Theorising Empowerment Practice from the Pacific and Indigenous Australia

Richard Barcham

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Chapter 8

Conclusion: The Field of Community Control

[U]topians should not be discouraged from formulating their proposals…


8.1 Empowerment Defined

The present study began with four questions.

- What are the linkages between an organisation’s practices, its operational philosophy and empowerment?
- How can these linkages be theorised synoptically?
- How do organisational strategies optimise empowerment?
- What organisational elements are necessary and sufficient to a successful empowerment program?

The intention in asking these questions is to arrive at Stanner’s standard of a logical explanation based on a “significant set” of “problematical facts”. This set has been developed in this thesis through the reflections of a practitioner seeking to understand how four organisations have acted to try to achieve personal, group and social change. The subsequent investigation set out from Johan Galtung’s Goals, Processes and Indicators in Development (GPID) project (Galtung 1975; Galtung 1976; Galtung 1996), and his view that “development as such is seen as human development, as development of people in society” (Galtung 1976). Galtung’s conceptual work on the GPID project was used as the basis to create the tools of the Pacific case-study groups. Not only have these been shown to be effective, and have stood the test of time and transference, but also the philosophical underpinnings are independently supported by the Australian example.

This thesis has argued that the formulations of basic human need from the 1970s (and before) remain a good foundation for consideration of persons, groups and society. That they were largely swept away by the global winds of neoliberal ideology does them no discredit. The use of universal human need in the present study is intended to show recognition for this work, while renovating its meaning with contemporary social theory. To aid this task, this study has extracted from a range of disciplines the concepts and vocabulary needed to transcribe what it is that sets the four organisations under examination apart. From the critical sociology of Habermas to the field of
community health, the matter of central interest has been how organisations support people, both inside and outside those organisations, to have greater autonomy and control. This has been shown to be necessary because it contributes to physiological and psychological health, and to social wellbeing.

In their practice as organisations, and in their social analysis as shown in the graphic tools, the four case-study organisations seek to propose alternatives. These alternatives are posed positively in terms of people’s control of their development in society, and negatively as the effect of oppression by structures of power relations. The crucial significance of the effect of power on a positive or negative outcome for human development leads to this need to understand the nature of empowerment in order to know how to support those for whom a disparity of power has a negative outcome. For it is visibly apparent that the world contains gross disparities of power. The evidence is there in social dependency, anomie and stagnation, as well as in personal violence, alienation, fatalism and apathy. Conclusively, powerlessness as the consequence of an encapsulating structural disparity of power is harmful. It is harmful because that powerlessness is part of past and present exploitative, colonising relations. Colonisation is not, as Lukes would say, a matter of preference. Rather, power is expressed in terms of interests (Lukes 2005). It follows that reversing this harm is centrally, as Nussbaum would also have it, a matter of power and a universalist foundation for morality (Nussbaum 2000). A view based on universal human need shows that autonomy and control contribute to reversing the harm of colonisation. Positively, this is expressed as development of people in society, meaning physiological and psychological health and social wellbeing.

However, the colonised are ranged against an established political and economic order of states and capital, both having a vested interest in maintaining the status quo. The force of the argument for change based on the moral presupposition that human health and wellbeing are universal interests is blunted by the requirement that the dominant structure also change. The ability to initiate social change depends on both Indigenous agency\textsuperscript{107} and innovation in the structural relationship with the coloniser. Both kinds of actors are necessary to change. However, the choice to act is the prerogative of the minority. This is inherent in autonomy, and essential to guarantee empowerment as motivated action.

\textsuperscript{107} “Agency” is here understood to refer to the means of transmission of power, as in something being “delivered by divine agency”. It is a term the present study has avoided up to this point, preferring the simpler differentiation of actors and structures. This is discussed further below.
A change in power relations from below, from the powerless, necessarily involves steps of engagement between those inside a group and those outside. For any of these steps to be transformative for relations of power, the engagement necessarily takes the form of communicative action as previously practised by the group. Communicative action is transformative for relations of power because it is limited to the practices of a setting that allows intersubjectivity removed from habits of the daily round. Empowering agency is therefore also necessarily a phenomenon developed by a group. This group must meet the requirements for the dissent group specified in Chapter 6, being privileged to intermediate in size, motivated, and so on.

Recalling Lash, a group in possession of empowering agency expands its field of control through its supporters. These supporters include beneficiaries, donors and adherents, as discussed in Chapter 7. A group able to attract supporters is necessarily a rule-bound entity because the complexity and goal-orientation of the task requires relief from communicative action. These “players” (Lash 1994), the entity and its exclusive group, together with supporters, can control what is received in the social field. In relation to empowering agency, the collective of players and supporters is called a community, a description defined by modernity. For those who were powerless to choose their situation, and who now struggle to regain the power to change it, the presence of a colonising modernity is an everyday fact that will not go away. Recognising this, appropriation of the modern community and its tools by minority interests must be treated as an opportunity. The modern community is a community that defines itself. This adaptability of the modern community lends itself to minorities struggling to maintain and continue to evolve adaptive social structures from within. From without, the community presents an opportunity for engagement in a setting that makes communicative action possible. For both kinds of actors, inside and out, experiencing communicative engagement is always transformative. Prejudice struggles in the face of personal encounter.

In sum, empowerment is necessary when there is a systemic disparity of power – when those who structurally have little collective power require action from the strong in order to have health and wellbeing. Structurally, empowerment replaces exploitative relations – relations that cause harm – with the practice of equitable ones. Empowerment as intervention to rectify the harm caused by colonisation must be on

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108 This recalls the “step-process” of the BRG and FWB case studies. Whiteside (2006) in particular reports on empowerment as a two-step process involving these levels of the group and its environment.
the basis of equity. Equitable relations depend upon both the self-reliance of Indigenous agency, and the values and performance of supporters. Empowerment is not a thing that can be bestowed, nor is it a strategy of amelioration. Power does not stand alone; it is a relationship. Empowerment is the communicative relation that supports human agency, creating the opportunity for change and hope.

To take this definition a step further, towards what can be deployed empirically from this orientation, this study now turns to the “ground” where players and supporters interact. The first thing that is apparent is that when looking for empowerment, one looks for the quality of relationships. The field of those relationships – the personal, community and social extent of the ground – is called here the field of community control.

8.2 The Field of Community Control

The last three chapters set out to present the material for a coherent account of empowerment as a “multi-level construct” (Zimmerman 2000). Chapter 5 considered universal human need, Chapter 6 the logic and dynamics of a group as an entity, and Chapter 7 examined the encounter between this entity and society. The consistent theoretical basis for this account has been the Theory of Communicative Action (Habermas 1984; Habermas 1987). To this has been added a detailed interpretation of human need, and an interpretation of power from below based on seeing interests in terms of need, including belief. This account has been grounded in praxis as an interpretation of the case studies. From each case study first emerged a range of comparative theory selected on that which showed good fit with observation and available data. This material has, in the last three chapters, been placed into the frameworks of the person, group and society.

The consistent theoretical basis of communicative action underpinned by need lends itself to taking a synoptic view of these frameworks. To do so, the present study returns to the scheme of universal human need shown in Table 3, Chapter 5. This scheme recaptures two crucial facts established in the early literature of need. First, that need can be material and non-material, and secondly that there is need that is actor dependent and need that is structure dependent. The specification of universal human need adopted these two dimensions as axes, the former for the classes of need, the latter for need and its satisfiers. In the image of “people in society”, for the person,

109 “Whatever imbalance there is in the relationship is not a result of the structure” (Galtung 1976).
need frames the lifeworld as a source of satisfiers, to be drawn on by the person in meeting need. In this way, the lifeworld is embodied through need. In the image of universal human need, shown in Table 3, this embodiment is represented in two dimensions. However, the immanent resources of the lifeworld only become directly available in communicative action, which necessarily introduces the person to the relational structure of a group. Humans are “irreducibly social beings” (West 1990). In order to accommodate this further complexity, consider that the actor-structure axis is now made vertical, with the actor at the base. This has the advantage of placing all need in one base layer, subverting the usual claim to a hierarchy of need as discussed in Chapter 5. The vertical hierarchy in the present model, from actor to structure, is one of scale, from person to group to society. Those structure-dependent satisfiers from the lifeworld that are made available through bilateral relationships, social organization and values are now at the top. Mediating between the two is the group, defined in the present study in the context of the modern community of specialists and supporters. Personal need, this community, and the social effects of collective action, now make up three layers in a three-dimensional representation of the empowering group engaged in communicative action. Having a common basis in the classes of universal human need allows the tables from the previous chapters to be layered, with the classes of need now serving as universal classifications. Each layer is labelled to represent the logical components of the overall field. This is shown in Figure 11.
At first glance, such a figure looks overly complex. However, consider some of the relationships that it suggests. Taking a slice through Security links this class of need to, in the group: risk and trust as the necessary public good that must be produced; dramaturgical action as the form of social action to achieve this; and personal responsibility as an indicator of progress in avoiding the consequences of deficiency. Socially, risk and trust is related to bilateral relationships; the form of action is related to belief in subjective sincerity with the purpose of having self-reliance. In the social layer, the indicator of personal responsibility in the group points to the opposite of self-reliance, dependency, as a consequence of deficiency. Similarly meaningful dissections can be made for Identity and Autonomy.

With the horizontal dimension containing the universal classes of need, and the vertical dimension the categories of personal need, community, and social effect, the final dimension has been shown in the social layer with the classes of resources, agency and common purpose. The other layers show a similar progression. They correspond in the community layer to the public goods produced by the group, the form of social action, and an indicator of progress, and in the personal layer to need lists, and motivation to achieve desirable states and avoid undesirable ones. What the layers in this dimension share is the transformative process whereby, for example, social resources are transformed by agency into purpose, or needs are transformed by motivation into living desired states. Having linked the layers of persons, community and social effects using the common denominators of security, identity and autonomy, it becomes possible to also consider some further intersections contained in the framework. Agency, for example, is a term often employed to refer to the capability of persons or groups to produce a given outcome. The field of community control serves to unpack the nature of agency by showing novel intersections in the vertical dimension. The framework shows that in different settings, agency draws on different forms of social action, which are grounded in different types of public goods, and will have identifiably different social outcomes depending upon the form of social action. The present study has also provided a view of universal human need that considers power from lifeworld and system perspectives. From a lifeworld perspective, as motivation that links a person to the group through love, connection and control, and
the group to society through relations of equity or exploitation.\textsuperscript{110} This is shown in Figure 12.

**Figure 12: Psychological Empowerment. Agency progresses from actors to structures in a 2-step process**

On the other hand, power from a system perspective is represented as the agency of a community. Both forms of power bear on actors meeting their significant interests, defined as satisfying need. This is shown in Figure 13.

**Figure 13. The outcome of agency in achieving significant interests is contingent on the power relation, being either horizontal (equity) or vertical (exploitation).**

\textsuperscript{110} In later work, Galtung refines this horizontal and vertical concept of power, calling exploitation an Alpha system, symbolised by a triangle with the apex at the top, and equity a Beta system, symbolised by a circle (Galtung 1996). It is interesting to note the similarity of the account of social evolution based on lifeworld and system given by Habermas, and that which Galtung presents in this later work.
Here, the effect of relations of power are shown both positively and negatively, emphasising that power has consequences. This suggests a progression through time, of things improving or disintegrating, and so can be coupled with an indicator. Both the vertical and depth dimensions are dynamic relations of power, setting the logical components of the framework in motion. This logical framework of the empowering community provides a dynamic lattice of power relations supported by communicative action.

While this framework has, in the context of empowerment, tended to emphasise strengths in the group layer of the lattice, it shows that the reverse can also be true. Dependency, anomie and stasis are certainly alternatives to self-reliance, framing and mobilisation, and indeed are a great deal more prevalent. However, what this framework does is identify goals for individual and common purpose, provide indicators of group progress, and include two separate views of power that determine processes and outcomes. Starting from the outline of basic human need provided by Galtung in the GPID project, the understanding of the relationship between need and power has been elaborated by this framework. As such, it is a further contribution to Galtung’s GPID project, serving the spirit of that project that “human fulfilment, reduction of violence, abolition of misery, reduction of alienation and abolition of repression” be the guiding lights of the exercise.

8.3 Evaluating Empowerment

From an approach seeking to understand the empowerment efforts of the case study organisations, the present study has developed a generalised three-dimensional view of the field of community control incorporating persons, groups as entities, and their social effects. In order for the present study to claim to have met W.E.H. Stanner’s standard of having given a logical account of a “complex, if narrow, set of problematical facts” (Stanner 1958), and that therefore the contents of this framework forms a “significant set”, it needs to be demonstrated that this set lends itself to flexibility of application. In this regard, the use of the expression “logical framework” above is intended. Logical frameworks are an accepted tool in project evaluation
(Gasper 2000). While the accepted format of such frameworks is different, nevertheless the intersecting matrices of the field of community control do suggest possibilities for assessing empowerment. The question of why anyone would want to assess empowerment is an important one. The collection of evidence for empowerment can be driven by a desire to promulgate what appears to be a good program, with the “see, it worked for them” approach, and by the requirements of donors or policy makers for auditable outcomes. These are clearly two different action settings. For the purposes of evaluation, it is important to separate the two. The setting for empowerment as a logical framework is one of trust and learning, in contrast to auditable outcomes that stress ex-post-accountability and therefore favour measurement (Gasper 2000). It is a framework that, to use Gasper’s terms, is “learning-oriented” rather than “accountability-oriented” (Gasper 2000:27). That is, the purpose of such a framework is to assist organisational learning rather than undertake assessment. However, placing any particular organisation in the layer of the site of control, consisting of the community of specialists and supporters, depends upon identifying a rule-bound entity that serves the common interests of this community. Obviously, many entities do not, so finding ones that do is a matter of some interest. Habermas makes it quite clear that this can only be done by identifying with the interests of the community – what Freire would have called being “of the people”. In other words, entities are identified by the values they practice.

In common with the framework of the field of community control, Perkins (Perkins et.al. 2007) separates organisational learning as a process or set of practices from a learning organisation as a goal or ideal. Creativity, critical reflection, the importance of groups or “teams”, communication, the gradient of increasing complexity with increasing social engagement and the crucial significance of power all stand out as common emphases between community psychology and the sociological approach taken by the present study. As such, the framework of the field of community control suggests some alternative ways to assist the “diagnosis” of a learning organisation. The three-dimensional framework developed in the present study varies significantly from that developed by Perkins. One source of this difference is the redefinition of

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111 For example, a project matrix generally includes a cascade of goals, purposes, outputs and activities.
112 It is an odd coincidence of the present study that the three-dimensional lattice proposed here was first visualised by the this author the day before locating Perkins’s assessment tool, which is similarly layered as “individual”, “ organisational” and “community levels” (Perkins et.al. 2007). This coincidence was a gratifying affirmation.
community as the group of specialists and supporters, rather than as an interest association or by identification of shared properties. By resetting the boundaries in this way, the community and the entity are identified in a single layer. This centre layer of the field identifies those elements over which the community has the ability to exercise control and so is called the site of community control. The framework in the present study points in particular to the dynamic processes that are essential to learning, defined in communicative action as increasing rationalisation of the lifeworld (Habermas 1987). This is indicated by the presence of discursively redeemed validity claims. Such claims are visible in that they make reference to the lifeworld as objectified. A discursively redeemed claim is recognisable as being explanatory, and marked in actors by self-consciousness of the dynamic processes of dramaturgical, normative and teleological action, and the necessity of all in meeting the standards of subjective sincerity, normative rightness and objective truth. All of these qualities are intuitively recognisable, lending themselves to the real-time assessment of group action so important to the facilitator of group learning.

The production of public goods appears as other visible evidence of the style of group activity. The focus on public goods in the present study has served the purpose of constraining the size of potential groups, and making the logical link to the necessary motivations of actors in empowerment. It has also been said that empowerment is a phenomenon of groups, and it has been stressed that isolation carries risks. This is the weakness of a field methodology that relies on a scattergun approach with the aim of achieving a critical mass of exposure. Isolated actors will struggle to reproduce the necessary public goods. Focus on the public goods produced by groups suggests that to maximise the quantity of any good it is more important for a single community to succeed and persist than for many to have contact with a methodology and be subsequently left to continue in environments that are highly resistant to change. This in turn suggests that social change that is reliant on empowerment is better effected by

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113 Recall here that Habermas made use of the work of Piaget in his conceptualisation of communicative action as formative in social relations.

114 For example, reflective use of the first person singular, “I used to ... now I ...” See in particular Tsey (2009).

115 For example, use of a causative, “Because of the grog I used to ...” or, “What I saw as a young person, it made me think ...”

116 This is often marked in Tsey et al. by reference to the program or the program content, “I can use this FWB to make myself better ...”, ”... since I know this FWB ...”. It is this quality that sometimes lends an evangelical flavour to empowerment that is seized upon so readily by missionised people. The “SIDT way” is another example of this.
consolidating self-reliant groups in the privileged to intermediate range, with the aim of having a subsequent persistent social effect on intergenerational timescales.

For the entity that identifies as part of this community, evidence of the public goods produced by the empowering group is found in the structures of the group – the field methodology, tools and images of all kinds, time allocation and decision-making routines – all of these serve to display the particular public goods of the group. The production of the range of public goods is associated with the practice of the three different forms of social action. In the progression toward the production of increasingly non-material goods and increasing complexity in an entity, actors necessarily engage in all forms of social action when the aim of the organisation is social change. In empowerment, communicative utterances are self-consciously embedded in all three “world relations” (Habermas 1987:120), in as much as there is recognition of the setting,\(^{117}\) which may thematically stress only one of the three.\(^{118}\)

Evidence that language is instrumental in the production of the non-material public goods required for empowerment is provided by Tsey and his co-workers, who used coding of transcripts to identify consistently recurring themes within “empowerment narrative” (Tsey et.al. 2009).\(^{119}\) This work was supported at an individual level by Haswell’s application of psychometric scales and scenarios (Haswell et.al. 2010).\(^{120}\) As West says, “if Habermas is right the values that inform radical critique are as fundamental as language itself” (West 1990: 43). The framework of the field of community control has the benefit of showing the dynamic relations between the parts of the nomological networks that these approaches identify.\(^{121}\) As shown in Figure 11, these dynamics are power relations that operate in two dimensions. The third dimension is contributed by the person and need, as previously discussed. The field of community control shows the necessary processes to produce the types of public goods often included under thematic headings in the nomological networks\(^{122}\) of Zimmerman, Tsey and Christens (Zimmerman 2000; Tsey et.al. 2009; Christens

\(^{117}\) In FWB, this is reflected in the “Group Agreement”, the first session of the course (as discussed in Chapter 4).

\(^{118}\) Echoing Maslow’s view of the healthy person, Habermas says, “In fact, communicative utterances are always embedded in various world relations at the same time” (Habermas 1986:II,120).

\(^{119}\) As indicated, the examples cited in the earlier footnotes are drawn from this published work.

\(^{120}\) Scales (EES) assessing “Self-Capacity; Inner Peace” and Scenarios (12S) assessing “Healing and Enabling Growth, Connection and Purpose”.

\(^{121}\) The work of Tsey and others is here identified with the field of community psychology, in having drawn on the work of Rappaport, Zimmerman and Wallerstein, and also Christens (2011).

\(^{122}\) For example, Tsey (2009) and Christens (2011).
2011), coupled with the consequences of the power relations thereby entered into. The framework proposed by the present study provides the vocabulary to assist with classifying language as a means to identify the dynamic relations embedded in it. Ultimately based on Habermas’s “universal pragmatics” (Habermas 1976), those dynamic relations of dramaturgical, normative and teleological action taken together are indicative of empowering praxis. Recognition of these forms of social action is the core of the field of community control. The rule that must apply here, says Habermas, it that “when a hearer assents to a thematized validity claim, he acknowledges the other two implicitly raised validity claims as well – otherwise he is supposed to make known his dissent” (Habermas 1987:121, italics added). A hearer may accept the objective truth of an assertion but not necessarily the speaker’s reasons for asserting it. Similarly, sincerity does not put one in possession of the facts. For the structurally weaker party, the marker of negation, with the ability of actors in a group to make a counter-claim (and so make an invasive validity claim by the coloniser the subject of discourse), is a further indicator of empowerment in action.

So, drawing on each of the layers in the field of community control, the principle markers of the empowering community appear as:

- Motivation/incentive (push/pull) – a balance of everyone having a legitimate reason for participating that is personal and is reinforced by the solidary and purposive outcomes of participation;
- Communicative action – the effort and contribution of every person to the production of public goods is systematically noticed and acknowledged in the procedures of discourse;
- Public goods produced – risk and trust, critical consciousness, structural innovation;
- Common purpose – everyone in the group has a belief in the real existence of a common purpose that explains why they are working together.

These characteristics are identifiable in the language, and more broadly in the tools, employed by groups. Furthermore, looking to the social layer in the field of community control, the resources required to do these things are found in bilateral relationships, organized social events\(^\text{123}\) and, coming back to where this section began, the values upon which personal growth depends. Actors positively engaged in this group accrue the benefits of satisfying non-material need.

\(^{123}\) Defined earlier as “settings”.
8.4 Empowerment as Intervention

Intervention\textsuperscript{124} on behalf of another was a topic first considered in Chapter 5, in the discussion of Sen’s “agent” and “patient” (Sen 1999). Sen’s metaphor of the patient suggests one “etherized upon a table”.\textsuperscript{125} Such a patient is certainly having his or her interests served by intervention, and is also certainly incapable of independently reversing the harm he or she is suffering from disease or misadventure. On this basis, intervention by those in possession of great capability is justified. In a social sense, Sen’s proposal is that this intervention should serve the cause of freedom, defined in terms of liberal democratic values. The appropriate response of the patient is considered to be one of participation, based on full and informed consent, presupposing the universal acceptance of the value of freedom and the rights of the individual. This is a view that has been questioned in Chapter 5, where it was proposed that a standard based on the liberal democratic values of freedom and rights does not meet the requirement of universality. Instead, the standard that has provided the foundation for this study has been that of individuals being able to meet their needs in the classes of security, identity and autonomy. As a consequence of this, the early discussion of participation as dialogue that was proposed by Roughan (Roughan 1986) has been subsumed by the way in which empowerment has been conceptualised. In following Rappaport (Rappaport 1987), the central theme here has been empowerment, not the quality of participation. Roughan’s concept of participation as dialogue drew on the development theorists of the 1970s, who were the first to look closely at the quality of the dichotomy developed/undeveloped, and regarded participation of people in their own development as essential to reversing the process of colonisation. That is, dialogue was seen as the means of addressing disparities of power by placing actors engaged in intervention on a par with actors as “beneficiaries”, a relationship between actors that has been characterised here as having the structural form of equity. In terms of actors, the present study has examined individual participation as motivated action or psychological empowerment. The actions of motivated participation\textsuperscript{126} are judged to directly fulfil human need.

Empowerment is a modern concept of intervention that in the case study organisations aims to address the historical harm caused by the inequity of the power relations of

\textsuperscript{124} It is to be noted that in the current Australian policy context, this term is heavily laden by association with the \textit{Northern Territory Emergency Response Act (2007)}, also known as “the intervention”.
\textsuperscript{125} T.S. Eliot, “The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock”.
\textsuperscript{126} Also referred to in the present study as “voluntarism”.

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colonisation. In practice, the form of participation for empowering intervention has been clearly articulated in the case studies. The way organisations use time and make regular space for cycles of communicative action are indicative of the methods reflected in the case studies. Also indicative is the particular way tools are employed, echoing Freire in the use of codes, role plays and imagery to generate dialogue as the way to construct knowledge.

However, as an intervention, the problematic of the relationship between agent and patient remains. This can be seen in, for example, the contrast between the Solomon Islands Development Trust and the Bismark Ramu Group in their relationships with donors, or the larger contrast between the Pacific groups in general (funded by international non-government agencies as donor sources) and the Family WellBeing program (funded primarily by government sources). This problematic appears to centre around the question of standards of accountability – between organisations and donors, and between organisations and beneficiaries. The field of community control, by defining donors and beneficiaries as part of a single community based on values, conceals the reality of this problem of accountability. There remains an unresolved tension about the location of these boundaries between persons and groups, players and supporters, the exclusive group and the group of beneficiaries, donors and adherents as they relate to mutual accountability. This tension is created by the conceptual merging of entity, group and community into a single layer of community control. The approach is justified because while the entity made by the exclusive group would appear to set a clear boundary for identifying the “who” in participation, the use of paraprofessional personnel and the emphasis placed on shared values blurs this boundary. The exclusive group, which clearly includes the paraprofessionals, must develop the practices it expects to instil in its supporters. It is up to this community as a whole how those practices are received in society. Supporters are not normally part of the operations of the group, and yet beneficiaries require evidence of their power in decision-making that is specific to his or her particular constituency. Some of this tension appears in the way language is employed. For example, self-reliance is often thought of as a personal quality of actors able to participate – that is, as a capability. By contrast, in the framework of the field of community control it appears as made possible in social structure, being the converse of dependency as originally conceived by the Latin Americans.

127 In the sense of “Zeuge” employed by Lash, quoting Heidegger.
This suggests that the problem of accountability can be resolved by reference to the evaluative qualities of the field of community control. Adopting the approach employed throughout the present study, in intervention, accountability of persons should be dealt with in terms of the need of actors. Universal human need supports the ethical position that intervention is justified to reverse the harm of colonisation, and furthermore that both parties are independently necessary to create the change. The moral question of what constitutes right action in intervention that seeks to produce such change has been a matter of central interest here. A concept of empowerment is required to respond to this question, because of the disparity of power in the relationship between colonised and coloniser. This disparity must be taken into consideration in arriving at a response. The moral question of how to act is central here because from the point of view of the coloniser, intervention is grounded in a moral imperative, not necessity. The particular interest in Habermas evident throughout this study was spurred by his position that philosophy should concern itself with orientation to right action. Habermas distinguishes moral questions from evaluative ones. Evaluative categories deal with issues of “the good life”, in the manner of Sen’s “life one has reason to value”. This is an assessment limited to the horizon-forming context of either what is historically determined, or any chosen lifestyle. Moral categories, on the other hand, which are logically necessary in decisive action, can only be decided on rationally determined criteria of justice and a universal concept of interests. For organisations in civil society focussed on transforming inequitable power relations between citizens, markets and the State, these rationally determined criteria have previously been stated in terms of trust and shared values. It has been shown that accountability that is based on values implies equitable relationships. These relationships are formed selectively, as a matter of choice, not out of necessity. This allows for flexibility in aims within a belief in common purpose. Flexibility suggests minimum standards of formal organisation, and recognition of trial and error as necessary when learning. The necessity that change be the result of learning suggests high self-reliance or “autonomy” as a further standard. These standards for empowering organisation, derived from the field of community control, can be extended to propose the practical necessities of intervention that supports empowering organisation. These are summarised in Table 6. By way of contrast, it has been stressed above that empowerment is not a strategy of amelioration. Perkins and Gasper both contrast learning-oriented or transformative organisation and accountability-oriented or ameliorative organisation. In Table 6, transformative organisation is shown
in contrast to the dominant ameliorative approach that stresses competitive processes to form relationships – contracts built on statements of outcomes and indicators, with low tolerance of error or deficiency and low autonomy. Empowerment cannot be achieved in this environment. While this approach may be suitable to ameliorative service delivery, it cannot engender the systemic change actors in empowerment require in order to participate self-reliantly.

Table 6 – Transformative and ameliorative organisation

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<th>Empowerment – transformative</th>
<th>Service Delivery – ameliorative</th>
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<td>Selective process to form relationship</td>
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Beyond these organisational mechanisms for establishing accountability, the field of community control also models indicators and outcomes for empowerment. From the point of view of actors, accountability in an empowering setting is judged on the basis of the group meeting universal need for security, identity and autonomy, as reflected in achievement of personal responsibility, solidarity and discourse. When considered from the point of view of structures, accountability is suggested by the structural disparity of power that requires action on the part of the strong, or capable, in addition to the individual agency of local actors. If intervention is called for, this is so because of an historical disparity of power, called exploitation. Reversing the harm of exploitation demands from the coloniser a reflexive response. This response contains acknowledgement that the disparity causes harm, and requires either the coloniser to change, or the colonised to continue to sacrifice their own requirements to meet
universal need. The fact that it is this harm that calls for intervention in the first instance again raises the persistent moral question of right action in intervention. As the interpretation of the case studies has shown, structurally this takes the form of dissent, understood as innovative social action that is necessary to mobilisation. Intervention in these circumstances is reliant upon the existence of a vehicle that facilitates interaction with a minimum of organisation necessary to its task of generating common purpose. The possible scope of common purpose is determined by the complexity and action-orientation of the group. What is at stake structurally is the production of the specific public goods of trust, critical consciousness and structural innovation, which are in turn dependent upon the power relations of equity.

8.5 Further Research

One objective of the present study has been to unpack the concept of empowerment in order to more clearly define its constituent elements, including individual motivation, the settings in which empowerment takes place, its social dimensions, and the potential outcomes for persons, groups and in society. In this context, it has been concerned primarily with examining theoretically the underlying dynamics of change processes and not just the properties of empowerment as they appear, for example, in the nomological networks of community psychology. In so doing, this study has drawn extensively on the theory of communicative action to conceptualise the pivotal dynamics of persons interacting in groups. In its use of lifeworld and system, the theory of communicative action systematically addresses rational actors, the social construction of reality and individual psychology in terms of objective, normative and subjective worlds and the way these are drawn on in achieving valid communication. Habermas has “clarified the scope of practical discourse” (West 1990:46) – that is, he has defined the procedures of communicative action in a way that effectively captures the effortful cognitive responses that are central to empowerment, differentiating it from the automatic processing of daily habit. Based on the case studies, this thesis has defined empowerment as a communicative relation, demonstrating the usefulness of the theory of communicative action as a tool for understanding empowerment. As discussed in Chapter 7, Habermas has been criticised for proposing that the “ideal speech situation” of discourse can anywhere be identified as separate from relations of power. However, the analysis of the case-study organisations has shown that it is the creation of this Habermasian communicative space that is precisely what makes these

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128 For example, in the loss of identity caused by assimilation.
organisations exceptional.

Paul Streeten, whose work on basic human need was discussed in Chapter 5, has said that:

utopians should not be discouraged from formulating their proposals, and from thinking the unthinkable, unencumbered by the inhibitions and obstacles of political constraints, in the same detail that the defenders of the status quo devote to its elaboration and celebration (Streeten 1995:121).

To develop this detail, the present study has argued that research on reasoning, judgment and choice necessarily proceeds from an image of what it is to be human, those unifying traits that make us recognisable to each other. Further, it has been argued that this image can be grounded in universal human need in the classes of security, identity and autonomy, and that these classes can be used to unify a framework of persons, groups and their social effects. The case studies presented here, and the subsequent framework that has been developed, suggest that the recognition and conceptualisation of empowering organisation can be furthered by testing of the following propositions:

1. That the organisational entity and its beneficiaries and donors form an identifiable community of commonly held values that are demonstrated in shared meanings and practices;
2. That these shared meanings and practices will display common purposes of self-reliance, framing and mobilisation in proportion to the complexity of the organisational entity;
3. That these shared meanings and practices will be based on an analysis of power aimed at the reconstitution of local organisation;
4. That the organisational entity will shift its specific goals in response to the need and preferences of beneficiaries;
5. That the organisational entity will derive its legitimacy from its beneficiaries;
6. That the ability of the organisational entity to shift goals while maintaining common purpose will contribute to its persistence and hence to its longer-term legitimacy;
7. That maintaining common purpose will take precedence over organisational maintenance and growth;
8. That the membership of the community will be driven primarily by solidary incentives, secondarily by purposive incentives, and that material incentives will have only a compensatory role;

9. That the organisational entity, regardless of available resources, will be limited to privileged or intermediate size;

10. That the organisational entity will devolve strategic tasks to beneficiaries;

11. That the tasks of the community will be oriented towards framing a two-step process of mobilising sentiment followed by engagement with society;

12. That an orientation towards questioning dominant sources of authority will lead to ongoing internal tension that assists in maintaining a cycle of organisational action and reflection;

13. That the organisational entity will structure into its activities discretionary time for workers and beneficiaries to engage in cycles of action and reflection;

14. That given the historical shift of resources away from beneficiaries resulting from colonisation, the organisational entity will remain heavily dependent upon resources provided by conscience adherents;

15. That this (14) will contribute to a less stable flow of resources to support the organisational entity.

Furthermore, in the broadest terms, the present study proposes that the continuing study of empowering communities can contribute to further elaboration and deepening of the theory of communicative action as a model of empowerment.

**8.6 Conclusions**

The critique of growth begun in the 1960s led to the field of international development employing the language of grassroots development, bottom-up process and empowerment. In the present study, this language has been expanded by examining the basis of empowerment in a wide variety of fields, from management to education, community organizing and community psychology. This reflects the range of fields in which an empowering methodology has been employed by the case-study groups: rural development in the Solomon Islands; conservation in Papua New Guinea; civil society in Fiji; and social and emotional wellbeing in Aboriginal Australia. Asking how organisations can support people to have greater autonomy and control has led to the consideration of empowerment as a three-dimensional construct that engages with persons, communities and society. This construct has developed in the context of consideration of who we are as persons as the basis for determining the nature of justice and injustice. For, adopting the approach of Habermas, it must be that action
alone has a moral dimension. The advent of modernity has eroded the value-basis of traditional societies formerly secured by their cosmologies and conceptions of the sacred. It is the explosion of the lifeworld by the globalisation of system imperatives that underlies the contemporary dilemma portrayed in the image of the Question Man. Deliberation of what constitutes the good life is always subject to the horizon-forming context of the lifeworld, and so is irreducibly pluralist. In the absence of a secure identity, each must now formulate their own response to the question, “How should I live my life?” There is no longer a response to this question that can be grounded in a philosophy of ethics. Instead, Habermas’s ethics of discourse proposes a model of right action based on the consciousness of the community of subjects engaged in discourse. Right action can only be determined on the basis of the group of persons discursively testing the validity of claims that are made to subjective sincerity, normative rightness and objective truth. The field of community control proposed by the present study provides a model for the elaboration of this discourse. The claim to universality made here is limited to the universal applicability of these procedures of discourse in determining the valid interests of persons. The community itself establishes the character of relationships, the form of organisation and the values to be held dear on the basis of this discourse. This provides for the mobilisation of both Indigenous agency and the resources of the coloniser. This mobilisation is a practical necessity to meet minority interests for security, identity and autonomy.

Disparity of power is inherent in the historic outcomes of colonisation. Empowerment is necessarily the just response to this disparity. Empowerment occurs in the transformative domains of risk and trust, critical consciousness and structural innovation that forge the bonds between personal and collective power. Working to reverse the consequences of colonisation with those whose lifeworld has been thrown into turmoil by loss of the anchor of need being met in daily life is one of the most challenging aspects of human endeavour. It challenges all of us to reconsider the basis upon which we make our choice of action. That personal challenge is necessary to begin to transform our societies and overturn the structures that contribute to the loss of life and health and a future so sorely incurred under the exploitative power relations of colonisation.
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