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OFFICE POLITICS: POWER IN THE LONDON SALESROOM

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Introduction

THIS article explores the concept of power, its characteristics and its manifestation in two London offices. It seeks to understand how power is utilized in the workplace and what this can tell us about the world of business and values in the industrialized West. The office is regarded as a microculture. The two organizations examined exhibit different political structures, though they share many characteristics. The research, based on participant observation, provides insight into the experiences of employees in a flexible labour market and the daily realities of work in the publishing sales industry as part of a global network of organizations.[1]

The rapid turnover of staff in the two companies and the volume and breadth of communication are indicative of current trends in business within metropolitan centres. Certain features recur, such as managerial composition and attitudes, business target pressures and the coercive use of power. This leads us to examine the daily exercise of power and its various guises, specifically the uses of control and the reproduction of attitudes and behaviour patterns. The relationship between the metropolitan centre and the periphery is also explored, relating the use of power

[1] Research involved a comparative study of two sales-driven companies producing business-to-business publications and selling advertising space by telephone. Fieldwork was undertaken in central London over a period of eleven months during 1998. This work forms part of a broader project which explores political economy, globalization, and the relationship between people and their physical environment.

within the micro-culture of the office to that utilized between the office and outside clients and thereafter within the global arena. Control is differentiated into primary, secondary, and tertiary areas for purposes of analytical rigour.

Both companies worked on sociopolitical and telecommunications books, producing titles that were sponsored or edited by global organizations such as the United Nations, the International Telecommunications Union, and the Commonwealth Secretariat. These organizations require the companies to print the books and sell advertising space to finance them. Books are expected to make substantial sums in advertising fees, and the companies employ salesmen to sell space over the phone to potential clients as varied as telecommunication companies, car firms, lawyers, educational establishments, and exporters. It is with the sales department and sales process that this article is concerned.

Power, People, and Work

In her introduction to the ASA monograph *The Social Anthropology of Work,* the editor, Sandra Wallman, considers the concept of work in a cross-cultural context and declares: 'work is "about" control—physical and psychological, social and symbolic' (1979: 1). Further, she sees the 'primeval purpose of work in the human need to control nature, to wrest a living from it and impose culture on it' (ibid.). This theme is elaborated as follows:

> Central to the rubric of this volume is the fact that the working relationship between man and nature is never unembroidered; and that much of the socio-cultural embroidery on work tends to be concerned with the control of one person or category of people over another—whether direct control by means of command over the actions of others, or indirect control achieved either by limiting their access to resources and benefits (cf. Nadel 1957) or by devaluing the resources and benefits which they have. These resources may pertain to any or all aspects of work. (ibid.)

Using a broader canvas for his analysis of power, Roger Keesing observes that it is conceptually 'fuzzy', but nevertheless feels able to write: 'Power, virtually all analysts agree, is a matter of relationships between individuals (or units such as corporations or governments) who exert control and those who are controlled by them' (1981: 299).

For further definitions of power, Keesing refers to R. N. Adams (as does Seymour-Smith, 1986: 230, in a dictionary of anthropology). Adams defines power as:

> The ability of a person or social unit to influence the conduct and decision-making of another through the control over energetic forms in the latter's en-

> vironment (in the broadest sense of that term). (Fogelson and Adams 1977: 388)

In a conclusive statement, Keesing writes:

> We can assume that imposing constraints on one another—being 'powerful'—is a basic and pervasive motive in all human societies. Building up the means and resources that enable one to exercise more constraints over more people in regard to more things in a wider range of contexts is everywhere one of the dynamics of social life. To understand any society—not simply what appears as its 'political system', but kinship and religion as well—we must explore these dynamics. If we understand 'power' as a shorthand for these relationships and processes it will serve us well. (1981: 300)

This article concentrates on power which is validated through the organizational apparatus, the formal arrangement of offices of authority (management), in the sense of socially acknowledged rights to take decisions and exercise power. It looks at the way this power becomes manifest primarily through the use of control, thus maintaining existing social relationships. Through this micro-analysis of a face-to-face situation, we will be able to observe the operation of power in the workplace, which will have relevance for all comparable circumstances. The analytical framework will enable us to consider the types of control, their interconnections, and their variety.

Before I examine the concept and application of power in detail, an outline of the two companies' formal power structures will be useful.[2] Company A (Co. A) had a power structure consisting of a managerial pyramid, with the managing director (MD) at the top, devolving power through the following ranks: the sales director (SD), the floor managers (FM), the book managers (BM), down to the salespeople (SP). At the base of the organization, the primary producers of wealth were the sales teams, which were built around the book managers, who had recognized authority enabling them to hire and fire SPs and decide on their daily activities.

Company B (Co. B) was organized more loosely, with an MD who was effectively a dictator surrounded by a coterie of senior salespeople, some of whom had the power to hire and fire SPs. Over time a more rigid regime was implemented with managers emerging, and at one stage a new sales director was appointed (and subsequently fired after six weeks). Paradoxically, this company had advertised itself in national newspapers as being 'without office politics', whereas in fact there was an informal network of long-term employees who had the ear of the MD and strongly influenced his decisions, as well as an emerging managerial hierar-

[2] These models relate to the office staff only and do not include the owners of the companies, who exercise powers beyond the scope of this enquiry.

chy. Status in this company was achieved through proven sales ability and long service.

The vast majority of staff in the two companies were under forty, with men providing over 75% of the workforce, many of whom had recently graduated from university. Ethnic minorities (Asian, Afro-Caribbean, East European) were well represented, making up over half the employees on occasion. Because of the extremely high rate of staff turnover it is difficult to supply statistics which provide an idea of constant levels, but despite rapid changes some patterns predominated, especially in the case of managers, the majority of whom were young, white, British males.

The Manifestation of Power

If we use Adams's definition of power, we shall understand the companies as being able to influence the conduct and decision-making of the workforce through their control over energetic forms. I shall expand on this definition by concentrating on the manifestation of such 'influence'—which may be described as 'control' over the physical (energetic) environment and also the intellectual and social environment (in the broadest sense of the term). In this article I shall distinguish between (i) 'primary' areas of control, in this case the employment contract and financial rewards (commission and salary), these being the fundamental reasons why the relationship exists; (ii) 'secondary' areas arising from the primary relationships, which appear as constraints on the physical environment (including the dimension of time); and (iii) 'tertiary' areas: the social organization and intellectual activities of the staff. Specific areas under which employees found themselves controlled are described below.

Primary Areas of Control

The commission or basic salary is to be regarded as a primary area of control, as is the employment contract. They are the fundamental reasons why the social relationship of control exists and are areas supported by legal rights and obligations enshrined in law surrounding property and employment. The payment of monies due was calculated and authorized by managerial staff, with specific deductions being made for taxation purposes and 'retainers'—a way of securing loyalty and insurance against clients defaulting on debts. The deductions are taken off the basic commission due to the SP, which is normally 15% of the deal's value. Consequently the company retains at least 85% of the fees due from clients to cover its costs and remunerate management and shareholders.

Co. A provided a contract after the initial training period (six weeks). The contract reserved the right of the employers to sack employees with one week's notice. In Co. B no such contract was offered: usually the SPs were given a verbal agreement by the MD during the job interview and were dependent upon his decision and assessment for their continued employment. There was undoubtedly a sense of insecurity throughout the staff, even though many were employed on a commission-only basis (i.e. no basic pay): those in receipt of a basic salary were continually reminded that they had to sell more to justify this remuneration.

In the eyes of the sales force, arbitrary dismissals seemed to take place. They believed that if management disliked a salesperson then an excuse would be found to sack that person. Also, the threat of being fired was regularly used indirectly, e.g. in floor meetings managers would say, 'If you don't like it you know where the door is' or 'There are over three million people looking for a job; we can easily replace you.' The usual method of dismissal was to give an employee an ultimatum to sell a certain amount over the following week or lose their job. In Co. B the new Sales Director sacked two people in his first week, one of whom was notoriously hard-working, which was generally regarded as unfair by the sales team.

The real possibility of being fired was the ultimate sanction used by management, and it ensured a sense of insecurity throughout the company. Managers themselves frequently spoke of the insecurity of their own jobs, and indeed in Co. A all three managers on the floor lost their jobs within three months. Furthermore, the sales director and two senior directors also lost their jobs (or resigned), being replaced by a new SD and MD. More striking was the turnover of salespeople: during a three-month period, an entire floor of SPs (twenty people) disappeared through being sacked or resigning. The majority of new salesmen left the company after the first six weeks, and the managers were the only, somewhat tenuous group with historical continuity in the company. In Co. B the turnover of managers was almost as high as Co. A, 30% losing their jobs within a four-month period.[3]

Secondary Areas of Control

These are areas of control which follow on from the primary areas, being dependent on the initial relationship (employment) for the reward of access to the primary resource (money). As such they are more derivative, abstract, and flexible in their forms and are more open to contestation than primary areas, which tend to be clearly defined as contractual arrangements defended by legal rights. The secondary and tertiary areas are therefore of equal, if not more interest to the social scientist because of their malleable and negotiable qualities. It is here that the right to exercise power becomes truly 'fuzzy', but affording an insight into the particular microculture under examination, as it deals with and manages control. Secondary areas are 'physical' in that they form part of the material world and include time as

[3] This piece of data refers to the period of fieldwork, although sources claimed that it reflected previous patterns of dismissal.

a quantifiable resource, as well as information which is usually available in a physically accessible format.

Time

There were numerous ways of exercising power over an employee's time, the most important of which were the office hours between 8.45 a.m. and 5.30 p.m. (varying within and between companies), during which everyone should be present. Those staff who were repeatedly late were threatened by managers and occasionally fired at the whim of the manager, depending on discretion and attitude. On the other hand, workers enduring long office hours (sometimes until 10 p.m.) were acknowledged and praised by the MD. Taking time off from office hours was frowned upon by senior management, but was particularly abused by book managers in Co. A, who would regularly do so for personal pleasure (fishing and sporting trips etc.). In doing so, they were exercising their power to thwart the regulations on the use of time and indirectly emphasizing the constraints on conscientious SPs.

During office hours time use was surveyed, and telephone calls monitored and timed: ideally the SP should be making calls consistently during working hours. Co. A had a specific period during which calls must be made, and another period when research was to be done. These timed calls were analysed and used in assessing SPs' performance. More broadly, within the framework of the working week, there were certain times when staff were required to be at sales training sessions or end-of-month sales meetings.

Space

The layout of the office is indicative of placement in the hierarchy of power, with greater status usually being denoted by having more physical space in which to operate (larger office, more desk space) and occupation of a higher floor (the top floor was occupied by senior managerial staff). Managers also had complete freedom in choosing where they themselves sat and in determining the seating arrangements of their staff. In addition, actual furniture also denoted status through size and amount: large chairs, numerous desks, filing racks, telephones, and other equipment were part of the manager's accoutrements.

Seating arrangements were under the direct control of book managers. In Co. A they moved workers regularly (known as 'hot-desking' in some fashionable offices). Some SPs were instructed to change desks, face the wall, face one another, face the centre, remove desk screens, erect them, or sit together, with moves occurring almost every week. Each new manager imposed his own seating pattern on the staff. These moves were always annoying and disconcerting, disrupting for staff, and often involving the necessity to change phones and numbers, a real disadvantage, wasting up to half a day's working time. Inevitably the manager would be seated in a central or commanding position in which he could watch his team and supervise them, exercising the power of observation—an event comparable to the panopticon surveillance system analysed by Foucault (see Rabinow 1991).

Managers also had some control over the physical body of the salesperson. They might demand a salesperson to stand up when talking to a client on the phone (thus in theory becoming more energized, enthusiastic, and aggressive) and would sometimes remove the SP's chair to encourage this. They also had freedom to use office space in terms of walking around at will, sometimes to instruct staff who were expected to remain at their desks unless pursuing a recognized activity.

Resources

Managers might take the telephone from a salesperson if they desired to talk to the client, in the expectation of winning a deal. Sometimes they forcibly wrenched the phone out of the hand of the SP or shouted at them to hand over the phone. When the MD in Co. B entered the salesroom to give a brief talk, the managers would shout, 'Lose the phones!', even though this meant the possibility of losing a deal. In Co. A the stationery cupboard was opened weekly for general access (pencils, paper etc.). In Co. B staff had to obtain pens from the receptionist and provide the rest of their equipment themselves. This apparently insignificant control reinforced the SPs subordinate status and demonstrated the company's distrust of their integrity.

Information regarding clients and potential 'leads' (possible customers) is vital to a sale. Managers have access to good leads through experience and knowledge (via library, magazines, the Internet, past advertisements). They could withhold this information at will, giving leads to favoured staff, or keep information to themselves and gain commission. Information on office events or changes, such as new projects, future plans, and managerial or book changes, could be withheld or used to the manager's advantage. This is especially pertinent given the staff's state of anxiety over their employment prospects and income.

Tertiary areas of control

Tertiary areas of control concern the social organization and intellectual activities of the staff. This is perhaps the area of constraint which shows the greatest variance between different companies. It embraces the arrangement of social groupings—teams, competing groups, authority structures—as well as the individual activity of the staff, including business and private communications, company rhetoric, and other qualities occasionally referred to as office 'culture'.[4] As such it

[4] Susan Wright states that 'the culture concept' is used in four ways in organizational studies. Of these, the fourth definition is most appropriate to this article: '"company culture" can refer to the formal organizational values and practices imposed by management as a

also embraces the values and ideology of the office as espoused by the senior management.

The Sales Process

The basic working tool of the salesperson is the 'pitch', the message communicated to the client, originating as a scripted speech. This may develop into a relatively spontaneous delivery involving use of key phrases or bullet points by the experienced SP. Management exhorted SPs to establish control over the conversation, persuading and leading the client into giving the required response. At the same time the SP's intellectual freedom is restricted by the intentions of the manager, as the SP's mind is directed towards achieving the company's (and, usually, the SP's) goal. The process is analysed below, highlighting areas in which the exercise of control is paramount.

The Pitch. The salesperson is expected to phone up potential purchasers of advertising space in the book and persuade them that they should advertise their product. A particularly successful call is one where the SP 'takes the client off the phone', that is, sells on the first call. Given that most capable SPs can expect to make only one sale a fortnight, this is unusual. The SP makes a 'pitch' to the client, initially a written script which s/he is expected to learn by heart and repeat without deviation down the phone. It is composed of an introduction to the product, reasons to purchase advertising (the 'angle'), and the offer (the 'close'). The SP is therefore a sort of actor, speaking the script, often knowing very little about the product, the book, or the client, let alone the advantages of advertising in the book.[5]

The Angle. The 'angle' is important for those more advanced in their sales experience. In essence this is the reason why the client should be advertising in the book. The SP researches the company and works out the advantages for them in advertising in the book, such as increasing visibility, competition, income growth, or establishing their brand. These reasons are then inserted into the pitch. Co. B placed great emphasis on the angle and encouraged SPs to research companies with a view to creating a strong angle with which to persuade the key decision-maker to advertise.

The Close. This is where the salesman might conceivably clinch the deal. It may confirm the client's involvement, which is satisfied by faxing him a contract which is signed and returned. An example is the 'assumptive close', i.e. the final part of a pitch which asks what type of advertisement the client wants: 'Will you be taking a single-page, full-colour, or a double-page spread?' (known as the 'double assumptive close', theoretically giving the client no room to answer, 'No'). Co. A

"glue" to hold the workforce together and make it capable of responding as a body to fast changing and global competition' (1994: 2).

[5] Salespeople were expected to make eight full pitches per day, often necessitating over forty enquiry calls.

encouraged neophyte SPs to reach the close during their initial pitches—sometimes 600 words in length—in which reciting the close often became an embarrassing procedure leading to a negative response. Co. B was more wary of the close being used by inexperienced SPs and sometimes insisted that SPs should let managers close, usually on a second call, after the client had received faxed information about the book. In these cases, therefore, senior personnel took responsibility for the final sale. At one stage Co. B restructured its sales force by introducing a formal managerial system, so that only the most senior managers 'closed' the deal, SPs simply 'fronting' the deal by explaining the book and angle without attempting to obtain a sale.

The SPs were always supposed to communicate directly with the 'decision-maker' of a company or organization. This may be the chief executive officer, MD, or a government minister. Co. A told SPs, many of whom were in their early twenties and inexperienced in the world of work, that they should consider themselves the equal of MDs when talking to them and be dismissive towards any obstructive secretaries, asking for the MD by name without explaining who they were or why they were making the call. Some SPs were advised to alter their accents to appear more 'upmarket' or 'professional', and even styled themselves 'Doctor'. Many used pseudonyms, especially at Co B., where the majority did so, sometimes disguising awkward or foreign names they regarded as a liability. Others believed that they adopted a different persona with a different name, becoming more assertive, vibrant, and confident: the pseudonym and attached personality became a mask. Given free reign to assert themselves through a stage personality, it is worth considering the poetic licence that was also given to the SPs regarding the constituent elements of the pitch itself.

Euphemism and Mendacity: Controlling the Truth

In the salesroom the practice of 'larging it' (exaggeration) and 'bullshitting' (exaggerating, lying) during the pitch were regularly encouraged, and successful salesmen would boast of their ability to bullshit. One senior manager in Co. B regularly exhorted his staff to 'Large it!', effectively make untrue claims about other clients who have supposedly already booked a space: 'We've got company X in already, we've got company Y as well', and so on. Or: 'This is the best book of its kind; I can guarantee you will increase your sales.' They were also encouraged to put pressure on a client by insinuating that booking time and available space were running out: 'I'm having a meeting with the editor this afternoon and we only have one space left in that section. Can I tell him that you will be included?'; or, more simply, to state: 'You've got to do this; everyone else has.' In conversation to staff, managers justified the use of false claims regarding the involvement of other clients by saying that they would eventually be persuaded to advertise in the book (sometimes this materialized, as a general trend was drastically to reduce the prices of advertising space in the books in the last weeks of the campaign, thereby ensuring the inclusion of some famous companies and covering the cost of publication).

Euphemism was also employed heavily. Salespeople were advised to avoid the word 'advertising' in their pitch, and never to introduce themselves as someone selling advertising space. Instead the pitch would concentrate on aspects of the book or the conference or the organization backing it, maintaining the client's interest and enthusiasm. The SP would seek to involve the client in a 'project' and avoid mentioning the word 'publication': 'We are working on a project with the UN on development issues; would you be interested in coming on board?' The names of the actual publishing companies were also chosen to reflect prestige, class, pedigree, and security, qualities deemed attractive to prospective clients: an example might be the use of 'Westminster Publications' (actually fictitious) as a name, when in fact the company would have no connection with the area.

One MD preferred salespeople to be thought of as 'business strategists' but became blunt when under pressure, stressing that only devious workers would be successful. He lauded the quality of mendacity, saying that Asians were notoriously mendacious and that one particular salesman, an Indian, ought to be more successful because of this. Salespeople were encouraged to enthuse about the projects as if the client would seriously lose out if not involved. Therefore constant and, over time, unselfconscious exaggeration and false enthusiasm about the project was voiced over the phone. Calls were taped at Co. B so that the managers could listen in and analyse a tape after the conversation, pointing out weaknesses to the SP.

Many previous clients complained that their advertisements had poor responses, but this knowledge did not hinder the superficial enthusiasm of the SPs, although they were aware of the weaknesses of their products. One company (X) had a particularly bad reputation, and a rumour circulated that it did not actually send out the books in which it had sold space. Managers, and therefore SPs, in Co. A regularly agreed with clients that the business was full of crooked companies, especially Co. X, while stressing that Co. A was redeeming the industry's image and would ensure that the client had no future problems. Amusingly, managers in Co. B continually referred to Co. A as the rogue company, an example of bad practice in the industry which put out poor-quality books, cheated clients, and produced bad salespeople. Each company referred to competitors in derogatory terms in order to make its own work appear more attractive and to sympathise with wary clients, thus increasing trust and the potential for a deal.

As we can see, the salesperson's communications with clients are controlled through their use of the pitch, recommendations on how to interact with other business employees, and encouragement to exaggerate and misrepresent the truth. To ensure this, the SPs are regularly listened to during their telephone conversations (telephones have multiple ear pieces fitted to allow this), and in some companies all conversations are tape-recorded. The intellectual arena is therefore bounded by the management's desires: controls over communication are strict and enforced by the possibility of a sacking. It would seem that there is also control over morality, relating to falsehoods propagated over the phone—salespeople are encouraged to distort the truth. Thus the individual SP's desire to be honest is not only challenged, it is positively denied.[6]

Competition

To maintain a continual sense of urgency and excitement, aggression and determination, the companies organized competitions to reward individual salespeople for success in sales on a monthly basis. Co. A ran a league of salespeople, which was constructed to show where someone was placed in terms of sales for the month, highlighting both successes and failures. Managers would continually comment on an individual's placing in the chart. Managers were also placed against one another, as were floors (run by the floor managers, responsible for up to six books each). There was a tiered structure of oppositions, starting with the individual SPs and rising to floor managers. In addition, the company as a whole was expected to meet a weekly target. Targets were ever-present for all employees. Managers continually set targets for their workforce to meet and pressed salesmen to achieve them, asking each one what he expected to make over the following week.

In this manner, the relative placings of SPs were controlled and presented in a fashion so as to emphasize their selling success over a given period, usually within a short time-frame (one month), thus ignoring previous sales. Thus success is seen in the context of a social relationship, individuals being pitched against individuals within a given time-frame, with peer performance constantly changing. 'Blanking' (periods of no sales) was recognized as something that most SPs experience; nevertheless last month's best salesman may have had a poor record this month and appear as a loser in the competition. As a consequence, historical trends for individuals were not made clear; performances were interpreted at the management's discretion. There was no way for SPs to avoid inclusion within this competitive group, and its existence had a permanent impact on performance and staff morale.

Co. B had only one floor, and the sales force was divided between experienced and new staff, all of whom were in competition within their own groups. A visual display recorded the sales of each person, and competitions were run over periods of time with money prizes for the winners. Importantly, books themselves were not placed in competition, thus denying their relative merits and placing the onus of selling on to the individual SPs, despite the effort put into building sales teams around the books. Team mates and book managers often socialized together and

[6] Eric Wolf, when considering the concepts of 'culture' and 'meaning', writes: 'The ability to bestow meanings—to "name" things, acts and ideas—is a source of power. Control of communication allows the manager of ideology to lay down the categories through which reality is to be perceived' (1982: 388).

formed strong bonds, though given the short duration of the projects (three to six months) and the high staff turnover, such groups soon dissolved.

In both companies managers continually maintained that it was the salesperson who mattered, not the product. 'If an SP is good s/he can sell any product.' Sales training consistently placed the burden of success on the SPs and promoted various techniques to enhance their performance, especially concentrating on the individual's 'confidence'. Nevertheless certain books were informally recognized by all as being bad products, and some were temporarily abandoned following difficult initial periods (after only one month in the case of Co. B).

Office Values

In terms of speech, physical action, and verbal imagery, violence was ever-present. Managers would make humorous remarks about what they might do to a worker in terms of physical damage if he did not perform a task well, or simply because they did not like him. In Co. A one worker was victimized and bullied due to his unusual personality. Notices were displayed on computer screen-savers, such as, 'The first person to put an axe in Dave's head gets a prize.' Managers joked in the pub about how they would 'kick Dave in, given the chance'. The sales director was particularly prone to using violent language and would finish an argument by threatening a salesman—humorously but nevertheless in an intimidating fashion: 'Do you want to be hit on the nose and have to clean up the carpet?'[7]

The MD of Co. B regularly used violent imagery and blue language, occasionally completely losing control of himself in anger when criticizing what he thought was a bad pitch. He generated an atmosphere of physical menace and insulted people by using homophobic imagery to suggest that they were submissive, occasionally flaring up with a diatribe consisting of swearwords and belittling comments. Such comments were used to denigrate or tease workers in the office and were arbitrarily aimed at anyone he chose to ridicule, whether over appearance, personality, or performance. This role model was imitated by his subordinates, and senior managers aped his general attitude to the extent of shouting orders and behaving aggressively. Bullying went hand-in-hand with the violence, and certain salespeople were the continual butt of verbal or practical jokes, comments, and aggression. One manager claimed that he was not racist but continually made racist jokes and even used racist remarks while sitting next to an Indian salesman. He sacked a black and an Asian salesman within the first two weeks of joining the company.

[7] An observation by Schultz and Lavenda on the view of power in state societies is particularly relevant to the findings of this research: 'Power is something that individuals as free agents can accumulate from their attempts to coerce other people to yield to their will. From this perspective, violence is a common and effective means to increase the power of individuals and groups' (1995: 372).

Violence and bullying were not always so physically blatant but came in more subtle, psychological forms. Thus managers played on the continual insecurity over employment by using threats about job losses or project failures, implying that targets must be met or penalties would be applied. The MD of Co. B was a promoter of selfish and competitive values, and regularly reminded staff that his was not an altruistic business, that he was out to get to the top, and that he had no room for anyone who would not work hard for him. Loyalty would be rewarded.

Both companies were subsidiaries of large holding companies, major players in the publishing and media industries. As such they were representative of a thriving sector of business in London, comparable to similar companies world-wide. They give an insight into how the flexible labour market actually operates, as well as the use of power within such companies. It would appear that potential workers are not highly respected. One manager expressed this by saying, 'If you throw enough shit against the wall, some of it will stick', implying that out of the crowd of people passing through the company doors, some will prove worthy of long-term employment. This is an illustration of an 'employer's market', where the supply of labour and demand for work is in their favour. One MD stated: 'The cream will rise to the top'. In both companies, new employees were placed on various assignments, usually very difficult, and expected to sink or swim; it was generally acknowledged to be a tough industry, and the attitude of 'survival of the fittest' also served to support the general disdain shown towards caring values. This would-be 'evolutionary' philosophy (currently very popular in the media and advertising), with its 'law of the jungle' mentality, served the process of brutalizing management into treating staff and clients with disdain. Clients who were easily booked were regarded as 'soft' and termed 'pussycats'. Office values are thus appropriately summed up by the clichés, 'Win at all costs' and 'Only the strong survive', which capture the stereotyped approach of management, both blasé and ruthless.

Geopolitical Advantage

During a day's work a salesperson might communicate with someone in over twenty different countries in various continents. A company's sales force may be in touch with every country in the world, with individuals talking to people in Saudi Arabia, Russia, India, and France within the space of an hour. Communication is truly global, the same message being reiterated world-wide. Many times a salesperson has been in a conversation and forgotten which country he is calling. Managers have been known to close deals unaware of the country the client is in.

A huge network of telecommunications supports conversations world-wide, involving business and political bodies in the communications and advertising projects that originate in the UK. A company in Africa can advertise in a book published in England, distributed around the world with articles from politicians throughout the UN. In this example those people involved in the process who benefit most from it are élites—senior businessmen, politicians, and global organizations—while engaging the labour of workers who operate the wheels of this global industry.[8]

In these examples, companies and books gain great prestige from being based in London and being supported by notable organizations such as the Commonwealth Secretariat, the UN, and the ITU. It is these organizations that provide editors and most of the contributors to the books, and it is the publishing company's duty to find the financial support through advertising, making a profit in the process. Most books are expected to earn around £250,000 from advertising and are usually distributed free to about 5–10,000 recipients.

With the qualified backing of a world-famous organization, salespeople are able to say that they are working on behalf of or with the UN or Commonwealth or ITU, giving themselves a sense of importance, power and influence, and obtaining the ear of a decision-maker. The most successful books are those attached to a conference, where a captive audience will be in receipt of the book (the conference catalogue, for example). Thanks to the support of such organizations, the words of the SP carry more weight, in this way exercising geopolitical power relationships between the West and the rest of the world. Thus, in the case of books dealing with 'development', the SP, ensconced in London and with the backing of the UN, is able to talk with apparent confidence and knowledge about the importance of development issues to potential advertisers around the world, in Africa, Asia, the Caribbean, and eastern Europe. Power, in terms of geopolitical, economic, and cultural advantage, bears on the relationship between salesperson and client.

The concept of 'development' is particularly popular, and numerous books circulate with this word in the title. Books were usually connected to a specific conference or project— perhaps 'Sustainable Development and Investment'—and backed by the Commonwealth Secretariat and finance organizations, or the UN. The term 'development' was rarely regarded as problematic by the SP in phone conversations, and the pitch would outline the goals in a straightforward fashion, with the assumption that everything was understood and agreed upon, and such terms as 'Third World' were accepted uncritically. This blind faith has repercussions, not least amongst the salespeople, with their weak grasp of sociological jargon—for it is in such daily activities that simplistic and generalizing notions are repeated and reaffirmed in the operating world of business and politics, creating a diluted hegemony. In this sense Wolf's observation is relevant:

[8] Few salespeople were genuinely interested in the issues addressed in the books being published. In general terms they were not cosmopolitan businessmen with 'a certain metacultural position' but London-based clerical workers, 'locals, representatives of more circumscribed territorial cultures' (Hannerz 1992: 252), who happened to interact with influential people from around the world on a daily basis.

> The development of an overall hegemonic pattern or 'design for living' is not so much the victory of a collective logic or aesthetic impulse as the development of redundancy—the continuous repetition, in diverse instrumental domains, of the same basic propositions regarding the nature of constructed reality. (Wolf 1982: 388)

Equally, the manner and attitude of the salespeople from the metropolitan core came with the apparent support of these powerful groups: 'Good morning Mr Client, this is John Smart calling on behalf of the United Nations in London. How are you today?'

Conclusions

This research has drawn attention to global connections which are increasing in number and influence, part of the links between global political organizations and business communities. Stereotypical images of the power relationships between the industrialized West and the rest of the world seem to be maintained in the rhetoric of the sales pitch, but apparently supported by powerful organizations, and serve to imprint themselves on the minds of recipients overseas. Development as an issue is discussed without analysis, and large sums of money change hands in the pursuit of wealth through a persuasive concept. Patterns of behaviour, relationships of dependence, and political hierarchies are all suggested and repeated in conversations spanning the globe which involve business and political interests. There is a direct connection between the microculture of the London office and the macroculture of international organisations and business.

Power in the office has been found to rest on the control of various areas, usually backed by coercion in all its forms, and apparently supported by the rule of law enshrined in the employment contract and property rights. Public discussion of bullying, exploitation, and stress count for very little in the competitive workplace, where economic hardship is the bottom line, and workers tolerate abusive conditions to earn money. The link between the individual company (in terms of values and social organization) and the wider political economy is a direct one, but it may manifest itself in diverse ways according to different situations.

By dividing areas of control into primary, secondary, and tertiary, I have been able to analyse power within the office with greater precision than Adams's original definition allows, gaining a rich understanding of the existence and exercise of control, the comparative difference between companies, and the diversity of range within which constraints operate. Consequently this research has allowed a coming to terms with the various sources of power, and it labels specific areas of control which can be compared across companies and potentially across different social groupings.

As a model, the relationship between the primary and tertiary areas of control within the company is analogous with the base and superstructure models used by some Marxist approaches. Within anthropology, there has been a continuous debate as to which area forms the base of the larger society—the economic or the ideological.[9] However, for the purposes of this method of microcultural analysis, the primary area does not absolutely determine the tertiary area but is simply the most fundamental area of control bonding employee to employer, whereas it is the dominant social groups within society (in business, politics, and the law) which determine the nature of this initial, primary relationship.[10]

In examining the secondary and tertiary areas, we see how far the constraints of control may be exercised, what values predominate within the specific company, and the diversity of ways in which power becomes manifest based on a social relationship. The extent to which the office is a microcosm of broader society is a moot point, but as an indicator and occasional broadcaster of social values it is strong, and as a reflection of contemporary political and economic policies it is revealing.

[9] Notable participants in this debate include Godelier (1978) and Meillassoux (1978).

[10] Compare this with Foucault, who observes a similar relationship when considering the panoptic modality of power: 'The real, corporal disciplines contributed the foundation of the formal, juridical liberties. The contract may have been regarded as the ideal foundation of law and political order; panopticism constituted the technique, universally widespread, of coercion' (Foucault on 'Panopticism', from 'Discipline and Punish', in Rabinow 1991: 211).

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