

Chapter 1 return to the integrating theme of the culture of conflict and suggest two important extensions of the argument—the development of a model of a low-conflict society in which constructive conflict management is common and the important implications of the cross-cultural theory of conflict for the development of effective conflict management.

2

Conflict, Culture, and the Cross-Cultural Method

Because of strong negative cultural assumptions about conflict in western cultures, we do not easily distinguish among different forms or levels of conflict or among different motives of disputants. Yet it is important to keep in mind that conflict in and of itself is neither undesirable nor desirable. Just as there are cases where it is easy to suggest that the costs of conflict for individuals and the wider society are too high, in other situations the absence of conflict is also costly, as in authoritarian regimes where all dissent is ruthlessly repressed. Judgments about any conflict involve not only considering the goals of each side but also asking if there might have been less costly ways to achieve them.

This chapter explores the concepts of conflict and culture and suggests that conflict is usefully viewed as cultural behavior. Among the world's preindustrial societies, there is wide variation in the intensity of internal and external conflict and the forms each takes as a result of biological and social evolution and the interaction of each society with a specific environment. Cross-cultural analysis of conflict emphasizes ways in which social and psychocultural differences among societies can account for this variation. Using Axelrod's analysis of the evolution of cooperation as an example, I discuss how investigations at the individual and societal levels of conflict or cooperation can offer important insights into how cultural practices and institutions affect behavior—insights that are easily neglected in analyses at a single level. Finally, I suggest that a society's culture of conflict defines what people value, appropriate ways to obtain it, responses to others seeking the same

11

The Culture of Conflict

ways by which particular disputes can end. Here, interests associated with social structure complement the interpretations arising out of psychocultural dispositions.

Interests and interpretations motivate actions in such different ways that an adequate explanation for societal differences in conflict behavior is one which considers both mechanisms. Resource scarcity, whether absolute or relative, finds expression in group and individual interests. When overt conflict develops and what form it takes when it occurs depend on the relationship among the disputants, their interpretations of each other's motives, and their own fears. An explanation of a cultural pattern of conflict can begin with either the interests or interpretations involved, but to be comprehensive it must at some point consider both elements. For example, high conflict among the Mae Enga (and other highland New Guinea peoples) is surely related to land scarcity, but the intensity and persistence of local fighting is only comprehensible in light of the psychocultural dispositions linking the land to the core of one's identity and rarely remitting trust and security outside the clan.

In every society interests and interpretations are organized in particular ways that reflect and shape its culture of conflict. If the language of conflict in any society emphasizes unique features, my analysis points to important common elements as well, which I shall consider in the next chapter, a discussion of the concept of the culture of conflict.

In closing, I draw on my cross-cultural analysis to develop three insights about conflict. First, the culture of conflict is a useful tool for understanding societal level differences in conflict, emphasizing both how culture shapes conflict behavior and how conflict can be understood as cultural behavior. Second, just as medical diagnoses frequently focus on pathology, social analysis can easily examine only problems. The results of the cross-cultural study provide an opportunity to reflect on the positive lessons from low-conflict societies. Through discussion of low-conflict societies, I hope to suggest how some of their institutions, practices, and norms may be relevant in other settings. Third, the cross-cultural theory of conflict with its emphasis on social structural interests and psychocultural interpretations has important implications for the management of individual disputes. In particular, I suggest that constructive conflict management is most likely when both interests and interpretations are effectively addressed.

Conflict as Cultural Behavior

The culture of conflict is a society's configuration of norms, practices, and institutions which affect what people enter into disputes about, with whom they fight, how the disputes evolve, and how they are likely to end. It is a product of social structural organization and psychocultural dispositions. Culture is an emergent concept, something which appears on the aggregate but not individual level in the sense that a single person cannot have his or her own culture; rather, culture is what is shared by people living in a society. Although any society's

The concept of the culture of conflict is relevant to understanding both conflict and conflict management. Although theories of conflict have many implicit hypotheses about what constitutes effective conflict management, and despite the fact that approaches to conflict management are based on often unarticulated hypotheses about the roots of conflict, theories of conflict and approaches to conflict management are too rarely brought together. The concept of the culture of conflict directs attention to how societal level institutions and practices affect the course of particular conflicts. Despite the fact that different processes operate at the societal and dispute levels, culture links the two.

Culture affects conflict behavior, but conflict can also be viewed as cultural behavior. All conflict occurs in a cultural context. Knowing something about the cultural context in which a conflict occurs tells us a lot about its roots, its likely course, and its management. This study identifies two critical sources of cultural differences in conflict—social structure and psychocultural practices.¹

Culture is a way of life transmitted (with modifications) over time, and embodied in a community's institutions, norms, and accepted practices. It provides critical tools by which groups and individuals operate in and understand their social worlds. Culture is broadly seen in world-views that influence action, whereas a social community (less abstract than culture) uses more direct methods to shape the behavior of its members (Price-Williams 1985).

The goals and procedures of community institutions are linked to culturally shared notions of appropriate behavior. In terms of conflict, this refers to shared expectations about how to respond to particular kinds of events, how others in the community are likely to react, and what are reasonable goals and approved ways of pursuing them. Culturally shared rules can guide behavior even in the absence of institutions to enforce them. Even in as basic a conflict as Axelrod's prisoner's dilemma tournament between computer programs, culture is present in the definition of what constitutes winning and in the payoff matrix, and changes in either of these produce different outcomes.

1. This does not deny the effect of individual differences within any cultural community. Group members who are more—or less—assertive, ambitious, or pugnacious in a setting often make a difference.

Conflict is cultural behavior, therefore, because culture shapes so many of its key elements. Conflict can take place outside a culturally shared frame of reference; when it does, the absence of common assumptions makes it especially difficult to contain. In such situations one party may use its own cultural assumptions to try to understand what another has done or is likely to do, often with disastrous results (Cohen 1991). At other times a group decides that an adversary's values and behaviors are completely at odds with its own and therefore behaviors toward it are not subject to any of the inhibitions on within-group conflict.

Culture is critical in the development of in-group and out-group identities, providing the metaphors and associations to distinguish allies and enemies. Through participation in day-to-day events, groups associate affectively salient experiences around which identities coalesce. Critical differences between groups are not found in the objective dissimilarities between such experiences so much as in small disparities that can take on great emotional meaning.

Cultural differences can mark the political polarization of a community and at the same time provide signals that help people to lead their lives with a minimum of overt conflict. In Northern Ireland, Boyle and Hadden note:

Ulster people [do not] spend [all] their time arguing, abusing each other or fighting. On the contrary, they are naturally reserved and wary on first acquaintance. That is because it is important for them to establish on which side someone else stands. When two Ulster people whose communal identity is not self-evident meet, each immediately sets about discovering—without, of course, asking—whether the other is Protestant or Catholic. Since the difference between members of the two communities is not instantly apparent, as it would be in societies divided by race, colour or language, they use a series of more or less accurate cues: surnames . . . ; Christian names . . . ; schooling (perhaps the best test if it can be got at); the 'h' test (Catholics tend to say 'h'aitch,' while Protestants tend to say 'aitch'); or just the attitudes that may be disclosed on a whole range of sensitive issues. The point of this elaborate process is to enable both parties to avoid saying or revealing something that may prove embarrassing or offensive or may lead to disagreement on some fundamental issue. The desire to avoid having to embark on an argument that both sides know cannot be resolved is as good an indication as any of the stubbornness with which each clings to its basic political beliefs. (1985:58)

*Culture shapes how individuals understand their social worlds, how they classify people, evaluate possible actions, and sanction certain responses but not others. Conflict reflects cultural priorities but can also be used to alter them. Culture is also political because its control over the definition of legitimate actors and actions favors certain people and groups.*²

Generalizing societies (where internal and external conflict are at similar levels) and differentiating societies (where internal and external conflict are at different levels) offer two contrasting cultures of conflict. While more preindustrial societies are generalizers than differentiators, the fact that differentiation is associated with increased complexity and stronger cross-cutting ties means that both cultural styles might occur in many settings. What the data analysis could not address are the conditions giving rise to the development of each style or the dynamics of its perpetuation. The two groups of societies are most readily distinguished in terms of their structural features. However, it is reasonable to expect important psychocultural practices involved in the maintenance of generalization and differentiation as well. This question is worthy of more systematic analysis.

The Low-Conflict Culture

The data analysis in chapters 6 and 7 highlights differences between low- and high-conflict societies. Throughout the discussion, however, there has been greater emphasis on those societies with high levels of conflict because it is easier to account for an existing or problematic phenomenon than an absent one. Yet a low level of conflict is not simply the absence of a high level of conflict. The culture of conflict in low-conflict societies can and should be described and discussed on its own terms. I first discuss low conflict societies, building on the data analysis from the earlier chapters, while noting that in some low-conflict societies, conflict is not dealt with very effectively. For this reason I then introduce the notion of the constructive conflict society, a society defined

2. Conflict that arises over cultural definitions becomes especially important once societies develop any permanent social divisions. The culture of conflict, then, both includes a society's core values at any point in time and reflects prior conflicts that favor some groups and individuals over others.

not in terms of low conflict level, but in terms of conflict management processes which promote integrative solutions that meet the underlying needs of all parties.

High- and low-conflict societies are most clearly distinguished by their psychocultural features, whereas structural features are important when we consider differences between internal and external conflict. A model of the low-conflict society can provide both theoretical and political insights. Theoretically, one seeks to better understand the institutions and practices common to low-conflict communities. Politically, increased discussion of low-conflict communities in a world where the dramatic cases of death and destruction get the lion's share of attention may counter the sense that high conflict is inevitable and suggest how specific distinctive institutions and practices found in low-conflict settings may have relevance elsewhere.

The low-conflict society is not one without disputes and differences, but more often one where differences that arise are managed in such a way that extreme rancor, polarization, and outright violence are avoided.³ Such a society is most distinctive in terms of the psychocultural features which permit it to develop institutions and practices which handle disputes in certain characteristic ways. The common structural features characteristic of low conflict societies are less obvious, however.⁴ Low-conflict societies are not simply those with less wealth and hence fewer resources for people to fight over, for the data analysis found little relationship between overall conflict and measures of wealth or complexity.⁵ Nor are low-conflict societies more likely to be centralized,

3. I prefer the term low-conflict society to peaceful society for several reasons: it suggests the notion of a continuum rather than a dichotomy and allows that all societies have at least some conflict. In addition, peace is often juxtaposed to war and open fighting whose relative absence I see as just one feature, albeit an important one, of low-conflict societies.

4. Many claims about low- versus high-conflict societies have a tautological character. For example, high conflict is often explained in terms of cultural or ethnic diversity, whereas other cases where the same diversity exists but the level of conflict is far lower are ignored. As already discussed, Northern Ireland's high level of conflict is explained in terms of differences between Catholics and Protestants without regard for the many nations in Europe (and elsewhere) where the incidence of overt Protestant-Catholic conflict is far lower.

5. Under certain conditions there may be a negative relationship between material abundance and conflict, to the extent that the scarcities producing the

powerful states that limit internal fighting, although this has been the case with the Buganda and the Aztecs. Koch (1974) says that conflict among the Jale of New Guinea frequently escalates rapidly because there are no effective third parties to step between the disputants, but the analysis here finds many low-conflict societies that lack these powerful third parties and many cases of high conflict levels despite the presence of third parties.

Psychocultural Conditions

Low-conflict societies have a psychocultural environment that is affectionate, warm, and low in overt aggression, and relatively untroubled by male gender identity conflicts. These patterns, established in early relationships, are likely to produce dispositions facilitating the peaceful resolution of disputes. The low level of overt conflict these dispositions engender means that fewer violent events provide models of appropriate action and the idea that nonviolent action can be efficacious is more strongly reinforced.

A secure self-identity that promotes interpersonal and social trust is probably a crucial disposition in the low-conflict society, and it facilitates the management of conflict in several ways. Secure and trusting individuals are less likely to interpret conflict situations in extreme terms, thus increasing the likelihood of more moderate, less escalatory responses to events.⁶ Greater trust means a lower sense of social isolation, less fear of abandonment, and a stronger sense that effective action can make things right. Conflict situations tend not to be viewed in intensely personal terms, facilitating third party involvement in developing solutions, and the acceptance of compromises. Finally, a strong disposition to empathize with (if not necessarily accept) the concerns of others enhances the tendency to work with others toward mutually acceptable solutions (White 1984).

Lest the reader think that I have moved from data-based analysis most violence may be relative rather than absolute. For the past several decades, for example, conflict within third world nations has been greater than conflict in industrialized nations.

6. Deutsch (1973) uses the term "benevolent misperception" to refer to ways in which disputants make assumptions of each other's cooperative motives and good intentions.

to utopia construction, let me hasten to add that these characteristics are relative, not absolute. Disputes in low-conflict societies can certainly be intense and bitter, but the point is that they are less likely to lead to violence and destruction, which then make constructive solutions difficult to achieve.⁷ Certainly there can be anger and bitterness accompanied by displacement, projection, and externalization. But in the end, these processes are less intense because conflicts produce less of a threat to the fundamental existence of one's self or one's group.

Structural Trade-Offs

The psychocultural dispositions found in low-conflict societies apply to both internal and external conflict. The structure of societies low in each form of conflict, however, is quite different. Societies with low levels of internal conflict are internally integrated and their extensive cross-cutting ties discourage bitter, enduring disputes. Multiple lines of social cleavage offer alternative sources of identification and attachment, lessening the relative importance of any single social identity.

Strong cross-cutting ties produce a relatively large number of potential third parties who can step between disputants when conflicts arise. These third parties act because their own interests are threatened when a dispute remains unresolved, and they can invoke the interests they share with the disputants or those which affect the wider community, putting the specific issue of contention in perspective.⁸ In a dramatic but apt example of this phenomenon, Turner (1957) vividly describes how the Ndembu of Zambia respond to the periodic stress caused by the conflicting principles of virilocal residence and matrilineality through intense ritual activity which unites previously divided individuals and groups. North American Plains Indians also use intense ritual activities at such emotionally charged times as the onset of the

7. Turnbull (1961) describes conflicts among the Mbuti, for example, where intense emotions are expressed; but few of these cases end in violence producing permanent injury and damage.

8. Extremists in polarized societies use this maneuver in reverse whenever they fear that moderates on both sides may be moving toward accommodation. A bombing or some kind of dramatic terrorist action rekindles the sense of threat to each community's existence and creates a climate in which continued public discussion between moderates is not viable.

...bringing reason to bring together kinship-based and other local groups who could easily come into conflict during the coming months.⁹

Cross-cutting ties lower the intensity of conflict psychologically in addition to affecting interests. The existence of conflict psychologically institutional links among groups sharing common interests can make the other's demands seem more reasonable, or at least less threatening. Cross-cutting ties produce nuanced, less extreme images that facilitate a reaction to the substance of a demand rather than to a caricature of its sender, preventing potential adversaries from seeing each other as non-human. Where fraternal interest groups are weak, for example, the contrast between images of one's own kin group and those of others is probably far less than in those societies where such groups are strong.

A parallel psychological question concerns the affective significance accorded such ties in relation to material security and emotional needs. Low-conflict societies not only have greater overlapping ties than high-conflict communities, but these ties are also affectively more important in the low-conflict society. The selective emphasis, de-emphasis, or invention of all social ties (not just kinship) is important. In low-conflict societies, the value of attachment to others may result in relative overvaluation of links beyond the local community, whereas in high-conflict societies the opposite is the case.

But if cross-cutting ties lower the severity of internal conflict, they may embolden a society facing an external enemy (often to the point of foolhardiness). Murphy's (1957) classic description of the internally peaceful yet externally fierce matrilineal Mundurucu of Brazil is a well-known example of this phenomenon.¹⁰ LeVine (1965) offers a second apt case, that of the pastoral Kipsigis of East Africa where kinship and age-based organizations produce widespread social links within the tribe but fierce conflict with outsiders. Not only do strong within-group ties build unity, thus facilitating joint action, but LeVine also suggests that

9. Gluckman (1955) describes rituals of rebellion in which members of a community are permitted, at fixed occasions, to attack the ruler in ways that both vent deeply felt frustration and renew support for existing authority.

10. Although the multivariate analysis (chapters 6 and 7) does not support Murphy's hypothesis that matrilineal and patrilineal societies significantly differ in their levels of internal versus external conflict, it does show that strong overlapping identities are negatively related to internal conflict and positively related to external conflict—as his theory suggests at the general level.

this is associated with highly polarized images which exaggerate insider-outsider differences and justify subsequent aggression.

Societies with low levels of external conflict are less complex socioeconomically and are more isolated. Yet it is hardly desirable that societies should move toward simpler technology or greater isolation in order to lower levels of conflict. Instead, it may be that the best we can do is be aware of how increased complexity increases the likelihood of severe conflict and try to actively guard against its effects.

Increased complexity brings a greater capacity to develop enduring links within and between societies. Strong cross-cutting ties within a society lower internal conflict, and strong ties between groups in different societies can have the same effect on external conflict. The argument for building significant ties between societies is similar to that of Haas (1964), Mitrany (1966), and other functionalists who saw this as the route to European integration. Functional linkages among societies on their own, however, are insufficient to build constructive conflict relationships, yet they can be a crucial ingredient when accompanied by relative equality between the parties, appropriate political leadership (Lindberg and Sheingold 1970), and a conducive psychocultural environment.¹¹

The Intersocietal System

In building a model of the low-conflict society, it is important to remember that a prosperous society living with aggressive neighbors in a hard-to-defend location is likely to find itself under attack at some point, no matter what its internal characteristics. As discussed in chapter 8 in relation to the Teda, conflict and cooperation are discussed not only in terms of the properties of the individual states, but in terms of those of the intersocietal system (Waltz 1959; Midlarsky 1975; Zinnes 1980).

For conceptual and political purposes, anthropology created the myth of the isolated (almost pristine) traditional society that could be

11. Interaction between groups does not necessarily improve intergroup relations. When scarce resources, threat, and inequality are perceived, for example, interaction can raise rather than lower tension. The most positive changes occur when members of different groups see themselves as pursuing a greater common goal (Sherif et al. 1988).

response to external forces points to the need for more serious investigation of this question in a variety of settings.

The Constructive Conflict Society

The term "low-conflict society," a quantitative label, is certainly useful, yet we need to characterize a society's conflict management style qualitatively as well. Deutsch's (1973) concept of constructive (as opposed to destructive) conflict at the individual dispute level can be fruitfully applied to the societal level as well. Deutsch focuses on the kinds of exchanges between parties in a conflict, the attention given to their concerns, the search for creative solutions to conflicts, and the degree to which conflict management speaks to the needs of disputants—all pertinent questions about the conflict management styles of different societies.

Constructive conflict management is characterized by cooperative processes (not just attention to outcomes) that focus on the ability of different parties to define shared interests and to communicate openly in order to establish empathy between the disputants. An eventual legitimation of both sides' interests and a convergence of points of view results—what Deutsch (1973) calls "benevolent misperception." Communication and perceptions are central explanatory factors in his scheme and are prerequisites for resolving differences of substantive interests. Constructive conflict management, Deutsch argues, is more likely in situations where the power of the parties is relatively equal, although he offers suggestions as to how weak parties can bolster their negotiating position (1973:393–399). Deutsch suggests that third parties may be crucial in developing cooperative conflict procedures and in helping parties to reach constructive outcomes. One indicator of constructive conflict societies is probably that third parties are much more available than in destructive conflict societies. Finally, he argues that it is easier to go from cooperation to competition than the reverse (Pruitt and Ruben 1986). Constructive conflict patterns may be fragile and re-establishing them in a society after a period of intense destructive conflict may be difficult.

The psychocultural dispositions and social structural conditions found in low-conflict societies facilitate constructive conflict management because they enhance effective communication and shared identity leading to the resolution of substantive differences in interests. In so-

underrated entirely on its own terms. In fact, however, migration, fighting, trade, and other exchanges between nonwestern preindustrial societies were extensive in most of the world long before western colonial contact (Ferguson and Whitehead 1992). Few societies were sufficiently isolated historically that the activities of their neighbors could be ignored. Even the island societies of the Pacific mastered ocean travel and conducted trade and warfare over great distances. Isolation in the colonial period was relative, not absolute, and perhaps severe only in the most remote Arctic, mountain, or desert areas.

D. White (1989) and others (Divale 1974, for example) examine intersocietal interactions generally, and patterns of external conflict in particular, as a source of changes in a society's internal social organization and level of internal conflict. In a highly speculative analysis, White suggests that a society's location in the world system affects internal disputes, which in turn promote internal disputes.¹² From this perspective, low-conflict societies are likely only in certain settings. These communities need either to have relatively peaceful neighbors (as part of a local security system), to be located in an environment where they are not vulnerable to attack or from which flight is a viable option, or to be so much stronger than their neighbors that no one dares attack them.

The finding here that preindustrial societies are much more likely to be generalizers than differentiators is consistent with the argument that regional cultural systems reflect the internal properties of particular societies and patterns of interaction among them.¹³ A society's regional context can affect conflict by encouraging changes in internal social organization either through functional adaptation or intercultural borrowing. The plausibility of the hypothesis that changes in interests, dispositions, and internal conflict patterns can develop, in part, as a

12. White's hypotheses about the impact of external conflict and incorporation into the world system on internal conflict merit serious consideration, yet his data analysis—using inadequate measures, questionable procedures, and a tiny sample—does not provide much useful evidence.

13. Divale (1974) suggests that societies with high levels of external warfare, for example, tend to become matrilineal, whereas internal warfare promotes patrilineality. Ember (1974), however, presents convincing data against Divale's hypothesized sequence. Without temporal data I can only speculate about the relationship between changes in socioeconomic complexity, cross-cutting ties, contact with other societies, and external violence.

tive conflict management processes. In such situations, it is useful to ask why constructive conflict management is limited to certain contexts and how constructive techniques may be extended to other domains. An initial hypothesis is that such techniques are most likely to occur in societies with moderate, or even moderately high, levels of conflict in small, interdependent, local groups with well-established positive interpersonal relations. Localized kin groups are typical here, but certainly such patterns are found elsewhere, where there is an equation of group and individual interests, or the ability to perceive the short-run group interest as serving the long-run needs of the group.

Both interests and interpretations are important in the description of the culture of conflict in societies characterized by low levels of conflict and constructive conflict management processes. The psychocultural features of these societies make polarization of disputants and rapid escalation of conflict less likely and increase the possibility that the interests of all will be addressed. In such situations, the core identities of participants are rarely threatened directly, making it easier for them to develop some understanding, if not acceptance, of the opponent's demands and to consider compromises and third-party intervention. In these societies, the long-term relationship among disputants is at least as significant as the substantive differences in any specific dispute (what Axelrod [1984] calls the shadow of the future).

The perspective developed here reveals real limitations of some common proposals to improve conflict management. Changes in legal procedures or institutions that manage disputes, for example, are rarely going to be successful in isolation.¹⁵ The proposal that disputants need only "get to know each other better" is similarly doomed. My analysis suggests that changes in conflict management procedures are most

Conflict and Conflict Management¹⁵

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15. The topic of this section is a central theme in Ross (1993), which uses the theory developed here to analyze conflict management.

16. New Guinea provides a striking example of the way change may alter institutions but fail to address underlying psychocultural dispositions or social structural interests. Precolonial warfare gave way to a short peaceful period under colonial rule, which was followed by a return to warfare and violence in the postcolonial period (Gordon and Meggitt 1984). In Ross (1993) I discuss this case as a failure of conflict management.

cles where the prevailing view of the world is of effective cooperative action, rather than life-and-death struggle, the exchanges and compromises necessary for creative problem solving are far more likely to occur.

High-conflict situations are rarely constructive and are often characterized by an escalation of hostile actions producing a polarized community, a radicalization of leaders, and little room for a middle group between the extremes (Coleman 1957; Pruitt and Rubin 1986:7). Differences of substance, which may be open to negotiation early on, are often transformed into differences of principle which make any compromise feel like defeat. In such situations disputants recognize few constraints on their actions and resort to violence easily.

Low-conflict societies are most likely to have constructive conflict management because the dispositions of disputants are most conducive to creative joint problem solving and open communication. Yet low levels of conflict may occur when power inequalities among the disputants are large and the weaker party is unable to press its case effectively. We have little reason to believe that the constructive conflict management as Deutsch describes it occurs very often in hierarchical societies like the Buganda and the Aztec, where authorities intervene to impose solutions on less powerful disputants. Another low-conflict situation lacking in constructive conflict management is found among the Cayapa (described in chapter 8) and similar societies, where levels of conflict are apparently very low because people are so fearful of interpersonal interaction that they avoid exchanges and interactions needed for creative problem solving. Briggs' (1975) description of conflict among the Utke Eskimo also reveals the dynamics of low conflict in the absence of the constructive conflict pattern. The Utke are so overwhelmed by what first appears to be nurturance—but is really a powerful combination of affection and aggression—that few adults are capable of significant relationships in which powerful emotions are expressed. Overall conflict levels among the Utke are very low, but, as with the Cayapa, this is due not to constructive conflict management but rather to the avoidance of any interaction.¹⁴

Finally, there are many dispute-level examples of constructive problem solving even in societies not easily characterized by construc-

14. Some of these elements, in less extreme form, are found in the discussion below of the use of fear as a socialization mechanism among the Semai (Ross 1993).

effective when they are associated with efforts to address both the disputants' substantive interests and underlying psychocultural interpretations.

Interest-based approaches to conflict management emphasize strategies that bridge substantive differences and package outcomes in ways that benefit all. In contrast, psychocultural approaches focus on altering disputants' hostile suspicions as a step toward dealing with substantive differences. Effective conflict management must address both interests and interpretations as significant sources of conflict.

The cross-cultural theory of conflict presented here explains societal-level differences, and has significant implications for understanding differences in the management of individual disputes both within and between societies. The most effective way to address interests and interpretations in order to make conflict management more constructive, of course, varies from context to context. In some cases underlying interests and the social structural conditions which give rise to them take priority; in other cases, increasing the emphasis of addressing disputants' shared interpretations of the world proves the best route to make a society's culture of conflict more constructive.

Current strategies of conflict management address interests and interpretations quite differently, as a brief comparison of joint problem solving and third-party decision making, two commonly used modes of conflict management, reveals. Joint problem solving consists of the principal disputants acting together to resolve a dispute; it can include direct bargaining between the parties as well as decision making with third party assistance, as in mediation, arbitration, or negotiation. In contrast, in methods such as adjudication or administrative decision making, known as third-party decision making, representatives of the wider community invoke shared norms to impose binding decisions on the disputants.

Third-party decision making works on the assumption that differences in interests are real and can be effectively resolved through reference to certain abstract principles like law or community norms without great regard for the larger context of a dispute or how disputants view each other. Focusing on the substantive interests at stake, outside parties, who represent the community's authority (which the disputants accept), decide among competing claims and back their decisions with sanctioned force. As a conflict management strategy, the approach focuses on past behavior more than future action (although this may be

involved), and the process addresses the substantive differences among the parties rather than the more subjective background of the conflict.

Joint problem solving, in contrast, emphasizes perceptions and dispositions (such as low levels of trust or threats to identity) as the source of many conflicts, and addresses these subjective elements to create a climate in which creative problem solving can occur. Differences in interests are not denied but are viewed as surface manifestations of the more basic conflict or as symptoms of a dispute as much as the cause. In addition, joint problem-solving strategies focus less on the interests parties have in resolving past differences and emphasize instead their interests in living together in future harmony. Interests, then, are often seen as somewhat flexible and subject to redefinition so that resolving interest differences hinges, in part, on how the parties view each other and themselves. From this perspective, if antagonistic perceptions rooted in deeply held worldviews are altered, resolution of differences in interests may follow.

Each method addresses certain sources of conflict more readily than others: joint problem-solving may overlook the essential role of differences in interests in a conflict and overemphasize the importance of the interpersonal bonds and images created between disputants, especially when large communities are involved. In contrast, third-party decision making sometimes fails to address underlying psychocultural interpretations and may offer "solutions" to a dispute that do little to address its underlying sources.

Assumptions about the psychocultural aspects of conflict are embedded in third-party dispute management strategies, just as assumptions about interests inform joint decision making. What is striking, however, is how poorly developed each of these assumptions is and how they differ from the assumptions made about the same factors in the cases of the other dispute management method. In some cases assumptions about sources of conflict which underlie different procedures appear to contradict each other. Genuinely constructive dispute management procedures address both sets of factors in a comprehensive view that sees structural and psychocultural roots in almost all serious conflicts.

Dispute-Level Lessons

Whereas a societal-level analysis of conflict focuses on dispositional and structural factors in their most general form, at the dispute

level. It is useful to identify more proximate manifestations of interests and interpretations to avoid invoking factors that are too remote, mechanical, or reductionistic. Neither social structural interests nor psychocultural dispositions defined at the societal level provide useful answers to such questions as:

- Why was a particular interest pursued?
- Why did a dispute escalate at the time it did?
- Why were certain incompatible demands made by each side?
- Why were a certain set of dispute management methods used and with what effect?
- How did the interests and interpretations of disputants change in the course of a conflict?
- How might the conflict have been managed better than it was?

Explaining the course of particular conflicts means identifying the precise interests and interpretations involved and trying to understand how they connect to more general forces.

This consists of more than just identifying specific interests and interpretations involved in a conflict. Dispute-level analysis of conflict also pays particular attention to the process by which a conflict unfolds, trying to understand its origin, development, and management and examining changes within any dispute. Societal level analysis, in contrast, focuses on continuities across disputes in a society. How, then, can interests and dispositions which are seen as relatively unchanging at the societal level help explain change at the dispute level?

If interests are seen only in terms of the social structural conditions that produce them, then adjusting interests during conflict management seems to be a contradiction, or leads to the idealistic request that parties simply set their interests aside in order to achieve agreement. In many situations, however, the overlap of interests among disputants is frequently greater than initially recognized because disputants have different priorities even when contesting a common concern (Raiffa 1982). Furthermore, the choice for each disputant is almost never between keeping everything or having to share it with others. Rather, it is between what can be obtained through alternative action strategies including noncooperation (Fisher and Ury 1981). Often the latter, in fact, presents unattractive options. Thus, social structural conditions broadly shape interests, but more proximate events modify, reorganize, and prioritize them, and shape what actions are actually taken.

Similarly, although disputants' interpretations of conflict situations are linked to dispositions rooted in early socialization, interpretations in specific disputes are not fully determined by such distant events. For one thing, psychocultural theory identifies how dispositions are subject to change under certain conditions, if and when the fundamental sources of anxiety are addressed.¹⁷ Consideration of more proximate psychocultural data than socialization experiences is necessary in considering specific conflicts. Even if good data on child rearing for major actors are available, we would turn first to data on beliefs and behaviors most clearly associated with the events to be explained. Psychocultural dispositions are important in making sense of conflict and conflict management, and while the cross-cultural theory of conflict ultimately links these to early developmental experiences, more proximate manifestations of psychocultural dispositions are required in order to understand any single dispute.

Rather than altering psychocultural dispositions, constructive conflict management strategies can selectively emphasize specific dispositions, and linkages among dispositions can be reorganized. The mechanisms underlying psychocultural processes involve the invocation of analogies, metaphors, and other connections linking early experiences and images to later experiences. In cultures where there is a high predisposition to define in- and out-groups in dramatically different terms, to see the actions of others as threatening and provocative, or to identify with few beyond one's inner circle, conflict management cannot alter the inner psychic structures. It can, however, provide alternative psychoculturally appropriate analogies, metaphors, and images which may be more compatible with constructive conflict management.

Here I draw on the principle of psychocultural complexity and the notion that the organization of dispositions is as important as the presence of any particular disposition.¹⁸ Therefore, although groups and individuals tend to emphasize certain dispositions, reorganization and changes in emphasis are also possible. Psychocultural dispositions

17. As an individual experience, the change in dispositions shares key assumptions with psychoanalysis.

18. I want to suggest here an approach focused on the system of interacting dispositions—in the same way that family systems therapy focuses on the interactions among members of a social system, not the characteristics of any single member in isolation (Bowen 1978).

and interpretations can be incorporated into strategies of conflict management without changing the fundamental worldviews of all parties in a short time—a most unrealistic goal, to say the least. A more modest but achievable aim would be a degree of affective and cognitive reorganization, with results in both being more important than the magnitude of change in either one. Such reorganization could involve an expansion of who is included in the label “we,” stress metaphors associated with past cooperative successes, or offer a vision of mutual gain that effectively challenges a current scenario of animosity. When disputants have a long history of hostility, achieving this is difficult, and the involvement of skilled third parties can be especially helpful. Altering participants’ interpretations of a situation can be achieved without necessarily addressing their childhood experiences but cannot ignore how culture selectively reinforces dispositions first developed at that stage.

Conclusion

This book has examined conflict and violence cross-culturally and has identified psychocultural and social structural factors which explain both differences in overall levels of conflict and particular patterns of conflict and cooperation. The culture of conflict refers to the complex ways a society’s institutions, practices, and norms produce a pattern of conflict. It also includes culturally shared ideas about valued objects and interests, about ways to pursue them, about appropriate responses to the actions of others seeking the same valued items, and about past experiences relevant to understanding conflict behavior.

This concluding chapter has explored two extensions of the argument from the cross-cultural study. Explicit consideration of societies characterized by low levels of conflict and constructive conflict processes will, I hope, deepen awareness of their existence and extend our understanding of their internal dynamics. These societies are not defined simply by the absence of conflict but also by the presence of psychocultural dispositions and structurally defined interests that promote the management of disputes in essentially constructive and peaceful ways. Understanding and analyzing such cases demonstrate that high levels of conflict are not inevitable and that particularly effective practices may be applicable in other settings.

Last, I have considered ways in which the theoretical framework of the cross-cultural theory of conflict also provides a framework for the

analysis of the management of individual disputes. Interests and interpretations, I suggest, are important in social conflicts, and effective conflict management needs to address both. Conflict management cannot necessarily alter deeply rooted social structural patterns or change basic psychocultural dispositions in every dispute. It may, however, recognize the role played by underlying interests and dispositions and try to address these directly so that we may in the future manage conflicts more constructively than we do at present.

views that others believe long forgotten or settled. The manager of a production department may align with the marketing manager to block a proposal from the production engineer not because he disagrees with the basic ideas, but because of resentments associated with the fact that he and the production engineer have never gotten along. Though such resentments may seem petty, they are often powerful forces in organizational life.

Many organizational conflicts often become institutionalized in the shape of attitudes, stereotypes, values, beliefs, rituals, and other aspects of organizational culture. In this socialized form, the underlying conflicts can be extremely difficult to identify and to break down. Here again history can shape the present in subtle ways. However, by remembering Aristotle's injunction to understand the source of politics in the diversity of interests to which conflicts merely lend visible form, organizational analysts have a means of penetrating beneath the surface of any conflict situation to understand its genesis. We will examine some of the ways in which conflicts can be managed when we discuss the politics of pluralist organizations later in this chapter.

EXPLORING POWER

Power is the medium through which conflicts of interest are ultimately resolved. Power influences who gets what, when, and how.

In recent years organization and management theorists have become increasingly aware of the need to recognize the importance of power in explaining organizational affairs. However, no really clear and consistent definition of power has emerged. While some view power as a resource, i.e., as something one possesses, others view it as a social relation characterized by some kind of dependency, i.e., as an influence over something or someone. Most organization theorists tend to take their point of departure from the definition of power offered by American political scientist Robert Dahl, who suggests that power involves an ability to get another person to do something that he or she would not otherwise have done. For some theorists this definition leads to a study of the "here and now" conditions under which one person, group, or organization becomes dependent on another while for others it leads to an examination of the historical forces that shape the stage of action on which contemporary power relations are set. As listed in Exhibit 6.3, the sources of power are rich and varied, providing those who wish to wheel and deal in the pursuit of their interests with many ways of doing so. In the following discussion we will examine how these sources of power are used to shape the dynamics of organizational life. In so doing we will be creating an analytical frame-

The following are among the most important sources of power:

1. FORMAL AUTHORITY ✓
2. CONTROL OF SCARCE RESOURCES ✓
3. USE OF ORGANIZATIONAL STRUCTURE, RULES, AND REGULATIONS ✓
4. CONTROL OF DECISION PROCESSES ✓
5. CONTROL OF KNOWLEDGE AND INFORMATION ✓
6. CONTROL OF BOUNDARIES ✓
7. ABILITY TO COPE WITH UNCERTAINTY ✓
8. CONTROL OF TECHNOLOGY ✓
9. INTERPERSONAL ALLIANCES, NETWORKS, AND CONTROL OF "INFORMAL ORGANIZATION" ✓
10. CONTROL OF COUNTERORGANIZATIONS ✓
11. SYMBOLISM AND THE MANAGEMENT OF MEANING ✓
12. GENDER AND THE MANAGEMENT OF GENDER RELATIONS ✓
13. STRUCTURAL FACTORS THAT DEFINE THE STAGE OF ACTION ✓
14. THE POWER ONE ALREADY HAS ✓

These sources of power provide organizational members with a variety of means for enhancing their interests and resolving or perpetuating organizational conflict.

Exhibit 6.3. Sources of power in organizations

work that can help us to understand the power dynamics within an organization, and to identify the ways in which organizational members can attempt to exert their influence.

Formal authority. The first and most obvious source of power in an organization is formal authority, a form of legitimized power that is respected and acknowledged by those with whom one interacts. As sociologist Max Weber has noted, legitimacy is a form of social approval that is essential for stabilizing power relations, and arises when people recognize that a person has a right to rule some area of human life, and when the ruled consider it their duty to obey. Historically, legitimate authority has been underpinned by one or more of three characteristics: charisma, tradition, or the rule of law (see Exhibit 9.1 for further details). Charismatic authority arises when people respect the special qualities of an individual (charisma means "gift of grace") and see those qualities as defining the right of the individual to act on their behalf. Traditional authority arises when people respect the custom and practices of the past and vest authority in those who symbolize and embody these traditional values. Monarchs and others who rule because of some kind of inherited status acquire their right to rule through this kind of principle. Bureaucratic or rational-legal authority arises when people insist that the exercise of power depends on

the correct application of formal rules and procedures. Those that exercise bureaucratic authority must win their rights to power through procedural means, for example by demonstrating ownership or property rights in a corporation, through election in a democratic system, or by demonstrating appropriate professional or technical qualifications in a meritocracy.

Each of these three kinds of formal authority may be found in modern organizations. A hero figure may acquire immense charismatic power that allows him or her to control and direct others as he or she wishes. The owner of a family firm may exercise authority as a result of his or her membership in the founding family. A bureaucrat may exercise power as a result of the formal office that he or she holds. So long as those who are subject to the kind of authority in use respect and accept the nature of that authority, the authority serves as a form of power. If it is not respected, the authority becomes vacuous, and power depends on the other sources named in Exhibit 6.3.

The most obvious type of formal authority in most organizations is bureaucratic and is typically associated with the position one holds, whether as sales manager, accountant, project coordinator, secretary, factory supervisor, or machine operator. These different organizational positions are usually defined in terms of rights and obligations, which create a field of influence within which one can legitimately operate with the formal support of those with whom one works. A factory supervisor is given a "right" to instruct those under his or her control. A sales manager is given the "right" to influence policy on sales campaigns—but not on financial accounting. The latter falls within the field of discretion and influence delegated to the accounting manager. The formal positions on an organization chart thus define spheres of delegated authority. To the extent that authority is translated into power through the assent of those falling under the pattern of command, the authority structure is also a power structure. Though the authority is often seen as flowing down from the top of the organization chart, being delegated by one's superior, our discussion of the nature of legitimacy suggests that this is only partly true. For the authority becomes effective only to the extent that it is legitimized from below. The pyramid of power represented in an organization chart thus builds on a base where considerable power belongs to those at the bottom of the pyramid as well as to those at the top. Trade unionization has of course recognized this, channeling the power existing at the lower levels of the pyramid to challenge the power at the top. To the extent that trade-union power is legitimized by the rule of law and the right to unionize, it too represents a type of formal authority. We will have more to say on this later in our discussion of "counterorganizations."

Control of scarce resources. All organizations depend for their continued existence on an adequate flow of resources, such as money, materials, technology, personnel, and support from customers, suppliers, and the community at large. An ability to exercise control over any of these resources can thus provide an important source of power within and between organizations. Access to funds, possession of a crucial skill or raw material, control of access to some valued computer program or new technology, or even access to a special customer or supplier can lend individuals considerable organizational power. If the resource is in scarce supply and someone is dependent on its availability, then it can almost certainly be translated into power. Scarcity and dependence are the keys to resource power!

When we begin to talk about the power associated with resources, attention usually focuses on the role of money. For money is among the most liquid of all resources, and can usually be converted into the others. A person with a valued skill, a supplier with a precious raw material, or a person holding information on a new project opportunity can often be persuaded to exchange their valued resource for an attractive price. Money can also be converted into promotions, patronage, threats, promises, or favors to buy loyalty, service, support, or raw compliance.

No wonder therefore that so much organizational politics surrounds the process of budgeting and the control and allocation of financial resources. As Jeffrey Pfeffer of Stanford University has suggested, the use of such power is critically linked with one's ability to control the discretionary use of funds. It is not necessary to have full control over financial decisions. One needs to have just enough control to pull the crucial strings that can create changes at the margin. The reason for this is that most of the financial resources available to an organization are committed to sustain current operations. Changes to these operations are usually incremental, decisions being made to increase or reduce current expenditure. It is the ability to increase or decrease this flow of funds that gives power. Hence if a manager can acquire access to uncommitted resources that he or she can use in a discretionary way, e.g., as a slush fund, he or she can exert a major influence over future organizational development and at the same time buy commitment from those who benefit from this use of funds. Similarly, someone outside an organization who is responsible for deciding whether his or her financial support to that organization should be continued is in a position to exercise considerable influence on the policies and practices of the organization. Often this influence is out of all proportion with the amount actually given, since organizations are often critically dependent on marginal funds to create room to maneu-

... Organizations often have a tendency to use their slack in one year in ways that create commitments or expectations for the next year—e.g., by giving a raise in salary that will be expected to be repeated next year, by appointing staff whose appointments will need to be renewed, or by launching a new program that staff will wish to continue—thus lending considerable power to the marginal funder.

The principles that we have discussed in relation to the use of financial power apply to other kinds of resource power as well. The important point is that power rests in controlling resources on which the organization is dependent for current operations or for creating new initiatives. There must be a dependence before one is able to control; and such control always derives its power from there being a scarcity of, or limited access to, the resource in question. Whether we are talking about the control of finance, skills, materials, or personnel, or even the provision of emotional support to a key decision maker who has come to value one's support and friendship, the principles remain the same. The more Machiavellian among us will quickly see how these principles point the way to a strategy for increasing power by *creating* dependence through the planned control of critical resources.

One's power can also be increased by reducing one's dependence on others. This is why many managers and organizational units like to have their own pockets of resources. The seemingly needless duplication of resources in an organization, where each department has the same underemployed machine or set of experts or a stockpile of staff that can be used in rush periods, is often a result of attempts to reduce one's dependence on the resources of others.

Use of organizational structure, rules, and regulations. Most often, organizational structure, rules, regulations, and procedures are viewed as rational instruments intended to aid task performance. A political view of these arrangements, however, suggests that in many situations they are often best understood as products and reflections of a struggle for political control.

Consider the following example drawn from research that I conducted on British "new town" development corporations. The corporation in question was established in the early 1960s to develop a new town in an old industrial area. A functional organization was established with separate departments (finance, law, administration, commercial development, housing, architecture and planning, and engineering services) reporting to a general manager, who reported to the board. In the late 1960s an energetic businessman became chairman of the board. He made the corporation's chief legal officer the new general manager and split the now vacant legal officer's post into two parts, creating the post of corporation secretary and leaving the new legal officer with a narrower range of functions. The secretary's post

was filled by a nominee of the chairman who had worked with him in a similar capacity at another organization. The chairman and secretary began to work closely together, and the board eventually agreed that the secretary should have direct access to the board without having to go through the general manager. The chairman involved himself in the day-to-day running of the organization, often bypassing the general manager, whose role became very difficult to perform.

This situation came to a rather abrupt end after just one year, with the surprise resignation of the chairman in response to a controversy over policy issues. With the appointment of a new chairman who was interested in delegating the task of running the organization to the general manager, power relations within the corporation changed dramatically. The general manager gradually established his control over his department heads, many of whom had become quite powerful through the interventions of the former chairman. His approach was to bring many of the functions that had been allocated to the secretary under his own control, and to reorganize other departmental responsibilities. For example, he split the functions of the architecture and planning department, establishing a new planning department and a new department dealing with surveys. This move left the chief architect, who had become a strong executive during the reign of the previous chairman, with but a fraction of the department he once ran. These structural redesigns were later accompanied by further changes that in effect demoted the heads of the functional departments, and it was not long before a number left the organization, including the secretary and the chief architect.

While these structural changes were justified in technical terms, they were also motivated by political considerations relating to issues of control. The initial changes created by the corporation's energetic chairman were designed to enhance his own control of the organization by weakening that of the general manager. The changes introduced after the chairman's resignation were primarily designed to help the general manager regain control over powerful department heads. Structural change was part of a power play to limit the role and influence of other key individuals.

The circumstances of this case may be unique, but the pattern is quite general, since organizational structure is frequently used as a political instrument. Plans for organizational differentiation and integration, designs for centralization and decentralization, and the tensions that can arise in matrix organizations often entail hidden agendas related to the power, autonomy, or interdependence of departments and individuals. The size and status of a group or department within an organization often provides an indication of its power within the overall structure, since one obvious tactic of control is to downgrade the

importance of a function or group of individuals, or to adopt a divide-and-rule strategy that fragments potential power bases. This tactic is illustrated in the case study discussed above and was also present in a number of other "new town" corporations included in my research. For example, in one corporation the community-development function, which often achieved departmental status in other corporations, was relegated to a small subdivision under the control of the chief legal officer—someone who had little knowledge of or interest in this kind of work. The community development staff, who usually took radical stands on planning matters, were correct in their perception that their unusual location within the organizational structure reflected the general manager's desire to reduce their influence and exclude them from meetings among department heads. The same general manager attempted to stifle the development of project teams across middle levels of the hierarchy, which would have led the organization toward a matrix rather than bureaucratic structure. The general manager wished to exercise strong authoritarian control through his department heads by discouraging project teams and making his department heads responsible for cross-departmental integration. Many of the middle-rank planning professionals became extremely discouraged by their lack of autonomy and influence and soon left the organization in large numbers.

The tensions surrounding the process of organizational design and redesign thus provide many insights on organizational power structures. And the rigidity and inertia of organizational structures can do the same, since people often preserve existing structures in order to protect the power that they derive from them. For example, people and departments often cling to outdated job descriptions or organizational designs, e.g., by resisting adoption of computer technology, because their power and status within the organization is so closely tied with the old order. One of the ironies of bureaucratic organization is that job and departmental designs that were originally introduced to control the work of employees can also be used by employees to control their superiors.

The same is true in relation to rules, regulations, and other kinds of formal procedures. Just as a job description can be used by an employee to define what he or she is *not* prepared to do ("that's not part of my job," or "I'm not paid to do that"), rules and regulations often prove to be two-edged swords. One outstanding example is found in the case of British Rail, where employees have discovered the power of "working to rule." Rather than going on strike to further a claim or address a grievance, a process that proves costly to employees since they forfeit their pay, the union often declares a "work to rule" whereby employees do exactly what is required by the regulations developed by the

railway authorities. The result is that hardly any train leaves on time, schedules go haywire, and the whole railway system quickly slows to a snail's pace if not to a halt. The rules of course were created to control employees, to protect the safety of passengers, and, equally important, to protect the railway authorities, since in the event of a major accident a clear structure of rules and responsibilities can help allocate blame. The only trouble is that there are so many rules that they render the railway system almost inoperable. Normal functioning thus requires that employees find shortcuts or at least streamline procedures. British Rail is of course not unique in this regard. Many organizations have similar rules that, as many employees know, are not routinely applied.

The importance of these rules for their creators is clearly illustrated in the public investigations that follow major accidents, where investigators compare the evidence of events with the norms prescribed in formal regulations to find who is in error. Sometimes gaps in the rules are found. Sometimes gross negligence is discovered. But often the accident is no more than what Charles Perrow of Yale University calls a "normal accident," in the sense that its probability is built into the nature of the system. The broken rules that accompany the accident have often been broken thousands of times before as part of normal work practice, since normal work is impossible without breaking the rules. The railwaymen in Britain, like others who have adopted the "work to rule" practice, have discovered how they can use a weapon designed to control and possibly punish them to control and punish others.

Rules and regulations are thus often created, invoked, and used in either a proactive or retrospective fashion as part of a power play. All bureaucratic regulations, decision-making criteria, plans and schedules, promotion and job-evaluation requirements, and other rules that guide organizational functioning give potential power to both the controllers and those controlled. Rules designed to guide and streamline activities can almost always be used to block activities. Just as lawyers make a profession out of finding a new angle on what appears to be a clear-cut rule, many organizational members are able to invoke rules in ways that no one ever imagined possible. An ability to use the rules to one's advantage is thus an important source of organizational power and, as in the case of organizational structures, defines a contested terrain that is forever being negotiated, preserved, or changed.

Control of decision processes. An ability to influence the outcomes of decision-making processes is a well-recognized source of power, and one that has attracted considerable attention in the organization-theory literature. Since organizations are in large measure decision-making systems, an individual or group that can exert a major influence on decision processes can exert a great influence on the affairs of his or her organization. No wonder,

therefore, the time, energy, and meticulous attention that so many power-hungry men and women devote to endless strings of meetings. These "politicos," as they are often known, are wheeling and dealing in terms of agendas that are often hidden to create the decision outcomes that they desire. It is these hidden agendas that allow many of them to emerge triumphant after hours of circular discussion that ends in stalemate. For the politics of organizational decision making often involves preventing crucial decisions from being made, as well as fostering those that one actually desires.

In discussing the kinds of power utilized in decision making it is useful to distinguish between control of three interrelated elements: decision *premises*, decision *processes*, and decision *issues and objectives*. One of the most effective ways of getting a decision is to allow it to be made by default. Hence much of the political activity within an organization hinges on the control of agendas and other decision premises that influence how a particular decision will be approached, perhaps in ways that prevent certain core issues from surfacing at all. By avoiding explicit discussion of an issue, one may be able to get precisely what one wants. For example, in an organization where members wish to form a trade union, or where there is a growing coalition in favor of opening up a new program area, these key decisions can often be avoided or delayed by making marginal though significant changes elsewhere in order to redirect attention. This tactic of preventing certain subjects from becoming hot issues that *must* command attention often proves popular with those who wish to preserve the status quo.

In addition to the conscious manipulation of decision premises there is also often a large unconscious or socialized element of control. As Charles Perrow has noted, much unobtrusive control is built into vocabularies, structures of communication, attitudes, beliefs, rules, and procedures that, though unquestioned, exert a decisive influence on decision outcomes. These factors shape decision premises by shaping the way we think and act. Visions of what the problems and issues are and how they can be tackled often act as mental straitjackets that prevent us from seeing other ways of formulating our basic concerns and the alternative courses of action that are available. Many of these constraints are built into organizational assumptions, beliefs, and practices about "who we are" and "the way we do things around here."

Control of decision-making *processes* is usually more visible than the control of decision *premises*. How should a decision be made? Who should be involved? When will the decision be made? By determining whether a decision can be taken and then reported to appropriate quarters, whether it must go before a committee, and which committee, whether it must be supported by a full report, whether it will an-

pear on an agenda where it is likely to receive a rough ride (or an easy passage), the order of an agenda, and even whether the decision should be discussed at the beginning or end of a meeting, a manager can have a considerable impact on decision outcomes. The ground rules that are to guide decision making are thus important variables that organization members can manipulate and use to stack the deck in favor of or against a given action.

A final way of controlling decision making is to influence the *issues and objectives* to be addressed and the evaluative criteria to be employed. An individual can shape issues and objectives most directly through preparing the reports and contributing to the discussion on which the decision will be based. By emphasizing the importance of particular constraints, selecting and evaluating the alternatives on which a decision will be made, and highlighting the importance of certain values or outcomes, decision makers can exert considerable influence on the decision that emerges from discussion. Eloquence, command of the facts, passionate commitment, or sheer tenacity or endurance can in the end win the day, adding to a person's power to influence the decisions with which he or she is involved.

Control of knowledge and information. Evident in much of the above discussion, particularly with regard to the control of decision premises, is the idea that power accrues to the person who is able to structure attention to issues in a way that in effect defines the reality of the decision-making process. This draws attention to the key importance of knowledge and information as sources of power. By controlling these key resources a person can systematically influence the definition of organizational situations and can create patterns of dependency. Both these activities deserve attention on their own account.

The American social psychologist W. I. Thomas once observed that if people define situations as real, they are real in their consequences. Many skillful organizational politicians put this dictum into practice on a daily basis by controlling information flows and the knowledge that is made available to different people, thereby influencing their perception of situations and hence the ways they act in relation to those situations. These politicians are often known as "gatekeepers," opening and closing channels of communication and filtering, summarizing, analyzing, and thus shaping knowledge in accordance with a view of the world that favors their interests. Many aspects of organizational structure, especially hierarchy and departmental divisions, influence how information flows and are readily used by unofficial gatekeepers to advance their own ends. Even by the simple process of slowing down or

available in a timely manner or too late for it to be of use to its recipients, the gatekeeper can wield considerable power.

Often the quest for control of information in an organization is linked to questions of organizational structure. For example, many battles have been fought over the control and use of centralized computer systems, because control of the computer often carried with it control over information flows and the design of information systems. The power of many finance and other information-processing departments is tied up with this fact. Finance staff are important not only because they control resources, but because they also define and control information about the use of resources. By influencing the design of budgeting and cost-control information systems they are able to influence what is perceived as being important within the organization, both on the part of those who use the information as a basis for control and among those who are subject to these controls. Just as decision-making premises influence the kind of decisions that are made, the hidden and sometimes unquestioned assumptions that are built into the design of information systems can be of crucial importance in structuring day-to-day activity.

Many of the hot issues regarding the merits and problems of micro-processing hinge on the question of power. The new information-processing technology creates the possibility of multiple points of access to common data bases and the possibility of local rather than centralized information systems. In principle the technology can be used to increase the power of those at the periphery or local levels of the organization by providing them with more comprehensive, immediate, and relevant data relating to their work, facilitating self-control rather than centralized control. In practice the technology is often used to increase power at the center. The designers and users of such systems have been acutely aware of the power in information, decentralizing certain activities while centralizing ongoing surveillance over their performance. Thus executives in remote parts of the world, airline reservation staff in unsupervised offices, and workers on the factory floor perform under the watchful eye of the computer, which reports almost every move to someone at the heart of the information system.

In addition to shaping definitions of organizational realities or exercising control, knowledge and information can be used to weave patterns of dependency. By possessing the right information at the right time, by having exclusive access to key data, or by simply demonstrating the ability to marshal and synthesize facts in an effective manner, organizational members can increase the power they wield within an organization. Many people develop these skills in a systematic way, and jealously guard or block access to crucial knowledge to enhance

their indispensability and "expert" status. Obviously, other organizational members have an interest in breaking such exclusivity and widening access. There is thus usually a tendency in organizations to routinize valued skills and abilities whenever possible. There is also a tendency to break down dependencies on specific individuals and departments by acquiring one's own experts. Thus departments often prefer to have their own specialist skills on hand, even if this involves duplication and some redundancy of specialisms within the organization as a whole.

A final aspect of expert power relates to the use of knowledge and expertise as a means of legitimizing what one wishes to do. "The expert" often carries an aura of authority and power that can add considerable weight to a decision that rests in the balance but that has already been made in the minds of key actors.

Control of boundaries: Any discussion of power in organizations must give attention to what is sometimes known as "boundary management." The notion of boundary is used to refer to the interface between different elements of an organization. Thus we can talk about the boundary between different work groups or departments, or between an organization and its environment. By monitoring and controlling boundary transactions people are able to build up considerable power. For example, it becomes possible to monitor changes occurring outside one's group, department, or organization and initiate timely responses. One acquires knowledge of critical interdependencies over which one may be able to secure a degree of control. Or one gains access to critical information that places one in a particularly powerful position to interpret what is happening in the outside world, and thus to help define the organizational reality that will guide action. One can also control transactions across boundaries by performing a buffering function that allows or even encourages certain transactions while blocking others.

Most people in leadership positions at all levels of an organization can engage in this kind of boundary management in a way that contributes to their power. The process is also an important element of many organizational roles, such as those of a secretary, special assistant, or project coordinator, and of liaison people of all kinds. People in such roles are often able to acquire power that goes well beyond their formal status. For example, many secretaries and special assistants are able to exert a major impact on the way their boss views the reality of a given situation by determining who is given access to the manager and when, and by managing information in a way that highlights or downplays the importance of events and activities occurring elsewhere in the organization. One outstanding example of boundary management

is found in the management of the White House under the Nixon administration, where Nixon's top aides Richard Erlichman and Bob Haldeman exercised tight control over access to the president. In doing so it seems that they were able to manage the president's view of what was happening in the White House and elsewhere. One of the main issues in the notorious Watergate affair and the collapse of the presidency was whether Nixon's aides had allowed him to receive the critical information regarding the Watergate burglary. Erlichman and Haldeman were experts at boundary management, and their basic strategy for acquiring power is found in many different kinds of organizations all over the world.

Boundary management can help integrate a unit with the outside world, or it can be used to isolate that unit so that it can function in an autonomous way. The quest for autonomy—by individuals, groups, and even departments—is a powerful feature of organizational life, because many people like to be in full control over their life space. Boundary management aids this quest, since it often shows ways in which a unit can acquire the resources necessary to create autonomy and points to strategies that can be used to fend off threats to autonomy. Groups and departments often attempt to incorporate key skills and resources within their boundaries and to control admissions through selective recruitment. They also often engage in what sociologist Erving Goffman has described as "avoidance rituals," steering clear of issues and potential problems that will threaten their independence.

The quest for autonomy is, however, often countered by opposing strategies initiated by managers elsewhere in the system. They may attempt to break down the cohesiveness of the group by nominating their own representatives or allies to key positions, find ways of minimizing the slack resources available to the group, or encourage organizational redesigns that increase interdependence and minimize the consequences of autonomous actions. Boundary transactions are thus often characterized by competing strategies for control and counter-control. Many groups and departments are successful in acquiring considerable degrees of autonomy, and in defending their position in a way that makes the organization a system of loosely coupled groups and departments rather than a highly integrated unit.

Ability to cope with uncertainty. One source of power implicit in much that has been discussed above is the ability to cope with the uncertainties that influence the day-to-day operation of an organization. Organization implies a certain degree of interdependence, so that discontinuous or unpredictable situations in one part of an organization have considerable implications for operations elsewhere. An ability to deal with these uncertainties gives an

individual, group, or subunit considerable power in the organization as a whole.

The ability to cope with uncertainty is often intimately connected with one's place in the overall division of labor in an organization. Generally speaking, uncertainty is of two kinds. Environmental uncertainties (e.g., with regard to markets, sources of raw materials, or finance) can provide great opportunities for those with the contacts or skills to tackle the problems and thus minimize their effects on the organization as a whole. Operational uncertainties within the organization (such as from the breakdown of critical machinery used in factory production or data processing) can help troubleshooters, maintenance staff, or others with the requisite skills and abilities acquire power and status as a result of their ability to restore normal operations. The degree of power that accrues to people who can tackle both these kinds of uncertainty depends primarily on two factors. First, the degree to which their skills are substitutable, and hence the ease with which they can be replaced. Second, the centrality of their functions to the operations of the organization as a whole.

Organizations generally try to reduce uncertainties whenever possible, usually by "buffering" or through processes of routinization. For example, stocks of critical resources may be built up from different sources, maintenance programs may be developed to minimize technological failures, and people may be trained to deal with environmental contingencies. However, some uncertainty almost always remains, since by nature, uncertain situations cannot always be accurately predicted and forestalled. In addition, those who see the power deriving from their capacity to deal with uncertainty often preserve their power base by ensuring that the uncertainties continue, and sometimes by manipulating situations so that they appear more uncertain than they actually are.

In understanding the impact of uncertainty on the way an organization operates, we thus have an important means of understanding the power relations between different groups and departments. We also get a better understanding of the conditions under which the power of the expert or troubleshooter comes into play, and of the importance of the various kinds of power deriving from the control of resources that we discussed earlier. The existence of uncertainty and an ability to cope with uncertainty are often reasons explaining why and when these other kinds of power become so critical in shaping organizational affairs.

Control of technology. From the beginning of history technology has served as an instrument of power, enhancing the ability of humans to manipulate, control, and impose themselves on their environment. The technology employed in mod-

an organization performs a similar function. It provides its users with an ability to achieve amazing results in productive activity, and it also provides them with an ability to manipulate this productive power and make it work effectively for their own ends.

Organizations usually become vitally dependent on some form of core technology as a means of converting organizational inputs into outputs. This may be a factory assembly line; a telephone switchboard; a centralized computer or record-keeping system; or perhaps a capital-intensive plant like those used in oil refining, the production of chemicals, or power stations. The kind of technology employed influences the patterns of interdependence within an organization and hence the power relations between different individuals and departments. For example, in organizations where the technology creates patterns of sequential interdependence, as in a mass-production assembly line where task A must be completed before B, which must be completed before C, the people controlling any one part of the technology possess considerable power to disrupt the whole. In organizations where the technology involves more autonomous systems of production, the ability of one individual or group to influence the operation of the whole is much more limited.

The fact that technology has a major impact on power relations is an important reason why attempts to change technology often create major conflicts between managers and employees and between different groups within an organization. For the introduction of a new technology can alter the balance of power. The introduction of assembly-line production into industry, designed to increase managerial control over the work process, also had the unintended effect of increasing the power of factory workers and their unions: in standardizing jobs the technology standardized employee interests in a way that encouraged collective action, and also gave employees the power over the production process to make that action extremely effective. A strike on any part of an assembly line can bring the work of hundreds or even thousands of people to a complete halt. The technology is designed in a way that makes collective action by a small group of people extremely effective. The system of production based on the use of autonomous work groups and other forms of "cellular technology," on the other hand, fragments the interests of workers. Work and rewards accrue to the work team as a primary organizational unit. The interests of an employee thus often become more closely associated with those of his team than with those of a general type of employee or occupational group, making unionization and collective action much more difficult, especially since competitive relations may develop between different work teams. Since under the group system a withdrawal of work does

not affect overall operations unless other work groups do the same, the power of workers and their unions over the organization as a whole tends to be reduced quite substantially.

The introduction of new production methods, machines, computing facilities, or any kind of technological change that will increase the power of one group or department at the expense of another thus tends to develop into a hot political issue. Groups of employees usually have a clear understanding of the power relations inherent in current work arrangements and are usually ready to marshal all their resources and ingenuity to fight changes that threaten their position.

The power associated with the control of technology becomes most visible in confrontations and negotiations surrounding organizational change, or when groups are attempting to improve their lot within the organization. However, it also operates in more subtle ways. In working with a particular machine or work system an employee learns the ins and outs of its operation in a way that often lends him or her considerable power. Earlier in this chapter we discussed how machine operators were able to use their knowledge of their machines to outwit the work-study experts attempting to set work standards. They were able to control the use of their technology to improve their wages and control their pace of work. This kind of process is used for many purposes in different kinds of work settings every day. People manipulate and control their technology, just as they twist and turn rules, regulations, and job descriptions. Technology designed to direct and control the work of employees frequently becomes a tool of workers' control!

Interpersonal alliances, networks, and control of "informal organization." Friends in high places; sponsors; mentors; coalitions of people prepared to trade support and favors to further their individual ends; and informal networks for touching base, sounding out, or merely shooting the breeze—all provide a source of power to those involved. Through various kinds of interlocking networks an individual can acquire advance notice of developments that are relevant to his or her interests, exert various forms of interpersonal influence to shape these developments in a manner that he or she desires, and prepare the way for proposals he or she is interested in advancing. The skilled organizational politician systematically builds and cultivates such informal alliances and networks, incorporating whenever possible the help and influence of all those with an important stake in the domain in which he or she is operating. Alliances and coalitions are not necessarily built around an identity of interests; rather, the requirement for these forms of informal organization is that there be a basis for some form of mutually beneficial exchange. Successful networking or coalition building involves an

business that in addition to winning friends, it is necessary to incorporate and pacify potential enemies, and an ability to see beyond immediate issues and find ways of trading help in the present for promises in the future. The successful coalition builder recognizes that the currency of coalition building is one of mutual dependency and exchange.

The coalitions, alliances, and networks built through these processes may remain highly informal and to a degree invisible. The coalition building may occur over the telephone, through old-boy networks and other friendship groups, through the golf club, or through chance contacts. For example, people sharing a meeting on one project may find that they share an interest in relation to another area of their work, and use informal exchanges at the meeting to lay the ground for cooperative action elsewhere. Much of the coalition building found in organizational life occurs through this kind of chance encounter, or through planned informal meetings such as lunches and receptions. Sometimes, however, alliances and networks are forged through various kinds of institutionalized exchange, such as meetings of professional groups and associations, and may themselves eventually become institutionalized in enduring forms such as project teams, advisory boards, joint ventures, or cartellike organizations. As will be clear from the above examples, networks may be internal to an organization or extend to include key people outside. Sometimes they are explicitly interorganizational, such as interlocking directorships where the same people serve on the boards of different organizations. In all networks, some players may take an active central role while others may operate at the fringes. Some will contribute to and derive power from the network more than others, according to the pattern of mutual dependence on which the alliance builds.

In addition to drawing power from networking and coalition building, many members of an organization may draw power from their role in the social networks known as the "informal organization." All organizations have informal networks where people interact in ways that meet various kinds of social needs. Groups of coworkers may make a habit of going to lunch together or drinking on Fridays after work, or may evolve means of enhancing the quality of their life at work. Informal group leaders may become as powerful an influence on their group as any rule, regulation, or manager, and become forces to be recognized and respected for the way their area of the organization operates. The attention currently given to the importance of corporate culture in determining an organization's success highlights the power possessed by leaders and other members of social groups who are in a position to shape the values and attitudes of the particular subculture to which they belong.

One other variant of informal organization arises in situations where one member of an organization develops a psychological or emotional dependency on another. This becomes particularly significant when the dependent party draws considerable power from other sources. The history of corporate and public life is full of examples where a key decision maker has become critically dependent on his or her spouse, lover, secretary, or trusted aide, or even on a self-proclaimed prophet or mystic. In the power-behind-the-throne syndrome that results, the informal collaborator exerts a critical influence on how the decision maker's power is used. While such relations often develop by chance, it is by no means uncommon for people to rise to power by cultivating such dependencies in a Machiavellian way.

Control of counterorganizations. Another route to power in organizations rests in the establishment and control of what can be called "counterorganizations." Trade unions are the most obvious of these. Whenever a group of people manages to build a concentration of power in relatively few hands it is not uncommon for opposing forces to coordinate their actions to create a rival power bloc. Economist John Kenneth Galbraith has described the process as one involving the development of "countervailing power." Thus unions develop as a check on management in industries where there is a high degree of industrial concentration; government and other regulatory agencies develop as a check on the abuse of monopoly power; and the concentration of production is often balanced by the development of large organizations in the field of distributions, e.g., chain stores often develop in ways that balance the power exercised by the large producers and suppliers.

The strategy of exercising countervailing power thus provides a way of influencing organizations where one is not part of the established power structure. By joining and working for a trade union, consumers' association, social movement, cooperative, or lobby group—or by exercising citizen's rights and pressuring the media, one's political representative, or a government agency—one has a way of balancing power relations. Many people make a career out of doing this. Thus a shop-floor worker may spend a major part of his leisure time working for his union, perhaps rising through the ranks of the union bureaucracy to a level at which he deals with senior management face to face. For many people at the lowest levels of an organization the only effective way that they can influence their work life is through this form of countervailing power. Consumer advocate Ralph Nader has been able to have a much greater influence on American industry by acting as critic and champion of consumer rights than he would have had as an employee of any of the organizations he has criticized. Many socially conscious lawyers, journalists, academics, and members of other professional

groups have also found an effective route to influence by criticizing rather than joining the organizations that are the object of their concern. The principle of countervailing power is also often employed by the leaders of large conglomerates, who in effect play a form of chess with their environment, buying and selling organizations as corporate pawns. More than one multinational has attempted to counter the power of its competitors or bargain with its host government with the principle of countervailing power in mind.

Symbolism and the management of meaning. Another important source of power in organizations rests in one's ability to persuade others to enact realities that further the interests one wishes to pursue. Leadership ultimately involves an ability to define the reality of others. While the authoritarian leader attempts to "sell," "tell," or force a reality on his or her subordinates, more democratic leaders allow definitions of a situation to evolve from the views of others. The democratic leader's influence is far more subtle and symbolic. He or she spends time listening, summarizing, integrating, and guiding what is being said, making key interventions and summoning images, ideas, and values that help those involved to make sense of the situation with which they are dealing. In managing the meanings assigned to a situation, the leader in effect wields a form of symbolic power that exerts a decisive influence on how people perceive their realities and hence the way they act. Charismatic leaders seem to have a natural ability to shape meaning in this way.

We will focus upon three related aspects of symbolic management: the use of imagery, the use of theater, and the use of gamesmanship. Images, language, symbols, stories, ceremonies, rituals, and all the other attributes of corporate culture discussed in Chapter 5 are tools that can be used in the management of meaning and hence in shaping power relations in organizational life. Many successful managers and leaders are aware of the power of evocative imagery and instinctively give a great deal of attention to the impact their words and actions have on those around them. For example, they often encourage the idea that the organization is a team and the environment a competitive jungle, talk about problems in terms of opportunities and challenges, symbolize the importance of a key activity or function by giving it high priority and visibility on their own personal agenda, or find other ways of creating and massaging the systems of belief deemed necessary to achieve their aims. In managing the meaning of organizational situations in these ways, they can do much to shape patterns of corporate culture and subculture that will help them achieve desired aims and objectives.

Many organizational members are also keenly aware of the way in which theater—including physical settings, appearances, and styles

of behavior—can add to their power; and many deserve organizational Oscars for their performances. We have all walked into senior executives' offices that exude power in terms of decor and layout, shouting out that someone of considerable influence works there. An executive's office is the stage on which he or she performs and is often carefully organized in ways that will help that performance. In one area we may find a formal desk with a throne-like chair where the executive plays authoritarian roles. In another we may find casual chairs around a coffee table, setting a more convivial scene. When one is summoned to such an office, one often senses the likely tone of the meeting according to where one is seated. If you are guided to a low-level chair facing a desk where the manager can physically look down and thus dominate you, you can almost be sure that you are in for a hard time. Situations often speak louder than words, and do much to express and reproduce the power relations existing within an organization.

Appearances can also count for a great deal. For example, most people in an organization soon learn the rules of dress and other unwritten requirements for successful progress to higher ranks. In some organizations it is possible to distinguish marketing people, accountants, or even those who work on a certain floor according to their choice of fashion and general demeanor. Many aspiring young executives quickly learn the value of carrying the *Wall Street Journal* to work and ensuring that it is always visible, even if they never actually manage to read it. Some people symbolize their activity with paper-strewn desks, and others demonstrate their control and mastery of their work with a desk where no trace of paper is ever seen. In organizational contexts, there is usually more to appearance than meets the eye.

Style also counts. It's amazing how you can symbolize power by being a couple of minutes late for that all-important meeting where everyone depends on your presence, or how visibility in certain situations can enhance your status. For example, in many organizations senior executives dramatize their presence at high-profile events but fade into the woodwork at low-status functions. It is reported that in the White House people often dramatize their access to the president by making sure that they arrive at least half an hour early so that others can see that they are seeing the president. Access to the president is itself both a reflection and a source of power, but if others know that you have such access, it can usually be used to acquire even more power. Those who are aware of how symbolism can enhance power often spend a great deal of time dramatizing their work, utilizing "impression management" to influence the systems of meaning surrounding them and their activities.

finally, we must note the skills of "gamesmanship." The organizational game player comes in many forms. Sometimes he is reckless and ruthless, shooting from the hip at targets that he dislikes, engaging in boardroom brawls when he's certain that he's the best around. In doing so, he increases his visibility and asserts his power and superiority over his competitors. Other kinds of gamesmen may be as crafty and low in profile as a fox, making their way through the organization in a more subtle manner, shaping key impressions at every turn. In seeing organization—with its rewards of success, status, power, and influence—as a game to be played according to their own sets of unwritten rules, organizational game players often have a significant influence on the structure of power relations.

Gender and the management of gender relations. It often makes a great deal of difference if you're a man or a woman! Many organizations are dominated by gender-related values that bias organizational life in favor of one sex over another. Thus, as many feminist writers have emphasized, organizations often segment opportunity structures and job markets in ways that enable men to achieve positions of prestige and power more easily than women, and often operate in ways that produce gender-related biases in the way organizational reality is created and sustained on a day-to-day basis. This is most obvious in situations of open discrimination and various forms of sexual harassment, but often pervades the culture of an organization in a way that is much less visible.

Consider, for example, some of the links between gender stereotypes and traditional principles of organization. Exhibit 6.4 counterposes a series of characteristics that are often used to differentiate between male and female. The links between the male stereotype and the values that dominate many ideas about the nature of organization are striking. Organizations are often encouraged to be rational, analytical, strategic, decision-oriented, tough, and aggressive, and so are men. This has important implications for women who wish to operate in this kind of world, for insofar as they attempt to foster these values, they are often seen as breaking the traditional female stereotype in a way that opens them to criticism, e.g., for being "overly assertive" and "trying to play a male role." Of course, in organizations that cultivate values that are closer to those of the female stereotype, women can have an advantage, reversing the traditional imbalance.

These and other gender biases are also found in the language, rituals, myths, stories, and other modes of symbolism that shape an organization's culture. General conversation and day-to-day ritual can serve to include or to exclude and is sometimes constructed to achieve this end. A lone man or woman can quickly feel outnumbered or "out on a limb" when others talk about matters that he or

Relations between men and women are frequently shaped by predefined stereotypes and images as to how they are expected to behave. Here are some of the more common traits traditionally associated with being male and female in Western society:

The Male Stereotype **The Female Stereotype**

- | | |
|-------------------------------|----------------------------------|
| Logical | Intuitive |
| Rational | Emotional |
| Aggressive | Submissive |
| Exploitative | Empathetic |
| Strategic | Spontaneous |
| Independent | Nurturing |
| Competitive | Cooperative |
| "A leader and decision-maker" | "A loyal supporter and follower" |

Under the influence of the "gender revolution" these stereotypes are now in flux and transition.

Exhibit 6.4. Traditional male and female stereotypes

she cannot share, or when language and jokes assume a derogatory form. He or she can miss important conversation by not being in the same locker room, and can be subjected to all kinds of subtle degradation through the stories and myths that circulate on the organizational grapevine. All the factors shaping corporate culture discussed in Chapter 5 are relevant for understanding the gender realities constructed in an organization. They also identify the means through which a person can begin to counter and reshape the power relations thus produced.

The subtleties associated with gender often create different experiences of the same organizational situation and present many practical problems for the way men and women interact on a daily basis. Sometimes the difficulties created are so significant that they give rise to conscious and unconscious strategies for "gender management."

Consider the following situation, drawn from research conducted by my colleague Deborah Sheppard:

Susan Jones is a marketing research manager in a male-dominated industry. She frequently has to give presentations to her male colleagues, and feels a need to ensure that she "blends in" by managing her appearance and behavior so that conventional expectations and

norms relating to sex-roles are maintained. She strives to be "credible," while not overtly challenging the status quo, and monitors herself on a continuing basis. She is particularly careful not to act in a malelike way, and much of her "impression management" rests in avoiding giving offense because she is a woman. Thus, in her oral presentations she tries to demonstrate competence while avoiding being assertive. She stands in the same place rather than engaging in the more aggressive act of walking around, even if the presentation lasts three hours. She attempts to get her ideas across gently. She does not raise her voice, finding other ways of emphasizing critical points, e.g., by using over-heads, but being sure never to use a pointer. She avoids wearing pants or three piece suits with a vest, and is always careful to balance her more formal attire with a feminine blouse.

Susan Jones works in a male-dominated reality, and spends a lot of her time living on other people's terms. Ms. Jones knows exactly what she is doing: She feels that to succeed in her organization she must try and fit in as best she can.

Many people would challenge her style of gender management, and suggest that she should be more assertive and confront and change the status quo. And many women in organizations do this very effectively. But the point about the case for present purposes rests in the fact that it shows how life in organizations is often guided by subtle and not so subtle power relations that guide attention and behavior in one direction rather than another. To do a good job Susan Jones has to put a much greater effort into accomplishing everyday reality than her male colleagues.

Exhibit 6.5 presents an evocative illustration of some of the implicit role models that men and women sometimes adopt in dealing with these gender-related issues. Whether or not gender is perceived as a factor shaping power relations, the choice or inclination toward one gender management strategy rather than another can have a major effect on one's success and general influence within an organization. We shall have more to say about the source and nature of gender biases in Chapter 7, when we discuss the role of repressed sexuality, the influence of the patriarchal family, and the general role of ideology in corporate life.

Structural factors that define the stage of action. One of the surprising things one discovers in talking with members of an organization is that hardly anyone will admit to having any real power. Even chief executives often say that they feel highly constrained, that they have few significant options in decision making, and that the power they wield is more apparent than real. Everyone usually feels in some degree hemmed in, either by forces within the

organization or in terms of requirements posed by the environment. Given the numerous and varied sources of power already discussed, these attitudes present us with a paradox. How is it that there can be so many sources of power, yet so many feelings of powerlessness?

One possible answer is that access to power is so open, wide, and varied that to a large extent power relations become more or less balanced. While some people may be able to amass considerable personal power, this is offset by the power of others, and even the powerful thus feel constrained. We will give more attention to this "pluralist" view later in the chapter.

Another possible explanation rests in the idea that it is important to distinguish between the surface manifestations and the deep structure of power. This view is linked with perspectives on organization to be explored in Chapters 8 and 9. It suggests that while organizations and society may at any one time comprise a variety of political actors drawing on a variety of power bases, the stage on which they engage in their various kinds of power play is defined by the logic of change shaping the social epoch in which they live. This view summons the idea that organization and society must be understood from a historical perspective. To illustrate let us examine an analogy from the natural world. Suppose that we are considering the ecology of a river valley. We can understand that ecology in terms of the "power relations" between the various species of tree, shrub, fern, and undergrowth and the soil from which they draw sustenance. But these power relations are underpinned by the basic structure of the river valley, as determined by the impact of glaciation millennia before. One species of tree may be more powerful and thus dominate another, but the conditions of this domination are structurally determined.

Applying this analogy to organizational life, we see how underlying structures or logics of change underpin power relations. A manager may control an important budget, have access to key information, and be excellent at impression management, and be a powerful person for all these reasons. But his ability to draw on and use these sources of power is underpinned by various structural factors, such as the invested capital that sustains the organization. Similarly a factory worker may possess considerable power to disrupt production as a result of his or her role on an assembly line. His or her knowledge of the way in which production can be disrupted is the immediate source of power, but the ultimate source is the structure of productive activity that makes such power significant. These considerations encourage us to see people as agents or carriers of power relations embedded in the wider structure of society. As such people may be no more than semi-autonomous pawns moving themselves around in a game where they

As one looks around the organizational world it is possible to identify different ways in which people manage gender relations. Here are a variety of popular strategies. Each can be successful or unsuccessful, according to the persons and situations involved.

Some Female Strategies

- Queen Elizabeth I — Rule with a firm hand, surrounding oneself as far as possible by submissive men. Margaret Thatcher provides a modern example.
- The First Lady — Be content to exercise power behind the throne: a tactic adopted by many "corporate wives" such as executive secretaries and special assistants.
- The Invisible Woman — Adopt a low profile and try and blend with one's surroundings, exercising influence in whatever ways one can.
- The Great Mother — Consolidate power through caring and nurturing.
- The Liberationist — Play rough and give as good as you get; be outspoken and always make a stand in favor of the role of women.
- The Amazon — Be a leader of women. This style is especially successful when one can build a powerful coalition by placing like-minded women in influential positions.
- Delilah — Use the powers of seduction to win over key figures in male-dominated organizations.
- Joan of Arc — Use the power of a shared cause and mission to transcend the fact that you are a woman, and gain widespread male support.
- The Daughter — Find a "father figure" prepared to act as sponsor and mentor.

can learn to understand the rules but have no power to change them. This phenomenon may explain why even the powerful often feel that they have little real choice as to how they should behave. For example, a chief executive may face some of these wider rules of the game in terms of the economic conditions that influence the survival of her organization. Insofar as she wishes the organization to survive, she may perceive herself as having no real options about what must be done to ensure its survival.

Some Male Strategies

- The Warrior — Frequently adopted by busy executives caught up in fighting corporate battles. Often used to bind women into roles as committed supporters.
- The Father — Often used to win the support of younger women searching for a mentor.
- King Henry VIII — Use of absolute power to get what one wants, attracting and discarding female supporters according to their usefulness.
- The Playboy — Use of sex appeal (both real and imagined) to win support and favor from female colleagues. A role often adopted by executives lacking a more stable power base.
- The Jock — Based on various kinds of "display behavior" concerned to attract and convince women of one's corporate prowess. Often used to develop admiration and support from women in subordinate or lateral positions.
- The Little Boy — Often used to try and "get one's way" in difficult situations, especially in relation to female co-workers and subordinates. The role may take many forms, e.g., the "angry little boy" who throws a temper to create a stir and force action; the "frustrated or whining little boy" who tries to cultivate sympathy; and the "cute little boy" who tries to curry favor, especially when he's in a jam.
- The Good Friend — Often used to develop partnerships with female colleagues, either as confidants or as key sources of information and advice.
- The Chauvinist Pig — Often used by men who feel threatened by the presence of women. Characterized by use of various "degradation" rituals, which seek to undermine the status of women and their contributions.

Exhibit 6.5. Some strategies for the management of gender relations

This view of the deep structure of power leads us to recognize the importance of factors such as class relations in determining the role we occupy within organizations and hence the kind of opportunity structure and power to which we have access. It draws attention to the way educational systems and other processes of socialization shape basic elements of culture. It draws attention to the logic of capital accumula-

tion, which shapes the structure of industry, levels of employment, patterns of economic growth, and the ownership and distribution of wealth. We will be considering these underlying factors in some detail in the following chapters. They define the stage on which organizational members act, and moderate the significance and influence of the other sources of power to which one has access.

The power one already has. Power is a route to power, and one can often use power to acquire more. The biographies of many consummate politicians illustrate this fact. For example, politicians within organizations and in public life frequently tie the use of power to informal IOU agreements where help or favor begs its return in kind at a later date. Thus a manager may use his or her power to support X in a struggle with Y, knowing that when X is successful it will be possible to call upon similar (if not more) support from X: "Remember last July. Your future was on the line, and I risked everything to help out. Surely you'll now do a small favor for me?" Often the exchanges are more subtle than this, but the message is essentially the same. Power used in a judicious way takes the form of an investment and, like money, often becomes useful on a rainy day.

It is also possible to take advantage of the honey-pot characteristic of power. The presence of power attracts and sustains people who wish to feed off that power, and actually serves to increase the power holder's power. In the hope of gaining favor, people may begin to lend the power holder uninvited support or buy into his or her way of thinking so that he or she can see that they're on the same side. When the time comes for the power holder to recognize this interest with active support, people then actually become indebted to the power holder, with all kinds of IOUs coming into play. Power, like honey, is a perpetual source of sustenance and attraction among the worker bees.

Finally, there is the empowering aspect of power. When people experience progress or success, they are often energized to achieve further progress and success. In this way a sense of power can actually lead to more power. This kind of potential or transformative power is overlooked in most contemporary discussions of power relations but is vital in understanding the kind of dynamism and energy that can develop from very small and insignificant beginnings. The process is perhaps most evident in those situations in which people who believe that they have absolutely no power fight and win a small victory. Very soon they realize that one victory can lead to another and feel as if they are being carried on the crest of a wave. Action itself can be an empowering force, and many organizations and communities have been transformed by its effects in quite unexpected ways.

The ambiguity of power. While we have identified numerous sources of power, which are probably far

from being exhaustive, it is difficult to tie down exactly what the phenomenon is. We know that it has a great deal to do with asymmetrical patterns of dependence whereby one person or unit becomes dependent on another in an unbalanced way, and that it also has a great deal to do with an ability to define the reality of others in ways that lead them to perceive and enact relations that one desires. However, it is far from clear whether power should be understood as an interpersonal behavioral phenomenon or as the manifestation of deep-seated structural factors. It is not clear whether people have and exercise power as autonomous human beings or are simply carriers of power relations that are the product of more fundamental forces. These and other issues—such as whether power is a resource or a relationship, whether there is a distinction between power and processes of societal domination and control, whether power is ultimately linked to the control of capital and the structuring of the world economy, or whether it is important to distinguish between actual manifest power and potential power—continue to be the subject of considerable interest and debate among those interested in the sociology of organization.

These problems aside, however, it is clear that our discussion of possible sources and uses of power provides us with an inventory of ideas through which we can begin to decode power plays and political dynamics in organizational contexts. Like our analysis of interests and our discussion of conflict, it provides us with a working tool through which we can analyze organizational politics and, if we so wish, orient our action in a politicized way.

Managing pluralist organizations

The image of organizations developed above reflects what is sometimes known as a "pluralist" frame of reference. For it emphasizes the plural nature of the interests, conflicts, and sources of power that shape organizational life. The term "pluralism" is used in political science to characterize idealized kinds of liberal democracies where potentially authoritarian tendencies are held in check by the free interplay of interest groups that have a stake in government. The pluralist vision is of a society where different groups bargain and compete for a share in the balance of power and use their influence to realize Aristotle's ideal of politics: a negotiated order that creates unity out of diversity.

This pluralist philosophy stands in contrast with an older organic or "unitary" frame of reference. The unitary view pictures society as an integrated whole where the interests of individual and society are syn-