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Building Organizational Identity in Minority Communities (Organizacinio identiteto konstravimas mažumų bendruomenėse)

Santrauka. Šiame straipsnyje nagrinėjama galios raiška ir jos funkcijos, o taip pat svarstoma metodologinė, teorinė ir procedūrinė problematika, susijusi su komunikaciniais santykiais, kurie konstruojami pasitelkiant tiriamąją bendruomenės veiklą. Kartu analizuojamas organizacinio identiteto susidarymas.

Galia, tiksliau, galios raiška apibūdinama ne tik kaip blogai slepiamas apskaičiavimo veiksnys, bet ir kaip būdingas komunikacinis kintamasis. Tokia prielaida rodo, kad kritinė analizė neturi ribotis paplitusiomis „dvi-taktėmis“ jėgos–pasipriešinimo metaforomis. Gerokai svarbiau – išsiaiškinti organizacines prielaidas ir komunikacinius galios raiškos bruožus. Galia apibūdina komplikuoatą, daugiakryptę santykių raišką, sudėtingą įtakų tėkmę, atsitiktinių veiksmų įgyvendinimą, susijusį su išorinėmis ir vidinėmis socialinių veikėjų kryptimis. Remiantis šiomis prielaidomis, galia – ne individų, o organizacinių reiškinių požymis.

Pažymėtina, kad šis straipsnis siejamas su metodologine Ohio (JAV) universiteto Komunikacijos katedros programa – viešųjų interesų komunikacijos tyrimais.

Introduction

The purpose of this article is to outline the basic methodological, theoretical, and technical issues in the development and practice of organizational identity formation through research.

The development of the methodology and the studies were set in the context of attempting to create a program in the Department of Communication at The Ohio State University, *Communication in the Public Interest*. As the name implies, we believe that Communication Research can serve the public through pedagogy and research with policy payoff.

However, there were few studies and fewer methodologies which were consistent with public interest and truly addressed the political domain of our society. While my orientation was theoretically oriented from the phenomenology

of Husserl and Merleau-Ponty, the hermeneutics of Gadamer, the critical theory of Habermas and Marcuse, and the cynicism of the 1970's, that an a priori methodology must efface itself in favor of the subject matter is critical (see *Science of Communication*, 1990, and *Democracy and Technocracy: Some Issues in Political Communication*, 1997, Pilotta & Mickunas).

The concretization of the public interest program as well as our search for a method was created by the Driving Park Project (Also American Community), which formulated our thematic of *community justice* and set in motion the ongoing “inner” dialectic between methodology method/and public concern, while there have been several community social action research projects, some 25 in all, we have selected three exem-

plars demonstrating pertinent issues and practical recommendations. They are pivotal studies for our own development and reflection on developing social action research. The Driving Park Project was our initiation in the world of political research contestation. The Legal Education Project Through Cultural Dialogue with the Case of the New Americans (Indo-Chinese refugees) facilitated the development of our methodological principles, and the "Central City" Profile focused us more clearly in communication and policy issues, thematically reflecting on system and organization issues *qua* communication, and the politics of difference and otherness.

The three studies thematically point up the role community social action research can have, as our orientation was, upon reflection, communication as politics which is founded upon the political covenant of democracy. Like democracy community social action is not set once and for all, but must be consistently re-won prior to any social contract to make civil sense.

Engaging the political now has been referred to as the justice gap or the rethinking of the welfare state under capitalism. In light of globalization, our civil rights to health, education, and employment are placed under the sign of scarcity economics, creating zero-sum solutions, which means our basic civil institutions are in trouble, particularly the political. It appears that another right is placed under the sign of scarcity - the right to communicate. The very civic/political virtues of access and understanding, cornerstones of the political institution, have been placed under the sign of scarcity by academic administrators caught in the rhetoric of marketization of global rankings, and economic "hard choices." Equality of freedom, fairness of efficiency, global rankings, or communication are up for grabs in the administration of public education should consult the political in the public.

Organization Identity

This article focuses on the functions and manifestations of power in the communication re-

lationships constructed through the community organization research activity. Power, or more precisely, empowerment is conceptualized as a proper communication variable rather than as a poorly disguised analogue of a dimension of physical calculation. This means that we shall not entertain in this discussion the push-pull metaphors so endemic to analyses presupposing the mechanical triad, force-resistance-change. Instead, we shall make some explicit assumptions about organizations and generate a communication evaluation of power.

Following Weick (1979), organization (to substantivise his "organizing") consists of the resolution of "equivocality in an enacted environment by means of interlocked behaviors embedded in conditionally related processes" (p. 91). For our purposes, this working definition of *organization* requires one minor modification, which at any rate probably amounts not so much to a modification as to the selection of a different point of emphasis. We shall apply "interlocking behavior" in the broader sense of the reciprocal obligation of behaviors rather than in terms of Weick's most specific interact-double interact units of analysis that he draws from the relational systems school (Fisher 1983). What this notion of obligatory reciprocity implies will become evident shortly.

For the present, we need to display definitionally the relationship between our working assumptions about organizations and the communication conceptualization of power. We propose that the interesting dimension of organizations consist not in what they do or the fact that they do anything in particular, but consists rather in their enacting an environment in which and by virtue of which "some thing" inevitably gets done. The condition that something invariably gets done in the environment called *organization* does not depend on either the individual or the collective will of organizational actors. Indeed, things get accomplished often enough despite the volitions of actors. It is this later phenomenon of doing without willing that contributes to talk

about “things” that organizations “do” to people. Organizations are not agents, but they are environments dominated by actions, places in which things get done.

Power describes a complicated, multidirectional articulation of relationships, avenues of influence flow, manifesting the communication system of contingent necessitation (“control”) embodying concretely and signifying the external and internal contours of the organizational environment for social actors. On these assumptions, power is a property of the organizational phenomenon as such, not a quality of individuals: individuals’ power quanta are functions of their respective positions within the network of interlocked behaviors detailing the system’s contingent necessity. (The assumptions do not require that such positions are part of formalized intercultural relationships.)

The notion of contingent necessitation follows tautologically from the assumption that organizations are articulated enacted environments of action. It is not at present important how things get done, why they get done, or who does them; instead, all we need to presuppose is that organizations are “doing environments” where tasks (meaningful or not) are accomplished along recognizable (redundant) pathways. We can flesh out the concept of contingent necessitation through indicating its relationship with Weick’s “resolving of equivocality.” In processing the environment, organizations order informational input, much like behavioral inputs are ordered through interlocking, because organization introduces structure (or at least a different order of structure) that establishes for organizational members’ restricted (defined) latitudes of discretion with regard to problem solving and decision making. The “doing environment” (enacted domain of activity) generates rules phenomena of all types (social, task, motivational, psychological, etc.) that serve to differentiate organizations from the greater complexity of external environments (Weick 1979).

We prefer “contingent necessitation” over “rules” because the former is descriptively more precise and conceptually less worrisome. Rules approaches, especially when grounded in sociological conventionalism and unstipulated social contract assumptions, lead analysis into warrentless speculations about deliberation (setting the rules) and knowledge of the rules. We maintain that (a) rules are not formulated but discovered; (b) conscious mastery of the rules constitutes an exceptional situation in an organizational setting, which latter condition itself probably possesses its own characteristic dynamic of contingent necessitation; and (c) rules furnish a necessary precondition of choice, not its proper object.

If one still requires a physical analogy for purposes of visualizing power, one can have recourse to a less anachronistic conception of the physical nature. Just as space expresses the proper geometry of locations in the presence of matter (the “bending” of space), so power expresses a peculiar configuration of behavioral interlocking in an enacted environment. Power articulates a dimension of contingent bonding in human activity much like space articulates the relational motility of “space-occupying” material entities.

In this context, *empowerment* has two communication applications. First, empowerment is coextensive with organizing, inasmuch as an enhanced environment predisposes the regularizing interlocking of behaviors effectively regulating the complex mutual necessitation of human interactions. Hence, by definition, to organize is to create power. Second, empowerment occurs in some proportion to the articulation of relationships (interlocking behaviors) with other organizations. According to this assessment, possessing some relationship with another organization means to have at one’s disposal some measure of power, however comparatively insignificant, with respect to that organization (to participate at some level in a network of fate/behavior controls.)

The sheer amount of prose required here to reduce a useful definition of power should not be taken as an indicator of the relative importance of the power variable in this research.

At the same time, power is of great importance from the standpoint of at least one component in the research equation, namely, the *refugee populations*. In turn, one could advance the hypothesis that an organization's own assessment of the importance of its power is inversely proportional to the objective powerfulness of the organization. A weak organization, one capable of only marginally influencing its environment, cannot afford to not be highly "ego involved" in, and so jealously guard, its measure of power. In contrast, a secure and powerful organization can more easily assume an influenceable - even compliant - posture as well as de-emphasize internally the role of power to such a degree that for analytic purposes power relationships have become well concealed.

But, at bottom, these surmised are reducible to the proposition that the perceived difference between no power and some power cannot be compared with that between little power and extensive power. Furthermore, it is not clear whether the degree of powerfulness affects theoretically the analysis of power; it may turn out that the increment of power does not meaningfully change the qualitative complexity of the power variable. At any rate, these considerations, although certainly relevant, do not enter directly into subsequent discussion.

Empowerment & Identity Formation

For purposes of exposition as well as for some substantive reasons, the analysis of power requires that the data be subdivided into three units corresponding to the three central and, to be sure, loosely-coupled components in the organizational equation, namely, the target communities, the research, and the project sponsor. In different, but equally important ways, the communication concept of *power* that has previously been

sketched can illuminate the relationships taking shape among these components. But for present purposes we shall be assessing only the empowerment of the communities and their local associations. It should be noted that, although it is not attempted here, many of the same phenomena that are associated with empowerment also permit evaluation from a rhetorical perspective concerned with expression, perception, and social perspective as they affect the development of group symbols and interests.

The initial manifestation of community empowerment derives immediately from the communication function of recognition. By mere fact of having been targeted by city government as the first recipient of its jurisprudential largess, the Indochinese community, as opposed, for example, to the Hispanic, Ethiopian, or Korean populations, acquired definition as the principal project focus and the most proximate test of both the city's and the researchers' organizational and interpersonal skills. Because the city envisioned expanding the scope of legal education activities tailored to the needs and interests of resident communities to include additional ethnic populations, the group's initial moment in the spotlight cast a shadow across the entire undertaking in a manner that significantly enhanced their importance both from the city and research viewpoints. In short, the decision to define the task in this fashion constitutes the first stage of a bonding process that promotes by increments obligatory reciprocity- fate/behavior control *vis-a-vis* both the city and the research interests has been bestowed gratuitously on the refugee communities.

Although the first step in the interlocking of behaviors issues simply from the research directive formulated by city government and the Columbus Area Refugee Task Force, the second step depends on coincidence, identifiability, and limited information. How the communities became defined depended on the representative subgroupings contacted by the researchers. The importance of this factor can be easily demon-

rated. As matters evolved, the research component possessed virtually tyrannical control over the equivocality resolving gatekeeping functions with respect to the city. The immediate consequence of the importance of its mediating role left the city with no genuine alternative but to rely on the research component for the information necessary to realize the project objectives. So little knowledge was available, and the opportunities for contact with the target communities so limited, that the research component constituted the vital factor in the project as a whole. Accordingly, owing to the dependence of the research component on subgroups available for interviewing, the communities acquired definition in the eyes of the city on the basis of the viewpoints expressed by these self-selected samples on not only their own communities but on the city and the project as well.

By way of the caricatures emerging through the interview data, the target communities as a whole were drawn into the orbit of the legal system. Community empowerment occurred through subgroup participation in the research component's activity. Even though the degree of empowerment may be relatively minor, still empowerment bears directly on the direction and the implementation of the project and, at the very least, has a potential impact on the communities in ways affecting matters strictly unrelated to the particular objectives of his undertaking.

As far as concerns the project directly, these communities received recognition, inclusion, and therewith consultation privileges immediately influencing the design and execution of an official function; in itself, no small feat. For instance, interview data suggested the value of including crime prevention information and training either as a part or as an offshoot of legal education. The importance of this comparatively minor modification of items germane to the project/research agenda had two interdependent consequences: (a) by promising to respond, the city indicated to the target community that com-

munity input serves a role in the formulation of institutional initiatives; and (b) by delivering on the promise, the city provided concrete evidence to the community of the value of participating in the civic process for the sake of satisfying specific community needs. In short, the community gained an awareness that the beneficiary can in part dictate the terms of its benefaction.

But project participation introduces more than just recognition of an institution's influenceability into the target community. Participation also gives access to and information about mechanisms for exercising legitimate power. From one perspective that is a symbol of city "responsiveness" to community priorities, lending itself to greater sophistication on the part of the community with regard to methods for actively obtaining a response from sources of legitimate power.

By displaying its flexibility, especially, as in this case, in a manner that also informs segments of the community about the articulation of the institution in question, institutional authority enables the community to begin to comprehend the means for securing *community-initiated* needs responses from the institution, as well as creating assumptive expectations within the community about the appropriate level of responsiveness of the institution. In other words, expressions of flexibility furnished unilaterally by the institution introduce into the community the presupposition that "responsiveness" constitutes a proper characteristic of institutions as well as suggested ways of going about eliciting responsive behaviors from the institution. The upshot is that the community begins to believe that it possesses at least a *prima facie* credibility that endows it potentially with- and encourages-self-advocacy capability. Taken together, *expectation*, *institutional insight*, and *presumptive credibility* offer the rudimentary premises for action.

If we look at the community associations themselves, we can see more clearly how the research activity and the project serve to organize and to empower the refugee population. For

example, the Vietnamese Association, which existed only for approximately 1 year, had a governing body consisting of an unrepresentative sample of highly educated and largely suburbanized middle-class refugees. The association “represented” a minority of the local Vietnamese population. Project participation held open for this group the promise of legitimation-generating bonds with the city and, if for no other reason, mere attendance at city-sponsored legal information events covered by the local news media contributes to their credentials in the eyes of the greater population of Vietnamese. Almost unavoidably, additional research information resources will be interpreted in light of established bonding implications stemming from the association’s research participation. Research participation (research intervention) imparts structure to the community both from the viewpoint of the community as a whole and that of officialdom’s mere function of the necessity for mediating the legal system’s outreach activity.

In any event, it serves no one’s best interests to underestimate the impact of the project on the target communities. Project participation became a factor in the factious, but most effectively organized, Laotian community, offering a tempting instrument for attempting to manipulate externally the credibility of the competing subgroups within the community.

In this situation, empowerment of the community can proceed only by way of empowering community organizations. Although from the program standpoint, this approach furnishes the most effective, convenient, and durable mechanism for institutionalizing program goals, from the research standpoint this procedure, if not in effect inventing organizational structure out of whole cloth, at least dramatically increases the articulation of the existing organizations.

Project participation introduces a clear representative/represented relationship into the community, not simply by reason of providing samples of community needs and priorities, but

also politically, owing to their service as mediators diffusing information within the community and as the central providers of project participants. The two primary functions of organization (refugee associations) empowerment that generate representation consequences are patent: (a) the targeting function- organizations form the chief means of gaining access to the community, and (b) the contingency function- research contact mediation produces attendance and participation effects establishing these organizations as the network nodal positions indigenous to the community for purposes, at least, of the project.

But behavioral interlocking extends beyond these minimal conditions. We have already alluded to additional bonding ramifications. Project participation gradually came to be identified by the organizations themselves as an entree mechanism granting community leaders access to institutional power and, as a consequence, solidifying their positions as leaders within their communities by imputing to them the necessary credentials to “speak on the communities behalf” to the research and the project sponsor. Tied into this heightened community-organization articulation is the emergence of a reference group function bestowing organizations with an enhanced capacity for controlling not simply information and aid to community subgroups but also for influencing power relationships within the community.

Leadership in the community is diffused through a community subgroup by virtue of having a member participating in the project. The resolution of a rivalry or two will doubtlessly be in part determined on the basis of apparent prominence in research project participation; whoever is relied on by the research and project sponsor components acquires greater influence within the community. Indeed, one might go so far as to say that one of the defining characteristics of the “community” will be the level and quality of project participation.

There has emerged another curious phenomenon directly relevant to the power-generating structural articulation of the community associations. For purposes of this analysis, we shall contrast organization *task* with organization *theme*. Organizational task simply names the particular activity or activities undertaken by an organization. In this case, the organizational tasks consist of legal education and related community research. Organizational themes are those symbolic elements establishing the organization as a cohesive entity by supplying the reason for its diverse endeavors. From the standpoint of the project sponsor and the research components, the tasks at hand unambiguously delimit their measure of interest in uncovering the target communities; organizational thematic compositions. In other words, all these components need is adequate information to make educated judgements about how best to introduce legal education into these communities.

The situation becomes much more complicated when assessed from the standpoint of the community associations. In part, the thematic structure of the organizations themselves was gradually undergoing elaboration and becoming concretely perceived in relation to project participation.

The first immediate consequence typically is the reduction of the rationalization utility of the futility prerogative possessed by unenfranchised "interest" groups. New-found access to the legal system institutes, for the associations, the possibility for attracting the attention of the political system, and thereby sets on the associations the burden of "doing something" meaningful to benefit their communities.

At this point, success and failure become genuine descriptors from the organizations' points of view. Should the project fail, blame must be assigned; should it succeed, the associations are first in line to claim credit. More than that, success in this instance would reflect upon the viability and competence of the associations both

within their respective communities and from the standpoint of legitimate authorities, including more than just the legal system; for instance, social service agencies would have to acknowledge these associations' improved credibility.

Finally, organizations representing the interests of other local ethnic communities would be encouraged to take into account a number of additional competitors for the attention of institutional authority and, as a result, open themselves at some level to include the Indochinese as part of their reference group. On the other hand, failure produces a familiar dialectic. The organizations lose their opportunity; this must be rationalized. *Alienation* becomes a meaningful concept at this juncture; so do the associations' ineptitude, researcher incompetence and miscalculation, institutional insensitivity or misunderstanding, and the like. The significant point here is that organizational justification and recrimination reflexive mechanisms have been stimulated within these associations by virtue of their having been targeted, and so structured, by the research and sponsoring agency/components.

The interaction between thematic structure, organizational articulation, and the project task can be viewed in still another connection. The potential for extending their influence within their communities draws the associations toward the city and the project. But the possibility of competition, emanating both from other community subgroups and from other ethnic communities, not to mention the ever-present possibility of project failure, provokes ingroup reflection upon organizational themes, if for no other reason than as the means for ascertaining the degree to which it is in the best interest of the associations to commit themselves to the project. Genuine payoffs are at stake for the associations as a whole and for subgroups within the associations.

In the broadest sense, project participation requires reflection on superordinate association goals. For instance, is the main function of the association to promote the preservation of nati-

ve customs or to advocate the interests, rights, and needs of the immigrant community? Or, should the major concern be the satisfaction of essential survival needs or the social and political articulation of the community?

Answers to such questions will influence not only the associations' own self-definitions and thus their internal standards of evaluation, but also help determine which subgroup and which individuals will control the associations and, by extension, "speak for the community." Different emphases require different skills, most especially for immigrant populations, and different criteria of effectiveness. Relationships among associations and the communities, the associations and the research component, the associations and the city, and, *a fortiori*, the city and the communities are all affected by the associations' deliberations upon the organizational themes made salient by project participation.

Two additional factors germane to the empowerment of the associations require mention here. We have labeled these factors respectively the *social psychology of the semblance of action* and the *mystique of procedures*.

As we have previously asserted, organizations are more or less articulated "doing" environments. Getting something accomplished creates its own mechanism of rationalization and legitimation. Of course, to be in a state of "not doing," whether as an individual, a subgroup, or an organizational whole, puts into question—primarily by putting out of play—the sensefulness of the organizational enterprise as such. On the other hand, having a task institutes a marvelously effective intersubjective dynamic promoting the formulation of the organization from the standpoint of members and observers alike. For present purposes, it suffices that we acknowledge that the existence of a project in which the associations and the communities are invited to participate in and of itself can be enough to encourage organizational articulation and thereby generate further association empowerment.

Finally, organizational articulation assessed from the standpoint of the incremental interlocking of behaviors can be seen to be embodied perceptually by "procedures." At one level, of course, a task stimulates the formalization of interpersonal relationships through raising to greater explicitness the contingent necessitation underpinning organizational member interaction, both with respect to task proper and to theme and associated symbols. But more interestingly in this case, the associations, while somewhat intimidated, are attracted by the procedural nuances, with respect both to implementation and design revealed to them by the process of constructing the program for legal education.

People appear to be attracted to the research component in part because the latter symbolizes a *procedural moment* within the process of generating the requisite materials and plans. In other words, regardless of the problems of relevance and of coordinating the level of difficulty in the materials presented with the linguistic and legal comprehension capacities of the recipients, it is our guess that if the city or the researchers had a ready-made leaning package that they sought simply to deliver to the communities, the latter would not display the degree of interest they currently communicate.

These people have grown accustomed to assorted "hand-outs" whether on the order of welfare assistance, securing housing and employment, or of various forms of instruction, language and otherwise. But they have always assumed or been forced to assume the role of recipients, pure and simple. Consequently, they have had infrequent exposure to the internal workings of the organizational process. In short, in and of itself, the bureaucratization of decision making smacks to them of legitimacy. Restated somewhat cynically, given this project has been the rather broad latitude available for manipulating without accountability the community associations' perceptions of the bureaucratic complexity involved in accomplishing the project goals.

THE ENCODING OF THE CENTRAL CITY: “MINORITIZING” POPULATIONS

One way to distinguish between *cooperation* and *compliance* is to observe the presence or absence of a sense of proactivity on the part of an individual or group of individuals. Compliance is behavior directed and determined by another, whereas cooperation is self-directed behavior influenced by another. For the social actor, the difference lies in one's understanding of possible alternatives available for selection.

For the social observer, the difference lies in his or her alignment with implicitly or explicitly specified outcomes or goals embedded in the presumption of a perspective. The same observable behavior may be judged either compliant or cooperative depending on whether the attribution of proactivity is made and to which party or parties. But if we instead adopt a system perspective, it is possible to evaluate the behavior of social actors as *adaptive*, that is, as responses to system conditions.

Minorities find themselves facing conditions of scarcity in terms of all types of resources. As the behavior of any interactant can be said to condition the behavior of other interactants, the conditions of the social and physical environment can be understood as expressing a set of expectations on the part of the system in regard to the actors. In the absence of any other mitigating circumstances, such conditions translate as expectations, which serve to limit the field of possible responses. That is to say, if those inadequate resources are experienced as not only characteristics of the environment, but also as a kind of social and communicative code, then those conditions become the encoded expectations of possible selections on the part of those actors. Those conditions are transformed into symbolic media, and as a social actor, I read them as the answer to the question “What does the system expect of me?”

It is not beyond the scope of this research effort to suggest that, because communication co-

des are such potent and efficacious mechanisms (as previously discussed), their characteristics operate as a kind of blueprint for the creation and interpretation of much of social reality. As a functioning member of this social system, I implicitly abstract the general pattern of communication codes and then typically utilize that pattern to deconstruct many or most aspects of my experience in the social world.

From a system perspective, this makes pragmatic sense. If, in fact, communication codes have evolved as a response to increasing levels of complexity, and so are mechanisms for reducing complexity by limiting contingencies- and they seem to be doubly effective because they both cohere elements while allowing for subsystem differentiation- it would be counterproductive for many different mechanisms to evolve because complexity would then reappear only at a higher level of abstraction. In short, such a development would constitute a failure to reduce complexity. Put more succinctly, the development of more than one pattern for reducing complexity would not be mere redundancy, it would be another form of complexity. Redundancy within a pattern (or mechanism) would increase its overall information value; a multiplicity of patterns for reducing complexity in terms of guiding behavior alternatives is not redundancy, but diversity.

It is consistent within a system perspective to conclude that any pattern or mechanism successful at reducing complexity is likely to be employed with great frequency. Although this conclusion is not to suggest that such a strategy does not also have its drawbacks, it nonetheless serves to enable the continuation of the system because of the self-replicating nature of the mechanism (the codes). Not only can specific codes be replicated, but the duplication of the general pattern help to ensure the potential for the formulation of new codes as they might be needed. The abstract and ahistorical nature of codes renders them the ideal sort of mechanism from a system perspective because, as such, they

are both generically and specifically replicable and are therefore both triply efficacious and yet versatile. Their versatility resides in their potency in transforming any and all actual and potential contingencies into a set of preferred and manageable alternatives.

The desirability of those alternatives is entirely relative to one's perspective. The perspective from which desirability is most likely assured is that of the system itself, and it is probable that social systems operate on general system theory principles.

Most relevant here is the fact that evolution does not proceed on the basis of optimization of alternatives. That is to say that changes in an organism need not be optimal in order to endure, but merely functional at some historical period of time. Similarly, the utility of some development may fade, leaving the change in place. As a consequence, it is not always a simple matter to determine the function or appropriateness of some entity's current state of evolution. Lacking sufficient information or understanding of the original context, it is all too easy to draw erroneous conclusions. It is easy to forget that developments are often originally adaptive, although it might not be clear that they are now adaptive, nor clear in exactly what ways they were originally adaptive.

What appears to be most applicable to the case of evaluating the response of social actors to system demands is that such responses need to be carefully examined in light of both their original context and from the perspective of the actors. This highlights the difference between the sensibility of the system and that of the actor; what is functional for one is not necessarily optimal for the other. From a system perspective, the need for self-replication may consistently override the option of optimization for/of system elements.

At strategic points, the deployment of a code (maybe "socioeconomic mobility") or codes minus the component of reciprocity creates the

economic marginalization of the inner-city regions of urban areas through the replication of subsystem divisions that, in turn, maintain a particular simplification or balancing of a host of symbolic and material contingencies. This, in turn, enables the continuation of a particular pattern of resource allocation while minimizing both the likelihood of and potential success of any challenge to that pattern. By encoding specific behavioral expectations into variations of communication media across the spectrum of social differentiation, and by the selective engagement of code reciprocity, the system induces replication of itself, including a segment characterized by economic and social marginalization.

From the perspective of the social actor, such marginalization is certainly not experienced as anything nearing optimal. Nonetheless, from a system perspective, such a component serves various functions, and because system elements are interdependent, altering this component is difficult and implicitly threatening to the future of the system, which is biased in favor of actualizing any future state as a replication, if not near duplication, of its present state. In other words, the system itself, although potentially adaptable, is inherently conservative, favoring preservation of the status quo. Replication more commonly wins out over optimization.

In offering up greatly reduced alternatives and in favoring the selection of one or several of those alternatives over others, codes provide the sort of information on which individuals predicate their understanding of self, of the world, and of the relationship between the self and the world. In so orienting the individual to the world, codes influence the ability of individuals to generate new or different perspectives.

Because one can only ask questions about what one understands (or believes oneself to understand: I must be able to articulate what it is I know that I don't know in order to formulate a question), one can limit the extent and range of questions an individual might raise. Put different-

ly, that people often don't know that they don't know is, to some extent, a byproduct of the nature of communication codes. The net result is that they don't know what questions to ask because they don't understand the relationships that constitute the encryption scheme for locating the information they need but don't know they need.

These are precisely two of the problems that emerged as thematic in the interview data: asking the right questions to get at relevant information and determining that one does in fact know what one believes one knows. The way a social actor knows virtually anything is from engagement with the social system (e.g., with other actors and/or institutions).

Here again, reciprocity is a key to the communication process and its social consequences. If successful engagement is characterized by the articulation of code reciprocity, then disconfirmation would be characterized by a lack of reciprocity. If a communication encounter does not activate reciprocity as anticipated by a social actor, then there is only disconfirmation of the assumptions and understanding that predicated the interaction.

The result is that the actor must conclude that he or she does not know what he or she thought he or she knew or understood. And without the engagement of the reciprocity, there is a sudden and steep rise in contingencies and therefore a complexity accompanied by a parallel drop in predictability. The interaction is now characterized by uncertainty, and the actors experience discomfort and possible dissatisfaction.

Furthermore, without the engagement of reciprocity of the code, the linking and binding functions of communicative transactions are not accomplished, or at least not in the ordinary sense in which connectivity is recognized and understood as a positive force in the sense that it is the presence of some relationship. In a backhanded sort of way, the failure of reciprocity links individuals in the sense that it firmly establishes the absence of connectivity, but in the context of a so-

cial system, demarcation of relational boundaries (exclusion as well as inclusion) is still acknowledging a relationship in terms of the larger system.

That this negative linking is still a form of social relating reflects on the need of the system to replicate itself, and on the idea of socio-economic competency and mobility. In terms of the system, it may be necessary, or at least desirable, for certain elements to remain, in socio-economic terms, immobile, in which case it is inaccurate to label those elements as socio-economically incompetent. For, from a system perspective, such immobility is really a form of competency, of accurately enacting the expectations of the system.

It is clear that codes must, in fact, order the social situation and constitute the context of an interaction, what Luhmann (1995) so elliptically refers to as "code-guided communication processes." Minorities attempting to deal with bank loan officers clearly illustrate an example of the effect of code-limited alternatives restricting the possibility or probability of a social actor asking the appropriate and relevant questions in order to secure the necessary information and understanding to accomplish his or her goal (i.e., to secure a loan).

This difficulty is further exacerbated by the fact that much (legal, etc.) information is encrypted in a way that renders it incomprehensible to the very people who might most benefit from access to it (in this case, inner-city small business owners). At one level, untangling this kind of encryption problem can be managed if dealt with in a conscientious and systematic way. That it remains a problem in light of the attention afforded it at local, state, and federal levels is an indication that something more pervasive is at work in the situation.

One explanation is that changing that situation will result in a direct challenge to the governmental and financial networks that enmesh such programs as those designed to offer support and technical assistance to small business, especially ones located in inner cities. However, it is beyond the scope of any single case study to

provide sufficient evidence to determine whether a specific code or set of codes is directly implicated here. What can be noted is that such a significant reallocation of resources raises contingencies within several social system domains, and so constitutes an implicit threat to replication.

To shift perspective from communication codes to more general system characteristics, the need for a system to ensure its continuation by means of replication is closely related to a system's tendency toward homeostasis, that is, its tendency to maintain equilibrium in the face of newly introduced forces. It can either adapt itself to the new condition, or it can reconfigure the new force into a shape which the system can assimilate and/or manipulate. In the first case, the system must make some significant self-adjustment, whereas in the second, it conversely causes a change in the new contingency or force. One can argue that a sufficiently robust system would tend toward the second alternative, which is more conservative, requires fewer changes or manipulations, and does not require the nearly always risky application of the principle of *equifinality*.

An example of this kind of homeostatic response is the taking over of specific symbols, images, and issues by the dominant culture and the telecommunication media of "minority" efforts to shift some aspect of the social value system. This is otherwise recognized by scholars as cooptation. Although social movements arise from within a social system, partly as a result of high levels of differentiation, the mechanisms that cohere the system (those that cut across the differentiation) operative to co-opt such movements in order to manipulate or reconfigure them into forms the system can better direct and control.

Trivialization of a social movement effectively co-opts that movement and reduces its potency in two ways. It presents the issues around which efforts to create change are focuses as insignificant and frivolous. It also reconfigures that symbols into forms already dominant and meaning-laden, and so the new meaning is overw-

helmed by the old, dominant, easily recognized, and commonly embraced meaning. The new message comes to merely reiterate the old.

In the case of the articulation of a minority identity, and the articulation of an identity as a minority, this kind of cooptation appears to characterize the efforts of generations of central city minorities. Although it is true that there is no necessary (e.g., genetic or biological) connection between an underclass status and race- indeed, there are Blacks at virtually all socioeconomic levels, there appears to be an institutionalized form of racism which serves to facilitate social and economic differentiation in broad terms across the system.

It may be the case that racism is one of the key triggers of the suspension of code reciprocity a means of activating differentiation while deploying a mechanism that otherwise coheres system elements by reducing contingencies to ordered alternatives. In this respect, racism serves to assist in the attainment and maintenance of homeostasis of the system. To the extent that this is the case, cooptation of the efforts by minorities to initiate substantive change in their social status and valuation in the system clearly reflects the conservative and robust nature of the system. The capacity to enact the transformation of new forces to fit standard formats means that replication of existing codes will be favored as a means of ensuring the continuation of the system. In this way, the potential for significant and substantive (social) change is subsumed by the system while being made possible in part by the potency of communication codes and their ability to reduce complexity and order alternatives into mutual expectation.

Social Difference

We need to examine the unique aspects of "social distinction", "social difference," and "minority" (racial, ethnic, and therefore social) in order to fully elaborate and finally explicate the socio-political and theoretical significance of the

politics of social difference forming the basis of critical politics.

The meanings of difference and minority first need to be contextualized within the framework of social organization. That is, we must understand difference/minority within the principles of modern social organization. Traditionally, social organizing is understood as a set of elements whose interrelationships are best characterized as hierarchical. The notion of hierarchy implies a particular pattern of interrelating: that these relationships can be placed on an abstract continuum (like complexity or power) and thus, each element stands in place on this scale and can be understood and identified by its position on the scale in relation to the position of other elements on the scale and to each other. Consequently, each element must be identifiable in at least two ways: by its distinctiveness and by its connectedness/interrelatedness.

So, we can say that the individual element must be marked by both distinction and connection. Social distinction becomes essential to having a social place or position. But if distinctiveness is essential to position or place, the connectivity is essential to social mobility, for motion or movement within the framework of social organization requires the coordination (cooperation) of or with other elements. Mobility without such coordination places individuals at risk of exclusion from the system. Social distinction and connection, then, form opposite faces of the same coin: The former providing the means to anchor in a kind of (social) harbor, and the latter providing the sail of social and economic mobility.

Social difference, taken to the extreme of minority, however, marks a place in the social order without co-temporaneously providing genuine connectivity. Without social connectivity, there is no real possibility of social mobility. To (socially) institutionalize difference as minority is to have created an intranscendent social category. Acceptance into this category is tantamount to entering a room with no exits.

In the case of a central city community's self-identification as a social and racial minority, the perception of this kind of intranscendent difference (self-identifying as a minority community) is often combined with an acceptance of broad cultural goals, and a rejection of the traditional methods of achieving such goals. It is a particular and contemporary form of social and economic disenfranchisement, and attitude, if you will, unfortunately reinforced by both popular culture forms and by the socio-economic realities of most minority neighborhoods.

There is a difference between, for example, wanting attainment or acquisition and wanting achievement; in the first case one wants to be famous, win the lottery, and so on, and in the second, one hopes for a level of skill warranting reward and recognition. For a large part of the central city community, socio-economic disenfranchisement means having no access, understanding, or acceptance of the socially approved means (mechanisms, channels, vehicles) of goal achievement. This mixture of wanting materially but not apprehending a means of attainment leads to a displaced sense of agency.

The means of social success are tied up in the rules of a game biased against minority participants – only the rule-makers have power or agency. In this case, the rule-makers are White members of the social system. And because cultural values and goals are common currency, and because American mythology still contains the empty promise of equal and ample opportunity for all, a curious sense of entitlement has evolved among minority members. But it is entitlement to what others already have, and not to the means of that attainment. If one believes that agency lies external to oneself (because the system treats one as without agency), then one is unlikely to value access to the means of attainment, for only agents can transform means into ends.

Indeed, even minority members who gain access to an attainment means such as higher education will frequently manage the opportunity as

a chance to manipulate the system and not as a chance to develop and hone new skills. This is to suggest neither that scamming the system is tied in any way to racial or ethnic membership, nor that this is an unreasonable or ineffective strategy. Rather, this is to point out a difference in manner of participation between what is socially prescribed and what is (sometimes) enacted.

To continue, the sense of agency seems to be displaced into a sense of identification as a minority, as though enacting an identity as a minority were both a means and an end. Although most socio-cultural acts of identification are certainly ends in themselves, the particular nature of central city community identification as a minority has at least two qualities that render it significantly different as a subcultural identity from many other minority (subcultural) identities. The first of these is the displaced and abbreviated sense of agency previously described, and the second is a cultural (systemic) characteristic described in the anthropological literature as *liminality*.

In socio-cultural terms, that which is liminal is that element or group whose identity is sufficiently ambiguous as to contain at least one set of paradoxical conditions, such that its members are disabled from participating in the larger social system in a meaningful, productive, adult way. So, what are the paradoxes comprising the label *minority* in application to central city communities? To begin at the most general (and pervasive level), to be Black is to be not White (or some other color binary). If to be white is to be successful by working inside of the system, then to be Black is to be successful by working against or at least outside of the system. The problem this appears to create is that for a Black to succeed in a WASP society by following conventional (White) means, is to simultaneously reject one's minority membership or identity: a crippling paradox.

For example, the educational system is viewed as oppressive of Black historical experience and repressive of Black cultural expression. This

is an identity based not on some particular cultural articulation, but rather on difference, if not opposition to mainstream (White) culture.

This stands in contrast to some other minority groups, who embrace much about mainstream culture (goals, values, etc.) and who demarcate difference or subgroup membership by the use of primarily ritualistic events (i.e., specific marriage customs and costumes, religious displays, food preparation, rites of passage, jewelry, emblems, and organized community activities or events). However, each of these cultural demarcations, although emphasizing unique subcultural features and a sense of community and identity, occurs while individual members participate in general and on a daily basis within the structure of the (White) socio-cultural hegemony.

It is beyond the scope of this chapter to comment on or evaluate the gains and losses of such acculturations, except to note that both parties are affected by the process. The exact nature, extent, significance, value, and meaning of these changes is a difficult and elusive topic. Rather than seek to assess such a process, our intent here is simply to observe and partially characterize it as it relates to the issues at hand, and in doing so assist in illuminating system characteristics and processes relevant here. The point is to make note of the fact that ethnicity need not be equivalent to social and economic marginality.

Clearly, this conclusion flies in the face of the partially articulated perspective underlying many of the comments and explanations offered by "minorities," many of whom have voiced the sentiment that they are denied success as well as access by virtue of their race. At this point, the question seems to be: Is their lack of access and success the result of self-imposed minority identification or the result of socio-cultural racism? In fact, both perspectives are partially valid because the social system and the subgroup each participate in the articulation of minority membership as agentless and liminal. Each participates in the communication code that articulates

“Blackness, Brownness, or Yellowness,” as specifically evident in the Driving Park and Windsor Terrace studies. And this code binds its participants in a kind of reciprocity that perpetuates the code and the social system.

One of the key consequences of this code is the lack of consistent economic cohesiveness. What does not occur is the sort of economic solidarity that would take the form of central city Blacks purchasing primarily from other Black business owners, which would generally mean patronizing neighborhood businesses. For instance, as one respondent noted, Jews living in the far northwest corner of the city commonly travel to the east side, a 20- to 30- minute trip, to patronize Jewish-owned businesses, whereas Blacks living only several blocks away make no effort to patronize Black-owned businesses. In short, as a group, they seem not to display economic solidarity.

And yet, this is not to suggest that as a minority group central city Blacks lack a sense of community, but rather to make note of the manner in which “community” is articulated: it is an interpersonal phenomenon, and not a socio-economic one, with one obvious exception – the case of neighborhood organized drug dealing. In Windsor Terrace, the money generated by such endeavors was not being funneled back into the area and local businesses, and most certainly it was not the neighborhood that gained in any respect from drug trafficking.

Adapting how we can understand this theoretical and practical theory of communication codes has an intellectual and political benefit in that such codes are posited to operate throughout a system (e.g. society) without distinguishing among cultural variations. These codes reduce contingencies that might overwhelm an individual, and thereby enable great amounts of social differentiation along economic lines, while enabling the now differentiated segments to interact predictably.

Thus, the codes provide the means to relatively stable system ends by providing or perhaps

“enlisting” a kind of compliance on the part of all individuals. Because the codes remain out of conscious consideration of most system participants, compliance does not require consenting cooperation on the part of these same individuals. Because their behavior is compliant only in terms of the system’s needs, and not in terms of the needs of an individual’s psyche, it is not necessary to resort to either personality characteristics or to hypothetical genetic or cultural predispositions to explain and understand the behavior of individuals and groups. In short, in applying this theoretical construct, it is not necessary to blame individuals in order to explain social phenomena.

Communication codes are characterized by both reducing the field of alternatives, and reciprocity. Communication codes are complexity-reducing mechanisms that are accomplished through the management of fields of contingency. In a social system, the fields of contingency are the alternatives (action and meaning) available to individuals. One way to define *meaning* is as a reduction of these alternatives through the mutual acknowledgement of the participants.

In this way, meaning is created by the increase in the probability of the selection of some very limited actions on the part of the participants. The net result is that each participant can be said to understand the situation in the sense that it is predicable to a large degree for the participant. This is, of course, a limited and specific way of defining *meaning*, and is not meant to deny or invalidate other ways of defining the term. It is also not to suggest that alternative or additional kinds of meaning both actually occur and are possible to discern given the same parameters as are utilized here. The point, instead, is to sharpen the focus of this theoretic discussion in a way that will enable us to more clearly understand the detail and application of communication codes to minoritization.

The first step is to determine whether any set of transactions can be said to be constitutive

of, or at least indicative of, a communication code. We can judge communication processes for clues to the existence and enactment of codes by looking for the following pattern in the exchange: participants who complete their own action selections and know this from each other. Immediately, the participants are linked because both the selection choices and their completion require confirmation by the other. Once this takes place, the participants become bound because their future exchanges and action selections are predicted upon confirmation on the part of the other. It is, in part, this particular kind of interdependence which earmarks the formulation of a communication code.

Communication codes seen as mechanisms, as catalysts that guide transactions, the specifics of the selections, are not as important as is the motivating quality of the selecting process. It is motivating in terms of the selections made by the other, a communication code can be said to be formulated. Clearly, if it is the manner, and not the content of the selections that is the compelling or conditioning aspect of the transactions, then a code is formulated because it can be said to be both abstract and ahistorical in nature. By encoding the manner of the selecting, a code is freed from the boundaries of the here and now and can operate out of consciousness, because, in fact, it is the code which now orders the situation and not the situation that determines the encoding.

One of the benefits of employing the concept of communication codes is that it provides a way of specifying how that which communication scholars call *context* affects human interaction. Thus, we can operationalize the variable context as the presence of a specific code or set of codes that co-condition the selections of the actors, so that the interpretation or meaning created is wholly a product of a highly reduced field of contingencies perceived by the participants. Contingencies are further ordered by a code so that some specific combinations of selections are rendered highly probable. Because probability (determined

by codes) greatly enhances predictability, and predictability constitutes one basis of/for meaning, context operationalized as communication code(s) directly affects the range of possible and likely meanings available to the participants.

Because codes manage complexity by reducing contingency, they not only reduce the number of action alternatives available to the participants, but they simultaneously order those contingencies, the remaining preferred alternatives, and in so doing, significantly increase the probability of a few of those remaining selections. (This sequence of contingency reduces “motivation” because of the net effect: the high probability of the selection of some few alternatives by the participants.) For a participant, the field of options appears to be intrinsically limited, that is, limited due to the nature of the world or of the situation, not as the consequence of the operation of codes. Two results follow from this apprehension: limited and narrow changes seem possible, if any do; and, the actors do not see themselves as participating in the mechanism responsible for the curtailment of their options.

This net effect is further reinforced by the fact that codes are ahistorical and atemporal in nature, and these qualities render them invisible to social participants. When a mechanism is invisible and only the effects of it are manifest, it is easy to conclude that either some completely different mechanism is at work, or that nothing in particular is at work; that the effects merely constitute “reality”. In this respect, codes gain potency and efficacy by being ahistorical and atemporal, in contrast to the more typical assumptions communication researchers make about the nature of context: that it is very much a product of the specific histories of both the parties involved and their joint history (their relational history) in addition to immediate situational variables.

Reciprocity, the second key characteristic of codes, is crucial to both the success of the social system and to the ability of the individual to par-

ticipate in the system. It is a marker of inclusion. It is also, in principle, the characteristic responsible for exclusion from system processes. Without the reciprocation of the other during interaction, the field of selection remains relatively unpredictable, which is to say that compliance of any kind is not a likely result. The other is not responsive to the individual's manner of selecting alternatives, so that the individual cannot seem to influence the selection of alternatives (the behavior) of the other: a situation of relatively high contingency and low predictability. Given the potency and efficacy of codes when enacted, being unable to enact a code would cause an individual to feel excluded and ineffective, and over time, possibly impotent and/or helpless.

It is reciprocity that serves as boundary marker for the system participants. Not that it demarcates members from nonmembers, but rather, it indicates points of differentiations within the system. That is, the failure to engage reciprocity of the code (any code) occurs as a means of distinguishing subsystems within the larger social system. In fact, it is exactly because codes, as atemporal and ahistorical phenomena, possess the potential for guiding communication processes throughout the entire system that the points at which there is a failure or reciprocity are functionally equivalent to actual physical borders. From a system perspective, it is highly efficacious to utilize a mechanism that simultaneously serves to cohere the system elements and to differentiate among subsystems.

Epilogue

This article presents a rethinking of organizing and organizational research within the context of community-based research. Our thinking is not complete nor will it be. But from a practical point of view, we have become engaged in

what we may call *community-based marketing*. Community-based marketing is the buying and selling of power to communities, not in the traditional sense of marketing as the "manipulation of needs," but rather of establishing an exchange relationship where there was none, particularly in the service of economic development. It is in this light that the mass media became relevant and should have been utilized more effectively by our consortium.

The goal remains: to develop community-based networks to improve their quality of community. Community-based rethinking is an efficient process that is based on the principle that information and recognition are power. From the community's point of view, power means the community either achieves or is enabled to achieve some goal. The premise of community-based marketing is based on lessons from our studies; persons do not live as solitary, random individuals, but live in and through their membership in the mass media into community-based marketing is viable because the media require economic return, and communities deal in economic return.

Community groups and organizations view mass media, particularly television, as a source of power. It can influence, manipulate, select, and distribute good and bad information. It can make famous, pacify, or disempower someone. Community groups and organizations are formed to become powerful, or increase their power. They will buy into whoever will facilitate their quest for power. As such, the general principle learned from our project is that journalists and reporters could be trained or convinced to be community-based researchers and marketers as they are viewed as powerbrokers anyway by the community. Academics have to demonstrate their ability to be powerbrokers as well. This also requires a rethinking of social science as a deliverer of practical (power) truths.