Theorising Empowerment Practice from the Pacific and Indigenous Australia

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Chapter 6

The Dissent Group

“We are irreducibly social beings.”

David West, Authenticity and Empowerment (1990:68)

6.1 Introduction

The study of organisation is present in many different fields, employing many different intellectual approaches. For example, political science (Michels 1962; Mulgan 1990; West 1990; Colebatch & Lamour 1993), sociology (Weber 1947; Parsons 1956; Grunsky 1970), management (Taylor 1923; Barnard 1951; Clark & Wilson 1961) and civil society studies (Korten 1987; Vakil 1997) have all contributed to conceptual development of organisational theories. Yet, in this large body of work, there is little that deals directly with the kind of social change organisations considered in this study, the reason being that much of this literature deals with large social conglomerations: bureaucracy, corporations, institutional forms of politics, hospitals or universities. The literature also is frequently concerned with the internal functions of organisations, uncritically accepting the social environment as a given set of values. Alternatively, those approaches that consider organisation for social change (Olson 1965; Zald & McCarthey 1975; Davis et.al. 2005), while useful for providing perspectives on organisations participating in social movements, tend to be more concerned with processes of social change than the nuts and bolts of how groups are able to effect such change. An exception to this general outlook is the field of community psychology, which, as has been seen, makes individual, organisational and social levels of empowerment its matter of central interest. As a field, however, it has struggled with the shift from individual psychology to an “ecological” approach that addresses the wider levels of the group and society (Boyd & Angelique 2007).

In the same way that community psychology identifies three levels of empowerment, theories of organisation also operate at different levels: organisations as groups of actors; organisations as functioning entities in society; organisations as their effect on the social environment. The study of organisations at small scales borders on psychology; at large scales it approaches the study of society itself. The field of organisational studies presents no clearly defined limits to the scope of study. From
interpretations of civil society, social capital, capacity and capability, to actors, logics, governance and mobilisation, the conceptual tools of organisation theory are many and varied. From the company and the institution to the “NGO” and “the community”, the subject matter is diverse. To bring some order to this diversity, here, theories of organisation are first broadly considered.

6.2 Theories of Organisation

Modern theories in the field of human organisation begin with philosopher David Hume and his allegorical tale of “draining the meadow”, written in 1739 (Hume 1911). Hume’s story draws attention to the problems of scale in collective action, and the potential conflicts between self-interest and collective interest – another version of the “micro-macro” problem. Colebatch and Larmour (Colebatch & Lamour 1993) present this and other classic dilemmas of organisation theory: the Tragedy of the Commons (Hardin), the Free Rider problem (Olson), and the Prisoner’s Dilemma (Luce and Raiffa). These hypothetical situations call for collective action to solve a problem. They represent the largest branch of organisation theory: rational choice theory. Rational choice theory takes the liberal concept of costs and benefits into a broader field of enquiry, with all the concomitant assumptions of actors possessing full and unambiguous information. In this view, actors will always seek to maximise, or at least seek minimum satisfactory outcomes, on the basis of “rational” (meaning utilitarian) choice. Colebatch and Larmour propose that organisations can be broadly classified as “market, bureaucracy and community”, reflecting organising principles based on self-interest and private ownership, rule- and regulation-based authority, and “collective self restraint” that draws on norms, values and affiliations (Colebatch & Lamour 1993:17). While this initially appears as a useful classification, it has two major difficulties. One is that markets and bureaucracies are also driven by norms and values. Their point of difference from a “community” is that these are not necessarily made overt in organisational transactions. In terms of the language used by Habermas, market and bureaucracy represent aspects of “system” in contrast to the communal “lifeworld”, a perspective to be pursued below. While the allegorical tale of the Tragedy of the Commons is typical of this utilitarian approach, it does not have to be regarded as a fait accompli, the ultimate tragedy of humanity’s collective fate. Instead, it is but a particular view of the strategies and tactics employed to achieve a contested outcome within a particular setting. The second difficulty is that many organisations show aspects of all three classifications. The education system presents one example of
The organisational relationship between teacher and student sits within the class as a learning community, regulated by the school as an institution in competition with others, and contested assumptions about a hierarchy of knowledge, its value and appropriate means of transmission.

Rather than beginning with a classification of organisations as a means of solving the conflicts between self and collective interests, another approach is functional. Chester Barnard in *The Functions of the Executive* proposed that the elements that define organisation are “(1) communication; (2) willingness to serve; and (3) common purpose” (Barnard 1951:82). Such a view is encouraging in its simplicity, and opens interesting lines of enquiry. For the purpose of the present study, the emphasis on “communication” immediately suggests Habermas and his view of the speech act as foundational in social relations. “Willingness” appears as a potentially multi-faceted construct, contingent on goal-rational, normative and psychological elements. “Common purpose” is satisfyingly simple, but to what extent does an employee experience the common purpose of a corporation? Responding to this question leads to further literature on coercive and seductive incentives for individuals to participate in collectives. In a smaller, self-motivated group with clearly shared aims, having common purpose still begs the question as to how that purpose gets defined, and whether it gets expressed in organisational tasks.

From the 1960s comes “open systems” theory, typified by Katz and Kahn in *The Social Psychology of Organizations*. Adopting models from the biological sciences, organisations are here regarded as entropic. An energy input is converted into both intrinsic and extrinsic output. The energy to drive the system is achieved through transactions between the organisation and its environment, in “patterned activity”. The criteria for identifying a discrete social entity and determining its function are (1) the presence of this patterned exchange of energy that results in output; and (2) how that output reactivates the organisation. The major components forming the template for patterned activity are roles/behaviours, norms/prescriptive sanctions, and values. With the sociologist’s interest in social reproduction, they define organisation as a sustained effort at self-maintenance. Katz and Kahn apply their theory at large scales, identifying maintenance structures that mediate between task demand and human needs (Katz & Khan 1966).

In the field of community psychology, and specifically related to organisations with an empowerment component, Maton and Salem in *Organizational Characteristics of*
Empowering Community Settings describe the organisation that is engaged in empowerment as a “setting” that commonly features:

(a) a belief system that inspires growth, is strengths-based, and is focused beyond the self; (b) an opportunity role structure that is pervasive, highly accessible, and multifunctional; (c) a support system that is encompassing, peer-based, and provides a sense of community; and (d) leadership that is inspiring, talented, shared, and committed to both setting and members (Maton & Salem 1995:631).

Consistent with much of the Northern tradition, the case study organisations Maton and Salem analyse serve primarily to help people integrate with society. Their interest is in organisational characteristics that enable individuals to “enhance psychological sense of control and achieve personal goals” (Maton 1995:632). While their findings are again of interest, the definition of empowerment used may have limited the scope of enquiry at an organisational level, more particularly when the organisational concern is with its effects in the external environment. The high standard set by Maton and Salem may be a useful goal, but it is also useful to know more about how to get there.

More consistent with the present study, and still in the field of community psychology, Perkins and others enlarge on Maton and Salem by drawing on work from the 1970s to classify “non-profit community organizations” as involved in “first order (incremental or ameliorative)” and “second order (transformative)” change (Perkins et.al. 2007:310). They express their specific interest in “organizational learning” as a process and the “learning organization” as an ideal type that can contribute to “systemic community change” by “empowered organizations” (Perkins et.al. 2007). The case studies show that organisational learning requires conscious effort and is facilitated by the use of tools, including the same reflective tools and participatory processes employed with the client part of the community. Community psychology identifies “individual learning” and “organisational learning” among “key diagnostic variables” differentiating transformative and ameliorative organisations (Perkins et.al. 2007:310).

Given such a wide diversity of perspectives, it is little wonder that community psychology has struggled with its “ecological” approach to organisation and empowerment. To clarify the relationship of such divergent views, it is possible to suggest that the same phenomenon is at play here as in the perspectives of Bronowski,
Maslow and Weisskopf from the previous chapter. That is, these different approaches show different aspects of human intersubjectivity. The classic scholars of organisation have a utilitarian, goal-rational foundation to their work. Likewise, the large-scale sociological approach of Katz and Khan gives pre-eminence to the identification of norms and values, and the normative “patterning” of interactions as the means to identify where organisation exists. Finally, Maton and Salem identify the elements of subjective experience that support individuals in a group. And, of course, all must include an interactional component, be it communication, patterns of exchange, or learning and participatory process.

In order to take these varying perspectives to a point where they can be integrated, it has been proposed in the present study that there are two complementary ways of looking at organisations: as groups of actors, and as structures. First, consider the nature of the actor in a group.

6.3 Actors in Organisation
Regardless of the specific language used to describe an organisation, be it a community, interest association, gang, corporation or institution, first and foremost all are types of bounded groups of actors. The present study is concerned with the particular type of group of actors for whom gaining control – that is, acquiring the capability to exercise “power in action” (Sites 1973) – is a necessary part of fulfilling their universal need in the classes of security, identity and autonomy. However, this in itself is not sufficiently definitive, for as Zimmerman and others have pointed out, empowerment as a necessary part of human development can operate at multiple levels. That is, for those who are in a position of relative powerlessness, this necessity for control through empowerment can be operational in different ways. While a group that seeks to empower its members and its clients will be likely to possess at least some of the characteristics Maton and Salem identify, there is also a clear difference between, for example, mutual-help “GROW” group and the organisations described in this study.

From the organisational literature, it is possible to distinguish three circumstances in which an empowering intervention is employed. In mutual support groups such as those analysed by Maton and Salem, the necessity for control is manifest as a

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78 One of Maton and Salem's case studies, GROW Inc. is a mutual help organisation for persons with a mental illness. GROW has three program components: weekly group meetings; an extensive organisational literature, including the "Blue Book" developed from participant experiences; and a "sharing and caring community".
phenomenon of the self. The power to heal oneself, such as is derived from the mutual support group or counselling relationship, relies on the internalisation of a narrative of strength created and inculcated by the interactions of the group (Rappaport 1995). Next, while the aim in the mutual-help setting may be better individual integration with society, under conditions of the inability for a group to meet universal need from the dominant society, this narrative also necessarily requires the construction of recognisable group identity as a product of the group. In these circumstances, the group can bound itself by establishing a separate identity through the gang, the group of peers, or by, for example, ethnic or class identity, carving out an autonomous social space. Lastly, where there is a structural component to a disparity of control that cannot be dealt with by a group turning inward and away from society, the group must develop its own discourse of values to launch a social critique aimed at structural change. In each of these circumstances, the relationships between actors have fundamentally the same objective: the enhancement of control. This is referred to in Table 4 (at the end of the chapter) as the group control orientation.

So, while these different types of empowering setting have in common the objective of control, clarifying the nature of the differences in empowerment at the level of organisational practice is necessary. Defining the differences in these settings again directs attention to the field of community psychology. These differences can be defined by their relational, or subject-subject characteristics. Brian Christens, in his 2011 paper Toward Relational Empowerment (Christens 2011), expands Zimmerman’s earlier nomological network (Zimmerman 1995). Christen’s conclusions from his analysis are striking because of the similarity to Habermas’s categories of communicative rationality. As shown in Figure 9, the two sets of categories can be overlayed. Christens identifies four components of psychological empowerment: emotional, cognitive, relational and behavioural. These correspond to the categories that Habermas proposes can be intuitively distinguished, being the subjective, objective and normative “worlds” and the intersubjectivity of language.
Whereas in the nomological network, the “hypothesised elements” are accompanied by lists of variables for each component, Habermas takes the components and uses them to derive the structural components of the lifeworld, personality, society and culture, and their respective social reproductive processes of socialisation, social integration and cultural reproduction (Habermas 1987:142).

Basing his thinking in the childhood development studies of Jean Piaget (Habermas 1984:68), Habermas argues that the different approaches to theorising social reproduction – as framed by Berger and Luckmann, Durkheim, Parsons and Mead – each give precedence to only one aspect of the lifeworld, to the exclusion of others. His fundamental disagreement with these authors is that the foundation of their work rests in a particular philosophical “theory of consciousness”. Habermas rejects the “familiar psychological and sociological models of the isolated actor” (Habermas 1987:129), the subjective consciousness in interaction with an objective world. His view is that this image traps our thinking in the goal-rational, teleological world of the ancients. Instead, he begins by adopting the “unexpected” view proposed by Karl Popper in his 1967 address “Epistemology Without a Knowing Subject’, which identifies:
first the world of physical objects or physical states; secondly, the world of states of consciousness, or of mental states or perhaps of behavioural dispositions to act; and thirdly the world of objective contents of thought, especially of scientific and poetic thoughts and of works of art (Popper in Habermas 1984:76).

Popper provided the seed for Habermas’s conception of a three-dimensional lifeworld reproduced in intersubjectivity by language. In this way, the Theory of Communicative Action is radically communal in its epistemology, while still recognising the subjectivity of actors. This communality is the antidote to the individualistic perspective of the previous chapter, which was concerned primarily with an image of the self. Through his focus on language and communication as being the basis of the subject-subject or group relation, Habermas draws together the perspectives of these earlier classic authors as three aspects of a single process, based on the following three-dimensional structure of the lifeworld:

Under the functional aspect of mutual understanding, communicative action serves to transmit and renew cultural knowledge; under the aspect of coordinating action, it serves social integration and the establishment of solidarity; finally, under the aspect of socialisation, communicative action serves the formation of personal identities. The symbolic contents of the lifeworld are reproduced by way of the continuation of valid knowledge, stabilization of group solidarity, and socialisation of responsible actors (Habermas 1987:137).

The emphasis on communication provides the opportunity to expand the view of narrative as discussed in Chapter 3. Rappaport identified the use of the narrative form of communication as an “endeavour consistent with the development of empowerment” (Rappaport 1995:802). For Habermas, engagement with narrative allows participants to reach beyond the “horizon-forming context” imposed by a particular action situation. Adopting narrative as the form of speech endows narrators with a perspective that bases description “on an everyday concept of the lifeworld as a cognitive reference system” (Habermas 1987:136, italics in original). Narrative objectifies the lifeworld, serving the mutual understanding of actors coordinating common tasks, at the same time as it serves the self-understanding of persons. This is

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Note that the term “lifeworld” is not unique to Habermas. It is a term used by Durkheim, and also Shutz and Luckmann (The Structure of the Lifeworld, 1973), which was influential for Habermas.
because the lifeworld is not only private, but also intersubjective, the linguistically recreated structure of a shared personal and group reality. By adopting the perspective of narrators in the communicative context of a group, actors cease to be participants and become the agents of their own destiny. In this sense, organisational empowerment can be understood as the communicative process by which individuals and groups develop from their own experience a narrative of competence, cooperation and control.

As discussed in the previous chapter, communicative action rests on speakers and hearers using “the reference system of the three worlds as an interpretive framework within which they work out their common situational definitions” (Habermas 1987,120). These tripartite actor-world relations give rise to Habermas’s pure types of social action oriented to mutual understanding, being teleological, normative, and dramaturgical action, as limit cases of communicative action (Habermas, 1984,85 and II,120). If organisation for empowerment is defined as intentionally creating settings in which narrative is the chosen form, then it follows that these types of action can be used to describe the particular dynamics inherent in different group objectives, as all are forms of communicative action. Thus, the mutual help group is primarily one where the participants in interaction constitute a public for one another. Speakers and hearers seek the intersubjective recognition of the validity of personal experience in the context of a group setting. Each agent can monitor public access to the attitudes, feelings and desires to which he or she has privileged access in a progressive unveiling of the self. This form is defined as dramaturgical action. Next, the peer group can be identified with normative action. Among peers, the group project is primarily to reinforce identity through constructing a shared narrative of behavioural norms that serve to orient the action of the group. The inherent group self-consciousness serves to highlight the us/them boundaries of the group engaged in normative action. Finally, teleological action is geared towards bringing about a particular state of affairs by choosing strategic means that promise success in bringing about the necessary change. Teleological action emphasises the group processes for coming to a decision, that is, the structural process for choosing among alternative courses of action.

For actors, the processes of building empowerment are the same. They all involve communicative action, whereby “the actors seek to reach an understanding about the action situation and their plans of action in order to coordinate their action by way of agreement” (Habermas 1984:86). As discussed in the previous chapter, personal empowerment is achieved in communicative action through the process of the
rationalisation of lifeworld. Similarly, at the second step, for actors engaged in organisational empowerment, each form of social action involves differentiation of the specific kinds of validity claims at the level of discourse. In this discourse, as the referent lifeworld segment moves from what is personal to what is social to what is cultural, the form of action moves from dramaturgical to normative to teleological. It is this element of discourse that introduces the requirement for organisation, in as much as discourse is a particular form of communication requiring conscious effort, and one enabled by the performance of narrative. Both require particular settings that do not tend to arise spontaneously. The forms of social action are shown in Table 4, corresponding to each group control orientation.

Actors in the empowering group step outside their everyday communicative practice, owing their “mutual understanding to their own interpretive performances” as speakers and hearers (Habermas 1987:133, italics in original). Thus, they open the way for the creation of collective consciousness uniquely owned and controlled by the group members. This is the foundation of the reflexive community described by Lash, which emerged as another necessary characteristic displayed by the case study organisations. Based on this understanding of the process by which the group takes on identity, it is now possible to move on to consider the structural form of the group itself, and the constraints and opportunities that this offers for the second-order effects of individual and collective action.

6.4 The Organisation as Entity: Size, Structure and Communication

6.4.1 Size

An initial important way to consider structure is in terms of scale. The size of an organized community qualitatively changes subsystems in simple numerical ways. The ratio of the number of members to, for example, the available decision-making positions is a structural parameter that can be assessed as a measure of participation (Brown et.al. 2007). In The Logic of Collective Action (1965), Mancur Olson examined the logic of structures that apply at different scales of groups to develop a taxonomy of size.

In common with most authors in the organisation field, Olson is concerned with large, usually market-oriented organisations rather than small groups. Nevertheless, he aims to construct a unified theory of organization-based rational choice that explains the dynamics of groups large and small, market and non-market, inclusive and exclusive. Olson confronts some difficult problems for rational choice, and in the process
employs some interesting vocabulary. In addition to clarifying the “public good” (Olson 1965:14), the important conceptual tools he uses with reference to group behaviour include, in the non-market sector, his taxonomy of groups based on size from small to large of “privileged”, “intermediate” and “latent” (Olson 1965:48); and in the same sector, “selective incentives” (Olson 1965:51).

A large group is defined as a group in which the effect of a single actor is not noticeable: you can do nothing and still get the benefit of the public good. In large groups, says Olson, “it is certain that a collective good will not be provided unless there is coercion or some outside inducements” (Olson 1965:44, italics in original). Olson calls these large groups “latent”. They are groups in which the actors have no self-interested reason to act to provide a group benefit. An example could be the employee of a large corporation. Whereas shareholders obtain benefit from membership, the employee must be provided with incentive. The employee gets the benefit of the existence of the company, but his or her individual effort is not noticeable in its effect on the dividend. Formal organisation of the group is necessary to the extent that the incentive of obtaining the benefits of group membership is made selective, that is, available only to group members. According to Olson, this is essential for the public good to be delivered in the large or “latent” group.

In a small group, called by Olson “privileged”, coercion or inducement is not required for the public good to be delivered. The group is so small that the benefits of the public good can be obtained without formal organization. In this group, the contribution of every party is voluntary, and rules for the operation of the group are embedded within the activity itself. Individual motivation is a necessary condition for meeting group need. An example of this group could be a student household. The dishes must eventually get washed, or there will be no bowls or spoons to eat breakfast. What is crucial is that while one householder must eventually wash up, the lack of contribution of other householders will be noticeable.

Between large and small is the “intermediate” group, in which no single member gets a share of the benefit sufficient to give him an incentive to provide the good himself, but

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80 The public good defines group products, the group consumable. It is a “good” in the same sense that a store has goods, but in this case it is a group consumable. “Public” is defined by Olson as any good “such that, if any person in a group consumes it, it cannot feasibly be withheld from others in that group” (Olson 1965:14). The use of public goods as the group product is in contrast to defining groups, for example, in terms of achievement of their stated aims and objectives.
which does not have so many members that no one will notice whether any other member is or is not helping (Olson 1965:50). Olson states:

The standard for determining whether a group will have the capacity to act [without incentives, i.e. voluntarily] depends on whether the individual actions of one or more members in a group are noticeable to any other individuals in the group (Olson 1965:45).

What is significant for the present study is that the criterion Olson uses to scale his taxonomy of groups is the extent to which the contributions of actors are noticeable to others in the group. As groups get larger, the contribution of each individual makes a smaller difference to the overall outcome, and it is harder to maintain effective communication with everyone. It follows that each individual has less stake in what happens. In a large group, you can do nothing, still get the benefit of the group’s purpose, and it doesn't matter that you did not contribute because your lack of effort goes unnoticed. In a small group, by definition, anyone’s lack of contribution to the group’s purpose gets noticed by all other group members. This is further linked to each individual’s motivation to provide the public good. Self-motivation or voluntarism is essential to the purpose of both privileged and intermediate size groups, through the push to achieve the purpose, and the pull of getting noticed for contributing or not. The point here for the present study is that the process driving the structural differences described by Olson is communicative, a matter of being able to notice everyone’s contribution. Furthermore, Olson’s taxonomy suggests the possibility of numerical limits to empowering organisation.

A suggestion of the likely figure of the numerical size applicable to privileged and intermediate groups comes from looking at the ability of a group to act. Olson points out that the empirical studies show that small groups, on average six members, get things done. The same studies show that larger groups, beginning from about 14 participants, are better for looking for points of view, reactions and debate (James 1951). Evolutionary biologist Robin Dunbar has collated findings in relation to small group numbers with similar results, and goes further by proposing that the largest group in which a “stable interpersonal relationship” can be maintained is about 150. Interestingly, Dunbar links this relatively large group size to the evolution of language.

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81 The question of what constitutes “effective communication” in an organisational setting is dealt with below in the discussion of Chester Barnard.
Group size any larger than this enters the realm of abstract definitions of group identity and the socially defined latent group. While these figures are not definitive in terms of the degree of formal organisation required to maintain group solidarity and effectiveness, what they do suggest is that the ability to generate communicatively shared understanding – that is, for everyone’s contribution to be noticeable and acknowledged through interpersonal exchange, coupled with effective action – is feasible in groups of less than about 150. Clearly, the larger the group, the more formal organisation will be required to maintain effective communication, defined here as each and every individual being both noticed and accountable in terms of the production of the public good.

6.4.2 Structure - Incentive and Motivation.

For an initial specification of structure, the early literature of organisation considers organisational structures largely in terms of incentives. For example, Clark and Wilson (1961) elaborate types of incentives, and try to bring the problem of objective versus subjective incentives under the one roof in a causal model. Their basic hypothesis is that the incentive system is the “principle variable affecting organizational behaviour” and that rather than having to persuade the recalcitrant of the value of participation, organisations change the incentive system in response to changes in “the apparent motives of contributors, or potential contributors, to the organization”. Clark and Wilson differentiate three types of incentives: material, solidary and purposive (Clark & Wilson 1961:130). Material incentives are tangible rewards, including wages and salaries and also including financial or other tangible benefits that derive from association, such as membership of a labour union. Solidary incentives are intangible, and are derived from group membership – fun, belonging, maintenance of social distinctions, and so on. Solidary incentives do not rely directly on the goals of the organisation except in the broadest sense. While goals may exist, they are flexible and can be transitory without damage to the organisation. Finally, purpose incentives are also intangible, but derive from the goals of the organisation. The incentive comes from the necessity to have organization in order to achieve the stated aim, such as changing a law, or having a national park declared. It follows that achievement of the aim is likely to result in the dissolution of the organisation, depending on how broadly the aim is stated. “Fighting globalisation” is a reason some organisations exist, but the aim is not likely to be achieved in the short term.

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In this view, incentives are there to appeal to individuals in order to encourage collective behaviour. They represent the micro side of the picture and are an attempt to describe the potential lures likely to be attractive to a range of “men” of a “certain state of mind”. What Clark and Wilson do next is to suggest that at the macro level these incentives correspond to different organisational types. Business firms, labour unions and political machines are described as utilitarian organisations. They rely primarily on material incentives to sustain “willingness”. By and large, they predict that for the participants, organisational goals will be secondary to incentives. They take the view that goals are the responsibility of the executive and, presumably in the well-functioning organisation there will be clearly defined working procedures and processes of accountability. The next group are the service-oriented voluntary organisations and social clubs. The organisational goals of these institutions are non-controversial and socially acceptable. Finally, to make a neat set, there are purposive organisations. These rely on their stated goals to attract and retain people. It can be said that the perfect placement for such an organisation to continue is to be able to make visible progress towards the goal, without ever actually getting there. For example, ending hunger or saving the planet can only keep so many people going for so long before other priorities are likely to intervene. In other words, if the attainment of the goal cannot be seen to be getting any closer, people will lose interest. If the goal is too vague, or the appeal is to a small minority, then the incentive to participate is weak or the pool of potential members is too small. In these instances organisation will fail.

Olson also gave extensive attention to incentives. Rational choice demands that a latent group has power and the capacity for action that is only realised or mobilised through incentives that are necessarily “selective”. In contrast to a collective good, an incentive is a selective good. Whereas a collective good is indiscriminate and available to every group member, a selective good means that only those actors that join in acting for the collective get the individual good. These incentives can be positive or negative; seductive or coercive. Olson gives some examples of selective incentives as “a desire to win prestige, respect, or friendship”. He is of the view that using social incentives to mobilise a latent group action is consistent with rational choice because “social status and social acceptance are individual, non-collective goods” (Olson 1965:61). Social incentives are selective because they can distinguish between those individuals who will support action in the common interest, and those who will not. These selective incentives can come in all shapes and sizes. As well as monetary and
social incentives, there can be “erotic incentives, psychological incentives, moral incentives and so on”. As we have seen, Olson’s definition – that the size of a group is based on the feasibility of exclusion from the products of the group – requires that incentives to contribute to the group can be applied selectively. Selective incentives “distinguish between those individuals who support action in the common interest and those who do not” (Olson 1965:61).

Applying this notion of selective incentives to the organisational community, it appears as another way in which to delimit the field of the group. The hypothetical situations of Hume or Hardin emphasise that “a core problem for organization [sic] is divergence between individual self-interest and the requirements of collective action” (Colebatch & Lamour 1993:15). However, it also appears that at the scale of the privileged to intermediate group, self-interest and an interest in collective action become one. Motivation and incentive become two sides of a single coin. The application of rational choice reaches its limit and it is the voluntarism of actors that becomes important. Olsen’s proposition that “moral incentives” can be selective makes the assumption that all social incentives necessarily occur as phenomena external to the group, and are part of the objective world. In the case of the empowering group, just the opposite argument has been made in the present study. That is, here, group norms and values are developed as part of a group narrative in a creative act of interpretation. Olson acknowledges that rational logics become indeterminate at the level of actors. Indeterminacy arises when an actor in a group reaches the point of deciding whether he or she might or might not contribute or withhold activity to generate the public good. That is, when an actor has a choice, and is able to exercise that in choosing (the definition of autonomy) rational choice theory will not help predict that choice. Says Olson, “there seems to be no way at present of getting a general, valid and determinate solution at the level of abstract of this chapter” (Olson 1965:43), meaning at the level of actors. The individual motives for making one choice or another come into operation, and because those motives are, from a “rational” view, unknowable to other parties in the group, and multivariant in terms of being satisfiers of needs, a rational choice analysis will not further our understanding. It is only by considering all three rationalities of the lifeworld that the question of choice is given moral force. In terms of the non-material need of the group, normative and subjective worlds are also subject to validity claims in deciding to contribute to a group. These aspects of the lifeworld are not unknowable, merely inaccessible for the purpose of
rational choice theory. Olson’s groups account for the logic of structures but not for the dynamism of actors.

However, Olson’s growing list of possible incentives looks remarkably like a needs list, with needs for autonomy (through reference to a moral code and values), identity (through reference to friendships, social status) and security (through reference to erotic and psychological incentives) all appearing (Olson 1965:61). In keeping with the universal need approach, Olson’s list could be amalgamated into the classes of security, identity and autonomy.

Olson is not concerned about the particularities of a moral code. It is not the quality or content of the code that matters to him, but the fact of having one that can serve as a selective incentive. This is ultimately how Olson gets around the problem of indeterminancy. Rational choice predicts that when circumstances demand individual sacrifice to obtain a collective good, no-one will make the sacrifice. So it matters for rational choice to place the emphasis not on the sacrifice, but on the values that make sacrifice a selective incentive.

Knowing the limits of rational choice, a theory of motivation, as presented in the previous chapter, is necessary to complete the picture of an intermediate-sized group. This may be particularly true of groups towards the smaller end of this class, because having self-motivated actors is a necessary condition of the privileged group. Groups are a means to satisfy the needs of the members. Empowering groups meet needs that require cooperative structures and abstract values in order to be satisfied. Rational choice does allow for groups to act without coercion or inducement. As shown, these are likely to be small- to intermediate-sized groups where communication is sufficient to ensure that the contribution of every person to the group purpose is noticeable by other group members.

What is of interest here for the present study is the process involved in what determines the group size – this balance of motivation and the contribution of each person being noticeable and acknowledged, coupled with a selective incentive as a way to describe motivation at the level of organisation. Group size does condition the way that the public good is produced. Olson’s use of being noticed as the criteria for group size draws attention to how people get noticed and acknowledged in groups. This may be through all kinds of different incentives, and through behaviour that draws attention; it may be through provision of material goods or bestowal of status; it may be concrete or symbolic. The public goods of values and a stock of images to
convey them are the tools that are used for the process of communication that is necessary for this noticing that satisfies universal need and so is linked to motivation. Finally, it is the quality of intersubjectivity, aided by tools and organisational habits, that conditions the group size for which action based on meaningful communication is possible.

6.4.3 Meaningful Communication

The tools used by the case study groups demonstrate the characteristics of a setting wherein “the subjective worlds of participants could serve as mirror surfaces […] to adopt in common the perspective of a third person or a nonparticipant” (Habermas 1984:69). The tools show the important place of providing an evidential framework for the group’s narrative. As discussed in Chapter 3, it is important that this framework is formed not as a counterfactual artefact, but rather a means of explication and ordering, one that provides for firmly grasping what is already intuitively understood. The lifeworld is the ultimate setting for everything, and as such, as expressed by Shutz and Luckmann (Shutz 1973), is “immunised” against total revision. That the lifeworldly stock of information may not be adequate to the task of its own interpretation is a different matter. Lived experience has its limitations, but the lifeworld itself “in principle cannot be exhausted” (Habermas 1984:133). It is always available to be added to as a stock of knowledge in general. In terms of the use of tools, the narrative for which they provide a framework is a form that permits users to step beyond the horizon of “situation oriented actors caught up in the communicative practice of everyday life” opening up “a further stock of meaning, which, while it calls for explication, is already intuitively familiar” (Habermas 1984:133). It is this process that allows each individual to grasp the limitations of a lifeworld that, in one of its structural aspects, is dependent upon a particular cultural stock of knowledge. At the same time, that knowledge is expanded and made increasingly complex by drawing on the other structural aspects of the lifeworld. It is this that has been referred to as the “Ah-Hah” moment in empowerment (Howlett 1985). This is not a challenge to the lifeworld but, rather, an augmentation of it. The framework provided by a reflective tool anticipates the “hermeneutic reflexivity” described by Lash. It is the investigative process, SIDT’s “questioning”, that in itself constitutes part of this new knowledge. As Habermas and Lash agree, it is a distinctive feature of modernity that normatively regulated interpretive frameworks can be exposed to methodical testing.
The question of what constitutes meaningful communication in an organisational context was pursued early on in the study of organisation by Chester Barnard in *The Functions of the Executive* (1951). This is worthwhile looking at, because Barnard places his definition of “authoritative communication” in the context of an organisation where a small decision-making group, the “executive”, generates commands that require assent for the purpose of the organization to exist and be maintained. We can examine the characteristics of the group that performs this executive function with Olson’s taxonomy of group size. For example, reaching back to Michels and the “iron law of oligarchy”, both Barnard and Olson would agree that decision-making is best achieved in small groups of roughly less than 10 members, and that as groups grow, there must be a division of functions within the group. We would expect that a group of decision-making size is bordering on being what Olson calls “privileged”, where the contribution of every member is critical to provision of a public good – in this case, the decisions of the group that are made for the whole organisation. As the title states, Barnard’s procedure takes a functional approach to the examination of structure. Barnard adds to the vocabulary of organisation in his approach to the minimum requirements for organisation to exist as a recognisable entity. Apart from the fact that there can be no organisation without persons, in addition to “willingness to serve”, to be discussed further below, Barnard considers his other fundamentals to be communication and common purpose. Both are dealt with by Barnard in a quite brief and matter-of-fact way.

Barnard’s primary condition for an organisation to exist as an entity is communication. In the context of Olson’s requirement for being noticed, and given the universal emphasis placed on communication in the literature of organisations, this is worthy of some attention. He puts the view that “the structure, extensiveness and scope of organization are almost entirely determined by communication techniques” (Barnard 1951:91). In his introduction to the topic, Barnard only briefly elaborates on these techniques as being written, oral and “observational feeling”. What he is concerned about is communication per se. It is defined as the dynamic by which “the possibility of accomplishing a common purpose and the existence of persons whose desires might constitute motives for contributing toward such a common purpose” are brought together in organisation. Barnard gives further attention to what else is included among these communication techniques in his development of a theory of authority. This is because he regards it as critical that the communication of the executive be authoritative. In a group, under what conditions would an individual accept
communication as authoritative? Barnard’s perspective on this question is interesting because it does not imply a definition of organizational authority that is based in structures, particularly hierarchical structures, and the stasis that managerial structural analysis is prone to. Instead, Barnard provides a functional definition of communication that is concerned with the technical quality of communication as an effective process for the subjective acceptance of the content of that communication in an organisational context. Communication is authoritative when:

- it can be understood;
- it is not inconsistent with the purpose of the organisation;
- it is compatible with personal interest;
- compliance is physically possible (Barnard 1947:165).

Communication that does not meet these criteria will not contribute to group definition and maintenance. There are many forms of communication, but it is this particular type of communication that defines a group as an entity. Of course, not all communication is sifted by the recipients in a rational way using these standards. There are many communications that the recipient assents to unquestionably. Membership of an organisation does require acceptance of the rules and authority of the group, and many aspects of communication will fall within “the range that in a general way was anticipated at the time of undertaking the connection with the organization” (Barnard 1951:169). It is only when there is doubt about whether the instructions of the organisation are adequate to the recipient that assent and cooperation may not be secured.

Furthermore, this communication serves the function of bringing together persons with a common purpose. Barnard divides organizational purpose into first the purpose that comes with willingness to cooperate, and secondly the subjective purposes of the individuals involved in a group activity. The reason for this division is that:

> purpose can serve as an element of the cooperative system only so long as the participants do not recognize that there are serious divergences in their understanding of the purpose as the object of cooperation (Barnard 1951:87).

Each individual has his or her own motives and experience, and responds to different incentives to decide to contribute willingly to the group. An objective purpose, ‘out there’, that can serve as an expression of the group’s identity, need only be one that is believed by the contributors to be the determined purpose of the organisation. When
much of the managerial and capabilities literature looks at purpose, the generally intended meaning is of a goal, the production of some outcome from group effort. It is interesting that for Barnard, purpose is quite different. For him, it is enough that everyone believes in the efforts of the group. He thinks that often the stated aim of the group will be something quite different from the purpose. Aims can change, and organisations that seek to perpetuate themselves may change the apparent reason for their existence without abandoning the willingness of the members. Purpose is simply a unifying principle that tells you a group exists as an entity.

To summarise the foregoing discussion, it should be clear that groups where empowerment is possible will be of privileged to intermediate size. Groups of this size possess a particular logic to their structures and the nature of the participation of their actors. As conditioned by their size, four elements can now be defined as essential to the structures and actors of the groups under discussion in the present study:

- **Motivation/Incentive (push/pull)** – everyone has a legitimate reason for participating that is personal and is reinforced by the solidary and purposive outcomes of participation;
- **Communication** – the effort and contribution of every person to the production of public goods is noticeable and acknowledged;
- **Common purpose** – everyone in the group has a belief in the real existence of a common purpose that explains why they are there together;
- **Adaptability** – everyone understands that the purpose of the group is different from the aim, and can respond positively when aims are not achieved, provided the purpose remains consistent.

There is a further factor that conditions the nature of the empowering group. In the organisational literature considered so far there is no discussion of dissent. However, this is of particular interest for interpretation from the case studies, because dissent emerged from the case studies as a defining characteristic of an empowering group. Having first looked at the consequences of size, dissent now needs to be considered in terms of the structural conditions it imposes on the group of actors. This provides the opportunity to further flesh out the four elements proposed above.

**6.5 The Modern Structure of Dissent**

From the above discussion, three types of empowering group emerged, each associated with a different type of social action. It also emerged that these groups will display a hierarchy of increasing organisational complexity from mutual help group to minority
identity group to social movement organisation. Furthermore, groups must codify their practices as the amount of complexity increases. For structures, in terms of the requirements for formal organisation, what can be seen to be different for each form of action are the consequences of action for structure. As the social scope of action widens, from self-help to formation of group identity to social change, the requirement for formal organisation – that is, governance by rules – increases, finally becoming an obligatory part of group interactions. In terms of the organisational requirements for empowerment, these are dictated by the action orientation, as defined by the particular objectives of the group.

To begin with what is structurally common to all, it became clear from the case studies that intentionality is essential to the way these groups of actors have come together – that is, the group is self-defining or “reflexive”. It follows that unlike a corporation or institution that can operate independently of communicatively structured contexts, these groups must be oriented to action based on communicatively developed shared understanding. The expanded world concepts and corresponding validity claims provide the “formal scaffolding with which those acting communicatively order problematic contexts of situations” (Habermas 1984:70). It is this scaffolding which serves to demarcate group boundaries and which is the structural element common to all types of empowering groups.

It is the narrative setting that characterises the relationships between actors in the intentionally bounded group as having the structural characteristics, the “scaffolding”, of Habermas’s ideal speech situation, the home of discourse aimed at generating action through uncompelled consensus. This setting is defined by tripartite communicative claims to validity as true to reality, normatively right and subjectively sincere. This discourse is related to action through ideas: theory and praxis. Quoting Hegel’s university roommate, Joseph Schelling, Habermas wrote:

… ideas alone lend firmness and moral significance to action. Only knowledge which has been freed from mere practical concerns and has been centered around ideas, which has, in other words, acquired a theoretical basis, is able to provide the right setting for action (Habermas 1966:285).

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83 This is called by Habermas a “media-steered subsystem” (Habermas 1987:309). See below for further discussion.
However, as discussed above, these ideas are not posited counterfactually but reflexively, in line with Lash’s definition of the modern community. In Chapter 2 the modern community was defined in terms of Hegelian Sittlichkeit, “concrete ethical life” (Lash 1994:148), expressed in Sitten, accepted practices or habit. Furthermore, the idea was developed that dissent is necessarily a characteristic of the modern reflexive community as it reclaims social space in contradiction to the colonisation of the lifeworld. This communal dissent is an expression of power that is derived from the praxis of Lash’s “hermeneutic reflexivity”. In this community,

Everyday activities in the “we” are about the routine achievement of meaning: about the production of substantive goods, and guided by an understanding of more generally what is substantively good by the community (Lash 1994:157).

As Lash says, it is important to iterate here that this community is not about shared interests, as in interest groups, nor about shared properties, as in gay or lesbian. It is about the products of a “field”, in the sense that religion, politics, science, art or (as is the case with the Bismark Ramu Group) campaigning and organizing are fields.84 In the context of modernity, these specialists and the community of which they are a part are “social actors” that are “as much producers of a cultural product as consumers” (Lash 1994:161), whose goods are received in society in general as cultural artefacts. In terms of organisation for social action, the specialist field and its community can be imagined as a soccer team playing to a stadium. The team is regulated by teleological action – that is, its job is to score goals and win, subject to fixed rules. As specialists, members or the team turn up and play regardless. The crowd, however, is organised by normative action. They depend on the specialists to be there, producing the cultural good of the match they have come to watch. The crowd transforms the highly regulated field of the players into an artefact received in society at large, be it “soccer hooligans” or “grand final week”. Similarly, empowering organisations and their clients are bound together as a community while acting in different ways. Together with members of the specialist field, these “social actors” constitute a community in having:

- shared meaning and practices;
- affective involvement with the products of the field;

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84 Lash is here referring to the work of Pierre Bourdieu, An Invitation to Reflexive Sociology (1992).
• internally generated standards, telos and ends;
• felt obligations, the characteristic “habitus” of the field.

These communities are reflexive in that:

• one is not born or thrown into them, but throws oneself into them;
• they may be widely stretched over abstract space;
• they consciously pose themselves the problem of their own creation;
• their tools (Zeuge) and products tend to be not material ones but abstract and cultural ones (after Lash 1995:161).

It has emerged from the case studies that these characteristics are applicable to empowering groups. They are practices of actors on the one hand – the shared meanings of the community – and on the other hand have the structural characteristics of the particular type of bounded group, called here specialists and clients or supporters.

Being structural, the circumstances of an oppressed community are governed by the dominant system. The group is affected by events that occur elsewhere, in a centre-periphery type relationship as discussed in Chapter 1. As the group turns outwards to analyse the world, the reality that the social order reproduces disparities of power generates critical consciousness as a necessary part of the community. As has been discussed, Galtung and Sites highlight that need is structure-dependent. For Galtung, this is because many satisfiers are socially organised. For Sites, it is because in circumstances where classes of need are not being met by the dominant way things are organized, then it is necessary to find other ways to organize to meet those needs. The alcoholics who meet by the willow tree are organized in their own way, as are graffiti artists. Both are an expression of a kind of power, in as much as both dissent from the dominant normative standard. Each objectifies what is dominant in that each is formed in opposition to dominant values. They are self-motivating and bounded by their dissent. What Sites shows is that it is in the everyday acts of the reproduction of the dissent group that independent control becomes necessary. Control is what makes the difference between a group bounded by fatalism and one that can organize to meet its needs. Ryan and Deci, who relate motivation to an intrinsic need for self-determination, support this view. They see this intrinsic motivation as a “natural inclination towards assimilation, mastery, spontaneous interest, and exploration that is […] essential to cognitive and social development” (Ryan & Deci 2000:70). This view has been supported by the case studies. As an organising principle, universal need can
be a tool to help motivate people to have control. For individuals, control gives the sense of having choice in life is essential to health.

Dissent can put on a deliberate face as withdrawal to shared group boundaries, or it can represent active opposition with a view to changing society. The point here is to see that under the conditions of modernity, the production of goods such as identity and autonomy are creative acts by a group of actors that have an effect in the social field. Under conditions of modernity, structurally these public goods are constituted autonomously, independently of tradition, and so possess the quality of structural innovation. The necessity of this innovation in the current age is established by the existence of global risk. This point is important because when a structural disparity of power exists between actors – one of the three conditions under which empowerment is a necessary part of intervention — transformative change can only come about through structural innovation. This change comes about with the achievement of critical consciousness at the level of the group. It is this requirement for structural innovation that means actors must organize, precisely because the required change is structural.

6.6 Synthesis: Group Control
The persistent existence of a visible grouping, bounded by its shared values, is a means necessary to the end of social change. This is the “patterning” described by Katz and Khan. The characteristic bounding pattern of the empowering group has been identified as dissent. To have dissent as an implied purpose requires being conscious of socially produced meanings. Convention implies that these meanings are common-sense schemata applied to the world, and, in the circumstances of a disparity of power, that they are the product of a dominant group. Questioning common sense is therefore

85 Corresponding to the group control orientation as shown in Table 4.
86 The use of aircraft as missiles by organised militants, leading to the use of the term “asymmetrical warfare”, would have to be a leading example of this. It is in this sense that terrorism is very “modern”. That this “warfare” has affected the consciousness of millions would seem beyond doubt. So too would it seem beyond doubt that members of these extremist groups feel empowered in their actions, possessing strong identity and autonomous control.
87 For the dissent organisation this should always be problematic. There is a longstanding tendency to avoid the language of hierarchy in describing the functional division of the group. Titles such as ‘coordinator’ or ‘facilitator’ replace the more usual nomenclature of ‘director’ or ‘manager’. Emphasis in principle is placed on coordinating the freely chosen activities of the members of the wider group, rather than on giving instructions to be followed. When the consent of the entire group matters to group cohesiveness – that is, when motivation rather than incentive is the primary driver of knowing the purpose of the group and maintaining cohesion – it is necessary for authoritative communication that it is compatible with the personal interests of individual members. Communication must ensure that everyone shares and indeed generates the values of the group in their motives for participation.
one activity of a dissent group. This questioning occurs at every level, from the person’s own needs and motivations, to the nature of the group as a cohesive entity, to questioning as an expression of dissent from social norms. This is a task that involves risk to both persons and the group, and therefore in the empowering setting must be subject to the tripartite test of objective, normative and subjective validity for action to follow. It has also been noted that, when dissent does take the form of specific action, it does not have to be in the shape of active transgression or civil disobedience. In some circumstances existing institutions can serve the cause of dissent. Dissent can also take the form of a group creating its own norms or value space, and of withdrawal.

The principle task in the bounded dissent group is the achievement of meaning to meet need for security, identity and autonomy. Whereas universal human need focused on persons, and the necessary conditions for having health and fulfilling human potential, in the present chapter, in addition to actors there is a further focus on the necessary structural conditions for achieving increased human potential in an empowering group. Three types of groups that support empowering settings are identified: the mutual help group, the collective identity group and the social change group. Following from Sites, the present study identifies these as the control orientation of the group. That is, each is defined by the sphere of control that is required to meet the universal need of actors in the group. For actors, empowering groups are a means to assert control over particular parts of the environment – at the minimum, the group itself. In the present study, these parts have been identified with Habermas’s lifeworld segments, and subsequently with forms of communicative action, being dramaturgical, normative and teleological action. In this way, the actors in the group are placed in their dynamic relations. The significance of narrative has re-emerged as the particular linguistic form of the empowering group. Providing a setting for people to tell their stories takes participants out of their everyday communicative practice. However, unlike Rappaport, who sees narrative as a resource, narrative appears here as a form of communicative action, and hence is part of dynamic interrelations. The resource from which narrative operates is the lifeworld.88 However, the narrative tools used by the case study groups do provide the framework for a cognitive reference system based on their own interpretive efforts. The effectiveness of this form is true of all types of empowering group. If, as Habermas suggests, social evolution comes about through the increasing rationalisation of the lifeworld, it follows that tools which allow participants in action

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88 Perhaps “lifeworld” is closer to Rappaport’s meaning. Here, “narrative” is used in a more linguistic, operational sense.
to interpret and analyse the lifeworld contribute to empowerment by allowing people to assert their own claim to the validity of their actions – that is, to satisfy need for autonomy in a social choice.

Furthermore, it has been identified above that a way to consider groups in general is as producers of public goods. Organisations are conditioned by the means of producing these goods. Empowering groups have different action orientations, dependent upon the requirement for different lifeworld segments to be made the central theme of the narrative setting. As the action orientation shifts from dramaturgical to normative to teleological, the increasing necessity for rationalisation of the lifeworld is accompanied by increasing systemic complexity, which ultimately requires codification in a subsystem steered by regulation of group boundaries in terms of rules of governance. Constraining the relations of actors, this perspective imposes a particular logic on a group, since to produce a public good it must exist as an entity composed of people with willingness, common purpose and communicative ability. In the three types of empowering organisation, the experience of the case studies shows that the public goods produced correspond to risk and trust, critical consciousness, and structural innovation.

In the context of universal need, production of these goods has been linked to the push of motivation rather than the pull of incentives placing it. This is justified because in privileged and intermediate-sized groups, willingness will depend more on motivation and less on incentive. All such groups have been broadly categorised in terms of social dissent. In the dissent group, these three aspects of an entity – personal motivation, the public goods produced, and the form of social action – are structurally within the ambit of the group’s control. This is summarised in Table 4.

For each control orientation, the matrix shown in Table 4 links the person to the group through need and the production of public goods. In turn, each type of public good can be related to a form of social action. By making these linkages, between persons, actions and public goods, the group is seen as the locus of control between persons and the social resources for meeting need.

It is these social resources for meeting need that will be discussed in the following chapter. The present chapter has been concerned with the internal dynamics of group control, and developing a model of empowering entities. However, there is, in this Habermasian space, too great an emphasis on consensus. The group as it is portrayed here is empowering to the extent that it has power to. But is can never be forgotten that
for the case study organisations, the necessity for intervention practices that empower is a consequence of the historical disparities of colonisation. There is systematic power over the lives of the community attempting to meet need in all classes.

Table 4: The Dissent Group

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Group control orientation</th>
<th>Mutual help</th>
<th>Collective identity</th>
<th>Social change</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Form of social action</td>
<td>Dramaturgical</td>
<td>Normative</td>
<td>Teleological</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Public Goods</td>
<td>Trust/Risk</td>
<td>Critical consciousness</td>
<td>Structural innovation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Personal Motivation</td>
<td>Security</td>
<td>Identity</td>
<td>Autonomy</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

To take the view of empowerment as a multi-level construct to the next stage, the following chapter must consider these entities in their interaction with society. The themes of incentives, common purpose and dissent will be developed in the social context of empowerment in terms of self-reliance, framing and mobilisation of contentious action.