

## **Power Crafting at Work: A Phenomenological Study on Individual Differences**

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### **Abstract**

What does having power mean, not *for*, but *to* an individual at work? In this paper, we focus on the individual's concerns and experiences in the work setting and discuss how individuals conceptualise and construct their own power at work. This perspective is important due to its corresponding implications for how individuals choose their jobs, how they show proactive work behaviours, and how they are engaged in power relations in organisations. In-depth interviews with eleven participants were subjected to interpretative phenomenological analysis and key themes were identified to explain how these individuals cognitively, socially, and operationally crafted their 'own' versions of power in their organisations. Despite the idiosyncratic similarity among the participants, our analysis revealed a clear divide: 'position-based power holders' and 'territory holders'. We first present our findings and results with interview excerpts and implications drawn from the emergent themes based on participant accounts. Next, we focus on two individual cases to explain how these individuals identified themselves as power holders within their own organisational contexts. Finally, we discuss our findings in association with other theoretical frameworks and concepts including the meaning of power, the organisational context, and proactive work behaviours.

### **Keywords**

Power, power crafting, job crafting, interpretative phenomenological analysis, individual

# Power Crafting at Work: A Phenomenological Study on Individual Differences

## Introduction

What does having power mean *to* an individual at work? Studies that attempt to explore the source and use of power at work are countless. However, the literature is haunted by a perspective that confines the individual to a context predominantly shaped by organisational structures and policies, and the underlying assumption almost never changes—power and the flexibility to use it can only be *granted* by the organisation in the form of a formal authority. We see much emphasis in this assumption placed on the organisation as the institution that has the ultimate power. Researchers, in this vein, dwelt more on identifying structural antecedents for having power at work and organisational consequences when power is used. But we must also give credit to some scholars for their attempts to explore ‘what it is like to have power’ and place the focus more on micro-organisational behaviours (Flynn et al., 2011; Anderson et al., 2012; Tost, 2015; De Wit et al., 2017). In its simplest and most conventional form, managerial authority grants the individual the right to exert power over (or with) others in order to get things done. Assigned authority can provide the individual with a position, status and organisational resources, but the meaning of this ‘given’ power is subject to interpretation and reframing (e.g. Woods, 2016; Lau & Liden, 2008). So once again, we ask: What does having power mean, not *for*, but *to* an individual at work?

The nature of our inquiry acknowledges individuals at work as the true cognoscenti of their own experience. Therefore, from the micro-organisational behaviours perspective, we directed our focus on the individual at work and on how this individual acts ‘alone’ as well as ‘in a group’. With an attempt to explore personal experiences of individuals in their own real-life contexts, in this study, we sought to understand how individuals conceptualised and constructed their own power at work. Our main objectives were to identify key themes that would describe experiential claims and concerns of individuals in constructing their own

power at work *and* understand what these activities and concerns meant to these individuals with regard to the particular organisational contexts where their experiences took place. We did not seek to produce generalisable claims. Instead, we aimed to gain insights into the intentions, drives and strategies individuals had in shaping and exerting their power. We also aimed to discover variations among different interpretations of the ‘power’ phenomenon that could offer a point of departure to an alternative understanding of power relations in organisations.

Our framework draws parallels with Wrzesniewski & Dutton’s (2001) influential study on ‘job crafting’. We were inspired by the conceptualisation of the theory in its purest form and the way it addressed how individuals at work shaped and redefined their jobs within their own social contexts. Our early dialogues as co-researchers of this study and informal idea exchange opportunities we had through our social circles were seemingly fruitful and encouraging. We were unequivocally directed towards exploring on what grounds and to what extent individuals would deviate from the power ‘given’ by the organisation and seek to shape their own versions of power at work. Among the possible answers were that this could depend on their personality types (e.g. Madter et al., 2012), how they perceived their roles as leaders having power over their followers (e.g. Leheta et al., 2017), and how the individual could enjoy the limits of empowerment practices implemented by the organisation (e.g. Yin et al., 2019). However, our approach to the question was different. As mid-career management scholars, we came to reckon that a wide range of theoretical perspectives were represented in the literature on managerial authority and power at work; yet, in most cases, it was nearly impossible to fully answer such questions (e.g. Harding et al., 2014) as these: What identity is pointed out when, for example, the CEO of a large multinational company is presented in the media as a ‘powerful’ leader? Is it because of the position that the media carves this stereotype on the body of the CEO? What about a middle manager, or a team

leader? What does an individual ‘actually’ do to be powerful, and furthermore, what does being powerful really mean to this individual?

We have chosen interpretative phenomenological analysis (IPA) as the methodology of our study and conducted in-depth interviews to identify how individuals cognitively, socially and operationally crafted their ‘own’ versions of power at work. IPA allows researchers to understand the lived experiences of individuals in detail and provides insight to explore phenomena from the subjective perspectives of participants (Smith et al., 2012: 2-4). In a methodological sense, an IPA study is concerned with ‘a highly intensive and detailed analysis of the accounts produced by a small number of participants’ (Larkin et al., 2006). Understanding phenomena through personal views and experiences of individuals in their own real-life contexts without making generalisable claims is the paramount objective (Smith & Osborn, 2008: 55-56).

Our findings showed that conceptualising and constructing power, or power crafting as we call it in this study, was indeed a cognitive, social and operational act performed by individuals at work. Even though, we believed, our participants in this study were of a relatively homogenous group of individuals (with one exception), each participant presented a unique way of power crafting experience. The overall results demonstrated a clear divide—while some participants depicted a profile of a position-based power holder, five participants illustrated more independent and self-centred portrayals. These illustrations were all based on subjective experiences and concerns of the participants in response to their own respective organisational contexts. To introduce these findings and discuss how they resonate with relevant literature, we firstly present our perspective in conducting this research and the power crafting framework that guided our analysis. Second, we briefly introduce the method we used as well as our participants, and explain how data were collected and analysed. We then present the results with interview excerpts with implications drawn from the emergent

themes based on participant accounts. This is followed by another section which, this time, focuses on particular individual cases to explain how these individuals identified themselves as power holders within their own organisational contexts. Finally, we discuss our findings in association with other theoretical frameworks and concepts such as the meaning of power, the organisational context and proactive work behaviours.

### **Theoretical background**

Although authority and power are two different constructs, they have extensively been associated in the literature (Anderson & Brion, 2014). Classical writings on management revolved mainly around managerial authority (e.g. Weber, 1922/1968; Bennis, 1959; Koontz, 1961; Goodman, 1967), and hence power (e.g. the five forms of power according to French & Raven, 1959), with an attempt to achieve a better understanding of the nature of management and duty of managers in business organisations. Authority was even featured in management textbooks as the fundamental premise of management's role in the shape of a given right delegated by the organisation—a right that represents the values, expectations and reputation of the organisation in the form of 'power to command others and to act or not to act in a manner deemed by the possessor of the authority' (Harding, 2016: 81-82 with reference to Koontz & O'Donnell, 1968: 59). Other disciplines also have a similar approach. From the sociological lens, for example, 'authority is generally defined as the legitimate or socially approved right to exercise power including making decisions, giving orders or commands or enforcing obedience given one's social position' (Harrell & Thye, 2019: 223). To us, reading these literatures was like sailing an ocean—one massive body of water was stretching endlessly towards the horizon and we could hardly find a few islands to dock our boat and rediscover our thoughts on what such a power could actually mean. At a time where job crafting became a widely recognised practice in the contemporary work setting (Niessen, 2016), and moreover, informal power hierarchies can emerge even in work teams where no

formal hierarchy is assigned (Frauendorfer et al., 2015), individual discretion became more important than ever. At this point, we decided to further focus on the role of this discretion from the micro-organisational behaviours perspective and we asked: How does the individual tend to use discretion ‘alone’ to judge on this given right to exercise power at work and make a decision about what it is and what it is not, *and* how does this same individual tend to use discretion ‘in a group’ to implement the outcome of this decision?

### *Our perspective*

Many definitions were suggested for power over the past decades—‘a basic force in social relationships’ (Russell, 1938) or more recently, ‘control over resources in social relations’ (e.g. Magee & Galinsky, 2008). Sturm & Antonakis (2015) suggested a more comprehensive definition for power as ‘having the discretion and the means (e.g. charisma, expertise, etc.) to asymmetrically enforce one’s will over others to regulate or control aspects of one’s environment’. There exists a vast literature on power; however, in organisational studies, the conventional view is structural with much emphasis placed on position, hierarchical status and ‘control of valued resources’ (Tost, 2015). We also see other neighbouring disciplines beginning to embrace different angles in analysing power (e.g. Spicer et al., 2009). Psychological experience of power, for example, gained acceleration in becoming a widely acknowledged phenomenon in social psychology over the past few years. Possessing power could shape the individual behaviour—for instance, a manager with ‘heightened power’ could exert ‘verbal dominance’ that negatively affects team performance (e.g. Tost et al., 2013). Alternatively, one’s personal sense of power could also take its form in accordance with social relationships in a given environment (e.g. Anderson et al., 2012). We saw this neighbouring field a safe haven where we could linger, at least for a while, and dwell more on how ‘sense of power’ could be useful to us to shed light on our big question. We thought, from the ‘business’ perspective, this ‘given’ environment mentioned above would have to be

the workplace where the individual would assume safe enough to develop relationships with others to have a personal sense of power to take its form. In other words, power, in a genuine sense (at least at work), would have to be mentally created and personally designed with self-provided resources as well as resources provided by the organisation. Worth to note, structural power would not guarantee this at all times—individuals could feel powerless even in most powerful positions (Harding, 2014; Tost, 2015; Bugental & Lewis, 1999). So, we departed from this safe haven by placing the emphasis on individuals at work as ‘agents of power’ in their own rights—they assume an active role in shaping their own power at work to produce significant effects to the advantage of the organisation, to their own advantage, or both. This perspective is important due to its corresponding implications for how individuals choose their jobs, how they show proactive work behaviours, and how they are engaged in power relations in organisations.

Individuals construct their own knowledge and meaning from their experience with other individuals, and this knowledge has a social nature since it is created within a particular sociocultural context (Prawatt & Floden, 1994). In this regard, power can also be seen as socially created knowledge constructed individually as a result of social interactions in different sociocultural contexts. On the other hand, this knowledge belongs to the subjective view of a particular individual and for this reason it can not have a neutral and descriptive meaning. Citing the philosophical work of Morriss (1987), who began his analysis of the concept by asking why individuals needed power, Guzzini (2005) pointed out that context where power was assumed was essential since individuals were not always concerned with having the same type of power—individuals ‘can make sense of concepts only in their-meaning world’, and ‘any neutral definition for power seems elusive’. From this point onward, we asked: How do individuals decide mentally what their own power is? And moreover, how do they construct this into a solid form of power? In a business setting, this



would be a cognitive as well as a social and operational act to shape power at work. This turned our attention to job crafting, which we saw organically analogous to this process.

### *The power crafting framework*

Wrzesniewski & Dutton's (2001) seminal work on job crafting introduced a fundamental conceptualisation of the theory in its most original form. The idea behind the theory was that it was the very individuals themselves who actively shaped their own work, altered the meaning of work and changed the way they saw themselves at work. We were inspired (e.g. Petrou & Bakker, 2016) by the central premise of this highly influential framework that addressed how tasks, roles, responsibilities and interactions at work were used as 'raw materials' by the individuals to 'mould, shape and redefine' their jobs and these individuals were to 'build experience of work' within the social context where these raw materials were provided (Salancik & Pfeffer, 1978; Wrzesniewski & Dutton, 2001). Owing to this framework, the premise of the case we made was, not the job itself, but the power that came along with the job. Using the sociological lens we borrowed from Harrell & Thye (2019) and drawing parallels between Wrzesniewski & Dutton's (2001) approach and ours, we framed power crafting as a phenomenon where 'individuals cognitively and actively alter the meaning of their power at work by socially and operationally reshaping their own power to make decisions, give orders and enforce obedience, *and* change the way they see themselves as power holders at work'. This framework enabled us to concentrate on the following study questions that addressed both the individual experiences and concerns and the social contexts where these experiences and concerns took place:

SQ1: What does 'formal authority and having power at work' mean to an individual?

SQ2: How does power socially become to mean what it means to an individual?

SQ3: How does power operationally become to mean what it means to an individual?

Drawing further on Wrzesniewski & Dutton's (2001) framework we also thought an insight into 'how individuals identified themselves' (Walsh & Gordon, 2008; Gibbs, 2018: 95) as a result of crafting their power at work and 'how they fit into the organisational context in this sense' would be even more helpful to explore individual differences and their implications in understanding the phenomenon of power at work. This brought us our fourth study question:

SQ4: How do individuals identify themselves as power holders in their organisations with regard to organisation and job demands, and personal roles they adopt in their social environments?

## **Method**

The methodology we employed in this study is interpretative phenomenological analysis (IPA; Smith et al., 2012), which allows researchers to benefit from a 'detailed engagement with a small sample' (Smith et al., 2012: 29). IPA aims to address the unique experience of every single participant in a study and explore the meanings of these experiences in relation to their own contexts in which they took place (see Eatough & Smith, 2017). It offers researchers with the opportunity to explore subtle differences among various interpretations of a particular phenomenon. IPA served to our interest in this study because it allowed us to concentrate on personal experiences of participants and to explore from the first hand what meanings they attached to authority, power and related concepts. It also allowed us to understand how they made sense of these concepts in their own meaning worlds and in their real-life contexts. Additionally, we found the opportunity to compare alternative stories and experiences of participants for a better understanding of the power crafting phenomenon.

## *Participants*

An IPA study ‘typically involves a highly intensive and detailed analysis’ of the individual participant accounts. For this reason, sample sizes used in IPA studies are typically small and the idiographic approach of the methodology requires the recruitment of a fairly homogenous group of participants (Larkin et al., 2006: 46; Smith & Osborn, 2008: 55-56). On the methodological level, our concern was maintaining the richness of accounts produced by the participants so that we could generate an in-depth analysis to understand what it was like to conceptualise and construct power at work. To observe converging and diverging ideas from different perspectives of a homogenous group of individuals, we have selected eleven participants (Table 1). All confidential and sensitive information, either personal or organisational, are protected and English pseudonyms are used to assure consistency in the style of narration used in the following sections of the paper.

--- Table 1 about here ---

Participants were recruited upon calls made across the alumni networks of one of the leading business schools in Turkey. These networks were readily accessible by both researchers. Volunteers were invited by the first author for screening and were provided with a short introduction that broadly explained the content of the research. Selected participants who agreed to take part in this study were invited for interview. Participants were known to both researchers from previous research for their results-oriented and self-disciplined approaches to work and their natural inclination towards managerial roles since the very early years of their careers. With regard to suggestions made by Smith and colleagues (2012: 49), these participants were selected purposively to form a homogenous group. All participants were male who identified themselves as heterosexual; they were all Turkish; and they all held

either a graduate degree in business or an MBA degree. They were of the same generation except for one participant from whom, as a recent graduate with less work experience, we anticipated to hear thoughts and more refined opinions that could help us to compare and contrast with other accounts.

### *Data collection and analysis*

The nature of our inquiry impelled us to focus on subjective interpretations of individuals on power at work and their lived experiences in their own particular contexts. In other words with reference to Larkin and colleagues (2006), as researchers engaged in an IPA study, we were not concerned with the nature of power itself, but with our participants' experiences and understandings of power. To preserve the idiographic nature of the inquiry and to allow participants to discuss the topics in their own words with reference to their own social interactions and relationships at work, questions used in the semi-structured interviews covered five key topics—authority, power, making decisions, giving orders and obedience. We aimed at gathering data to understand what meanings were assigned to these concepts in relation to their real working life experiences. Interviews were conducted in Turkish with each participant individually, and each interview lasted approximately 60 minutes. At the end of each interview, the participant was given a small case about the actions of an overlord, a role-playing game character, and topics relevant to interview questions were additionally discussed over this case by the participants themselves. The data recorded were transcribed by the author who conducted the interviews and these transcriptions were studied by both researchers. It is worth to note at this point that all participants were fluent in English and translated versions of their interview transcripts were also read and confirmed by the participants themselves.

We used MAXQDA Analytics Pro 12 (VERBI Software, 2017) for data analysis. Typically, data analysis in an IPA study is concerned to produce both a 'coherent and

psychologically informed’ description of ‘what the phenomenon is like’ according to participants, *and* an interpretation of ‘what it means for the participants to have made these claims, and to have expressed these feelings and concerns in this particular situation’ (Larkin et al., 2006). The first stage of analysis was conducted on the basis of individual cases. Themes were generated for each individual account respectively and descriptive, linguistic and conceptual notes were taken for further analysis. In response to our first three study questions, all individual cases were compared and contrasted to identify commonalities that explained the higher-order themes, and differences that explained variations among cases in terms of organisational contexts. It was, however, interesting to observe a substantial divide as we identified two groups: ‘position-based power holders’ and ‘territory holders’. It was possible to identify a pattern in understanding how power crafting took place among the members of the first group; however, this was not possible for the second group. This led us to turn our attention to participants who, in particular, worked for a company to better illustrate a picture of how individuals saw themselves as part of the organisational contexts where they crafted their power respectively. In this second stage, we took our fourth study question into consideration and analysed how participants responded to organisational and job-related demands. Much attention was given to rhetorical and linguistic forms the participants used to explain and justify their experiences in building social relationships and events they described during their interviews (Gibbs, 2018: 83). We also focused on subject positions the participants demonstrated (Gibbs, 2018: 95) and analysed significant roles they assumed with regard to their power crafting actions and how they adopted these roles in their discourses.

--- Table 2 about here ---

## **Power crafting at work**

### *Summary*

A complete list of emergent themes are introduced in Table 2. A total number of 32 subthemes were identified and scattered across six higher-order themes. Three subthemes were found particularly significant and common across all eleven accounts: ‘I’ll have the final say!’, ‘proficiency as source of authority’ and ‘own reality’. The first of these three themes was named after in-vivo coding the phrase used, as in the excerpt below, interestingly by almost all participants:

Bart: ‘... the process takes place exactly as I have designed it—either right or wrong! I mean, yes, others can express their ideas, but still I, myself, must do the planning and we will all walk on my way. I’ll have the final say! Nothing surprises me anymore, nothing. It’s because this is my way, I’m managing this.’

Belief in proficiency was a significant basis in the discourse of every participant with many strong expressions such as ‘bowing to knowledge and experience’ (Owen), ‘knowledge, by all means’ (Bart), ‘leader is only the one that has the knowledge and the experience’ (Eddy), and ‘only if I believe that person knows it, experienced it’ (Larry). Participants enthusiastically acknowledged the role of knowledge and experience to construct their power at work and their determination to own the process for which they undertook the responsibility. Uneasiness with being imposed by rules based on formal hierarchical positions was also common. In idiosyncratic terms, participants all together portrayed a profile of a courageous and determined power holder, who always intended to make the ultimate decision, and who was ambitious enough to welcome every struggle to reach the end while sticking with a truly believed cause. However, the irregular distribution of subthemes across

cases indicated variations among the participant accounts. The Jaccard similarity coefficients calculated for each pair of cases shown in Table 3 confirmed these variations.

--- Table 3 about here ---

Despite the participants all together demonstrated a high level of idiosyncratic similarity, subtheme clusters suggested a clear divide among the individual cases. With reference to the core phenomenon, we identified two groups: ‘position-based power holders’ and ‘territory holders’. One participant, John, belonged to neither of these groups whereas how he described the core phenomenon was more of a personal form of power rather than addressing the business setting. One other exceptional case was of a participant, Travis, who became a member of both groups but shared much more common features with the ‘territory holders’.

*Position-based power holders*

Five participants in this group associated their power at work with their structural positions in their organisations. Participants believed that, based on their levels of proficiency and their skills, they had the ‘deserved right’ to hold these positions. What their positions at work meant was illustrated as ‘taking the entire picture in hand and watching everything closely and constantly from above’ (Bart), ‘obtaining the authority and the title to get things done’ (Eddy), ‘watching the stage and making sure that the given script is played correctly by the actors on stage’ (Adler), and ‘essential to make people do as you say’ (Harold). Larry was even more decisive and assertive. He said:

Larry: ‘I must control, and I *do* control (...) I always want to have the strings in my hands, you know, and even when I do not control, it’s only because I let that person to take the control but I take it back any time I feel necessary.’

Taking control was, by all means possible, a duty for these participants and a very good reason to seize a hierarchical position. Bart's motivation, in particular, was rather based on positioning himself as both a head who did the planning and organising of the work to achieve an agreed goal and the guardian or the protector of the order as he said:

Bart: 'I remember myself being a school prefect for three consecutive years. Perhaps it's because I was the tallest, or maybe the strongest. You know (...) natural selection, maybe?'

Taking control was often depicted as 'something that not everyone could do' (Bart), and not many people were 'talented or patient' to assume it. A sense of competitive approach was quite obvious in Bart's and Eddy's accounts, which both addressed 'acting first and fast' and 'being the best' as accepted values in the financial sector. For Larry, it was more about 'proving himself' as the best fit in the environment. This sense was even further explicit in Adler's words:

Adler: 'I have competitors everywhere, inside and outside the company, and in technical sales, in every company, we are all replaceable. I know there are backups that can replace me and I, myself, am also a backup for others.'

Despite the general tendency to make implications of a competitive workplace culture, participants in this group saw their co-workers and team members as companions and placed great emphasis on, in one participant's words, a supportive environment where everyone could compete:

Larry: 'My team mates are my mates, we support each other, but everyone also tends to be the best. After all, the whole company is like a one big family. We all drive towards the same goal, the same direction. We're all in this together.'



Tough competition is good, OK, but only when with people with similar interests sharing a common understanding.’

In this direction, participants believed in the harmony of ideas and agreed on the same motto: ‘Every opinion matters!’ Eddy’s focus was on harmony and synergy among team members as he said, ‘everyone here can do the same task in different ways (...) there isn’t a single profile that fits the job, there is a variety of ideas’. Larry, instead, placed the emphasis on the organisation’s goal: ‘I don’t want people to hug my opinion; we all walk towards the same goal and I want opinions!’ For all participants, making decisions together was essential; however, they insisted in all cases to have the final word. Adler said:

Adler: ‘In most cases, the answer is already in my head. I ask their opinions to see if there’s more I can add to mine, or to make them approve my opinion so that we share the responsibility together.’

Participants attached much importance to the expectations of their organisations, and it was interesting to observe how they balanced their tendencies to highly influence, if not dominate, their team members with friendly and supportive attitudes. As Bart’s words summarised it:

Bart: ‘Obedience is all about mutual trust and expectations; I want them to do as I say, but this should be because they believe me, they share with me their ideas about this, and they have their own expectations from this.’

In their competitive but relatively ‘friendly’ workplace environments, an explicit presentation of self-confidence was also popular among these participants:

Eddy: ‘I only report to the boss, unlike others (same rank colleagues) who have their own department heads. That was my only precondition to accept the job. I know, I am much better than them (colleagues) and this is how I stand.’

Adler, in particular, thought self-branding was essential and believed that the company he worked for profited much from this. Having multiple skills and interests, according to him, was a valuable asset in the highly competitive world of the technical sales engineers as workplace rituals offered an effective opportunity to show this:

Adler: ‘With my team, we go to gym on a regular basis and this is where I show them *the other me*—not the person who only talks nicely in a neat and tidy outfit, but also who could kick, squat, jump and even bench press 120 kg if necessary!’

According to participants workplace rules were questionable, but they generally followed the existing rules. For Adler, working in accordance with other people’s rules and requests was a challenge as he said, ‘I say all right, but I try my best to convince these guys (other managers) until things settle into the shape I want’. On the other hand, Bart’s commitment to regulations was exemplary and this feature was only shared by Harold who came, as a lawyer, from a highly-disciplined background and placed the emphasis on ‘the principles of work’. For both participants, accomplishing a task was always a relief as, in Bart’s words, ‘it’s not in your head any more’. Adler’s words proved a great deal of satisfaction: ‘I have my goals of course, but the company’s goals are as essential as mine—the company wins, and I win.’

Bart, Larry, Adler and Eddy shared 15 common themes, while Harold, demonstrated a slightly different profile as a self-employed lawyer and co-owner of the firm he works for. Other four participants were employed in large companies, and demonstrated a power crafting behaviour on account of their positions. They saw their co-workers and team members as their companions and sought their approval and support in their relationships. Yet, they persistently focused on organisational goals—they always tended to supervise others in this direction and have the final word for decisions to be made.

### *Territory holders*

This group was consisted of five participants with diverse backgrounds. Having power, according to how these participants envisaged, was equal to having own independent territory at work. Nevertheless, the general tendency of participants in this group was to take well care of their independence while showing commitment to the roles and responsibilities which they only ‘deliberately and willingly chose’ to assume. Owen, for example, chose not to work in a corporate setting and became an academic. Morris was a manager in his family owned company enjoying the freedom of making his own decisions and the role of a typical entrepreneur. He was already happy to have his ‘own realm’ and looking for ways to expand it. Francis was the youngest of all participants in the entire study and had internship and part-time work experiences. However, he was inclined to build a future as an academic as he believed this was the best option for him to enjoy a self-dependent career with less intrusion of others. Among the participants of this group, only Steve and Travis were working for a company. Travis referred to having power as ‘his own system built with his own hands’. Steve also shared a similar approach as he said:

Steve: ‘Just go and sit in the chair they show you? It’s not real power. I mean some people may like it, OK, but you still have to please others and do as people say. You are replaceable. One does not take power. One creates the power. You create a power unique to yourself, and you use it. That’s what I believe.’

Francis had a similar interpretation, but this time ‘the chair’ metaphor was replaced by ‘the throne’:

Francis: ‘Take the throne, the crown as the new king? No, it’s not what I’d want. In fact, rather than accepting the given crown, it’s worth to create my own land with maybe ten men with me, but eventually I am crafting the crown myself!’

Most participants had their own ‘big pictures’ that were never to be shared with others. Steve saw this as the distribution of certain roles and tasks among other people as he said, ‘they might even not be aware what they are actually contributing to and they see a big solid picture I previously visualised appear in the end!’ Francis, also in a similar vein, said, ‘people may not be entirely aware of it, but the whole process flows as it is in my mind and leads to where I want and this is awesome.’ Travis illustrated this big picture as a well-kept and never-to-be-disclosed agenda embellished with some elements of ‘mystery’:

Travis: ‘I have an agenda, I do not share this with others, no, never. Only I know what we really are doing. (...) I am quite transparent, I explain people what I do, why I do, what my decision is about, so on. But, I give only the piece of information they should know ... My real power is embedded in this mystery.’

Meaningfulness of the role and responsibility in a ‘personal sense’ was a frequent element used in the narratives of territory holders. Owen said, ‘controlling people and resources’ might sound like a fascinating idea, but to do this, he had to be convinced that this had a target he himself heeded. On the other hand, Francis asked, ‘Why would someone climb Everest?’ and said it was both the means and the end that actually created a personal meaning for what he was doing.

Avoiding friendship and companionship in the work setting was generally common among these participants. Travis said:

Travis: ‘Guys once said things like how such a funny guy I was, what a good friend I was, etc. I said “hang on a minute, let’s clarify this: I am not your friend!” OK, we’re having fun, yes, and they probably see me more than they see their parents, partners, wives, husbands, children, but still, I’m not their friend.’

While territory holders preferred to have friendly but distant relationships with people at work, loyalty of followers was also valued. They intended to collaborate with people to whom they referred to as their ‘favourites’ and whom they chose to work closely and make strategic decisions together. Steve was an exception—he chose not to regularly collaborate with a certain group of people, but preferred to ask opinions of others when necessary. All territory holders attached great importance to their own ideas, prioritised their own goals and designated their roadmaps as being the only guide to achieve these. However, any challenge against their knowledge was also appreciated—they saw this as an opportunity ‘to test and demonstrate their power’. Travis saw this as an opportunity to examine his proficiency and to learn new things from those who challenged. To him, obeying someone was like a torture, which he could bear only in exchange for acquiring new skills and a new experience as he said, ‘once my bucket is full, I simply leave’.

Driven by their personal meanings they attached to the roles and responsibilities they chose to assume, territory holders expressed more of a combined feeling of possession and prestige rather than satisfaction. Steve referred to this feeling by calling it ‘*L’état c’est moi!*’ (I am the State!), an expression ascribed to King Louis XIV of France used for having power without limits and rivals. He said:

Steve: ‘It’s *l’état c’est moi!* Or maybe even a God-King like feeling (chuckles). I don’t like being ready at all times for giving account of what I am doing, but I don’t want any judgement, any appraisal, any sign of pampering either. I do that for myself. It’s the job, the building, whatever I construct that deserves this admiration from others.’

Francis used a very descriptive way to express this feeling. He said:

Francis: ‘School projects, for example. I always felt myself I had to be in the forefront. I constructed the whole concept *in* me. This is something in between what we

achieve all together and what *I* represent. They do as I say, they might even contribute by making final touches, changes, etc. Well done, but it's still me who owns the whole job. I represent it. This is fascinating!

Travis stated that it was indeed a big scenario entirely written and directed by himself—he set the stage and people acted on it as he said:

Travis: 'I mean, if we were in the Medieval age, I'd still find my way to establish my own order, my own realm. I might seem a bit selfish in saying this, I don't know, but I like seeing myself like this, like everything in the picture represents me. People do their own things in my realm, and it's still me!'

Territory holders all together demonstrated a heterogeneous group profile. All participants in this group substantially associated power with having a personally built and owned system. They tended to set the norms but avoid micromanagement, and decisively gave the priority to what they thought rather than listening to other opinions and ideas. However, individual cases varied in terms of how participants relationally and managerially crafted their power. Morris, in particular, demonstrated a different profile—just like other territory holders, he had his 'favourites' with whom he put his decisions and strategic plans into practice, but his relationship with employees was also built on mutual trust and expectations rather than loyalty.

### **Power, self and organisation as the social context**

Cross-case analysis results were curious. There was a clear difference in how position-based power holders crafted their power at work when compared to how this was done by the territory holders. Despite each participant in this study was selected as part of a relatively homogeneous group, each individual case revealed different nuances in approaching to crafting power at work. So what did our participants actually say? Our fourth study question

was framed to address these nuances. In this stage, we treated the interview transcripts as a bunch of stories in which our participants made ‘sense to themselves of their past experience’ (Gibbs, 2018: 76). By giving a more personal voice, we had the opportunity to gain more insight into our participants’ understandings of their roles and how each participant identified himself as a power holder in his organisation. To do this, we focused on how they used language and rhetoric in their stories with regard to job demands and their social relationships at work. Each story had its own distinctive way of looking at the phenomenon of power crafting and its own hero. Details were genuine and too many to introduce here. Bart, for example, was a ‘defender of the castle’ who believed others were not qualified enough to assume the control of the situation, therefore it was his mission to get things sorted and to be accomplished. Larry, on the other hand, was more of a determined ‘stage controller’ whereas he dedicated himself to enabling an environment where people could easily share ideas and play their parts in identifying common goals to achieve. Other participants also had their own stories illustrating many other different heroes having their own unique perspectives. But in this paper, we selected two territory holders: Steve and Travis. Both participants worked for a company despite their self-centred approaches to power and power crafting, which we found intriguing. Their individual cases shared many similar themes. However, there was also one particular theme that, we believed, made Travis’s case exceptional in order to understand his motives for accepting a structural position in a corporate setting as a territory holder: ‘Destined to it!’ So how did these participants identify themselves in their organisations? Due to page limitations, we can only present here a few excerpts and their interpretations.

### *The lonesome architect*

Steve was working for a company, in which he occupied a structural position and this position certainly had a job description. However, during his interview, Steve never made a reference to his job description, and structural position as a concept hardly took place in his

discourse. He was not interested in titles either, as he said: ‘One day, they said we’re making you a manager, you’re not a specialist anymore, I said OK. It’s only when I saw the payslip I was glad (chuckles).’

Steve’s approach to workplace was quite different when compared to approaches other participants had. He liked working alone and had no intention to let intruders in. There seemed no distinction between where he lived and where he worked as he said, ‘I see my work and the workplace as somewhere like my comfortable home where I can deal with stuff on my own.’ Yet, the company managers were glad with the way he worked. In Steve’s opinion, he was already accepted as he was. He said:

Steve: ‘Sense of belongingness? I am not looking for it. We are not a family, we are a company established for profit making purposes. (...) Take part in everything? No, never. I attend some meetings and some not, I decide upon the agenda. But if I hold a meeting, which is very rare, I *do* ask people and certainly the (marketing) manager to attend!’

Steve crafted many of his tasks himself. He hardly followed company’s procedures and had his own ways for analysing data that helped the company to shape its marketing strategies. He said:

Steve: ‘Sometimes other managers don’t listen, and this drives me mad! But I hold a lot of discussions. Their ideas might be important to them, but what they say is only data for me, and I create my idea in my own terms. I might find someone else’s idea interesting. But I know, I always have my own way of interpreting it, which is sometimes a bit problematic of course (chuckles).’

Steve’s power was based, not on the position he held, but on his work. He carefully embedded his skills and expertise in his relationships with others. He said:



Steve: ‘Expecting loyalty at work is nonsense. (...) What I am trying to achieve is a spectacular piece of work, it’s in the details. At least that’s how I see it. I need experts to answer my questions, no followers, no people to control, only experts. That’s it!’

This was the paramount excerpt in the entire interview. He was much more focused on his own thoughts, feelings and observations, which was, in Steve’s words, ‘quite unusual for a marketing excellence manager’. He was decisive as well as assertive to end up with his own unique piece of work (or even perhaps his own ‘piece of art’). He was also decisive and assertive to do this all by himself. This was, to us, the picture of a ‘lonesome architect’.

We read both Steve’s and Travis’s interview transcripts several times. Alternating between our own individual subjective interpretations and the text in our hands, it was very difficult for us to decide whether how Steve worked was really possible in a competitive business setting like his. After a series of discussions, we came to realise that the language Steve used was straightforward and very personal. He saw, for example, his introverted style at work ‘quite unusual’ for his occupation, but how did he know this? Indeed, it was rather a product of his own interpretations he made thanks to ‘many books he read’ in the past. Yet, it was his own imagination and how he illustrated himself, his power and his image. In the world he created himself, he was the only one to make decisions, suggest directions for company’s marketing strategies, and take on many other managerial duties. He did not want any followers or intrusion of others. He kept himself away from the power struggles inside the company. To him, the description of a busy working day was not about daily routines, working extra hours or pleasing customers, but making other managers to fully understand and implement his ideas. Do others always and literally listen to what he says? Neither Steve nor others can answer this question. But what we know is that this was a world he created for himself. He enjoyed it. He was even using it to make his livelihood. To enjoy the content and

limits of his own power, which he conceptualised himself, he chose the organisation that fit best to his world—a medium sized international company rather than a big corporation.

*The tenacious seeker*

Then why did Travis choose to work in a large multinational corporation? Several times during his interview, Travis articulated his disinterest in holding a well-established straightforward career path. He demonstrated a profile of a risk-taker who also had ‘a bit of luck’ on top of his skills. Below is a brief description of what happened when he was working previously as a manager in a highly reputed company in Silicon Valley, USA:

Travis: ‘My scorecards were over green! I received high performance rewards. In fact, there was this position I wanted, where I could realise my dream product, but they said “No, we need you more here in this position” and offered me a big raise. Instead, I refused and left.’

Quite explicitly and without hesitation, Travis introduced himself having a competent, skilled and successful profile in his field. It is worth to remember that this scene took place in Silicon Valley, which adds a different dimension to our discussion. Travis was, indeed, a quick learner (green scorecards) and he was also passionate and dedicated to his work (high performance rewards), but he was obviously not interested in the organisational goals at all. As we previously mentioned, he was looking for ways to fill in ‘his bucket’, and once it was full, he would be gone. In other words, organisations were like places of torture to him in terms of assigned duties, positions and responsibilities. However, organisations—and large corporations in particular—were also attractive to him as they were the invaluable sources of knowledge and experience. Then what made him understand that his bucket was full? The answer was embedded also in this short excerpt. He, like other position-based power holders, also thought that he needed a deserved position, but in his case, whether he deserved the

position was not up to the organisation to decide. He believed in his own ‘dream product’ and saw how it fit to that particular position. Based on his own judgement and without taking the organisation’s strategies and expectation into consideration, he asked for it—he was refused and he believed that ‘his bucket’ in Silicon Valley was now full: ‘If I said yes,’ he said, ‘it would begin to spill over the sides.’

The role he assumed in his previous job was that of an independent decision-maker rather than a corporate employee. His experience in getting his current job also had the same implications:

Travis: ‘First of all, I said, let’s sit together with the BPR and discuss what we can do.

If we are at the same point, then it’s OK. If not, then I’d prefer not to devote my time to something I would regret; I don’t want you to feel the same either.’

Once again, it was him who made the decision on what terms he and the company would agree (‘let’s sit’) and what his new job’s responsibilities would be (‘... and discuss what we can do’). The ultimate decision on whether this was the deserved position was up to him (‘let’s sit...’ followed by ‘if we are at the same point...’). What he looked for was, indeed, a platform disguised in the form of a formal position. He went even further to impose the ‘privilege’ of his ideas, experience and proficiency as he said he did not want to devote time to something he would regret. He did not want the company to regret either: He had the right qualities and this might attract the great interest of the company, but his plans were different and he was not interested in the company’s strategies. He was constructing a new situation that the company will be involved in, as in later stages of the interview, he said, ‘What I care is my project (...) and they know I’m the best in Europe, and they have to work with me.’

Another interesting element in his discourse was how he addressed his project:

Travis: ‘Destined to it! That’s how I feel. There is a path I have to walk, and it will be walked! I have a target and very limited time, and others will have to comply with this. I, myself, am the source of my real power.’

He interpreted the implementation of his project as a pre-existing plan, which he found himself developing. The passive form (‘the path will be walked’) implied that the project he implemented was of a magnificent, honoured and even triumphant action. He even had followers from his previous job, who believed in this project. They added an even more victorious sense to the mission as they said: ‘We believe you can make this, we can even work for you for free until you raise profit’. Travis’s discourse based on ‘a cause to fight for’ added another dimension to how he described his experience. He created a whole new situation in the company himself and the world he created began shaping into a territory, or in his own words, ‘an entity like a country in its own right’. He even introduced rituals and symbols to unite his team members:

Travis: ‘We organise our *own* events and celebrations in the office as a team. *I* actually invent them. We also have a huge leather sofa and a few pieces of furniture, some peculiar stuff unusual for an office. I know my team must be different, be unique among all other teams in this company.’

There were many more interesting details on how his territory at work shaped into an entity in its own right inside the company which ‘he worked for’. We identified two more roles that Travis associated with himself. The first was the role he assumed to represent his entity. Once he found himself in the midst of a dispute among two managers and was asked to pick, as a manager, a side:

Travis: ‘I said, I don’t know you, and I don’t know him either. I’m managing the product here and I have no intention to choose a side. I, myself, am a side. I do not act close to a party because I’m already a party on my own.’

This was clearly a straightforward declaration of his independence. He was not interested in workplace politics. His second role was that of a supreme commander in charge of all the forces in a country. Among the many stories he shared, the below was quite indicative of how he saw his team and team members:

Travis: ‘During the meeting, one of the company managers got furious and accused him (one of his team members) of doing something he (the manager) did not approve! He raised his voice and at that moment I ceased the meeting and told that manager to report me if there was some kind of a problem. He might be a manager, but this does not grant him to give my team’s member a dressing-down for whatever the reason might be. Then I said to the manager that the meeting was over. That is my man, only *I* am to deal with him if I see something wrong.’

This final example, in particular, showed a great contrast to Larry’s big family illustration for the company he worked for, which we shared in the previous section. In sum, the territory Travis created was a setting where he enjoyed, as Steve did, the contents and limits of his power—this time, in the shape of a team. The team itself was meticulously and deliberately formed to gain a unique status with its own private agenda inside the organisation. The whole picture was created by and only known to Travis.

## **Discussion**

We did not seek to develop a theory in this paper. Our intention was to introduce a phenomenon for power crafting at work. Every job comes with power, the content and limits

of which is determined formally by the organisation. However, the meaning of power, as Guzzini (2005) suggested, is not the same to everyone—and our findings in this study suggest the same. So, what answer did we find to the question we asked at the very beginning of this study: ‘What does power mean *to* (and not *for*) an individual?’ Perhaps innumerable answers can be given to this question, and we know that it depends on the other study questions which we took into consideration: ‘How does power become to mean what it means, socially and operationally?’ Placing our findings in a wider context is not easy. As is common with any qualitative research, our findings can be associated with or linked to many theories and literatures. Guided by the memos and reflection notes recorded in our research diaries we kept since the beginning of this study, we introduce a brief discussion on key elements of the power crafting phenomenon and how it could apply to the general framework of the proactive work behaviour theories.

#### *Individual meaning of power*

Power is construed as either a responsibility or an opportunity and this depends on the circumstances in which the power holder is involved (De Wit et al., 2017). On the one hand, in both Larry’s and Bart’s cases, power was obviously construed as a responsibility to take control and to make sure that shared goals were achieved. On the other hand, for Travis, this was more in the form of an opportunity. As a builder of his own ‘entrepreneurial venture’ in a large corporation, he took a courageous, ‘but calculated’, risk (Kets de Vries & Cheak, 2016: 320-322). We can not say that his freedom was granted for free—he *did* have a responsibility towards shareholders, managers and those who worked with him. However, this responsibility was of his choice—it did not depend on a job description and the organisation’s expectations, but on how well he managed the process that he, himself, designed and achieved the goal he personally set.

Versailles was the setting for King Louis XIV to display his power (Burke, 2011: 8-10) as well as his image. On the face of it, one may think such a ‘representation’ in the business setting would seem irrelevant and even awkward. However, our territory holder participants’ illustrations had many common elements with the concept of a powerful king with a delightfully adorned stronghold. Representations were everywhere in their discourses; yet, they almost never pronounced the word ‘leader’ during their interviews. To Steve, for example, it was the work he produced ‘all by himself’. Morris believed his business was his reflection, while Francis thought the same for his school projects. Travis’s case was no exception—it had such common elements as a court (circle of favourites), self-distinction (unsocial disposition) and performance (rituals). There is no doubt that his team members had their financial and many other expectations, but in the end, being there was their choice—a choice associated with a ‘magnificent’ and potentially ‘victorious’ cause. This representation was not a fancy display of power and the only lavishness was, perhaps, the leather sofa in the common room. However Travis’s messages were all over the organisation—his team was ‘different’. This independence would certainly cause occasional power conflicts with other managers (Lund, 2019), and they were, indeed, experienced by Steve and Travis themselves.

#### *Power and social relations at work*

A dyadic interaction is a sociologically significant relationship (e.g. husband and wife, teacher and student, manager and employee, etc.) carried out by two different roles aiming to achieve a common objective. On that premise, when an individual’s decisions and efforts depend on the decisions of a more powerful individual, the individual becomes overeager to act more in accordance with the powerful individual (Dulebohn et al., 2012). There is, indeed, salient evidence in Travis’s discourse acknowledging himself ‘the more powerful in his dyadic interactions’—e.g. selecting members of his team, or defending his team members against other managers in the company. As a builder (Kets de Vries & Cheak, 2016: 320-

322), he was at the centre, almost tended to ignore authority and needed a few well-trusted individuals with different talents and skills. Team members all together enjoyed the privilege of having access to valuable organisational resources to which other teams could hardly have. But still, Travis was the one who determined all the conditions for enjoying this privilege. This is an exceptionally conventional practice. Centuries ago in *Leviathan*, Hobbes (1651/1998: 83-84) wrote, those who ‘live without a common power to keep them all in awe’ will eventually end up fighting because everyone is equal to have access to everything.

Probably because Travis addressed not the entire organisation, but a smaller number of individuals, he strictly expected ‘belief with willingness’ from his team members. Besides, intellectual challenge was highly embraced, whereas Travis saw this as an opportunity to test his mastery and knowledge, thus, the limits of his power. This finding looks very similar to Hobbes’s (1651/1998) idea that, in addition to wielding and maintaining power, the power holder also seeks to build and maintain the reputation of his power. Rituals were also essential to bring the entire team together and create a sense of uniqueness as part of a wider organisation. Even though Travis did not directly demonstrate willingness to build friendship ties with his team members, he used rituals to present an alternative notion of reachability and sociability. As Collins (2004: 23) suggested, ‘rituals take place in a condition of situational co-presence which leads to mutual focus of attention’.

#### *Power and the organisational context*

Indifference towards formal authority—thus, the ‘given’ power—was a common attitude among participants. Yet, all participants were content with their jobs and positions in their organisations. Individuals seek ways ‘to make sense’ of their contexts in pursuing managerial activities (Sveningsson and Alvesson, 2003). This may arguably indicate a ‘value congruence’ or a match between our participants’ values and values of their respective organisations (Boon & Biron, 2016). Person-organisation (PO) fit is ‘the compatibility



between people and organisations that occurs when at least one entity provides what the other needs, or they share similar fundamental characteristics, or both' (Kristof, 1996: 4–5). Travis's 'bucket' metaphor suggests an interesting insight into his PO fit experiences. In Silicon Valley, he was a star employee. He performed his tasks with the utmost dedication and enthusiasm—he and the organisation were both happy. However, when his demand for the position where he could realise his dream product was declined, the PO fit from 'his point of view' came to an end. He refused the 'better opportunity' that the company offered and left. Travis sought for a PO fit that worked for both himself and the organisation. He wanted to secure, not the job itself (and therefore the 'given' power along with it), but the PO fit for both sides from the very beginning. He did not want to waste time, neither he wanted the organisation to feel the same. In Steve's case, the PO fit occurred from a different perspective. Steve's discourse suggested an unresponsive attitude towards the goals and expectations of the company he worked for, but he was sure that this company was the right place for him to have a working life of his own. We can not suggest that this was a one way PO fit as he had been working for the same company for four years and obviously his outputs and ideas were warmly welcomed despite his unsocial disposition. From Larry's point of view, the PO fit was more about what the company offered, how he proved himself to the company management in a way that he was most suitable for his position and how the social environment enhanced his efforts in maintaining his responsibilities at work. We believe that the PO fit theory could provide further insight into how individuals choose the organisation that might fit best for them to craft their power at work (Cable & Judge, 1997).

#### *Power crafting as a proactive work behaviour*

To Travis, applying for a job in a large corporation was equal to negotiating for a structural position to have access to resources and implement *his own* idea. This negotiation took place at the very beginning and he almost entirely relied on his own sources of power—the

originality of his idea, his level of proficiency, his recent experience, and of course his idiosyncrasies. Managers had the formal authority, but he had a stronger hand at the table, and this probably caused a knowledge asymmetry. Foss (2009: 82) explains this as the diminishing of importance of the authority of the hierarchical position—managers lack knowledge about the tasks held by knowledge workers, and knowledge workers, in turn, gain bargaining power. Travis, indeed, was using this advantage to craft his own power at the very beginning of the journey he would undertake in this company. This proactive behaviour points to the effect of idiosyncrasies and personal resources in shaping work arrangements individuals negotiate with their employers—in other words idiosyncratic deals, or briefly I-deals (Rofcanin et al., 2017; Rousseau, 2005).

A proactive work behaviour is a series of autonomous set of actions, where the individual recognises a potential problem or opportunity in the work setting, and self-initiates change for a better work situation in the future (Vough et al., 2017)—job crafting (Wrzesniewski & Dutton, 2001) and I-deals (Rousseau, 2005) are among the examples whereas the former was also key to our preliminary framework in this study. Power crafting behaviour, we suggest for future studies, could also be developed as a behavioural model and validated as an example of a proactive work behaviour (e.g. Parker et al., 2010). The phenomenon already demonstrates a series of actions conducted autonomously. The individual recognises a potential problem and takes responsibility of the control or an opportunity to construct a personal territory. Indeed, our participants were obviously the initiators of their own power crafting processes. ‘Taking control and aiming for change’ (Vough et al., 2017) is a major underlying reason for individuals to show proactive behaviours, which also applies to the elements we have identified for the power crafting phenomenon. Finally, the power crafting phenomenon in our study also required individuals to get ‘attuned to the broader social contexts’ (Vough et al., 2017). Since power has its

meaning always in the social context and depends on how social relations are constructed (Schmid Mast, 2010), power crafting behaviour can provide a better understanding of why and how individuals demonstrate proactive work behaviours at work from a different perspective.

### **Final remarks**

‘What power is’ was not our concern in this study. Like so, we did not intend to place a negative emphasis on having power at work. We did not seek to assign a meaning to power as something remarkable for the sake of good management either. We directed our attention to individuals themselves and sought to understand what power was meant *to* them. We were engaged in a double hermeneutic (Smith et al., 2012: 3), while trying, in each case, to make sense of ‘what the participant tried to make sense’ of his concerns and experiences in a given context. Every case was a unique journey where we explored many different experiences and the cross-case analysis we conducted was like an expedition to undiscovered worlds. Experience is subjective and complex—it is ‘uniquely embodied, situated and perspectival’, but also ‘worldly and relational’ (Smith et al., 2012: 29). Indeed, personal choices of our participants were far more critical than we expected. Patterns we identified suggested that there was a phenomenon of power crafting and our participants *did* craft their own power at work.

We believe that IPA can be used more often in management and organisational studies. In our case, studies with different groups in terms of age, gender, ethnicity, sexual orientation, cultural background as well as across countries and occupations can provide further evidence to better identify the power crafting phenomenon. Understanding power at work from the individuals’ subjective points of view will indeed help management and organisational studies to sail towards new horizons. After all, the individual at work is not only an agent to whom authority is delegated, nor is a mere object of the system of what we

call the organisation. Individuals have their own understandings, defence mechanisms and internal strategies. Therefore, we bring this paper to a close with a question that takes, this time, the subjective perspective of the *other* party into consideration: What does being a follower mean, not *for*, but *to* an individual at work?

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**Table 1.** Participants' information

Pseudonym	Age	Background and illustrative quote
John	34	Independent sales agent; business graduate: <i>'I am not a follower type, I do things on my own, and I do my own business'</i>
Harold	34	Lawyer and co-owner of a law firm; MBA: <i>'Corporate life is OK; but having a position, a status in your own company is, of course, much better'</i>
Bart	30	Assistant manager in an international financial institution; business graduate: <i>'I am happy to have a stable job in a large corporation where I can show myself'</i>
Larry	36	Project manager in an international company; engineer; MBA: <i>'This company is awesome; it offers great things that other companies don't, and I feel valued here'</i>
Adler	35	Technical sales manager; engineer; MBA: <i>'Technical knowledge and sales skills; that's a definition of me and this company is the right place for me'</i>
Eddy	34	Financial modelling manager in an international financial services company; business and economics graduate: <i>'My company offered me a tailor-made job that responds to my needs and expectations and I am very happy'</i>
Morris	34	Manager in a family-owned company; business graduate: <i>'My company, my brand'</i>
Steve	33	Marketing excellence manager in a medium sized international company; business graduate: <i>'What I know, what I like; I do things for myself, happy to be here'</i>
Travis	31	Product manager in a marketing analytics company; business graduate: <i>'They can't find someone better than I am and they know this very well'</i>
Owen	33	Teaching fellow in university; business graduate; Ph.D.: <i>'I can never associate myself with hierarchy, bureaucracy, formalities; I find real power in knowledge'</i>
Francis	24	Temporary/part-time jobs and postgraduate student; recent business graduate: <i>'I think I am really looking forward to an academic career'</i>

**Table 2.** Emergent themes based on participants' experiences

	John	Harold	Bart	Larry	Adler	Eddy	Morris	Steve	Travis	Owen	Francis	SUM
<b>Idiosyncrasies</b>												
Proficiency as source of authority	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	11
Task-orientation		●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●		●	9
Own reality	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	11
Uneasiness with imposed hierarchy	●	●		●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	10
<b>Drives</b>												
Personal meaning of role and responsibility		●		●		●	●	●	●	●	●	8
'Destined to it!'									●			1
Response to natural selection	●		●	●	●	●			●	●		7
Control as assumed duty	●	●	●	●	●	●						6
<b>Consequences</b>												
Satisfaction	●	●	●	●	●	●	●			●		8
'L'état c'est moi!'							●	●	●	●	●	5
<b>Cognitive power crafting (core phenomenon)</b>												
Own territory							●	●	●	●	●	5
Undisclosed agenda					●		●	●	●	●	●	6
Deserved position		●	●	●	●	●			●			6
Secured status		●		●		●						3
Self-image	●	●			●							3
<b>Relational (social) power crafting</b>												
Expertise as privilege								●	●			2
Circle of favourites							●		●	●	●	4
Group of experts								●				1
Workplace rituals		●		●	●	●			●	●	●	7
Absolute loyalty		●				●			●	●	●	5
Unsociable disposition at work								●	●	●	●	4
Circle of companions	●	●	●	●	●	●						6
Mutual trust and expectations	●		●	●	●	●	●					6
<b>Managerial (operational) power crafting</b>												
'I'll have the final say!'	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	11
Avoiding micromanagement	●						●	●	●	●	●	6
Lack of enthusiasm for others' ideas							●	●	●	●	●	5
Organisation's expectations		●	●	●	●	●	●					6
Priority given to goal	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●			9
Self-presentation	●	●	●	●	●	●		●	●			8
Intellectual challenge embraced		●			●			●	●	●	●	6
Vigilant supervision		●	●	●	●	●						5
"Every opinion matters!"	●		●	●	●	●	●					6
<b>SUM</b>	14	19	15	19	20	20	17	17	22	17	16	196

**Table 3.** Jaccard similarity coefficients

	John	Harold	Bart	Larry	Adler	Eddy	Morris	Steve	Travis	Owen	Francis
John	1										
Harold	0.43	1									
Bart	0.61	0.55	1								
Larry	0.57	0.73	0.79	1							
Adler	0.62	0.70	0.75	0.77	1						
Eddy	0.55	0.77	0.75	0.95	0.74	1					
Morris	0.41	0.33	0.39	0.44	0.42	0.42	1				
Steve	0.29	0.33	0.23	0.29	0.32	0.28	0.55	1			
Travis	0.29	0.41	0.28	0.37	0.40	0.40	0.50	0.70	1		
Owen	0.29	0.33	0.19	0.29	0.32	0.32	0.55	0.55	0.70	1	
Francis	0.20	0.35	0.15	0.25	0.29	0.29	0.57	0.65	0.73	0.83	1