

Chapter 10

Is Organization Development Possible in Power Cultures?

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INTRODUCTION

Variety is said to be the spice of life, and much attention is paid these days to contingency theories and other attempts to describe the various forms and processes which take place in organizations (Friedlander, 1971; Galbraith, 1973). In one attempt to describe organizational variety Harrison (1972), whose ideas were taken up by Handy (1976, 1979), developed a typology of four organizational *ideologies* or *cultures*: the *power* culture, the *role* culture, the *task* culture, and the *person* culture. It is from this that I take the concept of a power culture.

To describe variety as the *spice* of life may be a bit misleading, since a spice is something one appreciates and savours. The variety of organizational cultures is certainly a fascinating phenomenon, which behavioural scientists as *observers* may savour, but as *actors* we need to be able to *manage* if we are to be competent to intervene in a range of organizational situations. *Power* is an aspect of organizational life—one of the essential spices—that OB and OD are often accused of ignoring (Friedlander and Brown, 1974; Srivastva, 1975). Srivastva and Brown (1974) have asserted that 'power corrupts, powerlessness corrupts absolutely': this chapter is written as the author emerges, reeling slightly, from an encounter with a power culture, in which his only power was the very significant one of being able to leave the field. This paper describes an attempted OD project in this culture, and asks whether OD theory is sufficient to encompass interventions in such power cultures. First, however, the nature of power, culture, and OD requires further consideration.

POWER

While the reality of power appears self-evident when we come across it in

everyday life—especially from a position of relative powerlessness—power seems to be an elusive concept to define theoretically. Lukes (1974) has borrowed the phrase ‘essentially contested concept’ to describe it, and traces three steps towards an encompassing view of power.

First, there is a view of power solely in terms of which party gets its way when disagreements arise: a ‘one-dimensional’ view of power, which involves a ‘focus on *behaviour* in the making of *decisions* on *issues* over which there is overt *conflict* of (subjective) *interests*’ (Lukes, 1974, p. 15; original emphasis). That this view is inadequate is pointed out by Bachrach and Baratz (1970), since it is evident that power is frequently exercised through ‘non-decisions’ to *prevent* issues coming to the public forum for consideration, and to limit the scope of debate to issues innocuous to those in power. This is a ‘two-dimensional’ view of power, since it ‘allows for consideration of the ways in which *decisions* are prevented from being taken on *potential issues* over which there is observable *conflict* of (subjective) *interests*’ (Lukes, 1974, p. 20; original emphasis). Lukes argues that this two-dimensional view of power is inadequate on three counts. First, power is not only manifest through decision-making (or non-decision-making), but also through the overall bias of the social and political system towards consideration of certain issues and exclusion of others. Second, power is not only associated with observable conflict, but may also be used to shape desires and stop conflict from arising. Third, power is not present only when there are grievances, since:

is not the supreme and most insidious exercise of power to prevent people, to whatever degree, from having grievances by shaping their perceptions, cognitions and preferences in such a way that they accept their role in the existing order of things, either because they see or imagine no alternative to it, or because they see it as natural and unchangeable, or because they value it because it is divinely ordained and beneficial? To assume that the absence of grievance equals genuine consensus is simply to rule out the possibility of false or manipulated consensus. . . .

(Lukes, 1974, p. 24)

Thus a ‘three-dimensional’ view of power is close to the view that ‘Power in society includes the power to determine decisive socialisation processes, and, therefore, the power to *produce* reality’ (Berger and Luckman, 1966, p. 137; original emphasis).

Huckabay (1975) has argued in connection with the Women’s Movement that the most important tool for maintaining any particular social form or relationship is this power to define reality; a power which is developed and

maintained through control over reality-defining processes and institutions. Thus power, as used in this paper, refers to this capacity to impose definitions of reality on others: to prescribe what is and what is not, what may or may not be considered and discussed, what behaviour is appropriate—and indeed ultimately the power to define the personal identity of other individuals and classes within the social system.

ORGANIZATION DEVELOPMENT

Organization Development is an approach to organization life which involves a 'change in the organization's culture from one which avoids an examination of social processes . . . to one which legitimises and institutionalises this examination' (Burke and Hornstein, 1972, p. xi); it usually involves a variety of action-research methods to generate 'valid information' about organization processes from which change can take place based on 'free choice' and 'internal commitment' (Argyris, 1970). Thus OD may be seen as a straightforward approach of using third-party interventions to mobilize information and energy about organizational processes which would not otherwise be available for system improvement. It is thus a very rational, common-sense strategy (Fordyce and Weil, 1971); a bit personally threatening for some people maybe, but all in a good cause.

If, however, we take a second look at OD processes we may see that some aspects of the OD strategy strike directly at the reality-defining processes of the organization: in other words, activities aimed at system improvement also involve basic processes of system creation. Mangham (1975) has described OD as 'negotiating reality'; but how much reality are we negotiating? Very often it is impossible to generate 'valid information'—such an innocent-sounding phrase—without finding that we are questioning the basis from which that information arises and the fundamental assumptions of organization members. Sometimes, when we start asking questions, there seems to be no limit to the questions we *could* ask; and when we start to define the social issues around which OD work is indicated, we may begin to renegotiate the very reality which holds the organization together.

CULTURES

A culture involves the 'sets of values and norms and beliefs—reflected in different structures and systems' which pervade the organization (Handy, 1976, p. 176). The culture is the real world as constructed through organizational processes, and at the same time the means by which that reality is defined and redefined. As Harrison points out, 'Among people in organiza-

tions, ideas of “what is” and “what ought to be” merge into one another and are—or are made to appear—consistent’ (1972, p. 120). In this chapter I am primarily concerned with power cultures and with role cultures.

Handy likens the *power culture* to a web, depending on a:

central power source, with rays of power and influence spreading out from that central figure. . . . Control is exercised by the centre largely through the selection of key individuals, by occasional forays from the centre or summonses to the centre.

(1976, p. 178)

Harrison argues that:

An organization that is power-oriented attempts to dominate its environment and vanquish all opposition. It is unwilling to be the subject to any external law or power. And within the organization those who are powerful strive to maintain absolute control over subordinates.

(Harrison, 1972, p. 121)

Power cultures are proud and strong, able to move fast and react to threat or danger; they support ‘power-oriented, politically minded, risk-taking’ individuals (Handy, p. 179); they are competitive, jealous of territory, and self-serving (Harrison, p. 121).

In a power culture, some people are *powerful*, some are *powerless*; relationships nearly always have a vertical (one-up, one-down) character: even colleague (i.e. presumably equal and collaborative) relationships are often arenas for competitive striving and gamesmanship. The power to define reality and to define relationships lies in the hands of a very small number of people at the centre, and the ability of other members of the organization to raise and define issues is drastically curtailed.

In contrast the *role culture* is like a Greek Temple to the god Apollo:

this culture works by logic and rationality. The role organization rests on the strength of its pillars, its functions or specialities. These pillars are strong in their own right. . . .

(Handy, 1976, pp. 179–80)

The role culture is predictable, stable, respectable; correct, rather than effective. ‘Procedures for change tend to be cumbersome; therefore the system is slow to adapt to change’ (Harrison, 1972, p. 122). The role or job description is often more important than the individual who fills it; rules and procedures are the most important methods of influence.

An organization that is role-oriented aspires to be as rational and orderly as possible. In contrast to the wilful autocracy of the power-oriented organization, there is a preoccupation with legality, legitimacy, and responsibility. . . . Competition and conflict . . . are regulated and replaced by agreements, rules and procedures. Rights and privileges are carefully defined and adhered to. While there is a strong emphasis on hierarchy and status, it is moderated by the commitment to legitimacy and legality.

(Harrison, 1972, pp. 121–122)

Power in role cultures is much more evenly spread than in power cultures. There is of course a greater accumulation of power towards the top, but this power is tempered by the conservative power of the *system*, a conservation that Schon (1971) has tellingly labelled *dynamic*—‘a tendency to fight to remain the same’ (p. 32). The potential power to define reality and to define relationships lies widely in the hands of organization members, although most people do not experience themselves as possessing such power, since they feel impotent in the face of ‘the system’, usually personified as Them. Thus it is the experience of impotence rather than of power which is widely shared.

ORGANIZATION DEVELOPMENT AND ROLE CULTURES

I have defined culture, power, and organization development as being ultimately concerned with the construction and reconstruction of reality, the taken-for-granted backcloth against which all transactions and interactions are seen by organization members. OD, if it is to make any significant contribution to organization life, intervenes directly into the reality-defining processes of the organization; since these processes will be characteristically different in different cultures, we may hypothesize that similar OD interventions will have different outcomes in different cultures. My assumption is that OD grew up as a response to role cultures, and that the theory and practice of OD is primarily relevant to role cultures and to their movement towards being more appropriately task-oriented. OD expresses a concern for the entrapment of the individual in impersonal processes and for the loss of task effectiveness in the red-tape of bureaucracy, rather than the political manoeuvring and naked power plays of the power culture. Role cultures aim to be ‘as rational and orderly as possible’: OD offers a meta-rationality of ‘planned change’ in which even emotions can be rationally taken into account. Further, I suggest that OD professionals tend to be liberal rather than radical, in that they are oriented to rational, negotiated change processes

within an accepted cultural framework: fundamentally, they accept the role-based Western culture and their involvement in it, and they take for granted the basic distribution of power within that culture.

In role cultures the reality-defining processes may be seen as out of control—taken over by ‘the system’. OD, in helping people better to understand and take action in their situation, enables them once again to take charge of their organization and of their lives. In this sense, the amount of total power in the organization is increased, and with it the possibility of increased mutual influence. Everybody ‘wins’, so collaboration and consensus are possible.

In power culture, this cannot be true; if a small group of people hold a position from which they can impose their definitions of reality, any move to explore the reality of the organization and any suggestion of a renegotiation must be seen by them as a threat. It is to a detailed consideration of one such power culture that I now turn.

THE POWER CULTURE AT ‘CORMORANT’

Cormorant is an engineering factory, part of a very large international group, which manufactures in quantity specialized engineering components. Its history over the past few years has been chequered and as a result of this the factory was a few years ago in a sorry state, with low morale, hostile attitudes to the parent company management, run-down plant, and an outdated product.

In response to this situation the parent company collected together a large and strong management team under a super-strong General Manager to ‘turn the place around’. The measure of their success is that in a few years the factory has reorganized and introduced new management information systems, made major investments in new plant and equipment, developed an important new product, and in addition to all this appears to be moving steadily into a profitable situation.

Larry Campbell, the General Manager, is a large, bouncy, talkative, tremendously energetic man. He is enormously possessive of Cormorant, very careful to protect it from outside interference and from interventions from Head Office Departments. He has been known to order outsiders off the site, and Cormorant is often referred to as ‘Chateau Campbell’.

Larry has an enormous capacity to memorize detail. He introduced information and control systems which provide him with enormous amounts of detailed information about every area and function in the factory. He often appears to manage ‘by detail’ apparently knowing more about a particular subject than the manager responsible.

He is not, however, simply a detail man: he is also one of the most

charismatic leaders I have ever observed. At the management lunch table he is absolutely central, cracking jokes, laughing loudly and infectiously, producing ideas and excitement such that no-one can, or would want to, compete. He is the prime task *and* socio-emotional leader, lavish in both praise and rebuke, expecting and inspiring a high standard of performance, and usually getting it.

Some comments about Larry from interviews with members of his management team may give some flavour.

I'd go through hell fire for Larry—he understands my problems, makes demands that are hard to meet, but just attainable. A first class guy to work for.

Campbell—my kind of guy, a pusher, a goer, I can react to him.

Larry—the guy we needed, but a bit unpredictable, a bit controlling. I admire the drive, the energy, the memory.

Larry presents his management team with excitement, challenge, the need to manage tremendous amounts of detail, and an enormous workload; on the face of it, the team is very tightly bonded. For example, on the telephone most of them would speak sharply and abusively to subordinate members of the factory, shouting into a loudspeaker attachment so that anyone else around could hear the performance; however, if a management team colleague were to call, they would immediately lift the handset and speak more reasonably—almost fraternally, calling each other 'mate'; and if it were Larry on the 'phone (and when Larry calls, the 'phone is arranged to ring continuously until answered), the tone of the conversation shifts again slightly but perceptibly towards the subservient, always starting with a smart 'Yes, Larry. . . .'

While on first impressions the management team appears tightly bonded—and this is *certainly* the impression that they work hard to create and present to outsiders—it is not difficult to get an impression of some strains. Members commented to me that lateral communication was not good; that there were splits—for example between the 'thinkers' and the 'doers', between the inner cabinet and the rest; that some members were quite ruthless and 'ran over' the rest. Certainly in meetings, Larry is the centre of communication, defines the issues, and adjudicates. He may cut through a discussion with, 'Can we just get this clear . . .', summarizing and instructing out of the general confusion. He does this to such an extent that the team relies on his summaries and integration, and team members are free to be undisciplined, to compete for his attention, and to push their own parochial viewpoints.

The most telling point about the team came from an older manager, now slightly on the sidelines:

The team works well, but . . . they are fragile, there is a rivalry, they don't exactly trust each other. It's a problem: can you be a manager and be pushy, and also be a team member?

The team can probably be best understood in the context of its existence in a difficult and hostile environment: there has been a general threat and hostility from the workforce towards 'management' as a result of the recent difficult times; and the team is faced with the over-riding need to 'turn the place around'. Thus they are pulling together in the face of external threat.

As one moves below the management team a very different picture emerges. While there are one or two 'satellites' surrounding the management team who have an interesting life, one quickly discovers that there is little scope for most people to be other than 'lackeys' to the management team. Many of them are intensely busy, especially middle managers, but rarely involved in any significant decision-making; they are much more likely to be involved in doing work *created* by members of the management team. As one young manager on the edge of the team put it:

Life is probably pretty dull for the clerks, but there is more excitement as you get near the management group. That is nice for them, but downward communication is not good. There is not much here in the way of participative management. People respond better to rush things if it is explained to them.

Another young manager said more emotionally:

I'm badgered from pillar to post . . . torn between different loyalties . . . under pressure from a lot of different places. You can't explain things, especially to [Production Manager], but it's right through the management structure. If they needed SS guards to do it they would get them in. . . . Management doesn't realise that you have to *ask* people to do things . . . when the economy picks up there will be a mass exodus.

The activities of the management team—especially their intense involvement in detail—mean that they are constantly impacting on the day-to-day routines of the factory. One prime means of doing this is the Operations Meeting: the aim of this meeting is to review production and sort out bottlenecks, but it is also an opportunity for the Production Manager to exercise his abrasive management style. Each morning, from 9–11, every middle manager in the

factory may receive an abusive call on his ever-ringing 'phone. As one of his colleagues on the management team commented:

What bothers me is the blame and bullshit that his people feed him. The shit hits the fan, and we all catch it unfairly . . . they lie their backteeth off. We get the bollocking, and he gets the kudos—when *he's* the villain.

A more junior manager:

We tend to get ruled by Production Department, having a strong Production Manager who will run anything. He has an Operations meeting every morning ostensibly to sort out shortages, but it gives him a glorious opportunity for pointing the finger.

And a junior manager working closely for the Production Manager:

He manages by demand—'I want'—probably a bit too much. He doesn't pay attention to people's problems, they are not helped to think through their problems, they come out of meetings none the wiser. His day to day actions can cause long term problems by cutting through systems; but he always wants it both ways.

The last comment is supported by the Production Manager's own vigorous response to objections: 'I don't care how you do it, but this is what you've got to do. . . .' This strategy of management by demand, the insistence on having one's cake tomorrow *and* eating it today, creates an almost impossible situation for middle managers. Often in order to satisfy their superiors' demands they have to break procedures which the same superiors have instituted and insist are upheld.

Larry and his managers see themselves as working hard and furiously for the survival and success of the Cormorant factory. In my cynical moments I found it easy to turn everything on its head, and see Cormorant and its social relations as really existing only so that a small group of men could have an exciting time playing at being important managers. Much of their behaviour seemed not so much calculated to solve problems as to get one-up on each other or affirm themselves in the eyes of their subordinates. This creates a centrality which precludes the possibility of collaboration between subordinates: divide and rule.

DIAGNOSIS

It must be apparent to the reader that I have strong feelings about the

situation at Cormorant. I am sure that I was regarded with considerable suspicion by managers, and it was extremely difficult to feel comfortable there—I found it a very harsh and competitive place, and I felt continually tested and ‘put down’. I must therefore be explicit that I regard Cormorant as a place unfit for human beings, a culture where the actualization of any humanistic values must be well nigh impossible.

It is *also* important to stress that Cormorant is an *effective* organization: it has moved from the point of closure to become the success story of the company. Further, one can argue that this success was achieved by competent managers acting with energy and flexibility, and that this is only possible in a power culture. Yet this same power culture causes major problems for the factory and for the people in it, problems which I believe exist independent of my personal value bias.

- (1) Since energy, information, and excitement are drawn exclusively to the top of the organization, with the General Manager and his team making all the important decisions, and at the same time making sure that their power remains absolute and unquestioned, then powerlessness, alienation, and misunderstanding are the rule in the rest of the organization.
- (2) While the power culture is appropriate for a speedy and decisive response to an unsure environment, it invades those parts of the organization where stability and routine are required for task accomplishment, and where a role-orientation might be more appropriate.
- (3) Since power is maintained through a process of divide and rule, the establishment of collaborative task-centred relationships is nearly impossible.
- (4) The culture is activist, not given to reflection or introspection: it is not considered at all appropriate to consider alternative approaches to managing the organization.

ATTEMPTS TO DEVELOP AN OD PROJECT AT CORMORANT

I was recruited to help the development of OD work in the parent company, and was offered to Cormorant managers, or maybe imposed on them, as someone who might be able to help them with ‘communications’ or ‘human relations’. I had no clear, explicit contract, and since attempts to develop a relationship as process consultant to the management team were unsuccessful, I decided, with Larry’s agreement, to work one level down in the organization, to select a demonstration project to ‘show what OD could do’.

Clive, the manager of the Production Engineering Department, and a

member of the management team, was interested in my helping him explore problems with his Department, which he presented as twofold. First was the practical problem that his Department was not completing its work programme, which included the ordering of plant and equipment for the expansion and modernization of the factory; second was a more personal problem about his management style, specifically whether he should conform to the tough, harsh, table-thumping style of the Production Manager, or whether more two-way communication and a more participative style were appropriate:

I need to know whether the way I communicate is right, and no one is telling me this. Should I rant and rave? Are people unclear?

I thought that since the problem was presented first as a work problem and that behavioural issues stemmed from that, it would be seen as useful and legitimate. My notes at the time read: 'This is an opportunity to demonstrate a *process*: i.e. to outline some steps, starting from a "felt need" towards improving a human process.'

This project started well. I met the managers of the Department, discussed the issues, and began to develop collaborative relationships. I was particularly pleased when, after I had suggested a number of ways in which we might proceed with an exploration of the issues, they used my suggestions to design a process of their own to which they were committed and which seemed to suit the circumstances. I was to interview members of the Department in groups by hierarchical level around the question, 'What are the things that happen here that get in the way of effective work and high morale?'; towards the end of each session Clive and his managers were to join the discussion to hear each group's views directly, without of course identifying individuals, and without defending or attacking back.

This design produced a lot of information that was listened to non-defensively. Some of the information was directly and immediately useful for the improvement of Departmental effectiveness, in that it showed specific ways in which time and energy were wasted and misdirected; some of it was more threatening and difficult to grasp since it concerned Clive's style of management, and the impact of the management team as a whole. Clive was described as remote, threatening, blaming and never praising, never admitting mistakes or listening to explanations. The Cormorant management team were seen as inflexible and interfering, not appreciating the work of the 'expert' engineers, overriding their recommendations, and causing unnecessary panics and unnecessary work. Overall, the style was described as 'Victorian'.

At the end of the group interviews I asked Clive if I had done what he wanted and if the process had been useful. His answer was clear, that I had

uncovered information that would be useful and which, despite a number of attempts, he had been unable to find out for himself.

Despite this encouraging comment, the project quickly ran into difficulties. It was as if we began tentatively to negotiate a new reality with Clive and his Department, which was followed by a quick move by Clive to reimpose the old reality; I was then closed out of the situation, and finally enough power was mobilized to remove me altogether. All this happened with surprising speed.

Clive and his managers followed up the interviews by taking some immediate measures to improve the working of the Department: they made some changes to the organization of work, and instituted a new structure of meetings at which discussion could continue. Clive seemed keen to pursue and understand the comments about his management style. However, he quickly grew impatient with further discussion, and blamed his subordinates for the problems: he could not conceive that a young and dynamic leader such as himself could possibly be seen as Victorian; his view was that he was seen as threatening only because his subordinates were 'not man enough' to stand up to him; he argued that he had done his bit, and that it was time for his subordinates to respond to the overtures which he had made. His behaviour shifted back from being relatively open and exploratory immediately after the interviews, to being harsh and blaming. This had the effect of closing down the possibility of further discussion of organizational issues within the Department.

From this point on I found myself increasingly isolated and ignored at Cormorant; thus I cannot give a fair account of what happened, I can only guess. I *did* learn that I had been described as working as a shop steward for junior staff; my work was described by one of the management team as 'gaffer bashing'. I suspect that Clive came under considerable pressure from his colleagues to step back into line and prevent me from challenging established definitions of reality.

At this stage, I was instructed by the Head Office OD manager not to visit Cormorant any more while my work there was investigated; it was revealed that I was seen as 'too disturbing'. Eventually, and after considerable difficult discussion, it appeared that it would not be possible to renegotiate a satisfactory arrangement, and I withdrew from my contract with the company.

POSSIBILITIES FOR OD WORK IN POWER CULTURES

In retrospect it is easy to see mistakes; it is also probably easy for the reader of this story to sit back and say, 'I wouldn't have done it *that way*'—but then, what *would* you have done? My own view is that the work I was doing within the Production Engineering Department was a reasonably adequate

OD project which, had we been able to persist with it, would have been successful in improving the local situation. I think however that I was politically rather naive, allowing the project to be naked to outside pressure, and that the project was destroyed because members of the management team saw it as challenging the view of reality espoused by them and imposed on the factory, and also as challenging their sole right to define reality.

I have argued above that the theory and practice of OD was developed mainly in role cultures; and that in such cultures OD may be seen as power-enhancing in that it frees organization members from the constraints of outmoded rules and relationships, and increases the possibility of greater influence all round. A situation such as that at Cormorant is very different: since social reality is defined by a small group at the top and firmly imposed on the rest of the organization, those who define reality experience themselves as powerful, while the suppressed majority are powerless. An intervention which aims to mobilize information about such a situation will encourage the otherwise silent majority to speak and to attempt to define a new reality—which will be seen as a threat by those whose sole power to define reality is thus questioned. Since in a power culture it will be very difficult to establish superordinate goals—almost by definition they are not legitimate—OD under these circumstances is likely to involve a ‘win-lose’ situation, in that the silent majority can win power to define their world only if the autocratic minority loses such power. Thus *the power dynamics of OD in power cultures are quite different from those in role cultures*, and the theory of OD—as encapsulated in such terms as ‘valid information’, ‘free choice’, and ‘internal commitment’—is inadequate for dealing with these situations, because this theory assumes the possibility of collaboration and consensus in the service of planned change.

It seems to me that there are three ways of thinking about this in an attempt to understand better the relationship between power and organizational development. The first line of thought might be described as the *top-down* approach, and holds that the major mistake made at Cormorant was the failure to work carefully from the top down through the organization. This is the traditional OD view—indeed a classic definition of OD is that it is a ‘planned change effort . . . managed from the top’ (Beckhard, 1969, pp. 9–10). From this perspective one would argue that the dynamics of the situation as described above are not in the long-term interests of the management team, and that if they can be helped to see the unintended consequences of their actions they will see the need for change.

Thus the consultant must ‘start from where the client is’, and work on legitimate issues to gain credibility. His first task is to develop a mutually agreed contract for work, and to establish a ground for collaboration with the client before data gathering. Only so long as he retains the confidence of

management can he have any possible base for helping them to 'unfreeze', and he must constantly ask himself the question, 'Who is your client?'

This traditional, top-down approach has been criticized as being naively a-political, relying as it does on openness and trust rather than dealing with the reality of political behaviour in organizations. Recently, theorists of organization intervention have turned their attention to the *politics* of intervention in an attempt to meet this criticism. Pettigrew (1975) identified five potential power resources available to the consultant—expertise, control over information, political access and sensitivity, assessed stature, and group support. Schein (1977) suggests that the 'effective change agent needs to develop his own power-oriented approach', and outlines six possible power strategies: aligning with a powerful other, trade-offs, using the legitimacy of research as cover, using a neutral cover within the organization, limiting communication, and withdrawing from competition. Presumably, this more political approach to OD is particularly suitable in a power culture.

There are, however, three major problems in applying this top-down argument to the Cormorant situation. First, even if you manage to stay alongside the client and gain access to his worlds of meaning without being captured by them, *how* do you accomplish the unfreezing, and *how* do you disengage them from their power orientation? Second, I am sure that if I *had* been able to establish a firm credibility at the top of the organization, this would have closed off many possibilities of access further down, and I would have been unable effectively to gather 'valid information'. Finally, and most important, I believe that to the extent that the top approach *is* successful, it will be only moderating and ameliorating—indeed prolonging the agony of—an essentially untenable and pernicious situation. The very activities described above as necessary for the consultant to survive and have influence in the situation—gaining political access etc.—imply acceptance of those processes, divert attention from major issues, and thus contribute to a continuation of the status quo. Therefore the consultant becomes part of the problem rather than part of a potential solution.

The reader may imagine how self-critical I have been as a result of this experience at Cormorant. That self-criticism has convinced me that had I taken the top-down approach more skilfully, and had I behaved more politically, I would have survived longer in that organization. But I do *not* think I would have been significantly influential.

This leads me to the second line of thought, which is that the OD consultant should *stay away*. This holds that nothing can or should be done about a power culture such as Cormorant; that we should keep out of this kind of situation because we are powerless to act effectively, and may indeed get in the way of 'natural' change processes. One might argue that the organization is not yet 'ripe for change', that the dynamics of the situation will lead to a crisis at which time people within the organization will see more clearly the

need for change. Only then will OD be possible. This argument indicates that it is a waste of the consultant's time and skills, and of his precious optimism, to 'work uphill' and that there are likely to be much more fruitful fields for his endeavours elsewhere.

This argument is problematic too. We cannot say for certain that a place like Cormorant will ever be 'ripe for change' without some external intervention: these kinds of oppressive situations are actually quite stable. While the top-down approach assumes the eventual possibility of orderly and planned change, staying away from the situation assumes that nothing constructive can really be done. A third line of thought is a *bottom-up* approach, which is much more revolutionary. It assumes that the basic issue at Cormorant lies in the contradiction between a small group of privileged 'oppressors' and a larger group of the 'oppressed'; and that the primary goal of the oppressors is not so much to run an efficient factory as to maintain their position in power. As I have suggested above, Cormorant may be seen as a stage on which a small group of men act out their parts as dynamic managers, with a large captured supporting cast.

To the extent that this description holds, there is no possibility that, given 'valid information' about the working of the system, the management group will initiate change. As Freire has pointed out, it is the task of the *oppressed* to change the system since:

the oppressors, who oppress, exploit, and rape by virtue of their power, cannot find in this power the strength to liberate either the oppressed or themselves. Only power which springs from weakness will be sufficiently strong to free both. Any attempts to 'soften' the power of the oppressor in deference to the weakness of the oppressed almost always manifests itself in the form of false generosity.

(1970, pp. 28–29)

Similarly Mannheim points out that:

ruling groups can in their thinking become so intensively interest-bound to a situation that they are simply no longer able to see certain facts which would undermine their sense of domination.

(1936, p. 40)

In other words the top-down approach cannot alter the basic dynamics of the situation: it can only be changed through the development of a critical consciousness and action by those lower down in the organization:

[The oppressed] will not gain their liberation by chance but through the

praxis of their quest for it, through the recognition of the necessity to fight for it.

(Freire, 1970, p. 29)

This line of thought suggests that the only successful intervention would be through the oppressed, helping *them* to understand the nature of their situation, to organize and build support groups, and thus find the strength to challenge their oppressors, attempt to establish a dialogue with them, and begin to negotiate a new reality. Freire has suggested that this might be done through a 'pedagogy of the oppressed' through which they might 'emerge from their submersion and acquire the ability to *intervene* in reality as it is unveiled' (1970, p. 100). Similar ideas for a bottom-up strategy for social change are found in Alinsky's 'rules for radicals' (1972), in the consciousness-raising of the Women's Movement, in the development of an anti-psychiatry (Cooper, 1967), indeed, in many places where the established reality is experienced as oppressive.

This line of thought sounds very revolutionary. One wonders whether the revolution will be bloody, and whether there will be a swing from one dictator to another. One wonders what the impact of all this will be on organizational effectiveness. One wonders what the encounter between the oppressors and the oppressed will look like, since this bottom-up argument focuses on the development of awareness and power for the oppressed, and lacks a theory for a movement to dialogue with the oppressors.

It has been suggested that this bottom-up approach is a political, rather than a managerial, rhetoric, and thus cannot be part of an OD strategy. This may well be true: as we move toward a subversive approach, we step outside the domain of the consultant into the domain of the revolutionary. If, however, we wish to understand power in organizational change, we must realize that there is a well-articulated theory of power which lies outside the scope of OD, and outside the scope of the politicking and manoeuvring which is a normal part of organizational life: this latter is power used basically to preserve the status quo, while the bottom-up approach represents an attempt at a fundamental change in power relations.

The OD profession has always been ambivalent about power, usually ignoring it as an issue although at times castigating itself for this omission. In his review of OD in transition, Burke (1976) holds that OD has yet to come to grips with the politics of change—although he himself devotes remarkably little space to further consideration of the issue. I hope this consideration of OD in power cultures shows how fundamentally uncomfortable are the attempts to add considerations of power to the theory of OD. The work of the 'political' theorists of organizational intervention (Schein, 1977; Pettigrew, 1975) only 'tacks on' political strategies to an OD

theory which is basically a-political: they do not get to the roots of the use of power for organizational change.

We must take the comments of our critics seriously: Brimm (1972) describes OD consultants as 'system maintainers' who ignore fundamental variables; Nord (1974) takes a Marxist perspective on the *failure* of applied behavioural science, which he suggests 'encourages exploration of alternative power bases for humanistically oriented change'. If we wish to understand the use of power fully, we must move beyond a consideration of politicking in the service of system-maintenance and explore the radical view indicated above.

I would like to suggest that if there is genuine broad consensus about the existence, nature, and goals of an organization, but the organizational processes have somehow gone astray, then OD as system maintenance and system enhancement may make a contribution. If, however, there is fundamental disagreement or false consensus about the existence, nature, and goals of the organization, so that the organization must be held together by unilateral power, then a more radical view is needed. OD in this latter instance would tend to seek *premature* collaboration and conflict resolution, when polarization of issues, confrontation, and even destruction of organizational forms (Pages, 1974) are essential. We must recognize that there is a major arena in which OD has nothing to offer.

All this reinforces Harrison's point (1972) that much of the business of organizational change is really ideological struggle. If we in OD are going to have a theory of the use of power it must be a radical theory that shows us how to use power in the service of change, rather than how to simply survive in a political environment. But does OD, *should* OD encompass more revolutionary, even subversive interventions? Do we have the skills, the courage, and above all the commitment? Should we work where collaboration and consensus are readily available, or should we move in to participate in a more revolutionary arena? Should we, and do we want to?

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