote. During the next therapy session, Nurse Ratched determinedly presses one member with questions he doesn't want to answer. Another member proposes another vote about watching the second game of the World Series. McMurphy encourages the patients with the great lines, "I wanna see the hands. Come on. Which one of you nuts has got the guts?" Nine votes are cast in favor, and McMurphy senses victory—but Nurse Ratched changes the rules to defeat the proposal: "There are eighteen patients on this ward, Mr. McMurphy. And you have to have a majority to change ward policy. So you gentlemen can put your hands down now." McMurphy turns and gestures to the patients of the ward who are uninvolved in the therapy group, most of whom are seemingly in their own private worlds. "You're tryin' to tell me that you're gonna count these, these poor son-of-a-bitches, they don't know what we're talkin' about." Nurse Ratched replies: "Well, I have to disagree with you, Mr. McMurphy. These men are members of the ward just as you are." Nurse Ratched adjourns the meeting and closes the voting session. One of the outer group members not in the therapy session, a pivotal character called Chief, slowly raises his hand, so McMurphy says, "The Chief voted. Now will you please turn on the television set? The Nurse replies, "Mr. McMurphy, the meeting was adjourned and the

vote was closed.” “But the vote was 10 to 8. The Chief, he’s got his hand up! Look!” “No, Mr. McMurphy. When the meeting was adjourned, the vote was 9 to 9.” Democracy in action in organizations often involves the highly undemocratic manipulation of the numbers.

The film also illustrates the ways in which ordinary people can do quite extraordinary things as well after they have a uniform and are dealing not with people but with institutionally defined inmates: McMurphy ends up being lobotomized to “cure” him, although there is palpably nothing wrong with him other than a strong and stubborn streak of individualism and antiauthoritarianism.

9. We also suggest watching the 2001 German movie *Das Experiment*. It is very similar to the Haney, Banks, and Zimbardo (1973) experiment, which we described in this chapter. It shows, impressively, how the abuse of power can shape human relations and create a fatal dynamic. And it illustrates Lord Acton’s dictum, with which we began the chapter, perfectly.
10. Organizations frequently make routine deeds that, at the end of the functional chain of action, have appalling consequences. Have you seen the 1999 film *The Insider*, starring Russell Crowe? It is a good example of this point. Tobacco companies knew that their products were killing people, but they kept on making those products because the fact that people died was an externality of their business model, and it had no immediate causal consequences in terms of legal responsibility. Besides, people smoking made profits for the tobacco companies, and they needed to recruit new smokers to replace those who died, or they would lose market share.

