Making Use of Critical Management Theory:
A Discursive Intervention for Employee Empowerment

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Critical management scholars have examined employee oppression (i.e., wage inequity, union busting, marginalization and silencing), by leveling criticism against traditional management practices, arguing for more pluralistic relationships across agencies. Despite this action-oriented charge, the field is currently lacking in its potential to provide employees tools they need to create a more equitable balance of power in the workplace. To address this gap, this paper describes an organizational intervention that can be used by employees to openly discuss and take action to remedy the problem of power inequity. The paper also includes a discussion of ethical constraints related to the intervention.

PURPOSE

Critical management scholars are a diverse group of academics in the field of management whose work tries to uncover how scholars and teachers can intersect with organizations to create positive social change both within and outside of organizations (i.e., King & Learmonth, 2015). In their endeavors, these scholars have addressed the problem of employee oppression (i.e., wage inequity, union busting, marginalization and silencing), by leveling criticism against demoralizing management practices, and by arguing for more pluralistic relationships between corporations, citizens and governments (i.e., Alvesson & Spicer, 2012; Mumby, 2014; Deetz, 2001b). Deetz, (2001b) explained that the main focus of critical theory management theory is to create opportunities for all employees to develop an equitable balance of power. Critical management theory also suggests a strong sense of agency among researchers: "Much of the [critical researcher's] discourse has a suspicious and therapeutic tone, but also a theory of agency that provides an activist tone - a sense that people can and should act on these conditions and that improved understanding as well as access to communication forums is core to positive action (Deetz, 2001b, p. 26)."

Despite this action-oriented charge, critical management scholars have kept discussions within the realm of theory, rarely providing practical discursive tools for shifting systems of organizational control from hegemonic to pluralistic. As a result of this gap in the research, the field is currently lacking in its potential to provide low-status employees the tools they need to create a more equitable balance of power in the workplace (King & Learmonth, 2015).

There have been several calls for scholarly work that answers the activist call of the critical management theory agenda (i.e., King & Learmonth, 2015; Alvesson & Deetz, 2000, Harman, 2013; Wickert & Schaefer, 2015). For example, King and Learmonth (2015) explained that critical management research should be moved from a "...mode-privileging critique, toward a more overtly affirmative, practice-oriented position that explores new practices and possibilities for action" (pp. 5). In order to address this call, and the overall lack of practical, impact-based research in the field, this paper describes an organizational intervention that can be used for the purpose of empowering employees by addressing the problem of power inequity in the workplace. The first section of the paper discusses the modern origins of employee oppression through rational organizing, followed by arguments that support the use of discourse as a tool for shifting oppressive management practices.

Despite the potential for positive outcomes from this type of research, there are also several constraints. Applied critical management research that directly involves employees may require them to engage in risky behaviors that could threaten their jobs. Scholars and/or other agents of change take on considerable ethical conflicts when they attempt to disrupt corporate power structures. Given this tension, this paper concludes with a discussion of how ethical boundaries may affect the research intervention, and provides recommendations for specific practices that can be employed to address this problem.

MODERN ORIGINS OF 'THE RATIONAL ORGANIZATION'

It is no secret that most of the wealth in the global economy is under the control of multinational corporations (Vitali, Glattfelder & Battiston, 2011). Supported by global agreements on trade, mergers and acquisitions, and access to world-wide labor, corporations have seemingly inexhaustible power. As multinationals continue to grow, workers shoulder the brunt of the drive to maintain profitability. They are required to satisfy unrealistic financial and production goals while their compensation remains stagnant (Moen, Lam, Ammons & Kelly, 2013). In addition, the steady demise of union representation has worsened this already precarious situation. The percentage of U.S. workers belonging to unions decreased by 25 percent between 1950 and 2013 (DeSilver, 2015).

The current precarious situation for workers is a departure from the relative security they enjoyed during the 1950'and 1960's. At that time, it was considered 'good business' to make policies and long-term decisions with at least some consideration for employee well-being. If morality or economic interests didn't provide enough prompting for businesses to treat workers humanely, motivation to avoid government intervention and scolding from competing societal interests (i.e., the press, religious organizations, the academy, and citizens' groups), would play enough of a policing role (Deetz, 2001b).

By the 1980's however, industrial interests began to consistently supplant societal influence, creating what former Secretary of Labor, Robert Reich called a 'purer form of capitalism,' which caused most organizations to "shed affiliations with people and place (Deetz, 2001b, p. 77)." Huge faceless corporations and their leaders were widely removed from customers, constituent communities, and employees. This was also the decade of the 'lean' corporation as U.S. companies began cutting employee "overhead" by implementing massive layoffs, moving operations overseas, replacing workers with computers, and hiring women and immigrants at lower wages. Corporations dazzled stockholders with short-term financial results without concern for how layoffs and other cost-cutting measures would affect employees and their communities. While technological advances allowed employees to be at their most productive in modern history, wages remained stagnant (Mishel, Gould & Bivens, 2015).

By 2003, business leaders were being urged by economists and government officials to move away from the "earnings per share" approach. They worried that companies no longer seemed to care about creating sustainable long-term economic value by engaging in research and by cultivating employee skills

and developing new talent. The Center for Financial Marketing Integrity and the Business Roundtable Institute for Corporate Ethics concluded that the "obsession" with short-term results while ignoring training, development, and research, destroys long-term value of the organization and hurts communities: "An obsession with meeting short-term expectations of varying constituencies too often hinders corporate managers and all types of investors from focusing on long-term value creation. The causes of this short-term fixation are multifaceted, which necessitates reforms that involve many stakeholders…" (2005, pp. 3).

A report published by the Aspen Institute, a nonprofit organization for societal reform, also issued warnings: .fund managers with a primary focus on short-term trading gains have little reason to care about long-term corporate performance or externalities, and so are unlikely to exercise a positive role in promoting corporate policies, including appropriate proxy voting and corporate governance policies that are beneficial and sustainable in the long-term. Risk-taking is an essential underpinning of our capitalist system, but the consequences to the corporation, and the economy, of high-risk strategies designed exclusively to produce high returns in the short-run is evident in recent market failures (2009, pp. 2).

In September 2008 the world witnessed the collapse of some of the oldest banking institutions in the U.S., and an unprecedented bailout of 700 billion. Financial markets descended to historic lows. A housing crisis, and record joblessness destroyed consumer confidence as an almost two-year long recession ensued. The great recession did not come as a surprise to either financial or social policy experts. In fact, some saw the warning signs years before. In 2003, the then U.S. Securities and Exchange Commission (SEC) Chairman William H. urged business leaders to focus on long-term results and move away from the "earnings per share" approach.

'SHORT-TERMISM' AND THE RATIONAL ORGANIZATION

Despite the warnings and the crisis that ensued, there now seems to be an ever-increasing willingness on the part of society and government to serve corporate interests (Heineman, 2016). This boosts the profile of 'the self-centered manager,' a figure who thrives in a fast-paced profit-driven environment supported by a show of short-term quarterly revenue at the expense of long-term value for the firm and its stakeholders (Deetz, 2001b; Theorell, Nyberg, Leineweber, Hanson, Oxenstierna & Westerlund, 2012). Short range hyper-financial goals, and the managers who produce them require day-to-day supervisory practices that mechanize and objectify workers while privileging management, board members, corporate executives and stock holders.

This perspective on the firm and its purposes has been described as 'rational organizing' (Höllerer & Walgenbach, 2017). Rational organizations are driven by complex, highly-controlled systems of rules and regulations that guide almost every aspect of employee behavior (Scott & Davis, 2015). The strict rules, policies and multiple supervisory layers that define rational organizations, subject employees to over-management, and place the balance of power in the hands of a few top executives. It is a system that disenfranchises non-management and lower-managerial employees by silencing them and by providing few options for controlling their own work lives.

Employees in rational organizations are essentially infantilized at work by patriarchal systems that objectify them and create a disaffected work force (Cartwright & Cooper, 2014; Khamisa, Peltzer, Ilic & Oldernberg, 2016). Managers in rational organizations justify over-control of employees by invoking early economic models of behavior, which describe workers as lazy, unintelligent and self-centered (Ilgen, Fisher & Taylor, 1979; Wolfe & Milliken, 2000). This view of employees naturally creates a self-fulfilling prophesy in that workers tend to act out these negative stereotypes because of apathy, frustration and lack of voice.

The objectification of the worker is made worse by real and perceived boundaries that prohibit formal and informal inter-hierarchical communication (Monge & Contractor, 2001; Weber, 1947). This lack of interaction and dialogue between managers and their employees can fuel negative stereotyping on both sides. Those at the top of the organization rarely get to know staff, and therefore have few opportunities to question widely-held negative assumptions about their competence and commitment to the work and to

the organization. Employees in turn, are rarely exposed to any evidence that challenges the view that managers are aloof and unapproachable. Because of these stereotypes, employees are over-managed to the point where they begin to view themselves as ineffectual or child-like (Argyris, 1990). When employees are exposed to this system in the long-term, they may internalize their lack of efficacy and become very distant and uncommitted to their work. The resulting diminished performance further justifies management oppression.

Employees in rational organizations are also continually denied access to conversations related to strategy, decision-making, and other discursive contexts that focus on the construction and maintenance of power. Because of their isolation, employees are unable to see how those contexts function to continually diminish their influence while increasing the power of privileged groups. The lack of access to important conversations not only denies employees the opportunity to participate in important decisions that affect the organization and their work lives, but it also keeps them from criticizing decisions and policies that maintain the status quo, particularly with regard to power inequity. Management essentially creates rules and standards that support the system of domination while enforcing mechanisms that silence employee opposition.

CRITICAL MANAGEMENT THEORY: POWER THROUGH DISCOURSE

Critical management scholars have written widely about using discourse as a source of employee empowerment by displacing the cycle of power reification (for a review, see Deetz, 2001a). "The central goal of critical theory in organizational communication studies has been to create a society and workplaces that are free from domination and where all members can contribute equally to produce systems that meet human needs and lead to the progressive development of all" (Deetz, p. 26). The origin of this research is based on the perspectives of Jürgen Habermas, German philosopher and member of the Frankfurt School of critical theory. Among his many ideas about politics, social justice, and the structure of power and society (e.g., 1975, 1984, 1987, 1996), Habermas believed that power is created and perpetuated through discourse. Specifically, he argued that messages within a social system typically act to preserve the hierarchical aspects of that system by protecting privileged groups and further marginalizing disenfranchised groups. In organizational contexts, oppression happens when norms, assumptions, and interpretive schemes, the staples of organizational life, provide the discursive means to support and reproduce existing systems of power (Deetz, 1998; Knights & Willmott, 1987; Mills, 1994; Townley, 1993).

Habermas argued that continuous oppression can be reversed only when groups with low-status can affect the discursive process through which power is created and reproduced. This influence comes from developing an open place for discourse that provides full and equal access to information, communication channels, and discussions that control how power is allocated. Discourse that questions, and/or constructively criticizes and disrupts hegemony can potentially transform how both low and high-status individuals view themselves and their roles in the organization. Through creating a new discursive context, less powerful groups can be exposed to injustices of the past, and can discover how to take on new, more powerful roles in the future. Also, through providing a discursive space for individuals to make their interests and opinions known, discourse can challenge social reality in that it undercuts the authority of those in power and reduces the credibility and enforceability of oppressive rules that define an organizations' distinct society.

Discursive access can also change socially constructed perceptions of reality by questioning commonly held stereotypes. For example, it typically is assumed that only high-level employees are qualified to influence key organizational decisions. Through increased inter-group dialogue, lower-ranking employees can have the opportunity to construct a narrative that defines them as well-informed, hardworking, and committed to the organization. Those of high rank could also shift negative stereotypes by presenting themselves as approachable and open to feedback, rather than as inaccessible, smug and demanding.

Despite the potential for positive outcomes, the practice of 'undoing' hierarchy is obviously dangerous. The possible personal, and economic consequences, along with the distinct possibility for failure and resulting poor morale are considerable barriers. If critical management approaches are to be practically applied in the workplace, change agents need to be mindful of the ethical considerations of creating processes that are considered threatening to the current hierarchy. Such ethical considerations of the change agent will be discussed more later in the paper.

Although some organizations attempt to use post-modern, 'democratic' practices (i.e., servant leadership, self-management, and employee participation), the majority of organizations still apply the rational approach to plan and implement organizational goals. In these systems, managers enjoy an entitlement to legitimacy. They create and hand down rules, strategic objectives and policies to staff level employees who are expected to accept them and to carry them out (Ouchi, 1978). This situation creates an obvious power vacuum for those at the top of the hierarchy, and can damage the morale and organizational commitment of everyone below them. Employees who are caught up in a cycle of disenfranchisement have little control over their organizational life. As a result, they experience anxiety, stress, and various other physical and mental problems (Cheney, 1995; Eisenberg & Goodall, 2003; Greenberger & Strasser, 1986; Morrison & Milliken, 2000; Parker, 1993).

Unfortunately, addressing and deconstructing power in traditional organizations is very difficult. First, rational organizations value consensus over conflict, which creates a tendency for employees to silence themselves (Akcin, Erat, Alniacik, & Ciftcioglu, 2017; Ewing, 1977; Morrison & Milliken, 2000; Nemeth, 1997; Scott & Hart, 1979; Sprague & Ruud, 1988). Also, employees and managers maintain strict communication boundaries because of organizational obstacles that prohibit interaction between individuals of different status (Heckscher, 1994; Monge & Contractor, 2001; Weber, 1947). This lack of conversation fuels stereotyping of lower-level employees, which further justifies the managers' power over them. Specifically, managers sometimes hold traditional opinions of their supervisees, causing them to assume that they are unmotivated and uncommitted to the work (Ilgen, Fisher & Taylor, 1979; Wolfe & Milliken, 2002). These opinions eventually become solidified to the point where managers assume they "know" and so rarely take any opportunities to develop interpersonal relationships that can challenge negative stereotypes. Such stereotypes justify mistrust of non-managerial employees, and are used to make certain conversations, information, and communication channels inaccessible. Because employees lack access to strategic conversations central to the operation of the firm, and the quality of work-life for employees, they remain unaware of information exchanges that serve to continuously disenfranchise them while reifying power for high-ranking groups.

To change the power dynamic, employees need to become aware of and gain access to power-sustaining discursive environments and channels of communication. This is necessary so that employees can affect and shift the balance of power and also adopt new perspectives on power so that they can see it is malleable instead of fixed (Knights & Willmott, 1987).

Disenfranchisement can only be reversed when low-status employees can have a voice in decision-making by gaining access to discussions about the allocation of power (Bernstein, 1995; Habermas, 1975, 1984, 1987, 1996). This access can provide all organizational members with the opportunity to share knowledge and opinions while deconstructing and re-constructing new ways to produce and distribute power through communication. This discursive access can also help individuals shift social constructs by confronting unspoken assumptions that keep disenfranchised groups oppressed. When these assumptions are challenged, individuals have the opportunity to try on new, more powerful roles through rhetorically shifting the narrative about their own power as well as the power that others possess (Deetz, 2001; Mumby, 2014).

The idea of full and equal access to discourse is guided by the universality principle, or principle U. Habermas (1990) explained that in order for a conversation to be considered ethical, everyone affected by all aspects of the discussion should have a distinct voice in all potential outcomes of the discussion. Habermas' principle originated from the Kantian idea of ethical testing, which requires individual to contemplate the outcomes of any action if it were carried out universally. Habermas gives a discourse-based version of the universality principal by interpreting it literally in a rhetorical environment.

EMPOWERING EMPLOYEES THROUGH DISCOURSE: AN INTERVENTION

Meisenbach (2006) describes the necessary actions for providing Habermas' discursive idea of Principle U. In generating an utterance, the speaker must determine who will be effected by it and what the possible outcomes are. This open discussion should also include rigorous debate about effects on potential stakeholders and their willingness and ability to accept such effects. Finally, all parties involved judge whether they will accept the utterance (idea, policy, strategy). Using such a discursive process to shift oppressive organizational power is a prime example of how critical theorists can apply their work to produce impactful outcomes. The next section of this paper describes a practical intervention that can be used for undertaking this work. The intervention can potentially help both employees and managers critically evaluate and shift rational power structures as well as the system of power reification that maintains it. Keeping with the argument that discourse is critical to this shift, the intervention focuses on creating a safe space for employees to discuss their views about the organization and about the top management team, while potentially discovering and legitimizing new ways to have their own voices heard.

Consider that the cycle of power reification described earlier can potentially be undone if marginalized employees could, through access to discourse, participate in creating new organizational realities, and unique access to power-creating and reifying discussions. The process of organizational decision-making can provide opportunities to make these shifts. If employees can participate in decision-making conversations (particularly those that they have been previously excluded from), they can take part in creating new norms that allow them to access key organizational discussions that not only affect the day-to-day realities of the organization, but also shift organizational norms about who is 'allowed' to participate in such conversations. If an alternative decision-making method is introduced that permits all employees to be represented, the narrative related to decisions and other important organizational conversations (i.e., strategic planning, or goal setting), could be shifted from non-negotiable to negotiable. This expanded discursive access could also reveal to all employees that the policies and decisions they assumed to be fixed can instead become fluid through a mutually negotiated process.

Access to decision-making dialogues may also help employees discard cultural norms that require self-silencing and passive behavior (Thomas, 2016). Along with providing first-time access to power-reifying conversations that have typically excluded employees, this access can challenge norms that support privilege based on rank. It can also deconstruct organizational norms that entitle top managers to unilateral decision-making power. Through this new understanding, marginalized employees can be exposed to the idea that their 'lower' status is more a function of their lack of access to conversations that create, maintain, and solidify power, rather than of self and externally-imposed beliefs about their inadequacies.

ORGANIZATIONAL FITNESS PROFILING

A practical tool for enabling the discursive processes just described is an intervention called Organizational Fitness Profiling (hereafter referred to as OFP), developed by Beer and Eisenstat (2000). Based on the assumption that non-managerial employees often have the most authentic and accurate knowledge of the inner-workings of an organization and its current and potential stakeholders, OFP was specifically designed to allow these employees discursive access to the strategic planning process. The first step of OFP requires top managers to develop an overall strategic vision for the organization. During this stage, a researcher/facilitator leads a strategic discussion among top managers during which the managers determine the values that will drive the organization for the next three to five years. The next step requires lower-level employees (typically everyone below top management), to evaluate the strategic plan. This evaluation is done with the help of a "task-force" team of mid-level employees who solicit from lower-level staff members, a full critique of the strategy (i.e., Will the strategy work? Is it feasible? Is it based on sound data? Will the employees accept it)? After the task-force obtains responses from staff, they then report this feedback, (along with their own), to the top management team. The

presentation of the feedback takes place during a researcher-facilitated meeting that is arranged in a "fishbowl" format. This format diffuses defensive reactions to possible negative staff feedback because it prohibits top managers from making any comments until all of the staff and task-force feedback have been discussed.

The final stage of OFP requires the task-force and top managers to discuss and negotiate a modified version of the strategic plan based on feedback provided during the fishbowl meeting. After a new strategy has been negotiated, the task-force and top management team make a commitment to promote, maintain and publicize the vision, and to reexamine it (using OFP), at least every few years.

It is typical for lower-level staff members participating in the intervention to be hesitant about providing feedback to the task-force. In order to provide support for this group, it may be helpful for the researcher/facilitator to hold training sessions to help the task-force solicit meaningful feedback from reluctant participants. Such training can include interviewing techniques, as well as paraphrasing and listening skills. After the task-force members complete the feed-back session, they should meet again with the facilitator to discuss how feedback can be constructively presented to the top management team during the fishbowl meeting. It may also be helpful to address any nervousness or hesitation on the part of the task-force team.

When the task-force and the management team assemble for the fishbowl meeting, there should be a review of the OFP procedures and an open question and answer session. Task-force members are then invited to provide a summary of the feedback they collected from the staff. Throughout this summary, the task-force should report on what the staff members perceived to be factors limiting their ability to achieve strategic goals. When the task-force members complete the feedback session, the top management team are then invited to comment. At this point, managers sometimes appear defensive (Beer & Eisenstate, 2000). They may also cite reasons for some of the problems instead of 'owning' them and offering to collaborate in order to create solutions. If this situation occurs, the facilitator could conduct a debrief meeting during which managers and staff talk about reactions to the feedback. It is sometimes the case that the groups cannot negotiate changes to the strategic plan unless they first establish a healthy communication dynamic.

In order for OFP to be successful, adversarial groups have to learn to work together and interact effectively. Low and high-status groups will need time and guidance to construct an environment through which they will feel safe to speak openly and to make risky disclosures (Wheelan, 2005). Therefore, before any OFP meetings can take place, trust building activities are typically required. When trust is enabled, group members can empathize with each other, and they can form effective inter-and intra-group coalitions, which will help to create new interpretive schemes that focus on cooperation. In addition, cross-group exercises that involve conversational dyads and other team-building activities should be used to diffuse existing tensions. The researcher could also employ standard mediation techniques to disarm any tension in the groups by carefully drawing out common interests that participants would not otherwise have shared. In addition, researchers should make a clear commitment to support employees until they are able to independently sustain similar dialogic processes in the future.

Participants must also commit to following through with their new roles. For example, if employees have opportunities to suggest changes to strategic plans, they need to take ownership of those changes, and determine mutually agreed upon standards for measuring effectiveness. Managers have to be willing to let go of hierarchical structures and re-negotiate power so that employees can maintain 'voice' and access to power-creating and reifying conversations that the intervention allows. Researchers/facilitators should commit to providing knowledge and skills to help employees become successful and comfortable with these new identities.

Given that the work of shifting perceptions of organizational reality can be highly unpredictable, participants should plan for setbacks and develop specific methods for dealing with them as they occur. In attempting to preempt problems, it may be helpful to analyze barriers and drivers that affect employees' efforts to adopt new roles and discursive activities. It is also necessary to create a schedule for periodic facilitated meetings that involve all participants so that set-backs can be discussed when they arise, and potential conflicts can be addressed. Finally, and perhaps most importantly, it is necessary to help

participants acquire the skills and methods they need to solve ongoing problems on their own (perhaps through team-building and interpersonal skills training), so that they can learn to re-negotiate power on a regular basis without the help of a facilitator.

INTERVENTION AND ITS POTENTIAL EFFECTS ON THE 'RATIONAL' ORGANIZATION

The OFP method just described can potentially shift power reification by changing prevailing norms about power. For example, the fishbowl meeting provides middle managers and staff with a sanctioned opportunity to critique the current strategies of the organization, while allowing access to a key conversation that can potentially change the power dynamic. It also creates a transformed narrative that changes strategy-related conversations across the hierarchy from 'impossible' to 'possible.' In addition, by providing a model for reasonable discussion between low and high-status groups, the intervention exposes employees to a new discursive space that they could hopefully use continuously.

Despite limitations and communicative constraints, the intervention can potentially expose employees to some discursive conditions that can change a 'rational organization.' In particular, during the fishbowl meeting, middle managers and staff (to a lesser degree), can be exposed to vital communication channels that control how power is produced and reified. In addition, the task-force discussion of organizational strategy with the top management team, which disrupts that group's privilege (based on rank), which typically allows those group members to make unilateral decisions without input from lower ranking employees.

One of the central aspects of the intervention was controlled confrontation between powerful and marginalized groups. Through this confrontation, lower-ranking groups had access to a conversation during which exclusionary norms could be changed. The fishbowl meeting could allow the task-force to have an influence on the discussion and also to re-interpret their own potential access to strategy conversations. Through such access, task-force members can also come to understand that policies and decisions they assume to be fixed are actually developed through a negotiated process. The intervention also gave lower-ranking employees access to this process. In using the fishbowl meeting as a forum to reveal their opinions, the task-force members could potentially discard cultural norms that required self-silencing and passive behavior. They could use their access to the management team, as well as their own opinions and those offered by the staff, to reveal their dissatisfaction with the current system of power. Along with providing access to power-reifying conversations, the intervention could also challenge norms that supported discursive privilege based on rank. This opportunity could potentially deconstruct the organizational norms that entitle top management to unilateral decision making.

OFP: PRACTICAL AND ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS

There are several practical and ethical issues to consider when undertaking practical interventions to disrupt rational organizations. First, researchers may inadvertently intimidate or pressure employees to participate in the intervention and thereby perpetuate the power inequities they seek to remedy. In order to address this potential conflict, researchers need to create mechanisms that allow for critical evaluation of themselves. They also need to create a process for negotiating their own power with employees, and to create an atmosphere for unconstrained debate. Researchers should also openly discuss their bias regarding the process and also commit to providing data that accurately describes past outcomes resulting from the intervention. Individual discussions with employees prior to the first intervention activity could help to determine the safest methods for debate. After discussions have taken place, employees should have the option to make the final decision to participate. The researcher could also offer other alternatives to employees who refuse participation, but still want to address power inequity in some other way.

CONCLUSION

The pressure placed on rational organizations to produce short-term gains for their shareholders has created 'rational' organizational systems that put employees in a double-bind: Disenfranchising them while making it exceedingly difficult to improve their situations. This paper suggests that there is a significant role to play for critical management scholars and their agenda for social change provided that practical tools like OFP are implemented. There are many questions and constraints however that need to be addressed. Worker precarity (Gerrard, 2017), or the sustained feeling of insecurity that many employees experience, is both the impetus for change and is also one of its most formidable barriers. How can employees feel safe while advocating for themselves, and for the health of the organization? In addition, what are the obvious cultural differences that affect willingness and/or motivation to deconstruct organizational hierarchies (both from the standpoint of the powerful and the disenfranchised)? How can scholars argue more convincingly that egalitarian approaches to management can ultimately serve both the human and the financial interests of the firm? Critical management scholars are well-positioned to take up this agenda. Because the rights of workers are continuously under assault due to the ever-expanding power of global corporations, the need to address the problem of power inequity in the workplace through engaged and useful research is currently very pressing.

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