

The Concept of Power in the Analysis of Organisations with Social and Political Goals

by

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Abstract

I propose a theoretical framework for examining the extent to which organisations with social and political goals (OSPs) empower (or disempower) participants as effective political citizens. Theories of power – including behaviouralism, Structuration and Foucauldian notions – are drawn on to illuminate relevant aspects of organisational life. Together they account for the role of individuals, rules and processes, procedure and administration, culture and practice, techniques of organisation and communication. The intention is to shed light on how groups or individuals are empowered or otherwise and provides a basis, where necessary, for challenging existing structures and practices in the name of greater empowerment.

Keywords: power, political organisation, social movements, empowerment, participation.

Organisation, as Robert Michels ([1915] 1962) once said, is absolutely necessary to democracy because it provides the voiceless with a voice, it is ‘the weapon of the weak in their struggle with the strong’ and ‘an absolutely essential condition for the political struggle of the masses’. (Michels (1915] 1962, 61). However, as Michels also observed, the tragic (and perhaps ironic) logic of democratic, emancipatory organisation means that as it grows and becomes more successful, it professionalises and bureaucratises and thus becomes dislocated and distant from those for whom the organisation had been intended (in this case, the working class). Far from being emancipatory and radical, then, political organisation is also ‘the source from which the conservative currents flow over the plain of democracy’ (Michels (1915] 1962, 61-62), thus securing the dominance of an elite concerned with the perpetuation of their own position.

Michels’ observation that power and organisation are intertwined and in tension with one another has had a lasting resonance in political analysis, particularly the analysis of political parties (see for example: McKenzie 1955; Duverger 1959; Sartori 1976, 71; Minkin 1978, 4-5; Panebianco 1988; Shaw 1988; Scarrow 1996). Indeed, as Clegg, Courpasson and Phillips (2006) argue, ‘organisation *requires* power and, while not all power requires organisation, most does. Power is to organisation as oxygen is to breathing.’ (Clegg, Courpasson and Phillips 2006, 3 – my emphasis). In other words, organisation is not possible without power. The real strength of Michels’ original insight, however, lies in his recognition that the relationship between organisational power and democracy is often tense and contradictory. Organisation is *both* a means of empowerment or emancipation *and* a vehicle for domination. However, for Michels it is an ‘iron law’ that in the tension between organisation and democracy, the latter is always the loser. This pessimistic vision, therefore, represents a somewhat one-dimensional understanding of power in organisation, which moves in one direction with one possible outcome.

More contemporary scholarship on power, however, recognises power as multi-faceted, coming from a number of different sources and as simultaneously including elements of domination and empowerment (Haugaard 2003; 2012). In particular, contemporary scholarship on power in organisation recognises power in such contexts as more complex and varied than a straightforwardly hierarchical relationship between elites and a ‘mass’ (Clegg 1989; Clegg, Courpasson and Phillips 2006; Rye 2014a). There may be a tension within organisations between broadly ‘democratic’ tendencies and ‘oligarchic’ ones, but the

direction of travel is neither inevitable nor inexorable. These tensions, I would argue, are ongoing, shifting back and forth between the two. Furthermore, ‘oligarchy’ is perhaps just one way in which participants in democratic organisations may become disempowered politically and it may be counter-balanced by other areas in which they are more clearly empowered as effective political participants. Moreover, it follows that these tendencies may exist simultaneously. One’s empowerment as an effective political actor may be an effect of restriction or of apparent *disempowerment* in other areas (for example, to be a successful candidate one has to adhere to certain written and unwritten rules both internal to the party and to the behaviour expected by social norms).

In order to illuminate how power operates in organisations with social and political goals and how it invests in or bears down upon participants, then, it is necessary to undertake three tasks:

- i) Firstly, the identification of these ‘other areas’ in which power might be understood to be operating. In other words what are the relevant elements of organisation in which we might seek to examine and illuminate the operation and exercise of power?
- ii) Secondly, what broadly is the definition of power that we should be working with and what, more specifically, is meant by ‘empowerment’?
- iii) Thirdly, to identify how power might be understood to work in each of the elements of organisation both positively, as productive or supportive of effective political agency, and negatively, as suppressive of or detrimental to it.

The Elements of Organisation

Organisations are distinguished by their orientation towards goals. Scott (1987) distinguishes organisations from other collectivities by emphasising their high goal specificity (compared to, say, a family). In the case of organisations with social and political goals (OSPs) this seems especially significant, given their orientation towards specific political or social ends. However, Pfeffer (1997) points out that what distinguishes organisations from other collectivities in terms of goals is that they are more likely to be oriented towards the survival and perpetuation of the organisation itself over and above any specific political aim they may have. This restates the kind of tension that Michels first wrote about a century ago. Scott (1987) also highlights relatively high formalisation as a feature of organisation, but he

compares this against more ‘collectivist’ social movements, which I would argue must be included as organisations, even if not of a strictly formal, hierarchical kind. *Modes* of organisation have changed over the years and many today, including businesses as much as OSPs, may today be organised in less hierarchical ways, with flatter management structures and greater levels of collective decision-making¹. Furthermore, Scott fails to recognise the more ‘informal’ aspects of organisation (a weakness corrected in 2007 by Scott and Davis in a development of Scott’s original work) which might encompass culture, norms, values and the social networks to which people belong. Nonetheless, as Pfeffer (1997) points out, a feature of the relative formality of organisations – presumably irrespective of the actual form the structure takes in terms of hierarchy – is ‘more clearly defined, demarcated, and defended boundaries’ (Pfeffer 1997, 9). Becoming part of an organisation – ‘joining’ it – is something that needs to be granted *by* that organisation, according to certain conditions and ‘frequently with some sort of formal designation’ (Pfeffer 1997, 9). Thus, boundary maintenance and demarcation become important, significant organisational functions.

Scott and Davis (2007) add two other useful elements, which may be forgotten if one gets fixated with the more formal aspects of organisational life. Firstly, what they call ‘congeries of interdependent flows and activities’ (Scott and Davis 2007,32) that is the cultural-cognitive elements, the ‘ideas – conceptions, models, schemas, and scripts’ which organisations continuously adopt (Ibid.,31), thus emphasising more the kinds of techniques and practices that organisations employ in the pursuit of goals. Secondly, ‘work and technology’, that is the tasks that support the achievement of organisational goals and the technology it has available to do so. This emphasises the importance of strategies, techniques and approaches employed by organisations with social and political goals (for example through marketing and public relations techniques), which are not necessarily a formal part of organisational structures, constitutions and the like, but are crucial to its day-to-day operation and to the successful and efficient pursuit of its goals. Of course, another key element of any organisation has to be the people in it (Scott and Davis 2007). Their competing ideas and priorities will often be a source of tension, but the common concern of participants to support the perpetuation of the organisation and the ongoing shifting coalitions of participants that

¹ See for example Tim Kastelle ‘Hierarchy Is Overrated’ on the *Harvard Business Review Blog Network* November 20 2013 (blogs.hbr.org – accessed 29 September 2014).

cooperate as well as compete, developing goals by negotiation (Scott 1987), can be an important source of dynamism and positive power.

Partly because of the people in it, organisations are, finally, strongly influenced by environmental factors, including other organisations. In a more ‘informal’ sense, people move in and out of organisations all the time and bring different cultures and practices with them as they do. Techniques and practices are thus employed and adopted from elsewhere. More formally, according to Pfeffer, is that organisations (or relatively formal ones at least) are distinguished because they often (although not invariably) have some formal relationship with the state or state agencies which recognise their existence as distinct social entities with ‘certain legal and social obligations’ (Pfeffer 1997, 9). Registered charities or officially recognised lobby groups (including, for example, the Muslim Council of Britain) may be included in this.

So, to summarise, organisations are distinguished *as* such because they are founded in order to pursue goals (organisational perpetuation is an important subsidiary goal, but one which may, if not kept in check, become the *de facto* primary one) and are subject to formalisation to differing degrees (for example, through the routinisation of administrative tasks, the development of a functional hierarchy and organisational ‘career’ structure), and they include more or less formally demarcated boundaries (which may refer to membership, but also the ideas, ideologies, practices that are acceptable and admissible). They are also, however, locations in which informal culture and practices play a key role in governing the conduct of participants and provide a basis for common values and mutual comprehension (which moreover, can also help mark out more ‘informal’ boundaries of language and practice) and in which techniques, tasks and technologies are employed for the purposes of pursuing its goals. People are, of course, central to organisation. It is they that participate in organisations, are subject to them, are invested in by them and are their agents in the world. Finally, there is the matter of the socio-political environment and the role of external agencies. These are clearly important influences upon the development and shape of organisations and need to be considered in any complete account of them. However, for the purposes of this analysis, I am only interested in such factors insofar as they effect internal power relations and therefore do not treat them as an element of organisation as such. I would add to this list one more thing implicit in the discussion so far, but that has not yet been directly mentioned: the rules (formal or informal, but especially the former) by which participation in decision-making,

selection or election of officers and representatives and so on are governed. In any organisation with social and political goals that claims to be democratic or membership based, there will usually be at least formal provision for participation of some kind and this therefore needs to be accounted for. Along with the structure and operation of the organisation itself, all these elements are necessary to a comprehensive account of power.

To summarise, organisations can be defined as (networks of) competing and cooperating individuals governed by formal and informal rules, and cultural norms and practices. They have substantively rational goals which are supported by administration and hierarchy, and in pursuit of which they employ specific strategies, techniques and technologies. Each of these five elements of organisation – individuals, rules, norms and practices, administration and hierarchy, and strategies, techniques and technologies – has an important role to play in the empowerment or otherwise of its participants, and each is illuminated by a different mode of power, which I shall discuss below.

Power

In broad terms, my research concerns the capacity of human beings to be effective citizens and political actors. Its concern is with the capacity of human beings to pursue and realise human goals, which in this context refers to what might broadly be called social and political goals. At the core of this is the idea of power. However, as Lukes (2005) reminds us, power is a ‘contested concept’ over which there is much debate and disagreement amongst scholars. It is a term that at different times and in different places is and has been used to mean quite different things in terms of its location, level of operation and other elements. Engaging in these debates is essential because our understanding of how power is defined, its location, how it is exercised and how it bears upon human activity is central to formulating an understanding of how human beings articulate, formulate and pursue social and political goals.

In this ongoing debate, some define power relatively narrowly as, for example, the capacity of an individual agent to secure preferences over those of another (Dahl 1957), or a structure of relations beyond the control of individuals (Poulantzas 1978), that is, in classic structure versus agency terms. However, in recent years the work of Bourdieu (1977) and Giddens (1984) has become more influential in thinking about power, bringing with it a greater appreciation of the interaction between structure and agency in contemporary scholarship. As

a result, other scholars have defined power more broadly, encompassing various levels of analysis (Clegg 1989; Haugaard 2003, 2012), an approach with which I am broadly in sympathy. Seeing power in exclusively individual terms or as a purely collective or structural property fails to capture the depth and scope of power's operation and exercise. Some individuals may wield a kind of power over other individuals in that they can get them to do (or prevent them from doing) something, but the capacity (or opportunity) they have to do so is not an entirely individual matter. It is in part given to them by organisations, or built through social processes such as parenting, education, legal rights or cultural practices. In short, how the capacities of agents are produced, reproduced and reinforced by social, political and economic conditions (as well as by apparently 'natural' ones) is essential to a complete analysis of power.

A further dimension to debates about power centres on the extent to which power is seen as coercive or positively enabling and what the relationship between the two is. In particular, this debate is of central importance to the question of empowerment. Some analysts of power, including Lukes (2005), treat power as a phenomenon of conflict, coercion and 'power over'. More recently, Haugaard (2003; 2012), however, has drawn in particular on the work of Hannah Arendt (1970) and Talcott Parsons (1963) to argue that 'power to', a productive force which, invests agents with capacities to act, is at least as important. Power is seen more as a social attribute, concerned with how meaningful action and effective agents are produced and made possible by the structures and arrangements of the social world in which we are situated. Emerging out of Arendt's definition is a further sense of power as 'power with', proposed by Amy Allen (1998; 1999). This kind of power, she explains, refers to 'a collective ability that results from the receptivity and reciprocity that characterise the relations among individual members of the collectivity' (Allen, 1999, 126). In other words, 'power with' can be seen as 'the ability of a collectivity to act together for the attainment of an agreed-upon end or series of ends' (Allen 1999, 127). An important expression of this in organisations with social and political goals is in the solidarity specifically directed towards 'challenging, subverting, and, ultimately, overturning a system of domination' (Allen 1999, 127). In this sense, 'power with' acts as a means by which groups of agents can combine to challenge existing relations and structures of 'power over'. Following in this vein, I argue that a complete understanding of power in organisational contexts encapsulates all three of these perspectives: different modes of power can be understood as working in organisations which

may constrain and direct in different ways, as well as investing in and empowering agents and collectivities, often at the same time.

I argue, in addition, that power must be understood as simultaneously an agentic, a structural and an organisational phenomenon. To that end, a variety of perspectives that account for individuals, organisations and structures can be used to illuminate the operation of power in organisational settings. The theories of power upon which I draw in the development of this framework are, consequently, based on quite different understandings of subjects and actors, whether as conscious agents, bounded agents or subjects of organisational or structural power and this clearly creates problems for epistemological consistency. However, I do not seek to achieve this. I do not treat power as a concept of which there can be only one definition, but instead regard it as a heuristic tool through which the formulation, articulation and realisation of human goals can be examined. My approach is not committed to any one specific theoretical or ideological perspective and I make use of a variety of them according to their usefulness for examining the elements of organisation I have elaborated above.

This refusal to commit to a particular perspective could, of course, be understood as constituting a theoretical point-of-view in itself. Indeed, I should make clear that I do not make a claim to theoretical neutrality. What my approach requires, rather, is real ontological flexibility (even ambivalence) which allows for the role that human actors play in producing and reproducing structures, and in which structures are embedded in and emerge from human action as well as being subject to challenge through reflection (to which I add the recognition of the importance of organisation and micro-level technologies and relations). This owes something to the room Giddens (1984) and Bourdieu (1977) make for agents *and* structure in their respective epistemologies. In this sense, their theories have the potential to act as a kind of pivot around which the others may revolve. Shil (2000) argues that precisely this kind of approach can provide a foundation for an epistemological eclecticism. From this point-of-view, just as human action is unintelligible without some sense of the structural relations which give it meaning, so 'structure' is meaningless without some sense of how the actions of human beings themselves contribute to its production and reproduction.

Of course, my approach is by no means the first to take such a multi-faceted approach to the question of power. Steven Lukes was perhaps the first to do this with his three-dimensional approach, which accounted for the ways in which conflict is avoided or suppressed by the powerful (Lukes 1974). However, as well as some serious problems in his original theory's

reliance on notions like ‘real interests’ and ‘false consciousness’ (which he to some extent acknowledges – see Lukes 2005, 148-151), a major lacuna is an account of how the interests or preferences of individuals are formulated in a *positive* sense. That is, Lukes places a strong emphasis on ‘power over’, setting out how insidious forms of power prevent others from understanding what their ‘real’ or inherent interests are, but largely ignores ‘power to’². Digeser (1992) tries to overcome this problem by adding a fourth dimension to Lukes’ approach. Using Michel Foucault’s account of power, he tries to account for the way in which power forges subjects, imbues and creates social practices and forms of discourse that sustain politics. Thus, power *produces* interests and engenders desires into which individuals are forged (Digeser 1992, 989). However, this does not provide sufficient challenge to the overall difficulty of the concept of interests in general and the lack of *power to* in Lukes’ scheme. It is a problem that I would argue arises from the desire to ensure a consistency which ends up with theorists squeezing differing theoretical perspectives into one ontological and epistemological straitjacket. Thus, Lukes and Digeser neglect the real strength of alternatives to behavioural accounts of power, which is ironic since this is what they sought to provide in the first place. This is not a problem that can be ignored, but it is one that can be overcome by approaching power in a more ontologically open and epistemologically flexible way.

An Outline of Power

My approach, in order to be meaningful as an undertaking, nonetheless requires a broad sketch of the *parameters* of power which, rather than a precise ‘definition’, serves as a kind of outline that enables the consideration of individual, organisational, structural and relational levels of analysis. I have previously elaborated four elements – goals, agents, effects and the co-dependency of power to and power over (Rye 2014b, 43-4) – which I think achieve this. Firstly, power is concerned broadly with human goals ‘both in terms of how they are shaped and how they are obtained’ (Rye 2014b, 44). Thus it is a capacity that agents employ in the pursuit of goals, but can also be understood as the means by which those goals are constituted and formulated. Secondly, it is concerned with agents but not in crude methodologically individualistic terms. As well as in the actions and interactions of individuals, it also

²In his 2005 revision this becomes limited to ‘the power to mislead’ which includes censorship, disinformation or ‘the various ... ways there are of infantilising judgement’ or promoting ‘failures of rationality and illusory thinking’ (Lukes 2005, 149), but this is nonetheless still based on a negative account of power as a repressive, restraining force.

encompasses how they are constituted and shaped as agents by forces external to them. In other words, agents do exist and act in the world, but are constructed and produced. Power therefore, is not as Dennis Wrong suggests ‘a sub-category of agency’ (Wrong 2002, xxii), but it is intimately imbricated in and with agency, as much about shaping the conditions of its possible exercise as with its execution by human beings. Thirdly, it is concerned with producing *effects*, which may refer to the achievement by individuals or collectives of specified, intended goals or to the production and shaping of valuable agents. Fourthly, power is understood in terms of a co-dependent relationship between ‘power over’ and ‘power to’. In other words, to exercise ‘power over’ anyone or anything, agents need appropriate ‘power to’ and in order to have ‘power to’ do something, one needs ‘power over’ people or resources in order to be able to execute it. It is not that one always or necessarily precedes the other but that one cannot exist without the other. Thus although these two key dimensions of power are separated analytically, in its actual operation the two are intertwined (Pansardi 2012).

Empowerment

The key element that this paper adds to my existing framework of power is the dimension of empowerment. ‘Empowerment’ is a term that is much used but less often defined. However, it is crucial to the question of how power operates and how it relates to and with agents and their environments. It is therefore an essential part of the idea of power and needs particular clarification. Several authors have attempted directly to elaborate on the notion of empowerment in a political context. Barry Barnes (1988) argues that an important kind of empowerment comes from ‘downward delegation’ in which ‘an existing power-holder delegates some of his capacity for action to a subordinate’ (Barnes 1988, 71). When an agent is empowered, she is therefore given ‘discretion in the direction of a body of routine activity’ that is transferred to her from the original power-holder. In the context of the state, this might include, for example, an army unit, a budget, or a government department (Barnes 1988, 72). Although this clearly gives someone the capacity to do something that they might otherwise not have been able to do, this transfer is (in intention at least) a temporary one and conditional in that the point is to ‘further the objectives of the power-holder’ (Barnes 1988, 72). Thus, in an important way the power-holder continues to exert control, despite handing discretion to the subordinate. Empowerment of this kind is therefore beneficial to those that already have power since it ‘relieves the power-holder of much of the burden of control’

(Barnes 1988, 72) although, crucially, the power-holder becomes more dependent on the latter as a result of this transfer.

Wartenberg (1990) outlines a more clearly permanent kind of transfer of power from a power-holder to a subordinate. He borrows the term 'Transformative Power' from feminist theory which 'seeks to bring about its own obsolescence by means of the empowerment of the subordinate agent' (Wartenberg 1990, 184). Thus the point here is to render the power that one individual has over another redundant by investing the subordinate with appropriate capacities and skills. A common example of this is a (healthy) relationship between a mother and her child, in which the former seeks to invest the latter with the capacities to fend for himself and flourish in the world. For Wartenberg this remains a kind of 'power over' but one which acts as a 'constitutive force in human social relations' (Wartenberg 1990, 184). Key to this relationship is trust. Of course, a small child may have little option but to trust his mother, but Wartenberg suggests the (potentially) transformative nature of the relationship between a teacher and disciple (Wartenberg 1990, 207) may be an example where the relationship between power-holder and subordinate is more likely to be voluntary, but which nonetheless requires an openness and trust on the part of the latter. This is essential if she is to be open to the possibility of transformation by the power-holder (Wartenberg 1990, 211).

The common thread that runs between these two perspectives on empowerment is the assumption a) that in order to be invested with 'power-to' individuals must first be subject to 'power-over' which means that the process of 'empowerment' is centred on a transfer between one dominant individual and another subordinate one and b), that the relationship is therefore effectively zero-sum: i.e. if a power-holder transfers that power (temporarily or permanently) to another, the original power-holder has less power than she had before. Even when that transfer is temporary, it involves the power-holder losing discretion and makes her dependent on others. These are somewhat individually-centred approaches and whilst they reveal how *power-over* can have 'positive' empowering effects in such contexts, what they miss is the extent to which power (especially its empowering aspect) is, firstly, a collective phenomenon and, secondly, is not necessarily zero-sum. In other words, 'new' power can be generated through group relations and activities and the empowering of some does not automatically equal the disempowerment of others. Hannah Arendt's relatively unusual (but extremely useful) understanding of power as both collective and positive is relevant here. Power, in Arendt's estimation, is a group attribute that sustains positions of authority /

command. Those we think of as power-holders, therefore, are themselves empowered to act in the name of a certain number of people. Indeed, without a people or a group to sustain it ‘there is no power’ she argues, and ‘the moment the group from which the power originated to begin with disappears’ the power held by leaders also vanishes (Arendt 1970, 44). The alternative, in which people are subjected unwillingly to domination by another is not power at all, but force and a form of violence. Whilst I take issue with the argument that force and violence are not aspects of power, Arendt releases the analysis of power from a rather dyadic and individually focused approach. Instead, as Terence Ball (1992) puts it, ‘political power is a potentiality or capacity for acting that arises when people come together.’ That is, ‘groups or communities acting in concert, have the capacity ... to empower their members and/or leaders’ and this mutual empowerment is the key medium for political action (Ball 1992, 22). This perspective has been enhanced and developed by Amy Allen (1998; 1999) who introduces to the debate the notion of ‘power with’ as a distinct form of power. The importance of this idea is that it recognises solidarity as a means by which social groups and collectivities may be empowered to achieve goals, or to disrupt and even overturn existing systems of domination by acting together.

Excellent use of the idea of mutual empowerment through acting in concert has been made by Shari McDaid (2010). Although she applies it to the field of mental health, McDaid’s general elaboration of an Arendtian form of empowerment is very relevant to political engagement too. She points out that common uses of the term ‘empowerment’ describe the strengthening of individual capacities and competencies, or involvement in (organisational) governance (McDaid 2010, 210) and argues that this ignores the extent to which individual development takes place in a socio-political context. Attention is therefore deflected from the structural causes of inequality, thus supporting existing structures (McDaid 2010, 212). She argues, following Arendt, that power grows through collective action and an individual act can only become empowering because it occurs within a network of relations. For example, in segregation era America, Rosa Parks, when she refused to give up her bus seat to a white passenger, would have achieved little had she simply been acting in an isolated dyadic relationship with the bus driver who tried to make her move. The impact she had was because ‘she acted *into* the socio-political community’ (McDaid 2010, 214-5) and was part of existing activist networks like the NAACP. Thus, says McDaid, ‘empowerment occurs where people join together to act for a political purpose’ (McDaid 2010, 217). It has three key characteristics: firstly, it is collective – because individual action will bear little fruit without

the networks of relationships and associations that make it significant (thus individual self-improvement may build capacities, but it does not amount to an increase in power) – secondly, it comes through action, and thirdly, it requires publicity – that is, relationships of solidarity cannot result in increased power until they become the basis for public action (McDaid 2010, 217). This is not to say that individuals cannot exercise power or be empowered. They can. The point, however, is that this only happens in a social, collective context. Drawing on this work, then, when I refer to ‘empowered’ citizens what is being signified in broad terms are individuals and groups who as part of organisations, networks, communities or other collective entities have the capacity and opportunity to effectively express social or political goals (such as anti-discrimination) in a public arena.

Power and the Elements of Organisation

One of the most common collective contexts in which people act and in which they may either be empowered or disempowered is organisations. This, as I have suggested, is particularly important in a political context. Developing the tools with which to make judgements about the empowerment or otherwise of effective political citizens in organisations with social and political goals (OSPs) is vital for understanding the state of our democracies. There is much debate in the literature about whether the activity of a plurality of single-issue interest groups and campaigning organisations is healthy for democracies and a concern that the political party’s role of aggregating and prioritising demands has diminished (Grant 2008, 217). Nevertheless, it remains that, given the growing importance of such groups as articulators of social and political goals and identities, it is crucial for democracy – such as it is – that these groups are providing channels through which the voices of citizens may be heard. The fewer effective vehicles there are available for political education, interest articulation or participation, and the less participatory and empowering *they* are, the more we are in danger of tolerating a system of government and governance that is dislocated from and empty of the voices of its citizens. The question is whether the organisations we have, as well as *for* citizens, are also *of* citizens (Stoker 2006, 110). Are these organisations simply the domain of a new cadre of high intensity ‘civic professionals’ with the support of relatively passive ‘chequebook’ activists (Stoker 2006, 110), or are they genuine channels through which members of the public can be drawn into significant, meaningful action and engagement? If so, what are the ingredients of an organisation that is successful in this respect? What are the barriers to such a democratic ideal?

With the outline definition of power and empowerment that I have set out above as a guide and addressing the five key elements of organisation that I have already highlighted, therefore, I propose a framework of power and empowerment that provides a useful theoretical basis for an examination of OSPs and a means by which judgements can be made about the extent to which they empower their participants as effective political actors. This framework is a development of that which I originally elaborated in relation to political parties (see Rye 2014a), adapted to the particular question of empowerment in OSPs and is summarised in the table below.

[TABLE 1 HERE]

First Element: Competing and Co-operating Individuals

A key element of organisation is people and, just because they are part of the same organisation and even share similar values, there is no guarantee that they will agree on every issue. In fact, it is quite likely that there will be substantial amounts of disagreement on the precise content of policy, and the strategies and tactics employed to pursue them amongst other things. Any organisation needs to find ways of resolving such disputes between individuals. I will come to the rules and procedures by which such disputes may be resolved (or not) in a moment. However, to begin with any analysis of organisations needs to recognise that people in them compete with each other over preferences and goals.

Individualistic Power, as the first mode of power in my framework, therefore recognises that power may be exercised in a situation of conflict between two individuals. It draws on behaviouralist ideas that originated with Robert Dahl (1957; 1961) and aspects of rational choice theory, especially as set out by Anthony Downs (1957) and, more recently, Keith Dowding (1991; 1996). What can be gathered from these approaches is that the exercise of power consists of a relation between two actors in which one is able to change the behaviour of another. As such, these theories owe much to Max Weber's elaboration of *Macht*, a particular form of power rooted in social action which he defines as 'the chance of a man or a number of men to realise their own will in a social action even against the resistance of others who are participating in the action' (Weber 1978, 926). This mode of power encapsulates a straightforward account of power because it is predicated on the notion of individual actors, each with an independent and unified set of conscious preferences, seeking their fulfilment in competition with others, and making use of whatever resources are available – such as

particular know-how, access to influential networks, or the ability to exercise patronage – to secure his or her preferred outcomes and get others to go along with it.

An individual, then, exercises power *over* another when she has more resources and employs them in favour of her own preferences, thus denying the other hers. This is neatly summed-up in Dahl's 'intuitive' definition of power that 'A has power over B to the extent that A can get B to do something that B would otherwise not do' (Dahl 1957, 202-3). Specifically, the latter is *subject* to power because she lacks resources that might give her means to escape domination or empower her to act, to resist or to shape her circumstances. Empowerment, on the other hand, comes about when resources are possessed or available that enable an individual to pursue goals and (because power is manifested in action) the opportunity exists to use them. This highlights an important point about the effects of power and the extent to which it is experienced as positive or negative. In any instance of power's exercise, in whatever mode, empowerment or disempowerment, emancipation or domination, the realisation of one's potential or the inhibiting of it is likely to be dependent on circumstance, or rather on the position in which one finds oneself in a relationship of power (Clegg, Courpasson and Phillips 2009). In this respect, the exercise of power appears to be something of a zero-sum game: one is either a winner or a loser, depending on one's position in the conflict (a dualism clearly implied in Dahl's definition of power). Alternatively, however, empowerment may also occur when one agent shares resources with another, enabling her to act, resist or shape her circumstances. Inverting Dahl's definition, we may say that in such circumstances A empowers B to the extent that A *invests* in B the capacities to do something that B would otherwise not have the capacity to do. Thus, although there is still a sense in which B is doing something that she would otherwise not do. The difference is that rather than being forced to do something, B is provided with the *capacity* to do it (which implies choice). This resembles the kinds of individual empowerment that Barnes (1988) and Wartenberg (1990) elaborate, and which I have discussed above. It also recognises that a relationship of unequal resources does not inevitably lead to domination since the resources with which B is provided may be enough for her to escape the influence of A, or even reverse the relationship. However, as I have argued, this is not enough. Individuals may be empowered in a direct way through the transfer of resources from another more powerful individual, but power cannot be exercised alone and the context within which this takes place is crucial to that empowerment being meaningful or effective. Further to this, then, as well as being invested with power, B would also need to be provided with the opportunity to use it,

which points towards the second element of organisation and the second mode of power in my framework.

Second Element: Formal and Informal Rules

The settings and conditions under which struggles for power take place are crucial. Max Weber argues that when it comes to competitive struggles those who have more of the personal qualities required to succeed will typically do so (give or take accident and luck). However, he qualifies this by adding that ‘what qualities are important depends on the *conditions* in which the conflict or competition takes place’, including ‘the systems of order to which the behaviour of the parties is oriented’ (Weber 1978, 38-9; emphasis added). Thus, the second key element of organisation forms an important part of the analysis of power and power relations. This element consists in the formal and informal rules which constitute and govern the arenas in which confrontations are likely to take place and which set out how decisions (e.g. about policy, the selection of officers or representatives and so on) may be taken in a given organisation. For an individual in an organisational setting to be able to articulate and pursue a goal or a preference that they have formulated (whether they are eventually successful or not), they need access to the arenas in which they can be submitted to a decision-making process. However, in any organisation, however democratic, there is always likely to be uneven access to such arenas. Some in the organisation (often, but not always, leaders) will be in a position to control access to those arenas, to manipulate rules so as to prevent the possibility of confrontation with hostile, alternative or unwelcome voices or points-of-view. These factors underpin the formulation of *Strategic Power* as the second mode in my framework, which is strongly influenced by Schattschneider’s (1960) notion of organisation as the mobilisation of bias and Bachrach and Baratz’s (1970) ‘second face’ of power.

Strategic Power recognises that actions take place within and are mediated by organisational contexts. In other words, individuals are subject to rules and norms of conflict and cooperation. These rules and norms are not neutral, but a means by which some individuals or groups exercise power in more hidden ways and are therefore able to maintain power and ensure that others are disfavoured. It accounts for the ways that organisational structures and norms can be used to foreclose the manoeuvres of opponents. It looks for the modes of organisational advantage that can be used to institutionalise the power of an individual or group. It suggests that power tends to be in the hands of those who set and control agendas

and who can employ and manipulate rules and procedures in their own favour. It is concerned therefore with *means* rather than ends because the ability to secure or even express preferences is subject to organisational rules and procedures.

Because this kind of manoeuvring is not necessarily recognisable as a personal strategy, exercises of power are more difficult to identify and challenge. Analysis needs to encompass who participates behind the scenes as well as openly. It needs in particular to understand the rules-of-the-game and decision-making processes themselves and who has been put at a disadvantage by them, which voices don't get heard in public arenas, who can and cannot enter into decision-making processes, arenas and debates in the first place. Controlling access in this way is helpful to the powerful because it enables them to protect their position without having to expend effort in direct confrontation. Because they are already powerful, such individuals or groups are at an advantage in that their position enables them to interpret, even manipulate, decision-making rules in their own favour. As Clegg (1989) has put it, 'because of their power, as given by the rules, they are at much greater liberty to make their interpretations of rules stick than those for whom the rules of the game allow only a much more limited set of moves' (Clegg 1989, 210). It is, therefore, a distinct disadvantage to those that may espouse positions opposed to these dominant players. There may be resources available with which the latter would be capable of mounting a challenge, but opportunity to act is denied because access to arenas in which any such contestation might be brought is closed or blocked.

Once again, one's sense of empowerment or disempowerment may depend on the circumstances and the position in which one finds oneself. Whilst on one side there are those who are empowered by their control over access to these arenas, on the other there are those severely disempowered (even if they have access to the kinds of resources that might help them secure their preferences) to the extent that they are prevented from expressing a grievance or a point of view. This would suggest a form of power which is more about hierarchy than strategy. However, *Strategic Power* can also be exercised 'from below' as it were on the basis of an intimate knowledge of the rules and capacity to work or operate them in one's favour. The capacity to do so can empower those at the grass-roots of an organisation to out-manoeuvre the ostensibly powerful (in an Individualistic sense) by circumventing barriers to the realisation of goals.

Third Element: Administration and Hierarchy

OSPs are, self-evidently, organisations, albeit of differing kinds and with differing levels of hierarchy and administrative capacity /structure. All organisations, to differing degrees, have structures, hierarchies and administration. They have business needs that require servicing and certain functions that are necessary to the continuation of the organisation and the maintenance of relations with the outside world. As well as formal matters of oversight, taxation and other legal obligations, this includes the need to communicate and account for itself and its cause / members (whether formally and officially or informally). All of this and more supports the need for a permanent, ongoing administrative structure. This of course is important to the maintenance of an effective organisation. However, bureaucracies have a logic that, left unchecked, tends towards centralisation, control and standardisation. There is an imperative towards administrative convenience and a tendency towards dislocation from the beneficiaries of the organisation, which operates as a kind of impersonal power.

The third mode of power in my framework, *Bureaucratic Power*, accounts for these tendencies. It is distinguished from the first two modes of power, which are associated with agents and their preferences or strategies, because it is concerned with how decisions become structured and determined by the routines and imperatives of organisation. It is derived from Max Weber's elaboration of 'discipline' (Weber 1948, 253-264), which is a routinised kind of organisational power more structural and impersonal in its operations and possessed of a logic that restricts agency. Although prevalent in forms of organisation like the factory and the army, he argues that it is most strongly exemplified by bureaucracy as a form of organisation (Weber 1948, 253-4). *Bureaucratic Power* is a mode of power intimately associated with control and obedience, but of an automated, mechanised kind; not a matter of conflict, but of processes (such as disciplinary procedures and approval processes) that stifle and restrict agency and perpetuate inequalities of power. It suppresses opportunities for the advancement of radical or novel positions and rules out certain voices, ideas and interventions as a by-product of its hierarchy, procedures and routines.

This is a particular problem for large organisations which may be demonstrated when tensions appear between the priorities of professional administrators and managers and those of volunteers and activists. Another problem that can occur here is that as people get more involved in the cause, by taking on a position of responsibility for example, they become more engaged by paperwork and servicing the business needs of the organisation rather than engaging in what we might regard as properly 'political' activity. However, at the same time,

it is precisely this kind of administration that enables the organisation to be effective; to survive and to thrive in particular legal, economic, social and political environments. It is the foundation which provides people with the organisational clout they need to be effective, and to act in concert, where they would not be so effective alone.

Fourth Element: Cultural Norms and Practices

Organisations cannot be reduced to a series of structures or hierarchies. Just as important are the cultural norms and practices, the patterns of behaviour, the everyday material practices. This includes how people communicate with one another, shared language, the performance of roles and shared repertoires. These are important to reinforcing and reproducing organisational culture and are thus themselves important carriers of the fourth mode of power. *Constitutive Power* directs attention towards the means by which certain dominant structures of power and social relationships are reproduced and reinforced through day-to-day practices. It is immanent in conduct and patterns of behaviour in the everyday material practices of organisational life, in which subjectivities are constituted. On one level, it acts as a subtle form of control that tends to reinforce existing structures and patterns of relations, but at the same time it endows participants with the skills and capacities to act effectively in the appropriate milieu. It empowers by investing in individuals the capacity to *formulate* goals and preferences in the first place, and to effectively articulate, communicate and pursue them. This is perhaps most obviously apparent in training, mentoring and similar schemes, but it also works at more subtle informal levels in everyday acts and conduct.

This mode of power draws on Bourdieu's notion of *habitus* (Bourdieu 1977) and Giddens' theory of structuration (Giddens 1984). Rituals and practices, including the performance of roles and shared repertoires, reproduce social structure at the level of everyday life in terms of what is familiar, taken for granted and repeated. Analysis is concerned with how, through the regular, repeated activities and practices of organisational life (meetings and training, for example) certain social and political ideals are transmitted which help to shape agents, their social context and the social resources on which they draw. In Giddens' terminology, it shapes their 'practical consciousness', which refers to the instinctive socially embedded and habitual ways of acting that convey meaning in social situations. Like Bureaucratic Power, this mode of power may also privilege conservative forces by sedimenting 'the way things are done' beneath a level where they are reflected on or challenged. However, it recognises

that this kind of control is breakable through critical reflection and intervention to reorientate the actions of participants.

Fifth Element: Strategies, Techniques and Technologies

An additional aspect of any organisation that seeks particular social or political goals is the methods that it employs in their pursuit. Techniques associated with public relations and marketing, for example, methods of campaigning and organisation are particularly important here. The effect of the employment of these kinds of techniques and strategies is to be identified in the relations of power it engenders, the effect it has on the government of conduct and the disciplining of subjects (as in those subject to this kind of power).

It is in such detail that the final mode of power, *Disciplinary Power*, finds its expression. This is a mode of power that draws on Foucault's (1977) account of discipline, and which is highly salient when it comes to organisations and the strategies and techniques they employ, which are concerned with the minutiae of appearance, of organisation and presentation. It emphasises how such organisational and disciplinary technologies engender an insidious level of detailed control on bodies. However, it is not a purely negative or repressive kind of power. It is at the same time *productive* of agents, activists and participants who are rendered effective by their subjection to discipline. Thus, the focus of analysis shifts again, this time to the micro-level technical problems of organisations. Disciplinary Power is traced by examining the techniques and knowledges applied to everyday, often mundane, problems such as campaign presentation, logistics and publicity. What is their disciplinary effect and how do they contribute to the empowerment of effective political actors? The site and focus of this power is the body and its conduct, which is trained and surveyed at a micro-level.

The Overall Framework as a Heuristic Tool

My underlying approach to power, as I have suggested, is concerned with the capacities of human beings to formulate, express and realise goals (specifically, political ones). These capacities can be developed, impeded or imposed in a variety of ways, including through the actions of (other) individuals, the direction and operation of formal and informal rules and administration, through the cultural norms and practices of organisational life or the application of specific techniques of organisation, communication and so on. These modes of power, therefore, work together on the basis of this underlying concern with human goals.

They are not, in this sense, mutually exclusive. However, neither are they in all circumstances *inclusive*. That is, the framework does not claim to offer a ‘holistic’ concept of power, with several modes that may be present at the same time in a single act or event. It should rather be regarded as a heuristic tool with which to examine power in organisational settings. Different modes of power may be more salient than others in different circumstances, at different times and in different situations. That is the point, I would argue, of an eclectic approach of this kind. The alternative is a series of competing and incompatible approaches to power that by themselves provide only partial insight. Thus although the framework is not ‘holistic’, different modes of power may overlap and reinforce one another. Therefore situations and aspects of organisation can and should be interrogated for each of the five modes of power in the framework. Maintaining ontological flexibility supports this approach because it enables the shift into different modes of analysis which provides for a richer analysis than any one mode of power can offer alone.

The eclecticism of the framework’s treatment of individuals and their relationship to power is its great strength because it illuminates the effects that power has on the capacity of individuals to formulate, express and realise political goals. Empowerment or subjection can happen at numerous points in the organisation and the framework enables the identification of the various ways in which they do. It provides analytical tools with which to consider the importance of an individual’s conscious choices alongside her entanglement in an ongoing disciplinary network of relations. It allows for the examination of structure, but it also provides the tools with which to consider how it is that individuals make choices and act within its boundaries. It can therefore illuminate how they not only reproduce it, but contribute towards change in it. It furthermore spotlights the role of organisation in this process. In short, it provides a comprehensive range of tools with which assessments can be made about the extent to which organisations facilitate the formulation and realisation of human goals.

Conclusion

Organisations are, and remain, vitally important to the way in which human beings seek to formulate, articulate and pursue social and political goals. They are, in this respect, crucial to our understanding of power, just as power is crucial to our understanding of organisations. If it is to be comprehensive, any account of power in organisations needs to embrace the variety of elements which have some influence on the formulation, articulation and pursuit of human

goals. An account of power in organisations that, for example, examines conflicts between individuals without acknowledging the effect of organisational rules or party culture, or examines the bureaucratic functioning of an organisation without considering the strategies and techniques employed in the pursuit of its goals, will be an incomplete one. In order to address this, the different perspectives and traditions I have drawn on in this article provide an analytically rich framework for the study of power in organisations with social and political goals. I derive a framework which includes five modes of power relevant to such organisations: Individualistic Power, Strategic Power, Bureaucratic Power, Constitutive Power and Disciplinary Power. Each of these, as I have argued, represent different means by which participants in such organisations may be either empowered as active citizens or prevented from being so.

Since each mode of power draws on a different theoretical perspective, there is a clear tension between their treatment of the individual, the status of organisation and the importance of social structural factors. However, by bringing these approaches together in the way I have suggested, treating power as a heuristic and maintaining a flexible ontological perspective, the different modes of power in the framework can be used to generate questions about and interrogate the practices and structures of organisations with social and political goals. It is possible to argue that much of what I have set out here is applicable to any kind of organisation, not just specifically social or political ones. This may be true. However, the crucial and distinctive element of my approach in this paper is empowerment. Organisations that have the function of articulating social and political goals have a particular (potential) role in giving voice to ordinary citizens. The apparent diminishing of the role of political parties as aggregators and articulators of political and social goals, as well as channels for political participation and engagement, means that it becomes ever more crucial that an alternative democratic 'transmission belt' is identified. Despite their shortcomings in terms of representation it may be that these organisations are the best we have for now and thus the potential they have to provide, or at least contribute, to that role becomes imperative. If they do not, then democracy may well become (remain?) little more than an ongoing conversation between distant elites and professional advocates from which the rest of society is excluded.

Since organisations are so important to democracy, the point, perhaps, is whether it is possible to overcome the conundrum that Michels posed a century ago. My argument is that, with the help of the theoretical tools I have proposed here, it *is* possible to do so in some way.

Key to this is the argument that Michels was right, but only *partially*. He was right that there is a tension in democratic political organisation between forces that drive domination and forces that support the empowerment of participants. However, because he saw power overwhelmingly as domination, he could see such an organisation travelling in only one direction: towards inevitable domination by an elite dislocated from those the organisation was designed to benefit. In other words, an ‘iron law of oligarchy’ determined a tragic logic in democratic and emancipatory organisations. This perspective fails to recognise two key points about power that, thankfully, have become important parts of theoretical debates in more recent times. That is, firstly, that power as domination (or ‘power over’) should be understood as being closely entwined with its potential for empowering agents (or ‘power to’). Analysis needs to recognise that the two are often in tension with one another and that their respective salience can rise and fall as these tensions play out, but that they are also mutually dependent and may support one another, for example through the ‘transformative power’ elaborated by Wartenberg. Secondly, power operates at a number of different levels in an organisational context. It cannot simply be characterised as the relationship between an elite and a mass of what Weber described as ‘soulless’ followers (Weber 1948, 113). Rather, power is also at play in individual relations of conflict and cooperation, in the operation of rules, in administration, cultural norms and practices and in the strategies, techniques and technologies employed by the organisation. Thus, domination and empowerment are, in different ways, in tension all the time in each of these elements of organisation. The final victory of one over the other is not inevitable and indeed is not necessarily likely in any case. That is to say, where there is power, as Foucault once observed, there is resistance (Foucault 1979, 95). Similarly, where there is ‘power over’ there is ‘power to’.

The question that arises, then, is whether there is anything we can, or even should, do in response to this. Do we simply accept that there is a play of forces that we can do little about and restrict ourselves to finding ways of explaining and describing it? Or do we accept Marx’s exhortation and seek to *change* the world, or some small part of it at least, by providing some means of not only illuminating those forces, but intervening in them? My response to this last question would be a cautious yes. I would argue that it is possible, using the theoretical tools I have set out in this paper, to make useful judgements about how organisations with social and political goals can configure themselves organisationally in such a way that strikes the right balance between empowerment and domination. That is to say, the ever present tension in democratic organisation between the dictates of efficacy –

that is, of achieving organisational goals in the most efficient manner possible – versus the imperatives of democratic participation – which provides the means by which citizens can participate in resolving and addressing their own problems – can be addressed.

That is not to say that the framework for analysis that I have set out in this paper can, or even should, eliminate the tensions that Michels originally identified. Such tensions are inevitable in any human organisation, particularly one that seeks to achieve definite social or political goals on behalf of groups of citizens. However, it does provide a means to address them by shedding light on the different ways in which those tensions are played out. It means that the different elements of organisation – including practices, strategies, behaviour, procedures, and rules – that may at different times put up barriers against the empowerment of participants can be identified and inhibited, whilst those that support and foster it can be encouraged and cultivated.

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Table 1: Empowerment and the Elements of Organisation

	Element of Organisation	Mode of Power	Empowerment through	Blocks to empowerment
1	<i>Competing and Co-operating Individuals</i>	<u>Individualistic Power</u>	Resources are possessed or available that enable A or B to pursue specific goals & opportunity exists to use them; A shares resources with B that enable B to act / shape*	A has more resources than B; B lacks resources that might give her means to escape domination or empower her to act / shape
2	<i>Formal and Informal Rules</i>	<u>Strategic Power</u>	Knowledge of the rules and capacity to work or operate in one's favour; ability to circumvent barriers to realisation of goals; capacity to stop or block others from accessing arenas	Resources may be available, but opportunity to act denied because access to arenas of contestation closed or blocked.
3	<i>Administration and Hierarchy</i>	<u>Bureaucratic Power</u>	Organisation generates collective capacities greater than [sum of] individuals – acting in concert; empowers individuals to be effective political actors: provides structure, ROG, resources	Initiative / agency stymied by organisational imperative and bureaucracy; hierarchies drain capacity for agency
4	<i>Cultural Norms and Practices</i>	<u>Constitutive Power</u>	Invests agents with capacities to act in relevant contexts; discursive consciousness draws practices into contention, challenges, reshapes or overturns them	Practices shape and produce actors and their practical consciousness; practices discursively reshaped can quickly become embedded
5	<i>Strategies, Techniques and Technologies</i>	<u>Disciplinary Power</u>	Produces agents with capacities to act within the relevant [e.g. political] milieu, distributes and co-ordinates effectively.	Control – minutely detailed control of bodies in relation to space and time; Conformity – internalisation of surveillance techniques