Power and Public Relations: Paradoxes and Programmatic Thoughts

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"From Plato forward, philosophers have struggled to define power, which is at heart the capacity to bend reality to your will" (Meacham 2008, *Newsweek,* p. 34).

"The most important vehicle of reality-maintenance is conversation" (P. Berger & Luckmann, 1967, p. 152).

"Meaning structures are filled with privileged interests" (Deetz, 1982, p. 139).

Power is a problematic of public relations (and other professional communicators). Some critics charge that public relations exerts power through propaganda techniques that distort society to serve narrow and even dysfunctional interests. Defending, to an extent, public relations' discourse role in society, Scott Cutlip (1994), in his prologue to Unseen Power, bracketed the good, the bad, and the ugly sides of this challenge:

only through the expertise of public relations can causes, industries, individuals, and institutions make their voice heard in the public forum where thousands of shrill, competing voices daily re-create the Tower of Babel. I did not and do not deny the harm done by the incompetent, the charlatan, and those who serve dubious causes. (p. ix)

To understand this unseen power, Cutlip directed attention to "weapons of power in our no-holds-barred political, economic, and cause competition in the public opinion marketplace" (p. xi). Cutlip invoked democratic responsibility to constrain the damage practitioners can produce as they create meaning and influence judgement.

Whether by dialogue or monologue, meaning is created and influences society as it defines power resources that are enacted at individual, organizational and societal levels. If meaning is the crux of power dynamics, then we need to investigate where power forces intersect in societal idioms. To do so, we call upon several streams of analysis: rhetoric, discourse analysis, social construction, and a constitutive view of language.

This line of analysis, broadly reasons that thoughts about things, identities and identifications, as well as institutional power relationships are shaped by the terms/idioms that drive and result from community discourse: By what is said, who says what about these matters, and how such meaning shapes thoughts and actions. This discourse has constitutive (Stokes, 2005) and social constructionist impact as words define matters to privilege certain views of reality (and marginalize others) bent to various interests, motives, actions, institutions, relationships, and choices.

In addition to meaning, power results from systems dynamics; systems theory (with its implications for structural functionalism and structuration) suggests that power resources arise

from information flow and relationships that variously foster harmony or suffer disharmony. As this paper progresses, a systems view will be briefly discussed as a prelude to attending in detail to the power role of meaning. In this thematic development, this paper features the power resources public relations achieves through discourse generated meaning. It is reasonable to worry whether meaning is fully co-created through the discourse of many voices, or the product of one (or a few) voice, constructing social reality.

Theme: Power is a collective resource defined and enacted through discourse generated vocabularies, which can be applied to narrow or broad interests. This give and take, partially explainable by systems dynamics, may privilege some interests and marginalize others, but ideally society is more fully functioning when discourse does not distort the power resources to dysfunctional ends. The resources of power are fostered by the terministic bending of reality to fit cognitive/ideation, identity/self, and societal/relation needs as individuals, organizations, and societies variously and collectively manage risks. At its best, co-created meaning is a community power resource that maximizes individual and organizational efficiency rather than frustrates it.

Systems Overview

Viewed from a systems (subsuming structural/functionalism and structuration) perspective, public relations has been championed for its ability to help connect (or disconnect) organizations and individuals to power structures (or even dominate them as advocates of ethics), whether internal, local or global. As systems create, share and interpret information, such decisions build and exert power resources on behalf of various interests. This institutional view of power is not divorced from the influence of meaning and presumes that efficiency is a telling organizational quality.

Structural/functionalism addresses the power role public relations can play as it joins with and helps connect organizations as power structures to other such structures that together become society. Such systems may have many motives and feature compatible and competing interests: Profit, non-profit (including activist/NGO), or governmental.

According to this logic, practitioners bring information and ethical decision making into senior management and work with external systems to foster the kinds and qualities of relationships needed to achieve goodwill with key publics (J. E. Grunig & L. A. Grunig, 2008; see also, B. Berger 2005; 2007, B. Berger & Reber, 2006). Stacks (2004) applied part of this logic to address the challenges and responsibilities practitioners face as they strive to help organizations respond appropriately during crisis. Interested in leadership and rightfulness, B. Berger (2007; see also B. Berger & Reber, 2006)—much as did Cutlip (1994) —acknowledged the ambiguity created by "whether researchers seek to advance our understanding of these concepts within a relational and symmetrical perspective, or approach them or other power issues from alternative perspectives." Either way, "the concepts themselves continue to be crucial terms in our vocabulary of public relations power" (p. 227).

Exploring systems of power, Monge and Contractor (2000; see also, Shumate, Fulk, & Monge, 2005) argued that social capital is created through the quality of organizations and relationships as well as the kind of communication that they allow or facilitate. Similar analysis of global regimes, including NGOs (M. Stohl & C. Stohl, 2005) helped Taylor (2009) develop her analysis of the structural/functional and rhetorical resources needed for civil society.

Applying a structurational dominance theme to critique the institutionalization of the information age, Gandy (1992) examined how public policy systems can be manipulated to the advantage of some interests and the disadvantage of others. Baker, Conrad, Cudahy, and

Willyard (2009) observed how companies such as pharmaceutical giant Merck gain approval of products, such as Vioxx, from the Federal Drug Administration through systems (and rhetorical positioning) that is largely developed by the drug industry to protect and promote its interest.

Mitchell, Agle, and Wood (1997), in one of the classic discussions of stakeholder analysis, reasoned that power resources are based on dependence and reciprocity among parties that are variously at risk of losing or not achieving desired and needed resources. Such process variables are interconnected by relationship factors of legitimacy and ethics (moral claims). Along this same line of analysis, Rowley (1997) reasoned that such analysis could not be wisely reduced to interest in dyadic ties, but required network analysis that featured concepts such as density and centrality.

By their nature, systems generate and facilitate power resources by the structuration of functions that yield to principles such as transivity, uncertainty, control, openness/closedness, symmetry/asymmetry, complexity, turbulence (stability and randomness, even chaos), linkage, interdependence, adaptiveness, and hierarchy. As such, power results from connections, access, transparency, control, and other key variables that lead to or frustrate empowerment of various interests. As Clegg, Courpasson, and Phillips (2006) observed: "Power and discourses are equally intermingled in so far as they constitute the political structure of organizations through diverse circuits of power" (p. 17). However, devoid of the influence of meaning, some might argue, systems, relationships, and attributions make no sense as enactable processes independent of such meaning, which in all cases matters (Heath & Frandsen, 2008) as individuals and institutions co-create meaning and collectively manage risks.

Meaning Overview

The logic featured at the end of the preceding section underscores the argument that meaning defines and constitutes power resources and the systems (structures and functions) by which they are enacted. The central proposition of this paper is that in society words create shared meaning that serves as and consequently defines the power resources of the society. In that regard, and in keeping with the tenets of social construction, culture captures and expresses the power resources that can be forged, contested, and altered, but which are enacted as ways of thinking, believing, and acting. Whatever power resources are at play in any society results from key terms that essentially grant, frame, or deny power; they empower some and marginalize other people, actions, perspectives, and choices.

As such, power resources are socially constructed interpretations of facts, evaluations, policies, and systems/relationships. They become ultimate terms that form the bases of identity/identification, as well as define the nature and quality of relationships (See for instance, Courtright & Smudde, 2007). The power of public relations results from discourse generated meaning—a shared sense of social reality—formed and enacted at individual, organizational, and societal levels.

The nexus of power and meaning is not merely the influence—as traditionally defined—that one or more entities exerts on other entities, but the battle by various entities over the rationale of power to determine who are the legitimate participants in defining and brokering power resources. And, the logic continues, we then are interested to know and appreciate the specific terms that are forged through this process and serve as the rationale for power enactment.

Stressing this grounding principle of power, Barnes (1988) concluded, "Every society possesses a shared body of technical, manipulation-related knowledge, knowledge of nature, and

a shared body of social knowledge, knowledge of a normative order" (p. 55). Power resources are the enactable norms and expectations that are captured in this collective view of knowledge, selves, social relationships, privileges and obligations. As interest groups and private-sector organizations contest assumptions and norms, they define and redefine power, "the structure of discretion" (p. 62). Power, in this sense, is the "capacity for action and the possession of power [is] the possession of discretion in the use of capacity for action" (p. 67). For these reasons, communication practitioners (including those identified as serving a public relations function) engage in the ebb and flow of social meaning (and its sense of preferred expectations) and the application of that meaning as means for obtaining and distributing stakes, the management of power resources. In this sense, public relations is not limited to the "wordsmithing" of businesses, but of all organizations, including activists.

  The traditional definition of power features the ability X has to affect how Y achieves its goals. Barnes (1988) argued that this definition does not actually define power but merely indicates when it is present and legitimate. This logic forces us to separate the legitimacy various players enjoy to exert influence and the actual, and related, influence those players exert over decisions collectively made and as legitimate. The telling question asks what defined characteristics of X or the nature of the situation (Z) gives X the ability to affect Y? Meaning matters, Barnes reasoned as he directed our attention to this essential theme:

> Whether we talk of rights and obligations, or of roles and institutions, or of patterned social relationships, the import is much the same: we are talking of a presumed structure and orderliness in social activity, and a need to understand the nature and the basis of such structure and orderliness is implied. (p. 20)

  Power results from value premises and social norms—expected and accepted patterns of thinking and acting. This normative order results from symbolism: Societal relationships, ideation, and identity.

  As understood through discourse analysis and social construction of reality, power comes through the meaning that defines its resources and the structures and functions than result from and enact those resources. This logic can be expanded and usefully explored by dwelling on what Mead (1934) called mind, self, and society and as Motion and Leitch (2007) characterized public relations: "a meaning creation process with ideational, relational and identity functions" (p. 264). In a parallel discussion, Bentele (2008) used the terms (perspectivity, selectivity, and constructivity) to feature what he called a reconstructive approach to public relations that deals eternally with hypothetical realism.

  Clegg et al. (2006) forced attention to this meaning centric approach: "Discourses shape structures and provide the means for ordering the political structure. Thus, organizations and individuals use discourses purposefully to shape the political situation in and through which they can act and perform" (p. 17). Framed this way, power can be analyzed from a discourse perspective as a force within organizations and among the institutions in which participants make the meaning they and others enact their views of reality, their motives and interests, the various contexts that constitute each society, and the various purposes and ends to which they communicate and act. All of this discourse, and the exercise of power resources, serves collaborative and competing goals.

  A discourse rationale reasons that power consists of influence achieved through meaning crafted via discourse enactors through processes of statement and counter statement. To engage

in power may be feared, by this logic, because of the incentive some players have to manipulate meaning in a self-interested and narrow way to become or stay powerful. By this means, power can be unequally distributed rather than collaboratively used and therefore must be denied or mitigated if organizations and public relations are to be ethical. However, because it is created through discourse, power structures and their legitimacy can be contested by discourse: Statement and counterstatement.

Such circumstances and outcomes might lead us to dismiss or scorn the power role of public relations. However, we cannot usefully avoid the challenge of achieving a socially responsible theory to understand and guide the profession by merely critizing what is an ongoing reality. We seek to understand the logics that explain how, through linguistic resources, public relations engages in power resource management in ways that can make society more (or less) fully functioning (Heath, 2006). We can better understand and set standards when we realize that power is created through discourse and the force it has in matters of the mind, self-identity, and societal relationships. Understanding the discourse nature of power can help organizational leaderships to be more reflective and therefore be more committed to and able to sponsor mutually beneficial public relations. This rationale grounds the understanding and criticism of the role public relations can and should play collaboratively in co-created meaning that results from and guides product/service promotion, reputation building, repair, and management, as well as conflict resolution, crisis communication and risk management.

Perspectives that Frame the Matter: Mead, Foucault, and Others

Power results from a blend of thoughts that point to the interplay of the private/personal and socio-political; neither makes sense or yields power independent of the other. Relevant to public relations, one extreme development of this logic, the case Bernays (1955) made in Engineering Consent, connected propaganda and manipulation which became the bete noire of public relations. He believed public relations practitioners had the power to engineer consent through clever campaigns that, for instance, could make a tobacco product appealing because its color was framed as fashionable. A peer of Bernays, John Hill (1958; 1963) warned his clients that power resides with the public (key publics) who have the right and ability to decide some matter based on the quality of arguments competing voices offer that can lead to enlightened choice.

By considering these overarching views of public relations, we conceptualize power as resulting from personal and socio-political idioms to which many voices, including those of public relations contributes. Although some worry that business interests dominate this discourse, academics such as L. Grunig (1992) advised organizations, which need some public's goodwill to achieve their mission, to be attentive to the power any public can exert through issues it raises, perspectives it advances, and language it crafts and emboldens, especially in terms of giving life to issues.

From an issues management perspective, Heath (see Heath & Palenchar, 2009, for instance) features the power resources of the voices that jockey to produce and interpret facts, evaluate matter, recommend and contest public policy positions, and court others to adopt or abandon various identifications. In fact, issues management as he features it would not have come into existence in the 1970s if not for the rise in activist power, which included the framing and reframing of issues in ways that challenged the legitimacy of views preferred by businesses and the establishment government.

Whether at the personal or socio-political level, shared meaning is a necessary resource for thought, identity, and relationship. Rather than seeking to minimize or deny the role of power in organizational management and communication, Clegg et al. (2006) reasoned:

> Organization requires power and, while not all power requires organization, most does. Power is to organization as oxygen is to breathing. Politics are at the core of public life and their expression is invariably dependent on organization, be it in government, business, administration, religion, education, or whatever. (p. 3)

This logic agrees with resource dependency theory; own interests are never achieved independent of other interests (Pffeffer, 1981, 1992).

However well aligned, interests can be seen as being individually controlled or allotted and used collaboratively through variously functional relationships. Elaborating on this point, Clegg et al. (2006) observed:

Power concerns the ways that social relations shape capabilities, decisions, change; these social relations can do things and they can block things unfolding. Power is ultimately about the choices that we make, the actions we take, the evils we tolerate, the good we define, the privileges we bestow, the rights we claim, and the wrongs we do. Power means finding the most effective leverage for particular relations. (p. 3)

This decidedly discourse oriented sense of power focuses on fundamental matters of understanding and enacting the sources of power and the resources that are managed through discourse to that end. In such matters, the crux of discourse rests on the essential theme: "the ultimate arbiter of what such interests are is not some external agency but the selves whose interests are at issue" (Clegg et al., 2006, p. 4).

This logic views power as central to ideation, identity, and relationship defined by the interaction of efficiency and the quality of the discourse that brings about aligned, mutually beneficial interests. At the heart of this problematic is not only the willingness to collectively and collaboratively solve problems, but the challenges to doing so given the discourse resources that can be and are brought to bear in ways that depend fundamentally on shared meaning making.

Nearly three decades after Hill's work, this rationale became a cornerstone for addressing issues management and public affairs. As Ewing (1987) concluded, "Issues management is about power" (p. 1). Heath (1997, 2008; see also Heath & Palenchar, 2009) featured power resources—activism, NGO, governmental, intra-industry, and inter-industry—as tools in the battle to increase or narrow individual legitimacy gaps as the fundamental problematic of strategic issues management.

Viewed as a discourse challenge, personal and shared definitions, idioms, interests, values, and preferences are brought to life through discourse and the meaning that is strategically as well as idiosyncratically generated. One assumption, for the rationale of public relations, is that in such matters, individuals as well as organizations should be inspired and motivated to accommodate to others definitions and interests. However, as Roper (2005) argued, mere accommodation to external critics in order to make the organization less vulnerable, at least for the short-term, can reduce the likelihood that issues that need discussion actually receive appropriate attention. Accommodation can pre-empt full discussion and collaboration. Instead of discussing power as the essential focus of symmetry, we can feature the dynamics of competing issue positions, the wrangle of ideas, identities, and the welfare of society as the collective management of risk. This logic extends to marketing communication and related consumer

decisions, as well as those more centered on issues, the contest of ideas even via advocacy (Heath, 2007).

Framing Power: Mind/ideation, Self/identity, and Society/relational

The discussion to this point has focused on three foundational themes: Mind/ideation, self/identity, and society/relational. Power and knowledge are interdependent, co-produced constitutive perspectives that are the foundation for cognition, self-identity, and societal legitimacy as conceptualized by George Herbert Mead's (1930). Mind is ideational, self is identity, and society is relationship following the logic laid out by Motion and Leitch (2007). They observed that public relations is "a meaning creation process with ideational, relational and identity functions" (p. 264). Drawing on Fairclough (1992) and Foucault (1980, 1982a, 1982b), they elaborated these three functions:

> …the ideational function of public relations would be to influence the concepts and systems of thought that shape how we think about things. The relationship function of public relations would refer to the construction of power relationships between discourse actors or "stakeholders". The identity function of public relations would refer to the creation and transformation of the subject positions available to actors within discourse. (Motion & Leitch, 2007, p. 264)

Power by the logics unfolded here as elsewhere is positive and negative. "From this perspective, discourse may be seen as providing the vehicle through which power/knowledge circulates and discourse strategies as the means by which the relations of power/knowledge are created, maintained, resisted and transformed" (p. 265). The meaning public relations practitioners help shape can become hegemonic "in that it becomes so pervasive that it is perceived as common sense" (p. 266).

This analysis parallels Castor's (2005) observation: "Social constructionism is an ontological perspective that views knowledge, identity, and social reality as human construction" (p. 482). Of related interest, van Ruler and Vercic (2005) reasoned that public relations exerts "soft power" because it is "engaged in constructing society by making sense of situations, creating appropriate meanings out of them, and looking for acceptable frameworks and enactments" as the substrata of co-produced societal legitimacy (p. 266).

Critics as well as consumers are in varying degrees autonomous of their target in opinion and cannot singularly be defined only by that target but also define themselves, give themselves identity, and lay the foundations for higher or lower quality relationships (Leitch & Neilson, 2001). For this reason, Barnes (1988) reasoned, power is driven by the rationale that makes its enactment legitimate, a matter which is subject to contest and change. The resources, developed through discourse, are not only those supported by organizations but also those defined, forced, and yielded to by key publics of many kinds. How concern as well as compliance is expressed, the vocabulary of that concern or compliance, and the vocabulary against which it speaks is essential to the power dynamics that result through meaning driven management of power stakes.

Stakes, sought and yielded, constitute social capital as defined for the dialetics of mind, self and society. As Ihlen (2005) reasoned, "social capital can also be seen as one of the several resources used to obtain or maintain positions of power" (p. 492). Such capital arises from connections and memberships, the size and connectedness of various networks. Focusing on connections, Courtright and Smudde (2007) featured public relations as "the measured and

ethical use of language and symbols to inspire cooperation between an organization its publics." This theme, in tune with contemporary rhetorical inquiry, "concerns the means by which power constructs, regulates, and perpetuates itself through symbols and the individuals that use them" (p. 4). Such meaning-based logics can be used to examine the "power relations inherent in a corporation's image restoration struggle" (Jerome, Moffitt, & Knudsen, 2007, p. 87; see also Foucault, 1972, 1980).

Power is exerted and granted by individuals and organizations in deference to the standards defined by any dominant hegemony and can attribute responsibility in matters of crisis, consumer marketing decisions, the logics of public policy issue debate, and the collective management of risk. A central logic of this analysis, according to Smudde (2007), rests on the premise that "people get used to how they think and do things" and therefore,

> see those systems of thinking and doing as the ways that structure everything humans do, rather than as mere template for thinking, speaking, and acting. This perspective means that human discourse creates and recreates human reality, including that for organizations not the other way around. (p. 207)

Advancing this rubric, we are keenly interested in how such networks lead members to perceive and think about reality, their identities, and their networks of relationships. In this matter, meaning is the central power resource as members of networks work to bend reality to their wills (Meachem, 2008). As such, power is as necessary to society as breath is to living; inevitably, Clegg et al. (2006) reasoned, "power is not necessarily constraining, negative or antagonistic. Power can be creative, empowering, and positive" (p. 2). It is a resource the use of which and the ends to which it is used determine whether it is positive or negative. "The organizational media that form, condense, and distribute social relations shape power and they can shape it either way" (p. 2, italics in original).

Mind/Ideation

What do individuals think and know about reality that serves as power resources?

This question addresses the power that arises from the language (terminology/idioms) individuals singularly and collectively use to bend reality to various interests. Power results from the definitional and generative impact of language, whether informed by positivism, chaos, complexity or other theoretical underpinnings, that grants or gains power because of the fact that how people perceive reality conditions their reaction to it and to one another. Pressing this point a bit more, it is easy to argue that each philosophical stream of analysis is in itself an analysis of power because it explores how people do and should think and act.

Power flows from the pressure to achieve socially constructed knowledge and truth that in turn give society the collective ability to make decisions and enact those choices. How independent or interdependent is each individual in their sense of what they know and how they know it? Certain institutions, such as science and even the church, arise to power because they define reality that otherwise is an intolerable chaos or complexity. As such, mind/ideation depends less on some absolute positivistic truth to feature a shared and therefore enactable sense of truth that is captured in narratives (Heath, 1994) that frame rationale and expectations.

According to Motion and Leitch (2007), the ideational function of discourse focuses on "the concepts and systems of thought that shape how we think about things" (p. 264). This view

can explain how definitional meaning shapes power resources leading to empowerment or marginalization. "From a Foucauldian perspective, one would argue that the attachment to truth is central to the power/knowledge relationship. Particular knowledges gain the status of truths by virtue of their relationship to power" (p. 266). Attached to the interests and strategic skills (as well as professional ethics), they observed that "Conceptualized from a power/knowledge perspective, public relations shifts from the discourse domain of business, where it is understood as a commercial practice, to the discourse domain of politics, where it is understood as a power effect that produces and circulates certain kinds of truths" (p. 268).

The most fundamental connection between discourse and reality is that between word and thing: concept/object (thoughts about reality and reality as perceived and approached). One version of this relationship, referentialialism, posits that experience with reality defines words, the meaning that results from that experience (Ogden & Richards, 1923). In contrast, linguistic relativity sees words as defining reality. As Burke (1966) reasoned: "things are the signs of words" (p. 363). Instead of reflecting reality, words define and attitudinize it. Such is the case, Burke argued, because "there will be as many different worldviews in history as there are people" (p. 52). This is true because our instruments for knowing are nothing but structures of terms and therefore manifest the nature of each terminology, vocabulary (Burke, 1969a). Each idiom or vocabulary is a reflection, selection, and deflection of how people see and act toward the world they name and experience. Language is not a microscope for fully understanding reality but a set of terministic screens that define and enact it as named (Burke, 1966). Consequently, Burke (1934) warned: "If language is the fundamental instrument of human cooperation, and if there is an 'organic flaw' in the nature of language, we may well expect to find this organic flaw revealing itself through the texture of society" (p. 330). (For a parallel view, see Bentele, 2008).

We cannot expect agreement to exist independent of disagreement. As defined by discourse, power as asserted, refuted, and accepted is defined by the dialectical responses that are encountered through statement/counter statement, advocacy/counter advocacy. The limits of any one propositional thought are set by the counter response. Burke (1951, 1969, especially pp. 39-40, 306, 1973, 1983) wrote of the dialect of the act, the react and the lesson learned. Shared meaning facilitates, and even frustrates, shared understanding and enactment. "In any process of institutionalization, meaningfulness is never 'given' but has to be struggled for, has to be secured, even against the resistance of others" (Clegg et al., 2006, p. 8). "Thus, power has no essential qualities because power is not a thing but a relation between things and people as they struggle to secure 'truthfully' embedded meanings" (p. 10, italics in original). This discourse centered approach to power fits neatly with Entman's (2007) views on framing; entities that frame news and issues achieve power because each frame exerts influence and predicts how salient facts will be perceived as they are debated and resolved into shared enactment.

Power and the Bending of Reality: Conceptualization of power necessarily addresses the influence people have over one another and their circumstances. For instance, humans lack the power to make the sun rise or not. Even the most powerful ruler cannot extend his/her life beyond what is allotted by forces of nature, but they can foster development (or yield to others influence on that matter) of a religion that leads to the creation of massive tombs in which they will spend the afterlife in stately luxury—even with humans sacrificed to be eternal servants. Faced with an unyielding reality, humans seek empowerment through conceptualization of the afterlife, creation, and the power of prayer, whereby careful and appropriate invocation of God's will bends reality, such as the parting of a sea or the building of temples and pyramids. Doctrinal struggles (for instance religions or political party positions) are power battles. By the same token,

no matter how much power an activist group or a government might have they cannot will the weather to be hotter or cooler or produce petroleum/hydrocarbon products at no cost or without environmental impact.

Gordon and Pellegrin (2008) featured interaction as the means for social construction of shared reality:

> From the constructionist orientation, knowledge is itself a human product as well as an ongoing human production. Social constructionism, in short, contends that reality is a social construction that is created, maintained, altered, and destroyed through the process of human interaction. (p. 105)

Addressing the foundations of ideation, identity, and societal relationships, they observed: "Social constructionism does acknowledge a physical world independent of human interpretation" (p. 105). Operating vocabularies both increase/constrain and define limits of power in regard to reality as interpreted and enacted. Words define and thereby create power resources, such at leadership roles (king, priest, scientist, president, worker, teacher) and ascribe to each, variously constructed, the power and power limits that are societally operable at any time. These linguistic resources define how decisions are made in the face of complexity/chaos—by whom and what process.

Power Discourse as Account Vocabulary: As Castor (2005) defined this concept, "Accounts are linguistic devices used by actors to make action intelligible to others" (p. 483). Such action can reflect identity and relation, but also the interpretation of the physical realm. Such insights help diagnose, for instance, battles that fail or succeed to deal constructively with matters of diversity (Castor, 2005). As such, accounts are relevant to identity and societal expectations and discussions of that which matters. They reveal how ideology and power are intertwined in discourse (Shotter, 1993; Shotter & Gergen, 1994). As such, "Account vocabularies are keywords and phrases that provide organizing principles to make sense of a given event or situation" (Castor, 2005, p. 481). Such vocabularies have substantial impact for the discourse of sensemaking whereby "By the very act of using language to describe a problem, one generates problems by giving meaning and definitions to situations" (p. 484). The account vocabularies that emerge during discussions of some problem (issue) in fact augment it as the terms used in the discourse are problematic interpretations of a reality that is relevant for identities and relationships.

Power Discourse and the Precautionary Principle: Such struggles create power resources through efforts to make decisions and engage in power struggles regarding how they will be made. Viewed through the lens of complexity/chaos, one can argue that human knowledge of reality is inherently faulty because of the difficulty, even impossibility, to fully understand and therefore name reality accurately. Thus, the challenge of human ideation is to achieve sufficient definition of the character and patterns of reality needed for the expedient collective management of risk. Even here, however, we encounter the power of science and with it the mental models approach to risk communication that is based on comparing what scientists have concluded against what various lay audiences believe.

Definitional and propositional battles over controversial interpretations and societal uses of reality necessarily produce power tensions. In recent decades, attempts to make collective definitions and decisions have struggled with risk challenges such as biotechnology (see Leitch & Motion, 2009), global warming, and GMO's; scientists, activists, policy makers, and business

leaders, have yearned for a decision heuristic that would facilitate systematic, responsible, and ethical decision making. To this end, proponents of what has become known as the precautionary principle reasoned, in cautionary statements, that changes in biotechnology and GMOs, for instance, should be conservative. But, what is conservative and when is it harmful rather than useful?

The precautionary principle is intended to empower societal risk decision making. It has struggled to do that because the question of what is caution, and how can a cautious move toward decision actually be harmful rather than beneficial. The logics of power enactment through dialogue become frustrated by such challenges (McGuire & Ellis, 2009; see Proutheau & Heath, 2009, for specific discussion of power paradoxes and GMO's). Such quandaries are prone to social construction in terms that define relationships, ideas, and society in terms of quality of life and effective risk management (McComas, 2003).

The dynamics of such decision making, especially in matters of risk and uncertainty, are best conceptualized as occurring in infrastructures where many voices compete to influence decision outcomes—the Babel discussed by Cutlip (1994). The attributional and constitutive aspects of language give insights into how multiple voices co-define an enactable reality and shape the decision heuristics needed for shared perceptions and collective actions. Combining what we know, mind/ideation, and what we want to know, power derives from the ability to name and claim a sense of reality that is adopted and enacted by and with others, even to the extent that one perspective so instantiated can, and likely does, create some degree of alienation that fosters friction and disharmony all the while in pursuit of agreement and harmony.

Power words: Based on the logic of mind/ideation, several illustrative power terms easily come to mind: Sound science, myth, mystery, prayer, faith, product quality, product safety, product reliability, healthy, green (as in environmental), safe (for instance, engineering standards, 100 year storm, 1000 year storm, industry safety standards, test crash data, etc.), fair, equal, demographics, miracle, trends, estimations, predictions, certainty/uncertainty, beyond a shadow of doubt, reasonable doubt, highly suspicious, unshakable conviction, deep concern, probabilities (percentage chance of recovery, percentage chance of not surviving, recovery rate), reasonable, reservation, self-evident, confidential, top secret, private versus public information, secrecy, voodoo, speculation, doubt, conviction, caution, experimental, break through, certitude, wonderment, spiritual, unknowable.

Self/Identity

What do individuals think about themselves and others that foster empowerment/marginalization as power resources?

Conceptualized or symbolic power allows people to have rich, enactable, and externalizable definitions of themselves and others. How roles and identities are defined and enacted in turn relates to structural-functional relationships. The question relevant to social character or reputation (image, brand equity, and such) is what is identity and, from there, what is its attributional power, from which organizations or institutions does the individual derive identity, and what power resources do these attachments grant or deny based on such meaning generated identity and the forms of alienation so derived (Burke, 1973). Ever attentive to the role of language, rhetoric, and community, Burke (1965) cautioned, "Let the system of cooperation become impaired, and the communicative equipment is correspondingly impaired, while this impairment of the communicative medium in turn threatens the structure of rationality itself" (p. 163). This analysis builds on Mead's (1934) view: "Our society is built up out of our social

interests. Our social relations go to constitute the self" (p. 388). As Motion and Leitch (2007) explained, "The identity function of public relations would refer to the creation and transformation of the subject positions available to actors within discourse" (p. 264).

As humans take on the idioms of their society, they adopt enactable power resources through terms of image, identity and roles—with attendant empowerment and marginalization. Thus, in a monarchy, the sovereign's sense of self/identity overlays that of the "loyal" subjects and defines the power, responsibility, and allegiance dynamics, often voiced as expectations. However, no sovereign can be such, even in a totemic manner, unless the assertion of monarch is reciprocated by the submission of subjects driven by appropriate symbolism; one need look no further than the French Revolution for evidence to support this conclusion. Is this reasoning any less for persons who take their identities from the conventionalized symbol systems into which they are born and which they enact through shared meaning?

Discussions of image (whether individual, organizational, and societal) address processes of identity development, adoption, rejection, and enactment. Attributions, privileges, obligations, expectations, and the other accoutrement of sociality derive from language and in that regard suggest what power and power limits people have because of their identity. Even the matter of relationship arises from identity. In fact, individuals (as well as organizations) create relationships to foster, maintain, and repair their identities and that of others. We have, then, matters of identification and association as embedded in the implications of self/identity.

Power words: Based on the logic of self/identity, we find these illustrative terms: Ruler (a huge array of terms, such as monarch) and ruled (another large set, such as loyal servant or subject), owner, employee, customer, professional (another large array of terms including academic and public relations practitioner), citizen, demographics (one of the largest array, including "people of color" which even if politically correct suggests that white is not a color), judge, jury, white collar, blue collar, management, labor, voters, sports fan, arts supporter, traveller, woman, man, child, elderly, senior, juvenile, terrorist, patriot, freedom fighter, insurrectionist, invader, occupier, first responder, health care provider, safety inspector, regulator, clerk, friend, foe, partner, spouse, alternative life style, illegitimate, alien, illegal alien, migrant, emigrant, British, Arab, Muslim, middle eastern, refugee, indigenous, conscript, convert, subvert, savage, loyal, tolerant, faithful, diligent, sloven, tribal, inferior, qualified, resolute, envoy, provocateur, sceptic, liberal, conservative, moderate, activist, red-neck, Wall Street, Main Street, community organizer.

Society/Relational

What do individuals think about societal relationships that fosters empowerment/marginalization as power resources?

Implications of what has been addressed and what will be addressed in this paper are important to the almost compulsive attention to the role of relationship development, maintenance and repair in public relations as the basis of stakeholder power resource management. Teministic screens create and empower/disempower structural-functional relationships so that they serve as power resources. For instance, the Constitution of the United States empowers three branches: Administrative or executive branch (featuring the president, VP, cabinet and departments), legislative (House and Senate), and Judicial. By law and tradition, the relationships and responsibilities of each is defined and prescribed—obviously sensitive to debate and often a matter of power resource management. The same is likely to be true in other organizations and between them. In families, the parents have more power, at least up to a point.

As Motion and Leitch (2007) reasoned, the relational function of public relations features the construction of power relationships between discourse actors or stakeholders, as the rationale for legitimacy and power resource management.

Symbolism as Power-constituted Relationships: Viewed constitutively vocabulary guides human activities as undirected plays (Pearce & Cronin, 1980). This conception is very much the result of discourse—rhetorical forces, the logics of social constructivism and narrative enactment (Heath, 1994), as well as discourse analysis (See Edwards, 2006, whose discussion of this topic draws on Bourdieu, 1991). For this reason, a huge vocabulary exists that defines the nature, obligation, relationship quality, and expectations of the various relational entities. Some are political; others are commercial/financial. Still others are social.

Privilege may be legitimately enacted and reciprocated terministically. Edwards (2006) voiced concern that "public relations wields unjustified social influence on behalf of already privileged organizational interests" (p. 229) in ways that violate the tenets of democratic society. Discussion, when it occurs, of power and public relations is biased to "reflect largely agentic or structural perspectives" (p. 229) which define the quality of relationships. She recommends practicing and studying public relations "as a socially embedded profession" (p. 229).

Other agents exist, but often are defined in terms that privilege the established ways of thinking and distributing power resources. As a complex of several organizations arise and voice concerns and assert propositions, their collective efforts, however unified or diverse, comprise a social movement (Smith, 2005, Smith & Ferguson, 2001). Co-created, shared substance, viewed as conjoined and divergent zones of meaning, results in ideology, perspective, and identity/identification. "A social movement becomes a social actor at the point where such an organization takes form" (Leitch & Neilson, 2001, p. 133).

Organizations and the Problematic of Reflectiveness: Rather than denying the agentic bias, the challenge is to call on all agents to be reflective, considering the dialogic nature of power as discourse and meaning. Power develops discursively through many voices seeking to establish vocabulary that defines and reflects mind, self, and society as a coherent and unified concept with scripts, enactments, attributions, evaluations, obligations, benefits/losses, and defined relationships. In such matters, a fundamental concern is whether the assertion privileges one entity, failing to be reflective on such matters, in ways that marginalize others.

As agent, management theory focuses on principles of efficiency and the sociology of organization as power: "as the central terms of two opposing and antithetical discourses" (Clegg et al., 2006, p. 7). Efficiency is defined as productivity—the ratio of inputs to outputs: "Efficiency may be defined as achieving some predetermined end at the highest output in terms of the least input of resources" (p. 7). As Clegg et al., (2006) reasoned, "Power and efficiency are not two opposite sides of a continuum constituting the core problematic in organization studies. On the contrary, we claim power and efficiency should be simultaneously analyzed as fundamentally tangled up in the social fabric of power as both a concept and a set of practices" (p. 17). Systems thrive on and seek efficiency, but are also constrained by vocabulary. They come to life as enactable power resources. They result from definitions, and foster other sets of terministic views that privilege and empower some individuals, processes, choices, and organizations—perhaps while marginalizing others.

Organizations that have a reflective management seem more capable of working for a fully functioning alignment of shared interests and a constructive approach to power resource management (Van Ruler & Vercic, 2005). Comparing the dynamics of reflexivity and reflectivity, Holmstrom (2004) reasoned that reflexivity is mono-contextual whereas reflection

(reflectiveness) is poly-contextual. At heart of reflectiveness is how well individuals and organizations as a collectivity become and stay aware of and in harmony with processes that "continuously differentiate, change and reproduce perceptions of legitimacy" (p. 121). The key to relational success rests with the assumption: "Reflection becomes the production of self-understanding in relation to the environment" (Holmstrom, 2004, p. 123). The key polarities that define the conditions of reflection offer substantial implications for power resources: Integration-domination, interdependence-independence, not sharing-distributing, collaboration-unilateral decision making, and co-creation of social reality-manipulation through propaganda. More indicative than definitive, this list suggests the polarities that define the degree to which each organization embraces societal interests as part of its ability to be reflective in its efforts to achieve efficiency.

Power and the Paradox of Legitimacy: Public relations engages in battles for power through definitions of legitimacy; what Sethi (1977) called the legitimacy gap results from the difference between what specific organizations are thought to be doing (and what they are actually doing) and how publics expect and prefer them to operate. Involved publics approve or disapprove of any organization as it is responsive to community interests (Kruckeberg & Starck, 1988), a fundamental principle of strategic corporate responsibility (Crouch, 2006).

Strategies of social construction, as Vaara, Tienari, and Laurila (2006) observed, define legitimacy as a power resource: Normalization, authorization, rationalization, moralization, and narrativization. "From this perspective, legitimacy means a discursively created sense of acceptance in specific discourses or orders of discourse" (p. 793, italics in original). " Legitimacy by normalization "seeks to render something legitimate by exemplarity" (p. 798). "Authorization is legitimation by reference to authority" (p. 799). This discourse authorizes claims and establishes recurring authorizations and authorities. "Rationalization is legitimation by reference to the utility or function of specific actions or practices" (p. 800). "Moralization is legitimation that refers to specific values" (p. 801). Narrativization is legitimation that occurs when "telling a story provides evidence of acceptable, appropriate, or preferential behavior" (p. 802). The potency of narrativization results from dramatic attributive and constitutive dimensions of language—the living of collective existence as undirected play, and organized for the collective management of risks.

Control and the Paradox of Power: Relational variables are negotiated and co-defined. As such, power results from control, however symmetrical, trust, and liking. As explained by Millar and Rogers (1987), control is the dominant variable in relationship development (maintenance, dysfunction, repair, and dissolution) and refers to the right and ability each participant in a relationship has to define, direct, and delimit the action that transpires during interaction. It varies by context and purpose of various relationships. It is exerted through commitments, norms, rules, promises, threats, and contracts. It is defined by three related variables: Redundancy (flexibility and willingness as well as ability of relational partners to vary control measures), dominance (amount of influence of party A relative to B), and power (ability to reward and constrain others' power moves).

Looking for the proactive center of power relationships, Clegg et al. (2006) asked "what is organization but the collective bending of individual wills to a common purpose?" (p. 2). Is it reasonable, by the extension of this logic as well as that provided in detail above, to similarly define society as the collective bending of individual wills to a common purpose, such as the collective management of risk (Douglas, 1984)?

The question goes to the next layer of analysis. What rationale grants to any entity the right of holding and using power resources as defined by symbolism (ideation, identity, and relation)? Power is a combination of rationale (including battles over legitimacy) and resource influence (the ability justified by rationale to shape outcomes). Operating vocabularies define the power sources, resources, and dimensions of the relationships.

Power and the Paradox of Risk Management/Communication: Whether for commercial or issue management purposes, organizations and individuals organize for the collective management of risk (Douglas, 1984; Heath & O'Hair, 2009) where is a rationale for public relations (Jones, 2002). Cooperation and competition are at heart power resources for observing, managing, and communicating collectively experienced risks.

Power and the Paradox of Empowerment: Power can be positive or negative, constructive or destructive. Within this fluidity, social construction of power gives public relations the rationale, incentive, strategies and tools to be a force for collaboration and co-created meaning that shapes and reflects power in ways that brings societal empowerment. Such problematics force the question of whether power is a zero sum outcome, or something that can be magnified or diminished through collective engagement. To explore this paradox, some conceptualize empowerment as requiring key individuals (such as managers in an organization) or corporate entities (such as "powerful corporations") to share power with others. In contrast, empowerment (especially as the mix of ideation, identity, and relationship) can best be viewed as a post hoc sense of what has been accomplished collaboratively through the collective assertion of power resources (Albrecht, 1988).

Power and the Paradox of Discourse/Dialogue as Shared Power: To co-create meaning, as a mix of relevant voices, public relations can work for individual advantage (as the engineering of consent) or seek a fully functioning society whereby individuals collaborate to manage risks. Is the emergence and enactment of any vocabulary driven sense of mind, self, and society best conceptualized as the empowering pursuit of one interest or the collective need for mutual benefit? Here is the rationale for a dialogic approach to public relations (Pearson, 1989; Kent & Taylor, 2002, Motion, 2005).

The central theme of societal power is not only what meaning prevails, but what rationale of power, whether a cacophony, a Babel as Cutlip (1994) worried, that can advance one interest or mutual empowerment achieved through co-created meaning. Edwards (2006) reflected the influence of Stewart (2001) to conclude:

Even if a norm has been reached, it is always open to future challenges based on the preconditions associated with a particular validity claim. These challenges are evaluated on the basis of Habermas' criteria of truth, legitimacy and sincerity. (p. 230)

In keeping with the enriching rhetorical heritage of statement and counter statement (Heath 2001), Edwards (2006) discussed validity claims as either efforts to win a case, bring about a set of conclusions and definitions of reality of engineered consent, or to realize "when other evidence introduced into the communicative action process fails to support the argument being presented by practitioners and instead reveals the genuine and arbitrary interests underpinning those arguments" (pp. 230-231).

Giving rich insight into the enrichment of dialogue, Gordon and Pellegrin (2008) drew on social construction theory (P. Berger & Luckmann,1966/1980; Blumler, 1969: Carrol, 1956: Gergen, 1985) to extract three central tenets especially relevant to public relations theory and practice.

One tenet is that conceptions of reality (including of ourselves) are created through social interaction. A second tenet is that human institutions are created through social interactions and cannot exist independently of human agreement. Finally, a third tenet is that the constructed world of everyday life is itself an important element in the maintenance and reconstruction of social reality, human institutions, and ourselves. (p. 105)

However foundational the first two principles are, the last is most centrally informative of public relations theory and practice, but the underpinning theme is the importance of ideation, identity, and relation.

Power words: Based on the logic of society/relational, we find these illustrative terms: Institutions (governments and other types framed in socio-political, and socio-economic terminologies), culture, religion, business(es), commerce, trade, public policy, competition, cooperation, collaboration, avoidance, accommodation, truce, treaty, contract (whether formal or informal; legal or social), association, structures and functions, relationship quality, symmetry/asymmetry, dialogue/monologue, service, education, manufacturing, extraction, public health, walls and bridges (physical and symbolic), hierarchy, infrastructures, trust (as an organization, legal instrument, and relational quality), corporate social responsibility, public health/safety, communal, collective, isolated, emergency response, health care system, agriculture industry, efficient business/rationale market, legislation, regulation, adjudication, capitalism, free market, local, national, global, independent, dependent, interdependent, constraint of trade, ruinous competition, socialism, fiscal conservatism, progressive, taxation, representation, subsidy, stimulus, regressive, progressive, intereffication, mutual benefit.

Conclusion

However constructively, power is disposed in the public arena, the public sphere, each political economy through meaning structures. The meaning that results from discourse based courtship and advocacy defines mind (how language construction and vocabulary shape thought, what we think about and how we think about it which in turn shapes how we talk about it and act toward it), self (identity and identification), and society (which consists of culturally enacted, relationship based narratives). Narratives, which are shaped by discourse but which also serve as the foundation for discourse, address power, power distribution, and legitimacy.

Mind, self, and society exhibit tensions of the paradox of efficiency and power, the problematics of organization. The power of one organization, or entity, is relative to that of others, including activists. In the introduction to Activists Speak Out, Marie Cieri (2000) observed that activists—or at least engaged individuals "are scattered throughout this country, coming from different backgrounds, walks of life, and points of view" (pp. 1-2) Activism is about the strategic use of the tools of change: "person-to-person organizing, employment of mass media, economic pressuring, public actions, skillful oratory, legal weaponry, quiet persuasion, education, steady vigilance, and even prayer" (p. 10). If we believe that the meaning, that as implemented becomes society, results from a wrangle of views collectively seeking order from chaos, then we can conceptualize all voices as activist. Influence exerted in the public policy arena results from the power resources activists acquire and use efficiently (Blalock, 1989). Voices of all types work to acquire and use stakes as a means for encouraging or forcing change. Power is traditionally defined as the ability to affect some outcomes within the limits and allowances of legitimacy.

Defined in terms of the acquisition and use of power resources, power is the product of three variables: resources, the degree to which they are mobilized, and the efficiency of that

mobilization (Blalock, 1989). The incentive for creating and employing power resources entails the desire for gains through collective efforts. In such efforts, the likelihood is great that all entities share goals that can be the basis for reconciling differences (Blalock, 1989) through mutually beneficial relationships.

Are the voices of society brought together by some constructive ideal, or are they forced to compete for visibility, adherents and influence by denying other voices? "Organizations, above all, are means of constituting relations between people, ideas, and things, that would not otherwise occur. Organizations are performances of various kinds and power relations constitute the essence of these performances" (Clegg, et al, 2006, p. 17). Even in matters such as media relations, practitioners can deny information or frame it in self-interested ways or they can engage in what Bentele (2008) called intereffication, a concept used to reason that reporters and public relations practitioners are wise (increasing the power of both) to work together to be empowered to communicate accurately and thoughtfully with key publics. Aligned interests and the bending of reality to collective wills become the rationale and substance of conversation guiding ideation, identity, and relationships. The rationale for understanding reality as socially constructed, as Gordon and Pellegrin (2008) reasoned gives rationale to the power of public relations: "An orientation that focuses on the making of meaning through human interaction offers routes to redefine, refine, reformulate, and restructure ourselves and our methods relating to both the practice and study of public relations" (p. 104).

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