Power in Organisational Analysis: Delineating and Contrasting a Foucauldian Perspective

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*Every social act is an exercise of power, every social relationship is a power equation, and every social group or system is an organization of power* (Hawley, 1963, p. 422).

**Abstract**

Despite ‘power’ being an often used word in studies on management and organisations, it is variously conceived, variously employed and the problems associated with it variously dispensed with. This paper makes power its central focus. It examines the main assumptions implicit in the predominant conceptions of power in organisational analysis and in the wider social theory which informs, and is informed by it. Discussion focuses on how a Foucauldian approach to power and power relations differs from more mainstream conceptions rooted in functionalist/behaviourist beliefs and in radical structuralism, and on what some of the implications of adopting a Foucauldian approach to the study of management and organisations might be.

**Introduction**

Power is a critical concept for those interested in organisational analysis. Theorists (Kahn, 1964; Jackson & Carter, 1991) suggest that the concept of organisation might not exist if it were not for relations of power; indeed that social life in general always features unequal power.

A review of the discourse on power in organisations reveals just how little is actually known, or agreed upon, about the subject (Giddens, 1976; 1979; Clegg & Dunkerley, 1980; Wartenberg, 1990). According to Lukes (1974, p. 9), the concept of power is "ineradicably evaluative" and "essentially contested". A plethora of views is represented in the literature with a number of authors commenting on the absence of empirically operationalisable models of power, often as a basis for attempting to articulate their own theory (e.g. Lukes, 1974; Daudi, 1986; Wartenberg, 1990). Even among those who do elaborate or promote a particular theory of power, there is surprisingly little application of their work in studies of how power is exercised in actual social settings. Developed in conjunction with his analysis of the regimes of modern institutions to monitor and control behaviour at the margins, Foucault's theorising on power has been extended to more 'socially central' institutions in some recent work in organisation studies. Research which draws upon Foucauldian ideas is still regarded as an alternative approach to organisational analysis, however (Burrell, 1988).

This paper examines the main assumptions implicit in the predominant conceptions of power in organisational analysis and in the wider social theory which informs, and is informed by it. Discussion focuses on how a Foucauldian approach to power and power relations differs from these other conceptions, and on what some of the implications of adopting a Foucauldian approach to the study of management and organisations might be.

The paper is organised to address the following questions:

- How is power generally conceived in organisational analysis and how does a Foucauldian approach to power compare and contrast with these perspectives?

- What are the particulars of a Foucauldian approach to the subject of power?

- What are the bases of some of the criticisms which might be levelled against a Foucauldian approach by advocates of other paradigmatic positions?
What are the implications of a Foucauldian approach to analysing power in organisations?

This analysis of different conceptions of power is prefaced by a brief discussion as to its scope and focus.

**Scope and Focus of this Review**

The objective of this review is to describe some of the more predominant perspectives on power in organisational analysis and in the social sciences in order to define and contrast Foucault's ideas on power. Burrell and Morgan's (1979) paradigmatic framework serves as a useful schema by which to differentiate the other more mainstream perspectives from a Foucauldian position, though by no means is the argument for paradigm incommensurability now so widely accepted (Hopper & Powell, 1985; Reed, 1985; Hassard, 1988 & 1991; Gioia & Pitre, 1990; Willmott, 1990, 1993a & 1993b).

The perspectives which appear to predominate in the discourse on power are, broadly speaking, confined to the two right hand side quadrants of Burrell and Morgan's framework: the functionalist and radical structuralist paradigms. Clearly then, a Foucauldian perspective which is more radical humanist than anything else is in marked contrast. It is only through an understanding of the key assumptions which differentiate this position, however, that the various contributions to the debate on power in organisational analysis can be understood.

In this review, problems surface in the way 'power' is variously understood and referred to. While clearly advocating Berger and Luckmann's (1976) thesis that reality is socially constructed, like others (eg. Barnes, 1988), one must acknowledge the necessity of adopting a realist mode of speech in discussion, to make reference to the object of enquiry and not just to signs of its possible existence. In this sense then, one writes of power as if it were something real, as if it were an entity, while subscribing to the view that it is not, that it is a social construction which can scarcely be understood without reference to particular contexts in which it is more or less manifest. The argument is, therefore, for a context specific and historical view of organisations, an argument which sits well with a Foucauldian perspective but which does not hold in a discussion of theoretical considerations as in this paper. This need to refer to the different discourses on power while retaining the use of the one term 'power', should thus be borne in mind.

An obvious limitation, though is the paper's deliberate emphasis on theory rather than empirics. Consideration to the specifics of context required in any Foucauldian dechiffrement, is simply beyond the ambit of this paper. Moreover, it is unlikely that any one context would necessarily provide examples of all the concepts illustrated. In this relatively underexplored area of management and organisation studies, there is clearly scope for many more papers which seek to illustrate theory. As Clegg and Hardy (1996) conclude, Foucault's work has "some potential for practice, though its aversion to anything tainted by empiricism has steered it away from organisations and into the relative safety of theoretical discourse" (p. 23). This paper, likewise, engages in theoretical discussion by exploring the potential of Foucault's discourse on power as an alternative to other discourses on power which predominate in the study of organisations; it maps the terrain and signposts the boundaries within which Foucauldian-inspired research on the complex and diffuse phenomenon of power might be conducted. In this sense, it stands as a platform from which empirical research might move forward.

For Lukes (1974), the central interest of studying power relations is "an interest in the (attempted or successful) securing of people's compliance by overcoming or averting their opposition” (p. 31). A Foucauldian study is interested in how power is exercised and also in how the exercise of power is averted or resisted (itself, an exercise of power). But its objective is somewhat different. The aim is not so that ways of making people comply can be refined but so that one can begin to see the possibilities for the exercise of power in organisations to be resisted, and for new forms of organisation to emerge. This interest has its roots in radical change. A Foucauldian perspective has
much to offer in this regard, but its territory needs delineating - hence this review, under three broad headings, of various conceptions of power in terms of the methodological stances they imply and their differences to a Foucauldian approach.

Along with Foucault's (1977a; 1977b; 1980a; 1980b; 1982) own writings on power, reference is made to standard theoretical works on power (eg. Dahl, 1957; Lukes, 1974 & 1986; Wrong, 1979; Barnes, 1988). Additionally, Clegg (1975, 1979 & 1989) and Ng (1980) which contain excellent literature reviews and other insights have been consulted. Various other critiques and applications of the different perspectives on power in organisations and organisational power are included in the resource base for this paper. The various authors' specific approaches to the question of power are examined in broad and relatively general terms so as to provide the basis for differentiating a perspective based on Foucault's work. The review is thus mainly organised in terms of the paradigmatic assumptions apparent in the original works of the majority of the theorists in the field.

**Functionalist/Behaviourist Conceptions**

Barnes (1988) contends that most popular conceptions of power treat it "as an entity or attribute which all manner of things, processes, or agents may have" (p. 1). He cites three key dimensions of the power people may be said to have. First there is the physical power residing in the human body. Second there is personal or charismatic power said to reside in particular personalities. And third, there is the power of office or position which people possess or seek to possess, and which, following Emerson (1962), is expressed by most organisation theorists as constituting a relationship of dependency.

There is an acknowledgment in these functionalist/behaviouralist conceptions of power that power exists without necessarily being manifest, that power is a capacity. However, there is a sense in which power as a capacity is only evident through its effects:

> Power is one of those things, like gravity and electricity, which makes its existence apparent to us through its effects, and hence it has always been found much easier to describe its consequences than to identify its nature and its basis (Barnes, 1988, ix).

And here lies part of the problem of constructing power as an object of social enquiry. The commonsense approach which reifies power leads to looking at the effects of power and to identifying these effects with power, rather than exploring exactly what power is. The approach of many organisational researchers to the problem of the visibility of power has similarly focused on the effects of power implicitly equating it with authority, influence, decision-making etc. contributing to what D audi (1986) calls a primitive discourse on power. Within this discourse, power is conceptualised "as if it were a concrete means by which to govern and dominate; a means to be owned and which should be understood, studied and used as such" (p. 1).

The conception of power which survives in much of the literature on organisations retains the simple argument implicit in early research on power: Dahl's (1957) intuitive idea of power that "A has power over B to the extent that he [sic] can get B to do something B would otherwise not do" (pp. 202-3). Included in it, and in other definitions of this type (eg. Robbins, 1989) are several key assumptions which are examined below.

The first and most obvious assumption implicit in definitions such as Dahl's is that power can be possessed. The majority of writers of books on organisations which deal with power (eg. Korda, 1975) convey power as something which can be harnessed, and used for the good of the organisation. Some texts (eg. Kotter, 1979) quote recipes for the attainment and use of power, promoting power as a commodity which individuals can acquire, exchange, share or even delegate away. Implicit in this commodification of power is a conception of power as a latent and dispositional construct. Clegg (1989) believes, for example, that people possess dispositional power when they have the capacity to influence the behaviour of others, although not exercising that power at the moment. This view,
however, is problematic for those functionalists/behaviourists who seek to quantify and compare relative power. Potential power would be impossible to measure. In contrast, a Foucauldian perspective has no interest in potential power, nor indeed, in quantification. For Foucault, power is only power when it is exercised: "it only exists in action" (1980b, p. 89).

The second key assumption in functionalist/behaviourist conceptions of power is that despite Dahl and others expressing the power equation in terms of individuals, A and B, it is clear in Dahl's case at least, that he conceives power as equally able to be utilised by groups. In this view, power may be employed by collective actors such as local councils, committees or company boards, to cite more obvious instances. A collective actor may produce decisions with similar effect to decisions taken by individuals, but the actual decisions may not be identifiable with any particular individual. It is possible, too, that individuals or groups within these groups might struggle to exert power over one another. Hence functionalists/behaviourists speak of power as individualised and collective: the power of individuals and the power of organisations, for example.

The third assumption, implicit in definitions like Dahl's is the notion that power is a property of social relations. Dahl (1957) exhorts his readers thus: "Let us agree that power is a relation, and that it is a relation among people" (p. 203). Herein lies two contradictions. In first treating power as if it were an individual possession, commentators ignore its ultimate dependence on others for enactment. Second although, on the whole organisational theorists tend to be less interested in the power an individual might exercise over physical objects than over other individuals, control of resources is commonly cited as one means of attaining power (eg. Kanter, 1979, pp. 65-66; Robbins, 1990, pp. 255-260). Pfeffer (1977) links power with resource allocation in his study of organisations. So too, do Bacharach and Lawler (1980) who state "organizational life is dominated by political interactions; politics in organizations involve the tactical use of power to retain or obtain control of real or symbolic resources" (p. 1). A Foucauldian perspective retains the interest in social relationships, framing power as 'power relations', but departs radically from resource-based explanations derived from the Marxist position which sees the source of power in property ownership.

The fourth assumption in functionalist/behaviourist conceptions is that "the power of the individual is manifest in its effects upon other individuals - in their compliance, whether willing or reluctant, with the will of the power-holder; power is defined as 'power over' rather than 'power to'" (Barnes, 1988, p. 6). The idea of 'power over' is not without negative connotations for some authors. Kahn and Boulding (1964), for example, link power and conflict. The exercise of power, then, may benefit some individuals and groups and prejudice others. In Foucauldian terms, all are enmeshed in a web of power relations - relations which are neither fixed, nor necessarily top-down.

Power may be seen to be exercised over others through a range of tactics, a fifth important assumption, and one which is supported in Foucauldian explanations. The range of tactics provided in the organisational literature is not particularly great, however. The five primary bases of power (coercive, reward, legitimate, expert and referent power) identified by French and Raven (1959) remain among the most commonly cited (see, for examples, Robbins, 1989; Muchinsky, 1987). Others describe 'kinds' (Etzioni, 1961), 'types' (Olsen, 1978) and 'sources' (Bacharach & Lawler, 1980; Pfeffer, 1981; Astley & Sachdeva (1984)). Pfeffer reviews some strategies and tactics which make decision-making processes in organisations appear to be rational and thus legitimate, seeing "the management of meaning in organisations through processes of paradigm or shared belief creation as one of the critical tasks confronted by managers in organizations" (p. 177). Astley and Sachdeva (1984) refer to hierarchical authority, resource control and network centrality as 'structural sources' in the sense that they reflect "the properties of the organisation as a social system rather than being the product of the psychology or social psychology of particular individuals within the organisation" (p. 103). These views are more in line with the radical structuralists' conception of the role of ideology and a Foucauldian perspective of normalising discourses; this latter point is developed further in due course.
Though there seems to be some agreement among organisational theorists of what is meant by power, this agreement diminishes when researchers begin to examine power in organisational settings. Dahl (1957) suggests that power defined in such a way that the intuitively understood meaning of the word is encapsulated is not easily applied to concrete research situations. He suggests a single coherent theory of power is less likely to apply than might a variety of theories of limited scope which are situationally specific - similar "but different from the definitions of other studies" (p. 202).

Some organisational theorists have linked power to other key organisational constructs such as knowledge, for example. Pfeffer (1977, p. 246) notes that "secrecy, or the limitation of access to information is used strategically by power holders to enhance and maintain their capacity for action [power, presumably] in the organisation". There is, however, a tendency even within Foucauldian analysis to conflate power and knowledge, although there are attempts within Foucault's work to recount in specific instances how the two interrelate.

Without doubt, there are considerable problems in examining power in organisations. One such problem is essentially political, having more to do with the question of whether power should be investigated than with the more practical concerns of where and how to look for power (as if, indeed, such practical concerns can themselves be readily resolved). Pfeffer (1981) contends that management writing serves a variety of functions, virtually all of which have a strong component of ideology and values. "Topics such as power and politics", he points out:

are basically incompatible with the values and ideology being developed; therefore it is reasonable if not theoretically useful, to ignore topics which detract from the functions being served by the writing, and this includes tending to ignore or downplay the topics of power and politics (p. 10).

The values underscored in management writing are those which reinforce compliance with organisational goals of efficiency rather than resistance to power strategies - such imperatives for organisational behaviour are imbued in the ideology of rational functionalism (Pfeffer, 1981). The worker is supposed to be working for the greater good of the organisation and of society as a whole, rather than engaged in political struggles for personal gain or other equity considerations. Pfeffer's argument is that much of the theory and research on power in organisations serves some power legitimation and maintenance function. "The legitimation and justification of these concentrations of power [status quo bureaucracies] are clearly facilitated by theories arguing that efficiency, productivity and effectiveness are the dominant dynamics underlying the operation of organizations," he writes (p. 14). This discourse of efficiency, productiveness and effectiveness is normalised in the literature to such an extent that it would be difficult to develop a persuasive argument that organisations should be anything other than efficient, productive and effective. Clegg (1977) raises the possibility that:

The order of a particular interest theorizes the possibility of whatever issues arise for power to be exercised over in such a way that the security of the ruling convention and interest is rarely disturbed. What Gramsci ... calls 'hegemony' is thus preserved (p. 21).

And so the issue of power relations in organisations is commonly reduced to superiors rightfully exercising power over subordinates in order that the supposedly more noble ends of the former are served. On the whole, the concept of power is simplified or overlooked in much organisational discourse. In Foucauldian terms,

[This] discourse on power is not, in effect, about power; rather it produces power. A discourse produces its object, multiplies it and thereby grows stronger itself. To speak of the demystification of the discourse on power is to become aware of, and to draw attention to, the power of discourse, ie. that power which holds us prisoner of our own discourses (Daudi, 1986, pp. 13-14).
Functionalist/behaviourist discourse on power, seen in this light, has no greater claim to truth than any other discourse. But despite its arbitrary basis, the discourse is legitimised, and indeed normalised, through its continued deployment in texts on organisations.

Where power does get on the research agenda, problems emerge at a practical level. Neither power nor its effects may be immediately obvious. Many including Pfeffer (1977) mention the unobtrusiveness of power. Clearly, we should be bringing to our investigations the understanding that formalised power (the kind implied by organisation charts, for example) may well differ markedly from actual power relations. That the exercise of power by organisational members may not be sanctioned by their position in the formal structure has been well documented (eg. Mintzberg, 1983). People in organisations selectively use legitimate criteria to favour their own relative positions (Pfeffer, 1977). Effort may be directed so as to "make the sources of power or authority difficult to detect, and therefore difficult or impossible to challenge" (Kress, 1985, p. 57). As Lukes (1974) puts it, "the crucial point is that the most effective and insidious use of power is to prevent [overt] conflict arising in the first place" (p. 123). Foucauldians seek to look beyond the manifest and obvious exercise of power, to ask how resistance and expressions of dissent have been minimised or even eliminated.

A related consideration concerning power in organizations is the notion of power becoming institutionalised. Within organisations, norms and expectations develop that make the exercise of power accepted and expected. Investigation into the development of such normalising discourses is central to Foucauldian inspired research into the institutionalisation of power.

As alluded to earlier in this discussion, a further problem in considering power in organisations is that power relations are not fixed. Nor are they consistent across all issues. Thus researchers who seek to compare relative power are often thwarted. Dahl (1957) admits at least five factors that might be included in a comparison of power of two different individuals including differences in the properties of the actors exercising the power and differences in the responses of the respondents. Despite his having provided complex formulae for comparing relative power, Dahl concludes that the data needed for power comparability are not likely to exist. Foucauldians would similarly dispute whether power comparability in any quantifiable form exists, and would doubt whether power could have any useful meaning outside the context in which it is exercised.

Research on power in organisations has generally been based on simplistic notions of power which appear to render it amenable to empirical investigation, for the most part of a quantitative nature despite the impracticabilities of quantitative solutions to the problem. The tendency has been to examine the intentional and overt behaviour of individuals and groups and the effects of power. Pfeffer's (1981) review of research on power notes the focus of most studies of power in organisations is "on hierarchical power, the power of supervisors over subordinates, or bosses over employees" (p. 3), power which serves functionalist imperatives.

The problems in researching power identified above may account for the decline in the functionalist research interest in power. Knights and Roberts (1982) note that power has more latterly been seen as "having a complexity that defies treatment as either the first or last link in a causal chain that captures some more concrete reality" (p. 48). Some qualitative enquiries into power in organisations have been conducted. Pettigrew (1973) offers naturalistic descriptions of power and influence plays in organisational decision-making. Criticism of these kinds of approaches is evident in mainstream organisational theory, however. "They are extremely valuable in giving insights which lead to theoretical propositions to be tested in more methodologically rigorous work", writesDonaldson (1985, p. 80). Such critiques centre round questions of causal influence and generalisability, questions which are part of a wider methodological debate. On the whole, it would be fair to say the tendency within the literature on organisational power has been to develop a concept of power which lends itself to testing and quantitative analysis: who has power, what are the relative strengths of power, and what effects are manifest, are the questions asked.
In summary, the functionalist/behaviourist conception of power common in organisational theory involves a focus on the intentions of individuals (or agents) and on actual behaviours usually manifest in displays of authority. This conception of power is rather too static, promoting the idea of power relations as immediately observable in terms of their effects and, in some cases, as fixed over time and across issues. Dealing with power largely in its authority form derives from Weber's (1947) influential analysis of organisational power, and is part of a mechanistic view of organisations which seeks both logic and predictability within the organisational system. Rational models of human interaction do not include all dimensions of power, often taking into account only the most obvious exercise of power, and ignoring the more insidious forms. Many of the questions and problems raised by research into power in organisations appear to be ignored in the literature in which researchers and commentators attempt to define power in a supposedly neutral way. The functionalist research interest in quantifying and comparing the effects of power has waned in recent times, however. This decline in functionalist research on power in organisations has occurred alongside debates in sociological theory on the nature of power which maintain that the definition of power is value-laden, debates which are alluded to in the following section.

Towards a Radical Structuralist Conception

The understanding of power appears to be undergoing reassessment. The time is ripe, it seems, for empirical studies of organisations and texts based on newer understandings of power. Miller (1987) states that "a considerable distance separates a notion of power understood as the exercise by A of power over B, contrary to B's preferences, and a notion of power as a multiplicity of practices for the production and regulation of subjectivity" (p. 10). Clearly, power is much more complex and its effects can be more far-reaching than simple conceptions of power might imply. Knights & Willmott (1989) contend that the debate on power is illustrative of the tendency of social theory to alternate between the poles of 'action' and 'structure':

Initially, focussing upon the action pole by studying the interactions of decision-makers (Dahl, 1962; Polsby, 1963), it has moved towards an appreciation of the structural conditions of action (Bachrach & Baratz, 1962; Crenson, 1971) before, most recently, returning to incorporate neglected elements of ideology and organization (Benton, 1981; Hindess, 1982) (pp. 538-539).

Lukes (1974) states that the very definition of any given use of contested concepts such as power is "inextricably tied to a given set of probably unacknowledgeable value assumptions which predetermine the range of [their] empirical application" (p. 26). Adopting Lukes's labelling of power as a contested concept, Hiley (1987) suggests that the task of the researcher is to give good reasons as to why a particular conception of power is appropriate for understanding a particular range of phenomena in organisations. Connolly (1983) similarly labels power, suggesting that it is the discursive politics of such concepts which constitute their field of meanings. Thus power can be examined only with reference to particular situations - a tenet of Foucauldian theorising which examines how power is exercised through discursive and other practices which define and support power relations.

Lukes's (1974) seminal contribution Power: A radical view makes a useful link between what he sees as the behaviourist orientation of many organisational theorists and the views of other social theorists. Lukes's own view of power is predicated on a critique of what he sees as the one dimensional view of power of the American pluralists (of which he cites Dahl as a leading example), and the two dimensional view of Bachrach and Baratz, views which are presented briefly in the context of Lukes's critique.
While the one dimensional view of power, according to Lukes, is characterised by its emphasis on concrete, observable behaviour, the two dimensional view propounded by Bachrach and Baratz (1962; 1963 & 1970) incorporates the idea of mobilisation of bias:

a set of predominant values, beliefs, rituals and institutional procedures ('rules of the game') that operate systematically and consistently to the benefit of certain persons and groups at the expense of others. Those who benefit are placed in a preferred position to defend and promote their vested interests (Bachrach & Baratz, 1970, pp. 43-44).

Bachrach and Baratz claim to extend the interest in power to include not only the power exercised in the taking of decisions but also the power exercised by confining the scope of decision-making to safer issues: that is decision-making and nondecision-making.

Lukes's three dimensional view of power involves a critique of the two earlier views as too behaviourist - that is, too committed to the study of overt and actual behaviour of decision-making. Lukes (1974) reminds us that the system is not sustained simply by individually chosen acts, "but also, most importantly, by the socially structured and culturally patterned behaviour of groups, and practices of institutions, which may indeed be manifested by individuals' inaction" (p. 22). Lukes goes on to quote Marx, "Men make their own history but they do not make it just as they please; they do not make it under circumstances chosen by themselves, but under circumstances directly encountered, given and transmitted from the past" (p. 22). In this third dimension, then, Lukes points to power as a means of shaping the perceptions and cognitions of others, so that what they consider to be in their interests is radically transformed. This position underscores the complexity of power and the difficulty in confining observations of it to directly observable behaviours manifest in situations of conflict. Lukes's view is therefore wider and focuses on latent conflict - inaction rather than observable action. Power, in this perspective, may be exercised by individuals or groups, consciously or not; thus institutionalised power is incorporated. As such, power is not totally reducible to individuals' intentions. Nor is it so for Marx who believes that "the economic structure of society is independent of and not reducible to agents' willed intentions" (Hoy, 1981, p. 46).

Other theorists, too, conceive of power as possessed or exercised by structures or systems rather than by individuals. In this perspective, social and political practices tend to be conceptualised as the result of forces over which individuals have no control:

power is built into a social system in such a way that its exercise is almost independent of a particular individual's will. Individuals more or less unaware of the structure of power that surrounds them, participate, maintain and are limited by that power structure (Lipps, 1991, p. 5).

Giddens's (1979) theory of structuration is less extreme. Giddens sees structure as a medium as well as an outcome of action. Power, then, is a property of interaction which Giddens theorises exclusively as a means for securing or defending sectional interests. In this conception, the 'powerful' are not independent of subordinates and subordinates are never completely dependent upon the powerful. Power for Giddens, as indeed is the case for Foucault, can only be over others. It can never be shared. Knights and Roberts (1982) state that Giddens "sought to replace individualistic concepts of action and power with relational concepts" which, they claim, "provide a fruitful basis for the analysis of power in organizations" (p. 49). Power, for Giddens (1979; 1981; 1984), is not conceived simply as a relationship between individuals, however. But rather as a structural quality of institutional life, which is chronically reproduced by the day-to-day communicative practices of its members.

Parsons (1937) sees power as essentially a structural property which is present in society as a whole rather than in the individuals which make up society. Unlike structuralists such as Althusser and Poulantzas, Parsons did not see power as a property of social relations. Power is seen only as "a generalized capacity to secure the performance of binding obligations by units in a system of collective action (Parsons, 1967, p. 237). One very useful contribution Parsons makes to the debate on
power is his statement that the zero-sum conception of power is unlikely to prove adequate for the understanding of power. It is usual within the realm of functionalism, at least, to think that when one individual gains power it is at the expense of another who is losing power. For Parsons, and increasingly so for others including Foucault, power is not conceived in terms of an amount which must be shared and a balance which must be effected.

The mainstream debate in social science is between organisational theorists like Dahl who claim power as a property of agents (individuals and groups) and those who see it as a property of social structures. Power in this view "is located in a generalized system of beliefs or values. It dominates not so much by the direct exchange of power of one individual over another but indirectly at the level of beliefs and values that structure the field of possible decisions and behaviour" (Hiley, 1987, p. 350). Thus power is seen to include structural and social arrangements which produce certain outcomes and diminish the possibility of, or prevent other outcomes from arising.

Radical structuralists are been far less concerned with who exercises power, and rather more concerned with how power is exercised. A focus on how power operates in society has indeed become increasingly common in wider social theory, and indeed, is at the heart of any Foucauldian analysis. Barnes (1988) explains:

We need to consider how systems of powers may be developed and stabilised so that they persist as features in the distribution of knowledge, and how all the myriad interactions in society, based upon and informed by the distribution of knowledge, somehow serve to keep something close to that distribution in existence (p. 67).

This section has moved from considering a functionalist/behaviourist conception of power which involves a focus on the intentions of social actors and actual behaviours in the resolution of conflict to a structuralist conception which involves a focus on structural factors within a system of values and beliefs (such as are implicit in theories of Marxist domination). In his critique, Lukes (1974) tends to side with those who link power with human agency. Structuralists, he thinks, are necessarily determinists and do not allow for free will - for agents to have the power to act differently. In both complementing and countering Lukes's view, Hoy (1981) points out:

The claim that a structural system restricts what an agent can do, does not entail the claim that such a system determines what an agent will do. Correlatively, the system itself need not remain unaffected by what agents in fact do.

The question considered in the following analysis of Foucault's views on power is whether there can be the reconciliation between the agency perspective embodied in functionalism/behaviourism and the structuralist viewpoint which Hoy's comments would appear to suggest is possible.

The Case for a Foucauldian Understanding of Power

This section begins with a brief contextualisation of Foucault's writings on power. In his early work, Foucault claims that the objectification of 'man' was a comparatively recent phenomenon. Man as an object within the field of knowable objects, according to Foucault, came into play only from around the end of the eighteenth century in Europe. "Man is an invention which the archaeology of our thought can easily show to be of recent date" (1970, p. 387).

Examining the development of the human sciences in the nineteenth century through a study of institutions, Foucault discerns behind the means for increasing knowledge about man a growing technology of control and a proliferation of instruments of power. Power is exercised through institutions which codify human experience and extend the reach of its effects. Foucault shows institutions executing social norms through means of exclusion and interment. Employed systematically, such means inculcate norms which facilitate control. They, and the disciplines which
support them, are instruments of power. The complex historical roots of the institutions and of the
disciplines reflected, for Foucault, a general social transformation. The significant innovations in
techniques of surveillance and discipline in the military, religious, educational and penal institutions
became features of modern capitalism, spreading throughout the whole social structure. During the
nineteenth century and later, the techniques of the prison spread to the entire social body (Foucault,
1977a). The growth of institutions such as prisons, the military, schools, hospitals and factories
contributed to what Foucault (1980b) calls "a veritable technological take-off in the productivity of
power" (p. 119). Dandeker (1990) explains Foucault's view of the role power played in wider society:

Foucault saw as objects of the exercise of power minimal cost in terms of economic
expenditure, pervasiveness of power regimes throughout society and the link of economic
growth of power achieved by the discipline of different organisations so as to increase the
utility and docility of the system as a whole" (p. 27).

For all his interest in power, Foucault never clearly or concisely elaborates his conception of power. In
fact it was only in his later works that he explicitly acknowledged the importance and centrality of the
concept of power to his theorising. "When I think back now", writes Foucault, "I ask myself what else
was it I was talking about, in Madness and Civilization or The Birth of the Clinic, but power? Yet I am
perfectly aware that I scarcely ever used the word and never had such a field of analyses at my
disposal" (1980b, p. 115). In his early work, Foucault show considerable aversion to the question 'what
is power? For him, this question is secondary to the question 'how is power exercised?' (Cousins &
Hussain, 1984, p. 227). The 'how' question takes on a particular meaning for Foucault. He asks "'How'
not in the sense of 'How does [power] manifest itself?' but 'By what means is it exercised?' and 'What
happens when individuals exert (as they say) power over others?'" (Foucault, 1982, p. 217).

So it is in his elucidation of power, Foucault addresses various questions at various points in his
analyses, rather than providing at any one time any one distinct answer. Within Foucault's work, there
are repeated suggestions to the effect that a general theory of power is neither possible and that the
subject could only be addressed in respect of particular domains where power was present by showing
how power had structured them (Wartenberg, 1990, p. 11). "I in no way construct a theory of power",
claims Foucault (1990, p. 39).

Distilled from Foucault's works and from commentators' interpretations of them, are the following
features of a Foucauldian conception of power:

1. "Power is exercised rather than possessed" (Foucault, 1977a, p. 26). It exists in a nominal sense
rather than in any substantive sense:

Power is not a commodity, a position, a prize or a plot; it is the operation of the political technologies
throughout the social body. The functioning of these political rituals of power is exactly what sets up
the nonegalitarian, assymmetrical relations (Foucault, 1982, p. 185).

Power is immanent in all human relations. It is never localised in anybody's hands but "employed and
exercised through a net-like organisation.... [individuals] are always in the position of simultaneously
undergoing and exercising this power" (Foucault, 1980b, p. 98). The networks through which power is
exercised are not static. Foucault describes power as something that circulates and which is "produced
from one moment to the next" (1980a, p. 93).

Power is multidirectional, operating from the top-down and also from the bottom-up. It is
cocconstituted in resistance. "Power has its principle not so much in a person as in a certain concerted
distribution of bodies, surfaces, lights, gazes; in an arrangement whose internal mechanisms produce
the relation in which individuals are caught up" (Foucault, 1977a, p. 202). As Oliver (1991) expresses
it, "relations of power are internal conditions of differential relations: economic, sexual etc" (p. 182).
2. Power is positive and productive, not simply repressive (as in the Marxist view, for example). Foucault writes:

If power were never anything but repressive, if it never did anything but say no, do you really think one could be brought to obey it? What makes power hold good, what makes it accepted, is simply the fact that it doesn't only weigh on us as a force, that says no, but that it traverses and produces things; it induces pleasure, forms knowledge, produces discourse. It needs to be considered as a productive network which runs through the whole social body, much more than as a negative instance whose function is repression (1980b, p. 119)

Nor indeed can resistance be conceived of as an attempt to negate power, as it is, itself productive of power relations, not so much as by direct opposition (for without a locus of power there can be no clear opponent against which to struggle) as by more diffuse means

3. Power is inextricably bound up with knowledge (and knowledge like power is socially constructed). "We should admit rather that power produces knowledge ... that power and knowledge directly imply one another; that there is no power relation without the correlative constitution of a field of knowledge, nor any knowledge that does not presuppose and constitute at the same time power relations" (Foucault, 1977a, p. 27). The constructs of power and knowledge are not independent; neither are they linked by a discernible relationship of cause and effect, but are seen by Foucault as two sides of the same social relations. "Mechanisms of power are simultaneously instruments for the formation and accumulation of knowledge (Townley, 1994). In the process of coming to know and in knowing an individual, power is exercised with increasingly refined effect to the extent that the known subject is ultimately self disciplining. Hoy (1981) argues the relation is not one of predication but of identification - power and knowledge become so indistinguishable in Foucault's view that he labels what he is studying accordingly: power/knowledge, pouvoir/savoir. Foucault's "construction of the concept of power/knowledge is a device for studying the social and scientific practices that underlie and condition the formation of beliefs" (Hoy, 1981, p. 48). Power/knowledge, then, is constructed as a heuristic device.

4. Power/knowledge functions through discourse. Relations of power "cannot themselves be established, consolidated nor implemented without the production, accumulation, circulation and functioning of a discourse. There can be no possible exercise of power without a certain economy of discourses of truth which operates through and on the basis of this association" (Foucault, 1980b, p. 93).

5. Disciplinary power, which Foucault sees as distinct from the juridico-discursive concept of sovereign power, structures activity spatially and temporally to such an extent that power becomes internalised and to a considerable extent, invisible. Dandeker (1990) describes the effect of Foucault's concept of disciplinary power thus: "Power as 'visible coercion' was supplanted by detailed disciplinary practices and sustained observation and monitoring of conduct" (p. 25). For Foucault, the Panopticon and the confessional are exemplars of modern power.

Institutionalised disciplinary technologies or normalising regimes operate irrespective of and sometimes counter to the standards expressed in legal statute. The disciplines "effect a suspension of the law that is never total, but is never annulled either. Regular and institutional as it may be, the discipline, in its mechanism is a 'counter-law'"(Foucault, 1977a, p. 223).

Foucault's concept of disciplinary power is based upon systematic surveillance, monitoring, intervention, reform and training. This disciplinary regime replaced church and monarchy in Foucault's view. The types of instruments and strategies used by the operations of disciplinary power can be taken over and used by any institution: prisons, schools, hospitals and administrative apparatuses, bureaucratic agencies, police forces and so on (McHoul & Grace, 1993, p. 66). The
micro-techniques of disciplinary power "inscribe and normalise not only individuals but also collective organized bodies" (Clegg, 1989, p. 100).

6. Power is maintained and reproduced through a range of programmes, technologies and strategies which may be more or less evident (for example, discursive practices which limit what may be said and by whom it may be said). Power "is the name one attributes to a complex strategical relationship in a particular society" (Foucault, 1980a, p. 93). The strategical relationship is always in the process of being achieved because of the resistance of those subjected to it. Thus power relations are never fixed, nor are they immutable.

7. Power relations are implicated in what Foucault (1977a) calls the 'political economy of the body'. This political investment of the body is bound up in accordance with complex reciprocal relations, with its economic use; it is largely as a force of production that the body is invested with relations of power and domination; but on the other hand, its constitution as labour power is possible only if it is caught up in a system of subjection... the body becomes a useful force only if it is both a productive body and a subjective body (pp. 25-26).

8. The ultimate is pastoral power where people discipline themselves: "... this form of power applies itself to immediate everyday life which categorizes the individual, marks him by his own individuality, attaches him to his own identity, imposes a law of truth on him which he must recognize and which others have to recognize in him. It is a form of power which makes individuals subjects" (Foucault, 1982, p. 212).

In producing subjects, power does not necessarily produce conformity. On the contrary, one of the prime effects of power was to produce, precisely, individuality. Differences, peculiarities and deviances are in fact ever more highlighted in a system of controls concerned to seek them out. "The individual ... is not the vis- -vis of power; it is I believe one of its prime effects" writes Foucault (1980b, p. 98).

9. Power masquerades as a supposedly rationalist construction of modern institutions, a regime of truth which induces and extends the effects of power (Foucault, 1980b).

10. Foucault's concern in his later studies is with micro power. The emphasis on local strategies, according to Oliver (1991), provides the hope that individuals can make a difference. For in resisting power at the local level, changes within institutions could lead to changes in the effect of the multiplicity of institutions. Foucault argues for resistance performed by 'specific intellectuals' - ordinary people who have knowledge of their circumstances and are able to act "within specific sectors at the precise points where their own conditions of life or work situate them (housing, the hospital, the asylum, the laboratory, the university, family and sexual relations)" (1980b, p. 126).

11. Just prior to his death, Foucault began to link his notions of power with those of governmentality: "The regulation of the conduct of the individual was to become linked ... to the objective of improving the condition of the population as a whole.... the calculated management of life (Miller, 1987, p. 141). So Foucault's interest in power was in how power was extended and its effects made far-reaching.

Foucault's views on power differ from other conceptions of power in several important ways. Foucault locates social control within the context of power relations, not outside of, or separate from them. Wrong (1979) contends that social scientists have accepted that it is essential to "distinguish between the exercise of power and social control in general - otherwise there would be no point in employing power as a separate concept or in identifying power relations as a distinct kind of social relation" (p. 3).

Foucault, however, does not separate out power from the influence of norms inherent in social relations. Norms are implicated in the exercise of power. Normalising regimes are what render the
exercise of power less visible but nonetheless effective. Sheridan (1980) explains Foucault's perspective this way:

power is only tolerable when a good deal of its workings are concealed. Its efficacy is proportional to the degree of that concealment. For power, secrecy is not an abuse, but a necessity; and this not only for its greater efficiency, but also for its acceptance (p. 181).

To leave out of consideration power which operates through normalising regimes would seem to ignore much of the more subtle but highly efficacious exercise of power. In not separating out social norms from power, Foucault subscribes to the position that such norms are the effects of power whether they were intended effects or not. And here is a further differentiation of a Foucauldian perspective. In the vein of the functionalist tradition, Wrong (1979) suggests that intentionality is an important consideration: power has to produce intended effects to be power or, put another way, power that does not work out the way one wants it to, is not power. For Foucault, even unintended effects are the effects of the exercise of power. Foucault's discussion of intentionality appears somewhat contradictory. Power relations are both intentional and nonsubjective.... They are imbued, through and through, with calculation: there is no power that is exercised without a series of aims and objectives. But this does not mean that it results from the choice or decision of an individual subject; let us not look for the headquarters that presides over its rationality... the logic is perfectly clear, the aims decipherable, and yet it is often the case that no one is there to have invented them, and few who can be said to have formulated them (1980a, pp. 94-95).

Foucault is clearly less concerned with intent in regard to power (why power is exercised) than with how it is exercised and to what general effect (1980b, p. 97). There may be intentionality, but it does not follow, for Foucault, that the broader consequences of actions are necessarily as intended.

A further major difference revolves around the Foucauldian notion of subjectification. Cooper and Burrell (1988) contrast the functionalist approach to the 'subject' in traditional organisational analysis and the genealogical conception inherent in what they see as a postmodern approach of which Foucault is a leading exponent:

The role of the subject in traditional organizational analysis has been shaped by certain functional requirements: the subject is a ‘decision-maker’ or a ‘worker’, for example; that is, the definition of the subject is dependent on the prior acceptance of a normative-rational model of organization. In contrast, the genealogical conception of the subject as a body in material flow leads us to think of it as a machine that produces itself; it thus places the subject at the origin of the organizing process instead of seeing it as an adjunct (p. 105).

Foucault thus perceives the subject as exercising power and produced, as it were, by power. In so locating the individual as subject, Foucault argues that it is the processes which lead to subjectification which require analysis. Cooper and Burrell (1988) see the modern understanding of ‘organisation’ as turned upside down and the concept of power reversed when viewed from a Foucauldian perspective. No longer is the focus on formalised units such as individuals or organisations, nor is one led to think of power as owned and manipulated by such social units. Cooper and Burrell (1988) contend that "the 'informal' perspective makes us see power as an autonomous system of compulsion which works through formal systems of discipline and organisation" (p. 109). Foucault, in adhering to the possibility of resistance even at the microlevel, may not subscribe completely to the notion of autonomous systems, but certainly this is the direction his argument was leading.

Slightly more middle ground is to be found in the position taken by Baynes, Bohman and McCarthy (1987) who suggest that Foucault and other postmodern philosophers decentre the subject by recognising that s/he is created both historically [by structures] and socially [by other individuals]. This critique challenges the liberal humanist notion that we are free individuals capable of mastering
the universe. It looks at ways ideology is masked as commonsense truth, at the power structure that underlies representation and at the construction of subjectivity (In Neimark, 1990, p. 104).

Hoy (1981), too, takes a similar position in his analysis of the Foucauldian perspective:

While structural determinists are committed to the assumption that agents are not true causes of events, and therefore cannot say the agent could have acted differently, Foucault is not similarly restricted. The technology of power does not causally determine particular actions; it only makes them probable. So A could have options open, and, similarly, both A and B would have different interests if they were not caught up in this net of ideological coercion (p. 51).

The position taken here to the interpretation of Foucault's power/knowledge theories also occupies the middle ground. The argument is that Foucault engages in paradigmatic fence sitting. His conception of power while eschewing most of the tenets of functionalist/behaviourist conceptions of power, does retain elements of structuralism. It allows for power to be exercised by individuals and through structures - that is by way of 'programmes, technologies and strategies' which become absorbed into organisational norms as regimes of truth (one could go so far as to suggest that organisations are essentially strategies). Foucault, of course, does not hold with ideas of any essential structure underpinning particular events, arguing that the local and the particular always insert their differences. Though he writes of individuals being made into subjects, Foucault clearly does not subscribe totally to a determinist viewpoint. Though he emphasises the power of normalising regimes, Foucault does not leave the subject of such regimes without the possibility for resistance. Individuals simultaneously undergo and exercise power: "They are not only its inert or consenting target; they are also elements of its articulation (Foucault, 1980b, p. 98). So it is for Foucault, that power is exercised by individuals and through structures; the precise locus of power is a notion for which he clearly holds no favour.

The very aim of power is differentiated in a Foucauldian conception of power/knowledge. According to Hiley (1987), the aim of power for Foucault "is not to resolve conflict [the orientation of the functionalists/behaviourists] or to achieve ideological domination [the focus of the Marxists and neo-Marxists] but to realize efficiency and reduce opposition through processes of regimentation, regularization and supervision" (p. 346). So it is somewhat contradictory in organisational terms - a functionalist imperative realised through structure. But, a Foucauldian conception of power/knowledge is not so functionalist as to admit a notion of progress and improvement. Foucault argues that modern 'humane' discipline is not derived from a new respect for humanity but is "rather a more finely tuned mechanism of control of the social body, a more effective spinning of the web of power over everyday life" (Hoy, 1981, p. 54).

In his work on power, Foucault is perhaps less the radical humanist than the radical structuralist. For "radical humanism advocates an ideology that places people first. Organization is seen as being ultimately for people than the other way round" (Morgan, 1984, p. 320). Foucault does not situate individuals in any such privileged position. Individuals are part of the material flow of organisations and any resistance can be only at the micro level, though in sums its origins will be diffuse and varied. Despite his asking "who could be more of an antistructuralist than myself?" (1980b, p. 114) as alluded to earlier, Foucault does concede that some of the themes he employs, "may if one so wishes, be labelled structuralism" (1972, p. 11). Whether the whole of Foucault's work would locate him within or outside a structuralist perspective is not at issue here. The argument is merely for a reading of his conception of power as being allied to the structuralist position. Indeed Hoy (1981) makes the point that Foucault's notion of power "is not incommensurable with more traditional social theory (of both the Marxian and Liberal types) (p. 43).

Foucault's theorising on power has been variously received. It is both original and, confusing in its originality. Miller (1987) alludes to a sense of Foucauldian notions of power failing "because they refused to admit where power really came from (p. 11). It could be argued that despite the complexity of, and sometimes apparent contradictions within his work, Foucault does offer important insights as to the origins of modern forms of power and that his conclusions may in part be supported by his
analysis of empirics (though these empirics are sometimes criticised for being overly Eurocentric (e.g. Said, 1984; Neimark, 1990)).

It is perhaps in Foucault's explicit acknowledgment of his debt to Nietzsche, that critics have lodged their attack on what they see as the essential pessimism of Foucauldian theorising. Gordon (1991) notes two tenets of this criticism. First, that "Foucault's markedly bleak account of the effects of humanitarian penal reformism corresponded to an overall philosophy of nihilism and despair" and second, that "Foucault's representation of society as a network of omnipresent relations of subjugating power seemed to preclude the possibility of meaningful individual freedom" (p. 4). But, as Oliver (1991) argues, "Foucault's analysis points to the fragility of systems of domination.... Power is not something that belongs exclusively to the oppressors" (p. 182) - if, indeed, power could belong to anyone. In his suggestions that local resistance does allow for change to be effected, Foucault is clearly not subscribing to Marxist-type revolutions as the most convincing solutions but to the possibility of individuals exercising a degree of free will. As Knights and Vurdubakis (1994) point out in dismissing the critiques of labour process theorists and Marxists who believe Foucault's analysis of power and discipline leaves no room for resistance, power is neither exhaustive of social relations, nor totalising with respect to subjectivity. Discontinuities and gaps leave considerable space for resistance. Moreover, power and resistance for Foucault, as distinct from the Marxist position, is not formulated as a dualism.

Foucault (1989) denies that there is on the one side, Power... and on the other side, the resistance of the unhappy ones who are obligated to bow before power. I believe an analysis of this kind to be completely false, because power is borne out of a plurality of relationships (p. 157).

In taking a Foucauldian position on the possibility of resistance, however, one enters a wider debate which Cooper and Burrell (1988) claim is characterised by two seemingly conflicting epistemologies:

Modernism with its belief in the essential capacity of humanity to perfect itself through the power of rational thought and postmodernism with its critical questioning, and often outright rejection of the ethnocentric rationalism championed by modernism (p. 92). -14-

In short, the rationale for resistance: is it amelioration, critique, both or neither? In some senses, the above debate is one which Foucault's work engenders, by first avoiding simple epistemological categorisation, and by being open to sometimes conflicting interpretation. One could argue, for example, that in denying an interest in the reasons for power being exercised, Foucault is not interested in the motives for resistance, either. On the other hand, the object of examining power, for Foucault (1974) can be seen to be resistance:

The real political task in a society such as ours is to criticise the workings of institutions which appear to both neutral and independent; to criticise them in such a manner that the political violence which has exercised itself through them will be unmasked so that one could fight them (p. 171).

Foucault (1980b) thus advocates taking up local struggles through critique (a form of resistance) in order to "detach the power of truth from the forms of hegemony, social, economic and cultural, within which it operates at the present time" (p. 133). The position taken in this paper is that the act of resistance is an exercise of power and as such will have specific power effects, intended or unintended; as part of a dynamic system, one effect is (potentially radical) change.

Much of the criticism of Foucault's work on power does come from Marxists, for in their view, Foucault ignores the role of economic conditions in determining power and knowledge. Another major criticism of Foucauldian theorising comes from the critical theorists of which it is occasionally claimed the essence of Foucault's work is closely allied. Habermas (1987) claims that Foucault's theory of power lacks any sociological depth. He suggests that Foucault could not explain how "persistent local struggles", confrontations mediated by the body" and "the ebb and flow of an
anonymous process of subjugation" were "consolidated into institutionalized power" (In Ashley, 1990, p. 93). These issues could, for Foucault, be resolved only by analysis at the microlevel.

A criticism of Foucault's work alluded to by Barrett (1991) is that Foucault's position entails "seeing power everywhere or reducing everything to power just as Marxism had reduced everything to economics" (p. 136). Foucault's aim, suggests Barrett, was to understand how power operated, "how increased disciplining of individuals had come about in western society and how one could show the political and economic dimensions of changes in power" (1991, p. 136). His larger aim, is thus seen as akin to that of a grand theorist. Certainly he does seek to generalise beyond the specific cases he studied while, at the same time claiming it was impossible to do so. As Knights and Vurdubakis (1994, p. 173) point out, however, criticisms of Foucault as 'failing' to provide an all inclusive general theory of power (eg. Neimark, 1990) are valid only if one is committed to exactly those essentialist notions Foucault calls into question.

Foucault himself proposes what he calls an analytic of power, something which he opposes to the context free, ahistorical and objective notion of a theory:

If one tries to erect a theory of power, one will always be obliged to view it as emerging at a given place and time, and hence to deduce to it, to reconstruct its genesis. But if power is in reality an open, more or less co-ordinated (in the event, no doubt, ill-coordinated) cluster of relations, then the only problem is to provide oneself with a grid of analysis which makes possible an analytic of relations of power (1980b, p. 199)

Though aspects of it, at times, appear contradictory, Foucault's power analytics can be usefully applied to organisations. So far, however, the application of Foucauldian ideas on power has been largely the domain of sociologists, anthropologists and psychologists (e.g. Fardon, 1985; Rose, 1990, Hollway, 1991), feminist academics (e.g. Weendon, 1987; Diamond & Quinby, 1988; Oliver, 1991; Sawicki, 1991; McNeil, 1993) and accounting researchers (e.g. Burchell, Clubb & Hopwood, 1985; Loft, 1986; Hoskin & Macve, 1986 & 1988); Knights & Collinson, 1987; Hopwood, 1987; Miller & O'Leary, 1987; Neimark, 1990). There is, of course, overlap in the work of many of the above with organisation theory. Although passing references to Foucauldian ideas are increasingly found within studies on management and organisations (see, for example, Clegg, Hardy & Nord, 1996), explicit and thorough application of Foucault's ideas on power within organisation studies is infrequent. Exceptions include Fox (1989), Knights & Willmott (1989), Knights and Morgan (1990 & 1991), Mumbly and Stohl (1991), Sewell and Wilkinson (1992), Townley (1993 & 1994), and Austrin (1994). In general, the notion of disciplinary power, in particular the mechanisms for surveillance over workers and ultimately worker self-discipline predominates in this literature, and in recommendations regarding the application of Foucauldian ideas to the study of management and organisations; the objective here being to review and advance labour process analysis rather than to refine aspects of the labour process, as in more functionally oriented studies. Contending that there is "a growing suspicion of the adequacy of some models -especially rational models -of organisational decision-making to the concrete reality of organisational life", Hiley (1987, p. 343) suggests that researchers would do well to benefit from alternate models of the nature and role of power and postulates the disciplinary model derived from the work of Foucault as relevant for management theory (for example, as a critique of the use of disciplinary techniques to maximise productivity by maximising control and regimentation).

Foucault's work, according to Burrell (1988) is "suggestive of alternative ways of approaching problems and ordering material" (p. 222). Foucauldian inspired work by Daudi (1986) which approaches the problem of power in organisations through a diagnosis of how a primitive (read limited functionalist) conception of power has arisen in managerial praxis leads to the development of his proposition which is not dissimilar to that taken here: That power is an immanent phenomenon arising out of the interactions of individuals and the structures of organisations. This paper, having outlined a Foucauldian perspective on power as an alternative to other more mainstream perspectives, and locating its interest in strategies, rather than in individuals or in structures per se, now moves to a discussion of the practical implications of adopting a Foucauldian lens on power relations.
Some Implications of Foucauldian Theorising on Power for Organisational Analysis

Though he was reluctant to admit it at the time, power was central to many of Foucault's own analyses. His studies of the clinic and the prison in particular yield most insight into the application of his theorising on power. The implications of adopting a Foucauldian stance are many. The following would seem to be most pertinent to research on management and organisations.

First, the use of Foucault's genealogical method permits an historical understanding of how power has come to be exercised in individual organisations. The emphasis is on organisational processes - how power is instantiated in the routine discursive practices of everyday organisational life - in particular how organisational practices function in both more formal and overt as well as more subtle and discreet ways through the techniques of discipline, surveillance and normalisation to constitute individuals as organisational subjects.

Second, a Foucauldian study does not limit a discussion of power to a description of its effects without ever relating those effects to causes or a basic nature of power (Foucault, 1982). However, motives (why particular subjects act in particular ways) are not part of the grid of analysis.

Third, a focus on the role of individuals (agency) and structure in producing and maintaining power relations is enabled, though it remains impossible within a Foucauldian perspective to determine where, or with whom, power relations originate. Foucault admits that it is not always easy to identify exactly where power lies:

> No-one, strictly speaking, has an official right to power; and yet it is always being exerted in a particular direction, with some people on one side and some on the other. It is often difficult to say who holds power in a precise sense, but it is easy to see who lacks power (Foucault, 1977b, p. 213).

Indeed, it is fair to say that Foucault is not always interested in who exercised power, although he sometimes is, particularly in respect of any analysis of 'struggles'. "This theme of struggle only really becomes operative - if one establishes concretely - in each particular case - who is engaged in struggle, what the struggle is about, and how, where, by what means ... it evolves" (Foucault, 1980b, p. 164). The focus is oriented more towards how power was exercised though discussion necessarily recounts who benefited and who suffered (who is secondary to how). Notably, however, in any discussion of agents, the attractions of reductionist psychology are resisted: The focus is not on individual personality, cognitive style or attitudes rather on how agents might have been conditioned to act in particular ways.

Fourth, a Foucauldian approach allows for the study of organisations to be freed from the functionalist notions of progress and continual refinement.

Fifth, researchers using a Foucauldian approach of interpretive analytics as Dreyfus and Rabinow (1982) preferred to call it, are encouraged to accept that they have no privileged external position outside the practices which they are studying, and that they have been involved in and shaped by disciplinary power and other normalising practices.

Sixth, a conundrum for organisational theorists is posed. Though a case study approach is both a practicable and appropriate application of Foucauldian method, the question of generalisability arises. Foucault claims a certain homogeneity of organisational forms, where, as he sees it the underlying dynamics of organisations are all essentially alike despite their differences in surface features (Burrell, 1988). Thus do we allow for the possibility of a theory of organisations based on a Foucauldian perspective? Clegg (1989) argues that a general theory of organisations is not possible as far too many contingencies can enter into the picture - for example "the unforeseen external agencies who enter the field of action of action, or whose powers effect those already there, but also the competency of
agencies in the struggle" (p. 112). Do we accept that "the reality of organizations is that they reflect and reproduce a disciplinary society", and that in talking about organizations, we develop discourse and classification schemes for their analysis, and so we actively contribute to this discipline as Burrell (1988, p. 233) suggested? All the more so, then, to talk of organisations in conventionally functionalist ways is to reproduce a functionalist conception. Are we left with the "middle level conceptual refinement and empirical application" recommended by Clegg (1989) as maybe a more useful strategy for our researches?

So what can be done? We could use a Foucauldian conception of power/knowledge as an alternate way of theorising organisations provided we look for what Burrell labels the "Same and the Different" (1988, p. 234). We can ask what is similar to other organisations and what is different from other organisations we study with respect to how power is exercised? It is in unmasking how power is exercised that we reveal the possibilities for resistance and hence, maybe, even, variety in organizational forms.

Seventh, in practical terms, this review of a Foucauldian conception of power both in terms of what it is and what it is not, raises the question of what can be said about power and how it can be said. Power can only ever be exercised; in Foucault's words, "power is not something that is acquired, seized, or shared, something that one holds on to or allows to slip away" (1980a, p. 94). The interest in Foucauldian analyses can be only in the present and in the past insofar as the past informs the present. The future cannot be accounted for. Potential power simply does not exist. Power and knowledge are conflated: the traditional positivist distinctions between power and knowledge (or practice and theory) are dissolved (Marsden & Townley, 1996). Where power is described, knowledge is implicated and vice versa. Power/knowledge emerges as an heuristic device for organisational analysis denoting a relationship of interdependency and productivity. The focus is on how power produces specific effects, not on whether those effects might be conceived positively or negatively. Foucauldian discourse on power is circumscribed. It is mostly focused on how power is exercised and to what effect. Of necessity, but secondarily on who and on what structures are implicated in the particular power relations being investigated. And, almost never does Foucauldian analysis focus on why power is being exercised or what motives could be imputed.

Conclusion

This paper has reviewed three fundamentally different conceptions of power in order to clarify a Foucauldian position and the implications of adopting this kind of perspective in analyses of management and organisations.

Paradigmatically, Foucault's work remains difficult to define. Although his theories reject most of the assumptions implicit in functionalist explanations, they retain some similarities with radical structuralist perspectives. Foucault's theories on power straddle the radical humanist / radical structuralist divide, a division seen as problematic by various commentators, particularly Hopper and Powell (1985) who argue that the separation is based on a contentious reading of Marx's arguments and that the concerns of radical structuralist analysis should not be seen as incompatible with those stressing consciousness, both being "dialectical aspects of the same reality" (p. 451). Indeed, as Burrell and Morgan's (1979) taxonomy portrays, the main differentiating factor between the radical paradigms is one of subjectivity/objectivity which may be better conceived of in relative rather than in dichotomous terms. Gioia and Pitre (1990, p. 594) make an argument for bridging across blurred paradigm boundaries, highlighting the subjective-objective and regulation-radical change dimensions as continua. They contend that proponents of radical structuralism and radical humanism share the value for activism and change but differ mainly in their levels of analysis and in their assumptions about the nature of reality. Radical structuralists assume underlying objective class and economic structures whereas radical humanists assume the subjective social construction of deep structures at a micro-level. Arguably then, a clear-cut categorisation of Foucault in terms of the mutually exclusive dichotomies upon which Burrell and Morgan (1979) base their taxonomy is problematic at best. Yes it
is precisely this paradigmatic fence sitting that renders Foucault's theories on power novel and interesting, and affords the opportunity for a re-evaluation of the exercise of power in organisations.

Ultimately a Foucauldian approach to power relies on empirics for its explanation, but not in any consciously positivistic way for it accepts the ubiquitous nature of power and denies functionalist interpretations of progress. Foucault's challenge to the rationalist/functionalist pretensions of modern systems of power means that organisational life can no longer be seen as a continual refinement of strategems of power for more and more noble ends. Normalising practices which facilitate the exercise and maintenance of power, rather than ideologically derived explanations are the focus of a Foucauldian study.

Adopting a Foucauldian perspective, one might learn how power is exercised in particular organisations, what programmes, strategies and technologies support power relations, and who the beneficiaries and sufferers are in the web of power relations. An informed critique of power has significant implications for understanding the nature and role of organisations and for the resistance of power strategems - strategems which appear to be, but never are, neutral and independent. Some of the implications of Foucault's theorising on power and the use of the power/knowledge construct as an heuristic device for organisational analysis were discussed in this paper with final emphasis being placed on the use of 'power' in a nominalist sense, defining precisely what can be said about power within a Foucauldian-inspired discourse which should be oriented to specific management or organisational contexts.
References


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