

**POWER AND PROCESS:
THE PRODUCTION OF 'KNOWING' SUBJECTS AND 'KNOWN' OBJECTS**

Cynthia Hardy, University of Melbourne

Robyn Thomas, Cardiff Business School, Cardiff University

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Over the past decade there has been, as noted by the editors of this *Handbook*, an increasing interest in the study of temporal evolution, unfolding activities, incessant change, movement, and fluidity in organizations. This perspective, which has come to be known as ‘process organization studies,’ aims to “capture the dynamic, continuous and endogenous nature of change and changing, whether intended or not” (Langley & Tsoukas, 2013). Early research on organizational processes includes Mintzberg’s studies of emergent strategy (Mintzberg & Waters, 1985), Pettigrew’s (1985) examination of organizational change and Weick’s (1995) work on sense making. More recently, process researchers have engaged more directly with process philosophers, such as Whitehead, Bergson, James and Rescher. In doing so, they have sought to delineate what constitutes a sensitivity to process (e.g., Van de Ven & Poole, 2005), as well as to develop a vocabulary and methodology with which processual dynamics can be examined more easily (e.g., Langley, 2009).

In this chapter, we examine the interrelationship between process studies of organizations and the work on power in the organizational literature. In the first part, we revisit the theoretical assumptions underpinning different approaches to studying processes and then explore whether they are consistent with different conceptualizations of power. In this way, we are able to identify whether and how the investigation of power relations can contribute to the understanding of organizational processes. We demonstrate that the greatest potential lies at the intersection of a discursive view of power and performative or ‘strong’ process research. In the second part of the chapter, we explore this intersection in more detail by identifying two key lacunae in the performative process literature – agency and stabilization – different views about which have led to considerable confusion regarding the status of the ‘knowing’ (and acting) subject and its role in initiating and guiding processes, as well as how processes stabilize sufficiently to produce recognizable, ‘known’ objects. We conclude the chapter showing how, by incorporating a discursive view of power, performative process theorists can help to resolve this confusion.

PART I: STUDIES OF PROCESS AND OF POWER

In this section, we first clarify the assumptions that differentiate process theorizing from ‘non-process’ research, as well as those that differentiate what are commonly referred to as the synoptic or ‘weak’ and performative or ‘strong’ approaches to process. We then turn our attention to power and identify three different perspectives: studies on the social psychology of individual power-holders; studies that explore how individuals mobilize power in organizations; and critical studies of power and discourse. We examine how the first approach to power is incompatible with process studies, while the second displays similar assumptions as those underpinning synoptic process studies. We show how a discursive view of power aligns closely with a performative view of process although, so far, very few studies have brought these two research domains together.

What are Process Studies of Organizations?

To establish what process studies of organizations comprise, theorists have typically contrasted a process approach with research that is not process-oriented. The latter adopts a causal analysis of independent variables to explain change in an organizational entity or observes differences on selected dimensions. Van de Ven and Poole (2005) refer to such work as ‘variance’ studies. The concepts used in this work are relatively static: classifications and descriptors are stable and fixed as studies compare entities that have moved from one stable state to another. The interest is in the differences in an entity at two different points in time, not about how it got from one state to the other. The approach thus involves thinking ‘about’ things rather than thinking from ‘within’ them (Shotter, 2006). Time is considered only as a medium in explanations of change that privilege outcomes and end-states, while largely ignoring how they were arrived at (Chia 1999). In contrast, the aim of process studies of organizations is to establish what is occurring, rather than what is ‘there.’ Process research challenges the taken-for-granted understanding that the world is an immutable system of categories and things, where “objects of attention appear as bounded entities

which exist against a background” (Cooper, 2005: 1689). So, for example, process studies of organizational change see the organization as constantly in flux – in a state of becoming, rather than a pre-existing entity (Tsoukas & Chia, 2002), while process studies of strategy focus on how strategy emerges from particular practices, as a result of which individuals and activities become labelled as ‘strategic’ (Chia & MacKay, 2007). Table 1 provides a summary of how key theorists differentiate process research from non-process research.

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Table 1 also shows that, within the process literature, researchers often differentiate between two different theoretical positions – typically referred to as a synoptic (weak) and performative (strong) views of process (Van de Ven & Poole, 2005; Bakken & Hernes, 2006). Synoptic process research remains entitative, according to many commentators (Bakken & Hernes, 2006), and is only quasi-processual (Nayak & Chia, 2011). Accounts provide an overview or sequence of events, stages or cycles in the development of an entity (Van de Ven & Poole, 2005). Processes occur among stable entities as they interact and, while these entities may change as a result of the interactions, they remain analytically distinct from each other and from the processes in which they are embedded. This work adopts a transactional view of time, focusing on the temporal occurrence of significant events, where change is still an exception, albeit the object of inquiry.

[The synoptic approach] is ‘weak’ in the sense that the a priori assumption is of the world as consisting of entities, whose interactions constitute processes. In other words, processes take place whenever entities, such as individuals, interact. In this sense, individuals are seen as existing ontologically prior to the processes they engage in; they give shape to processes, while remaining intact throughout their participation in the processes (Bakken & Hernes, 2006: 1600).

The synoptic process approach is underpinned by a substance ontology: it retains a conception of a world of ‘things.’ Attention remains on the organization rather than on *organizing*; and the interest in movement is circumscribed by a focus on the stable entity that emerges from it (Tsoukas, 2005).

A performative process approach is founded on a ‘becoming’ ontology, rather than the ontology of ‘being’ that characterizes synoptic process studies (Tsoukas & Chia, 2002). The former sees entities as “constituted out of the flow of process”, where “substantiality is subordinated to activity” (Rescher, 1996: 42-43, quoted in MacKay & Chia, 2013: 211). Change is the norm: it is ceaseless and unremitting, and from it, entities emerge only insofar as they *appear* fixed. Thus both organization and individual ‘exist’ only as temporary stabilizations of ongoing processes.

Writers tending towards a ‘strong’ [performative] process view ... work from an ontological viewpoint of the world as process, where entities, as far as they are seen to exist, are products of processes rather than existing prior to them. If anything, they are what Rescher (2003: 53) refers to as ‘manifestations of processes’ (Bakken & Hernes, 2006: 1600).

Nayak & Chia (2011) argue that, rather than exploring a reality that is becoming (i.e., how social entities change over time as in the synoptic process approach), the performative approach is concerned with understanding a becoming that appears to be real (i.e., how entities are temporarily stabilized). Time is socially constructed. Researchers are interested in the complexity of micro-processual adjustments and in what these processes accomplish (Tsoukas & Chia, 2002). As a result, considerable attention is given to the practices of which processes are comprised (Chia & MacKay, 2007).

In this ‘post-processual’ view (Chia & MacKay (2007), ontological primacy is given to the “situated and recurrent nature of everyday activity” as practices become the starting point of analysis (Orlikowski, 2010).

[This] stance 1) places ontological primacy on practices rather than actors; 2) philosophically privileges practice-complexes rather than actors and things as the locus of analysis; and 3) makes the locus of explanation the field of practices rather than the intentions of individuals and organizations (Chia & MacKay, 2007: 230).

Practices are “embodied, materially mediated arrays of human activity centrally organized around shared practical understandings” (Schatzki, 2001: 2). Certain practices become ‘bundled’ (Schatzki, 2006) or ‘ordered’ (Chia, 2002) i.e., linked, coordinated and patterned. These patterns influence how entities emerge as “theoretical reifications” (Nayak & Chia, 2011: 284) or “manifest instantiations of practice-complexes” (Chia & MacKay 2007: 219).

How is Power Studied in Organizations?

Organizational researchers have also studied power in quite different ways. One body of research explores how individuals in organizations exercise power as part of a deliberate strategy to achieve intended outcomes. Here the focus is on the sources of power that allow actors, including those who do not possess ‘legitimate’ authority, to influence organizational decisions and actions (Hardy & Clegg, 2006). As such, their power is attributed to dependency i.e., the extent to which others are dependent on the actor in question, which in turn is derived from this actor’s access to scarce, valued resources (Mechanic, 1962; Emerson, 1962). Sources of such power include information, expertise, credibility, prestige, access to higher echelons, money, rewards, and sanctions, etc. (e.g., Pettigrew, 1973; Pfeffer & Salancik, 1978).

Informed by this early body of work on resource dependencies, two streams of research on power in organizations have developed somewhat separately. The first has adopted a social psychological approach. It treats power as an independent variable – usually in the form of some measurement of individuals’ asymmetric control of valued resources – and the ability to administer rewards and punishments (Goldstein & Hays, 2011). In such studies, quantitative research – often based on experiments or surveys – typically attempts to identify whether measures of high power (possession of resources) correlate with certain dependent outcomes, such as team performance, influence over decisions, career success, social perception, optimism, and risk taking (e.g., Anderson & Galinsky, 2006; Pfeffer, 2013; Tost, Gino & Larrick, 2013). This work has developed an understanding of power by delving into the psychology of individual power-holders, equating power with particular

attitudes and characteristics such that individuals categorized as ‘high power’ in terms of possessing scarce resources also appear predisposed to think and act in ways “that lead to the retention and acquisition of [more] power” (Magee, Galinsky & Wagner, 2008: 351).

A separate stream of research has drawn on the idea of resource dependencies in a rather different way. Based on the premise that it is not enough to simply possess control over scarce valued resources to influence outcomes, and recognizing that what constitutes such a power resource varies depending on the context, this work has focused on how actors successfully mobilize power resources in specific organizational settings. It has found that those individuals with the greatest access to these power resources *and* the greatest skill in putting them to use are the most likely to succeed, as well as revealing the complexity and richness of organizational power dynamics. Studies have examined how power shapes organizations over time, for example, Lindblom’s (1959) work on muddling through, Quinn’s (1978) work on logical incrementalism, Pettigrew’s (1985) 20-year study of strategy at Imperial Chemical Industries, and Buchanan and Badham’s (2008) study of power, politics and organizational change. These studies tend to be qualitative and interpretative, and focus on specific organizational change initiatives. They are, as a result, more processual in their research design as they examine how the exercise of power influences the transition of an organization from one state to another.

A very different conceptualization of power to either of the above two approaches is to be found in the discursive view of power (e.g., Knights & Morgan, 1991; Townley, 1993). Drawing on the work of Foucault (1972, 1979, 1980), this discursive approach challenges the very idea that individuals can pull the strings of power to achieve intended outcomes (Hardy & Thomas, 2014).

Power must be analyzed as something which circulates, or rather something which only functions in the form of a chain. It is never localized here or there, never in anybody’s hands, never appropriated as a commodity or piece of wealth. Power is employed and exercised through a net-like organization...[Individuals] are always in

the position of simultaneously undergoing and exercising this power (Foucault 1980: 98).

Rather than a convenient, manipulable resource controlled by autonomous individuals, power takes the form of a network or web of meaning in which both the advantaged and disadvantaged are enmeshed (Deetz, 1992).

According to this view, power circulates through discourse – collections of interrelated texts and practices that “systematically form the objects of which they speak” (Foucault, 1972: 49). Discourse creates bodies of knowledge that normalize certain ways of believing, speaking and acting (Townley, 1993). In creating knowledge, discourse produces meanings, which become “fixed or reified in certain forms” as “taken-for-granted categories of existence” (Clegg, 1989: 183), allowing particular kinds of subjects and objects to become ‘known’. In this way, discourse “defines and produces the objects of our knowledge” (Hall, 2001: 72). Discourse also creates subject positions – socially constructed and legitimated categories of identity that warrant voice (Hardy & Phillips, 1999) – providing those actors able to occupy the subject position with rights to speak and act (Maguire, Hardy & Lawrence, 2004). Studies on discursive power are typically qualitative and critical insofar as they seek to explore the complex nature of power and how it is hidden in the apparent fixity of meanings.

Table 2 summarizes these three approaches to power and shows how they might complement process studies of organizations. First, the work on the social psychology of individual power-holders has little to add to the study of process. The assumptions associated with this view of power are at odds with those underlying processual approaches (and in fact align with the non-processual or variance approach presented in the first column of Table 1). The processes whereby actors acquire power or how they use it to achieve organizational outcomes are ignored. In adopting a causal analysis of dependency measures to explain change in individual behaviours, as well as organizational outcomes, such research is primarily deterministic. As such, this particular view of

power is of limited value in understanding the complex processes that preoccupy process theorists.

– Table 2 here –

Second, the work on the mobilization of power in situ aligns well with a synoptic view of process, with its privileging of agency and focus on change as episodic. These power theorists do not question individual agency – particular individuals are deemed responsible for the deliberate initiation of power by mobilizing resources over actors who oppose them in attempts to bring about their desired endpoints. Organizational characteristics (and changes in them) are typically among these endpoints. There is a focus on temporality of change but in the form of episodic change i.e., change occurs between states of more settled equilibria. As exemplified by the work of scholars like Pettigrew, this approach to power is already embedded in many process studies of organizations.

Finally, the assumptions associated with a discursive view of power align most closely with a performative process approach, in which individual agency is far less evident than in synoptic process studies. Discursive views of power admit to agency, but only within the confines of the discursive context – the power relations – in which individuals are situated, and recognize that objects only become visible in the context of the bodies of knowledge in which they are situated. There has, however, been relatively little work bringing discursive views of power and performative views of process together. Nonetheless, we believe this intersection offers the most potential in terms of bringing power to bear on process, as we discuss further in the second part of the paper.

PART 2: PUTTING (DISCURSIVE) POWER INTO (PERFORMATIVE) PROCESS

In this section, we examine in more detail how, by engaging more directly with a discursive view of power, process scholars interested in a performative approach are able to address two key challenges posed by their theoretical orientation: agency and stabilization.

Agency: The Problem of the ‘Knowing’ Subject

Performative process researchers appear to struggle with the question of agency, as a result of which two different views are discernable: ‘owned’ and ‘un-owned’ processes (Rescher, 1996). Although performative process theorists do not champion the idea of the heroic change agent found in many synoptic process studies, some researchers nonetheless advocate a role for agency by subscribing to a view of owned processes. For example, Tsoukas and Chia (2002: 577) argue for organizational phenomena to be “not treated as entities, as accomplished events, but as enactments—unfolding processes involving actors making choices interactively, in inescapably local conditions, by drawing on broader rules and resources.” Human agents fine-tune processes by making a myriad of micro adjustments in specific contexts which, in turn, steers the unfolding of organisational reality. Organizations are “*made to work*” by change agents or managers exercising their “declarative powers” or by introducing a new “discursive template” (Tsoukas & Chia, 2002: 577). New discursive templates can create new subject positions and, in turn, construct greater scope for agency on the part of particular actors (Tsoukas, 2005). This idea of owned processes among performative process theorists conveys the sentiment that individuals set parameters within which processes evolve, albeit in tandem with complex, opportunistic adaptations and improvisations as a result of which actual processes often deviate from original intentions. Nonetheless, intentions and actions of individual actors form the basis of emerging and evolving processes. “Change programs trigger on-going change; they provide the discursive resources for making certain things possible, although what exactly will happen remains uncertain” (Tsoukas & Chia, 2002: 578).

In contrast, the concept of un-owned processes has been offered as a way to push the process ontology even further (Langley et al., 2013). It emphatically rejects the process reducibility thesis, which reduces processes to the actions of things (Rescher, 1996). In the case of un-owned processes, there is no originating agent to steer the change. Un-owned processes are subject-less,

free floating and autonomous. Change happens “of its own volition”, without the need for an identifiable change agent (Bergson, 1946/1992: 147-148, quoted in Mackay & Chia, 2013: 211). The focus switches from privileging the role of intentional agent directing processes (albeit imperfectly) as in the case of owned processes, to recognising that processes consist of their own momentum, which alone shapes outcomes independently of, and separately from, the activities of individual actors.

[S]ituations *contain their own internal dynamics* so that outcomes arise, not so much because of active intervention on the part of identifiable actors, but because of the ongoing reconfiguration of spontaneous self-generating processes, *independent of human intentions* (Chia, 2014:10, emphasis added).

MacKay and Chia (2013: 223) subscribe to an un-owned view of process in their study of the strategy of an auto parts company over the period leading up to its bankruptcy, which they attribute, not to unrealized intentions, but to “the accumulation of historical events, the interlocking effects of prior decisions, and their eventual unintended consequences”. Their analysis constructs a complex and chaotic account of processes where practices generate unintended and accidental consequences, regardless of independent actors.

The existence of both owned and un-owned understandings of processes within the rubric of performative process accounts of change creates a considerable degree of ambiguity regarding the nature of agency and the status of the ‘knowing’ subject. Too much emphasis on the idea of owned processes risks leading performative process researchers back into the realm of synoptic process theory, privileging actors and entities, and undermining the emphasis on the ‘becoming’ of phenomena, including individuals. At the same time, in promoting a view of un-owned processes, researchers appear ambivalent as to how to theorize agency. They emphasize inertia and habitus instead of deliberate action but, nonetheless, reserve a place for individual action (albeit unintended) as an important impetus in how processes play out. For example, Chia (2014) argues that individuals wishing to manage organizational change should step back and ‘let change happen.’

However, such an assertion, somewhat ironically, reinforces the role of agency insofar as it suggests that by doing nothing individuals nonetheless ‘act’ – if they were to do something, they would shape the change in a less desirable way. Without a clearer understanding of agency, it becomes difficult for performative process theorists to locate the ‘knowing’ subject and to understand how processes emerge, fade, start and change direction. In the vignette below, we show how bringing in a discursive view of power helps to understand how the knowing subject is produced discursively.

– Vignette 1 here –

Vignette 1 shows how power works in the recursive relationship between discourse, subject position, practices and agency to produce knowing subjects. Despite both strategic components featuring as equally important in the company’s strategic vision, technological leadership had a far more precarious status than cost-effectiveness. However, this was not because individuals mobilized power in the form of scarce resources with the intention of undermining technological leadership. Similarly, the durability of cost effectiveness cannot be attributed to a small group of senior managers, or even the CEO, singlehandedly putting this strategy into play. Instead, the dominance of the market discourse produced clear subject positions that legitimated a wide range of actors to act in the name of cost-effectiveness, including senior managers inside the company and, equally importantly, actors outside the company such as bankers, shareholders and the media. These external actors emphasized the importance of market indicators such as share price, blaming senior managers for failing to protect it through effective cost-cutting, and reducing the company’s credit ranking when the share price fell. Consequently, when managers introduced practices associated with cost effectiveness, their status as ‘responsible’ managers was reinforced. These practices and the widely shared meanings associated with them also served to construct a new subject position – the ‘cost conscious employee’ – as employees throughout the company were introduced to the language of cash flow, and trained to monitor and correct it. In this way, the power relations associated with the market discourse produced *multiple* knowing subjects who identified with the strategy of cost-effectiveness, were authorized to act on it, and could engage competently in

practices that realized it, thus serving to reproduce this part of the strategy. In contrast, subject positions that related to technological leadership were far less authoritative and, as the professional discourse lost out to the market discourse, individuals throughout the company started to question its meaning and whether it was a solution to the company's situation. Consequently, employees became less likely to enact practices related to technological leadership, undermining its strategic status.

Stabilization: The Problem of the 'Known' Object

The performative process approach does not deny the existence of individuals and other entities, but sees them as temporary stabilizations emerging from the processes in which they are situated i.e., transient and ephemeral abstractions constituted from on-going movement and flux. An entity is not an inert and permanent substance, but the result of a relational process of becoming.

Entities that emerge as unities out of processes are abstractions. They arise from processes and they form in turn the basis for further processes. Abstractions are always 'becoming' rather than 'being'; they are always in formation, and never exist as entities in themselves. For this reason, they cannot be seen as separate from their processes of becoming (Bakken & Hernes, 2006: 1610).

So-called enduring 'things' therefore come about through the emergence of "a stability wave in a surging sea of process" (Seibst, 2013: 16). The second challenge that process theorists face, then, is how does such stabilization occur? If discrete events dissolve "into a manifold of processes which themselves dissolve into further processes" (Rescher, 1996: 29), how is it that some processes persist and have effects whereas others do not? If processes are so fluid, how do they stabilize enough for entities to 'appear'? Can any form of outcome or entity emerge in a random manner from the processes that they inhabit?

The problem here is that many assertions are made as to the transitory and precarious status of individuals, organizations, and other objects, but very little theorization occurs as to how that status

is achieved and fixed, albeit momentarily. If entities are reifications – how do they become reified? If individuals are stabilized nodes, then how did they become nodes? Performative process theorists acknowledge that stabilizations have effects, but provide rather less explanation of how stabilizations occur in the first place. For example, Chia (2002) refers to persistent patterns among practices as ‘forms of social ordering’ that become frameworks for regulating subsequent interactions and modes of thought. However, the focus is on what forms of ordering do in terms of providing structure, rather than on how the ordering occurred. Similarly, Nayak & Chia (2011: 284) argue that the theoretical reifications that constitute individuals and entities refer to “slower-changing configurations of social relationships resulting from the sustained regularizing of human exchanges.” But the question remains: what accounts for some social relationships being slower to change and how do regularities become sustained? As Chia (1999: 219) notes, without explaining some kind of “pre-structured field of possibilities,” it is impossible “to establish the identity of an object of analysis.”

In sum, performative process theorists find it difficult account for stabilizing and stabilizations. They cannot explain how some objects – organizations, individuals, strategies, and entities – come to be collectively ‘known’, while others do not: the emphasis on fluidity processes suggests that processes would produce nothing other than the random, idiosyncratic effects of individual sense making. For objective and identifiable entities to emerge from processes, they must be distinguishable in some way to multiple members of a community who, in turn, must agree that they exhibit common features and meanings. In the vignette below, we show how bringing in a discursive view of power helps to understand how the knowing subject is produced discursively.

– Vignette 2 here –

Vignette 2 shows how the power relations circulating through different discourses led to the production of known objects as the meanings of the two chemicals as being risky or safe were stabilized at particular points in time through normalizing and problematizing practices. These

chemical objects were thus in a continual process of ‘becoming:’ having been safe, and then becoming risky in the case of BPA and, in the case of VAM, then becoming safe again. The organizing processes constituted by normalizing and problematizing practices were un-owned insofar as specific actors did not select either one deliberately for particular purposes. At the same time, the coalescing of practices into one or other form was not random – practices interrelated in ways that ‘made sense’ in light of prevailing discourses. Normalizing practices were embedded in the broader discourse of sound science, which relates to how risk is conceived of in late modernity and has an emphasis on scientific rationality. Problematizing practices related to the discourse of precaution, which questions the existing body of knowledge and allows for action to be taken in the face of scientific uncertainty regarding adverse effects. The objects that became known were not risky or safe in any essentialist way, but *were made meaningful* through practices, which in turn were embedded in, and legitimized by, the discursive ‘landscape’ in which they were situated.

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

We suggest that considerable potential is to be derived from bringing a discursive view of power to bear on a performative process orientation. In particular, it helps to address two key lacunae in the performative process literature. The first repudiates methodological ‘individualism’ and challenges the role of human agency in initiating new or different processes. While some performative process theorists advocate the idea of un-owned processes in which there is no role for any kind of change agent, other researchers have assigned a far greater role to individuals in initiating change processes, albeit accepting that these processes unfold in unexpected ways. There is, as a result, considerable ambivalence in the performative process literature concerning the role of the human agent – the ‘knowing’ subject. The incorporation of a discursive view of power helps to collapse the distinction between un-owned and owned processes, showing how practices create the knowing subject as individuals take up and act from particular subject positions in the discourse. Thus we avoid the mistakes of both attributing change to the acts of heroic leaders and proposing a naïve view of self-generating, uncontrolled, chaotic processes.

The second lacuna relates to the issue of stabilization and the rejection of a substance ontology. Performative process theorists argue that entities, such as individuals, organizations, strategies etc., emerge from processes. However, if the world is comprised of emerging, fluid processes, what causes them to stabilize sufficiently to produce these entities? This issue has, for the most part, been neglected by process researchers, with the result that there is no clear theoretical explanation for the emergence of particular entities – ‘known’ objects – except as random and arbitrary outcomes. We show how, by engaging with a discursive view of power, performative process theorists can retain the idea that entities ‘exist’ only as reified, stabilized moments in ongoing processes, while achieving greater explanatory potential as to why particular entities, and not others, come to be ‘petrified’ through the power relations that circulate through the discourses in which they are situated.

We conclude by suggesting how performative process researchers might introduce a consideration of a discursive approach to power into their empirical studies of organizational processes.

The Unfolding Nature of the Discursive Landscape

A first step in understanding how processes produce knowing subjects and known objects is to consider the circulation of power through discourse, by mapping the discursive landscape in which the processes under examination are situated. This requires sensitivity to its *unfolding* nature.

Accordingly, researchers might ascertain whether a dominant discourse prevails. Are countervailing discourses competing with it? Are prevailing discourses being displaced by other, newly emerging discourses? Are existing discourses evolving and, if so, how? In this way, the researcher becomes more aware of the way in which processes play out in particular ways, insofar as they are held in place by existing discourses. It also helps to attune them to how any discursive anchoring of existing processes is temporary and fluid – as discourses change so too does this discursive anchoring. This allows the performative process researcher to factor in power effects, and yet still

retain the conceptualization of processes as changeful and ever changing.

The Network of Subject Positions Emerging from the Discursive Landscape

Having identified the discursive landscape, researchers are then in a position to examine the most obvious subject positions associated with it. Discourses grant certain actors the rights to speak and act, while silencing others. Through ascertaining the presence of a dominant discourse, researchers may also examine who is authorized to speak and act and to consider what it is they are authorized to say and do. By referring back to the discursive landscape, researchers can also consider how, if the discourse changes, subject positions – and the relations among them – might also change. In understanding the *network* of subject positions, it becomes possible to examine the way in which particular processes unfold as practices instigated by one subject position affect others. Rather than ignore subject positions completely, as the un-owned approach tends to do, or privilege a singular, omnipotent change agent subject position, as the owned approach tends to do, the examination of discourse allows researchers to see how processes emerge from the multiple practices of multiple actors in an unfolding discursive landscape.

The Identification of Other Voices

As Foucault (1979) makes clear, power does not arise without resistance and, in fact, one way to trace power relations is to identify points of resistance. A focus on the clearly visible, powerful subject positions authorized to participate in, and influence processes, risks missing the role of *other*, less obvious actors who may resist this participation and influence. By being attuned to the pervasiveness of resistance, performative process researchers can explore how the constant push-pull of power-resistance relations shapes processes. In considering how power *and* resistance shape the network of relations among subject positions, researchers can identify the role of collective, organized resistance associated with relatively, well-defined positions (such as unions and professional groups), as well as local, unorganized, transversal resistance associated with far less obvious and less visible subject positions. In this way, it becomes possible to consider how new

subject positions emerge as discourses change, and how previously silent, invisible actors become discernable.

The Power of Processes: the Recursive Production of Practice, Subject and Object

Insofar as performative process research emphasizes that both actors and entities emerge from processes rather than pre-exist them, there is a need to appreciate the *recursive* relationship among process, subject and object. This conceptualization is entirely compatible with a discursive view of power, although it does create considerable challenges for researchers struggling with the complexity of empirical data. Processes comprise practices; practices are conducted by human agents located in evolving subject positions associated with an unfolding discursive landscape; these practices produce known objects and, in carrying out these practices, knowing subjects are also produced. Such complex processes are undoubtedly hard to study empirically. Nonetheless, by investigating what practices make up the processes under investigation, how practices are authorized, legitimated, and normalized in the particular discursive landscape, and how they serve to give meaning to the identities of individuals and entities, performative process researchers will be well placed to disentangle these complex relationships.

In sum, the mission of performative process theorists has been to challenge dominant, taken-for-granted, entitative views of the world by pushing our thinking in relation to fluidity rather than fixity; to encourage us to open up rather than close down. However, in doing so, these researchers have also made it difficult to understand how our ‘seeing’ of entities and agents comes from processes that are momentarily stabilized through power relations that hold them in place long enough for subjects and objects to emerge. A discursive view of power offers process researchers the opportunity to learn more about how processes produce objects and subjects without losing the sense of fluidity, since stabilization is never total and always subject to change.

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Table 1: A Classification of the Process Literature

Author(s)	Not process	Process (synoptic)	Process (performative)
Tsoukas & Chia (2003)	Change is juxtaposed against stability and routine Change is exceptional Understanding change as post-mortem i.e., what happened	Focuses on change as normal but considers it to be an empirical rather than ontological question	Change is central to constitution of socio-economic life Emphasis on understanding how is change is experienced Change as dynamic, unfolding, emerging, pervasive and indivisible
Tsoukas (2005)	Not explicitly discussed	World of things Process equals a change in things Focus on processes but grounded in variables	World of processes 'Things' are reifications of processes. Movement is the sine qua non of organizational life Language is the medium through which processes change
Van de Ven & Poole (2005)	Approaches I and IV (variance) Causal analysis of independent variables to explain change in a thing. Time as medium in explanation of change. Newtonian approach to time	Approach II Narrative: describing a sequence of events, stages or cycles in development of an entity. Transactional view of time, focusing on temporal occurrence of significant events	Approach III Narrating emergent actions and activities by which collective endeavours unfold Time as temporal predisposition, a key referent in the social world, and socially constructed in context.
Bakken & Hernes (2006)	Not explicitly discussed	The world consists of stable entities whose interactions constitute processes Process is the interaction between analytically distinct entities Ontologically, individuals exist prior to the processes they engage in and shape; and remain intact while participating in processes	Ontologically, the world consists only of processes Informed by philosophers such as Bergson, James and Whitehead Process is the main category of ontological description In so far as entities are seen to exist they emerge from processes
Nayak & Chia (2011)	Substance ontology Individuals and organizations are unified, spatially isolated entities that can be investigated without considering the social context in which they embedded	Quasi-processual: how social entities evolve over time Process as mechanism that works on the existing order and social entities	Process: how social entities are temporarily stabilized Process as that from which the existing order and social entities emerge and temporarily stabilize
Langley et al. (2013)	Ignores time, reduces it to a lag effect, compresses it into variables	Focuses on evolving phenomena, and incorporates temporal progressions of activities Change is something that happens to organizations, which are viewed as fixed identifiable entities	Things are reifications of processes Grounded in process metaphysics Change is the way in which reality is brought into being Events arise out of and are constituted by their relation to other events; events can be further analyzed in terms of smaller events

Table 2: Different Approaches to Power

	Studies of the social psychology of power-holders	Studies of power mobilized by individuals in organizations	Critical studies of power and discourse
Conceptualization of power	Power as possession of resource-dependencies	Power as the exercise of resource-dependencies	Power as circulating through discourse
Key foundational work	Mechanic, 1962 Emerson, 1962	Crozier, 1964	Foucault, 1979, 1980
Examples of organizational researchers	Magee et al., 2008 Pfeffer & Salancik, 1974	Pettigrew, 1985 Quinn, 1978	Knights & Morgan, 1991 Townley, 1993
Research design	Quantitative, experimental	Qualitative, interpretive case studies	Qualitative, critical case studies, discourse analysis
Power operates through	Possession of scarce resources by particular individuals whose characteristics predispose them to accumulate more of it	Possession of scarce resources by individuals coupled with their ability to mobilize it in relation to dependent actors in pursuit of specific outcomes	Bodies of knowledge and subject positions constituted through discourses that reify particular meanings regarding subjects and objects
Power/Process Alignment	Aligns with non-process studies	Aligns with synoptic process studies	Aligns with performative process studies

Vignette 1: A Study of Strategic Change in a Global Telecommunications Company¹

In 2000, GlobalTel² – one of the world's biggest suppliers of mobile phones – announced that they would be pursuing a twin-fold strategy of cost-effectiveness and technological leadership. The company had a leadership position in research and development (R&D), although the mobile phone division had posted an operating loss.

The processes involved in realizing this strategy were complex, with the introduction of a wide range of new practices. Jobs were relocated, outsourced and cut in successive waves of downsizing that affected particular divisions, products, plants and locations. Contractors were dismissed and their work was reallocated to permanent employees. An instructional computer game was developed for employees to learn more about cash flow, identify problems that caused delays in invoicing, and keep an eye on customers who were careless about paying. To maintain technological leadership, new units were created, including a new subsidiary and a separate joint venture, and old ones merged. Despite cutbacks, the company continued to invest heavily in R&D, generate new patents, and publicize its commitment to being the 'first and best' in terms of technology. Working practices were changed to accommodate both strategic components e.g., teams were modified to include a dedicated project manager to manage costs, as well as a customer project manager who became part of the customer's organization during the project to assess technology needs.

At the end of the three-year period, when the company was restored to profitability, differences in the two components of the strategy were clearly discernable. The meaning of cost-effectiveness had become broadly shared i.e., a wide range of individuals talked about being cost-effective in a similar and unproblematic way. They consistently linked it to a broader market discourse in a way that reinforced and rationalized the need to be cost-effective. This discourse emphasized the legitimacy of making cutbacks and reducing operating costs so as to maintain shareholder value in the context of the prevailing market conditions. 'Being' cost-effective was the obvious strategy solution to the problems of a difficult market.

In contrast, despite the introduction of practices to support technological leadership, there was far more ambiguity about what being 'first and best' meant. Initially, it meant being a technological leader and was linked to a professional discourse that emphasized the engineering expertise of the company and its history of producing leading-edge products characterized by technical excellence and innovation. Over time, however, this part of the strategy became disconnected from the professional discourse and, instead, became attached to the market discourse. Employees started to question whether being first and best technologically was a sensible strategy, arguing it would be better to be less advanced technologically and concentrate more on making sure the customer was first and best. Later, it came to mean being 'first to market'. Accordingly, there was considerable confusion about what 'being' first and best meant, and the technological meaning came to represent a strategy problem rather than a solution.

1. Adapted from Hardy & Thomas (2014).

2. A pseudonym.

Vignette 2: A Study of Chemical Risk Assessment in Canada¹

This study examines how power relations influenced the processes through which chemical objects became known as ‘risky’ or ‘safe’. It investigates the risk assessment and management processes introduced by the Canadian Government in 2006 to assess the toxicity of chemicals believed to pose risks to human health and the environment. It compares two chemicals. Vinyl acetate monomer (VAM) is an industrial chemical found in paints, adhesives and personal care products that is believed to cause cancer. VAM was initially found to be toxic, although this finding was later reversed as the final assessment pronounced it safe at current levels of exposure. Bisphenol A (BPA) is used in baby bottles, water bottles and can linings, and is believed to be an endocrine disruptor. It was found to be toxic, as a result of which Canada became the first country in the world to implement a ban on baby bottles containing this chemical.

The study found that the process of risk assessment clustered around two types of practice. Normalizing practices emphasized the discourse of ‘sound science’ i.e., the mindful application of accepted risk knowledge and the use of codified norms and precedents as a basis for action. Specific practices included referencing an accepted body of scientific or regulatory knowledge, anchoring actions in organizational precedents or taken-for-granted routines, and categorizing chemicals in ways that subsequently led to a predetermined sequence of clearly delineated actions. Problematizing was associated with the discourse of ‘precaution’, which acknowledges potential inadequacies in risk knowledge and the need for open-ended deliberations as a basis for ascertaining risk management actions. Specific practices included recognizing particular situations as unique or novel, innovating, questioning the adequacy of existing scientific knowledge, and acknowledging the plurality of multiple actors with stakes in risk assessment and management. The study found that, in the case of VAM, there was evidence only of normalizing practices whereas, in the case of BPA, in addition to normalizing, there was also evidence of extensive problematizing.

When normalizing practices dominated, the meaning of VAM as a chemical object was constructed through shared understandings as to accepted ‘facts’ and causal models, categories, as well as accepted methods for generating and validating risk knowledge. In this way, the meaning of VAM as *both* toxic and safe was held in place at different points in time by established power-knowledge relations i.e., a nexus of pre-existing texts (scientific articles, policy documents, etc.) and risk assessments from other jurisdictions that amounted to a taken-for-granted body of risk knowledge. Normalizing practices served to reproduce the authority and applicability of this body of risk knowledge and the credibility of scientific experts, such that even though having been risky, when VAM ‘later ‘became’ safe, the change was uncontroversial. When problematizing practices dominated, they called the authority and applicability of the body of risk knowledge concerning BPA into question, thereby constructing a problem that demanded innovative action. More texts were produced, distributed and consumed in the case of BPA compared to VAM; and they involved many more challenges to scientific expertise, basic facts and appropriate methods for generating and validating knowledge. What constituted the relevant body of risk knowledge, how to produce it and what to do with it were all highly contested, thereby helping to justify Canada’s decision to take pre-emptive action by banning baby bottles containing BPA.

1. Adapted from Maguire & Hardy (2013).