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# Organizational Power and Politics: More Than Meets the Eye in Program Planning

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**NATIONAL-LOUIS UNIVERSITY**

**ORGANIZATIONAL POWER AND POLITICS:  
MORE THAN MEETS THE EYE IN PROGRAM PLANNING**

A CRITICAL ENGAGEMENT PROJECT SUBMITTED TO  
THE GRADUATE SCHOOL IN PARTIAL  
FULFILLMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS  
FOR THE DEGREE  
DOCTOR OF ADULT & CONTINUING EDUCATION

**DEPARTMENT OF ADULT AND CONTINUING EDUCATION  
COLLEGE OF ARTS AND SCIENCES  
CHICAGO, ILLINOIS**

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## **ABSTRACT**

Organizational power and politics influence corporate training in ways not often discussed. This study explores the effects of organizational power and politics on program planning and how planning, with its inherent power and politics (see Cervero & Wilson, 1994a), influences the daily practices of corporate trainers.

This study was informed by the literature of systems theory and constructivism. Von Bertalanffy's (1968) general systems theory, in which the whole of a system is considered to be greater than the sum of its parts, Senge's (1990) systems view that interrelationships within organizational structures, (not events), underlie complex situations, and Lincoln & Guba's (1985) constructivist theory were used to explore ways in which trainers construct and modify knowledge and experiences as they plan training programs.

The intent was to examine how multiple influences — which are at the heart of systems thinking and include areas such as internal and external environmental factors and corporate culture — cause trainers to understand, take action, and manage day-to-day training practices.

A single case study design provided intense description and analysis of a specific group of trainers from a Canadian manufacturing company. Nine trainers and eight members of the senior management

team were direct sources of the data which were gathered in focus groups, semi-structured interviews, and document reviews of company materials.

A few of the conclusions that emerged from the findings include: (a) multiple influences affecting program planning are not limited to companies practicing Senge's (1990) systems thinking approach to business; (b) management and staff share an understanding that "training" is primarily a process of facilitation which ignores additional, strategic elements of program planning (such as needs assessment, learning outcomes, program design, and evaluation); (c) perceptions of management and trainers vary on the role of trainers, leading trainers to question how training aligns with strategic goals; and (d) although rapid company growth, corporate culture, and organizational systems present traditional challenges to training, power and political factors are less obvious, influencing program planning and trainers in ways not often discussed.

This study informs adult educators, organizational development practitioners, and human resources development staff about program planning from the perspectives of trainers rather than learners. It informs trainers of how practice fits into a broader organizational context in which power and political influences affect their organizations, program planning, and themselves.

## **ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS**

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I used your first names as pseudonyms throughout my thesis for two reasons. First, I was intent on preserving the identities of the individuals who participated in my study and who so kindly shared their thoughts and ideas with me. Second, what better way to ensure that each of you played an active role in my learning journey? Each time I read or typed your names, I thought about you and kept you in my heart and mind even as I crossed the line of moderation into obsession while working on my research. Thank you; thank you to all of you for your support and interest during the three years of this wonderful journey.

For those of you who cannot be with me — my Mom Lillian and my Dad Maurie — my research is dedicated to you, for without you my success would not have been possible. How I wish you could be here in person to share in my celebration and to model your senses of humour, loyalty, ethics, integrity, compassion, patience and love you instilled in me and by which I try to live my life and guide my practice.

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Randee, thanks to you, I now pursue excellence rather than perfection as I give myself space to develop my ideas rather than fixating on process. You inspire me to honour the role of collaboration in my personal and professional lives. Thanks to you, I am a better listener open to new ideas as I try to focus less on my own beliefs and more on the strengths of what other people have to say.

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No amount of tinkering with the relationship between professional development and teaching excellence will make a difference if there are systemic barriers to good practice (Dr. Thomas Heaney, personal communication, June, 2001).

## **Chapter 1**

### **INTRODUCTION**

My passion is working with adult learners. My strengths are program design, facilitation and evaluation within a business context. As a training specialist and sole proprietor of a Canadian consulting practice, Learning by Design, I provide staff development services to corporate clients. This thesis represents my efforts to learn how to improve my professional practice by studying the impact of non-instrumental planning considerations, namely the multiple influences of power relationships within organizations.

### **Background and Experience**

In my training specialist role, I plan, design, facilitate, and evaluate staff development seminars — usually in conjunction with organizational strategic goals, although some organizations are unwilling to share these goals with an external provider. Typically the people I train are managers and supervisors who, in addition to their daily roles, are also responsible for training their staff, monitoring staff performance, and orienting new employees. My contracts are often a year in length in order to work more effectively with client, staff, and

customer needs and to gain insight into organizational culture and operations. Longer contracts provide clients with finer insights into how adult education principles and practices, when woven into corporate training environments, can foster both individual and company performance. I often have access to senior management decisions on program planning, which strengthens my professional credibility with staff called upon to facilitate and to participate in training programs.

Prior to this study, I practiced an instrumental approach to program planning. By this approach I mean I used the classical, behaviour modification training model — including Tyler’s categories of needs assessment, learning outcomes, program design, program delivery, and evaluation of teaching and learning (cited by Brockett & Hiemstra, 1998, p. 120). I likely did this for three *uncritical* reasons: (a) this mode of program development has retained a conceptual preeminence in adult education since it was adopted in the 1950's (Brookfield, 1986, p. 204); (b) my professional development was based upon this model; and (c) this model fit neatly with my behaviourist approach to program planning

By day I have used this approach to design, facilitate, and evaluate management development workshops for clients in the manufacturing, office products, health, service, retail and educational

fields. Some of these workshops have been titled: Managing Workplace Training; Managing Diversity in the Workplace; Equality in the Workplace; Managing the Service Process; Managing for Productivity and Motivation; and Recruitment, Interviewing and Selection. My favourite corporate workshop is what I call Program Planning and Facilitation. Traditionally this type of program has been called *Train the Trainer*, a title which I am trying to change in the collective minds of trainers and adult educators to better reflect the level of skills, knowledge, aptitudes, and attitudes essential for facilitating adult learning. The intent of the program is to provide participants an understanding of how adults learn *and* instructional techniques to reflect training and teaching excellence.

By night I am a continuous learning faculty member hired on a course-to-course basis to teach evening programs for a community college in Ontario, Canada. I instruct in both the adult education and the human resources management programs. My favourite college program is a pre-requisite course, How To Teach Adults, the first of five credit courses in a certificate program called Teaching and Training Adults. This course is mandatory for all continuous learning instructors at the college (over 600 people) and is open to anyone else who presents information to adults — for example, teachers, novice and seasoned industry trainers, and volunteers. Past participants

included people teaching at the YMCA, people working with seniors' centres, auto mechanics who assist customers, nurses facilitating health promotion activities, as well as people interested in training and teaching adults but not engaged in either at the time of the course.

Participants in each of these programs (Program Planning and Facilitation) and (How To Teach Adults) have dubbed them my signature courses. They are fun and gratifying — apparently for participants and definitely for me. By necessity the participants and I still include Tyler's (1949) behaviourist training model. However, more and more we are introducing reflection and thought provoking discussions as we look at ourselves as adult learners, how we learn, and ways to apply learning to our personal and professional lives.

I initially considered a training or college program successful if learners achieved stated learning outcomes. Now I recognize the degree to which I emphasized a linear approach when working with trainers at various organizations. I also recognize an error in my approach — omitting the wider organizational context — within which program planning and facilitation ideally should take place. My one-size-fits-all approach to program planning could be considered valuable for my consistency as an adult educator (e.g., see Boone, 1985, p. xi). However, Brookfield (1986) raises doubts that highly structured models are transferable from setting to setting or that a

fully supportive economic and political climate will always exist for their implementation (p. 225). I now think that although Tyler's (1949) model is an excellent framework that provides a trainer with structure and comfort level gleaned from process, using this model exclusively might result in habit, rather than passion, infiltrating practice.

My commitments in everything I do are to integrity, my ethics and beliefs, family and friends, adult learners with whom I have the privilege to work, my dual practices, and the field of adult education. My passion for working with adult learners fits neatly with my surprise that they continue to show up, waiting to be taught. They expect me to tell them what to do, when and how to do it. I have always valued and drawn upon adult learners' previous experiences, but I am now thrusting onto learners considerable responsibility for aspects of planning and implementation (as suggested by Brockett & Hiemstra, 1998, p. 120) and standing firm when they try to push this accountability back. Whereas previously I tried to provide safe, friendly, non-threatening learning environments, now I am trying to help participants work through the discomforts of learning environments that differ from their conditioned expectations.

As a proponent of adult education for the personal growth and development of the individual, I sometimes experience ethical conflicts



in my program planning, especially in the context of working with clients who are focused solely on learning outcomes. As a trainer previously smitten by the five-phase training model — and hired to improve employee performance — I wonder if I have withheld information that could have helped participants use their learning in areas beyond the immediate applications which the company intends (a suggestion put forth by one of my doctoral faculty members, G. Stroschen, personal correspondence, November 2000). I suspect that I am becoming an ethical program planner focused on the individual and institutional contexts of planning (see Donaldson, 1998, p. 175) in addition to an instructor skilled in the techniques and methods of training and education (see Shipp, 1998, p. 112). Now it is time to fuel a second passion: the professional development of corporate trainers. I want to assist other practitioners to look for the “larger picture that lies beyond individual perspectives” (Senge, 1990, p. 12). In other words, organizationally what helps and hinders trainers in their daily practices?

### **Origin of the Study**

In 2000/2001, I had the chance to introduce adult education practices into the corporate training environment of a privately owned

manufacturing firm intent on launching new sales training initiatives. The company's goal was to develop existing staff as trainers so their staff could offer other internal staff (their international distribution network, customers, and suppliers) orientation workshops on product knowledge and product design.

I designed and facilitated 2-day and 3-day train-the trainer programs for both the dedicated trainers (in sales-related programs) and the occasional trainers (supervisors in customer service settings) on how to integrate adult learning principles into instructional design and facilitation. In addition, I coached the dedicated trainers on developing leaders' guides and participants' manuals. I value highly the working relationship established with this client. Senior managers endorse professional development of staff. They provide high quality, up-to-date resources and technology to complement their training programs. A healthy training budget has enhanced training excellence and participant learning, as facilitators have access to, and are trained in, these resources. Their responsiveness to, and willingness to try out, new training ideas based on adult education principles has been a major success factor according to feedback I obtained by telephone surveying many previous participants. For me, it has been very rewarding observing their successes in program planning and delivery.

What has puzzled me, though, is management's apparent lack of willingness to share strategic goals or to participate in assessments of training needs to better identify individual/company requirements (relative to strategic direction) and whether current training initiatives are actually contributing to individual and company performance. In other words, is training working and, if not, why not? There are also factors that appear to undermine performance of the dedicated trainers — including lengthy travel, tight scheduling of programs in different locations, lack of field resources and little in-between-program-time for trainers to reflect upon and to update programs. As occasional trainers have full-time responsibilities in positions other than as trainers, and as they plan programs on a periodic basis only, they require additional opportunities to help them remain confident and current in their training roles.

The sales training group had emerged as a training presence in the organization. They were a close-knit group enjoying company support and positive feedback from managers, co-workers, and participants in their training programs. However, I became interested in looking at what, if anything, were barriers to the good intentions of all the trainers in both dedicated and part-time positions. In particular, I wanted to explore if, and how, organizational power and politics was influencing program planning and the trainers' daily practices. The

decision to focus this case study research on a corporate environment fits with Donaldson's (1998) discussion on organizations as political arenas for program planning (p. 187) and his reference to Morgan's (1986) use of metaphor to describe organizations as instruments of domination (p. 188).

This organization is a leading designer, manufacturer, and distributor of high quality products. It is known for quality and customer service developed over a lengthy history of manufacturing. Written documents praise highly trained and responsive staff, the latest communications technology, and an international network of representatives and dealers. Company philosophy is to listen attentively to the people who design, manage, and work in their marketplace and to respond with quality solutions that adapt to changing customer needs.

This organization was highly supportive of training initiatives and training staff during my contract. However, as the contract ended, my sense was that a lack of communications by senior management, internal political nuances, a company history of "running lean", inter-departmental conflicts, and recent downsizing may have resulted in company goals and values contrasting with those actually practiced in program planning (e.g., see Rothwell & Cookson, 1997, p. 109). Therefore, I decided their program might make a useful case study for

examining the interplay of organizational context and program planning.

### **Purpose of the Study**

The purpose of this study was to explore the effects of organizational power and politics on program planning and how planning, with its inherent power and politics, influences the daily practices of corporate trainers. I chose to study program planning because it seems to be the logical link connecting organizational mission, values, function, structure, and processes to the adult educator's practice (see Boone, 1985, p. 208). Assuming this is so, the specific purpose was to: (a) determine ways in which organizational policies and practices facilitate or impede program planning and the daily practices of training staff in a corporate manufacturing environment; (b) identify if, and what, systemic issues of power and politics may support or obstruct what I assume to be good intentions of training practitioners; and (c) raise awareness of training staff to a wider organizational context in which program planning takes place.

This study was grounded in systems theory which posits that an organization represents an overall system comprising many subsystems interdependent on, and affected by, each other (see Rothwell & Cookson, 1997, p. 104). Systems theory provided a structure within which trainers could examine the internal and external

environmental effects on the organization, program planning and training. I used the case study to examine what organizational practices, personality conflicts, political factors and budgetary constraints alter what Brookfield (1986) calls "neatly conceived plans of action" (p. 202) of trainers. I chose a single case study as my research design to provide description and analysis of individual experiences within a single organization.

### **Organization of the Thesis**

Following this introductory chapter, in chapter 2 I review selected literature to determine what gaps, if any, exist on the systemic supports and the limitations of how power and politics affect trainers in the program planning process. Chapter 3 presents some parameters of qualitative research. In particular, I describe constructivism as the research perspective — or lens — framing this study and case study as the research design. In addition, I review methods of participant selection and data collection, my approach to data analysis, and additional factors influencing this study. In chapter 4, (the findings), I discuss five major themes that emerged during analysis of participant responses and provide examples of participant comments in support of the findings. Chapter 5 focuses on conclusions drawn through my in-depth analysis and my interpretation of how the

five themes represent multiple influences on program planning. In chapter 6 I extend the analysis and discussion of the conclusions in order to outline my assumptions on the influences of power and politics in the workplace. In chapter 7 I suggest additional areas in which adult educators may want to concentrate future research. I conclude this thesis with chapter 8, in which I offer personal reflections on how research into program planning and corporate training has contributed to my personal and professional development. Given that my research, adult education practice and personal growth are all works in progress, in this final chapter I try to answer 3 questions guiding these reflections: (a) Who Am I? (b) What Are My Commitments? and (c) Who Am I Becoming?

## **Chapter 2**

### **LITERATURE REVIEW**

In this chapter I examine selected literature for the multiple influences that impact the daily practices of corporate trainers as they design, facilitate, and evaluate training programs for adult learners. This review provides a rationale for corporate trainers to do what they are not now doing, namely to explore the organization from a business perspective beyond their training perspective.

Therefore in this review I examine why corporate trainers might want to situate their daily practices within a wider organizational context. The review is grounded in the theoretical framework of systems theory. Systems thinking equates to multiple influences on the subsystems — organizationally, departmentally and individually. This research reflects furthermore, an open systems approach to organizations and training emphasizing both internal and external environmental influences, in contrast to a closed systems approach that addresses internal influences only. The power and politics that exist within organizations — such as different interests, conflicts, and power plays — are often reflective of similar structures in a wider, western society.



In this review I am "speaking" to organizations *through* the perspectives of their trainers. The review adopts a humanistic philosophical approach, as it is more concerned with influences on individual training practice that may further or impede self-development rather than on influences that may — or may not — assist in developing a learning organization.

There are four main sections in this literature review. First, I review selected literature about systems theory. Following this, I review issues of organizational power and politics that might influence program planning and, ultimately, daily training practice. Next, I review the literature on program planning, focusing on who is invited to participate in the planning process, who is excluded, and who *should* be invited to the planning table. In the final section I look at training excellence, in particular attempts to define it, a systemic approach to training excellence and the role of critical reflection and change in training.

The significance of this review is embedded in the literature where researchers typically examine models of program planning yet do not indicate if the program planning role is separate from the training role, thus prompting the question: Are the program planners also the facilitators? Nor does the literature provide conclusions from a business perspective on the rewards and consequences of adopting

more inclusive methods of program planning. In addition, although the literature sometimes contains mention of the influences on adult learning of inclusive program planning, more often the research does not address the influences on practitioners and their learning.

Therefore this study builds on previous studies of program planning in corporate organizations and adds new understanding of how corporate trainers can realize their potential by deepening their understanding of organizational influences that dominate their design and facilitation roles.

### **Systems Theory**

Systems theory is difficult to describe succinctly. Theorists provide convoluted definitions; databases often record this literature under the name of "systems thinking" or "systems approach" rather than under "systems theory"; and authors often differ on the origins of systems thinking. In this review I use the descriptors "systems theory", "systems thinking" and "systems approach" interchangeably. In this section, I review systems theory as applied to organizations by definition, by its evolution, and from the perspectives of a variety of disciplines, including the social sciences, organizational development, human resources development, learning organizations, and adult

education. This format is designed to draw attention to the idea that I perceive that multiple influences are at the heart of systems thinking, across disciplines.

### ***Definition***

Senge (1990) defines systems thinking as a discipline for seeing wholes, a framework for seeing the interrelationships and structures, rather than events that underlie complex situations. Central to his framework are five major, non-linear, non-sequential components, which he calls disciplines: (a) systems thinking, (b) personal mastery, (c) mental models, (d) shared vision, and (e) team learning. In literature selected for this review, Senge is the most frequently referenced author on systems thinking. However, Senge, Roberts et al. (1999) attribute the origins of systems thinking to the work of biologist Ludwig Von Bertalanffy (1968) and the idea that the whole of a system is greater than the sum of its parts.

### ***Tracing Its Evolution***

Although his systems thinking emerged over 50 years ago, Von Bertalanffy (1968) revisited its origins when he wrote that modern science is characterized by ever increasing specializations, necessitated by enormous amounts of data and a complexity of techniques and theoretical structures within every field. With science split into innumerable disciplines, and scientists "encapsulated in their

private universes experiencing difficulty getting word from one cocoon to the other" (p. 30), Von Bertalanffy proposed a new discipline called General Systems Theory (GST) to embrace all levels of science from a single cell to the study of a society, emphasizing a unified science with similarities across all levels. Von Bertalanffy could not have predicted then how pertinent his observation about encapsulated scientists would be today when analyzing organizational structures and performance!

In Von Bertalanffy's (1968) view, GST is a general science of "wholeness" (p. 37) characterized by universal principles applicable to systems in general, whether physical, biological, sociological or other types of systems. His definitions of closed and open systems are clarified by social psychologists Katz and Kahn (1978), the first theorists to apply open systems theory to organizations. They suggest that a closed system is preoccupied with internal functions, disregards environmental influences on the organization and promotes the idea that there is one best way of doing things. In contrast, an open system is one in which there are more ways than one to achieve desired ends, and relationships exist between the characteristics of the environment and characteristics of an organization.

Senge, Roberts et al (1999) also clarify open systems by offering a metaphorical interpretation befitting open-systems theorists. Using

Von Bertalanffy's idea (1968) that any human organization is a life-form, (a biological cell or living entity), Senge, Roberts et al explain that

An organization is an entity that transforms its inputs, everything it eats, breathes, perceives, absorbs and takes in. To change an organization you must learn to understand and influence the things that it takes in and its relationships with the environment (p. 138).

Similarly, Katz and Kahn (1978) describe systems as patterns of relationships, although they emphasize that different levels of systems within these interrelationships form a hierarchy of organizational structure in which actions at higher levels are dominant over actions at lower levels. Applied organizationally, this hierarchal concept within systems suggests that analysts must look *up* to the next systemic level in order to analyse organizations (p. 4). A traditional management perspective could endorse this hierarchal analysis, yet an open-systems theorist such as Senge (1990) might dispute the sequential nature of this approach.

Although Katz and Kahn (1978) focus on social systems, surprisingly they appear to give less priority to the human element in their approach; similarly Churchman (1968) perceives systems as sets

of components that work together for the overall objective of the whole. However, his perception of organizations as systems of decisions and control indicates a behaviourist mindset to systems thinking and an exclusion of the human side of organizations. Whereas Katz and Kahn endorse a hierarchal approach from the bottom up to analyse organizations, Churchman emphasizes a systems approach that looks at the whole system overall rather than breaking the system down into its component parts. He adamantly states, however, that a great deal of nonsense has been written about the systems approach and suggests that the amount of time people spend trying to understand the whole system is in itself a systems problem. Churchman's meaning here appears contradictory. How can he claim faith in the whole system yet demean attempts to analyse the individual and collective levels of decisions and control that comprise the system?

### ***Perspectives from Variety of Disciplines***

Systems thinking is prevalent in the ideas of researchers representing a variety of disciplines. For example, Watkins (1991) explored human resources development (HRD) from a variety of disciplinary perspectives, definitions and philosophies to shed light on the multitude of voices clamouring to define HRD. She discovered that all perspectives emphasize systems thinking, yet only Senge's model

(1990) moves beyond a mechanistic approach to HRD. Whereas some disciplines assume a psychological approach (individual has control), other views assume a sociological approach (the social system, such as the organization, is the problem). Watkins concludes that some disciplines focus on ways employees learn, change, and improve performance whereas others acknowledge there may be performance issues, but "they may have more to do with the way in which the system functions or with the context in which the person must function" (p. 254).

Watkins' conclusion about examining performance within context reflects Lewin's (1951) field theory, his framework for analysing causal relations in order to develop scientific constructs. Essentially, Lewin proposes that analysts look at actual behaviour relevant to forces acting on a person at a given time; he calls this given time the "field." His premise is that the field influencing the individual should be described in the way it exists for the person at that time. From a systems approach, this supports the theme that individual members in organizations are subject to multiple, rather than linear, influences at any given time. However, this thinking appears to isolate behaviour into a present timeframe and excludes the role of previous experience upon which adults, in particular, draw in choosing how to react in current situations.

Wheatley (1992) reflects Lewin's field theory in her exploration of science as a way of thinking about organizations. Looking at the relational aspects of field theory, in the sense that fields change content and shape because of individual, (not organizational) activity, Wheatley proposes a new science in which "there is a movement towards understanding the system as one which places primary value on relationships that exist among seemingly discrete parts" (p. 9). She further suggests that individuals can forego the despair created by common organizational events such as change, chaos, information overload, and cyclical behaviours if we recognize that organizations are conscious entities possessing many of the properties of living systems. Wheatley proposes that we strive for open systems, that we separate living organisms from machines, and that we identify how an organization can move away from the linear, mechanistic, specialized (Newtonian) thinking that organizations use to maintain equilibrium.

Marquardt (1996) counters Wheatley's scorn of the Newtonian approach with his study of emerging learning organizations. Marquardt claims that, of necessity, people are always looking for better ways to see the world more objectively and, unlike Wheatley, perceives that linear thinking is not always "unempowering and disabling to all of us" (p. 6). Marquardt defines systems thinking as a conceptual framework to help make patterns clearer, represented by his Senge-based model



of interrelated circles depicting organizational subsystems of people, technology, knowledge, and the organization placed around a central circle of learning.

Whereas Marquardt uses diagrams to portray the interrelationships of systems thinking, Morgan (1997) uses metaphors to provide a way of seeing and thinking about organizational life. Emphasizing environmental factors as central to systems thinking, and in language similar to Wheatley, Morgan equates the organization to an organism, claiming that for organizations to *survive*, they must be open to their environments and achieve an appropriate relationship with the environment. One of the few researchers to provide examples of environmental systems, Morgan cites customers, suppliers, and the competition as external systems that an organization must match to its internal systems to achieve equilibrium. He suggests that organizations are interrelated subsystems — that individuals, groups, and organizations are each subsystems within a larger organizational system, although each subsystem is a complex system on its own — a view that aligns with Marquardt's (1997) view and supports Rothwell & Cookson's (1997) definition of systems thinking outlined in chapter 1.

However, Morgan's (1997) views prompt a question about closed-system types of organizations. How does Morgan define "survival"? Can a closed system organization survive and how? I

assume by "closed" Morgan is referring to organizations that make it difficult for customers and suppliers to do business with them and organizations that do not contribute to interrelationships with outside influences such as their unions and/or government legislators. It also would be interesting to know if any organizations that have achieved open systems have not survived and to what degree, if any, was their downfall related to an open systems approach?

According to French and Bell (1999), systems theory is the foundation of organizational development (OD) theory and practice. They perceive organizations as complex social systems in active exchange with environmental issues (including pressure from investors and environmentalists in addition to labour unions and government regulations). In their view the organization as a system, not its individual members, is the target of change, although they do concede that individual members are instruments of change. They do not clarify the contradictions inherent in this concession that individual members are instruments of change. What is clear however, is that from OD and Lewinian perspectives, French and Bell's systems approach strongly encourages analyses of events — and field forces initiating these events — to encourage practitioners to analyse current forces rather than historical events only.

In his synthesis of 10 models of strategic management within a systems framework, Haines (2000) draws from Von Bertalanffy's work (1968) to describe seven levels of living systems, five of which he applies organizationally: individual, department, teams, organizations, and society. Like Katz and Kahn (1978), Haines' presents a social psychological view with his belief that, in western society, each system influences every other system and that there is a natural hierarchy of systems within systems. He states that the most important feature of any system is that its performance as a whole is affected by every one of its parts.

From his management consulting perspective on organizational planning, Haines (2000) compares a systems approach with a traditional analytic approach; he states that in the latter, organizations start with today's problems, break them out into separate parts, analyse and resolve one area at a time, and then move on to the next area. He maintains that a systems thinking approach studies the organization as a whole in its interaction with the environment and then it works backwards to understand how each part of that whole functions in relation to, and in support of, the objectives of the entire system in order to formulate core strategies. Laiken (1997) likewise considers individual components in relation to the whole. She recounts how she successfully applied Senge's framework of disciplines to a

graduate adult education course in order to develop a learning community for group members to explore their learning experience; this learning community was similar to a learning organization. Laiken concludes that although her course represents the learning organization as a systemic whole, "in the end it is personal mastery that enables the system to flourish" (p. 7). In her view, Senge's discipline of Personal Mastery implies individual responsibility and promotes the notion that people have the power, individually and collectively, to alter the structures within which they operate.

Laiken (1997) does not clarify her use of the word "power", but she implies a humanist view of power as a personal strength acquired through education and self-fulfillment. She points out that as individuals we often do not see the structures at play; rather, we see our role in isolation instead of recognizing how it interacts within the larger system. This further reflects the humanist approach to systems thinking in adult education, as practitioners focused on the self-fulfillment of the individual learner may not realize that their educator role is influenced by, and interacts with, a larger system. Her call to perceive patterns and processes, rather than moments in time, mirrors Senge's (1990) assumption that business is bound by invisible fabrics of interrelated actions, that we tend to focus on isolated parts of the system and wonder why our deepest problems never get solved.

Further investigation is warranted of literature relevant to the organizational power and politics that often are the sources of some of these *deepest problems*.

### **Power and Politics**

The concepts of organizational power and politics seem to be related in the literature. As in systems thinking, it is difficult to pin down power and politics or to provide working examples of these constructs. However, researchers appear to share a few commonalities in their perspectives.

First, most of the authors seem to view power as an extrinsic resource (an intangible to keep, share or give away) and as an intrinsic resource (a capacity to act). Does this then suggest that power and politics can be used both as means and ends?

Second, only a few of the authors describe power in its stereotypical form, that of a force.

Third, some authors use metaphors to describe power and politics. Is this to convey visual images in the mind of readers of what the writer is unable to articulate? By using images, does this suggest that authors rely more on conjuring up similar, collective images to make a point rather than addressing how perceptual differences in readers' images may influence interpretation of their thinking?

This section discusses power and politics primarily within an organizational context. Although I attempt to weave the thread of multiple influences throughout this portion, the thread will be stronger in the next section, which focuses on linking the influences of power and politics to program planning.

### ***Definition***

In Morgan's (1997) study of learning organizations, no clear, consistent definition of power exists. Morgan perceives power as a medium, through which conflicts of interest are ultimately resolved (power influences who gets what, when and how). Similarly, Blackler and McDonald (2000) analyze power as a medium for, and product of, collective activity. Senge (1990) shares both these views with his observation that a political environment is one in which *who* is more important than *what* and power is both concentrated and wielded arbitrarily.

Coopey and Bourgoyne (2000), in their studies of power, politics, and organizational learning, define politics as activities within organizations to acquire, develop, and use power and other resources to obtain one's preferred outcomes. Their definition appears to stray from traditional insights that perceive power as the withholding or re-allocation of resources rather than as a resource in itself. It also suggests that politics is the means and power is the end. Their

interpretation of power does not fully explain “other resources” but indicates that power as a resource is a tool, rather than a capacity to act as suggested by Cervero and Wilson (1994a).

French and Bell (1999) provide an OD perspective on power and politics and in the process clarify the term resources. They suggest that (a) power is anything that creates dependence of one person or group on another and stems from possession of, or mediation of, desired resources such as an ability to reward or punish, control critical skills, knowledge or information, and/or an ability to solve critical problems; and (b) politics are the “battlefields” where people either win or lose, usually associated with decision-making, resource allocation, and conflict resolution.

Wheatley's (1992) exploration of the "new science" sees organizational power as that which allows workplaces to organize relationships — both the patterns of these relationships and the capacities available to form them. However, in her study of management theory, she portrays power from a traditional, organizational perspective and names power as both a force and a resource. She uses machine imagery to reflect such organizations, in which power is an elusive, energetic force if ever there was one, a measurable resource defined by “a share of the pie” (p. 28). Wheatley draws on this imagery to scorn organizational reverence for

understanding parts in order to comprehend the whole and for thriving on setting boundaries, similar to machines, in which every piece knows its place.

***As a Resource; As a Force***

Two other studies examine power as a force, although this time from an HRD context. First, Carter, Howell and Schied (1999) examine the many forms of power converging around the specific HRD function of training and development. Looking for power issues present in the benefits and purposes of education, they explore a single training situation within a theoretical framework of power and from a critical pedagogical perspective. Studying the case of one employee on a “forced march” by HRD at a mandatory Customer Service workshop, Carter et al. conclude that control is a function or process that helps to align individual employee actions with the interests of the employing organization. They draw two conclusions about power: (a) it is necessary to understand this issue of social control in organizations, institutions and bureaucracies in order to understand the power and control inherent in HRD training programs and (b) as with most forms of education, the existence and consequences of power are seldom analysed or even acknowledged by HRD professionals.

A second author who equates power with force is an individual who wishes to remain anonymous in her or his discussion of economic



impact on organizations and employees. She or he suggests, like Carter et al. (1999), that power is coercive — a tool wielded in their study by organizations and HRD, which resort to intimidation of employees through disciplinary and coercive power. In the words of this author “fear is the bluntest of management tools” (Anonymous, 1993, p. 14).

What Carter et al. (1999) do not discuss, as it may be beyond the scope of their study, is the multiple influences that power exerts on the individual facilitators of these HRD training programs and how power issues may get in the way of the good intentions of these practitioners. This observation is endorsed by Coopey and Bourgoyne (2000), who point out that politics within the management and organizational literature remains a relatively neglected and somewhat marginal field, and by Blackler and McDonald (2000), who maintain that the topic of power has not featured strongly in debates about organizational learning. Neither Coopey and Bourgoyne nor Blackler & McDonald specifically link these gaps to the training role.

In addition, it appears that discussion on the relationship between power, politics and facilitators is confined to the influences of *organizational* power only. Few authors discuss politics in relation to the *personal* politics of trainers themselves and how their politics combine with organizational politics to affect facilitation. However, Kirk

and Brassine (2000) focus on the influence of personal politics on facilitation using their definition of politics as a set of beliefs, principles or commitments that drive our actions and interventions (p. 14). As a result of their studies on power relations between organizations, groups and facilitators, Kirk & Brassine argue against facilitation as a set of skills and processes that are value-free, objective and neutral. In their view, facilitators need to recognize the political and emotional impact the organization has on them and to develop an awareness of the political role they play in the political systems in which they operate (2000, p. 13). However, no studies in the literature reviewed, including Kirk & Brassine's (2000) work, mention how the personal politics of the *learners* combine to affect facilitation and programs.

To summarize, from the reader's perspective, this omission — the existence and consequences of power in HRD and the multiple influences of power and politics on individual trainers and training programs — constitute a gap in the literature and provide a rationale for this study.

### ***Influences of Power and Politics***

In his study of two organizational models, one bureaucratic and one entrepreneurial, Block (1990) takes a hard look at politics, which he defines as an exchange of power that goes hand in hand with empowerment. Like Morgan (1997) who perceives politics as a "dirty

word" (p. 154) that prevents people from recognizing its usefulness, Block sees a shadow over politics because people think of it as manipulation. Block points out that "the original meaning of politics was to act in a service of society ... of late it has lost its dignity and been reinterpreted to mean acting in service of self" (p. 22). In a radical departure from traditional thinking about power and politics, Block endorses positive, rather than negative, political acts — a view not unlike that of Coopey and Bourgoyne (2000) who argue that a political perspective widens the understanding of what constitutes learning in organizations.

Block's (1990) philosophical approach mirrors Wheatley's (1992) urging that practitioners reconfigure their ideas about management in relational terms in order to eliminate what she calls the "language of defense" (p. 16) in organizations — memo madness, guarded personnel files, turf wars, and the use of competitive business jargon, such as offense and defense sports phrases. Both Block and Wheatley provide refreshing approaches to the elimination of self-serving power and politics; however, neither offers suggestions to the practitioner for how to introduce new ways of thinking about power and politics nor ideas on how to *positively* direct the energies of resistance that such changes will generate.

Senge (1990) and Argyris (1978) initiate similar discussion that could be helpful to the practitioner. Senge contends that the number one question in need of attention by organizations is "how can the internal politics and game playing that dominate traditional organizations be transcended?" (p. 272). He claims that organizational politics is such a perversion of truth and honesty that most organizations reek with its odour, yet most practitioners take it so for granted that they do not even notice it. Both Argyris and Morgan (1997) consider organizations as political systems. In Argyris' view, these political systems are made up of interest groups vying with other interest groups for control of resources and territory. Argyris prompts the researcher to ask questions, such as how members of these groups might achieve "collective awareness of the contention in which they are engaged" (p. 329) in order to convert contention into cooperation, organizational politics into organizational inquiry. In Morgan's political systems, politicking may be an essential part of organizational life, given the divergent interests of people in the workplace and the need for consultation and negotiation to resolve differences.

Pfeffer (1992) offers a rather clear definition of power and politics that can serve as a framework for understanding how power and politics influence organizational program planning:

Power is defined as the potential ability to influence behaviour, change the course of events, overcome resistance and get people to do things they would not otherwise do. Politics and influence are the processes, the actions, the behaviours through which this potential power is utilized and realized (p. 45)

This framework is used in the next section for reviewing the literature on program planning.

### **Program Planning**

Program planning is recognized as a critically important aspect of adult education (Selman & Dampier, 1991). Traditionally, planning educational programs for adult learners has followed a systematic approach of conducting needs assessments, developing learning outcomes, designing programs and implementing them, and evaluating teaching and learning. Although some educators (Boone, 1985; Herman, 1993; Smith, 1982) cite this classic model as sequential, these components tend to constitute an interacting system not a series of steps (Caffarella, 1994; Galbraith & Shedd, 1990; Knox, 1986).

The literature mentions program planning and its influences on, and by, program planning theorists, program planners, policymakers,

adult educators, and continuous learning administrators; yet only one of the books reviewed, Cervero & Wilson (1994a), alludes to the possibility that program planners may also be the program facilitators, or trainers. Therefore, in this section I assume that in the literature reviewed, planners are not the facilitators. This assumption highlights a gap in the literature to support research that focuses on program planners who *are also* the program facilitators. In addition, rather than limit program planning to the technical-rational process often practiced by trainers, in this section I view program planning within the context of organizational power and politics. First, I look at literature that is congruent with this view, then at challengers, finally critiquing program models.

### ***Congruent Views***

Following standardized planning procedures is no longer considered the epitome of practice in program planning. For example, Sork (2000) proposes a framework for thinking about planning that avoids the limitations of the technical-rational tradition by looking at planning from a variety of critiques, technical-rational, sociopolitical, and ethical responsibility. Donaldson (1998) is dedicated to helping program planners develop a broader understanding of their organizations to draw attention to the roles organizations and programs play in society, and the broader issues of social justice,

equity, involvement, and access. Rothwell and Cookson (1997) suggest that an open systems approach allows program planners to look internally for areas in which planned learning can address past, present, or future challenges and external environmental changes.

Forester (1989) urges planners to build political support and still produce technical documents. Boone (1985) claims that in his review of nine models of program planning, little or no attention is given to the role of the organization in influencing programming behaviour of adult educators. Churchman (cited in Forester, 1993, p. 20), argues that planners need to reformulate problems, strategies and solutions rather than follow standardized procedures.

### ***Where are the Challengers?***

While it is encouraging to find agreement amongst so many authors, it appears that authors infrequently cross-reference or challenge each other's viewpoints. This observation coincides with one of the findings in Sork and Buskey's (1986) analysis of program planning literature from 1950 to 1983. They found that literature written for training contexts made few references to the rich literature written for general adult education settings, and vice versa. If learners *are* of central concern in training and adult education settings, readers of the respective literature bases would be better informed if authors

built upon, integrated, and/or offered challenging insights to stimulate critical thinking by practitioners.

### ***Power & Politics in Program Planning***

Cervero and Wilson (1994a) define planning as a social activity in which educators negotiate personal and organizational interests to construct educational programs for adults. They agree with many researchers that planning always occurs in a power struggle. According to Churchman (1968), any type of planning in organizations always means a re-allocation of power. Planners need to understand how people form political coalitions that are either weakened or strengthened within the power structure. Forester (1989) endorses this point with a critical theorist view that the planning process recreates relations of political power such as some people get timely information, others do not; some people gain access to sources of power, some do not; some voices are organized and influential, others excluded, silenced, ineffectual. Brookfield (1986) and Cervero and Wilson (1994b) urge trainers and educators to find out how political decisions and power relations constrain and enable democratic planning given how they influence curricula, program formats, and evaluative standards. In Brookfield's opinion, trainers and educators lack political acumen and contribute to organizational power and politics in program planning when they accept, uncritically, the



marginality of their positions, when economic influences affect political decisions about educational programs.

According to Forester (1989) people, not theories, plan programs and, at every level, planners will experience the influences of power that jeopardize democratic participation and autonomy. However, Sork (1990) perceives power issues emanate from the program planning level itself in that a decision to plan is a decision to control events and outcomes of events. He suggests that few planning models address control directly but many do so indirectly by discussing who should be involved in making various planning decisions. Although Sork suggests that research on decision-making in program planning should interest program theorists, policymakers, and continuing education administrators, no mention is made of the trainers who facilitate the programs (another gap in the literature).

### ***Program Models – Critique & Support***

Like Senge's (1990) prominence in the realm of systems thinking, Cervero & Wilson and Sork are most notable in program planning literature in the last decade. Whereas Cervero & Wilson (1994a) offer a critical theory perspective on program planning, Sork's (2000) critique of their model suggests adult educators have to re-think this radical shift of focus from the techniques of planning to the people work of planning. Cervero and Wilson claim that their analysis

of program planning offers a new theoretical understanding of planning practice; their central thesis is that planning is a social, rather than technical-rational, practice. However, this claim does not appear innovative, for essentially it models Forester's (1989) research interest in public planning programs and the inherent social responsibilities of public planners. Therefore, it is unclear why Cervero and Wilson lay claim to originating a *new* theoretical understanding of program planning, as assumedly organizational program models have always considered people as the primary social component of planning.

Perhaps Cervero and Wilson's originality is more evident in their description of program planning as a social activity in which people negotiate personal and organizational interests (1996, p. 1). However, Sork (1996) critiques this model in its use of negotiating and interests as the two focal points for planning responsible programs. According to Sork, if negotiating power and interests are the central features of program planning, then great care must be taken not only to recount details of the negotiations but also to reveal the moral and ethical justifications for actions taken. Although Sork does concede that Cervero and Wilson provide a framework for program planning beyond the limitations of systematic planning, much work remains to extend their analysis to the implications for program planning. In Sork's words "we may not agree with their analysis but we cannot ignore it" (p. 89).

Hendricks (2001) builds on the Cervero and Wilson model by examining relationships between contextual factors (power and conflict) in planning, individual factors (perceived problem solving effectiveness), and years of experience as an adult education planner. She concludes that her study supports important aspects of Cervero and Wilson's theoretical position but she suggests that, from a political standpoint, adult education program planners should understand that issues of power, conflict, and the use of influencing tactics are aspects of adult education program planning practice and they may affect practical outcomes. Assumedly, Hendricks' conclusion is applicable to, and interchangeable with, corporate planning environments although she does not make this distinction.

Similarly, Yang, Cervero, Valentine and Benson (1998), from their study to develop and validate an instrument measuring adult educators' power and influence tactics in program planning practice, conclude that power is not a static concept. It is not necessarily connected with position and authority in organizations and, therefore, planners need to understand power relations and interests in order to actively and effectively exercise their influence. Similar to Yang et al., Mabry and Wilson (2001) found that program planners chose negotiation strategies dependent upon what sort of involvement — high, medium or low — the *planners* wanted from their stakeholders,

Their study investigated how adult educators negotiate power and interests in program planning for training in a corporate setting.

From an ethical standpoint, three questions surface. Do the findings from Mabry and Wilson's study indicate planners deliberately try to elicit certain behaviours from some people and *not* to elicit them from others? Would this be considered the use — or misuse — of planner power in determining whose needs the planners will serve when faced with multiple and conflicting interests, including their own? If so, and the planner is also the facilitator, will she or he be torn between those they serve (the organization), those they train (their learners), and their personal interests? It appears that researchers focus more on what adult educators *do* than on how, for example, educators negotiate multiple and conflicting interests in practice (Mabry & Wilson, 2001). However, were Mabry and Wilson aware of Sloan-Seale's (1994) praxis model in which she introduces critical reflection and action into the program planning role to focus on how planners deal with critical decision-making, and how they acquire understanding of their planning practices?

This section concludes with a simple suggestion from Carnevale, Gainer and Villet (1990) for juggling the multiple influences that program planners and trainers face daily in their practices. Carnevale

et al. insist that obstacles and objections *can* be surmounted, the trick is to become both a trainer and an in-house lobbyist!

## **Training Excellence**

How is training excellence defined? How do practitioners achieve this excellence? The literature is hazy on answering these questions. Here I try to pull out a definition of excellence for training, then I look at systems approaches versus chance in achieving excellence.

### ***Attempt at a Definition***

Katz and Kahn (1978) discuss training as so general a word it should be immediately qualified. They use the term to describe a combination of giving information and skills practice. In their opinion, training programs are hierarchal and/or occupational in nature and have more to do with organizational stability than organizational change. I agree with Katz and Kahn's position given that a hierarchal approach introduces levels of responsibility that will maintain the status quo whereas occupational training enhances — but may not change — individual performance; therefore it contributes to the stability, rather than the growth, of the individual and the organization.

Trainers are not opposed to learning about their organizations beyond daily practice. The question is how. Many trainers have support of senior executives to actively seek out broader knowledge of the inner workings of their companies in order to become more strategic players. However, trainers are seldom told the “punch line” by senior management; knowledge of inner workings is one thing but making trainers players in the organization's strategic arena is quite another (Carnevale et al. 1990). According to Carnevale et al., trainers will be present at the planning table only when an organizational culture considers the people implications of business decisions.

### ***Systemic Approach to Training Excellence***

Carnevale et al.'s (1990) concept of in-house lobbyist emerges if trainers choose either to take action to move training into the strategic realm or to accept the reality of continual service as a fire fighter — a view shared by Brookfield (1986) and Charchian & Cohen (2000).

Brookfield (1986) points out the tangential nature of training to operations in times of “program demolition in the name of cost-benefit analysis” (p. 228). Charchian and Cohen (2000) encourage trainers to be strategists rather than tacticians and to take a systemic, far-sighted approach to avoid being limited by the training perspective. Charchian and Cohen do not clarify their mildly offensive use of the word “limited”, its influences, or why a limited perspective is undesirable.

Both Carnevale et al. (1990) and Charchian and Cohen (2000) provide practical suggestions to trainers for achieving a more systemic approach in their practices. Nevertheless, Cervero and Wilson (1994b) claim that the literature falls short of identifying how to achieve the technical processes of practice in the world of power relations and interests.

First, Carnevale et al. (1990) suggest that trainers teach learners how to make decisions, how to solve problems, how to learn to think a job through from start to finish, and how to work with people to get the job done. Although it is refreshing to have researchers attempt to put theory into practice, as usual these criteria are aimed at the development of the training participants, not the trainers. How and in what ways can adult educators foster the growth and development of training excellence — and ultimately the organization — by helping individual trainers to master these criteria first?

Second, Charchian and Cohen (2000) point out that to avoid dealing with only training goals, trainers must first thoroughly understand the strategic agenda driving the training initiatives, the environment in which trainers work, measures of organization success that training is expected to accomplish to align performance with strategy and the potential performance barriers and enhancers to

consider. Although Sloane-Seale (1994) does not provide specific ways to apply theory to practice in developing her praxis model for planners, she does present feedback from participants in her study. It appears that these planners may have identified, wittingly or unwittingly, and perhaps beyond the scope of Sloane-Seale's study, some basic elements of training excellence and multiple influences that exist in an open systems approach to planning.

The planners in Sloane-Seale's (1994) study pinpointed internal organizational components of planning, including the mandate of the department, financial requirements for cost recovery, contribution to the organization and the learners served, and qualifications and knowledge of staff. They also highlighted influential, external environmental factors that consisted of government funding, competition from other providers, globalization, and technological change. However, one cannot consider training excellence without addressing the influence of any kind of change.

### ***Training Excellence and Change***

Steinburg (1992) distills some of the literature that focuses on resistance to change in the workplace. He cites recessions, language barriers, a lack of critical thinking skills, reduced resources and newly merged cultures as factors driving change in the workplace. His advice, applicable to trainers for this thesis, is to sidestep resistance



by finding groups of people in the organization who are already moving in the direction of changes needed. However, Charchian and Cohen (2000) query the meaning and depth of change. They perceive lots of discussion about the movement from training to performance improvement and ask whether the literature is talking about real, substantial change that will impact daily training practice or whether change is just a buzzword and practice will go on as it always has.

### ***Critical Reflection***

If researchers are asking trainers to change, educators of trainers need to look at the work of Slusarski (1998). She examined the meaning learners give to train-the-trainer interventions and the role of prior experiences in learning to be a trainer. Her research concentrates on how to develop new trainers or to enhance the performance of seasoned trainers, by strengthening their self-confidence in learning how to master content and concepts, develop design and facilitation skills, identify curriculum philosophies, and explore personal values. Participation in these programs connected learners to the organization and provided instrumental and communicative learning, yet provided little opportunity for participants to experience transformational learning, a component Slusarski (1999) claims in a later work that has yet to find a home in the workplace

given the workplace is currently conceived as having a top-down management style.

### **Summary of the Literature**

In this chapter I examined selected literature for any gaps addressing the effects of multiple influences associated with open systems thinking on the daily practices of corporate trainers. In particular, I was looking for views of systemic organizational power and politics in support of — or obstructing — what I assume are good intentions of training practitioners. I agree with Slusarksi (1998) that trainers must master the basics of program planning such as the technical-rational processes of design, facilitation and evaluation; I also agree with Kirk and Brassine's (2000) idea that as teachers of trainers, we limit the role of facilitators if we do not introduce them to the broader issues of power and decision-making shaping even their basic program planning initiatives. In the next chapter I describe case study research focusing on the effects of organizational power and politics on program planning and training excellence.

## **Chapter 3**

### **METHODOLOGY**

In this chapter I describe my choice of case study as my research design and constructivism as my research perspective for studying the effects of organizational power and politics on program planning and training excellence. I used “training excellence” as a metaphor representing best practices in a corporate manufacturing environment. My choice of case study provides what Merriam and Simpson (2000) portray as an intensive description and analysis of a phenomenon or social unit such as an individual, a group, an institution, or a community (p. 108). In addition, case study design supports my decision to use trainers from within a single organization, rather than from a multiple of organizations, given that organizational dynamics and contexts might vary from company to company. I wanted to conduct a concentrated inquiry into a single case (e. g., see Stake, 1998, p. 87) to understand how trainers in this organization constructed knowledge from experiences in their daily practices.

I begin by briefly discussing some parameters of qualitative research, focusing on constructivism as the research perspective or lens framing my study and case study as a research design to address my research questions outlined in Chapter 1. I then discuss participant

selection, methods of data collection, data analysis and factors influencing this study.

The following major question guided my research: "What are the effects of organizational power and politics on program planning and the daily practices of corporate training specialists?"

No clear definitions of power or politics emerge from the literature. However, for this research I used French and Bell's (1999) definition of power and Pfeffer's (1992) view of politics. According to French and Bell, power is the capacity to act, reward or punish, control knowledge and information, and/or solve critical problems — anything that creates dependence of one person or group on another (p. 282); Pfeffer (1992) views politics as influences, all the processes, actions and behaviours through which power is realized and utilized (p. 45). The reason I used these particular definitions is based upon my assumption that organizations are comprised of many different people who possess varying degrees of power, yet whose diverse interests are often in conflict as staff pursue individual, departmental, and organizational goals. There are, however, broader and more critical understandings of power to which I will return in chapter 6 which contains my critical analysis on the influences of power and politics in the workplace.

## Parameters of Qualitative Research

Qualitative research was appropriate for this study given the philosophic assumptions of several authors. Denzin and Lincoln (1998) maintain that qualitative researchers study things in their natural settings, attempting to make sense of, or interpret, phenomena in terms of the meanings people bring to them (p. 3). Bogdan and Biklen (1998) discuss five features of qualitative research (p. 4) while Merriam and Simpson (2000) also comment on numerous realities that exist for the individual (p. 97).

Bogdan and Biklen (1998), in their discussion of five features of qualitative research, state that qualitative research: is *naturalistic* as researchers use actual settings as direct sources of data and the researcher as the key instrument of data collection and analysis; provides *descriptive data* presented in words and pictures rather than in numbers; is *concerned with process* rather than outcomes; is *inductive* in that theory is both grounded in, and emerges from, the data comprised of many disparate pieces of collective evidence; is focused on participant perspectives or how people interpret and make *meaning* of their lives. In addition, Bogden and Biklen state that multiple realities, rather than a single reality, are of concern to the qualitative researcher (p. 27).

This theme of multiple realities aligns with Merriam and Simpson's (2000) assertion that inherent in qualitative research is the view that individuals construct reality as they interact with their social world, resulting in numerous realities for the individual (p. 97). Bogdan and Biklen's (1998) "multiple realities" and Merriam and Simpson's (2000) "numerous realities" of qualitative research support the theme of my literature review, and my research, through which I explored how multiple influences, which are at the heart of systems thinking, impact the daily practices of corporate trainers as they negotiate the design, facilitation, and evaluation of training programs.

Literature further suggests that multiple realities are wholes that cannot be understood in isolation from their natural settings or contexts (Lincoln & Guba, 1985, p. 39), that context influences learner experiences and responses (Fenwick, 2000, p. 148) and that human beings continually test and modify knowledge constructions in light of new experiences (Schwandt, 1998, p. 237). My mission was to interact with participants in their natural or everyday work setting to more fully grasp environmental factors, existing patterns of influence, and organizational context/values continually shaping their perceptions and practices. According to Rodwell (1997), these factors shape the "web of relationships" in which understanding is constructed (p. 55).

I approached my research from a constructivist perspective. Initially, Lincoln and Guba (1985) used the term "naturalistic inquiry" but they began using the term *constructivism* in 1989 as a way to describe inquiry into how individuals construct and perceive reality (cited in Schwandt, 1998, p. 242). Based on their philosophy that individuals construct reality in their minds, and reality differs for everyone, Lincoln and Guba (1985) maintain that reality is viewed from different vantage points, which they call *perceptions*, partial or incomplete views of something real interpreted differently by different viewpoints (p. 83). How individuals make sense of, organize, or reorganize these constructions become constructed realities. As there are multiple constructions, so there are multiple realities (Lincoln & Guba, 1985, p. 84).

The constructivist paradigm was appropriate for my inquiry for a number of reasons: (a) if perceptions *are* the highlight of constructivist inquiry (Rodwell, 1997, p. 4) and research in the natural setting of study participants is elemental to the constructivist paradigm (Rodwell, 1997), then researching "on-site" enabled me to "look" at an individual case and the worlds of the trainers *as they experience them* rather than through cause and effect relationships; (b) Guba and Lincoln's (1994) definition of "paradigm" as a belief system or worldview that guides the investigator in ontological, epistemological and

methodological ways (p. 195); and (c) my humanistic approach to practice, my passion for individual learners, and how they cope with factors that awaken or impede their self-development.

I knew, as the primary instrument of data collection, that ontologically I had to study as wholes, and integrate, the multiple realities of respondents, conflicting and otherwise. This meant that I could not separate participants from, or eliminate, environmental and personal factors continually shaping their individual perspectives and colouring their responses. Epistemologically, I was sensitive to the need for participants and me to interact as we explored issues, ideally with a shift in power from their perceptions of me as "expert" to themselves as "stakeholders" (Rodwell, 1997, p. 21). As the researcher I was the "passionate participant" (see Guba & Lincoln, 1994, p. 210) actively engaged in facilitating often-shared interpretations of reality. Methodologically, my hope was that emerging constructions would reflect more-informed and more-sophisticated reconstructions than previously held and decrease the possibility of my drawing conclusions ahead of time congruent with my personal biases.

My research was time-specific and a "snapshot" only of a specific group of people at a particular moment in the life-cycle of an organization. Therefore I used case study design as the "logic" (see



Yin, 1994, p. 19) linking data collected to both the questions driving my research and my research perspective. I wanted to optimize understanding of this specific case (see Stake, 1998, p. 86) rather than generalize findings to other organizations. My choice of design fits with Lincoln & Guba's (1985) premise that case study serves three major purposes in naturalistic inquiry: (a) it is ideal for providing "thick rich description" to portray a situation; (b) it is most appropriate for describing some of the key axioms of naturalistic inquiry such as the diversity of multiple realities and the interaction of participant, researcher, and contextual values guiding the inquiry; and (c) it provides readers a vicarious experience, a sense of "being there" and an ability to draw their own conclusions (p. 214).

This design enabled me to focus on what questions to study, identify what data to collect, and understand how to analyse the data (see Yin, 1994, p. 20). The very nature of the questions supports constructivism as the appropriate research lens. My task was to explore how trainers in this particular setting understand and manage their day-to-day situations. Research questions pointed to case study as the design based on Merriam and Simpson's (2000) characteristics of case study: *particularistic* in the focus on a single organization, *descriptive* in that the end product is a rich description in words of themes and patterns which emerged during the case study, and

*heuristic* in the illumination of participant meanings, potential discovery for new meaning, and the opportunity to extend and/or confirm participant experiences and knowledge (p. 109). Through data collection methods that included, but were not limited to, focus groups, interviews, and document reviews, I ensured that my descriptions and analyses of participant responses were maintained within the context suggested by my research questions.

### **Participant Selection**

As an organization represents an overall system comprised of many subsystems interdependent on, and affected by, each other (Rothwell & Cookson, 1997), I was intent on data collection from an open systems approach. I wanted to explore my research question from the perspectives of study participants representing a variety of the organization's internal and external subsystems. Therefore, I approached one of the senior managers to enlist his help in identifying individuals who would be willing to participate, who represented both internal work groups or departments at head office and external field staff from international locations, who could provide insights from an overall organizational perspective (executive and senior management teams), and who would share their thoughts from a staff perspective (as trainers).

My contact e-mailed 17 potential participants to ask each one of them if they would be willing to participate in my research. They all enthusiastically agreed. My contact then issued each of them a written invitation to participate (Appendix A) framed within an organizational context. At this point, I telephoned each person to thank her or him for participating and to arrange appointment times for the focus groups and interviews. The organization was most supportive of my research and even volunteered to have lunch brought in for the focus group sessions!

As the group sessions were scheduled for 2 to 3 weeks away, I stayed in touch with each member of the focus groups by e-mail and telephone. I provided them with general questions in writing to allay any concerns or confusion over what I would be asking them. In addition, I assured each person that all responses would be kept in strictest confidence by eliminating references to the organization, its marketplace, products, and locations. I also assured them that staff identities would be concealed in order to preserve anonymity, and jobs.

As the study progressed, some participants suggested that I interview two of the top executives to gather the highest level of opinions on perceived influences of organizational power and politics on program planning and training excellence. I interviewed one of

these executives. Adding this person to my initial sample of 17 people reflected Merriam's (1998) view that *network* sampling (italics in the original), perhaps the most common form of sampling, involves study participants referring the researcher to other potential participants (p. 63). Therefore, the overall participant profile included: (a) eight members of the executive and senior management teams; (b) one full-time trainer responsible for internal training programs; (c) one full-time trainer responsible for external training programs; (d) one person responsible for end-user electronic design and training; (e) one person previously in a full time role of training co-ordination; (f) four people in training roles auxiliary to their full time roles; (g) one person from an auxiliary training role in a sister organization, and (h) one former full-time trainer who recently joined another organization.

It should be noted, in light of my criteria on participant selection, that just prior to the beginning of this research, two individuals were trainers dedicated to sales training programs for people in the field. However, the organization switched each of these two trainers to other positions in which training was their auxiliary, rather than primary focus. This change was a result of the economic downturn due to the attacks on the United States on September 11, 2001 and the subsequent refusal by learners in the field to fly to training sessions. From a constructivist viewpoint, it is important to note the changes in

these two positions. If one cannot change one part of a system without influencing another part, what were the multiple effects of these changes on the two trainers and what new knowledge might they construct from experiencing change?

### **Data Collection Methods**

From the outset of my research, I wanted to glean as many meanings and values constructed by participants (see Jacobson, 1998, p. 126) through their interaction and experiences in a particular organizational culture in order to add to the existing literature base on program planning in adult education. My literature review, and e-mail correspondence with my thesis advisor, confirmed that few authors in adult education have looked at training excellence as influenced by the presence of organizational power. My decision to weave a systems theme of multiple influences on trainers and practices throughout my research reflects the fact that individual members in organizations are subject to multiple, rather than linear, influences at any given time. My mission to add to the literature base also fits with Merriam's (1998) idea that "research focused on discovery, insight, and understanding from the perspectives of those being studied offers the greatest promise of making significant contributions to the knowledge base and practice of education" (p. 1).

Therefore, in addition to a literature review, I used focus groups, one-on-one interviews, and document reviews of organizational and training resources as my data collection methods. According to Merriam (1998), interactive methods of data collection are frequently used in qualitative case studies. While no single method has a complete advantage over all the others (Yin, 1994, p. 80), engaging in one strategy may incorporate or lead to subsequent sources essential for providing breadth and depth of data for the intensive, *holistic* description (italics in the original) and analysis characteristic of a case study (Merriam, 1998, p. 134).

Following meetings with focus groups and interviewees I developed, and diligently maintained, extensive field notes and transcripts on each session to use as my database for analysis (Merriam, 1998, p. 104). Again, in keeping with the theme of multiple influences throughout my literature review, Bogdan and Biklen's (1998) "multiple realities" and Merriam and Simpson's (2000) "numerous realities" of qualitative research, I used multiple sources of data in my case study, rather than limiting data collection to a single source, hoping that a variety of sources would lead me to a fuller understanding of the phenomenon under study (see Bogdan & Biklen, 1998, p. 104). The opportunity to use a variety of sources of evidence was primarily based on Yin's (1994) observation that the most

important advantage of using multiple sources is the development of “converging lines of inquiry” in that case study findings are likely to be more accurate if data emanate from different sources of information (p. 92). I began data collection with the focus group method.

### ***Focus Groups***

Selection of focus group participants was purposeful (Merriam, 1998, p. 61 citing Patton, 1990). I wanted to gain as much insight as possible into if, how, and in what ways, trainers perceived their practices were influenced by the presence of organizational power and politics. If one of the advantages of focus group interviews is the study of individuals in socially oriented surroundings familiar to them (Marshall & Rossman, 1999, p. 115), then I expected to maximize my insights by providing a supportive, synergistic environment in which participants could verbally build upon one another's opinions and understanding of their practices. Bogdan and Biklen (1998) similarly assert that use of focus groups assumes that individual attitudes and beliefs do not form in a vacuum (p. 114). Given the familiarity I had established with these trainers during a lengthy contract with the organization, I was not concerned with one of the disadvantages of the focus group method, that tape-recorded group sessions are often difficult to reconstruct as recognizing who is speaking contributes to making transcription difficult (see Bogdan & Biklen, 1998, p. 100).

My focus group selection criteria were four-fold. First, I wanted to invite people who were in a training role, either full-time focusing on the design and facilitation of programs for internal staff or responsible for programs targeting the external distribution network and end-user customers. Second, I wanted participants who fulfilled auxiliary training roles, meaning that, in addition to daily responsibilities, they were also responsible for on-the-job training of their own staff. Third, I wanted to include trainers from 2-day and 3-day train-the-trainer programs that I had designed, facilitated and evaluated for the organization. Lastly, I wanted segmented samples of focus group participants.

I was not trying to compare data across groups. Rather, as a researcher, I was trying to be sensitive to group dynamics, a concept discussed by Merriam & Simpson in their discussion of focus group interviews (2000, p. 153).

Given existing tensions amongst the training groups, I hoped that segmenting the groups would enable participant discussion of sensitive issues and diminish feelings of inhibition by the presence of members from other groups (see Mayan, 2001, p. 19). Although focus group members were relatively homogeneous in their representation of small work groups in a single organization, I was aware that group members would differ by cultural values, beliefs, race, class, age,



gender, social roles, and personal actions in and out of work, elements that could colour their responses. My awareness heightened the need for document reviews as a third method of data collection to confirm or contradict the “anecdotal recollections” of the group members (see Hugo, 2001, p. 100).

I conducted four focus groups of which three groups had three members each and one group had two individuals. Makeup of the groups was as follows: (a) three occasional trainers; (b) one dedicated trainer, one technical trainer, and one occasional trainer; (c) one dedicated trainer, one training co-ordinator, one occasional trainer and (d) two dedicated trainers. Each focus group session was 90 minutes long and consisted of interactive discussions that I encouraged by asking open-ended informal questions to stimulate thinking and expansion of ideas related to my research questions. These group discussions were audio-taped for ease of transcription and integration with field notes.

I first explained to each group the nature and purpose of my case study and why I had chosen their organization as my focus. I then explained the consent-to-participate form, and asked each person to read the document and sign it if they wished. Although the form gave me a chance to discuss my research with participants, I was acutely aware that my contact at the organization had originally

invited their participation and therefore, their signature did not assume complete understanding of informed consent (see Bogdan & Biklen, 1998, p. 84).

I emphasized to each focus group member the confidentiality of my research and how I planned to ensure that confidentiality was respected. It was important to again reassure them that the organization, participants, location, marketplace, products, competition, and distribution networks would not be named in my study, nor would the business report emanating from this study for use by the organization contain any reference to names, positions, departments, or views of individual participants. This reassurance was intended to dispel their obvious fears about who would have access to this information and to provide me the flexibility to explore unanticipated issues as they arose in the discussions (see Marshall & Rossman, 1999, p. 115).

### ***Interviews***

According to Yin (1994), one of the most important sources of case study information is the interview, as most case studies are about human affairs reported and interpreted through the eyes of interviewees (p. 85). I chose in-depth interviewing of senior managers as a key method of data collection for two reasons. First, I wanted to discover the subjective views of each senior manager on the role of

training in the organization. I wanted to explore if, and how, each manager thought trainers — and their daily practices — were influenced by power and politics at play in the various organizational systems. If the purpose of a one-to-one interview is to obtain a special kind of information (Merriam, 1998, p. 71), my purpose was served by gathering data from individuals privy to the highest level of planning in the company. Second, I sensed that with business travel schedules, this group of managers would not make time to participate in focus group settings. Therefore, interviewing was a prominent method of data collection given my interest in current training practices, as well as past training practices which would be impossible to replicate (see Merriam, 1998, p. 72).

Authors of qualitative research methods differ in naming types of interviews. However, they agree that there are three basic kinds of interview: (a) informal conversational or unstructured; (b) semi-structured or a guided approach using questions and issues in no particular format or order and (c) highly structured or standardized interviews which use a pre-determined order of specific questions (Bogdan & Biklen, 1998; Marshall & Rossman, 1999; Merriam, 1998).

I prepared for each interview using the same open-ended, informal approach that I had used with each of the focus groups. On the advice of one of my advisors I prepared some general questions

relative to my research purpose and left my list at home. This approach was to ensure that each interviewee's perspective on training excellence was allowed to unfold as he viewed it, not as I the researcher viewed it (see Marshall & Rossman, 1999, p. 108).

As interviews were with senior managers only (the group privy to the highest level of planning in the organization), it is important to note here that senior managers are all male, therefore my use of the pronoun "he" in the previous sentence. I wondered how my gender as a research characteristic (Bogdan & Biklen, 1998, p. 86) might affect rapport with this group of participants. How would their personal observations and interpretations of training excellence be influenced by the fact that company trainers were female and in positions subordinate to their senior positions? In addition, the highest level of management is comprised of individuals from a culture other than my own. What would be the influence of a white, middle-aged, Jewish Canadian female returning as a researcher to study their organization when previously I had interacted with most of them in a long-term consulting role?

In a constructivist research paradigm, such as framed my study, the researcher's position and voice play a role in interactions with informants (Jacobson, 1998, p. 127). However, given existing relationships I enjoyed with study participants and my mission to

uncover how they interpret the world around them (Merriam, 1998, p. 72), it was essential that I actively refrain from engaging participants in two-way dialogue that included *my* personal assumptions about the organization, its culture and training initiatives. Instead, I wanted participants to identify, and describe from their own perspectives, the meaning of their experiences within the context of this organization.

According to Marshall and Rossman (1999), one of the limitations of interviewing is that interviewees may be uncomfortable sharing all that the researcher wants to explore (p. 110). This limitation was in evidence when my open-ended approach to interviewing the managers sometimes spilled over into a semi-structured approach, out of necessity. A skilled interviewer by profession, I had assumed that interviewees in senior positions would be accustomed to open-ended interviews in which they would be encouraged to do 80% of the talking. It became evident that this was one of my "going-in" biases when one of the managers suggested that I ask him specific questions. I complied with his request until he appeared more comfortable discussing sensitive issues of power and politics in an open-ended interview fashion.

My criteria for selecting individuals to participate in the personal interviews were again purposeful, yet two-fold. First, I wanted to include the broadest possible range of organizational perspectives from

numerous subsystems, for example Operations, Sales, Marketing, Customer Service, and Human Resources. Second, interviewees had to be members of either — or both — the executive and senior management teams so as to gather their observations and experiences from a relatively homogeneous organizational subsystem. I assumed that members in top-management positions would: (a) represent a higher level of accountability in decision-making, and (b) be more knowledgeable, from an organizational systems perspective, of decision-making processes, communication patterns and styles, relationships among interfacing groups, and overall planning methods (see French & Bell, 1999, p. 107).

I interviewed 8 individuals in personal, 60-90 minute interviews beginning with an open-ended approach. All interviews were conducted in private offices and tape recorded, with one exception in which the interviewee asked me *not* to tape the interview. Writing down his responses enabled me to record his nonverbal behaviour, yet this written method was both cumbersome and intrusive (see Merriam, 1998, p. 87). Not only did it slow down the conversation, there were times when I was writing that the individual chose to answer the phone or dash out to quickly speak to someone. At the end of each interview, each person invited me to come back if I needed clarification of if additional questions arose during my analysis.

Following each interview I created field notes to complement the taped and written data I would enter into my database for later analysis. My intent was to transcribe verbatim the recorded interviews, rather than hiring a professional transcriptionist, in order to preserve the anonymity I had promised participants and to attain an “intimate familiarity” with the data (see Merriam, 1998, p. 88).

Yin (1994) emphasizes interviews should always be considered *verbal reports* only (italics in the original) given they are subject to common problems of bias, poor recall and poor or inaccurate articulation (p. 85). Thus, it was important to corroborate interview data with information from a third source, document reviews.

### ***Document Reviews***

Merriam (1998) uses the term “document” to refer to a wide range of easily-accessible, written, visual and physical materials relevant to a case study (p. 112). Yin (1994) maintains that documentary information is relevant to every case study topic. Use of documents is advantageous in case study research for a number of reasons. Documents play an explicit role in providing the context of a setting. They are free, considered stable, and unobtrusive as they are not influenced by the presence of the researcher (Hodder, 2000, p. 704; Marshall & Rossman, 1999, p. 116; Merriam, 1998, p. 126). The overall value of documents is as a source of information used to

corroborate or contradict data gleaned from other data collection methods, (see Yin, 1994, p. 81) which were focus groups and personal interviews in this study.

However, document reviews have limitations. Documentary information is not developed for the purposes of research; materials may be incomplete from a research perspective and may contain inaccuracies and biases acquired through the editing-for-publication process (Merriam, 1998, p. 125).

As this case study was conducted within an organizational context, internal documents such as staff handbooks, company newsletters, and an annual report were important for revealing information about the official chain of command, internal rules and regulations, clues about leadership styles, and organizational staff values. I was aware of using documents for inferences or clues for further investigation, rather than literal interpretations, because organizations and staff routinely manipulate documents such as memos and minutes of meetings.

I reviewed external or published documents designed to help newcomers and outsiders become more aware of the key elements of the organization's culture. This information included the company history, news releases, staff orientation handbook, company newsletters and a current annual report to better understand official



perspectives administratively and structurally. As Schein (1985) suggests, these materials are better used to check one's hypotheses about basic assumptions than to decipher what those assumptions are in the first place (p. 127). During the document review, I sometimes felt how Stake (1998) portrays qualitative researchers: "as guests in the private spaces of the world" (p. 103).

### **Data Analysis**

This section describes my approach to analysing the data, including my "going-in" biases about the organization and decisions I made regarding the dependability of the data.

#### ***Data Analysis Strategies***

I used the corporate setting of a manufacturing firm and a specific group of staff members as direct sources of data, and I was the key instrument of data collection and analysis. One of my first decisions in terms of data collection was to conduct focus groups and interviews in succession because of the participants' availability subject to manufacturing operations. My decision fits with Lincoln and Guba's (1985) emphasis that naturalistic inquiry occurs to the extent possible in view of time and resource constraints (p. 188). I used multiple sources of data (focus groups, semi-structured interviews, and document reviews) as my method of triangulation, rather than

limiting data collection to a single source, to lead me to a fuller understanding of the phenomenon under study (consistent with Bogdan & Biklen, 1998, p. 104).

According to Yin (1994), data analysis consists of examining, categorizing, tabulating or otherwise re-combining the evidence to address the initial propositions of a study (p. 102). Therefore, guided by my constructivist paradigm, I focused on certain data, always assuming that an *inquiry* paradigm defines what falls within and outside the limits of legitimate inquiry (see Guba & Lincoln, 1994, p. 200). The beauty of this approach is that it engaged me theoretically and stimulated critical evaluation of what I was hearing, seeing and reading rather than just recording data.

As I completed each focus group and interview, I immediately hand recorded observations of behaviours (participants' and mine), verbal and non-verbal, relative to my research purpose, and made note of additional questions to ask in upcoming interviews. I kept these written observations together with each interview tape for transcription and coding and placed each set of observations into a separate computer file.

Although I had intended to transcribe all focus group and interview tapes, elbow tendonitis flared and I reluctantly engaged a transcription service after personally transcribing and storing 9 of 12

tapes in separate computer files on my database. I hesitated to use an outside service to preserve my oath of confidentiality and some participants' fear they were jeopardizing their jobs by speaking to me. I strongly concur with Stake's (1998) comment that "the value of the best research is not likely to outweigh injury to a person exposed" (p. 102).

I read each transcription twice after which I hand wrote a one-page "contact summary sheet" (Miles & Huberman's term, 1994, p. 51) for each document outlining the main concepts, themes, issues and questions emerging from the transcription. I attached each contact summary sheet to its corresponding transcription hard copy, placing each one in a labelled, individual binder for convenient access. I now had three sources of raw data: (a) transcriptions, (b) observation notes, and (c) contact summary sheets.

Following this early stage of analysis, I re-read each transcription, observation, and summary sheet, making notes in the margins of emerging themes and frequently used words and phrases. Previously, I had panicked thinking I had neglected to ask appropriate questions and rendered my raw data of no use. It seemed that all of the participants were saying the same thing, none of which illuminated my unit of analysis — organizational power and politics. However, as I began coding these documents, I created a data display as a visual

device representing emergent data expressed in what Marshall and Rossman (1999) call “conceptually intriguing” categories (p. 149).

This display resembles the format of a hierarchal organization chart. I titled the chart “Effects of Organizational Power & Politics” and established the first level of analysis represented by two columns, each under a major heading: 1) Systemic Supports and 2) Systemic Obstructions. I then created a second level of analysis under the first, creating four columns each representing one of four sub-categories: (a) Systemic Supports — Internal; (b) Systemic Supports — External; (c) Systemic Obstructions — Internal; and (d) Systemic Obstructions — External. From there I recorded in each column recurring words and common themes emerging from the data while preserving terminology used by participants. I wanted to capture the organizational jargon meaningful to participants in their construction of knowledge, as their “language” and my understanding of it would shape or impinge upon the data. This was consistent with ideas from Lincoln and Guba (1985, p. 333) and Weaver’s (2002) discussion.

The data display did just what Merriam suggested — it allowed me to visualize what I was learning about the phenomenon and to bring clarity to my analysis. Now I could “see” similarities and contradictions that previously had escaped me. As respondents represented two groups, training staff and senior management, I

began to wonder if, and how, data similarities and contradictions represented the groups. So I highlighted group responses in different colours for easier identification of who said what.

I used inductive data analysis to make sense of the data. In other words, I began with specific, raw units of information (as suggested by Lincoln & Guba, 1985, p. 203), from which I developed general and sub categories into which I placed bits of information to analyse for emerging patterns. I cross-checked multiple sources of evidence indicative of case study research, assuming multiple sources reflect a "crystal" (see Heaney's 2002 discussion): multi-faceted yet contained within a single setting.

### ***Assumptions***

I had to delve deeply into my personal biases about this organization, given what Corsaro calls "prior ethnographic" insights (cited in Lincoln & Guba, 1985, p. 251) acquired in our lengthy working relationship. These insights no doubt bred assumptions about organizational culture and expectations of how staff would respond in the study. At the same time I assumed these insights would help to diminish the conspicuous change in my role of consultant-turned-researcher.

As the primary instrument of data collection and analysis, I searched to identify personal biases that could result in analytical

errors. I, like Barlas (2000, p. 80), was acutely aware of the power of my decisions to include, or not, certain data. My going-in biases (based on my long association with this group) included an assumption that participants and I shared similar values, such as integrity and confidentiality. I further assumed that power and political influences favoured male career progression, as no female occupies an executive position in this organization. I perceived an imaginary halo effect on this group of female trainers. Given my gender, and the fact I had trained as facilitators all but one of this group, I assumed that, like me, these trainers focus on program development and refrain from reproducing organizational power and politics in their day-to-day situations.

To reduce these biases, I checked and re-checked data using methods of triangulation in order to identify different ways participants were experiencing power and political influences on program planning. I also kept a journal of *my* reflections in which I logged my methods of research as this case progressed, given I was the human element in the data analysis.

### ***Decisions on Dependability***

My intent was two-fold: (a) to ensure congruence between the data and what actually was transpiring in the organizational setting and (b) to describe and explain the daily practices of these trainers as

they experience them. To achieve this, I adhered to Lincoln & Guba's criteria of "trustworthiness" (1985, p. 219) to ensure the accuracy of my data and interpretations.

For credibility, I used multiple sources of data and methods, and member checks to determine if emerging data were indeed plausible. I did not expect these multiple sources to result in a single finding. Rather, I used them as a way to confirm data or create discord amongst the data. I addressed transferability issues by including as much "rich, thick description" (Merriam, 1998, p. 211) as possible, within time and resource restraints, to enable readers to determine how closely their situations match my study and whether my data are transferrable.

I hoped that findings emerging from my data were consistent and dependable. While it is possible to replicate methodology, it is not possible to replicate the study, given uniqueness of participants, organizational policies and practices, and my philosophical values. I used Rodwell's (1997) definition of dependability to keep my analysis within a constructivist perspective, aware that data interpretations differ when viewed through the lens of various theoretical paradigms. According to Rodwell, dependability is "a measure of constructivist research rigor which demonstrates that the procedures used to gather,

analyse, and interpret data fall within accepted constructivist practices" (1997, p. 255).

I approached issues of trustworthiness just as I approached data collection — from an open systems perspective — exploring research questions from the perspectives of study participants representing a variety of the organization's internal and external subsystems. My approach aligns with Lincoln and Guba's (1985) view that the criteria of trustworthiness is open-ended and sometimes assailable (p. 329). In their words "naturalistic inquiry is an *open* system — no amount of triangulation, member checking, auditing and observation can ever compel; it can at best *persuade* (p. 329, italics in the original) readers to trust the findings.

### ***Influences***

A number of influences affected this research. In particular, this study focuses on a specific group of people in one area of a single organization at a specific time in the organization's operating cycle, rather than the whole organization over time. Research was subject to participant time and availability relative to company operations. Participant interpretation of the phrase "power and politics" may have influenced their responses, despite my providing a contextual definition of this phrase in each interview. Did people truly understand that as Ewert and Grace (2000, p. 330) point out "politics is not



confined to one's relationship with the state but extends to one's use of, or access to, power"?

It is important to note that, as a training consultant-turned-researcher with this organization, I fell into a self-imposed trap of thinking my research was primarily for the organization. I temporarily lost sight of the wider context of my study, and the fact that my research was for me, and to inform the disciplines of adult education, human resources development and organizational development, in addition to the organization under study.

## **Chapter 4**

### **FINDINGS**

In this chapter I discuss the findings that emerged during analysis of participant responses to questions guiding my inquiry. In this chapter, the terms “program planning” and “training” are used interchangeably as respondents used “training” to describe all aspects of planning, facilitating, and evaluating training programs.

In order to analyse the findings of this study, I considered data collected from a variety of sources: (a) focus groups of company trainers; (b) individual, semi-structured interviews with members of the executive and senior management teams; (c) document reviews; and (d) my field notes following each focus group session and interview. I integrated personal reflections from a data collection journal into my inductive data analysis and conducted periodic member checks to verify the plausibility of emergent data.

Initially four major themes emerged from the data. They were: (a) organizational culture (shared understandings); (b) systemic supports (management influences); (c) perceptions of training (influences on daily practice); and (d) systemic challenges (power and political influences). However, through discussions with a personal friend and mentor (personal communications, D. Boliver, September to

December, 2002) and a doctoral cohort member (personal communications, K. Watanuki, September to December, 2002), I realized I was operating under the assumption that organizational culture and organizational context were one and the same.

Once I grasped that *culture* includes intangibles such as shared ideas, unwritten rules, and patterns of behaviour I was able to visualize organizational *context* as the tangibles of structure, policies and procedures, and environmental influences affecting the company. Context was my missing link and therefore is the first major theme, divided into sub-themes because essentially the influences of structure, policies and procedures, and environmental influences dictate workplace behaviour.

Therefore, five themes emerged from the analysis, each theme representing multiple influences on program planning: (a) organizational context (*environmental influences – internal and external*); (b) organizational culture (*shared understandings*); (c) systemic supports (*management influences*); (d) perceptions of training (*influences on daily practice*); and (e) systemic challenges (*power & political influences*). I discuss the findings under each of these themes and their respective sub-themes in the remainder of this chapter.

## **Organizational Context (Environmental Influences)**

The findings that I extracted from the organizational context theme include data on tangibles such as company structure, policies and procedures, and internal/external environmental influences — such as the economy affects how the company conducts business and how it implements program planning.

### ***Structure***

Organizational structure influences program planning. Structure is included here as a finding in keeping with one of the premises of systems theory that interrelationships and structures, not events, underlie complex situations (see Senge, 1990).

The company is made up of three business units, each of which is led by a member of senior management who reports to a corporate executive team. This case study focuses primarily on one of these business units although staff from other units, or sister companies, participated in the research to provide a more inclusive profile of training company-wide.

This particular unit is structured into what might be called a business partnership, as two members of senior management co-share accountability for running the unit. One executive focuses on marketing and sales, the other one on production. Participants in this

study suggested that management in this unit is more supportive of marketing and sales training than leaders are of training programs in the production group, based on the premise that sales training results in a quicker, greater return on the bottom line. One rationale in support of this perception that management pays more attention to sales training than to other programs is that sales programs are more visible to upper management because the company pays for people to fly in to these sessions. Another rationale suggests that programs of a human resources nature are only considered the soft, extra “stuff” to keep the employees happy.

There is a hierarchy within the organization, beginning with the executive team at the helm, a senior management team as the next level down, and departmental management filters down from the senior management level. Overall, there are two departments responsible for training — Human Resources for internal training and Marketing for external or field training. The Human Resources department is responsible for more of the internal business training, such as front-line leadership programs, Microsoft training, continuous improvement programs, and WHMIS (hazardous materials in the workplace). The Marketing training group is accountable for field training programs in addition to conducting product training internally and helping internal staff to understand the dynamics of the business.

There are at least three other groups that conduct internal training. However, for this study, I looked at a third group only, Customer Service, which is responsible for day-to-day, procedural training of in-house customer service representatives.

It is important to note that people who present programs within the other internal training groups hold full time positions in addition to their occasional role as trainers. Although these occasional trainers do not report to the Marketing group, members of the Marketing training group have lots of involvement in how training programs are developed with respect to these internal groups. Marketing involvement takes the form of helping occasional trainers to develop and present programs and to identify what kinds of resources are required to facilitate different sessions.

Company growth necessitated a need for training. Originally the company had a very simple product line but, as their product mix grew, the need for training became acute as their need to influence different audiences grew exponentially. Two participants explained, from a company perspective, how this need for training arose. They described how they had to develop a complete training program to position the product, to identify features and benefits to help the sales force sell the product, and to use the opportunity to get honest feedback and suggestions. At the time of this research, and in the

opinion of one of the senior managers, Marketing “owned” training with cross functionality with the Human Resources department, which was responsible for conducting programs for internal staff as well as developing and maintaining company policies and procedures governing training.

### ***Policies and Procedures***

Internal policies and procedures are shared with staff to some extent. However, program approvals require numerous management signatures, often resulting in lengthy delays and reduced preparation time once approvals are received. Participants pointed out the difficulty in getting things through the system. As one participant stated, “you have to sell it and keep selling it and the reason why you need to do it.” Although it is left to managers to decide which programs are discretionary and which programs are not, one manager highlighted the resistance often encountered when trying to make training decisions. In his words, “you go through hoops trying to prove that you absolutely need to do it ... if it is absolutely necessary that we do it, delay it and if it is not absolutely necessary then we just forget about it altogether.” This perception reflects management’s intense focus on finances and executive reaction to fluctuations in the economy.

### ***Economic Impact on Program Planning***

The American marketplace and fluctuations in the U. S. economy heavily influence this Canadian organization. At the time of this study, the company's industry had been in a downturn for over a year due to a spiralling U.S. economy, which resulted in industry layoffs and shortened work weeks, reduced pay, staff cutbacks, and a drop in employee morale at this organization. The attacks of September 11, 2001 compounded these economic influences by rendering much of the company's product surplus and learners afraid to travel to training sessions.

Such economic influences were happening at a time when sales related training was at a peak in the organization and people were getting to know the product more and more. However, as trainers were asked not to travel, they thought the company was setting aside training temporarily and would bring it back into focus when business picked up later on. Other participants confirmed that situations occurring in the external environment were influencing the company's commitment to training. Managers were told to stop all discretionary training and spending money on third party training, and although the company continued investing in machinery, it did not continue investing in its people. In the words of another participant, a trainer,



“this is wrong” and “that says something about how we look at training as an organization.”

At the time of this writing, some people perceived that the organization was starting to pull out of the downward spiral. Acknowledging the economy had not fully recovered and that other people are not as optimistic, Tony said, “there are some good signs that things are starting to bounce back. It's just that in our industry sometimes the wins that you get are several months down the road before you see the impact.”

Although organizational context has a substantial influence on program planning, context is not limited to the three sub-themes discussed here. For this study, discussion of context focussed on company structure, policies and procedures, and environmental influences in order to stress the tangible or factual nature of some of the influences on program planning. Therefore, if context is a tangible influence, the next theme, Organizational Culture, describes the intangible or elusive influences such as ideas, unwritten rules, and patterns of behaviour in organizations that so often exist as shared understandings by staff.

## **Organizational Culture (Shared Understandings)**

In her study of women, corporate culture and power relations, Bierema (1999, p. 108) cites Pettigrew's (1979) description of culture as amalgams of beliefs, ideologies, language, rituals and myths. I am using Bierema's definition of culture in order to emphasize the invisible or intangible elements of sub-themes or components affecting program planning in this study, in particular, (a) philosophy towards training, (b) strategic plan, (c) image of training, and (d) patterns of behaviour.

### ***Philosophy Towards Training***

All participants agreed that, in keeping with the organization's intense focus on finances, training is endorsed in good times; yet in bad times decisions to halt training are made by individuals who claim training is elemental to company philosophy and success. Almost all participants agreed that the organization does not have a philosophy on training or if a philosophy exists, it has not been shared with staff. Programs are generally limited to training that strengthens product knowledge only, and the perception is that management considers training an expense, rather than an investment in staff development and company performance. According to Tony, "if you can quantify and justify the expense of the training and show the benefit of the training,

there is no problem doing it” whereas in Maurie’s view “training is not something intrinsic to management, it is long term and the tendency is that you don’t make a long term investment.” These comments align with other opinions expressed by participants concerning the organization’s strategic plan.

### ***Strategic Plan***

The company does have a strategic plan, although it is flexible by design, similar to the mission of the organization. According to one person, “we kind of make it up as we go along and it doesn’t mean it is wrong, it just means it is flexible.” This individual perceived flexibility as a benefit, an asset to a small company, and a way to avoid the rigidity associated with strategic plans in larger companies. Although management has made a serious commitment to sales training related to the field — a pledge viewed by one person as a top-down, centralized, organized strategy — study participants said that operations training however continues to evolve on an ad hoc basis.

Trainers and almost all of the management participants expressed concern over the distinct lack of information about strategic goals. Generally, they want to know how their positions fit into the overall direction of the organization, and trainers specifically want to know why program planning is *not* linked to strategic goals. According to Lynda “if you were to ask most people in the company what is the

direction of the company they probably couldn't tell you." Tony is convinced that "one of the things we struggle with as a company is identifying and articulating the strategic direction of the company." Some members of management confirmed these concerns, acknowledging that planning is carried in people's heads, is not articulated, and neither trainers nor other employees would know the strategic goals of the organization. This kind of admission might account for how training is viewed within the company.

### ***Image of Training***

At the time of this study, there were three training groups planning and facilitating programs specific to their areas, each with a different audience and mandate. Three of the trainers who participated in this study held positions dedicated to a training function, whereas others held full time positions in addition to formally planning programs and training sessions in an occasional role. In our discussions trainers focused more on the image of training as it affected them in their daily practices whereas management participants provided insights they received as feedback from learners in previous sessions.

Two of the trainers agreed that, prior to this study, which occurred following a variety of organizational changes, training was highly respected in the company. According to Rebecca "everybody

died to be in our group, they didn't know what happy drugs we were on but they wanted to be in on it, everybody wanted to work with us." Allison claimed that "when it first was discovered that training was required everyone was 100% behind it ... the reception was just amazing." However, trainers responsible for programs in addition to their daily responsibilities were less enthusiastic as they described the image of training, and themselves as trainers. Although these trainers conduct informal training sessions daily for members of their staff, both Darlene and Lynda agreed that the organization does not view them as trainers. In their opinion, only people who hold recognized, full time training positions and who have the title of trainer on their cards are considered trainers.

How do the impressions of Rebecca, Allison, Darlene, and Lynda affect program planning? Rebecca and Allison approach their programs with glee born of confidence gained through professional development provided by the organization and considerable allotted program preparation time. Darlene and Lynda also received a company-sponsored course in planning and facilitating training programs. In fact Lynda confirmed that they *are* viewed as trainers — in their groups and as leaders to help guide their groups. She acknowledged the benefits of getting to try something new, gaining more experience, and feeling less overwhelmed when doing a training session. However,

she went on to say “when asked to train other people outside of our groups we have to decline at times because we don’t feel we are qualified to teach in some areas. Since our title is not trainer we are not given the luxury of time to do the training sessions and we have to do these on our own time as we have our own jobs to do.”

The trainers focused their comments more on the day-to-day image of training, whereas members of management stressed feedback received primarily from learners in sales training programs, concrete feedback that portrayed program planning in a positive, factual light. Norbert said “the overall image of the company has improved based upon participants who come back and say training is the best we have ever had, we feel much more knowledgeable about the product.” Tony concurred with “I have only heard good things about that training and how effective and well done it is, and nobody wants to touch that because it is working.” According to Mike, “it has served as a source of inspiration to the field ... it's empowered a lot of other people to preach the gospel of the company ... there are a lot of sales people out there now who are doing a competent job because of the training they’ve had.” Bill said, “I know the company sees values and benefits because of the feedback we hear from participants in our training programs — better product knowledge in the field, fewer questions from the field to our customer service group, and the ability

of the field to present the product themselves without having to call upon our in-house experts.”

There were points of view different from those quoted above, yet they were similar to each other. In particular, from Av “I am guessing the general view would be that the company does not invest heavily in training” while Nathan’s view of the image of training was “I don't think it's particularly strong, I think it’s adequate.” All participants agreed that factory staff would not perceive the company has a very high place in its heart for training; training is stronger on the sales side and a lot of improvement in training is required on the operational side. Av summed up the image of training with “the closer you are to the customer the more prone we are to invest in you, the closer you are to the plant the less prone we are to invest in you.” These shared ideas are reflected in patterns of behaviour affecting program planning.

### ***Patterns of Behaviour***

Both trainers and managers in this study share perceptions of the company as very: (a) conservative, (b) financially oriented, and (c) “top-down.”

According to one participant, the management group is not big on lots of words, and its members are very reserved. Although the executive group is trying to change this by bringing in new faces to

senior management, one person commented, "the conservative culture will change only when longer-term management members defer to new management staff." The monetary focus is viewed as management's drive to continue financial successes of the past and therefore, any increased training expense would take away from profit margins.

Emphasis was placed on the top-down aspect of the culture as participants described patterns of behaviour in the organization. Tony depicted the culture as "a very hard-working, mostly dedicated employee culture, very top-down with good visionaries at the top ... however, everybody's waiting for that next instruction from up top." A number of people referred to the unwritten rule or common practice of bypassing supervisors and asking senior management directly for approvals on projects, including program planning. One comment, from Lynda, was "Whenever we are in a bind to get something complete we must go to the executives to make it happen. This is a well-known rule within the company. It is part of the training for the staff that they all know that if they need something to happen see the executives."

However, Maurie's perceptions differed. In his opinion, it is a small-company culture in which "if somebody says something is a good idea we do it, whether it is in the budget or not." Although he



maintained that “we are entrepreneurial empowering people who are willing to make decisions outside of their structure,” other responses were not as generous. This was evidenced by Mike’s concern that “the culture of this company is that stuff happens in private offices with a few people,” a comment in line with Bierema’s (1999) opinion that corporate cultures reinforce the prevailing power structure (p. 108). However, Av’s comment indicated frustration with accepted patterns of behaviour embedded in the organization’s culture. He said “It is part of the culture here to be late for meetings and training and, worse, sometimes people do not show up at all ... we are trying to change that but it is not just training, people are habitually late here, habitually unprofessional; it is just stupid it is crazy.”

In this discussion of Organizational Culture, I have tried to highlight the harder-to-grasp, or intangible elements of the company’s philosophy towards training, the role of the strategic plan, the image of training as “seen” by participants, and patterns of behaviour that have become accepted as appropriate within the corporate culture. Despite the negative tone of some of the foregoing comments, there are numerous positive influences on program planning, discussed below under the heading of Systemic Supports.

## **Systemic Supports (Management Influences)**

In this section I use the terms “Systemic Supports” and “Management Influences” interchangeably, as essentially supports to or endorsements of program planning originate with members of the management and executive teams. Study participants used past successes in program planning to describe these supports, which I have categorized as: (a) Program Planning and Supports, (b) Recognition for Trainers, (c) Resources — Allocation/Budgets, and (d) Power and Politics — The Positives.

### ***Program Planning and Supports***

There are many supports for program planning. One major reason for the success of programs has been willingness by management and trainers to try out new training ideas based on adult education principles. Some participants mentioned the front-line leadership program and attributed its success to in-house design and facilitation by the Human Resources group. Other participants discussed how sales programs were more successful as a result of trainers using newly developed leaders’ guides and participant manuals. Other indicators of company-wide buy-in to sales training programs were getting salespeople involved in program development

and management contributions to the planning process of time, resources, facilities, and staff.

Everyone agreed that supports are primarily financial in nature, although a number of individuals identified secondary supports in the form of up-to-date facilities and equipment, audio-visual resources, and emerging administrative guidelines for program planning. Nathan thought that having full-time trainers associated with product and sales training classes at least indicated a training structure. Bill thought that the company stands behind its performance review process as a key component for identifying people development needs. Both Av and Mike were convinced that management attention is on short-term programs with impact on the bottom line, because management is particularly analytical, very numbers-oriented, technical, and good at supporting short-term programs offering tangible, measurable results.

Management is more committed to sales-related training than development of internal staff. In fact, sales training is perceived by staff as favoured over all other programs for its tangible benefits – that is, its ability to quickly generate revenue to the bottom line. Tony explained the rationale behind this support. He said that the company is building an entire sales force from scratch and this accounts for sales training treated differently than other programs. Norbert

confirmed that dollar expenditures are probably a little higher in the sales area, per capita, than the internal training. He suggested that support does vary from internal to external programs because “internal training is what we really *have* to do as an organization and external training is what we *want* to do.” However, Norbert did say that “we would like our internal people to be at the same level as external people, in particular our customer service representatives should have the same knowledge of our philosophy and the selling process, and understanding of where they fit in that process.”

Trainers were less convinced of visible executive supports for program planning. All but three trainers have participated in a company-sponsored train the trainer course provided by external resources, and in some cases more than one course, to enable them to competently design and facilitate programs reflecting adult learning principles. Professional development is also provided to better equip trainers with a broader understanding of how training fits into a wider organizational context. Lillian thought that one training project in particular was very well supported. In Lillian’s words “the vice president was totally behind us ... we had his emotional support which was good ... to know that he was buying into it.” This viewpoint was endorsed by another individual, who cited organizational supports in the forms of administrative supports, ongoing mentorship, and

collaboration with other trainers, in addition to availability of multiple resources. Furthermore, there are few limitations in terms of facilities, audiovisual equipment, and space. These types of support are reflected in the words of one person, who shared “We only empower the trainers here. We haven’t done much more other than say you have the ability to spend money if you need to bring in resources to make you effective.”

However, trainers face other challenges when training in the field. Rebecca summed up field limitations as the need to over-pack resources “just in case,” lack of attention from learners as they never actually “leave” their jobs for the day, too many interruptions, and difficulty fitting program design into one day.

Participants had a “wish-list” for strengthening programs. Generally, they wished for program planning linked to strategic initiatives. Specifically, they suggested programs include critical thinking processes (meaning opportunities for learners to explore *why* in addition to *how* things are done in the organization). They suggested consistent design and facilitation methods across all programs whether they are sales-related (how to sell product other than by price), customer service oriented (knowledge-based), for installation staff (how to properly install all company products), and all programs of a staff development nature (orientation, front-line

leadership, product knowledge). Trainers wished for more program preparation time, additional support staff and a more proactive (rather than reactive) approach by the company to training. Managers also suggested supports that should be in place for trainers but are not, in particular a clear and shared perspective on what investing in people means to the organization. Additional supports to program planning include ways of recognizing contributions trainers make to the organization.

### ***Recognition for Trainers***

Recognition for trainers comes in many forms, both obvious and more abstract. Sue described how management nominated a team of trainers for a company award as a way of recognizing their willingness to go above and beyond, enthusiasm, and positive ways of contributing to the design and facilitation of a new 2-day training program. According to Darlene, this team was honoured with “a lovely lunch, a T-shirt, a nice cheque, many people invited to watch the surprise presentation, and team pictures taken for the company newsletter.”

Another trainer has been encouraged to go beyond the training role to thoroughly understand product, positioning and different influences on the purchaser. According to her manager, encouraging this person to broaden her horizons with first-hand experience,

presenting winning projects, and dealing with senior sales management helps her to understand a little bit better what the sales force faces. This increased knowledge and experience base will strengthen her credibility-in the eyes of learners-as both designer and facilitator of sales related training programs.

Other trainers described less obvious and temporary forms of recognition. According to Allison, "one of the cool things about training was that we had a supervisor who was very supportive and *left us on our own* to experiment with different training ideas." Her expectation was that this free rein would always be there as she described feeling "it was like he was the Dad and we were the kids." When their supervisor's focus changed due to a promotion, Allison then likened the situation to "all of a sudden Dad got a new girlfriend and we were no longer the focus of his attention, we were kind of *left on our own*."

An interesting finding emerged relative to this sub-theme of recognition for trainers. Participants in this research identified the company's various training programs by the names of the trainers facilitating the programs, not by the titles of the programs. One person's name was mentioned 52 times during discussions on training in the four focus groups and eight individual interviews. This type of recognition is the human element in training. Additional resources, the non-human element are also necessary in training. In the next section

I describe some of these resources in terms of allocations and budgets.

### ***Resources – Allocation and Budgets***

The company has always been very profitable because executive management controls how much money they spend, and they are involved in every bit of money that goes out of the company. In keeping with policies and procedures, staff must follow certain procedures to obtain financial approvals. Although department managers can approve expenditures up to \$2500, any discretionary spending over \$2500 is a capital appropriation that must go to the Vice President of Finance and often to the President.

However, approvals (or no approval) can sometimes take weeks and depend on people filling out forms correctly, answering *all* questions justifying costs savings, and providing business reasons for their request. One participant thought management asks “a bunch of questions” that usually frustrate the applicant and extend approval times. Tony suggests that staff think about approvals from the standpoint of senior management and “you had better tell them the whole story and clearly articulate why you are doing this.” Management *will* listen to justification on spending more money, but will ask “What do we have to give up, or who are we going to have to take on to do that?” Bill suggested that one of the most difficult issues



for management is deciding where to spend available funds each year, because funds are finite and are based on projected profit margins.

Budgets are developed with rigour and every expense is looked at very carefully. However, some members of senior management claim that budgets are guidelines only, road maps rather than documents "signed off in blood" by business unit leaders. If someone believes in something passionately, management often says "well, you know, it's not in our budget but it's a great idea, let's do it!" Such flexibility was demonstrated in decisions on program planning following the September 11, 2001 attacks on the United States. With field staff reluctant to travel and their attention focused on rebuilding customer confidence, the company turned *its* attention to internal customer service staff by conducting focus groups and training sessions on how to eliminate or substitute product components to reduce prices without eroding profit margins.

Sponsorship of training funnels downward from senior management in the allocation of resources and budgets to program planning and training. Although Peter claims planning is not properly supported at the company right now, there is a yearly budget for improving programs, and requests for funds follow usual channels of approval. Although Norbert mentioned again that dollar expenditures are higher in sales related training he pointed out that "we have never

had an issue of money for those things.” Bill concurred, explaining that training for internal staff does receive less of the budget — not because some programs are favoured over others; rather, costs are much higher to bring people in from the field for training. In Paul’s words, “they (management) understand the importance of training and they are spending money on it, whether it is well spent and properly spent is another question, so I am assuming that they are beginning to recognize the value of it.” Allocation of resources is a tangible element in the planning process. Equally important although less concrete in nature is the existence and use of power and politics in training.

### ***Power and Politics – The Positives***

Some participants described the use of power and politics to influence training in positive ways. I found a few examples of power — such as French & Bell’s (1999) capacity to act and Pfeffer’s (1992) influences through which power is utilized — applied constructively to further the cause of program planning. Allison described management support when she said “We had our manager’s attention in anything that came up because he dealt with management and executives. He would say ‘no problem, whom do you want me to talk to?’ if they came across any obstacles”. This particular manager acknowledged a willingness to help other business units develop training strategies,

although he emphasized that collaboration would succeed only if “the total management group and leader of each unit is committed to, and involved with, the development of training methodology.” Although the company does not totally support the training function, according to Nathan, he did emphasize that when management decides who will ultimately be responsible for company training, the function must cross business unit boundaries to avoid supporting one part of the business over other units.

This discussion of management influences on program planning has concentrated on program planning and supports, recognition for trainers, resources and the allocation of budgets, and the positive indicators of power and political influences. In the next section, I explore a fourth theme, called Perceptions of Training, which I break down into three sub-themes.

### **Perceptions of Training (Influences on Daily Practice)**

In this section, I discuss how varying perceptions of training influence daily training practice. In particular I review (a) trainers’ perceptions, (b) management perceptions, and (c) frustrations of trainers and management with people and process.

### ***Trainers' Perceptions***

An image of *good intentions* came to mind as I listened to trainers describing their daily practices. Both Wilma and Rebecca thought they could make a difference by sharing with learners their passion for the product and by pushing aside all the “behind-the-scenes stuff that no one ever saw.” Full time trainers described close-knit relationships in their training group and collaboration with trainers in other groups when necessary, as evidenced by Allison’s comment that “a lot of the people were great, helpful, team players, just really a pleasant experience all around.” Trainers in occasional roles shared their surprise, and delight, at turning challenging training situations into confident learning experiences for themselves, primarily by developing their own training styles and sometimes drawing on guidance from other training staff. Lillian remarked “we have had a lot of support from the other trainers, great support, they don’t hesitate to jump right in.” Shirl suggested combining training group efforts to draw on the good things happening in both sales and the other groups, but primarily to better share resources currently allocated more to sales-related programs.

All trainers referred to limited preparation time as a major influence on their practices and how they developed coping strategies to support their good intentions. For example, occasional trainers

found it necessary to develop training outside of their day-to-day responsibilities. According to Lillian,

One of the obstacles we ran into was getting all of our team in the same spot at the same time because of other demands on our day. We managed by forging ahead and the missing party would catch up although sometimes that person did not have as much choice in what they did.

As they had just completed a company-sponsored professional development program (Planning and Facilitating Training Sessions), they had the further challenge of trying to put new techniques into practice. In Sue's words "we incorporated a lot of what we had taken in our training course such as the different ways that people learn, how to keep the program going, and how to make it exciting."

Time and resources restricted good intentions. Trainers were not clock-watchers, and they tried to meet their deadlines by developing programs outside of work. According to Wilma, "I am not a clock puncher, I take work home, I'll be there late, I'll be there early, they never have to question how much I actually put in." One trainer, Paul, perceived a company attitude of "march ahead, march ahead, hurry and wait," yet found this approach both frustrating and less than

empowering considering the company's centralized decision-making and control of the purse.

As the economy began to erode so did trainer morale and motivation. Previously, full time trainers enjoyed a very supportive supervisor who supported their training team and provided whatever they needed to get the job done. However, trainers began to find it very difficult to keep training at the forefront as their full time positions became more of a marketing role and less of a training role. According to Rebecca, they kept trying to justify the title of training specialists on their business cards even though their manager had a new marketing focus and they had to follow along with that focus.

### ***Managers' Perceptions***

Managers' perceptions of training practice ranged from views on training within a broad organizational context to individual trainer roles. Norbert pointed out that the training function is understaffed and therefore staff are struggling with workload largely due to the poor health of the U. S. economy. He suggested that as the economy picks up each sister company should manage it's own sales training with heavy interaction amongst the dedicated trainers. Nathan suggested integrating and centralizing training under the auspices of a company college or university, reporting to one person to avoid what he now perceives is a fragmented effort with little cross-over amongst

the trainers and training groups. Mike focused more on the individual trainers' role with his idea to help trainers understand they were part of a team and that the company had an overall scheme relative to training. However, Av thought management was using the economy as a poor excuse, and suggested detailed training and development plans were essential for all salaried staff consistent across the entire organization.

Management opinions varied when discussing influences on daily training practice. Tony, addressing trainer skepticism on management's commitment to training, pointed out that someone who trains full time and is always busy would perceive the company has a larger commitment to training than someone whose role is less focused on training. Although Maurie believed it was necessary for people to see their roles in a broader sense, he did admit there is no feedback mechanism for trainers to assess how their roles impact the organization as a whole. Av's response was "I strongly doubt it" when asked if trainers have a sense of where the organization is trying to go and how their positions fit into the strategic direction. Peter qualified this view with his statement that "trainers would have limited awareness if we accept that trainers even need a wider context for their roles."

### ***Frustrations with People and Process***

Participants in the focus groups were initially speechless when asked to identify what the company was doing right as far as program planning and training were concerned. However, all participants — focus group members and interviewees — agreed on numerous frustrations with people and process that interfere with the planning and delivery of training programs. In particular, they mentioned (a) peaks and valleys of business; (b) conflicting priorities of time-sensitive projects; (c) different training courses going on at the same time; (d) learners consistently arriving late; (e) managers who perceive training as futile; (f) lack of documented training policies and procedures; (g) company reluctance to support business unit ownership of programs; (h) discussions and decisions by a few people only in closed offices; (i) company inability to “nurture or incubate” new talent; (j) limited number of people to conduct training which limits the numbers of sessions and learners; (k) the reply “sorry, there is no money” to help novice trainers learn how to train others and (l) a lack of adequate field facilities to demonstrate product or the manufacturing process.

The participants found it easier to describe their perceptions of training once I asked them about any frustrations with people or process in program planning. The visible or concrete nature of the



frustrations sub-theme provided a link to discussing issues surrounding systemic challenges or the power and political influences in program planning. The next theme examines systemic challenges under the heading of power and political influences.

### **Systemic Challenges (Power & Political Influences)**

I have separated this theme of systemic challenges into sub-themes of power and political influences on program planning. Using *power* as a capacity to act (French & Bell, 1999) and *politics* to represent influences through which power is utilized (Pfeffer, 1992), the following section describes who in the organization gets what over whom and who is included or excluded and by whom.

#### ***Power Issues***

Respondents had varying opinions on who wields power in the organization. At the *individual* level, a number of people commented on how restricted they feel in terms of decision-making within their positions. According to one person, "you have zero authority to be honest with you"; another person talked about how the company hires exceptional talent and then "ties their hands through micro management and controls." A third person described involvement in projects as "I'm not allowed to own it, I have to watch the baby

through the window." And a fourth offered an opinion on how the organization sees itself. In this person's view, "management professes a deep interest in staff's knowledge, point of view, and experience. They see themselves as very inclusive and promise you will be empowered ... that's the way we think we are. But in no time at all, people in the field realize that decisions are made without asking them, in a small room with a couple of people ... so it's like, it's not really what I signed up for." This individual went on to say "I don't think that there's anything disingenuous about the company when they say it, I just think the company sees itself differently ... I don't think it's on purpose at all. The company is very conservative but to the point ... they sweat the pennies and lose the dollars."

There were also frequent, non-verbal cues from a variety of participants in the form of facial expressions and chuckles in response to questions on dominant group(s) favoured in the organization. These cues gave me a sense there was information that was *not* being shared for reasons of anonymity. I examine these hints in greater detail in Chapter 6, where I explore some of my critical assumptions on power and politics that sprang to life during this research.

At the *departmental* level, a few people perceived that the Sales and Marketing department wields the power, given ongoing visible management support to sales training even in economic downturns.

Other people believed that both power and politics reside in the Finance area although, no matter where they reside, one person said “if you are in the department where power is held, you can do anything.” A similar view connected power to finances with the suggestion that the “divvying up” of money is really in the hands of one or two people — training will get cut, or cut back, given the company’s focus of achieving the highest numbers possible on the bottom line.

At the *organizational* level, the overall perception is that power and decisions on training are concentrated in the hands of a few people at the top and that power *is* linked to finances. In good times, managers are trusted with budgetary decision-making, yet when times get tough, the reins are put on by higher levels. Bottom line? “When things get tight, power shifts up ... when power shifts up everybody waits for that next instruction from the top.” Power issues are interwoven with political issues, as noted in the following discussion of the second sub-theme, political issues.

### ***Political Issues***

A simplistic explanation of politics might focus on who, in the work environment, is included or excluded and by whom. The following quote from a study participant reflects this type of favouritism associated with politics: “The closer you are to the customer the more

prone we are to invest in you, the closer you are to the plant the less prone we are to invest in you.”

This description of company philosophy may account for why managers, in particular Sales and Marketing managers, tend to favour certain training programs and to ignore others. For example, managers urge new staff to attend product orientation training yet dissuade staff, citing on-the-job demands, from taking the company’s Human Resources orientation program on policies, procedures, and product overview. Although both programs would benefit new staff members, employees miss out because these types of programs fall under two different “umbrellas” in the company’s business unit structure. Commitment to training by the senior management person at the head of each unit determines the level of commitment and resources allocated to program planning and participation.

Managers also tend to ignore internal training needs identified through the performance review system. Both managers and staff question why they are required to specify professional development needs on performance appraisals given that the company does minimal in-house staff training. Yearly training objectives are usually outlined on individual reviews, yet meeting these objectives is not a high expectation of the organization, managers or individual employees. One participant expressed concern that this type of

attitude filters down through the company: "not only does the company not show a lot of commitment to this but neither do the employees." Another individual summarized his perception of what managers ignore: "As we are a very tangible, particularly analytical, and very numbers-oriented, technical company, managers as a whole would tend to identify hard training needs. Training that has to do with the softer elements like management skills is a taboo area unless you are senior enough to either approve it yourself or be convincing or credible."

All management participants in the study agreed that training is never a topic on management meeting agendas, although it may be informally discussed in terms of who attended recent sessions and who plans on coming to future sessions. According to some participants, the company is not good at planning either for programs or other types of planning, and training decisions are usually in the hands of a few individuals at the top and made behind closed doors. This perspective was substantiated by a member of senior management who, when asked if the management team makes decisions by consensus, said that a few core people on the management team make the decisions. According to another senior management member, the team never looks at the impact of training on the bottom line in actual measureables. Rather, they view it as something they

need, similar to many of their expenditures in marketing and supporting sales, but they really don't measure. In his words, "typically we tend to look at bottom line impact where it is easier to measure."

Allocation of resources was another point of discussion on power and political influences. Participants repeatedly referred to the practice of sales training receiving a greater proportion of financial support than other types of programs, even in tight times when funding normally is reduced or eliminated for other training groups. They attributed this practice to the company's segmented business unit structure. A structure in which two people co-share responsibility at the top of one unit, in particular, tends to lead to separation all the way down and, according to one participant, "within the same business unit you get different rules".

However, other participants provided another way of understanding this separation and approach to training. Urgency to train is significantly higher on the side of the business focussed on external sales than on the internal side, given that field sales staff must first understand the products and second must sell across the vast distances of their American marketplace. This approach becomes clearer with three admissions by senior management. First, the focus of the organization goes to bottom line impact. Second, they have not

actively explored training as a potential return on investment in the futures of both staff and the organization. Third, they have yet to sit down to develop and implement a training strategy.

There are at least three training groups — Sales, Customer Service, and Human Resources — each with a differing mandate, audience, and level of financial support from management. Study participants agree that formation of these groups was not politically inspired. They were formed more by evolution than by grand plan, more on an ad hoc basis than by design, as the company's training needs emerged. The three groups operate independently of one another, trainers seldom collaborate with each other, and meetings are rarely held with different business unit trainers and human resources trainers. Referring to the trainers, Mike said "they don't cross paths, they don't share, they don't share." The groups just "tend to do their own thing" although minimal collaboration is not usually interpreted as ownership issues or conflict amongst the groups. As one person explained, Sales training keeps going off on its own, internal training is sponsored through Human Resources, and Customer Service training evolved as business volumes dropped during the recession.

There is a political impact of having three training groups. Some people thought the organization was hesitant to identify an integrated approach to training, as training has always been "tacked on." For

example, product training has been tacked on to Sales and Marketing and continuous improvement training has been tacked on to Human Resources. Participants thought that staff would view the importance of training differently if they could, in the words of one person, "get a sense that this company is serious about training." Another individual said, "the real issue of having three training groups is less one of redundancy and infighting than the organization is not doing what is effective everywhere."

Some people perceive that the value of training comes from the Sales training group and that Marketing "owns" training with cross functionality with the Human Resources department. Others thought Sales training is driven from the top down (meaning visible executive support) while in-house training is driven from the bottom up (staff support). Although Customer Service trainers recently delivered a successful new program to their staff, the process was aided by the Sales training staff and developed using part of the sales training budget. Questions of a political nature would include whether Customer Service was at the mercy of Marketing and whether power and political issues exist between Marketing and Client Services? However, at the individual trainer level, Lynda commented that we needed to "figure out what it was they wanted us to train these people on and we had to nail this down from Marketing, our manager



and everybody else.” When members of management were asked about potential power and political issues in this instance, they said that the only feedback they had was that learners were afraid training meant they would eventually be relieved of their jobs.

Participants emphasized that management commitment to training differs in the business units and sometimes leads to conflict when unit staff is asked to collaborate on program planning. Those people who consider management commitment is shallow are more reluctant to share resources and expertise with staff in other units. As the importance of training is sometimes perceived as suspect in other units, one individual wanted to ensure that “for our involvement we want their involvement to be sure it works.” One executive agreed that power and political issues do exist within the organization, although not necessarily in training. He thought that the business unit structure itself influences program planning, as people are not willing to share best practices in terms of procedures within the organization. He cited sister company management, who are concerned if they ask for help initiating training programs that senior management at head office would perceive staff at the business unit is incompetent.

Other people pointed out that because some unit trainers have dual functions, facilitator development and training dollars are not equally forthcoming in all units. One person alluded to a sense of

separation, geographically and financially, when she referred to training staff in another unit as “you folks over there.” Still others expressed concern that management perceives business units as competitors rather than business partners. According to Rose, “we have been told that one particular unit is our competitor and that we are separate.”

Participants expressed confidence that the executive has a vision yet suggested the executive funnel this vision down so each group knows what to do to achieve it because now, according to one person, “it looks like nobody is driving the ship.” Staff lamented that information is seldom shared beyond the level of the senior management team and little is shared with the employees. One person attributed this scarcity of information to the corporate culture and decisions that “happen in private offices with a few people.” This individual was one of many people who felt the company is not very good at sharing information, whether it is on staff promotions or documenting procedures and communicating company policies.

Trainers felt that program information is poorly communicated throughout the organization and that managers are unaware of the types of training and variety of resources available in-house. Members of one focus group (Wilma, Rebecca, and Rose) agreed that across the board the company is not good at communications, whether it is

training or any other initiative within the company. However, one senior manager offered a combination of reasons why corporate communications are lacking in the organization. He suggested that the management group is very reserved and “not big on a lot of words.” In his opinion, there is no effective means to communicate on a reliable and consistent basis: senior management has yet to accept the importance of this kind of communications and, unless it ties into a value added to the business, communications is not seen as a priority.

To summarize this theme of Systemic Challenges, I have presented a few examples of simple forms of power and political issues at play in program planning. To review this chapter on Findings, five key themes emerged from analysis of the data, organizational context (*environmental influences*), organizational culture (*shared understandings*), systemic supports (*management influences*), perceptions of training (*influences on daily practice*) and systemic challenges (*power and political influences*). Findings outlined in this chapter reflect the meaning participants attach to the effects of organizational power and politics on program planning and training practices.

In chapter 5, I provide analysis and interpretation of these findings to explore how themes interact as multiple influences to affect

program planning and the daily practices of corporate trainers in a manufacturing environment.

In chapter 6, I revisit organizational power and political influences. Drawing upon the literature of adult education, the discussion in Chapter 6 is a critical analysis of more complex factors underlying power and political challenges in the workplace.

In chapter 7 I suggest some areas in which adult educators might want to concentrate future research and in chapter 8 I reflect upon ways in which my research on program planning continues to influence my personal growth and development.

## **Chapter 5**

### **CONCLUSIONS; DISCUSSION AND INTERPRETATION OF FINDINGS**

I begin this chapter by extracting a concise set of five conclusions from the findings. These conclusions parallel the five themes that I identified in chapter 4 based on the data. In the remainder of the chapter I discuss and interpret these conclusions. My lens for this discussion and interpretation is to understand what relationships, if any, exist between organizational power and politics, corporate trainers, and program planning.

A number of major conclusions emerged from the findings. These conclusions are discussed in detail below and are as follows:

1. Multiple influences affecting program planning are not limited to companies practicing Senge's (1990) systems thinking approach to business. Multiple influences also persist in companies where positions are structured by function in hierarchies on organization charts.
2. Overall, management and staff share an understanding that training is primarily a process of facilitation. This perception ignores the strategic, broader elements of program planning (conducting needs assessment, identifying learning outcomes,

program design, choosing facilitation methods and evaluation of training, and learning).

3. Systemic supports or management influences on program planning are admirable and tangible yet more representative of a concrete approach to training than an approach requiring higher levels of analyses on the relationship of training to company and staff performance.
4. Perceptions of management and trainers vary on the role of trainers, which leads trainers to question how training, if at all, fits into the overall direction of the organization.
5. Rapid growth, corporate culture and organizational systems present traditional challenges to program planning. Although not named as such, power (a capacity to act) and politics (who is favoured over whom) also challenge program planning and influence trainers in ways not often discussed.

I discuss and interpret these conclusions in the next five sections. In addition, I extend this discussion of conclusions into chapter 6, providing a sixth conclusion that states there is a perceived mismatch between my assumption that people would identify and talk about power issues with me, and their apparent reluctance to discuss power and political influences on program planning. Therefore, in chapter 6 I present additional meanings of power, including a brief

look at the relationship between power and gender, in order to open up discussion of more critical understandings of power beyond what I found in the data. But first, I begin with discussing my conclusions about organizational context.

### **Organizational Context**

*Multiple influences affecting program planning are not limited to companies practicing Senge's (1990) systems thinking approach to business. Multiple influences also persist in companies where positions are structured by function in hierarchies on organization charts.*

In an organizational hierarchy, positions grouped by departments perform specific functions, often with minimal crossover amongst the departments, for example, marketing, sales, production, and finance departments. Although this type of structure reduces ambiguity for employees in terms of established standards of performance and channels of communications, this kind of central structure also constrains or reduces staff autonomy (Robbins, 1998, p. 504), leading individuals to wait for instructions from people in higher positions on the organization chart.

In contrast, a process approach prevails in organizations practising a systems approach in which decentralization of control, departmental interrelationships, and collaboration frame the business

strategy. For example, using this type of approach in a manufacturing training environment, it would be necessary to identify who is part of the production process from beginning to end to ensure those individuals are represented at what Cervero and Wilson (1994a) call the planning table. According to Robbins (1998), this systems or interrelated strategy is desirable during the introduction of major new products and services as it attempts to eliminate boundaries amongst specialized departments and positions (p. 498).

I offer this brief interpretation of hierarchal and strategic thinking to show why I began this study with a second assumption, that this organization was already practicing Von Bertalanffy's general systems thinking (1968) and Senge's (1990) systems approach, capitalizing on the interrelationships prevalent in complex operations. As the company in this study was introducing the features and benefits of new products to the marketplace, and as I was coaching a training department that demonstrated what Robbins (1998) refers to as "looser controls on new undertakings" (p. 499), I assumed the organization overall approached business practices with a systems view. This assumption accounts for why I was intent on exploring what, if any, systemic supports and systemic limitations influenced program planning and corporate trainers.



However, I now realize that my going-in assumption on a systems environment was shaky at best. It was born of stereotypical thinking developed during my lengthy contract — primarily with one department only in the company — and then projected onto the company as a whole.

Emerging data rocked my assumption. As the central person in data collection and analysis, I quickly discovered a chasm between my perception and the views of participants as they described the hierarchal nature of positions depicted on their organization chart and the numerous processes through which requests for training in particular must move. It was only then that I realized how my perception diverged from their reality. Unwittingly, I as the researcher had mentally imposed systems as a way of thinking onto an organization thinking in the tradition of a hierarchy.

However, a hierarchy is still a type of system. As Haines (2000) explains, there is a natural hierarchy of systems within systems, each one interacting with the others. This hierarchy is subject to multiple influences similar to those found in a systems-based organization. What may be less evident in a hierarchy are the interrelationships among key components of the system and the ways in which decisions are made (see Senge, Kleiner et al, 1994, p. 90). This meant that I had to go deeper into the data seeking dominant themes indicative of

multiple influences affecting program planning. Differentiating context from culture further enabled me to accept that although the company is indeed structured as a hierarchy, it operates very successfully at least in terms of strong financial performance, using what Robbins (1998) would describe as "cost-minimization" strategy. This type of strategy is represented by tight controls, work specialization, and high centralization practices (p. 499). Respectful of the company's technological advances, I was also able to concede that hierarchal structures and systems thinking are not necessarily either-or situations in successful organizations.

It is important to note here that "hierarchal" in this organization is not limited to the grouping of positions on an organization chart, nor is it limited to how jobs are formally divided by function, grouped and coordinated. Hierarchy prevails in this organization in the narrow span of control managers have, and sometimes do not have, in their daily decision-making as it follows the chain of command. It is important to note, however, that this particular hierarchy does not preclude that members at the top of the hierarchy are unapproachable. Rather, members of management *are* approachable according to Maurie, who pointed out that "although this is a top-down company you certainly can talk to them. Any employee can talk to anybody, there is no question they can talk to us."

Accessibility to, and open lines of communication with, management *are* desirable in organizations. However, of greater importance is for members of management to understand how employees may interpret organizational structure in different ways. Staff will act upon their perceptions, as evident when they bypass structure and evade policies and procedures in order to hasten executive approvals in program planning.

Taken together, policies and procedures are part of organizational context. In this study, participants explained how staff members who want to hasten the approval process on financial requests are often more successful bypassing procedures and decision-makers and going directly to a member of the senior management or executive teams to expedite approvals. This practice ensures that policies and procedures are not consistently or fairly upheld by either management or staff. In terms of program planning, trainers buy themselves program preparation time by hastening the approval process, yet management members condoning procedural shortcuts undermine the structure or chain of command. By doing so, they reinforce existing patterns of behaviour and convey a cultural message that it is acceptable for some people — and perhaps not others — to “short-circuit” the system. This perception, now embedded in organizational context, has also become part of the organizational

culture and environment as seasoned staff members share with new staff members their understanding that to make something happen, one must see the executives. This interaction of context and culture provides another example of Senge's (1990) multiple forces acting upon, rather than independently of, each other to influence staff behaviour in the work environment.

Environmental influences (institutional culture and/or forces inside and outside the organization) potentially affect the organization's performance. In a broader context, such influences typically include the marketplace with new competitors emerging, customers changing buying preferences, suppliers facing raw materials shortages, and technological breakthroughs. These are all in addition to government regulatory agencies, public pressure groups and a fluctuating economy. According to Robbins (1998), organizations must be mindful of these external forces for the environmental uncertainties associated with each type of influence (p. 500). However, environmental uncertainties of a different kind impacted this organization's training thrust.

At the time of this research in 2002, the United States was trying to recover from the attacks of September 11, 2001. Prior to 9-11, the company and training staff had enjoyed rapid success in their sales training initiatives. After 9-11, however, training successes

dwindled due to economic upheavals in the external environment that created surplus product and resulted in the lay-off of numerous staff. The company recognized that existing training practices no longer matched “environmental needs” (see Robbins, 1998, p. 602) as the marketplace, staff, customers and suppliers turned their collective focus to rebuilding customer confidence and sales, and international participants fearful of travel stopped attending training programs. Of necessity, this collective focus took precedence over training initiatives and reflects a cultural or shared understanding of how to survive, operationally, in a sagging economy.

### **Organizational Culture**

*Overall, management and staff share an understanding that training is primarily a process of facilitation. This perception ignores the strategic, broader elements of program planning (conducting needs assessment, identifying learning outcomes, program design, choosing facilitation methods and evaluation of training, and learning).*

Study participants used the term training as an umbrella term to describe all aspects of program planning, design, facilitation, and evaluation. During the data collection phase, no one questioned the meaning of the phrase program planning or the word training or their

interrelationship. This suggests a shared understanding by staff that has become part of the organization's dominant culture and contributes to their use of the terms interchangeably.

This shared perception leaves room for *under*-appreciation by management and staff of the substantial number of hours trainers must invest in their practices for effective, "behind-the-scenes" program design (typically five hours of preparation time for each hour of facilitation time) which precedes program facilitation and evaluation. This surface understanding and minimal allotment of preparation time especially influences occasional trainers, given the amount of personal time they ethically devote to preparing a program in addition to their daily job responsibilities. As this study was conducted at head office, where the majority of staff is located, and as training initiatives vary geographically with each business unit and as organizations represent interdependent subsystems that affect each other (see Rothwell & Cookson, 1997), I wonder how perceptions on training shared by the dominant culture are communicated to, and/or prevail in, the mini-cultures of the business units.

As a result, I suggest that there is little formal program planning in the organization. Staff members accept that training is conducted on an ad hoc basis (for a specific purpose) rather than on a long term planning basis driven by organizational goals. They further accept that

at least three of the separate training groups have been formed on a similar ad hoc basis, each with different messages, mandates, and audiences. Maintaining the status quo in training groups ensures familiar but perhaps outdated practices. However, if managers and staff habitually accept the status quo, they lose the opportunity to: (a) minimize or eliminate duplication of training initiatives; (b) encourage trainers to consistently share their expertise, material resources, and costs; and (c) elevate the image of training to one of a strategic business investment achievable through long-range program planning.

As well, if the rest of the organization exists to support sales, then a long-term training plan is missing, a plan for staff to provide a stronger foundation to sales *and* for management to adhere to even in quieter times. Absence of a plan contradicts the company's employee handbook, in which management states its belief in staff development. In part it says that all individual training needs identified on annual performance appraisals will be met within the fiscal year as part of an annual training plan. Commitment to a plan would also eliminate the existing company image that training funds are more readily available for staff dealing directly with customers and funds are less forthcoming for production staff in little contact with paying customers.

These culturally imposed perceptions of training result in systemic supports and systemic challenges to program planning. First,

I discuss my conclusion regarding systemic supports. Then I discuss perceptions of training, following which are concluding thoughts on systemic limitations to planning.

### **Systemic Supports**

*Systemic supports or management influences on program planning are admirable, tangible yet more representative of a concrete approach to training than an approach requiring higher levels of analyses on the relationship of training to company and staff performance.*

The company backs training to the extent that it provides financial support, up-to-date facilities, and resources; in addition it provides verbal and written recognition for programs and trainers in company newsletters. When available, members of management join training sessions to sing Happy Birthday to participants celebrating birthdays and to provide each person with a gift book about Canada, an unusual form of recognition very much appreciated by trainers and workshop participants alike.

Management values programs for immediate, measurable results that generate payback to the bottom line. However, some members of management admit to gauging results more by the value of resources



trainers request than by tracking the degree to which learners transfer learning from workshops to workplace.

Intangible supports to trainers (ongoing professional development, measuring the effects of training, and linking program planning to strategic goals) are essential for helping trainers to visualize and perform their roles beyond their instrumental focus on content and instructional techniques. If the company measured the impact of program planning relative to strategic goals, I suggest this higher level of analysis might reduce or eliminate what Argyris (1999) calls "single-loop learning" (p. 69), in which organizations attempt to solve problems by focusing attention on immediate moments-in-time. Single-loop learning usually prevails in organizations anxious to correct immediate problems without also questioning or altering assumptions underlying the problems.

It could be more advantageous for management to practice Argyris' (1999) double-loop learning (p. 69) to identify as many as possible assumptions, interrelationships, and structures underlying those moments-in-time. Ideally, for the organization to achieve long-range organizational effectiveness, it could be useful to practice consistently a combination of single and double loop learning as found in a systems approach to business practices. This approach could also reduce situations in organizations in which members of management

too frequently focus on isolated parts of the system and wonder why major problems never get solved.

At first, I imagined program planning was caught in a tug-of-war between systemic supports (management influences) and systemic challenges (power and political influences). However, given management's focus on the concrete nature of program planning, I began to realize that forces influencing program planning were not pulling the planning process in opposite directions. Rather, these forces were acting upon and resisting each other to keep program planning in what Lewin (1951) calls a force field or state of equilibrium. Picture Lewin's social or driving forces (such as trainers' passion for program planning) colliding with political or restraining forces (such as administrative policies and procedures). If we assume that political or restraining forces tend to hinder social forces, and that systemic supports and systemic challenges are simultaneously driven by management, we can begin to look at how perceptions of training shape the health of program planning. Trapped between the forces of systemic supports and challenges, program planning will likely remain static rather than evolving through growth and change.

## Perceptions of Training

*Overall, perceptions of management and trainers vary on the role of trainers, which leads trainers to question how training, if at all, fits into the overall direction of the organization.*

For the most part, participants *agreed* on the variety of factors that influence program planning and trainers in the organization. Although one participant suggested that this study would uncover “enormous disparity in responses from management,” in fact, just the opposite occurred; there was minimal disparity in responses including those from management. Where participants *disagreed* was on how the company views training.

For example, those members of the executive and senior management teams who participated in this study disagree on the company’s commitment towards training. Differing views challenge the company’s position on training and development as stated in the staff handbook and cause confusion about the company’s espoused and expressed commitments to training. In addition, members of management and leaders of the various business units have demonstrated varying levels of commitment to training, inferring that only a few of them actually view training as a long-term investment in both company and staff performance. The fact that discretionary, not

sales-related, training is cancelled in bad times suggests that the actual decision-makers view internal training as an expense.

Cancellation and/or elimination of programs in bad times fosters additional skepticism about training and the trainers within the company. As staff identifies training programs by the names of the trainers facilitating the individual programs, trainers experience a loss of identity when they are reassigned to other projects or when programs are cut back or eliminated. Reassignment results in less time to prepare existing programs and erosion of trainer morale and motivation, which then compromises program design and facilitation. Cancellation of programs forces trainers to “look for things to train in order to remain trainers” and likely contributed to the resignations of two trainers in search of career paths more aligned with personal goals.

Yet some members of management consider reassignment of trainers to other projects as a way to expand trainer credibility by heightening awareness of business practices and positioning of product. However, as trainers tend to “train the details” (Slusarski, 1998, p. 141), they are more focussed on day-to-day, instrumental influences such as program approvals, content, resources, availability of administrative support, numbers of learners and in some cases, their individual career paths as trainers. The resulting gap in

perceptions between management and staff of the trainers' role leads to staff confusion on how, if at all, training fits into the overall direction of the organization.

I too was confused by these perceptions when trainers, and most of the management staff, had difficulty focusing on what the company is doing right, meaning they had difficulty identifying ways in which the larger organization supports the training environment. Members of management and trainers were often silent when asked to look beyond financial support into how the company endorses training. I am not sure if participants were reluctant to cross what Slusarski (1998) calls the culturally imposed "line of silence" (p. 207) when talking about the organization as a whole or if they were truly unaware of the bases for corporate decisions on training. In addition to responses such as "don't go there," and "some departments withhold help," non-verbal responses of laughter and guffaws often erupted when people were asked what the company is doing right. Their reactions strongly suggest elements of what was *not* being said when asked to examine the broader implications of how organizational strategy, culture and systems fit together to influence corporate decisions. As a result, I decided to continue this discussion in more detail in chapter 6, where I provide critical analysis of assumptions on power and political influences.

## **Systemic Challenges**

*Rapid growth, corporate culture and organizational systems present traditional challenges to program planning. Although not named as such, power (a capacity to act) and politics (who is favoured over whom) also challenge program planning and influence trainers in ways not often discussed.*

Discussion of the traditional challenges of growth, culture, and systems can be found elsewhere in this chapter under conclusions on organizational context and organizational culture. However, non-verbal cues from participants, such as body language and obvious discomfort discussing power and political influences indicated an awareness of power and politics that must have been high in their level of consciousness yet suggested there was “more than meets the eye” in our discussions.

Therefore, I further conclude there was a perceived mismatch between my assumption that people would identify, and talk about, power issues with me and their apparent reluctance (or inability) to discuss these issues. Due to the complex nature and difficulty of naming power and political influences, I continue this analysis in greater depth in the next chapter in which I try to characterize “unseen” power and politics affecting program planning.

## Chapter 6

### **CRITICAL ANALYSIS OF ASSUMPTIONS ON POWER AND POLITICAL INFLUENCES**

This chapter extends discussion of my fifth conclusion on the systemic challenges of power and politics by analysing in greater depth how power and politics were influencing program planning and trainers in ways not often discussed. Therefore, my sixth and final conclusion is:

6. *There was a perceived mismatch between my assumption that people would identify, and talk about, power issues with me and their apparent reluctance (or inability) to discuss these issues.*

In this chapter I first discuss what people were not saying, then interpret their non-verbal communications about power and politics. From these clues, I analyse their implicit, unspoken knowledge of organizational power; then I discuss the meanings of organizational power and politics. Finally, I examine dependence and inter-dependence as issues of organizational power and politics in program planning.

## What People Were Not Saying

During our meetings, I was disturbed by what participants were *not* saying to answer questions on power and politics in program planning. I also began to wonder if there was a relationship between power and gender in light of non-verbal responses from some participants to my casual question of why women were not represented in senior management positions. There were several hints that people were uncomfortable with these types of questions. Their body language and discomfort indicated an awareness of power and politics that must have been high in their level of consciousness, yet made me think there was “more than meets the eye” in our discussions.

I was particularly puzzled by the fact that nobody identified power as an issue. Initial analysis of findings suggested there was a mismatch between what I expected to find in the study (that power and political issues influence program planning) and what the data supports (rapid company growth, corporate culture, and organizational systems account for limitations to program planning).

Upon closer analysis, however, the mismatch was not between my expectations and my findings. The mismatch was between my *assumption* that people would identify, and talk about, power issues



with me and their reluctance (or inability) to do so; that is, their reluctance to name power and political influences and to discuss how these elements affect program planning.

I now wonder if participants' reluctance is a limitation of the organizational system in which they practice. Are their silences more telling of an *unseen* use of power at play in this company? Do people shelve their own observations and squelch their good ideas as a means of self-preservation in a workplace culture where, potentially, challenging the system could be job-limiting or job-eliminating?

Based on participants' reactions to my question about gender, I began to question what power relations existed relative to gender, given that 9 of the 10 trainers/training staff are female whereas senior management participants are all male. In particular, I recalled one metaphor that had remained prominent throughout the course of my research interviews.

Two trainers had described the relationship with their supervisor as "he was the Dad and we were the kids." Allison and Rebecca agreed that when their supervisor (whom they highly respected) was promoted, his focus shifted away from training towards his new responsibilities, although he was still accountable for the training function in his new role. Allison said,

All of a sudden Dad got a new girlfriend and we were no longer the focus of his attention. When that happened we didn't have the support we necessarily needed, we didn't have direction and so we were almost at the point where we were looking for things to train so we could remain as trainers.

At the time we laughed at their choice of words.

However, upon reflection, my sense is that Allison and Rebecca's intense disappointment in their supervisor's change of status was actually reinforcing the status quo and power elements in their relationship with him (see Bierema, 2001 for similar findings). In addition, Brooks (2000) finds from her research on transformative learning that, although some women are more relational than men are, the challenge for women is to integrate independence and competence into their relationships in order to avoid submerging their own sense of identity and power (p. 148).

To explore my concerns further and to support this sixth conclusion theoretically, I first provide examples of numerous, less-than-subtle hints of how participants appeared uncomfortable with these types of discussions. Next I draw from literature in order to present additional meanings of power and politics as a way to open up

for discussion a more critical understanding of power, including the relationship between power and gender, beyond what I found in the data. Last, I offer a view of power that is broader than my understanding at the outset of this study (a capacity to act) and frame the concept within the systems theory that has guided this study.

### ***Non-Verbal Communications***

Examples of non-verbal communications in response to power and political questions include laughter, but no answers, from a few trainers when asked if management perceives some training programs as more important than other programs. Other individuals chuckled when asked if the various training groups enjoy equal consideration by management. Facial contortions suggested the answer as “yes” to my question of whether there was a dominant training group favoured in the organization. These facial expressions made me wish I had video-taped as well as audio-taped the discussions! Many people struggled to define what the company is doing right in program planning. If they answered this question, they spoke in such muffled tones I could barely hear them, yet readily spoke with passion on what the organization could do to improve training.

Non-verbal responses were similar in “answer” to why women are not represented in senior management positions. Some participants laughed and feigned coughing and another participant,

male, said only "this is a very male-oriented company." There were varying perspectives from the few who were willing to discuss the influences of corporate culture with respect to women progressing in the organization.

One trainer suggested that the gender issue would come up more if she aspired to becoming the Director of Training whereas another trainer thought there *is* room for a woman to advance in the organization. In her opinion, adding a woman in a top position would balance the gender issue as there are only men in senior positions; however, she thought the executives were likely more concerned with having the "right capabilities" rather than the "right gender."

One could question why the first trainer was *not* aspiring to a higher position. Was her comment indicative of her awareness of organizational gender relations? One could also question if capabilities *would* prevail over gender, as suggested by the second trainer. In other words, is her insight accurate or perhaps an example of what Bierema (2001) discovered in her study of women, work and learning? Bierema found that many women overlook, discount, or conceal their knowledge of gendered power relations when they accept masculine work cultures without questioning how such environments reinforce systemic discrimination (p. 58).

Both comments align with Larwood and Wood's (1995) study on women and career progression, in which they found that women naively see education and hard work within the formal rules as ways to move ahead. According to Larwood and Wood, although women "know" working hard does not matter, they still think it will and are more likely to trust and believe what they are told (p. 58).

When asked to define power, some people giggled whereas others said the amount of power a person holds corresponds with position title. When asked to define, or provide examples of, politics in the workplace, a number of participants remained silent. I am unsure if workplace politics are also "unseen" or may be perceived as similar to societal power and politics of the "elections model" kind. Many people choose not to discuss this model of politics or, according to Bierema (2001), because they are unaware that workplaces are social institutions that mirror the power structures and forces in society (p. 55). Larwood and Wood (1995) explored such silence surrounding discussion of power and politics. They concluded that although the issue of power and politics has gained substantially in importance in women's career success, discussion of this topic has not been "widely welcomed or received" in most in-house training programs, as such topics compete with staff's focus on learning how to improve performance (p. 59).

### ***Implicit Knowledge of Power***

In terms of power, my sense is that staff wittingly, or unwittingly, uses other people's power *and* reproduces power relations, especially when they need to get something done. They *know* who holds the power as evidenced by the following statement: "we know they have it because if we need something done and have asked the people that report to them to get something done and they say no, we go to the executive and magically it gets done." Staff members *use* that person's power to bypass hierarchal channels of approval ("if you want something done you kind of whisper it to someone") and to wield their own power when they coach new employees to follow suit ("this is a well known rule within the company, it will not get escalated unless we go to them"). Additionally, members of the executive group reinforce the reproduction of power relations by often granting staff member requests directly. This type of reciprocal reinforcement, staff and executive using power to bypass and influence others, coincides with Hayes and Flannery's (2000) suggestion that workplaces have hidden agendas that reproduce power structures (p. 12).

Here I would like to revisit one person's statement as a final example of power and politics at play in the organization. In this person's words, "when times get tough, power shifts up" meaning the

executive group periodically withdraws — and then restores — the kinds of decisions middle management can make. This type of executive behaviour reflects what Pfeffer (1992) calls a “plague of centralization” in his attempts to understand power in organizations (p. 31).

I suggest that, unconsciously, the highest level of management is, in effect, “training” middle management *not* to take action and to *only* view themselves as decision-makers and thinkers in good times. Assumedly, middle management staff has little choice in relinquishing power to make decisions, as they must go along with directives from upper management. These same middle managers, however, will still be held accountable for their responsibilities even though input into how to carry them out is often reduced by top-level management. A consequence of this approach is that it can perpetuate an organizational mindset that the skills of figuring out what to do are more important than the skills of getting things done.

There is evidence of this type of conditioned thinking in a few examples: (a) one person asked me at the end of our discussions if he had answered all the questions in the way *I* wanted him to; (b) another person asked me *not* to tape our discussions; and (c) the same individual in point (b) subsequently chose *not* to respond to my

numerous requests to verify if I had accurately interpreted my written account of his interview responses.

The next part of my discussion returns to the literature in order to examine additional meanings of power and politics. The purpose of this is to consider a more critical understanding of power and politics, within which I briefly discuss the relationship between power and gender, beyond what I found in the data.

### ***The Meaning of Power and Politics***

First, I wondered why power and politics are linked together or used interchangeably in the literature (e. g., see Block, 1990; Pfeffer, 1992; French & Bell, 1999; Coopey & Burgoyne, 2000) and usually with a negative connotation (e. g., Brookfield, 2001). I realized that the word *people* is often omitted in definitions and explanations of power and politics. I also realized that as researchers we could make a social case out of a business case, if we assume that “people” are central to power and politics as we use, influence, and are influenced by, these processes in the workplace. I assume that it is *how* we as people go about influencing other people to achieve our desired ends that perpetuates the negative image of power and politics to the extent that people appear uncomfortable, or choose not to discuss these concepts.



Although French and Bell (1999) endorse the negative image in the literature, claiming power and politics set up “battlefields” for negotiation, as researchers we can apply their vivid metaphor to the workplace in a positive sense. Visualizing decision-making, resource allocation, and conflict mediation as organizational battlefields, we can explore power and politics as social *and* integral to getting things done, as ultimately organizational and individual success depend upon people working with and through each other.

For example, in this study members of separate training groups have varying interests in program planning yet sometimes must depend upon, and collaborate with, each other to get things done. A case in point is the Customer Service’s in-house, order-entry program. Design and facilitation of this program was imposed upon the Customer Service occasional trainers by their manager at the request of the head of another department. Development of this program was heavily influenced by these two senior managers, the availability and amount of program funds that came out of the other department’s budget, and input from full-time trainers in the other department.

The point of this example is to convey the variety of competing interests in launching this program and inherent power and political influences in play from the outset. It is also a confirmation of the powerlessness experienced initially by the four occasional trainers as

they tried to figure out “what *they* wanted us to do.” Despite the number of interests in this program, I suggest that the trainers began to overcome their powerlessness and to develop their own strategies when they first identified “who we are and the need to do our own stuff rather than going by their style.” Then they acknowledged their existing grasp of concepts to include in the program and, last, they explored their individual training styles as none of them had co-facilitated a training program before.

They went on to develop and facilitate such an effective program that they received awards and company-wide recognition by management and staff alike! Although the trainers did not name power and politics as influences by competing interests, *how* they described their tactics reflects Mabry and Wilson’s (2001) findings that adult educators *do* know a great deal “practically” about how they negotiate power and interests (p. 264).

Their success and recognition is also indicative of what Bierema (1998) discovered while studying the development of women executives in organizational culture. Bierema found that women experienced progressive development across three stages which she called: *compliant novices*, *competence seekers*, and *change agents* (p. 111). In her view, compliant novices acquiesced to organizational norms and people in positions of power. However, as women gained

more confidence and discovered they were valued by their organizations, they adopted less dependence on the opinions and direction of authority figures and replaced their reliance with a “stronger tendency to follow their own intuition” (p. 110). Similarly, the four occasional trainers in my study gained their confidence and momentum once they began to rely more on their own resources and less on the direction and authority of other people.

The moral of this story can be found in Cervero and Wilson’s (1994a) argument that program planning must be understood as a social activity in which educators negotiate personal and organizational interests within relationships of power. Educators adjust their practices daily in the face of multiple influences — the essence of systems thinking according to Von Bertalanffy (1968) and Senge (1990) — as they influence, interact with, and are influenced by their colleagues. However, educators are not the only group of people facing multiple realities daily.

### ***Dependence and Interdependence: Issues of Organizational Power and Politics in Program Planning***

Pfeffer (1992) highlights human dependence and interdependence as social necessities of power and politics. In his opinion, if we as educators ignore issues of power and influence in organizations, we forfeit the chance to understand them as critical

social processes and to train *all* staff to cope with them. Larwood and Wood (1995) concur. They suggest it is time to acknowledge power and politics as a way people realistically accomplish what is expected of them and to coach both women and men on the mechanisms and use of power and politics at work.

Kirk and Brassine (2000) offer a more compelling reason to develop political awareness of staff. In their opinion, power and politics is an unfolding story in the relationship between organizational and individual learning. Although I agree with Kirk and Brassine that facilitators play a leading role ensuring staff understand and engage with power issues, I emphasize that the story does not begin with facilitators. Managers, in partnership with facilitators and staff, have the potential to establish an environment, rather than an arena, in which to initiate and sustain staff dialogue on the tensions of power and politics. Facilitators definitely play a critical role, although not a neutral one as in times past.

However, in my story, the leading characters are staff members themselves and the story line will be activated only when all staff members aspire to be facilitators of their own personal and professional learning. To support this statement, in the next chapter I offer a few suggestions for future research on the use of power and politics in staff development.

What difference does this study make? This research adds to the existing literature base in Adult Education and would appeal to researchers and practitioners in HRD and Organizational Development. It confirms the existence of power and political influences on individual trainers and *their* construction of knowledge rather than on learners, who are, generally, more frequently represented in the literature of adult education. It informs organizations of the origins of systemic influences and impact on organizational learning, as well as systemic supports for, and limitations to, corporate program planning. It urges trainers to consider the broader organizational context, culture and systems influencing their organizations and their daily practices. It highlights ways trainers and members of management are keenly aware of organizational power relations yet may be unwilling or unable to discuss how — as individuals or in groups — they sustain and reproduce these relations or how their use of power and politics is influenced by gender.

Darlene, one of the trainers, described this study as a “snapshot in time” only. She is correct. The findings cannot be used to generalize to other companies or staff employed by other organizations. Through this study, I appeal to researchers and practitioners across these three disciplines to adopt an open systems approach to practice based upon sharing our findings on the complexities of adult learning.

## Chapter 7

### IMPLICATIONS FOR PRACTICE

This study explored the effects of organizational power and politics on program planning and the daily practices of corporate trainers. In a study of this nature, it is not surprising that more questions surfaced than the number of questions guiding the research. What *is* surprising are some of the unexpected findings and conclusions that emerged during this study and upon which I have based a few suggestions for future research.

*First, I suggest that researchers, practitioners, consultants and members of organizations and professional associations associated with adult education, human resources development and organizational development refrain from using the program title, "Train the Trainer." This has got to go! "Program Planning and Facilitation" is one suggested title.*

I suggest we embark on a collaborative journey to research and develop position and program titles, content, methods of facilitation, and evaluation more representative of Slusarski's (1998) descriptors "educating" and "developing" staff and less reminiscent of the historical, stereotypical perception of training as skills development or behaviour modification.

One dictionary (Webster's, 1988) defines the word *trainer* as a person who trains animals such as racehorses, show dogs, and circus beasts ... or works with athletes (p. 1418). A more current dictionary (Random House, 1998) does not even include the noun *trainer* yet explains the verb *train* as "to form habits, thoughts and behaviour by discipline and instruction" (p. 755). These definitions evoke images of coercion and raise questions regarding use of the word *trainer*.

Where and when did this term originate? If definitions apply more to handling animals and athletes, how did this word become entrenched in organizational jargon today? If jargon is language specific to a particular profession or group, why, in the case of "trainer," does it span at least three disciplines (adult education, human resources development, organizational development)? More importantly *why* does its use continue, a single word that is understood to cover a broad range of meanings in addition to its intended, narrow meaning? *Why* do so many people in so many organizations understand this word so readily? Is its use peculiar to Western culture and organizations only? How do trainers interpret dictionary descriptions of themselves and how are they perceived by *their* learners if training is portrayed in these ways?

As part of exploring the language of our fields, we as researchers and practitioners could begin by helping to establish a new, more

comprehensive role for trainers in our ever-changing Canadian business environment. We could collaborate to change perceptions and titles accordingly and forge a training-adult education link missing from workplaces today. The new role for novice and seasoned trainers would expand to ensure facilitators do more than manipulate learner behaviour. Facilitators could learn to manage learning environments by integrating business perspective into practice, critical thinking into corporate culture, and ethical obligations into program planning to help learners identify the relevancy of work place learning in all aspects of their lives.

*Second, it would be interesting to explore the self-image of occasional trainers in other workplace environments, given that four of the nine trainers in this study shared similar concerns about how occasional trainers are perceived by their colleagues in the work place.*

In this study, occasional trainers experienced the same professional development program conducted by the same external provider as did the dedicated trainers, although the occasional trainers attended at different times and for 2, (rather than 3) days, at the request of the organization which was concerned about time constraints.

Occasional trainers commented that they do not perceive themselves as trainers and were convinced that management and the



rest of staff shared their perception. They suggested two reasons for these perceptions: (a) they design and facilitate sessions occasionally and secondary to their regular positions, and (b) the title of trainer does not appear on their business cards.

Again many questions surface, this time in terms of consistency in workplace training practices, the power and politics of including some members of staff and not others in workshops, trainer self-confidence, and self-image.

What are the business rationales, results, consequences, and costs of providing partial professional development to members of staff who potentially could fill in for trainers' practices elsewhere in the organization? Who decides who will be included in which programs and how long each program should be? How often, if at all, are participants invited to participate in programs actually invited to planning meetings to offer their input on balancing position demands and time constraints? Would self images and corporate images of both occasional and dedicated trainers be more respected if professional development was conducted off-site and acknowledged with certificates of completion? Are professional images culturally imposed? How do trainers themselves perpetuate an existing culture, wittingly or otherwise? Is the issue of self-image prevalent only in occasional trainers in other organizations? What role does organizational power

and politics play in perpetuating this image? What role does language play in peoples' perceptions of other people, for example titles on business cards?

*Third, I suggest exploring literature to determine what, if any, research has been conducted into the interrelationship of power, gender, and ethnic, not organizational, cultures in the workplace, in particular studies where non-white males hold positions of authority.*

Although I have just begun to explore the literature base on power and gender in general, it appears that research on white males dominates the literature. It would be important to find out the degree to which results of research on white males is confirmed, or not, in studies of men — and women — of other cultures who hold senior work place positions in which power, gender, and ethnicity influence each other.

Power and politics, similar to the concept of motivation, has been talked about for years in the workplace. As in trying to visualize motivation, researchers are only able to visualize power and political influences by looking for certain behaviours indicative of their presence. Adding to this aura of elusiveness is how power and politics have been stereotypically brushed with a negative connotation, as they are usually discussed covertly in workplaces.

Therefore, my last recommendation for future research builds upon Kirk and Brassine's (2000) ideas about the politics of facilitation and Larwood and Wood's (1995) suggestion that companies help staff to identify, and cope with, power and political influences in the workplace.

*Fourth, I suggest educators such as external consultants and internal facilitators can help organizations to start talking about these types of influences. The goal would be first to acknowledge their existence; second to coach internal facilitators on naming the influences of their personal politics in program planning; and third, to share with all staff, including members of management, positive ways in which to use influence.*

One way to introduce this type of initiative could be to enlist management's support on introducing, and participating in, orientation sessions for existing and new staff on the ways to identify, discuss, and manage power and political influences in the workplace. This kind of initiative could be held in partnership with coaching in-house facilitators to further identify how, unwittingly, they may be reproducing their personal politics in their programs and the subsequent impact on learners and learning environments. It could be challenging to obtain management buy-in, yet very exciting to conduct a qualitative study of facilitators openly encouraged by executives to

explore the extent to which politics in their learning groups mirror similar influences in the wider organization. Integrating a deeper analysis of personal and organizational politics into workplace learning would expand the role of facilitators — and staff — and take a giant step towards increasing systemic supports to corporate program planning.

## Chapter 8

### EPILOGUE

#### LOOKING BACK ... LOOKING AHEAD

I chose the title of this chapter as a way to reflect upon how my research on program planning and trainers contributes to my personal and professional development. Although my research and own growth are works in progress, here I try to answer three questions guiding these reflections:

1. Who Am I?
2. What Are My Commitments?
3. Who Am I Becoming?

***First, Looking Back ...*** As an endurance athlete, specifically a long-distance runner and cyclist, I began this learning journey with a clear sense of self and my abilities, self-imposed discipline from years of physical training and a goal to finally elevate my mental fitness to the level of my physical fitness. I knew who I was and the essence of my commitments, although I seldom gave any thought to what I was becoming as a person. Professionally, I maintained dual practices — independent training consultant by day and continuous learning faculty by night, in a five-course adult education program. In both roles I designed, delivered and evaluated programs — from a business

perspective — for corporate trainers and part time college instructors. My passion is working with adult learners. I have an insatiable need to understand adults as learners. However, as I seldom had paid much attention to the concept of *critical thinking*, I did not realize its importance in learning or know how to stimulate critical thought in learners or myself. At the time, I also saw no need to look outside of myself in relation to what was going on in the larger Canadian society.

In program planning and delivery, I focused mostly on choosing and modelling instructional techniques to help participants teach *their* adult learners more effectively. I believed that if my program planning provided intellectually safe, non-threatening learning environments, kept learners busy, and allowed me to adhere to Tyler's (1949) technical-rational teaching model (conducting needs assessments, developing learning outcomes, program design, program facilitation, and program evaluation), that I could safely interpret learner "busy-ness" as indicative of their learning. I was more concerned with *how* I could convey material rather than *why*, meaning my underlying assumptions for *why* I chose certain techniques. I had little rationale for choosing these techniques and no philosophy of practice. I had no idea that my personal politics, that is my beliefs and principles, influenced my professional practices.

***Who Am I Now?*** I am an adult educator with a business

perspective *and* a philosophy of practice. My passion for working with adult learners has not changed. It has intensified, as has my need to understand adults as learners. What *has* changed is acceptance of myself as an adult educator who is weaving together the threads of my dual practices. Moving from role of training technician meeting adult learners' needs to adult educator meeting needs *and* fostering participant reflection on practices and attitudes, I am weaving these threads into what Cookson (1998) suggests is sharing a common field of practice (p. 5).

I am no longer focused solely on the instructional techniques of learning. Now I frame my practice with both thinking and theory as I encourage participants, and myself, to situate learning within broader social and political contexts. My role is to enhance the learning process rather than to control learning. For example, I have stopped walking around the room to ask individual learning groups if they need any help before they request it. Where previously I thought I was creating safe, non-threatening small group learning experiences, I now acknowledge that I was reluctant to relinquish control, interrupting learners thinking for themselves at my request and reinforcing learner dependency on me.

I have also stopped letting participants exert pressure on me to influence how they want me to behave. For example, we are currently

using a college text that contains more information than *I perceive* is relevant to this particular course. I have stopped advising learners of what sections within chapters to omit each week as a way to expose them to broader contexts provided and to reduce their focus on learning only what may be covered on tests. Although elements of control will always exist in facilitator-learner relationships, politically I am trying to help people think for themselves and challenge what they read as indicators of learning far superior to me deciding what information may, or may not, interest them.

Through my own educational experiences I have discovered two ways to relinquish this control. The first way is by applying my newfound abstract thinking abilities and the second way is by identifying my own philosophy of practice.

The first discovery, abstract thinking abilities, in part I attribute to Mezirow's (1990) idea that it is *not* that some adults are inherently incapable of thinking abstractly, becoming critically reflective, or making reflective judgments. Rather, they have simply not yet learned how to think in these ways (p. 359). As I strive to balance my mental and fitness levels, I am continually reminded of how my critical thinking has soared by changing my habit of expectation from one of reliance on others for answers to one of self-sufficiency (Shaver, 2001). Research has forced me to rely on my own analytical abilities.



Prior to this research I considered myself emphatically a "do-er" who thought after the fact. Now I consider thinking and doing as partners rather than antagonists in an either-or situation. I still value Tyler's (1949) instrumental model as the theoretical backbone of sound program planning; however, now I strive to introduce critical thinking *on practice into practice*, as — what Palmer (1998) calls — the "once dormant dimension of my identity" (p. 22) matures.

The second discovery, developing a philosophy of practice, would have been impossible without critical reflection. Previously I just wanted to train and teach adults. I had little time for, or interest in, theory and adult educational philosophies and did not see the need for introducing participants to theory or identifying my own philosophy of adult education. As my focus was on helping the individual learner, now I suspect that *was* my philosophy of practice. In both my training and teaching worlds, I was committed to helping learners develop their skills, knowledge, and attitudes to achieve self-fulfillment in their individual and professional lives.

I have always practiced for the individual not society. I believe that my practice of adult education should target growth and development of the individual learner rather than serve as an instrument of social action. If an individual chooses to apply learning to a communal effort then indirectly I have contributed to social

change, one learner at a time. This focus on the individual partially accounts for why social, political, and economic events used to be of little interest to me.

My philosophy is also a work in progress, yet if I had to label it, I would suggest it is critical-humanist (e.g., see Tisdell & Taylor, 2000), a blend of overlapping elements, part behaviourist yet mostly humanist, with critical thinking seeping into life and practice. However, I am reluctant to assign practice to a specific foundation of particular beliefs and values because naming practice constrains practice, once again, within a stereotypical body of techniques.

### ***What Are My Commitments and Who am I Becoming?***

Honesty, ethics, fairness, and compassion have always been the cornerstones of my personal and professional commitments. These commitments guide me in everything I do, including becoming a person far more aware of, and interested in, wider social, political, and economic issues. As a practitioner, I have committed to: (a) helping learners, if they wish, learn how to move beyond their “just-for-the-marks” paradigm; (b) engaging learners, when possible, in discussions about change before arbitrarily implementing change in our sessions and (c) challenging the assumptions of instructors and trainers by introducing them to elements of positionality such as race, class, culture, and gender.

Previously, I created intellectually safe learning environments and considered programs successful if learners met the learning outcomes. I realize that I was merely honing learners' conditioned focus on marks. Now I am integrating intellectually higher levels of resources and providing opportunities for critical reflection to stimulate discussion on course concepts. As learner resistance is palpable, and most participants want only what is in the course outline, I suspect their resistance is a product of socially constructed hierarchies in education, whereby they are taught to absorb information from teachers as experts.

I thought I could integrate changes on my own and did not realize that I was acting in a "power-over" paradigm rather than in a "power-with" mode (see, e. g., Bounous, 2001, p. 200), imposing on learners *my* thirst for thinking. I thought I was teaching collaboratively by giving learners more voice. Now I recognize the usefulness of discussing potential change with learners — prior to implementing change. This can be done in partnership with learners as we identify why we resist change. Hopefully, collaborating with learners to deconstruct power in our sessions will move them beyond their “just for the mark” paradigm.

I grew up in a family in which social, political, and economic issues were seldom discussed. This may account in part for my

humanistic focus on the individual and why larger issues in society were off my radar screen until I began my doctoral program. While I will never be found at any of the barricades, in my practice I now target the human rights and gay/lesbian movements as my vehicles for change. I strive to heighten individual awareness that joking and/or derogatory references to any person or groups of people are no longer acceptable in Canadian homes, workplaces, classrooms, and public places. My “unbending intent” (see Brew, 1993) is to challenge the assumptions of instructors and trainers by asking them to identify the impact on (a) *their* participants’ learning and (b) *their* credibility as educators of adults if they create hostile learning environments by allowing such references in their sessions, spoken in jest or otherwise. Collaborating with learners to identify how the elements of positionality permeate society, and unwittingly individuals’ attitudes, will hopefully foster our collective resolve to resist racism, sexism, and classism in our practices and our personal and professional lives.

***Looking Ahead ...*** I am more open to exploring the role of adult education in social change. Once again, my thinking had been contained in a binary, either-or framework in terms of individual or society. Thanks to Quigley (2000) I think I finally get it — there are what Quigley calls degrees of action (p. 216) in my practice relative to social change. As my practice has the potential to influence individuals

and groups and society, I no longer have to choose between individualism and broader societal issues. In Palmer's (1998) words, "technique is what teachers use until the real teacher shows up" (p. 5). I'm starting to show up.

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