Article

Power and Politics in Different Change Discourses

Guido Maes * and Geert Van Hootegem

Research Institute for Work and Society, KU Leuven, Hiva, 3000 Leuven, Belgium;
geert.vanhootegem@kuleuven.be
* Correspondence: g.maes@kuleuven.be

Abstract: Background: The purpose of this article is to examine how different views on power and politics manifest in organizational change, and how they can be integrated into a single model. Methods: Our research was based on an extensive literature review about power and politics and their relationship with organizational change. We used the systems model of organizational change developed by Maes and Van Hootegem to map the different views on power and politics in organizational change. This systems model integrated different change discourses and allowed us to post the various aspects of power and politics in organizational change. Results: Using the systems model as a reference to look at power and politics from different angles led to a better understanding of the role they play in organizational change so that actors can enter the political arena of change better prepared and play the game of change at a tactically higher level. Conclusions: The analysis contributes to the study of power and politics in three respects. First, using the metamodel of organizational change to map the different views on power and politics offers a more detailed and varied understanding of the use of power and politics in organizational change. Second, looking at power and politics from different discourses can accommodate greater complexity and nuance. Third, it shows that change projects rarely run smoothly but are constantly traversed by all kinds of obstacles and barriers that require specific political astuteness. Members of an organization, who have been introduced to political skills, will be better able to navigate the pitfalls of organizational change and its rhetoric and thus be better agents of change or better able to resist unreasonable change.

Keywords: power; politics; change management; discourse; system model

1. Introduction

In recent years, it has become increasingly clear that politics plays an important role in the success or failure of organizational change (Buchanan and Badham 2020; Senior et al. 2020). On the other hand, Kapoutsis and Thanos (2018) stated that research on organizational politics remains fragmented across different management disciplines and that there is a need to integrate the different streams of the literature. In this article we raise the question of how power and politics manifest during organizational change and integrate the different visions on power and politics, as well as on organizational change, into a single model. We found that the systems model of organizational change developed by Maes and Van Hootegem (2011, 2019) already provides a framework to look at organizational change from different angles. This systems model of organizational change is a metamodel that integrates different discourses on change and, as such, can provide a framework to position the most important aspects of the use of power and politics regarding organizational change.

2. Research Methodology—Literature Review

For this article, we conducted a literature review using a method developed by Fink (2005). A search was conducted for articles and books that link power and/or politics to organizational change. Several searches were performed on different databases for the selection of the relevant literature. Initially, the Social Sciences Citation Index (SSCI)

was polled. In addition, databases such as Social Abstracts, EBSCO, and Proquest, as well as several databases from publishers such as Emerald, JSTOR, Sage, ScienceDirect, Spingerlink, and Wiley, were also used. For books, the Librisource Plus (BE) and the Library of Congress (USA) were used. All the databases were examined for the period 1970 to the present.

Given the vastness of the domain, we concentrated on articles on organizational power and politics and less on articles from political science. We also limited our research to power and politics that can be generalized at the organizational level and not at the team level or between individuals. Finally, only power and politics within the organization were considered and not of the organization in relation to its environment. The initial bibliographical study showed that the connection between change and power and politics is not so evident, and that the subject is less developed than one might expect at first sight. Therefore, in this article, we indicate where there is still room for further research.

We first explain how we understand the concepts of power and politics and next use the systems model of organizational change to examine how different discourses view the role of power and politics in change.

3. Concepts of Power and Politics

From definitions found in the literature, power and politics emerge as complex and multidimensional concepts. One way to deal with this complexity is to distinguish between episodic and systemic forms of power and politics (Buchanan and Badham 2008; Clegg 1989; Daft and Weick 1984; Fleming and Spicer 2014; Lawrence and Buchanan 2017; Lawrence et al. 2001, 2012; Schirmer and Geithner 2018). Episodic power and politics assume episodes in which an actor performs power to make a certain decision turn out in their favor. Systemic power and politics, on the other hand, is embedded in the social systems of the organization. Both forms of power and politics can further be divided into two dimensions.

Episodic power includes control of resources and control over processes (Goldberg et al. 1983; Hardy and Clegg 1996). Power of resources is used by deploying scarce resources to influence decisions. The central question is how actors can influence decisions in their favor. Power is the ability to make others do something, even against their will. This form of power becomes visible when decisions must be made in an open conflict. There are many resources available that can exercise this kind of power. Anything people want or need can be considered a resource (Pfeffer 2010) (for an overview of possible resources, see Landells and Albrecht 2016). As such, politics is the use of resources (including power itself) to influence others to favor one's own objectives.

Power over processes is in fact about nondecisions. The most powerful groups deter others from the decision-making process using procedures and routines. This means not only that certain groups are kept away from the decision making in case of conflict, but also that power is used to prevent a conflict from arising. This form of power lies in the decision-making processes of organizations and consists of a series of procedures and political routines that can be used by the dominant coalition. By using these processes, the dominant coalition can ensure that certain persons or groups cannot, or can only partly, participate in the decision-making process.

Politics then stores the specific maneuvers that are used to keep others away from decision-making processes.

Systemic power in turn can be subdivided into the power of meaning and power of the system (Hardy and Leiba-O'Sullivan 1998). Power of meaning is used to influence the vision, knowledge, and preferences of people so that they accept the status quo because they cannot imagine an alternative. In that sense, power is not limited to conflict, but is also used to ensure political stability. Politics here is the use of power to perpetuate the status quo (Hardy and Leiba-O'Sullivan 1998).

Lastly, power of the system is anchored in the organizational system itself. It lies hidden in the unconscious acceptance of values, traditions, culture, and structure of the organization and holds every member of the organization in its web. In this dimension,

all the actors are "victims" of the system. Regardless of the position they occupy in the political arena, everyone experiences the power of the system (Buchanan and Badham 2020; Foucault 1977). According to some, this form of power cannot be used politically; though others believe that a certain degree of influence is possible (Hardy et al. 2000).

4. Using the Metamodel of Organizational Change to Examine the Role of Power and Politics in Change

The concepts of power and politics as defined above allow for a political interpretation of the metamodel for organizational change as developed by Maes and Van Hootegem (2019) (see Figure 1).
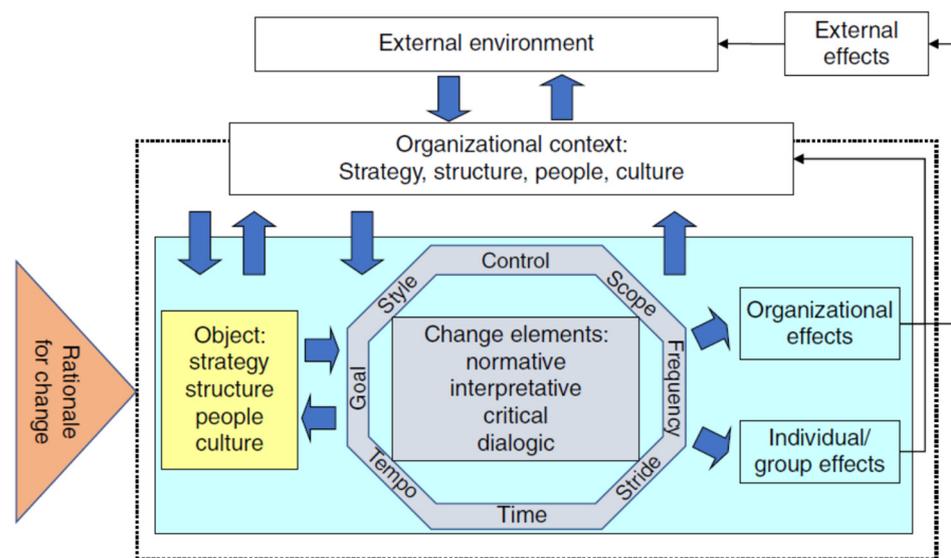

Figure 1. The generic systems model of organizational change (Maes and Van Hootegem 2019).

The model reads as follows: the rationale for change may be an external factor, but the change system also has its own dynamic that can generate unexpected or unwanted effects.

The input to the change system is one or more objects from the organizational context. Those objects are grouped into four aspect systems, namely, strategy, structure, culture, and behavior. These objects undergo certain changes due to the transformation processes of the system. The elements of the change processes vary according to the discourse. Discourses are divided into normative, interpretive, critical, and dialogical discourses (Alvesson and Deetz 2006; Deetz 1996), and each discourse approaches change in a different way, which results in different process elements (see Table 1).

Table 1. Process elements in the different discourses.

Discourse	Process Elements
Normative	Exploration, planning, action, integration
Interpretive	Scanning, interpretation, learning, incorporation
Critical	Having a voice, critical reflection and self-criticism, emancipation, democratic decision making
Dialogic	Discursive activity, performativity, connectivity

The output is a modified object which generates certain individual or group effects, organizational effects, or external effects. The organizational and socioeconomic environment affects the system, which in turn has an impact on the environment (Maes and Van Hootegem 2019).

The system elements interact with each other and create a pattern which surpasses the properties of the parts. These properties can be described in terms of control, scope, frequency, pace, duration, pace, purpose, and method of change (Maes and Van Hootegem 2011).

This system model makes it possible to largely absorb the complexity of change and yet to maintain a certain parsimony. The framework allows for a dialogue between change management and organizational politics.

Thus, let us look at how the different discourses each provide specific insight into the role that power and politics play in organizational change.

5. Political Interpretation of Organizational Change from the Normative Discourse

According to the systems model of organizational change, the system elements of a normative change system consist of the four generic steps of a linear change process: (1) exploration, (2) planning, (3) action, and (4) integration (see Table 1). For each of these steps, we examine the role of power and politics. To do so, we mostly refer to the pluralist perspective within the normative discourse because, in the unitary view of the normative discourse, the role of power and politics is largely ignored.

According to the pluralist perspective, organizations are loosely coupled systems in which coalitions are formed to achieve things. In this context, there can be no question of a rational linear process; however, by definition, change will take the form of a dynamic iterative process where the outcome is determined by transactions based on power and politics (Bolman and Deal 1991; Narayanan and Fahey 1982). Power and politics influence every stage in the decision-making and change process (Fahey 1981).

5.1. Exploration

According to the pluralist discourse, the exploration phase cannot be considered a rational analysis of the environment. Several options and points of view are presented by different stakeholders. These options bathe in confusion and conflict because of a lack of information, uncertainty regarding the results, or incompatibility with existing agreements (Fahey 1981). The first political activities are therefore already visible in the exploration phase. Indeed, it is crucial that the stakeholders are represented early in the process to push their analysis of the facts (politics of meaning). People or departments are looking for issues that correspond with their own interests and the power to tackle the issue (Nadler 1981; Pettigrew 1977).

Furthermore, the decision to start a change is not taken in a purely rational manner. This decision depends more on the commitment of top management, the vision of the facts, the formation of coalitions, and the power of the change agent, especially their position and expert power (Lines 2007). Walter et al. (2008) advised that executives should put less emphasis on a systematic scanning of issues and intensive long-range planning and instead focus on the political feasibility and consequence of each decision.

A first aspect for estimating the feasibility of a decision is knowing the position of the various actors in the central network of the organization. The central network controls the flow of information such that knowing who has access to this flow of information provides important information about the level of power of the various stakeholders. This information is politically used (politics of resources) to identify the coalitions in the organization and to reveal the weaknesses of certain political groups (Brass and Krackhardt 2012; Krackhardt 1990). Coalitions are the basic building block of any political structure and a powerful resource (Bacharach and Lawler 1998; Cobb 1991; Gilley 2006). To assess these positions of power, a political analysis of stakeholders (such as shareholders, employees, unions, competitors, suppliers, and government agencies) and their potential impact on the change is often used (Pinto 1996). Such an analysis makes it possible to estimate which environmental factors will be perceived by powerful individuals or groups as threats and opportunities.

Another aspect is to release the necessary funds (power of resources). Management should make available adequate time and resources to give the change a chance of success. As Salancik and Pfeffer (1974) indicated in their resource dependence model, organizational units will use their power to influence the decision about the availability of resources to their advantage. When a change threatens the normal distribution of resources and could destabilize the balance of power, units that feel disadvantaged will resist. A study by Guth and Macmillan (1986) showed that *"managers who believe that their self-interest is being compromised can not only redirect a strategy, delay its implementation, or reduce the quality of its implementation, but can also even totally sabotage the strategy"* (Guth and Macmillan 1986, p. 313).

5.2. Planning

The planning phase is also permeated by politics. The investigation of the various alternatives, the choice of a specific alternative, and the elaboration of planning are dominated by political tactics. First, scarce resources are used to clarify the objectives for the change and to study the various alternatives, as the proposed alternatives can cause major shifts in the current power base and the interdependencies between departments (power of resources). In addition, the personal interests of those involved in the fields of career, salary, status, and visibility can come under pressure. Often, personal interests lie at the basis of certain alternatives. This creates a context in which, at different levels of the organization with the necessary detours and delays, alternative proposals arise. Lindblom (1959), in his much-quoted article, called this *"the science of muddling through"* in which policies come about through an incremental and political process rather than by rational planning. Policymakers are limited in their rational choices and must take incremental steps between political maneuvers to achieve a policy measure (Braybrooke and Lindblom 1970; Cyert and March 1963; Lindblom 1959, 1979). Several authors have analyzed the political maneuvers used in this situation, mainly politics of resources, such as the use of power (Krishnan and Park 2003), coalition formation (Child and Tsai 2005), the use of external consultants (Pfeffer 1992), negotiation and bargaining (Papadakis 1998), manipulation and control of critical information (Pettigrew 1973), politics of processes such as tactics of timing (Hickson et al. 1986), and agenda control (Eisenhardt and Zbaracki 1992; Elbanna 2006). The main political motivation is to mobilize others around a particular alternative. Mobilization involves the use of formal (procedures, planning cycles, meetings of committees) and informal (tête-à-têtes, receptions, telephone, e-mail) forums to channel information to potential allies. These channels serve as a sounding board for possible alternatives and as a medium to find out the position and preferences of other coalitions. On the basis of this information, informal alliances and coalitions can be formed (Narayanan and Fahey 1982).

Which alternative will prevail is seldom a rational choice. Alternatives are constantly appreciated from the moment the first alternative is created. Political influence is exerted to put some alternatives in the foreground and develop them better than others. Moreover, the objectives and criteria to evaluate the alternatives are not fixed. Often, these objectives will evolve over time and will be adjusted to support a specific alternative (Narayanan and Fahey 1982).

5.3. Action

In the pluralist vision, formulating a change strategy and implementing it are much less clearly separated and sequential steps. The context in which the change is developing is conflictual, with many disagreements, quasi solutions, ambiguity, and incomplete information. According to Nadler and Nadler (1998), the implementation phase is characterized by instability, uncertainty, and stress for both change agents and everyone involved. The change leads to a flurry of political activity because those in power wish to maintain control and those with less power see opportunities to strengthen their position. These power problems have to be addressed at the beginning of the implementation, by making sure that there is sufficient support for the change that resistance to change can be controlled,

and that they remain master of the evaluation criteria so that the change can be presented as successful.

To assure support, change agents must continue to influence those in power during the implementation process so that they desire and accept the change. By promoting active participation, change agents will try to channel conflicts. For example, they may bring the most important leaders together in a steering committee; however, in that case, they must be able to convince them that they have a personal interest to run that risk (Bateman 1980; Guth and Macmillan 1986). It is also important that they are aware of ongoing political activities so that they can tune their political strategy on this basis. Therefore, different power sources can be used such as argumentation, control over scarce resources, occupying a central position, or control over the proceedings (Bradshaw and Boonstra 2004).

As the implementation progresses, the measures will become more concrete, and more resistance is to be expected. In the pluralist vision, there is a growing awareness that resistance to change is more than an aversion to imposed changes; it is also the manifestation of a complex political struggle between different interest groups (Burnes 2015; Fleming and Spicer 2014). Tichy (1983) stated that resistance to change in the political arena represents conflict and difference between coalitions over the allocation of resources and power. At an organizational level he sees three forms of resistance. Resistance due to threats to the powerful coalitions; resistance can arise from powerful coalitions if they feel threatened because the change alters power relations in the organization. Resistance due to resources limitations; when the change results in a reduction in available resources, political bargaining over who gets what share of the pie is necessary. If no agreement is achieved, this can result in impasse and overall resistance. Resistance due to sunk costs; writing off sunk costs can indicate that wrong investments have been made. Managers may resist in an effort to save face and prove their strategy was the right one.

Rather than sophisticated change techniques, political negotiations and the mobilization of influential players are needed to overcome this resistance (Dawson 1994, 2003).

The implementation activities should be monitored and evaluated to ensure that the necessary adjustments of the change are made and that lessons are learned for the future. In practice, managers oppose evaluations because they are very politically colored. Evaluation of results, especially when the results are less than admirable, has implications for visibility, as well as the survival and retention of individuals and departments. All kinds of contextual factors make the success or failure of the change dependent on both controllable and uncontrollable factors; however, during evaluation, there is a tendency to attribute the cause of failure to the individuals or units involved (Fahey and Narayanan 1983).

When evaluation does take place, there is a real danger that the data are manipulated to serve personal interests (White and Wooten 1983). Assessors are in a dominant position which they can use to attribute or not the cause of failure to certain contextual factors depending on whether they favor the individual or unit assessed (Fahey and Narayanan 1983). In complex changes, it is nearly impossible to evaluate whether the right decisions were taken and whether these decisions were made correctly.

One last word on restructuring. As stated above, the inputs to the change system can be strategy, structure, culture, and behavior. Of these four, structure (formal or informal) can be deliberately used as a political implementation strategy. Structure is a critical medium for control in organizations. Through prescribed production and reporting structures, management compels certain ways of working and restricts other forms of cooperation (politics of processes) (Valley and Thompson 1998). Restructuring—carrying out major changes in the formal ordering (the structure, processes, and systems) of an organization— is very popular within management. It allows the CEO and their team to clearly indicate what kind of organization they want. Restructuring underscores and supports the new strategy and reinforces concepts of change in real and observable ways (Nadler and Nadler 1998). To maintain control over scarce resources, certain structural changes are often made

which, in reality, are nothing more than "ceremonial" actions with symbolic value. Certain departments are created or modified without being really involved in the decision making.

Therefore, the structure that comes forward is the result of not only changes in the environment, but also the personalities and power needs of the dominant stakeholders (Senior et al. 2020).

5.4. Integration

Finally, during the integration phase, mostly politics of processes are used to institutionalize or re-institutionalize control over the organization. The powerful coalition reconfirms its power or sees it strengthened. Control and communication mechanisms are refreshed or strengthened, which allows filtering information that is not consistent with the change out of the communication flow (Corner et al. 1994). Managers and employees who resist the change are replaced by individuals who agree with the (new) direction indicated by the top management (Feldman 1981).

Pfeffer (1981) argued that institutionalization can have the perverse effect that it favors those looking for more control. Changes often lead to more centralization and control, thus strengthening the dominance of the party in power. If integration by institutionalization is performed successfully, it may complicate further changes. The dominant coalition, which sees its control position confirmed, will close off the organization even more from its environment and try to avoid further changes that could threaten its position (Pfeffer 1981; Pitt 2005).

The pluralist vision on organizational change is quite different from the unitary view of the normative discourse. Power and politics intersect the rational sequence of the change, thereby losing its evidence and straightforwardness. From a pluralist point of view, the roadmap for change is not much more than a means to satisfy "*the need for the appearance of rationality*" (Pfeffer 1994, p. 249).

It is clear that there are other forces present and other skills needed to manage change than comes forth in the unitary vision of the normative discourse. The pluralist vision has the merit of reducing the often heroic and utopian expectations created by rational processes of change to realistic proportions. This vision, however, is limited to the use of power and politics of resources and processes to improve the success rate of change. As such, the pluralist vision ignores the underlying power structures (Minett 1992). To learn more about how systemic power and politics influence change, it is necessary to make a cross over to the other discourses. The interpretive discourse provides more insight into the way in which meanings are manipulated during organizational changes.

6. Political Interpretation of Organizational Change from the Interpretive Discourse

The interpretive discourse assumes that a change evolves in sequential operations, which also affect the cognition and the interpretations of the change process. As change unfolds, other orientations are required. Each phase in the change process is characterized by a different construed reality, a series of interpretive activities, and a dominant frame of reference (Isabella 1990). The interpretive process of change can be described as a learning process that starts with (1) a scanning phase, followed by (2) an interpretation phase, and (3) a learning phase. Finally, during (4) the incorporation phase, what is learned is incorporated in the organization through certain forms of institutionalization (see Table 1).

We now discuss how power and politics manifest during this learning process.

6.1. Scanning Phase

In the scanning phase, the change has not yet been officially announced, but certain signals and movements indicate that something is afoot. From an interpretive point of view, changes are usually initiated when powerful groups in the organization conclude that the established mental models are no longer adequate to cope with major changes in the environment (Bartunek and Ringuest 1989; Kilmann and Covin 1988). Questioning the established mental models creates substantial uncertainty; thus, people start to collect bits

of information that can reassure them (Gioia and Chittipeddi 1991; Gioia et al. 1994; Isabella 1990; Kraft et al. 2018). They try to make sense by arranging this fragmentary information into a frame of reference in development (Daft et al. 1988). Information should be available and noticed before it can be processed and infused with meaning (Corner et al. 1994).

If there is no or insufficient information available from an official source or if this source is not trusted, people will resort to informal communication channels (Difonzo and Bordia 1998): gossip (about people) and rumors (about upcoming events) then spread over the organization. Gossip and rumors are seen as important political activities in this phase. Gossip and rumors often have a negative connotation but there are also neutral views. Noon and Delbridge (1993) defined gossip as "*the process of informally communicating value-laden information about members of a social setting*" (Noon and Delbridge 1993, p. 25). As such, whoever spreads gossip and rumors with information value increases their status in relation to their colleagues. Gossip and rumors also promote coalition building because it creates a more intimate relationship among employees (DuBrin 1990). In the absence of clear information, no rational decisions can be taken about the environment; hence, extensive discussion and coalition building are required to agree on a single interpretation and course of action (Daft and Weick 1984).

6.2. Interpretation Phase

After the formal decision for a change is taken, the sensemaking process shifts from scanning to interpretation. This is the start of the de-freezing process in preparation of the change. Those involved are trying to make sense of this change and to estimate what effect the change will have on their personal situation.

This is a phase of intense political activity. Kapoutsis (2016) even saw the management of meaning as the essence of organizational politics. He defined political behavior as "*intentional acts from a broad repertoire that may include influence tactics, self-presentation, impression management, voice, and helping behavior to manage (create, maintain, modify, or abandon) the shared meanings of organizational situations so as to produce desired outcomes that would otherwise be unfeasible*" (Kapoutsis 2016, p. 41). This is in line with Pettigrew (1985b) who saw the management of meaning as a political process of symbol construction and use of values designed both to create legitimacy for one's own actions and to "delegitimize" the demands of one's opponents. For example, the change agent can build up a power base from structures, values, and symbols to manipulate reality in such a way that the change is perceived as legitimate, desirable, and inevitable (Frost and Egri 1991). In this case, deeper control processes are used in line with the third dimension of power—power of meaning. Power is used not only to beat the competition in a process of change (first dimension), but also to prevent that competition from occurring (second dimension). In both cases, the manipulation of symbols, language, ideology, and beliefs is used to influence decisive choices (third dimension). In this sense, culture and even strategy and structure are not neutral functional constructions, but constructions that serve the interests of the dominant group. These aspects of the organizational context can be mobilized by powerful groups to legitimize existing definitions of strategic issues (to set new priorities) and to delegitimize threatening definitions (Pettigrew 1985a). However, this will not go without a fight. Between different stakeholders, conflicts arise about the need for change and about the most appropriate interpretive schemes. What interpretive scheme will eventually prevail depends on the result of this disagreement between the stakeholders (Bartunek and Ringuest 1989; Child and Smith 1987; Stensaker et al. 2008).

6.3. Learning Phase

In the learning phase, action is taken on the basis of interpretations in the interpretation phase. Through experimentation and testing, cognitive theories are transferred into action, and learning starts. This learning creates new information that requires interpretation, giving rise to new standards and behavior. Often, a feeling of confusion occurs as the existing interpretations no longer work and new interpretations have not yet been accepted.

In this phase, reality is reconstructed. Managers actively reconstruct their environment, deciding what to retain and what to alter. The ambiguous situation that arises allows certain groups to promote their mental framework. For example, leaders are inclined to accept paradigms that attribute organizational successes to their own actions and organizational failures to the actions of others or to external forces, whereas opposition groups are likely to have the converse principle for attributing causality. Objectives and results are often reinterpreted in such a way that there is success, even when the shortfall seems quite large. The result is a multitude of individual realities and divergent interpretations of the change; however, over time, a certain culmination will occur, as the people involved will gear their visions towards being more and more alike (Isabella 1990; Levitt and March 1988).

There is little research on the political and power-related aspects of learning in organizations (Akella 2003; Blackler and McDonald 2000; Coopey 1995, 2000; Flood and Romm 2018). Antonacopoulou (2006), in an investigation about the relationship between individual and organizational learning, concluded that the hegemony of the organization determines which learning is important and, thus, makes people dependent on teaching methods that are acceptable within the organizational culture. She wondered whether learning is not a way of control. While learning programs are promoted in the organization, the organizational culture seems to discourage organizational learning by offering only those programs that affirm the status quo rather than questioning it.

Lawrence et al. (2005) argued that both episodic power and systemic power play an essential role in how politics affects the learning organization. In their view, episodic power is manifested by influence and force, while systemic power is manifested by domination and discipline. Episodic power is an important element in the interpretation and integration processes of the learning cycle. During the interpretation phase, the change agents must have sufficient influence to change the ideas, feelings, and behaviors of others. Episodic power in the form of force is best suited to achieve integration at a group level. The focus of integrating is the accomplishment of coherent, collective action. Therefore, the options available to organizational members are restricted to those necessary for the success of the change. Force can be exercised to limit the number of alternatives, to prevent some issues from appearing in formal and informal agendas, and to eliminate opponents of the change. While influence is exerted mainly through informal networks, authority that comes from formal positions in the organization is necessary to exercise force. Therefore, the top management is seen as the driving force that determines the need for and the nature of the strategic changes (Gioia et al. 1994).

Systemic forms of power are important during the intuition phase and, later, in the incorporation of what is learned. Systemic power in the form of discipline supports and shapes the intuitions of organizational members by providing them with an ongoing stream of experience and affecting the ways in which they perceive that experience by shaping their identities. Members of an organization who have expertise in a particular subject explore and understand new business intuitively. Discipline supports the development of expertise by setting up systems and structures, such as socialization, reward systems, training, and teamwork, which allow for the gaining of in-depth experience and specialization. In addition, these systems will also have an influence on the way these experiences influence the identity of those involved as experts (Lawrence et al. 2005).

The learning phase of the interpretive change process is completed with an evaluation of the changes. The learning process is evaluated, and the consequences of the newly constructed reality are assessed. The main action here is to identify winners and losers: who has benefited from the change and who has been lost in the process (Isabella 1990). The evaluation will put the change in perspective, and standard visions of change will emerge, which will be used in the future as frames of reference in similar events.

6.4. Incorporation Phase

Finally, what was learned must be incorporated in the organization. As mentioned above, incorporation is a matter of institutionalization. Institutionalization is the process

that ensures that what is learned is embedded in routines (Berends and Lammers 2010). Tasks are defined, actions are specified, and mechanisms are installed to ensure that these actions are implemented. The best way to achieve this is the use of systemic power in the form of dominance. Lawrence et al. (2001) used the term dominance in a strict sense, namely, "*to describe forms of power that support institutionalization processes through systems or organized, routine practice, which do not require agency or choice on the part of those targeted*" (Lawrence et al. 2001, p. 637). Dominance can be found in several systems, including in certain technologies, such as the physical layout of a factory, or information systems imposing a particular way of working on the users (Santos and Steil 2015). By limiting the number of available actions, dominance will minimize many conflicts and resistance. What was learned is incorporated by individuals and groups in the strategy, structure, and culture of the organization. Incorporation creates a context for interaction so that events and experiences can be interpreted and placed (Crossan et al. 1999). Lawrence et al. (2005) pointed out that this incorporation will not take place without a struggle. Not every attempt at incorporation is equally successful because organizational members often resist changes to established practices. Therefore, Limba et al. (2019) believed that using systems of domination is not enough to achieve institutionalization of learning, especially when it is imposed from the top. As the use of domination is opposed to choice, it will result in a fast pace of institutionalization, but the change it effects will be relatively unstable. Therefore, use of domination should be accompanied by modes of episodic power so that actors voluntarily adopt the new practices being introduced.

Those in power play a fundamental role in the institutionalization of learning but they have to balance their power. Dover and Lawrence (2012) stated that incorporation may also fail because the use of force is either under- or overdeveloped. When power is overdeveloped, positions of authority can impose new practices on members, in a way that the possibility of critical engagement is removed. The result is alienation that is likely to lead to withdrawal instead of incorporation. In contrast, when force is underdeveloped, managers lack sufficient legitimacy or tools of coercion to establish and enforce compliance with new practices. This can result in incomplete or inconsistent incorporation.

The interpretive discourse provides deeper insight into the role of the power of meaning during a change. It turns out that, to make substantial changes, influencing decisions is not enough. Change agents must ensure that the actors involved understand the meaning of the changes as intended by management. By using symbols, the interpretive schemes of those involved can be changed so that lasting change occurs in the minds of the people.

The interpretive discourse looks at the deeper subjective structures of the organization. However, it does not question the prerogative of management. Authority is still a given. To better understand how the underlying power structures that are embedded in society determine the balance of power in the organization and influence organizational changes, critical discourse can provide more insight.

7. Political Interpretation of Organizational Change from the Critical Discourse

According to the system model for organizational change, the system elements of critical discourse include (1) having a voice, (2) critical reflection, (3) emancipation, and (4) democratic decision making (see Table 1). These elements are rather loosely coupled and form a dynamic process of growing awareness and emancipation. Below, we describe in more detail how power and politics influence this process.

7.1. Having a Voice

From the scarce literature that provides concrete indications about the practical application of critical theory puts forth that a requirement to bring about radical changes is to ensure that those who normally have no opportunity to express themselves have a voice (Bradshaw-Camball 1990; Darwin et al. 2002). Every subject must have the opportunity to participate in the public debate where conflicts are discussed not on the basis of power

relations, but on the basis of the strength of the argument (Darwin et al. 2002). The aim is to learn to see how some obvious visions of reality are socially constructed within a dominant culture, and to give people the opportunity to formulate their own definition of reality. Given the power relations and inequalities in the organization, this is not evident. Changes are decided over the heads of those involved, who are, thus, reduced to objects of change. Opposing these changes is seen as irrational resistance to changes that were developed by specialists (Alvesson and Willmott 2002). Voronov and Coleman (2003) pointed out that the lower echelons of the organization are "duped" by the top by making them believe that they are empowered, although in reality they are still being controlled from above and by each other through ideological or disciplinary power.

However, there is a danger that, by trying to liberate the oppressed from this "false consciousness", one ideology is simply replaced by another as dominant groups have the tendency to lapse into manipulation. According to Van Dijk (2006), manipulation is the "*communicative and interactional practice, in a manipulator, which exercises control over other people, usually against their will or against their best interests*" (Van Dijk 2006, p. 360). Van Dijk saw manipulation as a form of abuse of power by domination, whereby illegitimate influence is used by means of discourse. Manipulators make others believe or do things that are detrimental to them and that are in the interest of the manipulator. As manipulation creates and perpetuates inequality between the social actors, it is a form of abuse of power (Van Dijk 2006). Telling people what they must do should be avoided, while still ensuring that people will see and do things differently. Aktouf (1992) argued that, to achieve this, we have to think carefully about the theoretical management concept that can form the basis of changing the passive–obedient Taylorist employee to an active–cooperative one. We need managerial practices that will permit the development of the employees' desire to belong and to use their intelligence to serve the firm. This requires us to radically question the position of workers as pure instruments of production and objects of profit or cost. To give voice means that people receive their share of the power and decision rights in matters such as the means of production and the distribution of profits.

7.2. Critical Reflection

Critical reflection should help members of the organization see changes in a different way and to uncover the underlying interests that are hidden in obvious management practices. One should understand that these practices are social constructs and become aware of the role one plays in the production and reproduction of these practices (Darwin et al. 2002). Critical reflection does not come easily but develops from resistance against social restrictions. In this sense, soft management techniques have the paradoxical effect of weakening the capacity of staff to reflect critically on labor situations (Alvesson and Willmott 1992), thereby leading to the skeptical view that critical theorists have on management phenomena such as empowerment and teamwork (Boje and Rosile 2001; Hardy and Leiba-O'Sullivan 1998; Lincoln et al. 2002; Sewell 2001).

7.3. Emancipation

Having a voice and developing critical reflection should pave the way for more emancipation, whereby marginal members of the organization are freed from the authority of managers and are able to change their own situation (Clayton and Gregory 2000; Darwin et al. 2002). To achieve this emancipation, there are three possibilities. The first possibility is the challenging and critiquing of dominant forms of thinking through questioning. The aim is not so much to suggest alternatives but to problematize and challenge obvious and accepted ways of thinking. A second possibility confronts the current situation with an ideal form of cooperation. The intention is to counteract ideologies and social arrangements that obstruct human freedom.

Additionally, this utopian form of emancipation is more about learning to think in alternatives rather than the suggestion of readymade, concrete answers. Between the two forms is a form of micro-emancipation which concentrates on partial and temporary actions

against certain forms of oppression. Instead of opting for a unique radical change, the path of incrementalism is chosen. The road to emancipation is not seen as a large integrated project, but as a series of projects, each limited in time and space (Alvesson and Willmott 2002).

7.4. Democratic Decision Making

Lastly, democratic decision making can be enhanced by allowing all interested parties to participate in the change. The change agent can then act as facilitator. This is an educational role which concentrates more on the process than on content (Cassell and Johnson 2006; Clayton and Gregory 2000; Darwin et al. 2002). A method the change agent can use is action research. Carr and Kemmis (1986) defined action research from a critical perspective, *as a form of self-reflective inquiry undertaken by participants in social situations in order to improve the rationality and justice of their own practices, their understanding of these practices, and the situations in which these practices are carried out* (Carr and Kemmis 1986, p. 162). In general, action research proceeds as follows: First, a social practice is chosen which is susceptible to improvement. Next, the project runs in spiraling cycles of planning, action, observation, and reflection. The project involves certain stakeholders in a particular activity so that the circle of people involved will be gradually extended to all stakeholders in the project (Carr and Kemmis 1986).

Critical discourse digs deeper into the underlying structures of the organization and reveals how the power of meaning is used by the owners of the means of production to perpetuate their privileges at the expense of the operating groups in the organization. Power and politics dominate the social interactions in organizations. Critics are convinced that all decisions in organizations are the result of power exerted by decision makers. In contrast to the proponents of the pluralist vision, it is not the intention of critical researchers to help managers to better control decision-making processes by revealing political aspects; instead, they call for a democratic form of decision making through a radical transformation of the power relations (Alvesson and Willmott 1996).

8. Political Interpretation of Organizational Change from the Dialogic Discourse

Due to the ontological perspective of the dialogic discourse, one cannot expect many concrete indications about the way organizational change can be organized. Moreover, according to the dialogic discourse, actors are caught in the power play of the dominant discourse from which escape is almost impossible, preventing fundamental changes. Other voices have questioned this deterministic vision (Bushe and Marshak 2016; Clegg et al. 2006; Hardy et al. 2005).

Hardy et al. (2000) believed that people can develop discursive activities in a way that provides benefits for them. People produce and distribute different types of text in a particular discursive context. This context consists of discourses that are the result of the struggle of different actors and overlapping activities of many people. A context consists of a plurality of discourses from which one can choose. This interdiscursivity can be an important strategy for achieving changes (Fairclough 1992).

Hardy et al. (2000) developed a model in which discourse is used to make strategic changes. Their premise was that the discourse creates the social reality through the production of concepts, objects, and subject positions which shape the way in which people perceive reality and react to it. Concepts are categories, relations, and theories through which people understand the world and relate to one another. By using concepts, the material world can be made meaningful, and objects are created. Objects only make sense in terms of the concepts that are applied to them.

To be able to speak within a discourse, agents have to take up a particular subject position. For example, to speak in a change discourse, an available position is that of the change agent. By intervening in the processes of discursive production, discourses can be deployed strategically in the hope of achieving real political effects. Discursive

activities are initiated to achieve certain plans and projects and to ensure that the discourse is self-serving.

The proposed model consists of three circuits which identify the various steps through which discourse is engaged as a strategic resource (see Table 1).

The first circuit consists of discursive activities of individuals who are attempting to use discourse strategically. They make discursive statements in their attempts to manage meaning in ways that support their intentions. These statements involve the creation and dissemination of texts, including the introduction of symbols, the creation of narratives, the use of metaphors, and the employment of rhetoric. This allows texts to associate particular concepts with certain relations and/or material referents in order to create objects.

Therefore, the first activity is to make discursive statements to create specific meanings. For example, a newly appointed CEO certifies that the organization should have an international dimension. Therefore, they use stories, rhetoric, and symbols. An export committee is symbolically launched to search for foreign partners and to look for export opportunities. These activities help the organization to accept the new concept of "international" and, as such, to create a new object. The organization was formerly associated with the concept of "national" and is now associated with the concept of "international".

To be politically relevant, discursive activities must engage other actors. This process is called the circuit of performativity. The concepts evoked in discursive statements are embedded in the broader discursive context so that they have meaning for the people to whom they are addressed. The enunciator must then occupy a subject position to be heard by others, or their statements will simply be ignored. Lastly, the symbols, stories, metaphors, and rhetoric must be receptive to other actors; otherwise, they will fail to convey the meaning intended by the enunciator.

In our example, the activities of the CEO ensure that the idea of going international is embedded in the organization. Given their position as head of the organization, the CEO manages to make the idea acceptable. The export committee is recognized as a center of expertise for international expansion, and projects are launched to export services to other countries.

When the circuit activity and the circuit of performativity intersect, they create a circuit of connectivity. The new discursive statements "take" as concepts and are successfully attached to relations and/or material referents to create specific objects in the eyes of other actors. New subject positions and practices also emerge. The result is that the accumulation of individual statements and practices will affect the global context as the dominant discourses are contested, improved, corrected, or, on the contrary, strengthened. In this altered context, new discursive activities can emerge.

In our example, the circuit of discursive activities and the circuit of performativity intersect when the discursive statements of the CEO are accepted, such that concept and organization are connected in a meaningful context. This connection leads to new subject positions such as members of the export committee and members of the export projects. These new positions gain in importance and, in turn, strengthen the discursive activities of the CEO.

With this model, Hardy et al. (2000) showed how discourse has the power to turn rhetorical statements into action. This, however, requires more than touting language. One must succeed to produce new concepts, objects, and subject positions that are accepted by others.

Dialogic (postmodern) discourse has a totally different view on power and politics than the other three discourses. Power is not A getting B to do things B otherwise would not do; power is a machinery in which everyone is caught. In social power relations, both A and B do what they ordinarily do (Marsden and Townley 1996). What effect this vision has on organizational change is not yet entirely clear and is a subject for further research. It appears that, viewed from a dialogic discourse, most organizational changes, even if they are labeled as transformations, are no more than redeployments within established power relations. Power imbalances are imbedded in the formation of discourse, and these systems

perpetuate themselves (Alvesson and Deetz 2006). The direction in which organizations should evolve is also not clear. There are calls for more empowerment (Marsden and Townley 1996) and for "polyphonic" organizations (Anderson 2005; Clegg et al. 2006; Hazen 1993; Jabri 2004), which involve "*interacting and possibly competing representations that might engage in some dialogue with each other*" (Clegg et al. 2006, p. 14). Polyphony does not deny the existence of power but assumes that dominance can be replaced by multiple rationalities. How this can be achieved is a subject for further investigation (Kornberger et al. 2006).

9. Conclusions

In this article, it became clear that neither change nor political power can be summarized in a single theory. It also appeared that studies on organizational politics do not fit very well with the change literature. The political literature is often restricted to the finding that changes intensify the political activities in organizations. The change literature, for its part, offers a (too) fragmented picture of the role of politics.

This article tried to cope with this number of often conflicting theories and ideas using a multidimensional view of the subject. This view was found in the model of Maes and Van Hootegem that groups the different views on organizational change according to their underlying discourse. The framework allows for a dialogue between change management and organizational politics. It emerged that each discourse has its own vision on change and emphasizes a different aspect of power and politics. The normative discourse will put the emphasis on the power and politics of resources and processes. The interpretive and critical discourses concentrate more on the power and politics of meaning, while the dialogical discourse focuses on the power of the system. Therefore, an "interplay" between the discourses is necessary to fully comprehend the role of power and politics in change. However, while the normative and interpretive discourses are well developed regarding our subject, further research is necessary for the critical and dialogical discourses.

Given the restrictions we set ourselves in the research methodology this article is rather a first step in applying integrated methods to study change and to achieve more convergence between studies on organizational change and organizational politics. We were only able to map out the most important political maneuvers in the different phases of a change. We hope this is a starting point for further research not only at an organizational level but also at team—and individual levels.

Insights from different discourses into the political mechanisms that play a role in a change can have predictive value for both change agents and recipients of change. Through revealing these mechanisms from different points of view, it is possible to better predict who will be the winners and the losers in a change process. The winners are often the ones who know how to play the political game. Thus, insights into the role of power and politics during a change can help to ensure that there are more winners and fewer losers. It can make it possible for all parties to enter the political arena better prepared and to play the game of change at a tactically higher level. All stakeholders can gain power and influence through a better understanding of the role of power and politics in change. This should make a more democratic approach to change possible in the sense that more members of the organization have the opportunity and the capacity to influence decision-making processes in the organization.

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