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ORGANIZED DISSONANCE: FEMINIST BUREAUCRACY AS HYBRID FORM

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Feminist bureaucracy, a response to a historical tension between feminist theorists and practitioners, merges opposed models of power. Through qualitative analysis of power in practice, I examine the novelty and viability of feminist bureaucracy as a distinct hybrid form I term "organized dissonance." This form of organization upsets the conventional view that rationality requires resolution, suggesting the potential of strategic incongruity. It also underscores the significance of structure-practice and partner-environment relationships.

It has become commonplace to brand the present as an era of fragmentation, swift change, and decentralized control. Such pressures can strain and crack bureaucratic foundations, generating keen interest in other forms of organized action (Heckscher & Applegate, 1994; Heydebrand, 1989; Putnam, 1997). Scholars from varied camps have joined the search for alternatives to bureaucracy. Some management scholars have explored hybrid forms that adapt to modern environmental pressures to achieve competitive advantage (e.g., Borys & Jemison, 1989; Powell, 1987, 1990). Others have pursued alternatives that increase organization member control to improve quality of work life (e.g., Cheney, 1999; Deetz, 1992). I seek to demonstrate how a feminist perspective can link these diverse literatures and enrich understanding of organizational forms. Specifically, a feminist lens reveals a novel hybrid I term "organized dissonance," which disrupts dominant assumptions regarding rationality, power, and forms of organization.

Although feminists have played a vital role in the political and conceptual development of alternatives to bureaucracy (Martin, 1990; Rodriguez, 1988), their experiments with organizational form remain on the margins of scholarship. Rarely have management scholars considered how feminist practice informs organization theory (for an exception, see Martin, Knopoff, and Beckman [1998]). Even feminist management critics seldom speak of the abundant literature on feminist organizations (for exceptions, see Martin [1993] and Mumby [1996]). These silences seem especially curious, given the rise of feminist critique in management theory (e.g., Calás & Smircich, 1996; Mills & Tancred-Sheriff, 1992) and the pragmatic response feminist organizations may well represent. Nonetheless, the question remains open: Can feminism offer fresh alternatives to management studies?

Viewing bureaucracy as a structural expression of male dominance, feminist theorists have long promoted collectivism (e.g., Ahrens, 1980; Ferguson, 1984). Yet feminist practitioners have found this form impossible to sustain (e.g., Murray, 1988; Seccombe-Eastland, 1988). Some compromise has emerged with the rise of feminist bureaucracies that blend hierarchical and egalitarian models of power (e.g., Eisenstein, 1995; Gottfried & Weiss, 1994). I argue that this shift has produced a unique hybrid, organized dissonance, which defies the logic of mainstream management theory by embracing the strategic, ironic union of antagonistic elements.

(RE)DRAFTING DISSONANCE: THEORIZING FROM FEMINIST ORGANIZATION

Power versus Performance: Counterbureaucratic Empowerment Meets Postbureaucratic Hybrid

Alternatives to bureaucracy attract lively scholarly debate (Heckscher & Donnellon, 1994; Heydebrand, 1989), in part because bureaucratic habits persist despite awareness that they are ill-suited to complex, fast-paced environments (e.g., Barker, 1993; Kelley & Harrison, 1992). This essay most directly informs two research traditions with disparate critiques of bureaucracy.

First, "counterbureaucratic" arguments stem from critical management theory and reflect emancipatory motives. In this view, bureaucracy inherently maximizes the power of few at the expense of many, at profound ethical and practical cost (e.g.,

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Fischer & Sirianni, 1984). Scholars in this tradition turn to democratic, collectivist, and other participatory forms designed to enable empowerment, generally defined as equality and enhanced control over work life (e.g., Cheney, 1995, 1999; Deetz, 1992; Mansbridge, 1973; Newman, 1980; Rothschild-Whitt, 1976). These forms are loosely guided by value rationality, a view in which empowered community is a worthy goal in itself, financial performance aside (Rothschild-Whitt, 1979; Weber, 1968). With some exceptions (e.g., Deetz, 1995; Sirianni, 1984), scholars in this area endorse a near blanket rebuff of bureaucratic power.

In contrast, a more mainstream strand of scholarship faults bureaucracy for outdated rigidity, *not* innate malice. This work addresses hybrid forms thought to improve firm performance amid the pressures of postbureaucratic times, examining calculated blends of governance structures like those found in mergers, acquisitions, joint ventures, network forms, and "knowledge firms" (e.g., Bahrami, 1992; Borys & Jemison, 1989; Bradach & Eccles, 1989; Oliver & Montgomery, 2000; Powell, 1987, 1990; Steier, 1998). Although these hybrid forms revise bureaucratic methods and may even entail empowerment tactics (e.g., Drucker, 1988; Gittleman, Horrigan, & Joyce, 1998), the literature implies that they retain bureaucracy's instrumental rationality, whereby organization is chiefly a means to a competitive edge (Weber, 1968).

To date, these areas of study remain separate and seem unlikely allies, since their respective interests in power and performance are presumed to conflict. Though largely unnoticed, a parallel line of research integrates these disparate motives: feminist organization studies. Like most work on alternative forms, work on feminist organizations is pervaded by two questions: What features distinguish the form? and, To what extent is it a viable alternative?

The Novelty Question: Feminist Organization as Counterbureaucratic Empowerment

As with most alternative forms, scholars devote much discussion to traits that differentiate feminist organization. For over 30 years, they have overwhelmingly depicted it as antithetical to bureaucracy (e.g., Ahrens, 1980; Buzzanell et al., 1997; Cassel, 1977; Ferguson, 1984; Lugones & Spelman, 1987; Maguire & Mohtar, 1994; Martin et al., 1998; Rodriguez, 1988).[1] (Table 1, below, condenses key features of bureaucracy and feminist organization.) Historically, feminists have maintained that bureaucracy is a structural manifestation of male domination—that the form's defining features endorse the subordination of women and feminized others and so preserve oppressive gender relations (Ferguson, 1984). For instance, the bureaucratic canons of rationality and hierarchy privilege "professionals" (i.e., strategic, objective, managerial workers who suppress private needs) and exclude or devalue workers aligned with emotionality, sexuality, and other "irrational" matters (Acker, 1990; Ashcraft, 1999; Pringle, 1989). In short, feminists have long objected to the kind of power relations that bureaucracy engenders; thus, their search for gender justice and better business has required an alternative organizational form (Ianello, 1992).

Feminist organization generally promotes empowerment through (1) personal development of self-reliance and (2) egalitarian group relations (Reinelt, 1994). Individual power is viewed as an antecedent and outcome of genuinely collective power, but any use of influence that elevates some over others becomes illegitimate. Typically, feminist organization is found in women-centered missions, feminist health care agencies, rape crisis centers, domestic violence shelters, bookstores, banks, and other smaller non- and for-profit organizations. Although typically collectivist, feminist organization also includes careful efforts to attend to private issues in organizational life (Martin et al., 1998). For example, "bounded emotionality" (Mumby & Putnam, 1992), a feminist pattern of work relations, fosters caring community by inviting expression of spontaneous, emergent work feelings. Simultaneously, members negotiate flexible feeling rules that limit sharing as needed to preserve functional relations. Several empirical studies illustrate this feminist alternative to bureaucratic impersonality (Ashcraft, 2000; Gayle, 1994; Martin et al., 1998; Morgen, 1994).

The Viability Question: Performance Problems and the Shift to a Feminist-Bureaucratic Hybrid

A second question that drives research on alternative organizational forms stresses viability, or the extent to which alternatives are feasible, productive, and sustainable. As Putnam observed, "Even

[1] Martin's work (e.g., 1987, 1990, 1993) provides a notable exception, as do the recent studies of feminist hybrids cited in the next section. Otherwise, bureaucratic feminist communities have customarily been (1) discussed in terms other than organizational form, (2) treated as institutionalized political action, or (3) criticized in light of the pure feminist form.

TABLE 1
Comparison of Bureaucracy, Feminist Organization, and Organized Dissonance as Ideal Types

Feature	Bureaucracy	Feminist Organization	Organized Dissonance as Embodied in Feminist Bureaucracy
Primary goal/rationality	Organization as means to an end: efficient standardization in the service of productivity	Organization as end: women's empowerment	Organization as means and end: efficient, productive, gender-conscious empowerment
Power structure	Hierarchical; authority centralized at the top of the chain of command	Egalitarian and/or heterarchical; authority decentralized and grounded in the collective via consensual decision making	Formal hierarchical structure, undermined by (quasi)egalitarian practices; *centralization/decentralization* and *inequality/equality* dialectics
Rules	Formal, exhaustive rules; objective universalism (standardized application across situations)	Few, informal rules; subjective particularism (situational application and negotiation), control via shared belief preferable	Formal "living" rules generated by affected members and subject to situational context; *universalism/contextualism* dialectic
Division of labor	Formal; specialized	Informal; nonspecialized; task rotation preferable	Formal and informal; *task stability/flexibility* dialectic
Status of/qualifications for hiring and promotion	Formal, technical criteria; control via internalized desire for individual advancement	Informal criteria such as life experience and skill or feminist beliefs valued over professional credentials; goal of individual advancement replaced by that of building community	Multiple measures of education and merit; personal advancement tempered by collective good; *formal/informal sources of expertise* and *individual/community development* dialectics
Ideal member relations	"Professional" defined as rational and impersonal; public and private separated	Emotional and personal; work selves embrace and accommodate private needs	"Professional" expanded to include emotion and private needs; rationality-emotionality balance preferable; *impersonal/personal* and *public/private* dialectics

though these new forms invoke patterns and social arrangements that differ from bureaucratic structures, the verdict is still out as to whether they are genuine alternatives" (1997: 131). The troubled history of feminist organization vividly illustrates why "the verdict is still out."

Countless studies have documented a disabling contradiction between the ideals of feminist empowerment and the demands of practice (e.g., Morgen, 1990; Pahl, 1985; Seccombe-Eastland, 1988). For example, environmental pressures related to funding and community alliances have eroded the radical politics of feminist nonprofits (Ahrens, 1980; Mueller, 1995; Reinelt, 1994). Needs for efficiency, growth, competition, and other resource dependencies spur the growth of formal hierarchy, which structurally undermines egalitarianism (Maguire & Mohtar, 1994; Murray, 1988; Riger, 1994; Pfeffer & Salancik, 1978; Staggenborg, 1988). Further, as members' cultural habits play out, potent informal power structures emerge (Freeman, 1972–73; Morgen, 1988; Ristock, 1990). Embarrassment over the tendency of feminist organizations to reproduce bureaucracy may explain why some feminist management scholars seem reticent regarding the feminist form (Acker, 1990; Calás & Smircich, 1996). But for other scholars, the same empirical tendency is an honorable marriage, not a dirty secret.

Recently, several authors have begun to address hybrid feminist forms as such (Ashcraft, 2000; Eisenstein, 1995; Gottfried & Weiss, 1994; Leidner, 1991; Martin et al., 1998; Mayer, 1995; Reinelt, 1995; Riger, 1994). They seek compound structures "not premised on a principled hostility to all aspects of bureaucracy and market exchange" (Sirianni, 1984: 484). In particular, feminist-bureaucratic hybrids are marked by the merger of hierarchical and egalitarian modes of power. This odd union complicates the traditional feminist ac-

count of legitimate uses of power, as it evokes the irony that some individuals can exercise power over others to promote equality. Therefore, despite considerable success at achieving practical goals (e.g., Eisenstein, 1995; Staggenborg, 1988), feminist bureaucracy has its own—and no less acute—vulnerabilities. If antagonism to bureaucracy distinguishes feminist organization, what unique features can it claim when it allies with the enemy? If appropriate power is defined in opposition to bureaucratic power, how can a hybrid empower? Given bureaucracy's deep institutionalization, will such an alliance inevitably further dilute the feminist form? Put simply, in what sense is feminist bureaucracy a genuine alternative?

Organized Dissonance

I use variations on the term "organized dissonance"[2]—defined as the strategic union of forms presumed hostile—to capture the ironic alternative implied by feminist bureaucracy. To some, organized dissonance may appear indistinguishable from other hybrids. By definition, a hybrid unites multiple forms; many reflect deliberate combinations designed to meet tricky problems; and most blends create considerable conflict. Yet the genetic metaphor that pervades the hybrid literature implies a quest for resolution; it suggests that compatibility must be achieved for survival and performance (e.g., Oliver & Montgomery, 2000). Borys and Jemison (1989: 237) explained that "the reconciliation of heterogeneous partner operations" presents a pivotal problem for hybrids. In contrast, dissonant organization entails the active use of contradiction. To others, the dissonant form may seem little more than an empirical manifestation of a counterbureaucratic ideal type, which inevitably begets conflict and compromise. But this view invites us to interpret contradiction as imperfection or unintended irony (Buzzanell et al., 1997). A theory of organized dissonance is necessary to recognize a unique class of organization.

Table 1 initiates such a theory with a stylized comparison of bureaucracy, feminist organization, and organized dissonance. My formulation of the latter draws upon lasting visions of flexible, responsive alternatives to hierarchy that fit uncertain conditions (e.g., Burns & Stalker, 1961; Galbraith, 1973; Lawrence & Lorsch, 1967); early, foresighted accounts of conflict as constructive (e.g., Graham, 1995); and extant empirical work on feminist hybrids (e.g., Eisenstein, 1995; Gottfried & Weiss, 1994). In brief, organized dissonance meets routinely paradoxical, ostensibly debilitating demands (for instance, to create hierarchical accountability to secure grants to support egalitarianism; to enhance efficiency amid growth yet uphold consensual decision making) by reframing dualisms as dialectics (Buzzanell et al., 1997; Thayer, 1988). In other words, it comprises strategic tensions—pushes and pulls that become a check-and-balance system (e.g., Baxter, 1988). As such, organized dissonance locates organizational form in the dynamic interaction between structure and practice. Table 1 lists eight dialectics that typify feminist organized dissonance (rightmost column, in italics).

Practice is often downplayed in discussions of organizational form (Bahrami, 1992; Putnam, 1997). Its vital yet problematic role in organized dissonance is especially vivid in the first set of tensions in Table 1. Specifically, the *inequality/equality* and *centralization/decentralization* dialectics capture a conflict noted earlier: the ironic merger of hierarchical structure and egalitarian practice. This merger implies that hierarchy can be enacted in ways that alter its usual meanings, but that premise rests on a deeper one—that bureaucratic structure and feminist practice stand on an equal footing. Yet the latter assumption seems particularly suspect. As hinted above, resource dependence and institutionalization theories lead to the prediction that bureaucracy will dominate, if not engulf, feminist organization, especially in a nonprofit setting (e.g., DiMaggio & Powell, 1983; Pfeffer & Salancik, 1978; Zucker, 1988). It follows that members face a layered dilemma: (1) how to exercise and submit to influence yet accomplish equality and (2) how to achieve that balance when relations of dominance-submission carry more cultural weight than those of equality. This dilemma will likely be most acute if and when members lead and follow in formal meetings (Buzzanell et al., 1997), for meetings are a central site of such power practices as initiating and terminating agendas, setting the timing and process of debates and decisions, and negotiating individual and group identity (Conrad & Ryan, 1985; Eisenberg, Monge, & Farace, 1984; Eisenberg & Witten, 1987; Pfeffer, 1992; Schwartzman, 1989).

To examine this dilemma more closely requires a multifaceted view of power that includes its cultural, institutional, structural, and processual di-

[2] I use "dissonance" in the musical sense, as creation of unlikely resonance among tones thought to promote tension and require resolution. I do not mean the psychological idea of cognitive or emotional dissonance. Precedents for applying musical metaphors to organization include Bastien and Hostager (1988); Eisenberg (1990); and Hatch (1997a).

mensions (Fincham, 1992). Organization members approach interaction with perceptions of their environment and resources for wielding influence, such as legitimacy (formal authority), expertise (credentials, experience), and referents (personal attributes, reputation) (Pfeffer, 1992; Raven, 1993). Environments, structures, and individual resources become meaningful in motion, and these enactments of power draw from and act upon established patterns (e.g., Barley & Tolbert, 1997; Giddens, 1979, 1984; Weick, 1979). To explore the novelty and viability of the power relations produced by organized dissonance, I analyze formal meetings in one feminist bureaucracy, guided by this question: How do members manage the inequality/equality and centralization/decentralization dialectics?

METHODS

Data Collection and Analysis

The data reported here are drawn from an extensive research project with SAFE,[3] a self-avowed feminist bureaucracy that assists survivors of domestic violence. I selected the organization on the basis of its self-identification and my own assessment, explained below, that it fit a feminist-bureaucratic profile. I employed ethnographic methods to conduct research (Anderson, 1987; Lindlof, 1995). From May 1995 to June 1997, I logged nearly 300 research hours, including over 230 participant-observation hours and 60 interview hours (Spradley, 1979, 1980). The SAFE forums observed included staff meetings, formal volunteer trainings, and volunteer support meetings, where I took detailed notes. All consenting staff members (18) were interviewed, as well as 19 volunteers and 4 interns selected via convenience and snowball sampling strategies (Lindlof, 1995). Interviews averaged 90 minutes and followed a schedule of open-ended questions I developed to probe perceptions of SAFE philosophy, structure, practice, and power relations.

During data collection, I performed several roles, serving as a volunteer at the shelter, a trainee and trainer at the volunteer training program, and an observer in staff meetings. These multiple roles enabled a diverse perspective on SAFE life and reflected a feminist commitment to "know with" participants (Mies, 1983, 1991; Reinharz, 1992). My research role(s) also approximated participatory research, producing a critical perspective grounded in firsthand experience (Heron & Reason, 1997; Mumby, 1988).

Except where noted, the present analysis addresses staff meetings and participants; volunteers' disparate levels of involvement complicated matters beyond the scope of this study. SAFE staff routinely convened in two general meeting genres that I distinguish by substance (Yates & Orlikowski, 1992): (1) *regular* meetings stressed the coordinated execution of routine organizational tasks (examples are weekly all-staff and shelter case review forums), and (2) *metacommunicative* meetings addressed workplace dynamics (biannual shelter and all-staff retreats, monthly extended staff gatherings). Although meeting genres blurred on occasion, they typically remained separate.

Grounded practical theory supplied the basic structure for my analytic process (Craig & Tracy, 1995). To merge micro practice with macro reflection, grounded practical theory offers layers of analysis, two of which are uniquely suited to my research question. First, the *problem* level requires a researcher to identify and describe dilemmas as experienced by organization members. The dilemma I analyze here began to surface in my initial field notes, where I probed a pattern observed in meetings: staff supervisors seemed to mask power moves. I let this pattern fall by the wayside until, during interviews in my final year of research, staff members began to volunteer their own sense of "real hierarchical stuff" at SAFE meetings. I took their perceptions as support for my own and decided to investigate further. After repeatedly reading a subset of the meeting data, I developed a rough account of what I called the dilemma of leading. Analysis of the remaining data revealed that nonleading members actively accommodated and obscured supervisory influence. Accordingly, I revised my account to capture a complementary dilemma of following.

The second level, the *technical,* asks the scholar to inventory the tactics members use to manage dilemmas. From a subset of data, I drew the first four tactic categories reported below. Again, I clarified each through application to remaining meeting data; for instance, I expanded the fourth category to include three entwined ways of deflecting domination. I also added a fifth category to capture a playful tactic ignored in my early scheme. The problem and technical analytic levels respectively organize the ensuing response to my research question: How do members manage the inequality/equality and centralization/decentralization dialectics?

[3] A pseudonym.

SAFE POWER: DILEMMAS OF DISSONANCE IN A FEMINIST BUREAUCRACY

A Brief Profile of the Organization

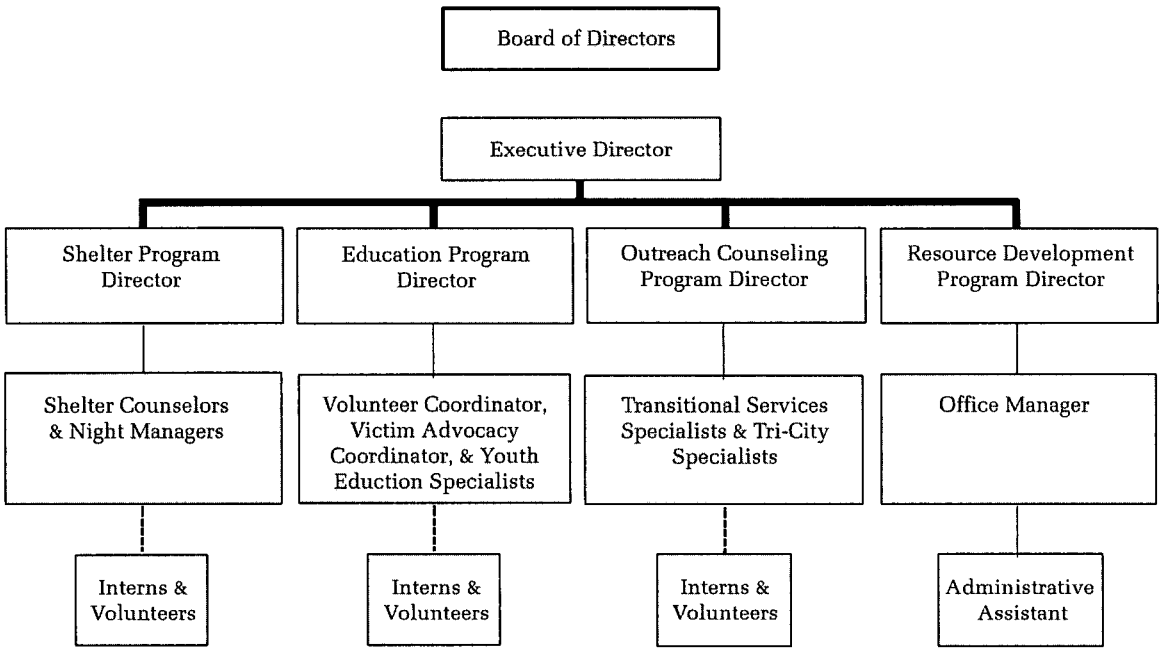
Founded in the early 1970s, SAFE is a nonprofit with a twofold mission: (1) to provide battered women and their children with shelter, support, and advocacy and (2) to quell domestic violence through community education and networking. SAFE offers emergency housing, counseling, and community outreach programs from three locations and is widely renowned for its success. A prominent national committee recently selected it as a model program for treating domestic violence. Annually, SAFE serves more than 1,200 women and children, speaks to some 8,000 community members, and handles a budget of approximately $740,000. A fluctuating population of 25 staff, 10 interns, and 115 volunteers executes these efforts. Most members are female, with the exception of a few male interns and volunteers.

Except for its woman-centered mission, SAFE resembles a typical bureaucracy on paper. Its formal structure reflects clear status and labor divisions (Figure 1). Though accountable to a board of directors, the executive director sits atop the hierarchy. Members recognized her and the four program directors as "supervisory staff." All other staff members are known as "line staff," and they share in the supervision of interns and volunteers. Despite the explicit hierarchy, members insist that SAFE is feminist. Most minimize and many mock the hierarchy as an obligatory formality; they chuckle at the notion that "bureaucratic necessities" preclude empowerment. Trainers teach new members how feminist ideals translate into client-led services, peerlike interaction between staff and volunteers, and the value of consensual decision making. Above all, members praise the SAFE system, labeled "ethical communication," that encourages them to resist traditional hierarchy and to integrate their personal and professional selves.

Ethical communication is SAFE's plan to institutionalize emotional sharing and, as members said, "to communicate around power." It entails corresponding individual and group responsibilities and rights. For instance, each member should know and express herself authentically to the group, who must hear and seriously consider her voice. Silenced emotion and suppressed disagreement are deplored, and prompt, direct discussion of conflict is demanded. Members believe that because ethical communication fosters disclosure and dialogue, it minimizes subtle "power blocs" and furtive, divisive communication.

Through a theoretical lens, ethical communication is a manifestation of bounded emotionality (Mumby & Putnam, 1992). Formal principles (stat-

FIGURE 1
The Formal Structure of SAFE[a]



[a] This chart is a replica of SAFE's formal organization chart, with member names removed. Bold lines signify supervisory staff, solid lines designate line staff, and broken lines indicate nonstaff (unpaid intern and volunteer) members.

ed in training and other documents)—such as "Open communication promotes egalitarian relationships," "Encourage members to raise opposing views," and "Personal relationships . . . are not necessarily private"—constitute feeling rules that push members to engage the work feelings of self and other. Since all members are bound to practice ethical communication, participants perceive it as the key to undermining SAFE's formal hierarchy and promoting empowerment. Consequently, most members hail this plan as SAFE's feminist foundation.

SAFE's Dilemma of Leading and Following

Ethical communication induces practical dilemmas. What if some disclose too much or too little? What if members differ on what the system prescribes or contest it? These and a host of similar questions expose the difficulty of enacting ethical communication. Although they rarely ruptured discussion at SAFE, such quandaries required ongoing management.

According to members, formal authority meant increased accountability; hence, the supervisory staff bore a heavier burden to uphold ethical communication. Supervisors also led staff meetings. To grasp the problem with this combination of duties, consider the case of the shelter program director. Her impressive credentials and experience were widely known and respected among members. Participants described her as a highly charismatic person; her supervisees praised her unique blend of skill and sensitivity, touting her influence on their political views, approach to work, and communication style. Although the outreach and development directors were far less visible,[4] the executive and education program directors enjoyed similar access to legitimate, expert, and referent sources of power. During meetings, these three supervisors set the agenda and governed discussion. Their frequent, articulate commentaries were generally attended with great interest and respect. Meeting facilitation accorded them a natural podium for guiding ethical communication by granting them an interpretive capacity not shared by other members. Yet ethical communication decisively denied the legitimacy of deploying power bases as a means of silencing ("Power-seeking squelches the voices of some"). The resulting challenge for supervisors involved piloting meetings without giving the appearance of undue influence. This task proved especially formidable in the metacommunicative meetings that overtly interrogated SAFE power dynamics.

But the burden did not fall on supervisors alone. Although ethical communication required all members to name discomfort, several participants quietly questioned the supervisors' use of influence but failed to voice their concerns. Indeed, they perceived that concealing this feature of SAFE life worked in their own interests. Line staff members depicted SAFE as a haven that few wished to upset. As one mused,

> My sense is that we don't, nobody wants to rock the boat, and we've got a good scene here, and we get to, in some ways, have a lot of freedom. We get to wear what we want; we set our own hours; we're not like punching a clock; we get lots of sugar in staff meeting, you know. I mean, I feel like people think, "Well, this is an alternative, progressive, different form of running a business, and let's don't rock the boat." Yeah, so we'll just sort of deal with this issue of the hierarchy, or we'll burn out and leave.

Alvesson (1992) explained that when members believe an organization offers a rare and desirable community, they often experience intense identification and peer pressure to preserve the peace. Several participants felt and/or caved in under the pressure to "keep a good thing going" at SAFE. Other members named apprehension as the cause of their silence. In the words of one staff participant, "It's not like men and their kind of hierarchy, but the reality is that they [SAFE supervisors] do have authority. And I'm kind of afraid of that. I think it creates fear. There are things I don't want to say, and even though I know that they would probably say to me that it's OK to say things, it doesn't feel OK to me." Members also depended on supervisors' leadership for efficiency and other practical outcomes (Eisenstein, 1995; Matthews, 1995; Staggenborg, 1988). Given such incentives, line staff members faced a complementary dilemma of ethical following. Ethical communication demanded that they name power tensions, yet for various reasons, they could not, would not, or did not often do so. Facing the risk of exposing their "unethical" silence, they had to simultaneously follow leaders and act as their empowered peers.

In sum, SAFE's power dilemma was that all members were supposed to participate as equals in the midst of evident inequalities and centralized authority—at once enacting and suppressing power imbalance. Accordingly, it manifests the inequality/equality and centralization/decentralization dialectics of organized dissonance shown in Table 1.

[4] The outreach director worked part-time with few supervisees; the development director did accounting, mostly off-site, and supervised one member.

Thus far, we have seen *who* managed the dilemma; next, I examine *how* this occurred.

Power Practices: SAFE Tactics for Leading and Following

An hour into one of the shelter staff's semiannual retreats, a participant bravely bared frustration with the power dynamics of many SAFE meetings. It was the sort of cautious, confused confession I had heard in interview sessions and private conversations. In a hesitant, cracking voice, she asked a question that ruptured the meeting: "Whose responsibility is it to take care of trust issues when some of us feel shut down by others?" Following a swarm of empathic confessions, the staff deserted their original agenda and explicitly engaged SAFE power relations for the next six hours. I emphasize excerpts from this shelter retreat (a metacommunicative meeting) to depict interaction patterns that characterized SAFE staff meetings. Specifically, this section reconstructs five informal tactics through which members managed the leading-following dilemma. I treat these strategies as interactive accomplishments and stress the functions they served, not member intent. Table 2 summarizes the features and functions of each tactic and, thus, the technical level of grounded practical theory.

Tactic 1: Tentative facilitation. In both staff meeting genres, SAFE supervisors employed "we" language that positioned decision making as a collective responsibility. They thus framed leadership as providing one possibility among many valid others. Meetings began with agenda "suggestions" and proceeded with "great flexibility" as to "what order we take," "how we approach this stuff," and when "we negotiate" breaks. Supervisors' "suggestions" were accepted without contest as a matter of course. Their careful reframing often appeared more concerned with appropriate form than with actual opportunity for participation. Consider how the shelter director introduced an activity at the shelter retreat: "OK, let's do this. Well, this is my suggestion anyway. We can do whatever you'd like. But, why don't we try to do this. . . ." Here, the original command was repositioned as an option. Yet she offered no pause for feedback, returning immediately to her original "suggestion." Although the group proceeded into the activity with no member input, the shelter director appeared bent on seeming to empower. Her capacity to command was technically relinquished, but agenda setting and interpretive power did not change hands.

Pfeffer's (1992) discussion of timing and power informs the tactic of tentative facilitation. He describes how acting first "can compel those who come later to accommodate themselves to our position" (1992: 228). SAFE supervisors systematically offered their "suggestions" first, increasing the likelihood that participants would consent to their proposals. To commence one meeting, the executive director asked members if they would like to break into groups or discuss as a whole. Before any could answer, she conveyed her preference for a group arrangement "in the interest of time." Met with compliant nods and shrugs, she promptly divided the room in half. Pfeffer also explains how acting swiftly can minimize the opposition's opportunity to "get organized and mobilized" (1992: 231). With little pause between calls for input and prods to action, the supervisors weakened potential resistance, implicitly urging members to submit to direction. During one meeting, the executive director asked if a quick break might be in order. Some nodded yes, some no, and some shrugged listlessly. She then continued, "OK, let's take a quick break. If you're not feeling very comfortable with some of this stuff, then please be open and honest and say so as we come back together." But as soon as the staff reconvened, the director announced a plan. Displaying two large sheets on the easel, she explained how they captured staff consensus. No disagreement arose, and the discussion continued from this point of departure. One might say the writing was already on the easel. Similar sequences typified other meetings.

The staff's apathetic consent may be usefully informed by Stohl's (1995) "paradox of cooperation" in participative organizations. Stohl described a pattern in which members "participate by not participating," letting "the manager do the participating" (1995: 209). In this light, the issue of whether members could have dissented is informed by the empirical observation that they rarely did. On occasion, participants did disagree with supervisory "suggestions." But the result in most of these cases confirmed that SAFE's members were more bound to the appearance than the substance of participation. For example, as one metacommunicative meeting concluded, the executive director proposed a follow-up meeting. One member asked to delay this meeting. Without asking for her rationale, the executive director asserted her "feeling" that "when we're stuck like this, sometimes it's good to just take that momentum and push through," dismissing the request. Pfeffer's (1992) analysis of timing again illuminates such supervisory moves. Shunning delay, SAFE supervisors minimized the formation of opposition and increased the probability that decisions would unfold as they wished.

TABLE 2
Tactics for Managing the Leading-Following Dilemma[a]

Tactic Description and Function	Tentative Facilitation	Invoking Collective Commitment to Egalitarian Practice	Candid Reality Checks	Deflecting Domination	Power Parodies
Description					
Inequality and centralization framed as . . .	Provisional guidance subject to group negotiation	Fulfillment of obligation to preserve collective ideals	Inevitable part of organizing	Abstract or relationship-specific phenomenon, an individual burden	Something done elsewhere, in dramatic contrast with SAFE relations
Form of expression	Supervisory staff: Mere suggestion, "we" language, hesitancy to lead Line staff: Consent (e.g., honorary leading roles, nonparticipation, active deferral to supervisors)	Supervisory staff: Decisive interpretation, command, and reprimand Line staff: Ironic, active deferral to supervisors' expertise in egalitarian matters	Usually performed by supervisory staff, occasionally by line staff or collectively; Blunt confessions that "tell it like it is" and spotlight inequality	Performed by all staff: Varied format (e.g., changing characters in an example, exposing power in vague generalities, assuming personal accountability)	Performed by all staff: Imitation of and laughter at dominant societal relationships (e.g., teacher-student, parent-child)
Relationship to context	Used in both meeting genres; positive relationship with available time	Used in both meeting genres	Used more in metacommunicative meetings, at critically tense moments	Used more in metacommunicative meetings, at critically tense moments	Used in both meeting genres
Function	Preserves empowering form; invites (but does not ensure) member participation and dissent; meets efficiency needs	Depersonalizes and legitimizes supervisory influence as system maintenance; thus, at once enforces and undermines egalitarian commitment; mediates system uncertainties; meets efficiency needs	Naturalizes supervisory influence; ascribes felt contradiction (and enforces accountability) to "reality"; releases tension yet avoids irreparable rupture by exposing inequality with minimal precision	Obscures and mitigates the impact of systemic power and systematic moves of influence; releases tension by diverting attention from the structure and enactment of inequality	Creates pleasure in emotionally taxing work; separates SAFE hierarchy from traditional bureaucratic power; provides regular tension release; absolves members of liability for specific moves of dominance and submission

[a] Table illustrates the technical level of grounded practical theory.

Certainly, supervisory direction responded to efficiency concerns. During one meeting, members committed "to devote whatever time needed" to achieve consensus. Yet immediately following this agreement, the group realized that little time was left in the meeting. My field notes report what followed:

> At this point, the executive director began lumping items together and explaining how they had already been covered during the discussion. It seemed that all felt the pressure of time and the drain on energy. . . . She turned to one concern on the easel. This, she thought, had already been addressed by previous discussion. "Right?" she asked. Silent nods gave her the go-ahead. OK, so then, the next concern for "consensus" was already covered by . . . "Right?" she repeatedly asked, to the non-verbal consent of the group.

As this excerpt reveals, even under the strains of time and fatigue, members assiduously wrapped interaction in a package of empowerment. This is not to say that this wrapping never came undone.

In rare moments, the tactic of tentative facilitation backfired. At one weekly all-staff meeting, for instance, the executive director raised the issue of the outreach director's maternity leave:

> The executive director described how she had considered asking someone familiar with our services to help out part-time during the absence, and she wondered what people thought about this. Hesitation and confusion appeared to fill the room. In a skeptical tone, one member asked, "Who would that be?" "Well," the executive director chuckled, "That's the next thing. I've pretty much already asked [X] to come in and work with us. What do you think about that?"

Here, the executive director's efforts to practice provisional leadership were exposed, as member inquiry pushed her to divulge that there was nothing tentative about it.

When time was especially scarce, the empowering structure tended to collapse. Indeed, members recognized this pragmatic reality as perhaps the only acceptable reason to circumvent participation. For example, the shelter director typically facilitated the weekly case review with a participative line of questioning: "What did that bring up for you?" "How do you think we should approach this?" During one case review meeting, she abruptly replaced tentative inquiry with decisive advice: "We don't have much time, obviously, so I'll throw out some things for you to consider." Eventually, I identified this shift as a predictable pattern for the hurried latter half of most case review meetings. For a while, the shelter staff flirted with rotating facilitators at these meetings. But this too remained susceptible to supervisory interference in the name of efficiency. Routinely, the shelter director emerged from the woodwork with words of warning: "Our facilitators seem to be losing their grip on the meeting." At one such moment, I remarked in my notes, "Huh. Apparently, [X] is today's facilitator, although the shelter director has clearly run the meeting so far." As the shelter director retained the right to judge and prod, member claims to leadership proved nominal at best.

A last and literal dimension of tentative facilitation affirms its interactive character. As mentioned above, participants enabled the tactic by not participating, and some members assumed nominal leadership positions that obscured enduring supervisory influence. In addition, many members looked to the supervisors for leadership, deferring to their direction even in settings in which the supervisors had no formal leading duties. Often, the supervisors appeared tentative, but they rarely refused the responsibility. For example, my notes report what happened when the staff divided into small groups at one meeting:

> When the shelter director joined the group, everyone turned toward her as if they expected something. After a few seconds, she mocked exasperation: "What?!" Someone told her semi-sarcastically that she needed to get the group started, and she shook her head and said that she didn't. But it was only a few more seconds before she did start the group. She suggested that members look at the reasoning on the handout.

Later in the meeting, representatives from each small group reported their findings to the whole. One group's representative faltered in the midst of her presentation. She turned directly to a supervisor in the group, asking her to summarize instead. Mimicking a child's voice, the supervisor slowly replied, "No, I don't want to." Pressed further, she took the same infantile tone to insist, "No, no one will like me." Much laughter followed. Moments later, she stood to complete the presentation. Again, I note that numerous factors may impel a general lack of member input, such as agreement with suggestions and the seemingly trivial and/or routine nature of certain issues. In sum, this tactic managed SAFE power dialectics by wrapping efficient inequality and centralized decision making in a participative package.

Tactic 2: Invoking collective commitment to egalitarian practice. At both meeting types, supervisors served as the guardians of ethical communication. This role allowed them to mediate uncer-

tainties, depersonalize overt directives, and dismiss problematic responses on the grounds of exacting compliance with community norms. In an ironic twist, ethical communication was actually deployed to dismiss or disallow authentic expression. Several accounts illustrate the nuances of this tactic.

During the shelter retreat, one member toiled to describe what she perceived as an underlying aversion to conflict among shelter staff. Struggling to answer requests for clarification, she responded, "I don't know . . . it's just something I sense." The shelter director explained the member's concern as a specific example of topics currently under discussion and, therefore, as an issue to be implicitly answered along the way. Following continued conversation, however, the member insisted that her concern had not received adequate attention: "I was talking about times when there's just this underlying thing going on. Does anyone else see that too? Like this sort of pressure . . . not to rock the boat? Is it just me?" A long silence followed. Finally, the shelter director replied, "Well, OK then, [X], why don't you take us through this? What are your needs? What do you need from the group when that happens? What could you do when it does?" After a long silence, with all eyes trained on her, the member confessed that she was "drawing a blank." Her concern was immediately abandoned.

When this member enacted ethical communication by hesitantly naming a subtle, undesirable dynamic, her petition for group support was denied. The shelter director appealed to the excessively rational expectation inherent in ethical communication that each member know and express her own agenda. It was almost as if the shelter director dared the member to exercise her voice yet depended on her to silence herself. When the member could not or would not speak, the issue was altogether abandoned. Note the significant shift from group to individual responsibility: it was not that the shelter director and other participants ignored this member; it was that she was unable to fulfill her share of the ethical communication bargain. The incident was particularly striking in light of various statements made throughout the retreat. For instance, later discussion emphasized the need to ensure that member concerns did not get "swept under the table." One member celebrated the group's openness: "If I have a problem, and I don't know quite what it is yet, I can just say it." And repeatedly, the group identified their chief charge as "making time" for member discomfort.

A particularly poignant exemplar surfaced toward the end of the shelter retreat, as fatigue began to envelop members:

> Children's counselor (CC): I have a question. In case review meetings, for example, if I mention how I might have done something differently from someone else, is that like a threatening kind of conflict?
>
> Night manager (NM): Yes, I would find that pretty aggravating.
>
> Shelter director (SD): That's not an option. We can't stop there. Let's reframe this. What would you need from her, [NM], if she wanted to describe an alternative approach to a client case?
>
> NM: Honestly, I'd need for her to talk to me afterward, not to say it there in front of everyone.
>
> SD: But then it's not a group thing, and the group can't benefit from that feedback. That's not OK.
>
> CC: This is what I mean about ethical communication stuff. If I differ from [NM], why can't I say it? Why shouldn't I? Why try so hard to frame it in so ambiguous a way?
>
> NM: Well, speaking of ethical communication, look at this. I just gave an honest answer there, and now I kind of wish I didn't. It wasn't an acceptable answer, now was it?

In this exchange, the shelter director invoked ethical communication principles (including individual obligation to the group, the group's right to stay informed) to decisively denounce the night manager's response. The director transformed a definitive declaration of her own interpretive power into mere preservation of a system to which all members had expressed commitment. In a piercing commentary on ethical communication tensions, the night manager marked how a system designed to ensure her voice had just been invoked to dismiss it. Her critique parallels the "paradox of commitment" in which members who question participation programs and fail to exhibit "compelled conformity" are labeled resistant to empowerment ideals (Stohl, 1995: 206).

The supervisory claim to ethical communication guardianship was interactively constructed, not imposed on passive members. As with the tentative facilitation tactic, members actively deferred to supervisors, directing the bulk of requests for insight and interpretation to them. Consider one member's qualifier to a solution she offered at the shelter retreat: "So is that bad, [shelter director]? Should I not do that?" In a regular staff meeting, a member paused after giving some details about a client. Turning to the executive director, she sheepishly added, "Oops. I'm suddenly wondering if that was confidential information. Should I not have shared that here?" The executive director replied with assurance, "No, that's OK, as long as it's kept with staff."

As these excerpts suggest, the supervisors typically accepted member deference to their interpretations, rarely redirecting member questions to the rest of the group. Moreover, they often swiftly answered the few ethical communication inquiries not directly addressed to them, implicitly encouraging and enforcing member submission. In a case review meeting, for example, one member cautiously described an entry she had written in the staff communication log. Since the entry critiqued another member, she wondered, was it appropriate for inclusion in the log? Although the query was directed to all present, the shelter director hastily admonished her to "check it out" with the criticized member.

In brief, the second tactic managed SAFE power dialectics in a manner reminiscent of bureaucracy's legal-rational authority (Weber, 1964, 1969). Namely, supervisors framed their influence as obligatory, impersonal moves made to uphold the (ironically, egalitarian) organizational system.

Tactic 3: Candid "reality checks." During metacommunicative meetings, the supervisors repeatedly directed member attention to power imbalance as a feature common to organizational life—a routine part of "how things work." These pronouncements blatantly acknowledged discrepancies between ideal and real. Consider the following "reality check" from the shelter director at the shelter retreat: "We all have equal responsibility to the communication process. That's the ideal, anyway, and I realize it's pretty hard to get to. Every group can have different ways of approaching this kind of problem. . . . We may need to talk about how we want to do that." This admission normalized and minimized inequality as an inherent barrier effectively negotiated by many groups.

At a different metacommunicative meeting, the executive director bluntly said:

> It's a really tough issue. . . . We don't want hierarchy but there seem to be intrinsic power differences here based on the different roles we fill in the agency. It's difficult, and it's uncomfortable, and we don't want to accept it, but it is there. And it's not uniform. You feel that power dynamic more with some people and not others. So because it doesn't seem that consistent, that just further clouds the issue. It's not easy.

This excerpt also positioned power imbalance as a natural part of organization. Departing from the first quote, it accentuated the elusive character of inequality and the challenge of changing it. Optimism or pessimism aside, both excerpts conceded the inevitability of hierarchy. Like other SAFE reality checks, they reminded members of their primary accountability to the demands of everyday practice.

Reality checks were usually announced: "Let's just put our cards on the table" or "Let's tell it like it is." It was as if the supervisors dared to honestly broach what everyone knew but hoped to suppress. The forthright form served a vital function in metacommunicative meetings. Since power imbalance lurked close to the surface in these forums, it became especially difficult to suppress. Reality checks released mounting tension in a manageable way, conforming to ethical communication in their sincere tone and thus diluting the dilemma of leading and following. Two quotes from the shelter director illustrate the point:

> If I'm in a group where I feel shut down—and quite frankly, there's a power difference too, that differential is there if it's a person with more sort of power or status that's making the statement. I'm really never gonna feel that way in this group, but I certainly do in others . . .

> But I think it's important that we also hold the powerful people responsible. And let's just name who those are. It's the articulate people, right? You know, the ones who talk the most—you might say the ones who have verbal power, not just agency power.

In the first candid confession of human tendencies, the shelter director "frankly" marked the role of inequality in producing silence. She directly situated herself as a powerful group member, suggesting her awareness and sensitivity to her impact on the group. She couched her role as simply "there," requiring acknowledgment rather than critical examination or change. The second reality check diffused responsibility for power differences throughout the group, reminding members that informal hierarchy ("verbal power") can prove the most potent. That group members similarly interpreted the comment was evident as four participants sheepishly raised their hands to the nods and laughter of the group. The potency of the shelter director's role was diminished as others shared the stage. These excerpts also suggest how supervisors summoned the perceptions of all members for support, inviting others to get "real" with them. And, on occasion, they did.

Although supervisors typically initiated reality checks, other members occasionally deployed them; at times, participants collectively performed them. Succinctly, the candid reality check managed SAFE power dialectics by confessing contradiction and framing inequality and centralization as natural, fixed truths of organization—realities independent of specific speakers or member

choice. The tactic parallels an ideological practice known among critical theorists as reification, naturalization, or perceptual control (e.g., Alvesson, 1992; Deetz, 1992; Sholle, 1988).

Tactic 4: Deflecting domination. Members exerted much effort to minimize and/or obscure the supervisory exercise of power when it most threatened to appear. In particular, they commonly deployed three discursive devices to deflect moves of dominance: defining power in terms of (1) particular relationships, (2) abstract generalizations, and (3) individual burdens.

During the shelter retreat, participants described various comfort levels with giving and receiving critical feedback. When two interns linked their discomfort with such feedback to formal hierarchy and informal power structures, the shelter director bristled and emphasized personalities:

> Shelter director: I think if hierarchy or power has to do with your comfort in giving feedback, that's more about trust. . . . Let's face it, you're a lot better off now in that regard than you were five years ago [a reference to problems with the previous shelter director].
>
> Night manager: Oh, definitely, I'd say! But it still does matter to some extent. It's easier to give feedback to [children's counselor] than you.
>
> Children's counselor: I really think it's not necessarily about power but about individual relationships. Like, power can be a factor if I feel like the person is really controlling and not open to what I have to say and won't hear me anyway. But if I get along well with the person and I'm comfortable, then the power difference isn't an issue for me. So I think it's more about the relationship and the history you have with the person.

Although the night manager initially supported the interns' perceptions, all members quickly concurred with the children's counselor and thus the shelter director. Without the active compliance of members, the shelter director's attempt to shift attention from hierarchy to particular relationships would have been incomplete.

Some forms of particularizing simultaneously involved abstracting. In this sense, the strategy of deflecting domination complemented the tactic of reality checks. As argued above, unmasked the presence of power without precision, rarely revealing specific power moves. Thus, members at once satisfied ethical communication's demands for particularizing and deflected painful particulars. This discussion elaborates my earlier point that reality checks released tension yet avoided irrevocable rupture. Many members acknowledged a tendency toward euphemistic abstraction in SAFE discourse:

> There's a certain vagueness about things here that bothers me. Like ethical communication. When I first worked here, I honestly thought that ethical communication meant that you don't say it out loud cuz it's not ethical. And I know better now. I know what it means, but it seems like that's what happens here a lot, really. We just circle around things and are sort of vague, or we don't say things at all, even though everyone knows what's going on.

In this sense, SAFE abstraction bore marked resemblance to the notion of strategic ambiguity in organizational communication theory (Eisenberg, 1984). Eisenberg explains how ambiguity can preserve privilege. Similarly, as SAFE members disguised the precise moments in which supervisors exercised influence, they obscured systematic power imbalance.

Beyond particularizing and abstracting, members also defined power in terms of individual burdens. Interaction following an exchange given above illustrated this tactic. Strained silence followed the night manager's observation that ethical communication had just been invoked to reject her authentic response. Finally, another member explained how she used self-confidence to handle criticism of her work. With this response, she "engaged" the night manager's irritation with public criticism but ignored her more fundamental exposure of group process. As the retreat progressed, the shelter staff continued to depict discomfort with feedback as an individual burden. As members placed personal duties on center stage, power relations sat comfortably in the wings. In sum, this tactic managed SAFE power dialectics by eclipsing systematic centralization and precise moments of inequality.

Tactic 5: Parodies of power. SAFE members frequently satirized familiar relations of dominance and submission. They were particularly fond of imitating teacher-student and parent-child relationships. For example, the shelter director asked an intern to take notes at a case review meeting. During the meeting, the intern repeatedly asked what she should be recording. Finally, the shelter director mimicked the slow, clear voice of an elementary school teacher: "Why yes, [intern], and a good summary sentence might look something like . . ." Everyone, including the intern, laughed heartily, and the intern never asked again. In a metacommunicative meeting, the executive director asked all members to silently write down their concerns. Ignoring the plan, one member loudly voiced her thoughts. After a moment's hesitation, the executive director smiled wryly. Assuming the exaggerated persona of a beleaguered teacher, she pleaded with exasperation, "OK, honey, can you write that down as I said? Just hold it!" Chuckles

transformed into laughter as the offending member huffed like an eager yet deflated student, "Well, fine! I just won't say anything!" Later in the meeting, a few members expressed confusion about the executive director's directions. In a childish voice, one member jokingly raised her hand and asked, much to the amusement of all, "Uh, teacher, can you repeat the assignment?" And in both meeting genres, members joked with supervisors that they were acting like "mean mommies"; they mockingly chided one other for being "bad girls" and "disobedient daughters." In each case, members donned embellished personas to exert or submit to influence.

Of course, such humorous expressions lightened the mood of meetings. The jokes at once marked and minimized inequality, absolving members of responsibility with their form (Lyman, 1995). A tacit message underlay these power parodies: "I'm not really dominating/submitting because if we're laughing, it must be OK." These parodies distanced hierarchy and centralized authority from the SAFE community by grounding them elsewhere. Table 2 condenses how this section answers the question at stake thus far: How do members manage the inequality/equality and centralization/decentralization dialectics? Below, I consider how this answer develops knowledge of organizational forms.

CONCLUSION

This essay proposes organized dissonance as a novel hybrid form revealed by a feminist perspective. Specifically, my analysis of SAFE explores dissonant power. Below, I consider what can be learned from this trek through SAFE meetings by addressing three questions: (1) Does the SAFE case provide preliminary support for the novelty and viability of organized dissonance? (2) What, if anything, is feminist about the form? (3) And finally, what major challenges and future directions does the form suggest for management scholarship?

Organized Dissonance as Manifest at SAFE: Returning to Novelty and Viability

As noted earlier, one might expect bureaucratic structure to overcome feminist practice, which would surely deflate the case for dissonance. My research methods limit me to speculation on novelty and viability, but a starting point is to consider how SAFE members coped with power in practice. At first glance, SAFE tactics seemed to create something like "servant leadership" or a mentor-apprentice model (e.g., Champy, 1995; Conger, 1989; Crom, 1998; Fisher, 1993). Yet at least one crucial feature separates SAFE's version of power relationships from current images of generous management and from older visions of organic organization (e.g., Burns & Stalker, 1961; Galbraith, 1973; Lawrence & Lorsch, 1967). Put simply, SAFE tactics were grounded in strategic incongruity; members appeared keenly aware of contradiction and bent on keeping it in play. Consider the conflicted roles implied by the five tactics detailed above: Followers should act as equals who, in the face of routine tensions, prefer hierarchy to egalitarian structure and so, freely choose to follow leaders. Meanwhile, leaders should efficiently administer egalitarian practice. Fulfilling these roles required members to forgo resolution and consistency in favor of an ironic stance toward work life (Gherardi, 1995; Trethewey, 1999).

Despite this vital distinguishing feature, I must stress the obvious need for caution. A key limitation of this study is that it cannot disprove the counterclaim that SAFE tactics were more a function of leadership style than of organizational form. I have argued that SAFE's deliberately conflicted system induced a fundamental tension that bound all members and, thus, shaped leader behavior. Empirical research across varied settings and leadership styles can clarify whether such an attribution is appropriate. Even if it is, the SAFE case demonstrates that novelty does not guarantee practical viability. It may be tempting to conclude that bureaucracy did not dominate SAFE's form—that ethical communication tempered hierarchical structure by granting all a formally equal voice and obliging supervisors to ensure that voice. From this view, SAFE's chief problem was one of shallow application. However, I contend that ethical communication offered little help in sustaining dissonance, for it too rested on bureaucratic discourse. For instance, ethical communication oddly institutionalized emotional sharing with a hyperrational mandate to "know and express yourself." My analysis showed how this excessive faith in rationality produced a tyranny of self-disclosure. Principles of open, authentic communication became tools that compelled conformity (Eisenberg & Witten, 1987) and robbed members of a language for expressing irrational feelings or indifference, multiple or incoherent selves, and opposition to the system itself (Huspek & Kendall, 1991; Stohl, 1995; Weedon, 1987). By entrusting supervisors to administer these principles, ethical communication granted them a form of legal-rational authority (Borys & Jemison, 1989). All acts of dissent were not equal, and "legitimate" dissent frequently required leader endorsement. Some concerns went unvoiced, and expressed concerns were often swept aside on the

grounds of impersonal obligation. In short, ethical communication invited members to reproduce familiar bureaucratic abuses in the name of feminist empowerment. SAFE members placed appearance over substance, as if reiterating the SAFE difference would actually make it real. This reading suggests that key players can define empowerment in a surface way that allows conventional performance measures to assume actual priority. Put in this light, the line between organized dissonance and "groupthink" (Janis, 1971), much less other organizational forms, grows dim.

But organized dissonance as feminist bureaucracy did not always prove shallow in practice. The shelter retreat featured in my analysis offers a compelling illustration. Recall the member who criticized SAFE power, asking who bore the burden of restoring collapsed trust. Participants pushed the shelter director to abandon the original agenda, and she acquiesced with little hesitation. In several meetings, I watched members—even interns and volunteers—scold supervisors for failing to "ethically" lead; I saw supervisors listen, apologize, and attempt change. In such moments, egalitarian practice effectively revised bureaucratic power. At least three conditions characterized each case: (1) the dissenting member(s) deemed the matter serious, (2) ample time remained in the meeting, and (3) other members expressed support for the dissenting member(s). Described as exhilarating by members, these instances suggest the potential feasibility and sustainability of organized dissonance, given the development of key supporting conditions. Future research can add to those identified here; specific suggestions follow.

First, organized dissonance, and feminist bureaucracy in particular, can benefit from avoiding needless concentration of power in leaders. It seems suspect to grant supervisors control of an egalitarian system designed to counteract hierarchy. Ultimately, ethical communication depended on follower confessions to keep supervisors in check. Still, followers censored themselves; leaders abused legitimate power; and the interplay of these moves perpetuated system distortion. A stronger collective authority system might minimize the impact of human error. Reducing the amount or changing the format of formal meetings, which endow leaders with influence, could also curb leader power. Put simply, the equality and decentralization sides of the dialectics need more pull. Second, organized dissonance periodically requires overt group reflection as a safety valve that keeps contradiction alive and sustains functional relations. To avoid superficial empowerment, members can negotiate how to measure power outcomes. Rotating "watchdog" members could push a group to identify power moves and critically examine tactics; for example, participants might decide that humor that undercuts supervisory influence is preferable to power parodies, which release pressure through denial. Finally, although the present study highlights inequality equality and centralization decentralization dialectics, other studies have stressed what Table 1 labels "private/public" and "impersonal/personal" tensions (Ashcraft, 2000; Martin et al., 1998; Morgen, 1994). Table 1 proposes other dialectical tensions that merit empirical study in feminist and other dissonant forms of organization.

What's Feminist about Organized Dissonance? Clarifying the Contribution

As the latter sentence implies, I do *not* claim that feminist organizations have a monopoly on organized dissonance. Many variations entailing distinct dialectical tensions are possible. Rather, I argue that feminist organizations, long overlooked by management scholarship, bring into relief a hybrid that current management theory cannot adequately explain. This claim begins to answer a question at the heart of this essay: Can feminist theory step beyond its demonstrated capacity for critique and offer novel alternatives to management studies?

Answering yes, some might point to the management literature on "women's ways" or the so-called feminine leadership advantage (e.g., Helgesen, 1990; Loden, 1985; Rosener, 1990). Several critiques of this work have exposed its problematic direction, and it is not a road I wish to take (e.g., Ashcraft & Pacanowsky, 1996; Buzzanell, 1995; Calás & Smircich, 1993; Fletcher, 1994). Instead, this essay positions feminist organizations as an untapped resource and, as I elaborate below, demonstrates how their inclusion in management research can build unlikely alliances and reveal alternative forms that undermine current assumptions. Research that investigates feminist organizations further may strengthen management studies in other ways. For example, feminist attempts at organized dissonance underscore the role of the private (the personal, emotional, and sexual) in organizational life (Ashcraft, 2000). For all its faults, SAFE engrained the importance of emotion, fostering more holistic community by keying members to their own and others' visceral reactions and personal obligations. For critical scholars and others concerned with power, feminist bureaucracy accents the neglected role of emotion in empowerment. For all scholars of organizational forms, feminist bureaucracy reclaims emotion as part of ratio-

nality, which is otherwise defined objectively and impersonally (Martin et al., 1998; Mumby & Putnam, 1992). It also unearths the private as a ubiquitous part of organization. When relationships between hybrid partners or between organizations and environments are seen as strictly public, the private arrangements and consequences on which these links depend are ignored (Deetz, 1992). This silence grows awkward in a time when the boundaries of work and home are increasingly strained, and management scholars can look to feminist organization studies for guidance in this area. Organization theory that accounts for the private is also essential to gender justice, since the denial of private matters often amounts to the devaluation of women and feminized others (Acker, 1990).

Finally, I hope to shatter the lingering perception that feminist perspectives are limited to women or a narrow set of interests. If men cannot participate in and learn from feminist organization—and if it cannot be applied to diverse missions—its capacity to enrich mainstream management research will stay seriously stunted. This is not to say that men's involvement is simple (Jardine & Smith, 1987; Mumby, 1993) or that feminist work can abandon gender issues. Claims of gender neutrality often mask gender bias and, certainly, endanger the identity of feminist perspectives (Acker, 1990). Rather, gender consciousness is needed to sensitize scholars to the subtle ways in which organizational forms and theories are gendered, to the consequences of such patterns, and to possibilities for revising them.

The Implications of Organized Dissonance: Present Challenges, Future Directions

The primary contribution of this article is that it surfaces dissonance as a class of hybrid organization. Organized dissonance adds more than emotionality to rationality; it uproots the entrenched assumption that rational organization needs consistency or even its pursuit. In a word, it shakes faith in unity of direction, in "one head with one plan" (Fayol, 1949). Several management scholars have begun to explore the organizational manifestation and management of irony and paradox (e.g., Filby & Willmott, 1988; Hatch, 1997b; Meyers & Garrett, 1993; Putnam, 1986, 1992; Stohl, 1995; Trethewey, 1999; Westenholz, 1993). With *strategic* incongruity as its guiding premise, the dissonance model extends such work to capture the case of organizations that employ incompatible forms to meet conflicting objectives and demands. Consequently, organized dissonance enables a radical shift in perspective: it allows one to engage contradiction as *deliberate* dialectical tension. Mary Parker Follett presaged this view in her enduring words on constructive conflict: "Instead of condemning it, we should set it to work for us. . . . The music of the violin we get by friction. . . . So in business, too, we have to know when to try to eliminate friction and when to try to capitalize it. . . . Integration involves invention, and the clever thing is to recognize this and not to let one's thinking stay within the boundaries of two alternatives which are mutually exclusive" (cited in Graham, 1995: 68, 70). Such a shift can dramatically alter one's approach to organizational forms and, specifically, to alternatives to bureaucracy.

For example, current research on postbureaucratic hybrids submits a catalogue of motives for combining forms, such as pooling resources, diversifying, increasing access to technologies, and mediating markets and hierarchies (e.g., Bahrami, 1992; Borys & Jemison, 1989; Powell, 1987, 1990). Organized dissonance supplies a new motive—accomplishing paradoxical goals—that disturbs the ideal of a hybrid as a harmonious fusion in the service of one purpose. Future research can generate a typology of other dissonant hybrids and build knowledge of ways to use friction between partnered forms to offset their respective pitfalls (ways, for instance, to maintain personalized client service amid massive growth and standardization).

The counterbureaucratic empowerment literature also needs this shift. Buzzanell and colleagues argued that as long as scholars and practitioners talk in terms of "oppositions rather than tensions, we, as researchers and as organizational members, envision the bridge between 'sides' as insurmountable, all-or-nothing propositions. These perceptions contribute to our difficulty in creating and sustaining democratic processes within corporate and alternative organizations" (1997: 304). As noted earlier, critical theories of alternatives to bureaucracy rarely address hybrid empowerment (Sirianni, 1984). As in the traditional feminist view, the assumption appears to be that bureaucracy will eventually overwhelm alternatives (e.g., Barker, 1993). Organized dissonance is a rejection of a hero versus villain account of alternative versus bureaucratic forms, a proposal that cautious pairing with the "enemy" might better enable social change (Ashcraft, 2000; Martin, 1987; Reinelt, 1995). By integrating the study of organization member empowerment with that of hybrid forms, the dissonant model merges the quest for empowerment with that for improved performance (Alvesson & Willmott, 1992; Sirianni, 1984). Simultaneously, it forsakes the tacit premise in much mainstream management work that empowerment

is chiefly a means to profitability or is, at best, secondary to that end (Fletcher, 1994). In sum, organized dissonance discards the notion that the only way to manage competing goals is to subordinate one to the other.

In addition, organized dissonance flags the significance of the structure-practice relationship for the study of organizational forms. Much current research continues to privilege a priori structures over process and/or to disparage practice through the lens of idealized conceptual models (Bahrami, 1992; Gottfried & Weiss, 1994; Kanter & Zurcher, 1973; Martin, 1990). Putnam proposed that "rather than classifying new organizational forms as networks or modular corporations, we might examine the discursive practices that form alliances, the institutional texts that mediate social interaction, and the paradoxes and tensions that arise from enacting oppositional forms" (1997: 131). I undertook such a project by examining how members produced an alternative to bureaucracy in practice. In the model of organized dissonance proposed here, form is an ongoing accomplishment, constructed as formal arrangements are enacted and acted upon in practice (Barley & Tolbert, 1997). Further, similar structures play out differently, practice can undermine structure; and structural tensions take shape and get managed in practice.

Finally, organized dissonance alters traditional relationship boundary debates. Typically, researchers consider the relationship between a hybrid and its environment or between its partners and the hybrid (Borys & Jemison, 1989; Oliver & Montgomery, 2000). Organized dissonance calls attention to the partner-environment relationship. In the case of a feminist-bureaucratic hybrid, imbalanced institutional influence between partners (feminism and bureaucracy) can compromise sustainability. For example, as a nonprofit dependent on external funding, interagency cooperation, and free labor, SAFE exhibited acute concern for alliances with patrons, businesses, law enforcement and educational groups, and volunteers. These relationships impelled the institutionalization of bureaucracy at SAFE. But the weaker partner, the feminist form of organization, is not inexorably doomed (Child, 1997; Pfeffer, 1992). The SAFE case suggests at least three resources members can marshal to boost it: the mission/nature of the work, regional and organizational culture (Taylor, 1999), and alliances with sister agencies. Here, domestic violence work bred members who were adept at talking about gender and power. SAFE's distaste for bureaucratic authority and penchant for self-reflection came easily in a regional culture friendly to egalitarian and therapeutic themes; the area was known for its odd blend of antiestablishment, "new age" discourse and staggering wealth. Reportedly, SAFE began as a feminist collective, which embedded egalitarian ideology in the organization's culture. Finally, the national battered women's movement linked shelters around the United States in a network of financial and media support.

Studies of larger, for-profit dissonant hybrids could inform the partner-environment relationship by probing distinct resource contexts and attendant dialectical tensions. Empirical study of bureaucracies that attempt grafts of counterbureaucratic forms might be an interesting point of departure. Such work would reverse the case of this essay and test the capacity of the radical perspective shift it suggests. For instance, many have described how corporate empowerment programs become distorted and diluted (e.g., Barker, 1993; Deetz, 1992; Stohl, 1995; Stohl & Cheney, 1999); the dissonant model should help allay this trend. The study of more mainstream cases of organized dissonance would also refine the model, particularly its sensitivity to such contextual factors as an organization's history or base form.

My analysis tempers optimism. Despite the appeal of the message that irony begets innovation, the SAFE case is a vivid reminder of the constraints and costs of lived tension. Certainly, fine lines divide strategic incongruity, delusions of unfettered agency, and crippling binds. Additional research is needed to determine which dialectical tensions are more critical or immobilizing and if, when, how, and why alternative practices mitigate bureaucratic excess. Dissonance can be reframed as a strategic choice, without embracing all forms of incongruity or neglecting the limits of member agency (Child, 1997).

Can organized dissonance stand as a genuine alternative? Whatever the verdict, contemporary feminist practice brings dissonant forms into relief and common assumptions into question. It compels researchers to imagine productive organization founded on incongruity and conflict. However thorny and precarious, organized dissonance hints at the potential to use the fragmentation and dissensus of our time to induce social change.

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