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PURPOSE, PRACTICE AND POWER
A STUDY OF POWER IN THE WORK OF SEVEN HEADS OF FIELD
OFFICES IN THE UNITED NATIONS EDUCATIONAL, SCIENTIFIC
AND CULTURAL ORGANIZATION

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ABSTRACT

Interest in the power of heads of field offices in the United Nations Organization (UN) began with the researcher's appointment to such a position and with anecdotal suggestions that any explanation of the powers they held would be complex. For these reasons, this study has the research aim of explaining the power of some UN heads of field offices. The study focusses on seven heads of field offices in the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO).

Literature searches indicated that no academic study had been made of any UN field work but the searches produced considerable literature on the UN and a wide range of theories about organizations, leadership and power, related issues of ethics and rationality and useful concepts from the work of Weber and Foucault.

The research is interpretive. A case study and an appropriate conceptual framework were designed to reflect both the literature and the three research questions that promote the aim: organizational bureaucracy, organizational capital and frontline work are the guiding concepts. Because case studies may be challenged for possible lack of rigour and for validity, a number of data collection and analysis methods were used to promote reliability: both the data sources and the analysis checks included participants, UNESCO documents and information from other international bodies. Appropriate literature is also used for theoretical analysis.

The results are presented progressively in three chapters, each chapter focussing on one framework concept and its appropriate question. The relevant data are presented and theoretical analysis, including selected concepts from Weber and Foucault, suggests answers to each question posed. The research results suggest that in the organization the participants gain power from UNESCO's intellectual and ethical purpose but are constrained in its use by processes of the bureaucracy, especially its lines of communication. The participants also have considerable power in organizational capital that includes tangible capital of qualifications, experience, skills, high level of position, the resources of the post in which they work and the intangible capital of the assumptions they hold about their work. At the frontline, although constrained by bureaucratic processes that limit their time for programme work, participants report valuable contributions to UNESCO's development and advocacy work: they gain power from proximity to the countries they serve and from their ethical motivation. They also gain some power in the freedom of distance from their headquarters, thus weakening the possible double jeopardy by being in a class-at-the-frontline and being in a group-not-in-headquarters. The final chapter brings all suggestions together and examines participants' power for sources (as rights or capacities), limitations (as control or domination) and agency (with compliance and resistance); when these perspectives are combined in a circle of power, the study suggests a Janus syndrome in which participants paradoxically are powerful/powerless agents,

sited as they are between the power provision and constraints of both their bureaucracy and the governments and other bodies with whom they work.

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CONTENTS

Abstract	ii
Acknowledgements	iv
List of Figures	xi
List of Appendices	xii
Abbreviations	xiii
CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION AND RESEARCH AIM	
Introduction	1
Research background	2
Challenges	3
Research aim	4
Research site	5
Field offices	6
Heads of offices	6
Research questions	7
Guiding questions	7
Research context:	8
Contradictions	8
Uncertainties	9
Access	9
Timing	10
Focus on power	10
Assumptions	12
Ethical issues	14
Contribution to knowledge	17
Structure of the report	17
Definitions	18
Conclusion	20
CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE SURVEY	
Introduction	21
The United Nations:	23
General	23
Organization	23
Practices	24
Politics	25
UNESCO:	26
External literature	26
Internal literature	27
	vi

Organization theory:	General	29
	Varied approaches	30
	Mechanistic: tasks	31
	Contingency: processes	32
	Multidirectional: contexts	33
Leadership theory:	General	36
	Varied approaches	37
	Tasks and traits	38
	Processes	39
	Multidirectional contexts	39
Power:	General	41
	Definition and sources	41
	Relationships	43
	Compliance and resistance	44
	Weber: rationalization and ethics	46
	Foucault: knowledge, power and resistance	51
Conclusion		58

CHAPTER THREE: CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK AND METHODOLOGY

Introduction		61
Interpretive research		61
Conceptual framework:	General	63
	Organizational bureaucracy	63
	Organizational capital	67
	Frontline work	70
Methodology:	General	74
	Design	75
	Validity	77
	Participants	78
	Data collection and analysis	80
Conclusion		86

CHAPTER FOUR: PURPOSE AND ORGANIZATIONAL STRUCTURE

Introduction		89
Lines of communication		89
Purpose:	General	90
	UNESCO's vision	91
	An intellectual and ethical mandate	92
Organizational Structure:	Member states: General	94

	General conference and executive board	96
	National commissions	98
	Permanent delegates	100
	Complexities of member states roles	101
Organizational structure:	Bureaucracy: General	102
	Director General	103
	Headquarters	104
	Field offices	115
	Summary of bureaucratic complexities	118
Theoretical analysis:	General	119
	Purpose	120
	Structure	123
	Bureaucracy	129
	Lines of communication	134
	Overview	136
Final view of UNESCO's organization		137
Conclusion		138

CHAPTER FIVE: PRACTICE AND ORGANIZATIONAL CAPITAL

Introduction		141
The concept of organizational capital		142
Tangible capital:	General	142
	Personal assets	143
	Appointment assets	144
	Assets developed with time	147
	Power potential of tangible capital	151
Intangible capital:	General	151
	Constitutional assumptions	153
	Bureaucratic assumptions	158
	Field office assumptions	166
	Power potential of intangible capital	169
Summary of organizational capital of heads		170
Theoretical analysis:	General	171
	Leadership: traits	171
	Leadership: skills	172
	Leadership: multi-variable contexts	174
	Leadership theory: positional complexities	176
	Leadership theory: the ethics gap	178
	Leadership: power potential	181
Conclusion		183

CHAPTER SIX: PRACTICE AND THE FRONTLINE

Introduction	186
Roles and responsibilities:	
General	187
Diplomatic role	189
Administrative role	191
Technical role	193
Organizational capital at work:	
General	195
Tangible capital	195
Intangible capital	196
A typical day	197
Significant frontline properties:	
General	200
Proximity	201
Distance	202
Time	204
Ethics	205
Overview of frontline properties	207
Work at the frontline:	
General	209
Most successful work	209
Most important work	210
Contributions to UNESCO’s vision and mandate	211
Improving frontline work	212
Power potential of frontline work	212
Summary	213
Theoretical analysis:	
General	213
Roles and responsibilities	214
Organizational capital at work	216
Frontline properties	221
Conclusion	234

CHAPTER SEVEN: THE POWER OF SEVEN HEADS OF FIELD OFFICES IN UNESCO

Introduction	237
Step one:	
Sources of power	238
Power from rights and capacities	239
Step one overview	247
Step two:	
Power limitations	248
Power limited by control and domination	248
Step two overview	262
Step three:	
Participants’ agency	264
Power as compliance and resistance	264
Step three overview	275

Step four:	The circle of power	276
	Synthesis	276
	The Janus syndrome	278
	Two fundamental problems	280
Conclusion	Paradoxes	281
	Proposals for improving frontline work	282
	Further problems for study	285
	The future	287
Appendices		289
Bibliography		332

List of Figures	Page
Figure 1 Research Aim	4
2 Conceptual framework	63
3 Organizational capital possibilities	68
4 Appropriate organizational capital for leaders	69
5 Possible leadership work	71
6 Overview of methodology	87
7 Simplified overview of UNESCO's structure and lines of communication	95
8 Organizational structure in mechanistic tradition	124
9 Constitutional assumptions	153
10 Assumptions in the bureaucracy	158
11 Participants' assumptions about their work in field offices	166
12 Overview of time distribution of participants' roles	188
13 Diagrammatic representation of frontline properties	207
14 Step one of participants' power	238
15 Step two of participants' power	248
16 Power sources and limitations in UNESCO's bureaucracy	258
17 Step three of participants' power	265
18 Step four: the circle of power	277
19 The Janus syndrome: the paradox of the power of participant heads	278

List of Appendices	Page
Appendix 1 Diagram of the United Nations Organization	290
Appendix 2 Standard position and post advertisement	291
Appendix 3 Constitution of UNESCO	292
Appendix 4 Organizational chart of UNESCO	297
Appendix 5 Questionnaire One	298
Appendix 6 Questionnaire One synthesis of responses	303
Appendix 7 Questionnaire One response sheet for follow up to synthesis	308
Appendix 8 Questionnaire Two	310
Appendix 9 Questionnaire Two synthesis and response sheet for follow up questions	315
Appendix 10 Outline of semi-structured interview	320
Appendix 11 Guide for observation in offices	321
Appendix 12 Initial collation and follow up analysis of operational and core assumptions	322
Appendix 13 Information sent to participants and to UNESCO	324
Appendix 14 Visa approval from UNESCO for the research	328
Appendix 15 Example of Consent Form	331

ABBREVIATIONS

BFC	UNESCO's Bureau of Field Coordination
DFID	Department for Internal Development (of the United Kingdom)
DG	Director General
D(1) D(2)	Director (level one or two)
FABS	UNESCO's Finance and Budgeting System
FAO	UN Food and Agriculture Organization
FO	Field office
HRM	UNESCO's Human Resources management
HQ	Headquarters
IGO	International Governmental Organization (eg EEC)
INGO	International Non-Governmental Organization (eg Oxfam)
ILO	UN International Labour Organization
IMF	UN International Monetary Fund
IOS	UNESCO's Office for Internal Oversight
Ms/s	Member State(s)
NGO	Non-Governmental Organization (eg national community care groups)
Natcoms	UNESCO's National Commissions
PP	UNESCO's Participation Programme
P1, P2 , P3 ...	Professional (level one, two, three ...) *
SISTER	UNESCO's System of Information on Strategies, Tasks and the Evaluation of Results
UN	United Nations Organization
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme
UNESCO	United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization
UNFPA	United Nations Population Fund
UNHCR	United Nations Commission for Human Rights
UNICEF	United Nations Children's Fund
WHO	UN World Health Organization

* Not to be confused with this report's system of numbering research participants