ACTUAL &IDEAL

OCCUPATIONAL IDENTITIES

in

DIFFERENCE

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by

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ACTUAL AND IDEAL OCCUPATIONAL IDENTITIES IN DIFFERENCE

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To our children.

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

We are grateful to those teachers of life for having opened our eyes.

I

INTRODUCTION

It is not uncommon to hear in different places of work that employers are all-powerful to decide upon who is going to work and in what way, regardless of the opinion, capability or needs of the employees. In other words, it is the employer who has or takes the right to define and determine the nature of occupational identities. It does not therefore come as a surprise that employees tend to challenge such a stance and in turn construct an identity for themselves that does not always correspond to that constructed by employers thus leading to difficult and often conflicting industrial relationships.

The way employer and employee identities are commonly constructed rests on a set of discourses that tend to essentialize and reduce, to stereotype occupational identities to the most basic and fundamental features. In doing so, they tend to consider that occupational identities are unique, immutable, fixed and closed upon themselves.

In contrast to such views, this short study proposes to show that approaching occupational identities in an essentialized manner tends to ignore that occupational identities are a 'becoming' (Hall, 1996: 4; Grossberg, 1996: 89). They are the result of interactions between individuals that take various and shifting forms through communication. It is the contingent and interdependent nature of power relationships to use Hanna (1988: 8) and Du Gay (1997: 293) between employers and employees that defines the direction and content of this relationship, and more importantly, the occupational identities themselves. This is an acknowledgement that identities are not closed upon themselves but rather open as they are capable of influencing and being influenced by their environment as Hanna (1988: 8) has noted, while never being wholly and objectively determined.

These are the main points that are developed in Section II where we present a paradigm termed "Open Self Theory" which has resulted from the interplay of three conceptualizations. To start with, a transposition of the 'open systems theory' presented by Hanna (1988: 8) from businesses to individuals. Furthermore, a conceptualization of power as taking different forms, circulating and being creative according to Foucault (1981: 94). And last, following Laclau (1990: 20-40), that identities can be constructed in relation to their ‘constitutive outside’ to the other that allows or disallows any form of power to be enacted.

In this way, the Open Self Theory is used as a tool to exhibit the internal inconsistencies of the traditional and contemporary discourses of identity construction, which is the first aim of this study. Ultimately the Theory is used to construct a novel framework to examine employer-employee relationships, which is the second aim of this study.

There are two traditional discourses of power explanation that we look at in Section III, namely, the discourse of capital ownership and the discourse of bureaucratic status. In the first instance, the power of employers derives from capital ownership. This Marxist perspective is based on the separation of society between economic base and superstructure, where the former determines the latter, leading to an employer-employee antagonism as the logical conclusion of a class conflict where employers detain monopsony power over employees. However, it seems difficult to separate owners of capital and those of labor as objective categories and that the antagonism between employers and employees depends on outside non-economic factors, that is, the superstructure. It follows that base and superstructure are interdependent. We have taken this argument further to claim that within the economic base itself relationships are contingent, since there are no grounds for maintaining the distinction between base and superstructure as closed objectivities.

The second traditional discourse considers that employer power derives from holding a formal position in the echelons of a hierarchy, the power of the bureau as described by Weber. This implies that occupational identities are socially pre-defined and that individuals readily accept the position that is constructed for them. We would like to argue however that since status and position are subjectively interpreted, a one-to-one relationship between leadership and position is difficult to sustain. Power constitution and its application are situational and not readily constructed entities.

In Section IV there is the examination of a first attempt to break away from considerations of capitalist or bureaucratic structures determining beliefs and values and instead consider that employer power derives from the construction of specific cultures of production to use Salaman (1997: 241). This is a more contemporary set of discourses aimed to subject-position employees in a way that they can identify with the objectives of the employers. We therefore describe how human resource 'technologies' (Miller & Rose, 1997/1990: 326) attempt to 'make up' (Du Gay, 1997: 313-314) the subjectivities of employees under the discourse of self-discipline and that of learning community. In addition, there is a brief description of how the new corporate discourses have been championed by the New Right and found expression in neo-liberal policies to break away from Keynesian state dependence and reduce the influence of Unions. Nevertheless, this novel approach has failed to consider that employees may resist top-down imposition of values and beliefs, that business cultures are multicultural rather than mono-cultural, that subcultures behave as political factions vying for their own interest. Ultimately, that culture is an act of creation and enactment of identities and not a priori constructed.

In summarizing the major weakness of both the traditional and contemporary discourses, the aim of Section V is to translate The Open Self Theory into a method for analyzing and explaining how employer-employee relationships take place, which we have termed The Open Self Framework. The starting point of this method is the construction, enactment and interaction of narratives of the ideal employer and employee as set against the experienced or actual occupational identities. It is the ensuing gap between the ideal and actual identities that becomes the focus of employer-employee relationships in the attempt to manipulate power resources to close this difference and hegemonize the relationship. But since hegemony is inconclusive, because of the impossibility of a closure or centeredness in relationships, the visible aspect of this gap is an antagonism mutually exercised by both the employer and employee. This also leads to the construction of new narratives of the ideal self and the other, hence a cycle of identity construction and destruction within discursive exchanges and battles.

Once the established traditional and contemporary discourses are assessed and developed, the proposed theoretical conjecture, The Open Self Theory, and related Framework for examining employer-employee relationships, are put to the test in Section VI. This involves setting out the hypotheses to be tested, selecting the measuring instrument and gathering data for analysis - stages composing 'category 1 of the research process' proposed by Remenyi et al (1997:

80). The overall method is ‘deductive’ (Gill & Johnson, 1997: 28-33) or ‘nomothetic’ following Burrell and Morgan (1979: 6) and is applied to a hotel in the United Kingdom. The chapter ends with an account on the degree to which the claims under the Open Self Theory and Framework are sustainable - the last stage of the research process.

And to conclude with Section VII, there is a summary description of the study and its conclusions, an assessment of the research method, and suggestions to improve and further the study. This is with the covert purpose that this study may pave the way to a conceptualization of employer-employee relationships away from the traditional and contemporary definitions and dichotomies as this is what we believe one experiences in industrial relations: an antagonism that shifts the location of power at all times.

II

OPEN SELF THEORY

What is the open self?

As a preliminary definition we can say that is the process of 'opening into otherness' (Crossley, 1996: 29) where the self constantly inter-acts with the other and thus perpetually re-creates the self and the other. This means that the self cannot be separated from the other to the extent of saying that the self is a 'transformer and a relay point of the flow of energies: a surface of intensities' to use Braidotti (2002: 21). In other words, what we consider as being our subjective self is very much the result of an interaction with a subjective other to the extent that subjectivity is dissolved. Yet the feeling that the subjective self is different from another remains.

Exploring the open self

A way of conceptualizing this similarity with and difference from the other is to say with Hanna (1988: 9) that each individual has a 'boundary of differentiation' which enables to differentiate oneself from other individuals, to 'fence off' oneself from another. The border is both corporeal and incorporeal in that a physical boundary, our body, encloses a metaphysical boundary, our 'cultural capital' following Bourdieu (in Johnson, 1993: 7), which consists in the competencies and knowledge used to participate in cultural relations with one's environment. This means that different people use different cultural capitals, which enables us to keep ourselves separate from others. At the same time we are able to communicate with others, thus come closer to other individuals. It is through this border therefore, that one transmits one's identity while receives the identity of others, hence a process of exchange with other individuals, objects and events, that is, one's environment.

In addition, individuals have a 'purpose' (Hanna, 1988: 9-10) that is pursued with specific or at times vague objectives. These are ideals to be fulfilled, reference points that individuals use so as to meet their needs and wants. Yet, since one's environment has expectations and sets normative and ascriptive limits upon the self, one tries to balance one's own purposes and those of the environment. Certainly the balance is never fully maintained given that at times it is the private purposes that predominate and at others those of the environment. There is therefore an antagonism between the self and one's environment.

To further use Hanna (1988: 11-12), through the border of differentiation, individuals draw from the environment 'inputs', the different resources for their survival and to fulfil their 'purposes'. These can be tangible, such as wages, but they may also take non-tangible forms, such as information and knowledge held by others. This is a process of mediation that requires the application of knowledge which, following Foucault (1981: 92), entails the exercise of power understood as 'the multiplicity of force relations immanent in the sphere in which they operate and which constitute their own organization'.

This means that power should *not* be understood as the ability that an individual has to modify, use, impose or destroy its environment. Even less that it is structurally defined when the determinants of power are systemic, or that it can be located in one central point from which it can emanate.

Decentred power

Rather, power can come from everywhere, take any form, thus become the underlying characteristic of social exchange in specific settings, become the constitutive element of society itself to use Laclau (1990: 33). Power can be made visible in that it produces vocabularies and organizes ideas in discourses which produce knowledge, and which in turn, produces, transmits and reinforces power relations Knights and Vurdubakis (1994: 179) and Hall (1997a: 44) have noted. Through the boundary of differentiation then individuals seek opportunities to discursively influence the environment in desired ways and in accordance to one's purposes to follow Knights and Vurdubakis (1994: 184-185). Yet it does not follow that *all* the desired inputs can be drawn from the environment. It is only those extracted relative to the power relations wherein one participates, and these are shifting relations as discourses shift to use Clegg (1994: 277).

Once the resources to be imported are found and the opportunity to extract them from the environment arises, their acceptability and usefulness is decided by our cultural capital. They are eventually 'transformed' into other forms, the 'output' to use Hanna (1988: 13-14). This output is transmitted to the environment. Tangible forms such as wages are thus transformed for instance into work and non-tangible forms such as information into those skills and competencies that help carry out work in a relative correspondence to environmental expectations.

Processes of transformation then necessitate the correct positioning of the individual. One needs to be able to get information about one's position relative to one's purpose and output. This means that what underlies social exchange is 'feedback', whether 'positive' or 'negative' (Hanna, 1988: 14-16). It is about knowledge re-creation based on a flow of information relatively in terms of the acceptability of both the outputs and the purposes. This means that we partake in a double process of acceptability: that of the self and that of the environment.

The open self is therefore none else than the self that is in perpetual inter-action with one's environment, with other people, objects and events. The 'permeability' of the 'border of differentiation' (Hanna, 1988: 9) makes that society is neither inside the self nor outside of it. It is the expression of the 'culmination of inter-subjective praxes, of action and interaction, and of the instituted and shared praxial and material resources which are mobilized in this process' (Crossley, 1996: 74).

Antagonism

Where social exchange is dynamic, as well as there is a natural tendency towards change and disorder, there is also a tendency to stabilize 'transformation processes' so as to reach one's designs (Hanna, 1988: 21-23). It follows that individuals may seek to fence themselves off completely, by attempting to either render the border of differentiation the least permeable possible or control, thus dominate, their environment. In other words, such individuals or even institutions will tend to constitute an objective center for identity construction and determination by making their border of differentiation as explicit as possible, thus fixing it and maintaining a difference between self and the other.

Yet, there is no guarantee that is fixity will be maintained. It may be questioned, undone or simply deferred since the nature of the border of differentiation is inherently unstable. This is because the contingent nature of the border of differentiation is characterized by the impossibility of fixing with any precision either the relations or the identities themselves or the context in which identities are formed to use Laclau (1990: 20, 28-29). The border of differentiation is therefore the theatre of antagonizing forces. Such forces on the one hand block the full constitution of the identity. On the other, given that identities are relational, otherwise selves would not be open, they are also part of the conditions of existence of that identity. This means that the open self is a threatened identity since its external constitutive element defies and upsets the objective construction of this identity to use Laclau (1990:19-21). Identity construction then is an ambiguous project because of an antagonism, an act of power.

How can one therefore consider the occupational identities of employer and employee from The Open Self Theory viewpoint?

To start with, each individual identity as employer and employee is discursively constructed and has as a border of differentiation through which exchanges with the organizational environment takes place. Yet, given that the cultural capitals of employers and employees are dissimilar, the respective processes of transformation make that different inputs are taken from the environment in order to produce diverse outputs. Simply put employer and employee identities as individuals are different but this does not mean closed and separate. They are open because identity construction takes place through contingent power relationships where 'every identity is dislocated insofar as it depends on an outside with both denies that identity and provides its condition of possibility at the same time' (Laclau, 1990: 39). Employer-employee relationships then are not only interdependent but also produce contested and competitive identities.

We shall now use the above ideas to examine the traditional discourses of identity construction and power relationships between employers and employees. To this effect, we use The Open Self Theory as a paradigm, to have a lens or a 'map ... and the directions for map making' as Kuhn (1996/1962: 109) has put it through which we seek to interpret and make sense of employer-employee relationships.

III

TRADITIONAL DISCOURSES

The first of the traditional discourse we examine in the light of The Open Self Theory is that of capital ownership.

Owning capital

Central to Marx's argument, Scott (1996: 63) explains, is that 'relations of possession' determine 'relations of production' and that these in turn determine 'class positions' and 'class relations'. What characterizes these relations for Laclau (1990: 5) is conflict and antagonism, and since relations of production are inherently contradictory, it logically follows that class relations are equally contradictory.

Let us examine this line of thought by starting with relations of production. For Marx these are relations of property, not only in terms of ownership but also in terms of effective control over the means of production. On the one hand, those who have control over the means of production constitute the bourgeoisie, which emerged by supplanting the landed classes. It is through the industrial revolution centered on the market mechanism that the bourgeoisie have managed to expand their capital, which is fundamental to the economic structure of capitalist society, that is, the totality of relations of production constituting the economic base. This base, Scott (1996: 57) explains, expresses the dominance of the ruling class. For Marx (in Laclau, 1990: 5) it is 'the real foundation on which arises a legal and political superstructure and to which correspond definite forms of social consciousness', which is transformed accordingly with changes in the economic base. On the other hand, those who have no control over the means of production, the proletariat, which is founded on wage labor, is subjected to the power of the bourgeoisie. There is therefore a clear separation in two classes, the employer and employee in terms of the actual positions people occupy in a social division of labor and the people who actually occupy it.

The relationship between these two classes is that of 'exploitation' (Scott, 1996: 59) since employees produce commodities for their employers and in return they receive a wage that represents the minimum necessary for their subsistence. The surplus produced by the employee - the difference between the value of the commodity and the amount of the wage - is appropriated by the employer, hence exploitation. In other words, the ownership of property, money and labor determines (class) relations between employers and employees. Depending on who controls such means, class positions and class relations are defined and since these are differentially distributed among classes Scott (1996: 55) notes, they are basically exploitative. Class relations are antagonistic for Marx and Englels (1992/1848: 3-8, 15), as a feature of production, since the surplus produced by the owner of labor - the difference between the value of the commodity and the amount of the wage - is appropriated and revolutionized by the owner of capital. They are moreover conflictual since the subordinate class is engaged in a continuous struggle with capital owners over wages and conditions of work Scott (1996: 57-60) further notes. The additional twist that Marx brings in this argument is that the over-expansion of capitalist society leads to its own downfall as exemplified by crises and the increasing pauperization of the proletariat. In other words, the capitalist mode of production is inherently contradictory, in addition to being antagonistic.

However, for Laclau (1990: 6), if an economic system cannot expand indefinitely it does not mean that its collapse must take the form of class struggle. Laclau (1990: 9) also argues that capitalist relations of production are not essentially antagonistic as Marx has claimed because it does not stem logically from the relationship between buyers and sellers of labor power. That is, a relationship between economic categories where social actors bear particular roles. A similar point is made by Scott (1996: 39, 77) who asserts with Weber that while particular individuals and groups drawn from social classes may be expected to behave in certain ways, one cannot assert that social classes per se are acting this way as they are not communal groups. Laclau (1990: 11, 25) goes further to claim that an antagonism exists not within capitalism but between the relations of production and something outside of them, the complex constitutive forces namely, economic, political, institutional and ideological, none of which can be conceptualized as superstructure.

Although these arguments upset the deterministic nature between economic base and superstructure, they fail to examine whether there is an antagonism *within* the relations of production. We would argue that relations of production involving employers and employees *are* antagonistic. This is because, to use Laclau (1990: 39), the economic base is in-itself a dislocated structure. This is where the construction of power centers, each capable to structure and influence its environment, is resisted and whose effects are contradictory because on the one hand they threaten identities, while on the other, they are the foundation on which new identities are constructed.

Dislocatory effects then also upset the neatness of class divisions. Indeed, the expansion and deepening of capitalism has given rise to another class, that of managers, separate from owners, as found in limited companies Scott (1996: 84) notes. Although they are controlling the processes of production in Marx's sense, they are not owners. It follows that the employer-employee conflict does *not* stem from class distinctions since a social category such as "class" cannot exist although Bourdieu (in Johnson, 1993) has maintained that each class has its own 'habitus' its own way of doing things as distinct from another class.

Having so far argued that employers overall cannot derive their power from ownership, does it mean however that with the rise of managers, managerialism and bureaucracies, employers can derive their power from the position they are holding?

To answer to this question one needs to look closely at Weber's arguments.

Positions of authority

Managers, by virtue of their legal appointment, are able to dominate. This is a special case of power, to have control over economic goods[1]. Weber (1978/1921: 943) distinguishes domination by 'virtue of a constellation of interests' – a monopoly position[2] - and by 'virtue of authority' - the power to command and the duty to obey. It is a form that corresponds to the 'principles of *office hierarchy* …a clearly established system of super- and subordination in which there is a supervision of the lower offices by the higher ones' (Weber, 1978/1921: 957, original emphasis). That is, the bureau is '*monocratically* organized' (ibid). Scott (1990: 41) explains that this is a feature of the social

[1] Although this is frequent, it is not exclusive, according to Weber (1978/1921: 942).

arrangement within the bureau. It is characterized by the presence of ‘command situations’, that is, a distribution of power generating ‘structured differentials’. To this Scott (1990: 41, original emphases) adds ‘class situations’, a line of thought similar to Marx’s, derived from ‘differentials of power in the economic sphere of *property* and the *market*’ in addition to ‘status situations derived from … *communal prestige*’.

In this way Weber (1978/1921: 999-1000) transposes the bureau from the centers of production into the wider society and thereby transforms society in a vast bureau, hence treats society as a totality. The (social or organizational) bureau is thus capable of attaining the highest degree of efficiency, and it is ‘superior to any other form in precision, in stability, in the stringency of its discipline and in its reliability’ (Weber, 1996/147: 228). ‘Organizational discipline in the factory’, Weber (1978/1921: 1156) says

> has a complete rational basis. With the help of suitable methods of measurement, the optimum profitability of the individual worker is calculated like that of any material means of production. On this basis, the American system of “scientific management” triumphantly proceeds with its rational conditioning with its rational conditioning and training of work performances, thus drawing the ultimate conclusions from the mechanization and discipline of the plant. The psycho-physical apparatus of man is completely adjusted to the demands of ... the tools, the machines - in short, it is functionalized, and the individual is shorn of his natural rhythm through the functional specialization of muscles and through creation of an optimal economy of physical effort. This whole process of rationalization, in the factory and elsewhere, …, parallels the centralization of the material implements of organization in the hands of the master.

In other words, with the help of suitable methods of measurement, in a scientifically organization to use Taylor (1994/1911: 231-233), the optimum profitability of the individual worker is calculated like that of any material means of production.

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[2] It is more appropriate to refer to oligopolistic positions.

However, as Merton (1996/1968: 146) has pointed out, bureaucracies lead to what Dewey has called 'occupational psychosis' as a result of the routinisation of work and competencies where individuals have difficulty adjusting to shifting circumstances. Further, it seems that there is no linear relationship between organizational means and ends. Organizations are characterized by a certain degree of ambiguity, which upsets the high level efficiency that Weber has ascribed to them according to Merton (1996/1968: 146). Further still, given that the main argument that Weber (1996/1947: 226) makes rests on the idea of 'legitimacy' whose validity rests on 'rational', 'traditional' and 'charismatic grounds', we would argue that there is never a guarantee that employees may perceive power and domination as it was intended by employers. In effect, the application of economic, knowledge and normative sources of power can be deemed illegitimate when they do not correspond to what employees understand, perceive and ways they experience the organizational environment. This is because identity construction and enactment is differentially experienced.

From the above discussion, in the light of The Open Self Theory, a clear picture emerges that traditional discourses tend to construct a neat typology of occupational identities that is closed, fixed and centered around structural and hierarchical power relationships. These relationships seem to exist and have a momentum *outside* the participants.

The Open Self Theory claims that it is the mutual involvement of participants that defines the structure of their relationships with its limits and opportunities according to the different values individuals put on their actions.

We therefore need to examine how values and their management affect the relationship employer-employee, that is, examine corporate cultures.

IV

CONTEMPORARY DISCOURSES

Corporate culture refers to the particular 'way of doing', of understanding, structuring, conducting and talking about business life that is unique to an organization thereby making it different from another organization.

Managing culture

Since a particular way of doing has effects on the business performance of an organization, Peters and Waterman (1983: 93) have argued, it is only committed employees who can bring about competitive 'excellence' and not structures, procedures and rules. It follows that when the personal values of employees can be matched with those of the organization, there are improvements in performance, quality, innovation, and customer relations. In other words, the development of the 'right culture' leads to a more effective organization (Salaman, 1997: 241-242).

Culture is therefore used as a 'benchmark' for corporate performance to distinguish organizational superior cultures from inferior organizations (Salaman, 1997: 245). In the former case, organizations are characterized by workforce cohesion around collectivist, stable and homogeneous qualities based on trust, subtlety and intimacy according to Ouchi (in Salaman, 1997: 246-247). These are companies able to cope with global challenges since they use post-Fordist productive methods of flexible specialization for segmented and changing markets with an organizational structure and culture that is marketing-led and consumer-focused as Nixon (1997: 192-193) has noted. In the latter case, Nixon (1997: 192-193) further notes, organizations are characterized by hierarchical divisions of labor that promote individualism that is organized around Fordist mass production processes, thereby causing procedural problems because of the poor management of culture

Therefore, a bureaucratic culture is seen as 'problematic' to companies to use Rose (1996: 131). It is the obstacle to be overcome in order to respond to globalising trends according to Du Gay (1996: 154). Consequently, employers need to break away from an obsession to achieve order through regulation so as to hedge risks and variability but which dehumanizes workers. Instead, the emphasis is for Marsden (1997: 108-109) on the management of human resources. It aims at fostering co-operation, commitment by motivating and giving employees the autonomy to own the responsibility of their actions while governing their conduct in such a way that they perceive the organization and their work in the same way as managers do.

Employers then have a new role to play: they need to manage the symbolic aspects of an organization. This is achieved through meaningful and symbolic practices that put forward values, beliefs and norms. It is about the construction of specific cultures of production that guides the actions of employees. Guidance must not take place through bureaucratic power. Rather, through a change in the subjectivity of employees to internalize the objectives and values of the organization which is the key determinant of organizational success. Employee subjectivity, Du Gay (1997: 294) has shown, is the 'object' to be developed through 'technologies of conduct regulation' and control by the employers, that is, the application of 'government' (Miller & Rose, 1997/1990: 330).

Governing behavior

'Government' for Foucault refers to methodical strategies and programs responsible for the direction and regulation of the behavior of individuals, thus of employees, according to political and rational 'mentalities' of rule so as to achieve a desired objective (Rose, 1996: 134). It is a form of power that is exercised by organizations relative to only what they consider to be true, the established 'regime of truth' (Miller & Rose, 1997/1990: 323). This is a unique and ideal way to interpret management and organizational behavior, a 'teleology' (Rose, 1996: 133). It is a hegemonic discourse to organize management knowledge and all actions thereof.

There are two aspects to this. The first one concerns the application of knowledge by way of mechanisms, devices and regulatory interventions, that is, 'technologies' that 'shape normalize and instrumentalise the conduct, thought and aspirations of others in order to achieve the [desired] objectives' (Miller & Rose, 1997/1990: 326). For Foucault (in Marsden, 1997: 108-109) these 'disciplinary practices' consist in distributing and arranging employees in conceptual temporal and geographical spaces, in addition to controlling bodily movements and activities in temporal frames that are logically segmented and sequenced.

The second aspect of 'government' concerns the prevailing discourse, which creates a subject-position for individuals in an unconscious manner. To use Althusser (2001/1971: 118) in the process of 'interpellation' employees come to recognize themselves in the elements of the discourse.

Using the above insights, what is the difference then between the traditional and contemporary discourses on employer-employee relationships?

The answer lies in the distinction formulated by McGregor (in Costley et al, 1994: 196-201) as 'theory X' and 'theory Y'. Under the traditional discourses employees are subject-positioned as idle. The translation of this knowledge is expressed by the precise monitoring of work along a hierarchical structure in addition to the institutionalization of duties and roles. In the latter case however, employees are considered to be capable and trustworthy. Thus, the adoption of the discourses of self-discipline and learning community has had the consequence of a decrease in supervisory methods.

Self-discipline

The discourse of self-discipline then with its specific statements and vocabulary around change, empowerment, autonomy aims at making employees come to recognize themselves as being enterprising which for Gordon (in Du Gay, 1997: 301) implies utility maximization based on choice and flexibility. In addition, since the environment is perceived as hostile, each employee operates as an entrepreneur who strives to maintain one's standards in relation to other employees by being pro-active and quality-focused. Managers on the other hand stress total quality for competitive excellence Salaman (1997: 253-257) notes.

In the center therefore of the discourse of self-discipline lies autonomous thinking and acting. 'Self-actualization' is seen to be the pinnacle of the hierarchy of needs according to Maslow (1996/1943: 113-114, 118), where an individual attempts to realize one's full potential and capability once the other levels of needs are relatively satisfied. Unlike Maslow (1996/1943: 116) who sees exceptional the case when the hierarchy of needs is upset, we argue that needs form an interdependent cluster where any type of need can be satisfied at any moment and in relation to all or some of the other needs. Self actualization then can be achieved *in relation to* the satisfaction of financial needs, employment security, self-image, or having the feeling one does something purposeful, and *not after* these needs are satisfied.

This does not take place without any cost. There is a trade-off in the form of a ‘contractual’ relationship between employees and the organization they work for: autonomy vs. responsibility (Du Gay, 1996: 153-154). The internal life of the organization is therefore conceived of and structured transactionally in terms of customer-supplier market relations. In other words, the discourse of self-discipline becomes intimately linked with that of ‘consumer sovereignty’ (Du Gay, 1997: 310).

The focus on customer satisfaction has led, according to Fuller and Smith (in Du Gay, 1997: 312-314), to the indirect involvement of the customer with the management of the firm in two ways. Firstly, the creation of new forms of government based on customer feedback which reduce control over employees as it is the customers who provide the benchmark against which the worker’s performance can be measured. And secondly, in case of failure, the employees’ conduct is re-shaped given that the disposition towards quality service is not innate. It is rather learnt and worked on what Hochschild (1997/1983: 108) has referred to as ‘emotional labor’.

Learning community

Yet given that customer satisfaction is an external factor that is constitutive of the identity of employees in an organization, it has contributed towards the construction of the discourse of learning community where organizations are seen as ‘clans’ for Ouchi (in McGovern & Hope-Hailey, 1997: 189) forming a coherent whole. This is achieved when employees have learned and internalized the dominant norms and values that trace a common direction and guidelines for behavior to use Deal & Kennedy (1997/1991: 273). It is a strategic course of action, as well as experienced organizational culture in corporate rituals, customs and displays according to Bauman (in Salaman, 1997: 254).

Organizations are thus perceived to be harmonious and consensual, whose central element are values which, made explicit in mission statements, contribute to the wholeness of the organization as well as establish promotional prospects by constructing a positive representation of the corporation. They are also strong cultures of collaboration. This factor leads to effectiveness Du Gay (1997: 289-290) notes because it is based on reciprocation: a positive response by employees to positive actions of the management such as openness, sensitivity, tolerance and flexibility. This also shows that managers are positioned within the discourse as the upholders and representatives of core organizational values carrying out specific interpersonal roles by being accessible to staff, building effective teams and managing by consensus to reconcile expectations. They are the heroes and heroines of the company inscribed in the company's folklore according to Deal (in McGovern & Hope-Hailey, 1997: 189). Hence, organizational culture is a vehicle for making everyone aware of the corporate values, whether within or outside the organization. Yet, this is a 'learning organization' in that, as an individual, the organization is a unitary entity able to learn through trial and error, evolve, fine-tune its values according to changes in competitive environments (Deal & Kennedy, 1997/1991: 273) and with it, its employees.

Discourses & society

The adoption of the discourses of self-discipline and learning community has had wider repercussions as they have been sanctioned by the New Right during the last decades under the labels of 'conservatism' and 'liberalism' respectively (Thompson, 1997: 40), whose effects are still felt today. In the first case, we have witnessed the emergence of discourses that stress national cohesion and put forward national qualities and values. In the second case, there has been economic deregulation to break away from any state dependence and interference as it has happened in the leisure sector among others. The rationale behind such a change is that markets should be considered as perfectly competitive where the demand and supply of labor determine wages. It follows that any attempt to regulate such markets is bound to fail since it leads to unemployment, which, to be financed, puts pressure on government budgets and the tax system. Therefore, Green (1995: 9-14) explains, unions and minimum wage legislation whose role is to protect employees upset the market mechanism. One can therefore expect economic deregulation to be in the favor of employers.

However, Green (1995: 5-6) further notes, in a perfectly competitive labor market employers have no control over wages since it is the employee's willingness to supply labor that becomes important. In addition, deregulation for Hall (1997b: 231) does not imply absence of regulation: the market has its own rules, which tends to work against employers when their management and production methods are not adapted to the market requirements.

This line of thought actually shows that employer-employee distinctions are blurred. One therefore needs to examine corporate culture closer.

Assessing contemporary discourses

Corporate culture approaches appear to be using culture in a functional manner. We argue that it is a mechanistic view of culture. Salaman (1997: 264-265) and Morgan (1993: 39-43) explain that management gurus have tended to fix culture as a distinct entity. It follows that employees have been exploited under the corporate school banner since there is a mechanical manipulation of organizational symbols, myths and rituals therefore supporting the exploitative character of work arrangements as argued by Knights and Willmott (in Salaman, 1997: 264-265). A reason behind this is that, in devising technologies of conduct, the opinion or involvement of employees, or their unions have been left out Wickens (in Salaman, 1997: 264-265) has pointed out.

Even more important, a top-down imposition of desirable cultures makes that collaboration and integration are contrived and the values to be shared are imposed from above. Empirical findings tend to confirm this tendency and to conclude that corporate culture as a management tool has not been as impressive as one has been led to think according to McGovern and Hope-Hailey (1997: 191).

The reasons behind this failure are several. First, the emergence of alternative cultures characterized by informal and less deliberate process of development. In addition the formation of political factions which, in attempting to maintain their cohesion, undermine the management's efforts to construct "one big team". This means that although managers may be aware of the symbolic consequences of their actions they cannot control culture the way cultural theorists advocate to use Morgan (1993: 39-43). Second, the very empowerment of employees may distance themselves from corporate values to preserve their self-identity according to Willmott (in Salaman, 1997: 264-265). Third, there is a discrepancy between the preferred way culture has been encoded by the management and the way it is decoded by employees Morley (1995: 300-301) notes. Fourth, if a discourse is a 'teleology' for Rose (1996: 133), an ideal to be reached, its application to an existing and implicitly strong culture may lead managers to work counter-culturally. They may see their actions undermined or prove to be damaging to consensus and employee commitment according to Alvesson (in Salaman, 1997: 264-265). And last, corporate culture tends to blur the distinction between private and public domains, a separation that a bureaucratic ethos establishes. Yet, since governing the subjectivity of employees is a top-down process, the very bureaucratic structures contemporary discourses aim at dismantling are actually maintained. For Du Gay (1996: 163-164) one can expect bureaucratic practices to be an essential part of a corporation's culture.

Therefore, we can only but agree with Meek (in Salaman, 1997: 264-265) that cultures cannot be 'created' by the senior management: personnel cannot be effectively subjectified since culture cannot be fixed. It follows that the variability of opinions and the very existence of power relationships hint towards a multicultural conception of organizations.

Overall, one can say that corporate culture cannot be readily constructed or imposed since it is the result of interactions between open selves which create different cultures and ways of life, because government and interpellation apply to both employers and employees. Organizations, we contend, should be viewed as pluricultural and fragmented. This is an environment where power governs the contingent and de-centered relationships among individuals or teams and their way of life and where there is a multitude of discourses each determining worker identities and roles which cannot be fixed since culture cannot be permanently established.

V

A FRAMEWORK UNDER THE OPEN SELF THEORY

Before proceeding into developing The Open Self Framework for analyzing employer-employee relations it is useful to sum up the main arguments so far.

The Open Self Theory as a paradigm has been used to show that traditional and contemporary discourses tend to fix identities thus create a binary opposition where power tends to be located in one of the poles, usually that of the employer. Indeed, under the traditional discourses employer power derives from a status quo: either owning capital or being appointed leader of an organization. This form of power is applied over employees on grounds that they lack the very resources employers have. Under the contemporary discourses, employer power stems from the ability to make up the subjectivities of employees through human resource technologies that empower, motivate, and reduce the likelihood of conflict. Employers therefore have the power to determine beforehand the nature, form and function of occupational identities and possess the capability of either fixing these identities or changing them according to their purpose.

The major weakness of both the traditional and contemporary discourses is that they fail to acknowledge the contingency of employer-employee relations wherein occupational identities are constructed through interaction in organizational contexts and not prior to or outside these relationships. Yet when individuals interact, and given that acts of communication are enmeshed in power relationships for Buck (1984: 4), the definition and determination of occupational identities is never fully achieved - it is deferred. Power then tends to render the linearity of the binary opposition employer-employee unstable, dislocated, because either of the poles is denied the possibility to constitute itself as a center for identity construction by its constitutive other pole.

Here one can see The Open Self Theory at play. One cannot fix, let alone define the boundary that keeps employers and employees apart. It follows that any resource used to fix the binary opposition employer-employee is ineffective as the binary opposition is pulled apart in relationships of power.

This does not imply that employers and employees do not have some way to describe occupational identities. They do so through the construction of narratives.

Ideal & actual narratives

According to Finnegan (1997: 77-81) narratives are a medium through which individuals formulate both their own identities and, by extension, the culture in which they are participants. Narratives - like language - are culturally developed resources that people can use to describe not only their storied lives, but also their feelings, impressions, opinions and thoughts. They are therefore unique and personal discursive constructs and, we would add, constitute the behavioral and ethical criteria for judging actions. They are in other words teleologies, narratives about *ideal identities*. To use Boella (1987: 52-53) employers typically construct narratives about ideal employees through job descriptions, job specifications and job designs, whereas employees on the other hand construct narratives about the ideal organization and working conditions already from job advertisements and interview processes.

Yet identities are also enacted. We have the actual construction of identities through the interaction with others. We can therefore speak of *actual identities*. Narratives that employers use for defining actual employees are the result of job evaluation, and performance appraisal to further use Boella (1987: 103-111, 132-139). Employees, on the other hand, as they do not have access to such 'technologies', construct the actual identities of employers through having experienced not only the working conditions as a whole - topics one hears over coffee breaks, but also the behavior of employers.

There is then a perceptual difference between the narratives referring to ideal and actual identities since they fail to match: such a correspondence is denied, pulled apart by the power relations in organizations. There is therefore a gap between the actual and ideal identities, that Mager and Pipe (in Pfeiffer, 1994: 124) refer to as being performance gap between the desired performance and the actual performance.

Deploying power resources in antagonism

The focus then of employer-employee relations *is the attempt to bridge the difference* between actual and ideal identities, or to ensure that the actual identity becomes as identical as possible to the ideal identity. For Mager and Pipe (in Pfeiffer, 1994: 126) the performance gap can be bridged through a balanced problem analysis that employers carry out.

In such an attempt however, the relationship employer-employee is hegemonized in that both the employer and employee undertake to recreate the binary opposition and to locate power in either of the poles.

To fulfil this purpose, employers and employees draw or extract from their environment inputs, resources that we will put under the label *"knowledge"*. This, following Collinson (1994: 49), can be technical, bureaucratic, procedural, social, regional, cultural, historical, legal, economic, normative, experiential, behavioral, strategic, and political. It is about one's self and the others. Knowledge then is returned in the environment as an output whose expression is power as it influences behavior.

Power can then have two faces, as either control or resistance. Put differently, resistance is a form of power exercised by employees to oppose practices of managerial control by employers Collinson (1994: 49), Bradshaw and Wicks (1997: 215) have noted, to the extent of actually constituting one another according to Collinson (1994: 25). Further, when resistance is exercised in either 'through distance' or 'through persistence' (Collinson, 1994: 24), it can be accommodated or outflanked by the employer according to Clegg (1994: 297) depending on whether employees are ignorant or fully aware of the control practices effected upon them.

This perspective, we argue, whereby power is divided by locating control in the pole of the employer and resistance in that of the employee, tends to reduce employer-employee relationships to a simple and linear cause-effect relation that calls for a determined causal direction. It is an echo of a concept of power according to which 'A exercises power over B when A affects B in a manner contrary to B's interests' (Lukes, 1974: 27). The term 'interests' may be the overt expression of wants and preferences (one-dimensional view), or include covert wants and preferences (two-dimensional view) or be the product of a system (three-dimensional view) (Lukes, 1974: 34-35). For Giddens (1995: 199) this conceptualization leads to a 'zero-sum situation' where power differentials inevitably entail conflicts of interest. It is based on a definition produced by Weber (in Giddens, 1995: 204) as 'the chance a man or of a number of men to realize their own will in a communal action even against the resistance of others who are participating in the action'. In other words, that incompatible interests arise from the fact that either pole, whether employer or employee, thinks has the capability to realize its own aims.

It seems to us however that in such a power perspective no time sequence can be clearly established. Let alone causality proper, as on the one hand it is difficult to explicitly locate resistance in any of the two poles, and on the other, it is difficult to differentiate between control and resistance since to resist is also an attempt to control. To take the argument further, power shifts and knowledge is relative. Therefore, any attempt to hegemonize the binary relationship employer-employee is impossible.

Bridging ideal and actual identities

We therefore need to re-conceptualize the way ideal and actual identities are brought to match under The Open Self Theory.

This, we suggest, takes place through the *antagonism exercised by both the employer and the employee* at the same time. Antagonism, as a single process, is directed from one individual to another. It is about the *unfolding and use of knowledge* to control, to outflank, to subvert, to accommodate, to escape, to devise strategies for the purpose of satisfying needs and interests. Antagonism therefore involves rational and non-rational elements to use Collinson (1994: 51), and since power can be located anywhere, it follows that it can be found anywhere. In consequence, the distinction between vertical and horizontal relationships is blurred. This allows us to consider employer and employees in a wider sense, even as leaders and followers characterized by an ability of mutual influence and not be restricted by the legal and narrow viewpoint whereby the former employs the latter.

Antagonism ensures that *no final bridging* between the actual and ideal identities are effected: no sooner the correspondence is complete than upset. This is because if at one moment we could find a match it would mean locating power and knowledge in one of the poles. In this situation since all the avenues and means to maintain the hegemony by both sides have been denied, one can reasonably expect the construction of new narratives of ideal identities as a result of a change in perspective, a discursive shift. It is a learning process because concrete experience is acted upon to question the assumptions on which knowledge is based.

We are therefore in the presence of a cycle of identity construction and destruction within discursive exchanges and battles.

VI

APPLYING THE OPEN SELF FRAMEWORK

The final aim of this inquiry is to describe employee-employer relationships by means of The Open Self Framework. Specifically, we seek to identify the ideal and actual conceptualizations of occupational identities, examine the way employers and employees use power resources to close the difference between ideal and actual identities, and therefore identify antagonism as the visible aspect of discursive exchange and battles.

To achieve these aims, three hypotheses will be tested to show the dislocatory nature of employer-employee relations. First, that there is a gap between ideal and actual identities. Second, that antagonism exists. And third, that antagonism is not biased in the sense that power has not been located in either of the poles.

The rationale behind the formulation of these hypotheses is that if antagonism is biased, it means that one can locate control in one of the poles and in consequence resistance in the other, implying that the relationship employer-employee is not dislocated. It could follow that The Open Self Theory has some weaknesses.

Testing the hypotheses

To therefore test the first hypothesis, a survey has been devised to examine typical descriptions of employers and employees as both idealized and actually experienced. There are two types of surveys, one destined to employer-respondents and one to employee-respondents. It is worth noting however, that this variation is instrumental, serving the purpose of the survey and is based on common-sense definitions and leader-follower distinctions. Nevertheless, since The Open Self Framework actually tends to blur and render unstable such oppositions, to satisfy its claims both surveys have similar if not identical statements or questions.

These are divided into three parts (see appendix). Part 1 of the survey is constructed with a 'Likert scale' (Sirkin, 1995: 40-42) which yields a score representing the ideal identity. Part 2 of the survey, which is directly based on part 1, also has a Likert scale and the calculated score represents the actual identities. The purpose for establishing an *ideal identity score* (IIS) and an *actual identity score* (AIS) is to be able to make comparisons between them in terms of the obtained means.

To understand how this takes place the matrix in table 1 can be of help.

employer on			
employee on	**ideal-ee**	**actual-ee**	*gap 2*
ideal-er	*gap 3*	*gap 4*	
actual-er	*gap 5*	*gap 6*	
gap 1			

table 1

Considering that both employers and employees use narratives of ideal and actual identities of one another, we are in the presence of six types of gaps. Within each category of employer and employee there is a difference between the ideal and actual identities as described by respectively the employee and employer, that is, gaps 1 and 2 (difference between IIS-EE and AIS-EE and a difference between IIS-ER and AIS-ER). This however does not enable us to compare actual and ideal identities across groups. We therefore need to recognise that in gap 3 there is a difference in terms of the ideal constructions between employers and employees (difference between IIS-ER and IIS-EE). Further, that in gap 6 we have the difference between their actual identities (difference between AIS-ER and AIS-EE scores). Finally, that in gaps 4 and 5 there is a difference between the means obtained under IIS and that under AIS (difference between IIS-ER and AIS-EE, and a difference between IIS-EE and AIS-ER).

If the differences in gaps 1, 2, 4, 5 is found to be significant, that is a percentage deviation that we set greater than 10%, one can say that there are grounds to believe that there is antagonism. Yet this needs to be proven, as it does not follow from having established the discrepancy between ideal and actual identities.

To therefore test the *second hypothesis*, part 3 of the survey is based on 'leader-member exchange theory' (Northouse, 1997: 109-112) to describe the relationship between employers and employees according to whether there is a strong reciprocal display of knowledge. If the survey is conclusive, that is, high scores, then there is antagonism and if not conclusive, that there is no antagonism.

These scores are derived from those used under the 'leader-member exchange theory' and especially in the 'MLX test' (Northouse, 1997: 125-126) with a difference though. The MLX is constructed with a 5-point Likert scale, over 7 questions and consists in summing up the scores according to the answer selected on the scale. This means that the maximum score is 35 (5x7), and the minimum 7 (1x7). This however tends to skew the higher scores. To remove this bias one can use a scale of 10 units where 7 is equated to 0 and 35 to 10. Considering that the mean 5 equates with 17.5, an increase in the scale, that is 6 equates with 21 and a decrease in the scale by one unit to 4 equates with 14. These are the moderate scores and in using the same logic, the high (21-35) and low (7-14) scores are derived.

Yet, showing that antagonism exists does not tell us whether it is biased, that is, that power is located in either of the poles. To test the *third hypothesis* then, the matrix in table 2 can help us identify the conditions for dislocation.

	employer	
employee	**display (D)**	**not display (d)**
display (D)	*unbiased antagonism (1)*	*biased: employee (2)*
not display (d)	*biased: employer (3)*	*no antagonism (4)*

table 2

Assuming that both employers and employees have the option to either display knowledge or not, we obtain four combinations. First, the combination N-n (cell 4), where neither the employer nor employee display and use knowledge as a power resource. No antagonism then occurs according to The Open Self Framework, since the condition for antagonism is knowledge display. Second, the combination D-d (cell 1) where both employer and employee display knowledge. It is a dislocated relationship where antagonism is unbiased. Third, the combination D-n (cell 3) where employers show a greater display of knowledge than employees and therefore antagonism is biased towards employers. Finally, the combination N-d (cell 2), were employees show a greater display of knowledge than employers: antagonism is biased towards employees.

Since to test this hypothesis we rely on the data collection method employed to test the second hypothesis, the scores reproduced in table 3 can be used to measure the third hypothesis.

	employer	
employee	**display (D)**	**not display (d)**
display (D)	*high: 21-35*	*moderate: 14-21*
not display (d)	*moderate: 14-21*	*low: 7-14*

table 3

This table shows that if the score is low (7-14), there is neither antagonism, nor biased display of knowledge as neither employers nor employees have found the means for displaying it. If the score is moderate (14-21) there is an attempt to display knowledge by taking advantage of the existing power resources and if the score is high (21-35), antagonism becomes unbiased since neither employer nor employee can impose knowledge on the other. It is, in other words, expected to show that combinations D-n and N-d do not occur but only the combination D-d.

This is consistent with the 'leader-member exchange theory' (Northouse, 1997:114) as it considers that the third phase of the exchange is reciprocal - but not the first and second stages as the theory assumes that exchange is one way at the beginning and is then ambiguous, before becoming reciprocal.

Research procedure

Given the above, the survey was piloted to establish whether the questions were clearly understandable and to determine whether the Likert scale should contain 3 points or more. Some of the questions on ideal narratives were eventually amended and found that a 3-point Likert scale was quicker to tackle given that the number of questions in the first two parts of the survey was considerable, and time in organizations can rarely be spared.

The survey was then sent to 40 companies in the UK but given the particular moment in the year, they were unable to conduct it, let alone that some claimed that the nature of the survey entered the domain of corporate secrecy.

Research context

Eventually, the survey took place in a company at Brighton and the respondents work in four departments. From the 32 responses, 27 questionnaires can be considered to be valid as the respondents answered to all the three parts of the survey.

Research results

To test the first hypothesis, that there is a gap between ideal and actual identities it was expected that in all gaps there would be a significant percentage discrepancy.

Table 4 shows the means obtained concerning IIS and AIS for employers (IIS-ER, AIS-ER) and employees (IIS-EE, AIS-EE).

IIS-ER	**IIS-EE**	**AIS-ER**	AIS-EE
79	*76*	*68*	*69.4*

table 4

A preliminary comment on these scores, especially IIS, is that they are not very high. Indeed, I was expecting that an ideal description would yield the maximum score of 90 or at least close to it. Yet given that they are by 14% lower, it means that there is a difference between what we have considered as ideal descriptions of employers and employees and what the respondents have.

As we have been concerned with a difference between ideal and actual narratives, the measured percentage deviations are presented in table 5.

% deviation	employer on		
employee on	**IIS-EE**	**AIS-EE**	*gap 2: 8.7*
IIS-ER	*gap 3: 3.9*	*gap 4: 12.1*	
AIS-ER	*gap 5: 10.5*	*gap 6: 2*	
gap 1: 13.9			

table 5

.

Within each group, we can see that the difference of 13.9% appears to be greater then 8.7 that is, when employees describe the ideal and actual identities of employers rather than the other way round.

Across groups, there is a relatively significant deviation if one compares the actual and ideal narratives of both employers and employees since for gap 4 the deviation is 12.1% and for gap 5 is 10.5%. It would appear however that the ideal and actual narratives are practically the same since in gap 3 the deviation is 3.9% and for gap 6 is 2. This means that whether employer or employee, they have similar ideal and actual identity constructions of one another. But given the previous finding, that within each group there is some degree of discrepancy we are faced with, there is, what we may call, an *occupational dilemma*.

That is, how is it that on the one hand employers and employees have similar ideal and actual constructions, while on the other, when they describe one another, there are differences between the ideal and actual narratives?

An explanation of similar IIS and AIS scores (gaps 3 & 6) could be that it is the actual experiencing of these roles that determines the ideal, since this occurs within the same organizational context. Now, if actual identities are the same does this mean that occupational roles are similar. Since organizational structures in hotels are highly hierarchical the answer is no which can then explain the difference in scores (gaps 1 & 2), yet does not solve the dilemma. There is therefore another variable at play, which made us check whether the variable gender had any influence on the results obtained. What we could therefore expect is to have a significant percentage of deviation between ideal and actual identities across genders but without making the distinction between employer and employee.

In this case, table 6 summarizes the results.

	male	female	% deviation
IIS	*74.3*	*82*	*9.3*
AIS	*69.1*	*70*	*1.3*
% deviation	*7*	*14.6*	

table 6

There is to some extent a significant difference in the ideal constructions of identities between male and female members of the organization this is at 9.3 %, but not in the way their occupational roles are actually experienced, that is, at 1.3%. Within female members it appears that the percentage of deviation is higher than within male members, that is, 14.6% against 7% which could be an indication that differences in identities are perceived to a greater extent by female members rather than their male counterparts.

In other words, as an attempt to explain the occupational dilemma, there are grounds to believe that the variable gender influences ideal and actual constructions of employer and employee occupational identities and roles but when this variable is isolated, the differences become smaller.

Given the above findings, one can say that there is to a certain degree a difference between ideal and actual identities which takes us to the testing of the second hypothesis, that is, assess whether there is antagonism or not.

The results from the survey are summarized in table 7.

	knowledge display
employer	*25.8*
employee	*24.4*
male	*25*
female	*25.6*

table 7

Given that all the scores are high, as they are greater than 21, we can say that there is antagonism, which is moreover not biased in neither direction. That is, that power has not located in either of the poles whether employer or employee thereby satisfying the third hypothesis. What is also noteworthy is that power is not biased along gender distinctions and this because of the way identities are actually experienced in the organizational context, that is, little difference in AIS scores.

To sum up, it was shown that there is a discrepancy between ideal and actual identities within each group of employers, and employees, male and female members of staff - regardless of their being employers or employees - in addition to a difference across groups. Research data also showed that across employers and employees the ideal and actual scores were close, indicating that in practice the way individuals construct their ideal and actual identities is ambiguous in the sense that they cannot make a clear distinction between them. This is not the case when one constructs the identity of others, and given the discrepancy between actual and ideal constructions, antagonism exists, a point that is confirmed by the survey. Further, that perceived antagonism is not biased in the sense that power has not been located in either of the poles, whether this be that of the employer, of the employee, whether male or female member of the organization.

We can therefore conclude that there are strong indications that the relationship employer-employee is dislocated and that The Open Self Theory offers some valuable understanding of the relationship employer-employee.

IV

CONCLUSIONS

This study started by constructing a conjecture, namely, The Open Self Theory as a tool to exhibit the internal inconsistencies of the traditional and contemporary discourses of identity construction. Then, to use the theory as a basis to construct a novel Framework to examine employer-employee relationships and in carrying out an investigation, to examine whether both Theory and Framework are consistent as well as able to offer some insights in complexity of such relations.

We started from the premise underpinning The Open Self Theory that it is the ongoing dislocated and antagonistic involvement of participants that defines the structure and nature of their relationships. In this way, it was shown that traditional discourses tend to construct a neat typology of structured and mutually exclusive occupational identities that are closed and fixed, whereas contemporary discourses tend to consider that individuals are willing to invariably accept and therefore cope with any change that is suggested. It was further shown that the main flaw of these discourses is that they consider employee-employer relations to either fit an already existing pattern, or to be competitive with a bias in both cases towards the employer.

Consequently, if we want to capture the reality one experiences in such relationships we need to view them as an antagonism exercised by both the employer and employee at the same time. The crucial element is the construction and display of knowledge as one needs knowledge to interact with others and this interaction brings about the construction of knowledge. This dialectic and to some extent cyclical process bridges the actual experience we have of relationships and their ideal construction but is nevertheless an unfinished process because of its antagonistic nature.

This was consistent with the way research was organized and the findings it yielded. Indeed, not only was the survey constructed along the principles laid under The Open Self Theory, but it was shown that first, there is a difference between ideal and actual narratives, second, that there is an antagonism which is due to this difference, and last, that this antagonism is dislocated.

But given the nature of the research method, one could argue that the findings are not sufficiently convincing for two reasons mainly. First, the quantitative method should have been supplemented by qualitative methods such as interviews with members of the hotel so as to have 'methodological pluralism' (Gill and Johnson, 1997: 133-137) and therefore have a confirmation of what the investigation showed. This was not possible for this study because the resources and conditions to go the Brighton could not be met. The second weakness of the method used is the fact that only one organization was used to conduct the survey, hence a low 'population validity' (Gill & Johnson, 1997: 128). This however was not due to the way the survey was methodologically organized but to the reluctance by other organizations to participate to the survey, which unavoidably led us to consider only one source of data. We would argue however that this does not render the findings unconvincing. Indeed, although the findings cannot be generalized from one organization to another, one cannot exclude that dislocated relationships exist since the one case studied showed that this is actually the case.

The Open Self Theory and related Framework actually show more than a dislocatory relationship. Antagonism shifts the emphasis away from managing this relationship transactionally, on a demand-supply basis whereupon total quality management is based, or transformationally, that is, influencing the subjectivities of employees. Indeed, the Theory was used to show the difficulties with such contemporary discourses. Rather, there is a strong emphasis on a *joint management of the relationship* by the employer and employee and that it is not the exclusive abode of employers. This means that to manage effectively the relationship employer-employee towards a given operational or strategic goal, one needs to manage antagonism where employers (employees) are aware that any decision, word or action affects the behavior of employees (employers), and therefore shapes their identity. Certainly employers even employees may choose not to manage antagonism but in this case one cannot avoid being faced with difficult relationships that undermine any efforts to harmonize organizations and industrial relations. That is, arrive at antagonism and dislocation as the ideal relationship.

These points actually show the future direction of this study. First, it needs to incorporate the management of antagonism in its conjecture. Second, to better explain why the occupational dilemma occurred. Third, to make more explicit the links between antagonism and the way exchange of knowledge occurs between employers and employees. Fourth, redesign the survey in a way that there is no explicit distinction between employer and employee for the respondents as this appears to precondition their answers. And last, to conduct the survey in different parts of the world to account for the cultural elements that may affect the employer-employee relationship.

In bringing about these improvements, we are confident that research into the antagonistic and dislocatory nature of employers and employees will set ground for a more careful examination of such relationships and, hopefully, a change in the way individuals consider work overall.

APPENDIX

QUESTIONNAIRE

Thank you in advance for taking some time to answer to this questionnaire.

POSITION_____________________DEPARTMENT___________________________

MALE OR FEMALE (please circle)

IF YOU ARE AN **EMPLOYEE** - MANAGED, FOLLOWER (entry levels) PLEASE ANSWER TO **PART 1**, AND THEN ONLY TO **PART 2**, AND **PART 3**.

IF YOU ARE AN **EMPLOYER** - MANAGER, LEADER (management and supervisory levels) PLEASE ANSWER TO **PART 1**, AND THEN ONLY TO **PART 4** AND **PART 5**.

PART 1 (TO BE ANSWERED BY BOTH EMPLOYERS AND EMPLOYEES)

INSTRUCTIONS: read each item carefully and think how far these descriptions correspond to EITHER the ideal manager (employer, leader) if you are an employee OR the ideal employee (follower) if you are an employer

1: disagree, 2: neutral, 3: agree

1. to be friendly	1 2 3
2. to inspire confidence	1 2 3
3. to act with certainty	1 2 3
4. to be committed	1 2 3
5. to be curious	1 2 3
6. to help other members of staff feel comfortable at work	1 2 3
7. to respond favourably to initiatives by other members of staff	1 2 3
8. to treat other members of staff fairly	1 2 3
9. to behave in a consistent manner towards other members of staff	1 2 3
10. to be a good listener and communicator	1 2 3
11. to show flexibility in doing the job	1 2 3
12. to see that work is of the highest quality	1 2 3
13. to plan work effectively	1 2 3
14. to know when the job is well done	1 2 3
15. to help other members of staff when in difficulty to do their job	1 2 3
16. to consult other members of staff before taking decisions	1 2 3
17. to invite other members of staff share decisions	1 2 3
18. to issue direct orders on how things should be done	1 2 3
19. to see that everybody follows the established rules	1 2 3
20. to take decisions before the other members of staff are consulted	1 2 3
21. to provide appealing images of the workplace	1 2 3
22. to help other members of staff find meaning in their work	1 2 3
23. to provide rewards when the job is done	1 2 3
24. to make other members of staff meet agreed-upon standards	1 2 3
25. to let members of staff do whatever they think is best	1 2 3
26. to avoid speaking to members of staff when angry at them	1 2 3
27. to see that conflicting parties can find a compromise	1 2 3
28. to acknowledge having done something wrong	1 2 3
29. to stay calm even when the job is not done as expected	1 2 3
30. to be open to suggestions for finding solutions to problems	1 2 3

Please turn over

PART 2 **(TO BE ANSWERED BY EMPLOYEES ONLY)**

INSTRUCTIONS: read each item carefully and think about how often your manager (employer, leader) actually engages in the described behaviour towards **you as employee** (follower)

1: never, 2: sometimes, 3: always

1. is friendly with you	1 2 3
2. inspires confidence	1 2 3
3. acts with certainty	1 2 3
4. is committed to all employees	1 2 3
5. is curious to get to know you better	1 2 3
6. helps you feel at home	1 2 3
7. shows interest in your initiatives	1 2 3
8. treats you fairly and seeks your well-being	1 2 3
9. behaves in a consistent manner towards you and other employees	1 2 3
10. listens to you and other employees and communicates well with them	1 2 3
11. is flexible about how you do your job	1 2 3
12. sees that your job is of the highest quality	1 2 3
13. plans your work effectively	1 2 3
14. knows when your job is well done	1 2 3
15. helps you when faced with problems	1 2 3
16. receives your opinion and that of other employees before deciding	1 2 3
17. you and other employees are invited to share decisions	1 2 3
18. issues direct orders on how things should be done	1 2 3
19. likes that everybody follows the established rules	1 2 3
20. decides without asking your opinion	1 2 3
21. makes the workplace appealing for you and other employees	1 2 3
22. helps employees find meaning in their work	1 2 3
23. pays bonuses when the job is done	1 2 3
24. sees that you and other employees meet agreed-upon standards	1 2 3
25. lets you do whatever you think is best for the job	1 2 3
26. avoids speaking to you when angry at you	1 2 3
27. tries to ease down conflict between you and other employees	1 2 3
28. has no difficulty telling you he or she is wrong	1 2 3
29. stays calm even when the job is not done as expected	1 2 3
30. is open to suggestions for finding solutions to problems	1 2 3

Please turn over.

PART 3 **(TO BE ANSWERED BY EMPLOYEES ONLY)**

INSTRUCTIONS: describe **your** relationship with your manager (employer, (leader)

1) do you usually know how satisfied your manager is with the work you do?

1: never	2: never	3: sometimes	4: often	5: always

2) how well does your manager understand your job problems and needs?

1: not a bit	2: little	3: fairly	4: quite a bit	5: a lot

3) how well does your manager recognise your potential?

1: not a bit	2: little	3: fairly	4: quite a bit	5: a lot

4) what are the chances that your manager would use power to help you solve problems in your work?

1: none	2: small	3: moderate	4: high	5: very high

5) what are the chances that your manager would accept to take the blame for something you have done wrong?

1: none	2: small	3: moderate	4: high	5: very high

6) I have enough confidence in my manager that I would defend his or her decisions

1: strongly disagree	2: disagree	3: neutral	4: agree	5: strongly agree

7) how would you characterise your working relationships with your manager?

1: extremely ineffective	2: worse than average	3: average	4: better than average	5: extremely effective

THANK YOU FOR YOUR TIME

PART 4 **(TO BE ANSWERED BY EMPLOYERS ONLY)**

INSTRUCTIONS: read each item carefully and think about how often one of your employees (followers) actually engages in the described behaviour towards **you as manager** (employer, leader)

1: never, 2: sometimes, 3: always

1. is sociable with you	1 2 3
2. inspires trust	1 2 3
3. carries out tasks with certainty	1 2 3
4. is committed to the organisation	1 2 3
5. is curious and eager to learn	1 2 3
6. assists you to create a comfortable working environment	1 2 3
7. responds favourably to your ideas and initiatives	1 2 3
8. treats you and other managers fairly and is concern for their well being	1 2 3
9. behaves in a consistent manner towards you and other managers	1 2 3
10. listens to you and other managers and communicates well with them	1 2 3
11. shows flexibility in doing the job	1 2 3
12. sees that work is of the highest quality	1 2 3
13. plans work effectively	1 2 3
14. knows when the job is well done	1 2 3
15. helps you solve problems	1 2 3
16. consults you before deciding to deal with a problem	1 2 3
17. is interested in sharing decisions	1 2 3
18. feels comfortable with your orders	1 2 3
19. sees that you follow the established rules	1 2 3
20. decides to solve problems without consulting you or other managers	1 2 3
21. finds the images of the workplace you provide appealing	1 2 3
22. finds meaning in work	1 2 3
23. likes being rewarded when the job is done	1 2 3
24. sees that you meet agreed-upon standards	1 2 3
25. lets you do whatever you think is best	1 2 3
26. avoids communication when relationships are tense	1 2 3
27. tries to find a compromise when in conflict with you	1 2 3
28. has no difficulty telling you that he or she is wrong	1 2 3
29. stays calm when you say that the job was unsatisfactory	1 2 3
30. is open to your suggestions for solving problems	1 2 3

Please turn over

PART 5 **(TO BE ANSWERED BY EMPLOYERS ONLY)**

INSTRUCTIONS: describe **your** relationship with one of your employees (followers)				
1) do you usually know how satisfied your employee is with the work you do?				
1: never	2: never	3: sometimes	4: often	5: always
2) how well does your employee understand your job problems and needs?				
1: not a bit	2: little	3: fairly	4: quite a bit	5: a lot
3) how well does your employee recognise your potential?				
1: not a bit	2: little	3: fairly	4: quite a bit	5: a lot
4) what are the chances that your employee would use power to help you solve problems in your work?				
1: none	2: small	3: moderate	4: high	5: very high
5) what are the chances that your employee would accept to take the blame for something you have done wrong?				
1: none	2: small	3: moderate	4: high	5: very high
6) I have enough confidence in my employee that I would defend his or her decisions.				
1: strongly disagree	2: disagree	3: neutral	4: agree	5: strongly agree
7) how would you characterise your working relationships with your employee?				
1: extremely ineffective	2: worse than average	3: average	4: better than average	5: extremely effective

THANK YOU FOR YOUR TIME

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