Hegemonic Power and Locality

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Abstract
Power in organizations often occurs in the form of hegemonic, that is to say, somewhat invisible and implicit power processes. Therefore we need a well-elaborated theory regarding hegemonic power processes in organizations. However, currently this theory is still in its infancy. Its theoretical insights have been borrowed from well-known, but rather general, concepts which emerged from the political and philosophical debates on power during the seventies. In the past decade, a number of studies have been carried out in regard to hegemonic power processes in various organizational practices, such as gender, team based work, ethnicity and identity, emotions in organizations, and work-life balance. Varying as the results may be, when it comes to the precise functioning of hegemonic power, one result frequently surfaces. Hegemonic power processes are part of local social practices and they are restricted to time and space. Hence, the existing global theory on hegemonic power in organizations would greatly benefit if an in-depth analysis of the relationship between hegemonic power and locality would be made. Such an analysis would then include the concepts 'situated knowledge', 'intersectionality' and 'social categories of inequality'.

What is Hegemonic Power in Organizations?

When discussing power in organizations, people usually refer to explicit forms of power, such as one's use of authority or expertise. However, apart from explicit power processes which are visible and often deliberately carried out, power takes place in the form of so-called hegemonic, that is to say rather invisible and implicit power processes. Hegemonic power processes influence people's behavior in organizations at least as effectively as the explicit forms of power do. In so doing, they clearly affect the success or failure of an organization.

The concept of hegemonic power in organizations expresses the casualness with which many employees wield power or are subjected to it, without fully being aware of this form of influence (see for example, Burawoy, 1979; Bocock, 1986; Clegg, 1989; Mumby and Stohl, 1991; Barker, 1993; Clegg, Kornberger and Pitsis, 2005). Hegemony unveils power as a seductive process rather than a threat. It is a particular form of influence, one which is not based on the use of violence or coercion, but on the normal and easy 'way things go' in the organization. 'It is the sheer taken-for-grantedness of hegemony that yields its full effects - the 'naturalness' of a way of thinking about social, economic, political and ethical issues' (Hamilton in: Bocock, 1986: 8). Hegemonic power processes proceed as (sub)routines, effectively regulating daily work flows and interactions in organizations, without being openly questioned or popping up at the surface. Their implicit functioning effectuates the

gradual acceptance of organizational practices, even when these practices bring about unintentional side effects.

The concept of hegemonic power in organizations is based upon the theoretical insights derived from three distinct lines of thought in social sciences. First, the 'community power debate' in political sciences (see for an overview Lukes, 1974) indicates the *cloaked and concealed* nature of hegemonic power processes. While acting according to the rules and social mores of everyday life and by acting upon the decisions made according to their own free will, employees help to create organizational practices which can even obstruct them from achieving their own interests. People are seldom aware of the power structure underlying these social practices.

Secondly, in the so-called 'knowledge-power analyses' (for example, Foucault, 1979; Clegg, 1989; Bourdieu, 1991; Deetz, 1992; Mumby and Stohl, 1991; see also Clegg, Courpasson and Phillips, 2006), we learn more about hegemonic power as an ongoing process of *meaning and identity* formation. Hegemonic power processes occur in 'discursive fields' (Bourdieu, 1991), in which people (re)formulate and (re)consolidate their commonly shared sense of social reality. Meaning formation processes are power processes, which *"...structure systems (...) such that certain conceptions of reality are organized into everyday practices, while other possible conceptions are organized out"* (Mumby and Stohl, 1991: 314). At the same time, meaning formation reflects a person's identity formation. This identification implies the acceptance of the implicit and explicit rules and norms related to organizational positions. Similar to meaning formations, identities are open and subject to change.

Finally, power analyses in the 'labor process approach' (for example, Burawoy, 1979; Sturdy et al, 1992; see also Fleming and Spicer, 2007) add to the discussion the distinct ways in which *consent* in organizations is produced. Consensual social relations lead to the acceptance of social inequality in organizations. Barkers' well-known analysis (1993) describes these concealed processes, through which implicit and explicit rules ('the rules of the game') make workers consent to the division of labor and labor conditions and they ensure the employees' identification with the company goals. These rules, mostly informal, define what is 'done and not done' in the organization.

> In short, hegemonic power processes are, to a great extent concealed processes of *meaning* and *identity* formation. In an ongoing and implicit way, ever changing meaning structures and identities in organizations are temporarily 'fixed', channeling the way subjects submit to enhance organizational interests. As a result, both meaning and identity formation processes encourage *consent* with the dominant organizational view and the *acceptance* of organizational practices, despite the *possible disadvantages* of these organizational practices for those involved (Doorewaard and Brouns, 2003).

Research issues
The influence of hegemonic power processes has been the subject of several studies, each focusing on distinct issues. I will introduce them briefly.

Gender Subtext
Hegemonic power appears to be one of the main (sub)routines which create a *gender subtext* in organizations. The analysis of the gender subtext helps us to understand the persistency of gender inequality. The gender subtext is a four-layered, implicitly functioning and power-based process, which brings about a semblance of equality

between men and women which only exists at the surface. Hegemonic power processes steer, for example, the resigned acceptance of the 'glass ceiling', which covers the persistent inequality between the career possibilities of men and women (see for example, Benschop and Doorewaard, 1998a, b). However, these processes operate differently in different situations. The career struggle of women in academia cannot easily be compared with the problems female marketers encounter when they try to advance in the organizational hierarchy.

Team based work
Hegemonic power processes channel the entrepreneurial way in which self-managing teams generally deal with organizational dilemmas, via the process of 'participatory regulation'. As if they were autonomous entrepreneurs, team members use job autonomy to manage their work processes. By doing so, they incorporate their own regulations. Hegemonic power processes implicitly steer participatory regulation in such a way, that the team members are induced to consent to organizational practices, despite the possible disadvantages for the people involved. Teamwork could become an 'iron cage of bondage' with invisible bars (Barker, 1993). Team members might become imprisoned in a system of implicit domination (Doorewaard and Brouns, 2003). However, would this hold true similarly for a team at the assembly line and a team of nurses in a local hospital? Research indicates how important it is to include the influence of local practices while analyzing power processes in organizations.

Emotions in organizations
Hegemonic power processes also help us to better understand the role of emotions in organizations. Emotions always operate within control and power relations in organizations (Fineman, 2000; Fineman and Sturdy, 1999; Pedersen, 2000; Doorewaard and Benschop, 2003). Sometimes, emotions are *explicitly* used as control mechanisms (for instance, in the police force and the army). However, an *implicit* effect of emotions is encountered in all organizations; it is the *control of the heart*, which concerns control via the system of implicit norms and values of the organizational culture (Van Maanen and Kunda, 1989). It goes within saying that 'control of the heart' has a different impact in different cultures, and different types of organizations.

Ethnicity and identity
Recent research of Muslim migrant entrepreneurial businesswomen in the Netherlands (see, for example, Essers and Benschop, 2007; Essers, Benschop and Doorewaard, forthcoming; Essers, forthcoming) indicates that hegemonic power processes play a part in the multiple identity formation processes of members of ethnic subgroups who live in a divergent ethnic environment. This study takes issue with the often taken-for-granted universal subjectivity of 'the' entrepreneur. It addresses the masculinity and whiteness of the archetypical entrepreneur by studying how a person's identity is being constructed at the intersection of gender and ethnicity within the context of entrepreneurship (Essers, forthcoming). The researchers need the concept of 'female ethnicity' to describe the results of their research. Female ethnicity refers to the various meanings of femininity constructed in different and constantly changing local ethnic contexts and is based on locality.

Work-life balance

Research on work-life balance focuses on the effects of work-life balance (WLB) arrangements on the perceptions of work-life balance of mothers with young children (see for example Mescher, Benschop and Doorewaard, 2007). Despite the official discourse, WLB arrangements appear to be gendered; most of the time childcare is at stake and this is considered to be a women's issue. The implicit message is also that only those who possess certain qualities and are willing to make sacrifices in terms of career, extra hours and availability are entitled to use WLB arrangements. Despite current legislation in regard to employees' rights, the use of WLB arrangements is not presented as a right, but as a privilege, granted by the company and people should be grateful for that. These implicit messages are not the result from malevolence or manipulation. These messages, which fit within the prevailing image of WLB practices, simply slip in, because everyone involved accepts and confirms them as a matter of fact. It is hegemonic power in full practice. Nevertheless, it is easy to imagine that these processes operate differently for female doctors and for female consultants, due to different job requirements and different sets of societal norms and values attributed to both professions.

Hegemony and locality

The research projects mentioned above have produced interesting and very useful information. Varying as the results may be, when it comes to the precise functioning of hegemonic power, one result frequently surfaces. Hegemonic power processes are part of local social practices and are restricted to time and space. Time- and space-oriented research of hegemonic power will help us to deal with the unintentional consequences of hegemonic power processes in daily practice. By studying the functioning of hegemonic processes, possibly new ways of coping with the undesired consequences of hegemonic power can be developed. Therefore, the main question I would like to pose in the debate is: What can we say about the locality of hegemonic power?

The existing global theory on hegemonic power in organizations would benefit from an analysis of the relationship between hegemonic power and locality. Such an analysis should include the concepts 'situated knowledge', 'intersectionality' and 'the social categories of inequality'.

As 'knowing' in general (Blackler 1995), our knowledge of hegemonic processes is always *situated* knowledge (Haraway, 1991; Blackler, 1995). The concept of situated knowledge accentuates that knowledge is always partial, embodied and responsible (Haraway, 1991) and "emphasizes the significance of people's interpretations of the contexts within they act (-)" Blackler, 1995: 1041). Hence, situatedness or locality is never a given, but always part of different and constantly changing local contexts.

An analysis of the relationship between hegemony and locality would benefit from the *intersectionality* theory. The concept of intersectionality was originally developed to understand the oppression of black women through the interaction between race and gender (Crenshaw, 1995). Intersectionality emphasizes the simultaneous and dynamic interaction between different 'axes' of identity (Buitelaar, 2006)**,** which entail different power relations and different relations of oppression. The concept of intersectionality helps us to understand identities as being multiple, complex and ambivalent (Essers, Benschop and Doorewaard, forthcoming).

The analysis of hegemonic power implies the analysis of *social categories* such as gender, race, class, ethnicity, age, sexuality, and so on, as being inextricably

interconnected in the production of social practices of inclusion and exclusion. Gender, for example, as a category of social exclusion is a process that is embedded in power relations, which is manifested in social practices and the identities that are formed 'in the intersections of gender, race, class, sexuality and other categories of social oppression' (Calás and Smircich 2006: 287).

Discussion

During the conference, I would like to discuss the relationship between hegemonic power and locality. More precisely, my questions are the following:

- Does the definition of hegemonic power presented on page 5 provide us with a basis for further research of hegemonic power processes in organizations?
- Do you agree that the theory of hegemonic power in organizations would benefit from a further elaboration of the relationship between hegemonic power and locality?
- Do you consider the concepts 'situated knowledge', 'intersectionality' and ' social categories of exclusion' as core concepts in the analysis of 'locality'?
- Do you recognize processes of hegemonic power in organizations in Aotearoa/New Zealand? Can you give examples?
- Which social categories of inequality (gender, age, class, status, ethnicity, religion, class, sexuality, and so son) would appear to be most influential when analyzing local hegemonic power processes in organizations in Aotearoa/New Zealand? Can you give examples?

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