TO KNOW THE PLACE FOR THE FIRST TIME: 
READING AND WRITING MY WORKPLACE THROUGH HABERMAS

by

LORNA PATRICIA SHAPIRO

B.Sc., The University of Alberta, 1971
M.Sc., The University of Alberta, 1973

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Department of Educational Studies

The University of British Columbia
Vancouver, Canada

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ABSTRACT

The genesis of this research initiative is situated in a very challenging and troubling period in my career as an associate dean in a public post-secondary educational institution - a time during which I led our first significant initiatives into cost-recovery program delivery. This mission gave rise to contentious issues about our values as educators and about bureaucratic norms that were being challenged. The issues cried out for discourse and values based decision making about what and how we “ought” to be as an institution. Instead, too often, power differentials and bureaucratic imperatives played the central roles in decision-making processes about this new form of programming. Fundamental questions of goodness and justice were left unresolved and often even un-discussed. The events of my practice form the “object of study” in this research as I seek both an understanding of why the experience was thus and also how it might have been otherwise. Through the work of Jürgen Habermas I explore the difficult problem of achieving social order, grounded in moral agency, in a world characterized by divergent values and perspectives. I discover hope and potential promise in his conceptually proceduralistic approach to the task of social coordination. Examining my experiences in light of Habermas’ notions of social coordination, I find some possible explanations for these events and some concepts that offer hope for new approaches to governance and administration. There remain, however, very real and complicating barriers to the ideal posited by Habermas – barriers located in the complexities of human behaviour and interpersonal relationships. Seeking better ways of understanding those barriers and
of responding to their impact, I turn to Hannah Arendt and Susan Bickford whose work provides insight into the personal and interpersonal dimensions of human action in creating just communities. Examining my practice experiences through their conceptualizations yields additional insights about what occurred and why, offers guidance about my own actions, and affords a new appreciation of my own complicity in the events as they transpired. The result is new ways of understanding power, discourse, and moral agency – and therefore of understanding my role in educational leadership.
# TABLE OF CONTENTS

ABSTRACT .................................................................................................................. ii
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS ............................................................................................... vi
CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION ............................................................................... 1
  The Practice Context ................................................................................................. 5
  Rationale for Doing this Study .................................................................................. 10
  The Major Research Question ................................................................................... 12
  Conceptual Resources ............................................................................................... 16
  Summary .................................................................................................................... 18
CHAPTER TWO: STORIES FROM MY PRACTICE ...................................................... 21
  A Rocky Introduction of a New Program .................................................................. 22
  Values Questions Missing-in-Action – The Facilities Story ...................................... 30
  Grievance on Contracting Out – The Divisiveness of Camps ................................... 33
  How We Are Heard – The Incubator Discussion ...................................................... 37
  Values Conflicts in Unsuspected Places .................................................................... 39
  The Joys and Frustrations of Values Talk ................................................................... 43
  Summary .................................................................................................................... 45
CHAPTER THREE: HABERMAS ON AGENCY, DISCOURSE AND POWER... 47
  Habermas’ Enterprise and Its Relevance to my Practice ............................................. 47
  Weber, Parsons and Foucault – Setting up the Problem ............................................. 51
  Foundational Concepts Necessary to Habermas’ Framework for Social Integration ... 60
    Necessary Conditions for a Stable, Just Society ....................................................... 60
    Communicative Action and Strategic Action ........................................................... 62
    Communicative Reason (Discourse) ....................................................................... 65
    Challenges Created by Modernity and Plurality ..................................................... 66
  Habermas’ Framework for Social Integration ............................................................. 68
    Law as a Surrogate for Communicative Action ....................................................... 69
    The Structural Interrelationship of Communicative Action, Law, Administrative Action.................................................................................................................. 71
    Maintaining the Legitimacy of Law ......................................................................... 75
    The Role of Human Agency and the Risk of Followership ...................................... 79
    Summarizing the Conceptual Framework of Societal Integration ......................... 82
  Core Principles of Operation and Characteristics of Power ....................................... 85
  Challenges to the Realization of Habermas’ Concept of Social Integration .............. 89
CHAPTER FOUR: PRACTICE THROUGH THE LENS OF THE CORE PRINCIPLES ... 93
  Applying Habermas to Interpret a Practice Story ..................................................... 94
  Considering the Impacts of Systems and Structures ................................................. 109
  Summary .................................................................................................................... 119
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Research of this sort, I have come to discover, cannot be accomplished in isolation. Certainly there are times that are isolating: as we search for and struggle with interpreting conceptual resources, as we sit down to develop our thoughts through our writing. But it is the quality of critique that, ultimately, is the determination of whether the research process yields valuable insights and new knowledge. That this research has produced what for me are useful new ways of understanding my role as an educational leader is due to the unstinting attention and effort of my advisory committee in their role as “disputers” of the correspondence, coherence, and pragmatism of my work. That I completed this research with my self-esteem intact is a credit to the caring and supportive manner with which each of these committee members approached the activity of critique. I owe Dr. David Coulter, Dr. Shauna Butterwick, and Dr. Kjell Rubenson a debt of gratitude and I hope to somehow “pay it forward” in more skillfully helping others when called upon to critique.

Shauna, you encouraged me to listen for the voices of others and you were there to help me pick up the pieces of my self-confidence when I actually heard them. Kjell, you taught me to always remember to look up at the larger context and your graciousness and humour in critique was a model for me to learn from. David, you showed confidence in my ability before I had earned the right to deserve it and so reminded me that even adults live up or down to expectations. You set high standards, praised good work when you saw it, and skillfully asked questions that allowed me to recognize when excellence had somehow eluded me in my work! And I never doubted you were there for me as my supervisor, but also as a friend and mentor. My sincere thanks to you all.

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CHAPTER ONE:
INTRODUCTION

What you got, when you got what you didn’t expect… is experience.
(Harold Geneen, CEO IT&T, 1959-1970)

And politics is not simply about shared interests or shared conceptions of
the good; it is how we decide what to do in the face of conflict about all
these things. (Bickford, 1996, p. 11)

The juxtaposition of these two quotes is indeed ironic to those readers who happen to be
familiar enough with these two authors to “consider the source.” Harold Geneen is
legendary as a tyrannical, autocratic, fear-instilling manager who ruled IT&T with an iron
fist through, paradoxically, 11 years of unprecedented growth. While I don’t subscribe to
his leadership style, his lesson succinctly describes one of the foundations of my thesis.
This thesis is about my practice, my mistakes, my occasional cases of wise judgment, and
what I can learn to better understand and improve that practice when examining it
through the lens of theory. Geneen believed that critical examination of one’s mistakes,
and seeking of lessons learned in those times when “you got what you didn’t expect,”
was necessary for the growth of individuals. The period of my practice that is the subject
of this thesis has been full of such “learning opportunities.” I hope and indeed believe
that many characteristics of my practice are similar to those of others and that the lessons
culled will have broader use.
In stark contrast with Geneen, Susan Bickford stands as an advocate for democratic public discourse and policy making. She would have turned Geneen apoplectic! So, while Geneen urges critical examination of practice, Bickford reminds us that one important element of practice is that messy business of making decisions about what “ought” to be done when there are divergent beliefs and values represented. “Represented” makes it sound so clinical. In fact the decision-makers are real people with strongly and often passionately held convictions about truth and goodness. And yet, as Bickford says, they must come to decisions in spite of that. Those decisions are needed to bring us to agreement on action. Such was the case in my practice.

The site of that practice is a public post secondary career technical/vocational educational institute. Internal debates about “the good” in our programs and services are common and ongoing. But the nature of my mandate within that institution involved major change that flew in the face of many strongly held values, rendered ineffective many established systems and disturbed existing power bases. The issues cried out for discussion about values and about how we “ought” to be as an institution. Instead, too often, power differentials and bureaucratic imperatives played the central roles in decision-making processes. As I became increasingly dissatisfied with our decision-making processes, the challenge became clearer in my mind; how do we achieve a bureaucratic organization that uses inclusive deliberation on values as a foundation to its operations?

At that point I still expected, based pretty much entirely on optimism, that a neat answer to that question existed. When, after wandering through a number of scholars’ work, I
encountered Jürgen Habermas, I was confident that I had the answer to my question – or at least the basis of my answer. I just needed to work out how to implement Habermas’ proposals in our institution. Certainly this would be a small task.

What was it in Habermas that I found so compelling? First, the challenge he tackles directly addresses my question above. He aims, in a portion of his work, to conceptualize ways in which societies can organize themselves to achieve both stability and justice. That means, then, a society that incorporates deliberation on values as an integral part of its operation. Second, Habermas recognizes that a society requires both governance – coming to agreement on what our guiding values and goals are, to a “collective will” – and administration – coordinating actions to achieve that collective will. So, also, does an institution. He coins the term communicative action to describe the talking together about what is true and good (a primary activity in governance) and the term strategic action to describe sorting through the most efficient manner to achieve a particular desired end (a primary activity in administration). He uses the term discourse to refer to that subset of communicative action when we are dealing with conflicting notions of truth and goodness. Third, he introduces a conceptualization of law as the means of linking administration back to the values determined in the governance activity. This role of law is to guide administrative decision-making and action so that it represents the “collective will” and thus produces justice as well as stability. Fourth and finally, Habermas conceptualizes two forms of power – communicative power, which arises from communicative action and is a “power with” others, and administrative power, which is more a “power over” others and has the goal of directing strategic action to successfully
administer the operations of the society. Fundamentally, Habermas appeared to offer a model of a society that is founded upon people talking to each other about values, people coming together to make tough decisions in situations of values conflicts. It seemed to me that Habermas' work deals directly with the challenges I was experiencing in practice. Let me explain.

It struck me in reading Habermas' analysis of societal integration that there were direct parallels between the challenges of achieving a just and stable society and those of achieving a just and stable educational institution. (As I draw these parallels I recognize that there are clear differences between societies and institutions and will deal with that more directly later.) Education, as an endeavour, is centrally concerned with questions of ethics and morality. Educational institutions comprise a pluralistic collection of "citizens" who are responsible for establishing norms, developing goals, and implementing plans of action to achieve those goals. These responsibilities entail grappling with questions of values and also of pragmatics. In the same way that citizens are responsible for shaping their society, so too are we, as members of an educational institution, responsible for shaping the nature of that institution.

I have, over the past years, found this process of shaping institutional values and norms to be fraught with strife. From my experiences, I have created a number of stories that capture the nature of some of the events and illustrate the dissonance created. Those stories are found in the following chapter. Too frequently it appeared that policy or pragmatics prevailed, leaving questions of values and norms unaddressed and sometimes
even unasked. There seemed to be more directing and less listening, more "followership" and less questioning, more sides and less community than is desirable given that our objective is to be a community characterized by wise judgment and sound action. I both contributed to and was affected by this dissonance and want to see what I can do to "make the hurt go away."

I have said this thesis is an attempt to use certain conceptual resources to help me better understand and learn from my experiences in practice, specifically, the means in which I created, applied and was affected by discourse and power in my attempts to lead difficult and sometimes controversial changes in the programs we offer within an established bureaucracy. Now I should attempt to fill in the reader a bit more fully on the nature and location of that practice.

The Practice Context

I work in a publicly funded post-secondary educational institution with a mandate to provide career training for individuals so that they may have career success and contribute to the economic development of the province. The institution serves over 16,000 full-time-equivalent (FTE) students, each year, in over 160 government subsidized "day-school" programs that prepare primarily full-time learners for careers in a wide range of Trades and Technologies fields. We also have a well established, partially government subsidized, part-time studies (PTS) operation which has traditionally been designed to service the occasional learner (one taking a course or two
per year). Over 80,000 individual registrants annually take part-time studies courses. We have over 2000 full time employees involved in delivering and administering our two lines of business and a significant number of contract instructors, primarily in the PTS operation. A substantial administrative bureaucracy has developed over 35 years to guide the delivery of what has been a reasonably stable but steadily growing education operation.

At the time described in these practice stories, and for most of its history, the president, all vice-presidents, and all deans are male. Associate Deans number approximately twenty-five of whom four are female. The student population is representative of the gender distribution common to the sector of the labour market for which they are being educated. For instance, women represent almost all the Health students, an almost negligible portion of the Trades programs students, over 50% of the Business programs students, and their representation hovers around the 30% mark in programs in Computing.

In summary, the Institute has traditionally viewed its “lines of business” as being twofold: full-time programs which are government funded and our focus, and part-time studies, partially government funded, but intended to serve “occasional” learners and not historically a focus in terms of our service levels or quality assurance measures. We have organized to deliver these lines of business in a traditional bureaucratic hierarchy. The culture is more like a business culture than would be the case for most universities,
however a business person observing our operations would undoubtedly label our culture “academic.”

But changes in the environment are having their impact here as they are around the world. There are threats from two fronts: reduced government funding and significantly increasing competition. Fortunately there are also opportunities created by the changes in the environment. Labour market turmoil, with individuals pursuing multiple careers over the course of their working lives, has resulted in the emergence of a relatively new and substantial market, mid-career professionals seeking new career skills. The explosion in the use of computer technology that created a critical shortage of skilled workers in the information technology (IT) field generally also created new training demands. This shortage has been observed for many years but appeared to reach more critical proportions in the past few years. My role then, for the past two years, has been to build a unit to develop and deliver full cost-recovery programs preparing mid-career adults for a variety of IT careers.

Prior to that, I had a standard associate dean role within the Institute. Leaving this for a one-of-a-kind position in the Institute, an educational manager responsible only for the development and delivery of full cost-recovery programs, was a decision I took quite deliberately when the opportunity arose. My line of reasoning was:

1. For the Institute to prosper in times of uncertain government funding, user pay programming needed to increase.
2. To increase this kind of programming requires an educational leader who is also interested in entrepreneurial (business growth and development) activity.

3. Therefore for the Institute to prosper we need some educational leaders interested in pursuing entrepreneurial activities. Due to our history, many are not interested in such activity. I did have an interest, having spent the first 20 years of my career in business.

The executive group of the Institute was calling strongly for a move to diversify and to find ways to reduce the Institute's dependence on public funding. The services areas, once very rigid in their operations, were openly expressing a desire to be more flexible in the ways in which they delivered services. I believed I could make a unique contribution that would benefit the Institute and, by utilizing more of my skills and knowledge, be more satisfying. That contribution would come in the form of trying to lead a full cost-recovery program area, learning what the obstacles are, working with others to resolve the obstacles, and thereby contributing to an increased body of institutional knowledge about how to successfully develop market-based education while remaining true to public-sector values.

Programs we have developed and introduced to the market represent a third line of business, with some characteristics of full-time, some of part-time studies and some unique qualities. Differentiators include the following program characteristics:

- Priced at private-sector tuition levels
- Not supported by public funds
• Non-standard in their delivery models (start times, durations, term structures, facility requirements, faculty and support staff roles)
• Characterized by older students (average age above 30), who are highly motivated career changers, all with some prior post-secondary education
• Non-standard in their curriculum, often focusing on particular vendor products in technical areas and using off-the-shelf curriculum for some courses
• Necessarily subject to a high rate of change in curricula due to the rate of change in the IT sector for which students are being prepared.

In essence, these differentiators introduced a conception of education that differed from our long-held perspectives and practices. Since taking on my new role, almost nothing we have done, our “outside the box” team, meshed well with existing Institute policy and systems. We have encountered numerous challenges, which we now refer to affectionately as “speedbumps on the road to happiness.” There were also times our names for these hurdles were significantly less endearing!

And yet in just over two years we have:

• Introduced six new full-time programs ranging from six months to one year in duration
• Funded and established eight new custom labs for delivery
• Forged a twelve person core delivery team comprising both administrative and academic staff
• Developed a network of over one hundred adjunct faculty
• Served over nine hundred students, maintaining a focus on creating a learning experience that was valued by our students
• Achieved a graduate employment rate of 95%, with correspondingly high levels of satisfaction with their program
• Negotiated articulation agreements to allow graduates to ladder into MBA programs
• Grown to an annual tuition revenue of $4 M which fully covers capital and operating expenses and supports ongoing program development.

So while I’m proud of what our team has accomplished, my head is “full to brimming” with memories of difficult incidents that we navigated, with varying degrees of success, as we set about trying to change the direction of the tanker ship that is our Institute. It has been a tumultuous few years.

Rationale for Doing this Study

In summary, my practice is situated in a bureaucratic educational organization that has established practices and norms regarding “what a program is” and we sought to introduce programs that did not fit those practices and norms. This inherently led to battles about what constitutes education at our institution. The battles were played out on different fields: the system barriers field (“There’s no way to do that.”), the values conflicts field (“We shouldn’t be doing that.”) and the power to control field (“I’ll tell you if you’re allowed to do that.”). Overcoming these barriers and struggles requires both sorting through questions of purpose and the working out of effective means – in
short, the application of governance and administration practices such as Habermas envisioned. Are there ways to make this process less divisive, our judgments more inclusive, and our decisions more thoughtful and reasoned?

It has been interesting to note the parallel between my “practice world,” in which I am a staff member trying to introduce a new form of program into an existing educational bureaucracy, and my “student world” where, as an Ed.D. student I am part of a new form of program that is being introduced into an existing educational bureaucracy with many of the same challenges for the staff members leading that initiative. I suspect, therefore, that my practice experiences share much in common with those of other educational leaders in other large institutions. This work should hopefully provide some useful insights that are also relevant to their practice settings.

My aim is to better understand the dynamics of navigating conflicting notions of purpose, of “the good,” to arrive at wise judgment on action and a means of implementing that action. With this understanding I hope to improve my capacity for moral agency in our institution. If successful, this will help me “learn from my mistakes” and take another step towards becoming the educational leader I would like to be. It will provide the benefit of translating experience into learning. It will also help others in similar situations learn from and perhaps avoid the mistakes that I have made, and benefit from the lessons I have culled from reflecting on this experience. My starting-off point in this research will be the conceptual framework for societal integration offered by Habermas, based as it is in an appreciation of the need for citizens to navigate questions of values, to
arrive at norms, and to administer their activities in ways consistent with those norms in a changing social reality.

The Major Research Question

The question towards which this research is directed is:

How can I initiate respectful discourse in order to arrive at values-based decisions on action in situations of conflict about conceptions of education amidst a bureaucratic institution with its attendant power differentials?

Habermas has devoted over forty years to efforts to explain human action in conditions of modernity (varying values and norms) and plurality (varying interests and experiences) as these humans seek to develop common understandings and agreements from which to coordinate their actions within a social system. He uses the terms societal coordination or social integration to describe the state in which the actions of members of a society are aligned with norms established by that society. Applying his theory of communicative action, he developed a proceduralist approach to the challenge of achieving societal coordination that is grounded in moral agency.

Habermas’ discussions and analyses are framed within the broad context of human society. I contend that these same concepts are also at play within various subsets of that society. This would include the different forms of organizations and institutions that
exist within society for purposes of coordinating the actions of humans to achieve some purpose and, in particular, in my institution.

Central to this broad research interest of coordinating human action is the exploration of power, discourse and agency. Habermas offers some concepts that provide useful perspectives from which to examine my actual experiences in practice with the possibilities for and impacts of power, discourse and agency. I will speak briefly about each of these by way of introduction and will start with his understanding of different forms of power, administrative and communicative.

Administrative power, both active and passive, is everywhere present (in my actions and those of others) in guiding action to be taken by the organization. The goal of administrative power is understood by Habermas as the efficient implementation of the “collective will.” Communicative power is what others and I strive to create in situations of deciding “what ought to be done” and what, when it is present, creates in me a sense of rightness and harmony about both the decision process and the decision. Communicative power is a consequence of achieving mutual agreement on the justifiability of the values and goals we collectively establish. Clearly both forms of power are at play as organizations arrive at decisions. When we are establishing the norms that will guide our decisions on who is eligible to attend convocation, we aim for communicative power arising from respectful discourse on the values guiding the establishment of these norms. When we are deciding if a particular student or group of students is eligible, we are using administrative power to administer the application of the norms to a particular situation.
Habermas posits that communicative power, created through discourse with others on questions of purpose, guides administrative power, which is aimed at ensuring that means are effective in achieving the desired ends. But my experiences reveal a more complicated story: of discourse avoided or usurped, of administrative power not grounded in the "collective will," of the intermeshing of strategic action and communicative action in sorting out issues. I am looking for a clearer understanding of what transpired in those practice experiences and of how I might better foster discourse to achieve communicative power and responsibly use administrative power. I therefore arrive at the second key concept in exploring my research question – discourse.

The need to develop a collective will in conditions of disparate perspectives and values, without marginalizing the perspectives of those in positions of lesser power, creates a tension between the drive for consensus and the honouring of plurality. This tension between consensus and plurality is an integral part of this investigation because it is a source of dissonance in my practice experiences. I believe that the purpose of communicative action is, as Bickford says, "not simply about shared interests or shared conceptions of the good; it is how we decide what to do in the face of conflict about all these things." Is consensus a worthy goal that is based on respect for others? Or is it a means of dismissing perspectives of the less powerful while cloaking a process in the guise of rational, respectful discourse? As I aim for conditions of respectful discourse and of decision-making that attends to diverse perspectives, I will consider what Habermas and others have concluded about consensus versus plurality in light of my experiences in practice. I must also consider to what extent others and I actually have
agency in the practice experiences described, and under what circumstances and for what reasons we choose to exercise our agency.

At the crux of this issue I am grappling with is the question of the role of human agency in educational leadership; I am concerned with how I can make a difference, can change the nature of the way situations of conflict are resolved and decisions on action are reached. I would like to understand better what certain theorists have proposed regarding human agency, and then to examine the implications of those ideas when tested against my practice. My aim is to understand how moral agency can be employed to promote discourse, leading to values-based decisions on norms, and to legitimately employ administrative power in directing the activities of the institution. I am interested in considering both the motivation that brings us to exercise our agency and what factors enhance or constrain the impact we can achieve through that agency.

To summarize, the question I am investigating arises from my understanding of our role as educators and my experiences working within an educational bureaucracy. In this role we must grapple with questions of “the good,” what ought to be done, in arriving at decisions about the form and content of education. We use and are affected by power, administrative and communicative, in reaching and then effecting those determinations. We operate in a context characterized by plurality, which renders problematic both the goal and the achievability of consensus. Additionally, constraints on our freedom of action exist in the context within which we operate, constraints arising both from established systems of administrative power and from the norms of behaviour as
practiced within the organization. These constraints affect the extent to which moral agency can bring about the conditions needed for effective discourse.

Conceptual Resources

The conceptual resources (or theoretical lenses) that I will employ fall into two broad areas. First will be the works of Habermas, which I have introduced. I focus on those more recent works (in the last ten years) in which his later thinking on power and forms of human action are discussed. As I have explained previously, I start with Habermas because in Habermas’ work, I found a proposal, as it were, for structuring the steering and coordinating mechanisms of society that was comprehensive (dealing with both the establishment of norms and the ongoing administration of action) and that recognized the need for moral action as the basis for societal coordination. He offers a notion of how communities can achieve both justice and stability in their operations. I will consider how this notion might be applied to the governance and administration within my institution and what insights it provides regarding my own ability to exercise agency in bringing about values-based decisions on action.

Habermas foregrounds process in applying his theory of communicative action to develop an approach to achieving societal integration. He builds on understandings drawn from Weber and Parsons who are concerned about the role of human agency in societal integration given the impact of systems and structures. Habermas attempts to devise a means of counteracting the influences of systems and structures, which are seen
to diminish the capacity for moral agency. He contrasts his approach with that of Foucault, who emphasizes individual critical reflection and civil disobedience in his conceptualization of the possibilities for moral agency.

The second body of conceptual resources central to this study comes from scholars who foreground the intra and interpersonal dimensions of exercising human agency in achieving societal integration. These scholars bring focus on the complexity that being human introduces into many highly "rational" models of human behaviour and, specifically, of discourse. I draw primarily on certain works of Hannah Arendt, Susan Bickford and Iris Marion Young to incorporate considerations of the personal and interpersonal dimensions of power, agency and discourse and these works illuminate other factors at play in my particular practice experiences. Some of these insights would apply to any person in the position from which I operate and some are relevant to the fact that I am a woman working in a predominantly male culture.

I find the work of Arendt and Bickford particularly meaningful in helping me think about the challenges I am exploring in my practice. Bickford ends her book, The Dissonance of Democracy: Listening, Citizenship and Conflict, with the following statement:

I have focused here on the difficult side of political action, on fear, courage, and conflict. I have done so to explicate the character of communicative participation in adversarial contexts [italics added], and to develop a democratic conception of listening adequate to contemporary politics. But caring for the world and caring about making our presence felt in the world has another side as well, which the theorists I discuss recognize in various ways. For Aristotle, sharing speech about the just and unjust, advantageous and disadvantageous, is part of human happiness and flourishing, and it appeals to the pleasure of learning something new and strange. This intertwining of exhilaration and exasperation is the
specific experience of a democratic politics that stresses speaking and listening together [italics added]. (1996, p. 186-187)

Bickford’s work does explore a reality of communicative participation, namely fear, courage, conflict, which is entirely aligned with my experiences in practice over the past two years. However her mention of the corresponding upsides of caring to make our presence felt in the world, the exhilaration of coming together in decisions about the just and the unjust, the advantageous and the disadvantageous, is also a part of my experience.

In considering the ideas drawn from Arendt, Bickford and Young, I explore the interpersonal as well as gender-specific influences on my actions and those of the individuals with whom I interacted in attempting to effect change within the Institute. More specifically, I explore how these influences affect the way in which agency, power and discourse is played out in large bureaucracies.

Summary

This research represents a process of critical reflection on events in my practice at a particular time, in a specific context, in interaction with particular others and as a particular human being. My experiences were difficult and challenging, sometimes very satisfying but more often deeply troubling as time and again I found myself “getting what I didn’t expect.” While I recognize that we can never dip our foot into the same river twice, I nonetheless felt the need to reflect on those events in order to draw out new understandings that might open up new possibilities for being and acting, for more easily
achieving respectful discourse in situations of conflict. To that end, I attempted to systematically and self-consciously apply certain conceptual resources in an effort to find meaning in those events. This "sense-making" process involved first my own critical reflection and then writing about it. There ensued a long series of encounters with others, committee members, colleagues, friends, who challenged my observations, my thinking, my tentative conclusions. In so doing, some early conclusions were shown to be flawed, some were developed more fully, and new understandings emerged. Lest I make this sound too neat and straightforward, let me state clearly that this was an iterative process that showed tendencies toward becoming infinite. However, as I returned and re-returned to the stories, the conceptual resources, and discussions, I found to my surprise that more than my interpretations and understandings were changing. In that process I was evolving my own identity. That evolution will in all likelihood be visible to the reader of this research and I leave it thus because in that fact itself lies a potential lesson for the brave practitioner who chooses to take this thesis in hand and start reading. When she does so, she will find a messy project in neat chapters.

Chapter 2 introduces the reader to my world of practice through a series of stories synthesized from my experiences in introducing full cost-recovery programs at the Institute. The stories have been created to exemplify the pervasiveness of values conflicts, the impact of power in its different forms, the challenges of achieving discourse and values-based decisions on action, and the possibilities of and constraints on human agency. Chapter 3 describes Habermas' development of a proceduralist approach to societal integration and the fundamental principles of that approach as I interpret it. It
starts with the impact of the systems and structures of our modern reality that tend to
diminish the role of moral agency in coordinating human action, and then offers
Habermas’ notions of how it could be otherwise. Chapter 4 analyzes the practice stories
in terms of those fundamental principles to understand the ways in which they were and
were not present in these experiences and explores some barriers to Habermas’
presentation of an ideal. Chapter 5 takes a look at the work of some scholars who chose
to foreground the intra and interpersonal dimensions of societal integration, again
applying those ideas to examine the practice stories and again seeking to understand both
barriers and mitigation strategies. Chapter 6 concludes this thesis with an integration of
the principles and insights that have helped explain the experiences of my practice and
the guidance I take from those lessons relative to power and discourse.

A common witticism maintains that there is a significant difference between that
individual who has ten years of experience and the individual with one year of
experience, repeated ten times. I often discuss this with students in our programs,
encouraging them to openly examine their practice in order that they learn from both their
mistakes and their successes. This research activity is an opportunity for me to do
precisely that.

We shall not cease from exploration
And the end of all our exploring
Will be to arrive where we started
And know the place for the first time.
T.S. Eliot, “Little Gidding”
CHAPTER TWO:
STORIES FROM MY PRACTICE

In this chapter I present a series of stories about my experiences in attempting to introduce programs that ran contrary to established conceptions of education within our institution. These stories incorporate the significant characteristics of my experience: values conflicts, the exercising of power by myself and others, the challenges in attempting to initiate discourse, and the reality of moral agency both achieved and failed. They are not offered as a basis for empirical research but as the context for critical reflection, for investigating what Habermas and others can illuminate about my concerns with agency, discourse and power.

Stories have a way of bringing into the realm of reality some past experience that is difficult to achieve through even the most articulate description. Through stories we are able to gain a sense of the emotional quality of an experience, of the depths of complexity, of the relationships. And there are limitations. If we remember to pay attention, stories also speak volumes through what is not spoken of, through noticing whose experiences are not described. In formulating these stories from my practice I recognize that what is foregrounded is my experiences and emotions and interpretations. They are therefore not put forth as "the truth," but as "a truth," the perspective from my location in the story. And yet it is from our own particular location that we all must find ways to interpret, to analyze, and to gain new understandings about our actions and new possibilities for the future. They are my reality.
The stories that are included in this chapter all have as their kernel a particular situation that I have experienced in my practice, and they all are to some extent a composite of my experiences in other similar situations. To that extent they should be viewed as representational. They must also be viewed as one person's interpretation of events, of biases, motives and intents. And yet they are absolutely representative of the range of experiences that brought me to this research question.

The stories have been selected for a number of reasons. They all involve fundamental questions of value, they all involve power, and they all left me wondering if there might have been a better way to resolve the conflict. They all have at their core the issue of my capacity for exercising moral agency to influence the nature of our institution. They differ, one from the other, in other regards. Fundamental questions of values were or were not debated. External constraints were or were not a significant factor. Sometimes a small number of people were involved and in other cases the cast of players was very large. They demonstrate the range and diversity of the sources from which conflict can arise as a result of even modest departures from established norms. And, finally, they represent a broad range in terms of the emotional quality of the discourse that occurred.

A Rocky Introduction of a New Program

One January, while an Associate Dean in the School of Business, I was approached by a national training organization to consider a proposal that the Institute take on the role of
BC delivery site for a new Information Technology career entry program they had developed. The program was designed for university and college graduates wishing to prepare for careers as business analysts. The program blend of business, professional skills and technical skills was one that I felt was sorely needed. My experience working in the IT sector was that universities and colleges tended to prepare individuals with either technical knowledge or business knowledge, but virtually never with both and rarely with adequate preparation in fundamental professional skills such as project management, teamwork, and communication.

Upon initial examination, the program appeared to be relevant to industry, appropriate to the Institute’s mandate and strengths, of high quality, and cost-effective for a mature learner community seeking intensive preparation for a lucrative career path. Offered on a full cost-recovery basis, it was also consistent with an executive-driven goal of reducing our dependence on government funding. I approached the School of Computing to propose we partner in the delivery of the program. They agreed. Between January and May, we evaluated program content and developed business and operations plans for the delivery of the program. As well we conducted an internal review of curriculum and delivery methodology; this involved working closely with the Registrar’s office and other service areas to sort out procedures for the various unusual requirements and characteristics of the program. Some notable departures from our normal educational programming included:

- Fees that were substantially larger than had been charged before (tuition in excess of $15,000),
• Admissions procedures that were competitive rather than first come, first served
and that included more evaluation instruments (reference letters, interview) than
usual,
• Non-standard “block” registration for students who would be considered part-time
by the Institute due to the fact that no government funding was associated with the
program,
• Mandatory laptop purchase for all students in the program, a staffing approach to
consist of a blend of full-time and part-time positions as the program was a hybrid
of full and part-time delivery models,
• Unusual graduation requirements which included successful completion of vendor
certification exams and approval of the franchising organization, and
• New special purpose lab facilities funded by program revenues.

Clearly this list of characteristics included many departures from standard Institute
policies and practices. They were, however, appropriate to the new learner market that
we were serving and consistent with the Institute’s desire to reduce our reliance on
government funding. Through many discussions with various service groups within the
Institute and with executives in the education organization we validated the legitimacy of
the curriculum and of the delivery approach. In the early summer, the Registrar’s office
confirmed they were satisfied with the program design and the education executive
approved the business and operations plans. We had approval to proceed.
As is common in our Institute, formal notification of program approval lagged somewhat. This notification was sent out by the Registrar’s office mid September. We had started marketing the program in July. By late November the program was full and a wait-list was being maintained. Demand was clearly strong.

The program approval had been handled according to customary practice at the Institute at that time. Although Senate had the formal authority to serve as the approver of new programs, the practice had developed at some distant point in history that only “full-time” programs would go to the senate. Part-time studies programs and their credentials were approved by the Registrar’s office and the education executive. This, however, was the first time that a part-time studies program had comprised sufficient credits to warrant a credential of Diploma. The credential was duly approved by the Registrar’s office and noted on the program approval. It did not pass through Senate.

In September, Senate members started noticing advertisements in the local papers for information sessions about a new program at our Institute, a new Diploma program of which they had heard nothing, our new program. Senate at that time was a rather contentious forum with issues frequently being approached as faculty vs. administration. When faculty raised questions about this new Diploma not having gone through Senate, the representative of the education executive mistakenly advised that the program did not carry a credential from our Institute, only a credential from the franchising organization. (The fact that any issue was being raised was never discussed directly with me, nor was any clarification sought regarding the nature of the program or its credential.) I am told
that at both the September and October Senate meetings this issue was raised and incorrect responses were given to Senate members raising the questions. At the November meeting it would appear that the faculty managed to convince the education executive that the Institute was, indeed, advertising the new program as a Diploma program. I am told that a senior education executive then put one of his staff managers on the case of fixing this "error." Still, I heard no word of any issue.

In early December, with a scheduled January 5 start date and the program full and wait-listed, an email was broadcast to all educational and service managers and staff associated with program delivery and support. The email stated that approval of the program was "OFFICIALLY RESCINDED." I should note that I was checking my emails early in the morning prior to spending the remainder of the morning interviewing for the final instructor position in the program when I found this email in my in-basket. There had been no prior indication of any questions, concerns or issues. As I headed into the interviews I met my staff, looking ashen-faced as they had also just received the email.

Contacting my Dean, I asked that he convene the individuals in the Registrar's and the education executive offices who had caused this notice to be sent so that we could meet with them to understand what was going on. Finishing three hours of interviews, I joined my Dean, the Registrar and the staff manager from the executive office. Our purpose was to understand who had made the decision to rescind program approval, on what basis they were making that decision, and how to go about addressing those concerns to get the
program “re-instated.” I also hoped to understand the process that had brought about this action without any attempt to contact me to discuss concerns prior to issuing the email notice.

While the Registrar’s office believed that it had acted on direct instructions from the staff manager in sending out the notice, the staff manager stated that the intention had been to notify the community that some concerns had been raised and remained unresolved. What end this notification was to achieve was never articulated. There was no explanation as to why no one in this process had thought to contact me to attempt to sort things out prior to sending the e-mail. The closest we got to that was a response that it seemed best to document the issues in a memo (which was to be forthcoming) prior to initiating any discussions.

The next day the staff manager provided said memo, listing the various concerns. Paraphrasing them:

- An Institute credential should not be awarded for a program that we are delivering but did not originate and that contains curriculum that is developed outside of the Institute,
- If a credential is to be granted, it must be approved by Senate and by the Ministry regardless of whether the program is government subsidized,
- A competitive admissions process that requires review of references and candidate interviews is not acceptable because of the equity concerns and staffing demands such a process creates,
• The prescription of a mandatory laptop purchase is not acceptable, and
• Credit calculation (based on 12 hours per credit, consistent with part-time studies standards) is not acceptable as full-time programs use a 15 hours per credit formula.

Over the next few days, I met with the staff manager and in larger sessions with that manager, the Dean, various education executives, and the Registrar. No one from amongst the Senate members objecting to this program was present. The issues were dealt with as follows.

The concern regarding the need for government approval of the credential was factually in error. It was not, however, determined at that time that this was in error because there was no attempt made to approach the government with this question. We proceeded under the impression that Ministry approval would have to be sought if a Diploma was to be the credential granted for this program.

The concern about the legitimacy of issuing an Institute credential for a program whose curriculum content is developed elsewhere, although reviewed and approved by the department delivering the program, raises fundamental questions. Questions such as “what constitutes teaching – is the curriculum the extent of the teaching-learning experience we deliver” and “whose knowledge counts at our Institute” are fundamental questions that arose from this new form of programming and that were certainly worthy of broad discussion to come to a resolution. While I broached these questions in
meetings with the Registrar, education executive, the staff manager and the Dean, they were never raised for discussion at any Senate forum to my knowledge. The interim resolution was that the credential as advertised would be honoured for the first two intakes of the program and that we would work to determine the appropriate credential for the program over the coming months. Subsequent stages of this story saw the program given a “Statement of Completion,” and finally a new credential created by the Institute for programs such as this.

The issues of a competitive admissions process considering qualitative input about an applicant and of the mandatory laptop purchase represent a combination of pragmatic questions related to how best to deliver the type of education represented by this program and ethical and moral questions of fairness and equity. While the former constituted the legitimate purview of educational administrators, the latter were again questions that warranted broader discourse to sort through the thorny issues of ethics and justice. Instead, the educational imperatives which argued in favour of the justification of these delivery choices and the fact that sound operational processes had been developed to support them were presented to that same small group of administrators and ultimately were deemed acceptable by the education executive. No discussion of these issues was conducted at the Senate to my knowledge.

Credit calculation is a fundamental educational policy question (the Institute employs different credit hours calculations for part-time studies than for full-time programs) that again could warrant discussion at Senate but was not in any way unique to the program in
question. Upon discussion it was decided not to raise the broad policy question for
debate and to follow the existing policy of differential credit hours for this program.

Within a few days, a formal memo reinstating the program was issued. Senate was
apparently advised that a Diploma would not be granted for subsequent intakes. All other
issues were apparently left un-discussed. Minutes of the September through December
senate meetings interestingly have no record of this issue ever having arisen. I have no
knowledge of any subsequent discussion at the Senate, or even amongst the deans and
associate deans, about any of the substantive issues that were the basis of concerns about
the appropriateness of this program and its delivery methods. Not surprisingly, given the
lack of public discussion of substantive issues, there are widespread lingering doubts
throughout the Institute about the educational quality and the alignment with our mission
of such programs.

The program started in January, on schedule. More than two hundred highly motivated
students with high expectations of the program have since emerged pleased with the
education, secured jobs they were seeking and created employers requesting more
graduates with the same career preparation.

Values Questions Missing-in-Action – The Facilities Story

Since its start in early 1998, this program area has grown from one program to six
programs, from one rented lab in an outside facility to eight specially designed labs in our
continuing education campus, serving over 300 students a year. This level of growth, demanding specialized lab facilities for quality delivery, requires significant ongoing negotiations regarding space. At our institution there existed no understood process for making determinations about requests for facilities for program delivery.

I have a number of interesting experiences, both successful and frustrating, associated with space procurement for these programs. The first started with my initial day on the job when I found that we had a program scheduled to start one month later, requiring a dedicated computer lab Monday to Friday for eight months, and no facility identified. This was when I discovered that no process for space allocation existed in our Institute. Calling the chair of the “space allocation committee,” I was told that that committee dealt only with non-educational space, that is, non-teaching facilities. I could try the timetabling office because they allocated space available for teaching purposes. Contacting that office, I was told that all facilities were booked. They were perhaps not all usefully employed, but they were all booked. I was advised to identify some potential space and to negotiate with departments to whom the space was allocated.

Putting out my feelers for possible options, I discovered that a lab previously used by the School of Business was unoccupied for program delivery for five months but had been taken over by Computer Services to use as a staging ground for new computers being installed throughout the Institute. What followed were negotiations with individuals in Computer Services, the School of Health, the School of Business, Purchasing, and the Continuing Education Centre, resulting in:
• Moving the staging lab to an underutilized School of Health room
• Borrowing the School of Business lab as an interim facility for the five months, on the understanding that we would purchase and contribute new lab desks
• Arranging with the Continuing Education Centre the renovation of a permanent lab to house the program after five months
• Arranging to fast-track the lab desk purchase and the facility clean-up to create a reasonable interim lab facility
• Offering a no-charge custom-delivered vendor certification course to the Computer Services staff who were inconvenienced by the move of their staging lab.

On what basis did all the involved players make the contributions required to see this lab come into existence? I believe their primary motivation was well founded; we had made a commitment to students and it was essential that, as an institution, we honour that commitment. The many individual decisions required were accomplished through one-on-one discussions that I had with the various players involved. The urgency and the risk of us failing our responsibility to students were the starting off point in those discussions and, one after another, the various players were quick to respond to the need and to embrace the importance of honouring commitments to our students. What did not occur was any systems change that would recognize the fact that space allocation decisions were de-facto demonstrations of our values as an organization and that it was therefore perhaps desirable to have some mechanism, other than the administrative timetabling function or personal negotiations, to guide decisions of allocation.
As the program area grew, gradually taking over additional facilities in the Continuing Education Centre, concerns began to arise about whether it was equitable to allocate additional facilities to the same program area. These concerns were spoken of obliquely and often I was aware of them only as people spoke to me of conversations they had participated in with others. In actuality, no discussion on how such decisions about resource allocation ought to be made ever took place in any form of inclusive forum. I was occasionally requested to make presentations to the executive team on individual space requests. After hearing the presentation, I would be thanked for my time and advised that the executive team would discuss the request and advise me of their decision. The requests were then approved with no discussion in my presence about the basis for such a decision. At other times the request would be directed to the Vice President of Education via my Dean, discussions held between the Vice Presidents of Finance and of Education, and approvals handed down. Often there were significant time delays and periods of uncertainty as the decision-making process was unclear to both others involved and myself. Never was a request denied and never was there any broad-based discussion about how we as an Institute ought to make determinations about facilities allocations.

Grievance on Contracting Out – The Divisiveness of Camps

The planning for two early programs that later came into the portfolio of our unit resulted in decisions by the Dean to partner with two private sector training companies in the
design and delivery of these specialized programs. His rationale was that these companies would bring a critical mass of skilled instructors and current industry experience and that our institution would bring the knowledge of structuring integrated training programs and the infrastructure for delivery. It seemed a prudent approach to entering a new training market.

It appears that when that decision was made, no discussion was held with the faculty union. As time went by and these programs continued to be offered and further developed, the faculty union approached existing union members in the School to see if they believed that this partnership represented unapproved “contracting out” of union work. The faculty reportedly advised that they did not believe that to be the case as the qualifications and content area specialties of these private sector instructors were substantively different than that of traditional computer science instructors. The work was not work that existing department members saw as appropriate for their discipline.

Nevertheless, the faculty union executive concluded that a dangerous precedent was being set and filed a grievance with the School, claiming that the partnership agreements constituted “contracting out.” Within our institution, grievances are filed directly with the labour relations department and all discussions about those grievances are to be conducted by that department. There was not, at that time, any mutual trust between the faculty union and the labour relations department.
Moving at glacial speed, the grievance discussions were conducted between those two parties and arrived at an impasse. Notice was given by the faculty union of a request for an arbitration hearing. Many days were to be set aside for hearing this case in the spring of 2000. At that point I found my frustration level rising because of my concern that both parties were adopting an unnecessarily adversarial approach. I felt that the partnerships were good for our students, for our Institute overall, and for the faculty union because the resulting programs also resulted in additional faculty positions. I decided to make a call to the faculty union staff to propose a meeting to discuss the issue.

Making the call to one of the union staff with whom I had worked previously, I found some hesitation in his response but a willingness to meet to discuss the grievance. At that point I contacted the labour relations office to advise them of the step I was taking. Their response was that such discussions were ill advised prior to arbitration, but that if I felt strongly about the matter I should proceed with caution and ensure that discussions were “off the record and without prejudice.”

At my first meeting with the faculty union staff member I explained my reason for meeting. I wanted an opportunity to explain to them the reasoning behind these partnerships and the benefits that accrued to the Institute. I wanted to hear their concerns and to see if there was some resolution that would address their concerns while saving the benefits. We made a small degree of progress and ended with his desire to discuss the issue with the executive of the union and to come back to me with a proposal. The progress we had achieved was that he, as an individual, was convinced that we as a
management team did not have malicious intent against the faculty union in structuring these partnerships and he was able to see the benefits that had flowed to both the Institute and the faculty union. For my part, I now understood their major concern was that the union not relinquish its right to approve or disapprove contracting out.

A subsequent meeting was held with two representatives of the faculty union. They had some general conclusions, reaffirming the fact that their interest was not in seeing these programs closed down. Rather it was in seeing “proper contracting out procedure” followed and in seeing that union members have an opportunity to perform the teaching roles they desired. We were starting to come to a place in which we could both be satisfied with the resolution. We came to a general agreement about the nature of the contracting out procedure to be followed and about the nature of the support we could provide to encourage faculty union members in pursuing teaching into these programs. The union members acknowledged that they understood that our intentions had not been to avoid contracting out terms of the collective agreement. That is, there had not been malicious intent on our part.

At that point the labour relations people were invited into the discussions to work out the exact terms of the settlement agreement. The agreement, in my view, was one that was respectful of both parties and served the objectives of both. And my only sour note on this whole issue relates to an article written by one of the faculty union staff members for the faculty newsletter after the agreement. This article appeared to me designed to present the union executive as effective campaigners in a war against management, who
were to be understood as conniving and self-serving. I spoke to one of the faculty union staff members about my reactions to the article and left it at that.

How We Are Heard – The Incubator Discussion

An idea had been conceived by one of the team with which I worked. This was developed into a proposal to launch a new type of program, a business start-up incubator for e-Business ventures. The program was envisioned to involve partnerships with legal firms, accounting firms and venture capital firms to create a “faculty” team that would guide entrepreneurs through a process of developing, testing, refining, and bringing to market their business venture concept. The goal would be to help individuals launch new businesses.

This was a concept that would draw on the expertise of many different areas of the institution, and that would involve new forms of relationships with private firms. In many ways it was consistent with our values and our mission as an organization. It would also be a very high-stakes educational activity for the students, requiring strong performance on the part of the faculty team to ensure they had all reasonable chances of success. There was a risk that the students would perceive our responsibilities to go beyond delivery of the training experience to success of the business launch itself.

Suffice to say, it was a concept worthy of consideration but in need of careful critical analysis and planning. We convened a meeting of all involved deans, directors, and the
management from the private firms who were working with us on the proposal. There were a dozen people around the table, eleven men and me.

The proposal was presented and then we started deliberating the potential benefits and drawbacks of the concept. There was very useful discussion about market need and about the logistics of offering such a program. I entered the discussion to raise the issue of impact to the student of success or failure and of our need to be very certain that we could both deliver this program well and ensure that the student understood what we could and could not commit to as outcomes of the program. My statement began “I am torn in two directions in considering this proposal. On the one hand I believe it aligns perfectly with our mandate as an institution and that it brings us into new ways of serving our students. On the other hand I am very conscious of the high-stakes nature of such a program to the students and am concerned that we must be very certain of our ability to both manage and meet their expectations.” I went on to describe both sides of the question a bit further and asked what others’ thoughts were on these conflicting forces.

Throughout the remainder of the meeting several people referred to the issue I had raised, and each characterized it in the same way. What they had heard was described by each of them as “I know Lorna is concerned about the risks of such an undertaking.” There was no discussion at all, in agreement or otherwise, of my contention that the program was well aligned with the mandate of the institution. There was no discussion of our ethical obligations to the students. There was only a perception that I was concerned about a “risky” undertaking.
In hindsight, perhaps I should have been able to anticipate all the various places in which the values and norms of our institution were at work in guiding our practices and our policies. And with this fore-knowledge I might have been able to structure a broader discussion about the issues, the fundamental values and the constraints on us as an institution in order to arrive at a more-encompassing and internally coherent approach to them. Instead, I bumped into them one at a time as we introduced a new program and saw our first set of students enter and graduate from that program. Although they all involved values which formed our established conception of education, we dealt with them as isolated practice or policy issues in need of some workable solution.

Admissions practice was the first wall that I bumped into with this program. Our Institute’s standard practice with respect to admission of students into full-time programs is to establish quantitative admission standards and to accept students meeting those standards on a first come, first served basis. The value of "fairness" is probably behind this practice. The occasional heavily subscribed program area makes admission decisions based on level of performance of the applicant in the quantitative assessment areas, but even this is rare. For part-time programs, classes are filled purely on a first come, first served basis with no evaluation of admission criteria.
Neither approach would meet the needs of our program. Because of the intense nature of these programs, the high cost of tuition, and the inclusion of work practicums in most programs, we felt a significant need to screen applicants on the basis of a variety of attributes that we believe to be indicators of likely success in the program. Some of these are quantitative and some qualitative. So in addition to the standard quantitative measures, in many of our programs we require references that speak to the individual’s maturity, work ethic, ability to work in teams and we also attempt our own assessment of these qualities in the individual through interviews with applicants.

This qualitative admissions process is one with which the Institute is still uncomfortable. Although the processes have been discussed with and accepted by the Registrar’s office, there has not been any broader discussion to my knowledge.

An experience early on in our program start-up reinforced in my mind that qualitative assessment methods were important to meeting our obligations to all students. I found myself having to make a decision about an applicant with whom the interviewing faculty member was uncomfortable. The faculty member had difficulty articulating the basis for his concern. Once articulated, I felt there was as yet insufficient evidence to support a decision to reject the applicant. I therefore recommended that the faculty member explain his concern to the applicant and allow the applicant to respond. The response of the applicant was sufficiently compelling that I made the decision to accept. It was a decision that had negative consequences for the applicant, the other students in the intake, and for us as a faculty team. The program proved indeed to be inappropriate for the
student who was unsuccessful and was ultimately vociferously disparaging of the program while others in the cohort were very satisfied.

So although we have become very certain of the need for qualitative assessment of applicants we have not yet initiated broader discussion on the values important to our institution that are inherent in the admissions process and on how, in practice, those values can best be realized. We have instead simply proceeded with our own, individually approved, process.

The next wall we encountered is that of eligibility for institutional bursaries. Because this program is not government-funded, the financial aid office ruled that it was not eligible for any of the existing bursary programs at the Institute. Finding no apparent opportunity for revisiting this decision, our approach was to anonymously fund, from the proceeds of program delivery, bursaries specifically targeted at these program areas.

As our students approached graduation, we encountered another wall – eligibility for participation in graduation ceremonies. Due to the Senate decisions to grant a new and non-traditional institutional credential to graduates of this cost-recovery program, what the graduates were receiving was not on the list of credentials qualifying for participation in convocation. These graduates, however, had made considerable investments, both time and financial, in their education. Here again we had two options: seek a values-based discussion on participation in convocation or develop our own approach. Again I chose the latter. Our strategy was to schedule and conduct departmental graduation
ceremonies for these students. Even with this approach, a surprising issue arose. It took significant negotiation with the graduation and awards office to receive their permission to use the Institute's coat of arms on our invitations to the graduation ceremonies.

The final wall we bumped into was that of graduate tracking. Our institution participates in a province-wide survey of graduates in order to assess their level of success in finding work after education and their satisfaction level with the education they received. This survey, however, involves only graduates of full-time and government funded, programs. Our program area felt that it was important to survey graduates of our programs in much the same way as graduates of government funded programs. These surveys are one way of assessing our performance in meeting the needs and expectations of a learner community that has invested their time and money in our institution. As such, they support our values of delivering a quality educational experience and of preparing individuals for employment.

We had two choices: raise for discussion the need for us to revisit our policy on graduate tracking given a new class of graduate that was being produced, or develop a workable approach for our particular graduate community. I chose the latter. We worked directly with the survey group on campus, funding their activities to survey and report on our graduates.
The Joys and Frustrations of Values Talk

This story describes experiences in attempting to build, within our small unit, a sense of community founded on common notions of values and purpose, and then of being challenged when taking action that is perceived to run contrary to those values. The first two years of our work in introducing these new programs saw a small team, working closely together, and discussing the values that guided our activities only on an ad-hoc basis related to specific curriculum, learning environment, or student support questions. That small team probably shared a core set of beliefs about our purpose and the values by which we operated, but it is also the case that our consciousness of those beliefs and the completeness and clarity of our understanding most certainly evolved from our discussions and our experiences.

By the second summer of operations, I felt we were becoming a sufficiently large team and we had an experience base in delivering the programs in our portfolio. It seemed to me that it was time to start a process of articulating our sense of purpose and values. The team met in the summer and started the discussions by exploring our various perspectives on what it means to be “an educated person.” With a richer appreciation of the contributions of intra and interpersonal skills and attitudes, more than specific knowledge, to being an educated person, we focused on articulating our sense of purpose related to the education we deliver and the values that guide our operation. At the end of the meeting, in planning for the next session, some of the team members suggested that
they would like to have some other Institute staff attend our next session to give us feedback on our thoughts. I invited three individuals from different parts of the Institute.

Our discussions at the second meeting were very helpful to the team in questioning and refining the purpose and values that we had developed. We also went on to identify some key goals for ourselves within the context of that purpose and values. An interesting observation was made by one of the invited guests at the end of the morning session. He said he was completely astounded, that he had never participated in a meeting like that before. What was different? “I came in five minutes late,” he said, “and missed the introductions. Throughout the morning I could not tell who were the support staff, who were the faculty and who were the program heads. Everyone participated as equal players in the discussion.” I was very encouraged by this outside observation that everyone seemed equally involved and respected in discussions of what we are and of making that definition come to life. We were all pleased with the values and plans we had articulated.

One year and more growth later, we had added programs, students and staff and we now needed to develop additional offices. There are two areas of management into which I tried with enormous trepidation that is consistently justified: offices and parking space. Nevertheless I chose to attempt to create a more workable office plan overall as our current space had been evolved into rather than planned. The program heads and I met and decided, among other things, to consolidate program administration and program head offices in one location so that student enquiries and issues, and questions of
program administration, could be easily handled. Our space on another floor of the building, equally desirable, would be used to house other faculty.

Describing these plans to the department, I was surprised to receive a very passionate e-mail from one department member who felt that such a physical layout was “hierarchical” and ran contrary to our strongly team-focussed values. I felt that this objection was potentially sending us back to the drawing boards on account of an issue that seemed to me an unfounded concern. Delay would certainly result. On the other hand, I felt it was good that concern felt was being openly expressed and also that maintenance of our values was seen as important. On balance, it seemed best to ask for the opinions of others.

I forwarded the e-mail to all other department members and asked for their thoughts... and was amazed at the results. Without exception those who had not been involved in the planning of this layout felt that it emphasized a hierarchy and represented a potential threat to our team-based operation. I was, after all, glad I had asked for broader participation in the discussion. We changed the plans.

Summary

The stories I have presented are representational of the events that prompted this research and are also the source to which I will turn as I explore how certain conceptual resources might help me to better understand my practice context, the attendant challenges, and my
own actions within that context. In so doing, I am seeking to develop my capacity for wise judgment and moral agency in situations of conflicting notions of purpose, of what we “ought” to do as an educational institution. Developing this capacity requires a deeper appreciation of how groups of individuals might come to agreement on a set of norms that will guide their actions, and also how they might go about the task of conducting their day-to-day activities in a manner consistent with those norms. In Habermas’ work I find a comprehensive analysis of that challenge from which I draw some guiding principles. The next chapter explores his ideas and the following chapter examines the events in my practice in light of these ideas.
CHAPTER THREE:
HABERMAS ON AGENCY, DISCOURSE AND POWER

Habermas' Enterprise and Its Relevance to my Practice

As I start to explore how I could exercise agency in practice experiences such as those described in these stories, keeping in mind my aim of promoting discourse that leads to decisions on action where conceptions of education are in conflict, I turn first to Habermas. I do so because, as described in the Introduction, he offers a comprehensive framework that addresses both the activities of governance (How “ought” we to be as an institution, given that we have conflicting notions of “the good?”) and administration (What is the most effective way to accomplish our goals?) that is based on an underlying premise that we must achieve both stability and justice in our operations. From this underlying premise Habermas argues the need for human moral agency and pluralistic discourse as the basis for our steering and coordinating mechanisms. Given that educational institutions should be fundamentally engaged in ethical and moral decision making as we design our programs and as we operationalize our plans, we too must aim for both stability and justice. I believe that Habermas’ framework will provide a useful lens for examining my own practice experiences, dealing as they are with governance and administration.

In Between Facts and Norms (1996) Habermas further develops conceptual models for guiding human action within communities that were first introduced in his Theory of
Communicative Action, Volumes 1 and 2 (1984, 1987). In this later work Habermas applies his theory of communicative action to develop a conceptual framework for the functioning of governance, law, and administrative activities within a democratic society to create a stable and a just society. He explores the nature of communicative and administrative power, their appropriate uses, potential limitations, and their respective relationships to political governance, law and administration. He deals, in this analysis, at the level of nation-states within a global political environment.

I wish to apply his framework, at a less lofty level, to the question of how institutions can ground their methods of establishing norms of operating so as to permit the establishment of goals and the coordination of action to implement those goals while achieving the desired ends of stability and just action. In doing so I recognize that there are also significant differences between nations and institutions, and that these differences will affect the application of Habermas’ ideas at an institutional level. Most fundamentally, perhaps, is the fact that we choose the institutions of which we are a part, while we are born into a particular nation-state and changing that is arguably more difficult. This difference, however, is not quite as clean as that. The issue of choice of institution is complicated: we may have a choice of a job in that institution or no job (making it more a question of live options than of choice), we may choose an institution believing it to have a certain set of values and find that the actual values do not reflect the espoused values. Nevertheless, a reasonable case can be made for greater individual agency in selecting their institution than in selecting the nation-state of which they are a part.

Another difference is that an educational institution is significantly more limited than a
nation in both its responsibilities and its rights. Our mandate as an educational institution is a subset of that of our nation; it flows directly from a chain of delegated responsibilities through national and provincial levels of government. That mandate is therefore more tenuous than is that of a nation, more directly alterable by higher levels of government. Laws, which govern citizens of nation-states, generally carry more weight and coercive capacity than do policies, which are the institutional-level parallel to nation-state laws. We are also arguably more constrained by social and economic policy, and by the laws that represent that policy, set by our governments than is our nation constrained by international social and economic policies and laws. Nonetheless, I contend that we are like a nation insofar as we have a need to establish means of coordinating our actions as an institution in a manner that yields both justice and stability.

The Institute in which my practice is situated considers that it carries a fiduciary responsibility for providing education that achieves the goals of relevance, quality, accessibility and affordability for the community we serve. Reliably fulfilling this fiduciary responsibility requires the organization be characterized by both stability and just action. To this end a political system, in the form of a governance system, is in place, laws have been established, in the form of policies, and an administrative structure exists which parallels in its responsibilities the administrative bureaucracy of the democratic society.

In this chapter I explore Habermas’ concept of societal coordination, based on his theory of communicative action, to see what it offers as guidance in my objective of grounding
educational planning and operations in action that stems from decisions made through pluralistic discourse on questions of values. The taking off point for this exploration is the work of Weber, Parsons and Foucault, three leading sociologists and social philosophers whose investigations of social order set up the problem that Habermas is aiming to address in his conceptualization of how societies might be organized. I move then to an overview of Habermas’ analysis, describing foundational concepts and the procedurally based framework for governance and administration that he derives from these concepts. I will then highlight the core principles of operation and of the use of power in institutions that appear, to me, central to his proposal. At various key junctures in crafting his approach, Habermas bases a central concept on what he refers to as the “counterfactual” or idealized possibility of conditions of intersubjective action. These moments represent Habermas’ recognition of, and response to, some of the challenges that he identifies as potential barriers to coordinating human action within a society in ways consistent with his theory of communicative action. In closing this chapter, and in preparation for applying Habermas’ concepts to my experiences, I will enumerate those significant counterfactual realities that Habermas posits as ideals in response to very real potential difficulties in operationalizing his model of governance. In these may lie the seeds of some of the difficulties I have encountered in my own experiences with educational governance and administration.
Max Weber (1881-1961) was a sociologist whose project comprised a meta-level analysis of how different societies are characterized by different forms of social domination. He sought to understand through what processes forms of domination become accepted as legitimate (that is, arrive at a state in which both rulers and subjects assume and accept the domination relationship) (Morgan, 1997, p. 304). Weber believed that modern Western society had evolved to a very dangerous state with respect to domination through a chain of events starting with the increased reliance on purposive-rational reason, that form of reason that is aimed at identifying best means to achieve a certain end. This increased faith in instrumental reason causes other forms of validating truth and goodness claims (dealing with ethical and moral questions) to lose visibility to the point that reason itself becomes conflated with purposive-rational reason. As the accepted form of reason becomes purposive-rational reason, all questions become viewed as technical and success for individuals is achieved through being effective at instrumental reasoning, that is, through the domination of others. Validity, as a basis for social integration, is lost.

Weber observed that this dominance of instrumental reason was exacerbated by the advent of industrialization and bureaucratization in modern society. Bureaucratic institutions, he contended, fostered the acceptance of positional power and rule following. He saw this as representing consensual domination. As this state of consensual
domination became more widespread, with the increasing predominance of bureaucracies, hope for "validity" as the basis of social coordination is lost.

In summary, Weber described the condition of modern society as being dominated by the influences of instrumental reason within hierarchical bureaucracies. Instrumental reason objectifies others and bureaucracies place us in positions of relative positional power, fostering rule following, a form of consensual domination. The financial aid director advising me that cost recovery programs are not eligible for existing bursaries is an example of both rule following and instrumental reason, leaving me as an objectified other to be acted upon rather than as an individual with whom to engage in discussions of justice and validity. And I, in my response of simply funding our own bursaries, am likewise applying instrumental reason and my own positional power that derives from my placement in the bureaucratic hierarchy. We are all implicated in this web of purposive-rational action and domination in which power takes only the form of domination. Habermas contends that moral agency, which requires communicative reason (discourse) with other people about questions of truth and goodness, loses out to the forces of instrumental reason and consensual domination. For Weber, the situation seemed very bleak. Parsons thought further about this and concluded that the situation was actually very, very bleak.

Talcott Parsons (1902-1979) sought to develop a theory of social order by applying the positivistic disciplines of science (Habermas, 1987b, pp. 201-204) to develop a model that would explain how social groups functioned. He envisioned a model of societies as
organisms, requiring the capacities of survival in a changing environment and of maintenance of their essence as socially integrated societies. Influenced also by the science of economics, he envisioned societies as systems abstracted from individuals and guided by market forces. Societies are seen to comprise four action systems: cultural, social, personality and behavioral.

Within action systems, cultural systems are specialized around the function of pattern-maintenance, social systems around the integration of acting units (human individuals or, more precisely, personalities engaged in roles), personality systems around goal attainment, and the behavioral organism around adaptation. (Parsons, 1966, p.7)

The above quotation contemplates a model of societal integration and human action in which all action emanates from individuals performing in a purposive-rational fashion. The identification of “ends” is therefore disassociated from moral judgment developed through moral reasoning with others.

Within various systems, Parsons identified the existence of media, steering mechanisms, as the means by which individuals’ action were coordinated. Drawing from the study of economics and the role that money plays as a steering mechanism within an economic system, he explored the characteristics of that medium and looked for similar steering mechanisms in other systems (Habermas, 1987b, p. 257). He posited that money served as an effective steering mechanism, independent of language and shared values, because money was capable of informing the receiver about a desired action and inducing him to accept it without any dependency on a tested and accepted claim to truth or goodness of the action (Habermas, 1987b, p. 264). He identified the following qualitative characteristics of money that are necessary to result in a medium that is at once the
"measure and store of value": it can be stored, it can be measured, and it can be assigned to others (Habermas, 1987b, p. 265). These characteristics create a steering medium that "incorporate(s) amounts of value that can be taken into exclusive possession in variable quantities, that can pass from hand to hand" (Habermas, 1987b, p. 265) and that therefore can be used to direct human action. Steering media, in Parsons' view, instantiate power. Power, for Parsons, approximates Weber's domination as it necessarily was backed by "the disposition over means of enforcement that can be used to threaten sanctions or to apply direct force" (Habermas, 1987b, p. 268).

Parsons proposed analogous media in other subsystems, specifically the political, social and cultural. He identified the media of power, influence and value as being correlated to the political, social and cultural subsystems respectively (Habermas, 1987b, 257). The most widely accepted of his proposed forms of media were money and power. Habermas agreed with Parsons that steering media act as a substitute for intersubjective agreements on questions of truth and goodness, and therefore saw them as highly dangerous. They decoupled individual action from questions of morality and in so doing reduced the possibility of moral agency as a basis for social coordination.

In summary, Parsons conceptualized societies as organisms comprising interacting systems and the actions of individuals as being guided by instrumental reason driven by market forces. This model caused him to fear for the possibility of moral agency as the basis of social coordination. Further substantiating his fear was his analysis of steering media at play within the systems of society. These media serve to direct human action as,
and even more, efficiently than the steering mechanism of language aimed at achieving mutual understanding and consensus. This has the capacity to effectively decouple collective action from agreement on morality and justice developed intersubjectively. This fact solidifies the concern that no longer can moral agency serve as the basis of social coordination.

Parsons’ work expands on Weber’s in a way that is useful to my exploration. What Parsons is offering is perhaps the mechanism whereby, or the motivational explanation of how, the acceptance of positional power and rule following that Weber identified comes to be. Why do we fall so easily into the range of action characterized by followership and instrumental action? Allowing my actions to be controlled by the media of money (getting that raise, keeping that job, bringing in more tuition) and power (engendering the support of those with greater positional power to assist in my objectives, using my own positional power to achieve some end) is simpler, has far more predictable results, and is far less dangerous to me in the short run than if I ask that mutual understanding and consensus guide my actions. The strong human drive for safety is more easily satisfied in the short term through the steering media of money and power than through that of mutual understanding and consensus. And hence Parsons concludes that the prospects for moral agency are very, very bleak. Foucault, entering the picture later, claimed that the prospects were even worse than Weber or Parsons had identified.

Michel Foucault (1926-1984) contends that we construct who we are and how we see the world under the very powerful influence of unrecognized (by us) domination that arises
from historical power/knowledge regimes. He claims that the domination of ourselves by others comes from more than positional power and steering media; it comes from our unchallenged understandings that we develop while failing to question the "truths" put forth historically from those in positions of power. We become the agents of our own domination by others, both historical and current. His aim was to develop a form of criticism that would allow us to examine more critically our assumptions and beliefs, thereby restoring the possibility of moral agency.

Foucault’s practice of critical reflection is concerned to loosen the grip of a picture which currently holds us captive and, simultaneously, to open up the possibility of being otherwise than we are by loosening this picture and to exhibit a mode of being otherwise than we are through its practice. (Ashendon and Owen, 1999, p. 11)

He viewed social order as comprising established power regimes that use their power to define what constitutes truth and knowledge thereby dominating others by marginalizing their knowledges and limiting the choices for action available to them. His goal was to both open the possibility of thinking and acting differently and to encourage individuals to take up that possibility of “being otherwise.”

Foucault’s understanding of power/knowledge complexes, and hence the politics of truth, is an important contribution to the study of action, power and social order. Any given epistemic field structures our thinking about what counts as truth or knowledge (we need only to contrast the epistemologies of traditional Western medicine with those of Naturopaths or traditional Eastern medicine). Foucault contends that:

there is no power (or ethical) relation without the correlative constitution of a field of knowledge, nor any knowledge that does not presuppose and
constitute at the same time power (and ethical) relations. (Foucault, 1977, p. 27)

As with Weber and Parsons, Foucault tends to use power in an instrumental sense primarily, although not exclusively; power is domination, it is "the ability to structure the field of possible actions of others" (Foucault, 1982, p. 221). Because any epistemic field structures what counts as truth and knowledge, it also inherently leads to the creation of power positions (those able to structure the field of possible actions of others by establishing what counts as knowledge in that field). This brings Foucault to conclude that there exist, have existed and always will exist power/knowledge solidarities that are intimately interconnected. The question then becomes how to disrupt those solidarities. Part of Foucault's answer was critical reflection.

Foucault described his methodological approach to critical reflection, genealogy, as "work carried out by ourselves on ourselves" (Owen, 1999, p.36). He described it as:

a self-directed exercise of our capacities for reflecting and acting on our ways of reflecting and acting on ourselves, [which] is itself a way of conducting our conduct directed to the development of our capacity for the self-directed exercise of our capacities for reflecting and acting on ourselves. (Owen, 1999, p. 36)

I include this quotation not because it is clear communication, but because it emphasizes Foucault's belief in the importance of individual critical reflection in questions of truth and goodness. He appears to give less prominence to intersubjective testing of truth and goodness claims, and is distinctly wary of consensus. Foucault views the objective of consensus as unreasonable and dangerous because it is unstable, subject to becoming unraveled at any time, and "consensus is not the basis of a power relation, but, at best, its instrument or result, so it cannot itself guarantee our freedom from arbitrary power"
Foucault envisions government, and other power regimes, as being something of which we are not a part, that we cannot shape from within, and that we can only influence from the periphery. Thomas Osborne describes Foucault’s view of government as follows.

Given that we are all subject to government, and that it is the duty of governments to work for the well-being of their citizens, then we have the right to contest the evils that are done supposedly in the name of government. In other words, given that there are those who speak in the name of government, it is logical that those who are governed also have the right to speak in a common name. (Osborne, 1999, p. 53)

This places individuals in the role of protestors, conducting civil disobedience as it were, rather than of citizens contributing to the steering and coordinating activities of a society of which they are a part. Accepting Foucault’s perspective seems to preclude the possibility of shaping and steering the nature of a society through efforts to achieve relatedness and intersubjective agreement. There is at least one caveat to this interpretation of Foucault, however; he does also speak of the possibility that the collective action of a small group of like-minded individuals could influence a social order. He observes that “power – even the most malign, even the most well-armed, brutal power – can always be resisted by the force of a collective will” (Osborne, 1999, p. 52).

Foucault finds most hope for the possibility that a morally grounded collective will might effect changes in social order when he considers the actions of small local organizations and NGO’s. He speaks directly of organizations such as Friends of the Earth, Amnesty
International, Médecins du Monde, finding in hope in them, Osborne believes, because “such organizations could be understood as creating networks of solidarity amongst disparate individuals, cultures and groups” (Osborne, 1999, p.54).

Foucault’s contributions bring to clarity the pervasiveness of power/knowledge complexes and their ability to serve as forces of domination that, as such, limit the possibilities of social integration grounded in moral agency. He saw critical reflection and civil disobedience as our primary options in countering these regimes. He held out little hope for individual or collective moral agency to shape societies. While Weber and Parsons argued that positional power and steering media were creating societal organization through domination, Foucault also saw additional deeply seated sources of domination in societies, which further limited the possibilities for societal integration grounded in the moral agency of citizens. Foucault identified the consequences of power/knowledge regimes: they cause us to become the agents of our own domination by those in positions of privilege and power through our acceptance of the truths and limits they claim. Habermas’ version of the problem is consistent with how it is variously framed by Weber, Parsons and Foucault. Much of his work can be understood as an attempt to remedy the problem, to redeem moral agency as the basis for societal coordination.
Foundational Concepts Necessary to Habermas’ Framework for Social Integration

In presenting the foundational concepts of Habermas’ approach to structuring the steering and coordinating mechanisms of society, I will speak first of Habermas’ characterization of the overarching goals of social integration: stability and justice. I will then speak of his conception of communicative and strategic action and of his notion of discourse, which he sees as the core tools for achieving stability and justice. The third and final element of this set of foundational concepts relates to the challenges created by the contextual realities of modernity and plurality.

Necessary Conditions for a Stable, Just Society

Habermas argues that the steering and coordinating mechanisms of societies ideally reflect the deliberative, rational best judgments of the diversity of individuals that constitute that society. Without satisfying this basic condition, societies will necessarily degenerate into either tyranny or anarchy and ultimately cease to exist as a coordinated community characterized by stability and justice.

Given this premise, he sees an inherent and pervasive tension that is at work within any system of coordinating human action – a tension between “facts and norms,” or what he also terms “facticity and validity.” In essence, Habermas is claiming that the effective coordination of human action within a society requires both a predictability of action (what he terms facticity, instantiated in compulsory laws which are backed by sanctions) and also validity, a reasonable presumption that the accepted rules of action “embody a
claim to legitimacy" (Habermas, 1996, p. xi). I digress here for an anecdote that provides a trivial but amusing example of the point that Habermas is making. My mother tells the story of being driven through the Irish countryside by a seventy-something year-old Irishman. Now my mother is one of those polite, queue-forming, law-abiding Canadians known by reputation throughout the world. The car approached an intersection at which there was a stop sign clearly indicating that traffic going their direction was to stop. In astonishment my mother watched as her driver (a relative by marriage) proceeded apace through the intersection. “Paddy,” she said in some alarm, “that was a stop sign you just drove through.” Speaking with self-righteous conviction, Paddy replied “Stupid place to have a stop sign!” This is a simple example, and we could all think of many, to support Habermas’ claim that effectively coordinating human action requires both facticity and validity.

Achieving “validity” requires that social facts, or laws, are always subject to re-analysis by citizens to confirm or refute their continued justification. Habermas proposes that “law is a set of coercible rules and impersonal procedures that also involves an appeal to reasons that all citizens should, at least ideally, find acceptable” (Habermas, 1996, p. xi). He concludes that a system of coordinating human action necessarily requires means whereby the validity claims on which it is based can be re-examined. It is through communicative action, and specifically through discourse, that Habermas proposes that individuals in a society raise and resolve questions about the continued validity of the steering and coordinating mechanisms of society. I will speak later of his notions of how both individual citizens and structures might foster this ongoing evaluative and reflexive
state. Failure to provide forums for such action will lead over time to the degeneration of the normative mechanisms. (I must point out that Paddy's approach does not reflect Habermas' views on how citizens fulfill their obligations to question and test the validity of laws!) Stable social coordination is therefore grounded in communicative action and discourse. This grounding of social coordination on the unpredictability of communicative action causes concern about the potentially anarchistic tendency of the theory of communicative action. Habermas addresses, throughout his analysis, the implications of this tension and the procedural methods required to keep the tension in balance. In doing so, he explicates two forms of human action: communicative and strategic.

**Communicative Action and Strategic Action**

Communicative action is action oriented towards achieving a common understanding amongst the participants about what is true and good. "In such action, actors in the role of speaker and hearer attempt to negotiate interpretations of the situation at hand and to harmonize their respective plans with one another through the unrestrained pursuit of illocutionary goals" (Habermas, 1996, p. 18). Participants must "suspend the objectivating attitude of an observer along with the immediate orientation to personal success in favor of the performative attitude of a speaker who wants to reach an understanding with a second person about something in the world" (Habermas, 1996, p. 18).
It is important to note that these two quotations reveal an often challenged area related to Habermas' work; is the purpose of communicative action "mutual understanding" or "agreement?" The first quotation would cause one to conclude that the goal is agreement, while the second appears to be satisfied with mutual understanding as the goal. Habermas, writing in German, actually uses the word verständigung, which has multiple meanings (Tully, 1999, p. 100); it means understanding, and agreement, and also the process of reaching understanding or agreement. By a gift of the language he therefore often manages to avoid precision in this distinction when speaking of communicative action. He does in fact recognize that mutual understanding does not always lead to agreement (in which case his recommendation is a resort to negotiation) and that, indeed, agreement is not necessary in all situations of communicative action. However, when developing his concepts for achieving societal integration (e.g., "So, now that we understand each other, what are we going to mutually agree to do in this instance?"), agreement becomes an assumed goal of discourse. So, focused on societies' need to achieve coordination of human action, Habermas tends to privilege the goal of agreement arising from mutual understanding over the end of mutual understanding in and of itself.

Strategic action is action oriented towards achieving a particular desired end in the most efficient manner. The goals are not questioned in the process of strategic action. "In more general terms, an actor who adopts a strategic attitude is primarily concerned with getting his or her way in a social environment that includes other actors" (Habermas, 1996, p. xvii).
While communicative action requires others, either an individual or group can undertake strategic action. Strategic action necessarily results in action towards a desired end. Communicative action, in contrast, results (ideally) in an alignment of individuals towards a common goal. As such, it has a normative impact only if the participants commit themselves to three idealized presuppositions: “that speakers and hearers can understand a grammatical expression in identical ways” (Habermas, 1996, p. 11), that participants are willing to be mutually accountable to act on the basis of their intersubjective agreement, and that they tie their agreement to the intersubjective recognition of criticizable validity claims (Habermas, 1996, pp. 4, 19-20).

These presuppositions move the participants from a mutual understanding, a common view of a goal, to an inclination toward action. Having reached a common goal and an inclination toward action, strategic action then comes to the foreground as the actors, individually or in groups, work through the best means of effecting the realization of the goal. This characterization of communicative and strategic action implies a dichotomy that, while useful for analytical purposes, must be recognized as being too stark. While communicative action is primarily concerned with goal definition and strategic action is primarily concerned with goal attainment (Habermas, 1996, p. 188), both are at play as we develop and implement a collective will. This intermeshing of communicative and strategic action becomes evident in later chapters as I examine the events described in my practice stories. Communicative and strategic action are not characterized as “good action” and “bad action,” but instead are presented as mutually supporting and often
enmeshed forms of action necessary, in Habermas’ view, for the development and implementation of a common will and hence for the attainment of a stable and just society.

**Communicative Reason (Discourse)**

In considering the process of reasoning through what are desired ends or appropriate means, Habermas distinguishes between practical reason, which is the action of an individual, and communicative reason, which is the process of reasoning through a question in communication with others. Communicative reason, then, is communicative action directed towards examining validity claims. Communicative reason is that form of communicative action that comes into play when the actors hold different views of what is true, good and just. Habermas uses both the term communicative reason and the term discourse for this activity. I will use the terms discourse and communicative reason interchangeably when speaking of the act of working through, in language, respective understandings of a question at hand to arrive at a mutually shared understanding and, where possible, agreement.

Habermas includes another idealization or counterfactual presupposition.

Communicative reason differs from practical reason first and foremost in that it is no longer ascribed to the individual actor... Rather, what makes communicative reason possible is the linguistic medium through which interactions are woven together and forms of life are structured. This rationality is inscribed in the linguistic telos of mutual understanding and forms an ensemble of conditions that both enable and limit. (Habermas, 1996, pp. 3-4)
The successful application of communicative reason requires that participants are free from coercion and from the influence of their own strategic objectives. In Habermas’ words, it requires that they “pursue their illocutionary goals without reservations” (Habermas, 1996, p.4). I move now to describe how the contextual realities of modernity and plurality complicate this process of achieving agreement through communicative action and discourse.

**Challenges Created by Modernity and Plurality**

Habermas coins the term lifeworld in reference to the set of unstated and unquestioned beliefs, values and assumptions that are the basis from which our interpretation of and judgment of truth and goodness claims proceeds. He describes the lifeworld as a “sprawling, deeply set, and unshakable rock of background assumptions, loyalties, and skills” (Habermas, 1996, p. 22). The power of the lifeworld is that it provides individuals with a guidance system, as it were, for interpreting and deciding about truth and rightness. It also has the interesting characteristic of removing the tension between facticity and validity. Because we believe it and don’t question it, it is both generative of social reality and assumed valid (neatly producing both facticity and validity). The danger of this lifeworld is that:

we make use of such knowledge without the awareness that it could be false. Insofar as all knowledge is fallible, background knowledge does not represent knowledge at all, in a strict sense. As background knowledge, it lacks the possibility of being challenged, that is, of being raised to the level of criticizable validity claims... by converting it from a resource into a topic of discussion, at which point – just when it is thematized – it no longer functions as a lifeworld background. (Habermas, 1996, p. 22)
The combined forces of pluralization and individualization of our society have conspired to shrink the zones of overlapping lifeworlds and shared background assumptions amongst groups of individuals. This has two apparently contrary results: there is greater scope for and need of discourse to achieve shared understandings, and there is more possibility for, and indeed a greater requirement for, strategic action or the self-interested pursuit of one’s own success. Both of these results create potential problems for our aim to achieve social integration based on accepted and validated norms.

Returning to the question of ensuring the validity of the normative rules of action, Habermas proposes that the disintegration of widespread support for earlier “encompassing metaphysical systems” which aimed to provide a comprehensive basis for judging the validity of truth and rightness claims has brought about a need for a “post metaphysical” approach to reason. This approach to reason is based on the use of language and social interaction to discursively arrive at judgments about truth and rightness claims. He maintains that the best judgment of citizens in conditions of modernity “depends all the more on a procedural reason, that is, on a reason that puts itself on trial” (Habermas, 1996, xli). Rather than giving up on the possible benefits of reason, Habermas devotes considerable analysis to the clarification of appropriate tests of validity for different classes of truth and rightness claims. He states that “a justified truth claim should allow its proponent to defend it with reasons against the objections of possible opponents; in the end she should be able to gain the rationally motivated agreement of the interpretation community as a whole” (Habermas, 1996, p. 14). Here again we see Habermas’ view of language generally, communicative action and discourse
more specifically, being directed towards the development of intersubjective agreement on contentious issues.

In summary, Habermas grounds his conceptual framework of governance, law and administration on premises which I have briefly summarized: the effects of the shrinking lifeworld and the need for both facticity and validity in the steering mechanisms of society, a distinction between communicative and strategic action, and an account of the role of communicative action in terms of validity claims that must be vindicated in discourses of different types. With this grounding, I move now to a description of Habermas’ procedural framework for structuring the steering and coordinating mechanisms of society.

Habermas’ Framework for Social Integration

Habermas constructs his proceduralistic approach to societal integration on the foundational concepts just described. His construction process starts with an understanding of law, or policy, as a means of reifying “collective will” in a way that will serve a normative role in grounding administrative action. He then goes on to describe the interrelationship of communicative power, law or policy, and administrative power and their respective roles in shaping, steering and administering the actions of a society. With this basis to his construction project, he delves into the challenges of maintaining the legitimacy of law in the face of evolving social realities. Finally, he addresses the
question of the role of human agency. I will use examples taken from the grievance story to help explain my interpretation of this framework.

**Law as a Surrogate for Communicative Action**

The shrinking lifeworld results in an increased need for communicative action to achieve shared understandings and for discourse in situations of disputed claims to truth and goodness. At the same time, the increasing instance of individual strategic action without the normative control system of a shared lifeworld with encompassing metaphysical systems creates ever more complex issues in need of shared understandings. The implications of this are an overburdening of society's capacity for communicative action and discourse.

Faced with a breakdown in social integration due to demand for communicative action that overloads our capacity, Habermas identifies two options: to break off communication or to switch to strategic action. The former being untenable, he focuses on how to structure strategic action in a way that is supportive of societal integration.

His solution is to propose that the individuals of the society must come to an agreement on how to normatively regulate strategic action thereby reducing the demand for communicative action to achievable levels. The collective agreement between our institution and the faculty union, specifying respective rights and responsibilities, would be an example of such an agreement for normatively regulating strategic action. The policies of our Institute are another example. The aim of policies is to regulate action,
ideally according to principles developed through discourse about our purpose and values. Drawing on his premise of the dual requirements for facticity and validity, Habermas proposes two necessary conditions for individuals to accept this normative regulation of their strategic action: the rules must incorporate sanctions that compel the rational strategic actor to compliance and the rules must be acceptable to the collective of actors, which is achieved only if they are intersubjectively recognized as representing legitimate normative validity claims. These rules governing strategic action are constituted as laws in the case of nations, and as policies in the case of institutions. Within the constraints of this legal system individuals are free, in fact encouraged, to act strategically.

Compliance with laws is ultimately based on the supposition that law has legitimacy, that the norm represented could be justified. History has shown that the “less a legal order is legitimate, or is at least considered such, the more other factors, such as intimidation, the force of circumstances, custom, and sheer habit, must step in to reinforce it” (Habermas, 1996, p. 30). In the grievance story, the collective agreement was perceived by management as not appropriately addressing new forms of partnership agreements between institutions and so was not accepted as governing their actions in the case of such agreements. So although a system of law with “coercive capacity” is required, that same system of law must both be based on validity claims and allow for the possibility of critically examining those claims. This brings Habermas to his understanding of the interrelationship of communicative action, law, and strategic action.
The Structural Interrelationship of Communicative Action, Law, Administrative Action

As we have described, Habermas has established that law, as the stabilizing force in social order, must be based on shared beliefs. "The acceptance of validity claims, which generates and perpetuates social facts" (the coercive nature of the law) depends on the "context-dependent acceptability of reasons that are constantly exposed to the risk of being invalidated by better reasons and context-altering learning processes" (Habermas, 1996, p. 36). Put alternately, the force of law or formal policy can be relied upon only as long as the normative validity claims upon which it is based continue to withstand the tests of new examination in the light of changing societal realities. It seems a shaky foundation. Indeed, the actions of management in the light of new forms of education requiring new forms of teaching would substantiate that impression. It is through his understanding of the interrelationship of communicative action, law and strategic action that Habermas addresses this concern. Here I introduce the notions of communicative and administrative power.

Habermas claims that political power takes two necessary, yet conceptually distinct, forms – communicative power and administrative power – and is distinct from violence (or force, as Hannah Arendt would term it). Violence represents the "capacity for instrumentalizing another's will for one's own purposes" (Habermas, 1996, p. 148). Communicative power, conversely, is the "consensus-achieving force of a communication aimed at reaching understanding" (Habermas, 1996, p. 148). Habermas concurs with Arendt's assessment that "communicatively produced power is a scarce resource, which organizations compete for and officials manage, but which none of them
can produce” (Habermas, 1996, p. 149). This power can result only from the unhindered play of communicative action. It can be created only through dialogue that is aimed at reaching understanding and consensus with others. And because it is created collectively and does not exist other than in dialogue, no individual is capable of producing or possessing communicative power. Laws devolve from communicative power. Ideally, the collective agreement would have been created and revised through discourse that created communicative power; it would represent a statement of a collective will.

Habermas recognizes that laws, in and of themselves, are insufficient to act as agents of social integration. Just as their existence presupposes a political or governance mechanism (a lawmaking process grounded in communicative action) so also does it require an implementation mechanism (an administrative process). Administrative power, Habermas proposes, is primarily concerned with goal attainment (Habermas, 1996, p. 188) and promotes an inclination towards strategic action and ends-means thinking, determining the best approach to achieving the unquestioned “end” defined by law (or policy). Habermas therefore views law “as the medium through which communicative power is translated into administrative power” (Habermas, 1996, p. 150). Administrative power, acting under the auspices of law, which in turn devolves from communicative power, serves to implement the collective will. Administrative actors receive legitimation for their roles from the system of law. In my example, the collective agreement provides legitimation for the administrative actors in both the union and the management. Administrative power is a clear necessity for the orderly functioning of a complex society (or institution). Given laws, administrative power serves as the
mechanism to implement that collective will. In contrast with communicative power, administrative power can be possessed and exercised by individuals.

Within a democratic society there should be a mutuality between law and power that is directed towards their reciprocal survival and results in social integration. Political power (both communicative and administrative) supports societal integration through the realization of collective goals and it supports law by acting as the political institutionalization of law. Communicative power creates the collective will and provides legitimation of the laws or policies. Administrative power implements that will, as represented by law. Reciprocally, law supports societal integration through the stabilization of behavioral expectations and it supports political power by lending legal organization to the exercising of power. The law, or collective agreement in the case of our example, has sanctions that have coercive capabilities to force compliance, thereby producing stability of behaviour and supporting the agency required by those exercising power.

While this mutually supporting combination is clearly of potential advantage in terms of stabilizing society, it is subject to the risk of degenerating into tyranny if it loses its grounding in the legitimacy of communicatively confirmed norms. Although administrative power derives from law, Habermas recognizes the risk of misappropriation of administrative systems for the self-serving purposes of the actors within the administrative hierarchy. He speaks of the empirical observation, supporting Foucault's notion of power/knowledge complexes, that within institutions “normatively unfiltered
interest positions often carry the day only because they are stronger and use the legitimating force of legal forms to cloak their merely factual strength” (Habermas, 1996, p. 39). And again “often enough, law provides illegitimate power with the mere semblance of legitimacy. At first glance, one cannot tell whether legal regulations deserve the assent of associated citizens or whether they result from administrative self-programming and structural social power” (Habermas, 1996, p. 40). When this latter occurs, administrative power has been effectively subverted into what Hannah Arendt would term force. In Habermas’ words, “if the sources of justice from which law draws its legitimacy are not to run dry, then a jurisgenerative communicative power must underlie the administrative power of the government” (Habermas, 1996, p. 147). Indeed, the actions by management of entering into partnership agreements without consultation with the union can be seen as a step towards the tyranny of which Habermas is speaking.

Habermas argues for Arendt’s position that articulating good reasons in public forces people to think about what counts as good and just from the standpoint of others. It is this activity that must be the foundation of our governance or lawmaking process and that must be accessible to those engaged in the process of administering those laws. Management contemplating a new form of educational delivery must have access to the lawmaking process concerning the collective agreement. How, then, does Habermas propose that administrative power retain its legitimacy and avoid the risk of degenerating into violence?
To address this risk Habermas proposes the establishment of a greater variety of communicative mechanisms to ensure that the actions of the administrative bodies are consistent with the norms represented in the law. This indeed is the challenge. In “Hannah Arendt’s Communications Concept of Power,” Habermas quotes Arendt as she described Thomas Jefferson’s reservation about the feasibility of the American democratic system:

What he [Jefferson] perceived to be the mortal danger to the republic was that the Constitution had given all power to the citizens, without giving them the opportunity of being republican and acting as citizens. (Habermas, 1977, p. 12)

I find a direct parallel with the implementation of administrative bureaucracies in institutions. Individuals are placed in decision-making roles without necessarily being given the means to engage in deliberative discourse about what “ought” to be done. In our example, no obvious forum was available for management and union to deliberate on what “ought” to be done to address the need for a new form of education. How, then, do political actors ensure the continued legitimacy of the laws that are governing their use of administrative power?

Maintaining the Legitimacy of Law

Discourse is the means whereby laws are tested and altered as necessary to reflect changing social realities. Throughout his work, Habermas speaks of the need for laws to be based on justifiable norms. The discourse principle is his proposed definition of legitimate justification of claims to pragmatics, ethics and morality represented in law.
This principle states:

Just those action norms are valid to which all possibly affected persons could agree as participants in rational discourses. (Habermas, 1996, p. 107)

This principle leads to the question of what would count as reasons sufficient that persons “could agree as participants in rational discourses.” These rational discourses instantiate communicative reason and Habermas identifies three classes of questions: pragmatic questions dealing with what is the most suitable means of achieving established goals, ethical-political questions dealing with how is it that a collection of individuals wish their society to be, and moral questions dealing with what is “good” for all of humanity, what is “just.” In the grievance story, a pragmatic question would then have been how best to secure the new type of instruction resources required. An ethical question would be whether it was good for us, as an institution, to provide such education that involved vendor-specific training delivered by instructors with different qualifications than is common at our institution. A moral issue would have been whether our society would benefit from the type of education being contemplated. Habermas discusses methods of validation appropriate for each class of question. The test for pragmatic questions is expedience, for ethical-political is expedience and “on the whole, is this good for us,” and for moral questions is justice (Habermas, 1996, p. 161).

This portion of Habermas’ analysis is relevant to the task of understanding the decision-making process at work within our Institute insofar as it implies different validity tests, involving different sets of actors, dependent upon the class of question being addressed. In my experience within an institutional setting, pragmatic questions prevail, ethical-
political questions are less common, and moral questions are raised relatively infrequently.

As he has before, here again Habermas identifies certain idealized (counterfactual) presuppositions necessary for successful application of the discourse principle. For ethical-political and moral questions he assumes that the discourse is pluralistic, close to the grass roots (if conducted by representatives), public and universally accessible, and relatively undisturbed by the effects of power (or, permitting only the rationally motivated force of the better argument) (Habermas, 1996, p. 182). With the discourse principle in place, Habermas tackles the question of how the legitimacy of law can be maintained within the structural framework of communicative power, law and administrative power.

I move now to Habermas’ perspective that continual reinterpretation of law is needed in light of new situations and changing social realities. In his conception of the role of law, Habermas argues for a view of law that recognizes it as a statement of “ethical self-understanding of a historical community” (Habermas, 1996, p. 258). Law is not something that we can take off the shelf and follow as one might follow an assembly guide.

Our political life includes ongoing moral discourse with one another in an effort to achieve ever more insightful answers to the question of what are our real interests, as opposed to our actual preferences, and thus what sort of persons – with what projects, goals, ideals – ought we to be… Deliberative politics is an essential instrument of self-knowledge. (Habermas, 1996, pp. 257-258)
The act of interpreting law is both necessary and non-trivial for two reasons. First, in applying law (or policy) there is a dual requirement to both reaffirm the justification of the law and to determine the appropriateness of (and relative priorities of) the laws – and the norms they manifest – to the particular situation at hand. This latter exercise is particularly problematic in Habermas' view.

Problems of norm justification do not present the real difficulties. Normally the basic principles themselves – entailing such duties as equal respect for each person, distributive justice, benevolence toward the needy, loyalty and sincerity – are not disputed. Rather, the abstractness of these highly generalized norms leads to problems of application as soon as a conflict reaches beyond the routine interactions in familiar contexts. (Habermas, 1996, p. 115)

The second imperative for and complicating factor related to interpreting law is the continually changing nature of social realities. Laws (or policies) reify norms within the context of the particular social reality within which they are created. As these social realities change, the fundamental justification of the manifest norm may become invalid. If not invalidated by these changing social realities, the appropriate application of the law to situations not anticipated at the time of lawmaking may be difficult to determine.

Habermas' two fundamental messages regarding the interpretation of law are: openness to continual interpretation of law is necessary, and the nature of the questions raised in the act of interpretation requires that the deliberation involve discourse. In other words, administrative actors must be alert to the need to consider both the justification and the appropriateness of the law (or policy) when encountering an unusual situation. They must also be alert to broader changes in social reality that might necessitate a more
encompassing law or policy-making activity. To achieve this level of alertness and to respond appropriately therefore requires that administrative players act both strategically and communicatively at the same time. In the grievance story, the administrative actors within management, while recognizing the changing social realities, did not enter into discourse with the union to reconsider the collective agreement. Instead, they applied their own (arguably self-serving) interpretation and acted strategically on the basis of their conclusions. This leads to Habermas’ understanding of human agency and his concept of the dual roles of citizenship – subject of the law and lawmaker.

The Role of Human Agency and the Risk of Followership

Achieving the governance and administration structure proposed by Habermas leads him to conceptualize the process of lawmaking as requiring citizens to conceive of themselves in two roles: subjects of the law and communicatively engaged citizens responsible for formulating the law (Habermas, 1996, p. 120). And at its foundation is communicative action and discourse. It is important to note that Habermas considers all citizens to carry responsibility for conceiving of themselves in these dual roles. In the grievance story management chose not to enter into a lawmaker role, which would have led them to raise the issue of education delivery through partnerships for resolution through policy making bodies of the Institute. Instead, they rationalized their actions by assuming the role of citizen as subject of the law and arguing that their actions did not, strictly speaking, contravene the collective agreement.
It is therefore necessary that political rights guarantee participation in all deliberative and decisional processes relevant to legislation. Habermas points out the paradox that basic political rights actually must institutionalize the public use of communicative freedom in the form of human rights thereby unleashing the potential of communicative action to challenge existing ordering structures.

He raises an important caution about a potential barrier to individuals assuming the role of lawmaker. He says that there is "evidence that democratic institutions of freedom disintegrate without the initiative of a population accustomed to freedom" (Habermas, 1996, p. 130). People not used to having the freedom to speak, to question, to challenge authority are unlikely to exercise that freedom when it is encountered due to fear of sanctions such as must necessarily have been present in any system in which they were not free to speak. Trust in the freedom to participate in communicative action without fear of reprisals is fundamental to fulfilling the lawmaking role of citizenship envisioned by Habermas. In the grievance story, I think it is fair to say that individual faculty members would have felt some reluctance to speak against the partnership arrangement even if they felt it was unfair because of a lack of trust in their ability to do so without reprisals. For their part, the management would have felt some reluctance to enter into discourse with the union on the question of partnerships because of a lack of trust in the union's willingness to enter into such discourse without self-serving intentions.

Habermas is clear that with administrative power and strategic action comes the risk that individuals in administrative roles will lose their distinctiveness, becoming instead
players of roles where their actions are determined by position and law (or policy). At the same time, throughout his discussion of the roles of citizens, laws and bureaucracies is embedded the assumption of human agency and of human motivation to strive for “just” action. Given this assumed moral imperative, it is communicative action that creates the possibility for moral human agency, for individuals to make a difference by working through questions of good action in public. So a moral imperative is assumed, and communicative action is the basis for realizing human agency.

Habermas recognizes that this assumption is not valid in all cases and that “followership” has a seductive appeal. He says:

The formula “Command us, Führer, we will follow you” goes perfectly with the formula “all for one and one for all” – as we saw in the posters of Nazi Germany in my youth – because fellowship is entwined with followership in every traditionalist sense of solidarity. Justice conceived in post conventional terms can converge with solidarity as its reverse side only when solidarity has been transformed in the light of the idea of a general discursive will formation. (Habermas, 1990, p. 245)

While Habermas’ analysis of a stable and just society is founded on the assumption of both a moral imperative and a capacity for human agency on the part of its citizens, he is conscious of some of the threats that can undermine these conditions. The administrative imperative to predictability, the comfort of followership, the lack of sufficient forums for communicative action, the lack of openness to the lifeworlds of others, and the individual pursuit of self-interest are among the threats that he does recognize. At the same time, he shares Arendt’s optimism in the capacity of individuals, as unique human beings, to come together in dialogue in pursuit of what is good and just. While not an emphasis of his, my reading of Habermas is that history leads him to share in Arendt’s appreciation of the
power of natality – the uniqueness of each person. This optimism is expressed by Arendt in The Human Condition when she says:

(T)he fact that man is capable of action means that the unexpected can be expected of him, that he is able to perform what is infinitely improbable. And this again is possible only because each man is unique, so with each birth something uniquely new comes into the world. (Arendt, 1958, p. 178)

Perhaps, though, even with their analyses of the lessons of history and the articulation of concepts such as natality and communicative action, in the end one is left with a gap in the proof of a moral imperative and a motivation for human agency. Opinions will differ on the size of the gap and hence of the leap of faith necessary to bridge that gap. I believe what is not in question is Habermas’ belief, on the whole, in the presence of both a moral imperative and a drive for human agency within individual human beings. The response of the union staff members to my request for discussion about the grievance about to go to arbitration is to a certain extent an instance of both a moral imperative and the exercising of human agency on their part. Before identifying the core principles that I take from Habermas’ work on societal integration, I will summarize his framework as I understand it.

**Summarizing the Conceptual Framework of Societal Integration**

“The argument developed in Between Facts and Norms essentially aims to demonstrate that there is a conceptual or internal relation, and not simply a historically contingent association, between the rule of law and democracy” (Habermas, 1996, p. 449). In the pursuit of stability and justice in social integration, the rule of law and democracy mutually support each other and both rest on discourse to derive their legitimacy.
Discourse both demands and enhances the capacity of human moral agency, upon which Habermas’ framework is grounded.

At the risk of creating a caricature of Habermas’ detailed account of the application of his theory of communicative action to structure mechanisms of social integration, I will summarize the major concepts and conclusions developed by Habermas in his model. At the foundation of his analysis is the differentiation between communicative action, aimed at achieving mutual understanding with others, and strategic action, aimed at determining and applying effective means to achieve a predetermined end. When the pursuit of mutual understanding surfaces conflicting notions of truth and goodness, the communicative action takes the specific form of discourse aimed at determining, in dialogue with others, truth and validity. Discourse is applied to three classes of questions: pragmatic, ethical-political, and moral (Habermas, 1996, p. 108).

Habermas posits that social integration requires both stability and just action and that both facticity and validity are necessary conditions of the steering mechanisms of any society that aims to achieve these goals of stability and justice. He describes the shrinking lifeworld that characterizes modern society, having the impact of both reducing the basis of shared beliefs (making validity more difficult to determine) and increasing the tendency towards strategic action. This shrinking lifeworld therefore creates both a greater demand for communicative action (and often its specific form, discourse) to determine what ought to be done and a greater complexity in the issues, to the point of overburdening society’s ability to use communicative action as the sole method of
coordinating human action. This in turn leads to a need for a way to normatively regulate strategic action so that it is supportive of the collective will of citizens regarding the type of community they wish to be. Drawing on his claim that facticity and validity are dual requirements of such steering mechanisms, he concludes that the laws that serve to normatively regulate strategic action must both incorporate sanctions and be seen as valid. To achieve laws which meet these criteria requires citizens to see themselves both as subjects of the law and as responsible for formulating the law.

Recognizing that laws, in and of themselves, are insufficient to guarantee social integration, Habermas describes the need for administrative bureaucracies with corresponding administrative power, to serve as the implementing mechanisms. He therefore describes a tiered power system in which communicative action determines the collective will of the society, yielding communicative power that is the basis of the coordinating system. Laws, the second tier, devolve from communicative power and represent the normative steering mechanism that expresses the collective will that is arrived at through communicative power. Administrative power, the third tier, provides the means of securing implementation of the law.

Habermas goes on to explore the context-dependent nature of the validity of truth claims and the complexity of determining both justification and appropriateness in administering the implementation of the law. He further describes the risk that exists of having administrative power subverted by self-interest or by the drive for stability at the expense of justice. To counter these risks, he makes the case for the ongoing need for
interpretation of law in a way which accesses communicative reason and power to address questions of continued validity and appropriate application. He sees moral agency, made possible through communicative reason or discourse, as the redeeming force to counter the possible misappropriation of administrative power.

I have experienced the power of communicative action and am drawn to his ideal that it is possible to structure law, politics and administrative power in a way that is generative of stability and justice in societies. In practice, both in the politics of nations and in the much less ambitious sphere of my place of work, achieving this ideal is fraught with difficulties. But why is that the case? The following section of this chapter is preparation for an examination of my practice through the lens of Habermas’ framework. I will attempt to distill the core principles of operation and of the use of power central to Habermas’ posited ideal. Finally in this chapter I will identify those challenges to achieving his idealized process of social integration that Habermas identifies and addresses through specifying counterfactual ideals towards which we are to strive. These will be important in the test against practice as they represent potential causes of failure to achieve the governance model that Habermas is recommending.

Core Principles of Operation and Characteristics of Power

In Habermas’ analysis of social coordination I identify a set of principles for the operation of institutions (or political communities) and a particular understanding of the nature of power. I synthesize the following core principles, drawn from Habermas’
A conceptual distinction between communicative and strategic action – and the need for both within an institution. Habermas differentiates these two distinct but enmeshed forms of action, the former being the means of arriving at decisions about what type of institution we wish to be and about what is ethical and just, the latter being the means of achieving effective implementation of our activities in order to achieve the agreed-upon goals. He understands communicative action to be the basis for our policy-making process and strategic action, guided by policy, to be the basis for our implementation or administrative process. Both forms of action are necessary for the goals of stability and justice.

The distinction between forms of power arising from the two forms of action, communicative power and administrative power. Habermas recognizes a form of power that comes into existence when individuals achieve, through intersubjective discourse, a mutual understanding and an alignment of purpose. He considers this power, communicative power, to be a necessary feature of societies if they are to remain both stable and just. Only when this form of power exists does a society have the possibility of claiming a collective will, a characteristic that is necessary for ongoing stability and for the just functioning of a community. He also recognizes a role for administrative power, grounded in the collective will expressed in policy, to carry out the myriad of tasks and decisions that are necessary to actually implement that will. This form of
power tends to be instrumental in nature, with individuals directing the actions of others to achieve the desired end. If exercised as described by Habermas, in accordance with the collective will of the institution, it has the benefit of producing stability within a community.

The view of policy as the reification of the results of discourse that occurred in a particular social context. Habermas understands policy to be context-dependent and therefore necessarily subject to ongoing interpretation (revisiting justification and considering applicability). The process of reasoning through questions of interpretation is necessarily one of discourse as it deals with questions of what our ends ought to be. The process of reconsidering justification employs the discourse principle. Three classes of discourse are involved in validating truth and rightness claims through discourse: pragmatic, ethical-political, moral. Foundational to Habermas' model is a belief that reason can be expanded under conditions of modernity from an emphasis on instrumental reason to include communicative reason or discourse. He rejects the notion that all truth is relative and instead argues for a "reason that puts itself on trial" and for which there are defensible grounds for evaluating truth claims. He believes in the ability of societies to intersubjectively reason through questions of truth to arrive at a collective will-formation. Laws or policies are to be based on justifiable norms and his discourse principle defines what it is for a norm to be justified: "Just those action norms are valid to which all possibly affected persons could agree as participants in rational discourses" (Habermas, 1996, p. 107).
His subsequent differentiation of three classes of question (pragmatic, ethical and moral) and associated validity tests for each are foundational to his belief in the feasibility of using discourse to grapple with questions of "ought" in a society. He highlights the fact that the social context of a community is inevitably changeable, as are the understandings of that community about the relative priorities of competing "goods."

*The dual roles of citizenship – citizen as subject of the law and citizen as lawmaker.*

Deriving from his understandings of communicative action, administrative action, and the context-dependent nature of policy is Habermas' principle that citizens must perceive themselves to be functioning in two roles. On the one hand they must see themselves and their actions as being subject to the guidance of policy. On the other hand they must retain a questioning attitude, alert to the fact that both the continued justification of an existing policy and the applicability of policy to a particular case are questions that may require deliberation of the community through discourse.

*The inherent tension between facticity and validity.* Habermas recognizes that the dual goals of stability and justice lead to an inherent tension within societies. Stability is achieved through policies that are coercible (using administrative power) but can be maintained in the long run only if all members of the community have a belief in the inherent validity, or justness, of the policies governing the action of the community. Achieving a lasting perception of validity requires that all policies be continually subject to re-analysis by citizens to confirm or refute their continued justification. This openness to re-analysis is threatening to stability.
I have distilled these core principles from Habermas’ application of his theory of communicative action to develop a proceduralistic approach to social integration. I believe that, were they achievable, societal integration in the form envisioned by Habermas would ensue. Furthermore, and the reason for my interest in the work of Habermas, I believe that governance of this form would result in a more just, more stable educational institution within my practice setting. Before testing this belief by examining practice settings and experiences through the framework of these principles, I will summarize the barriers that Habermas has identified as standing in the way of achieving this ideal.

Challenges to the Realization of Habermas’ Concept of Social Integration

Habermas identifies many potential risks to achieving his ideal form of social coordination and I will categorize them into three general areas: risks that lead us to fail to attempt communicative action within our governance system, risks that lead us to fail when attempting discourse, and risks that cause us to fail to act on the conclusions arrived at through communicative action. These risks have been noted in the initial sections of this chapter. In the first category are a number of risks that Habermas highlights as such and goes on, with varying degrees of attention, to address through specifying risk avoidance strategies of one form or another. In the final two categories Habermas instead recognizes the risks somewhat obliquely by specifying “counterfactual realities” or idealized assumptions governing the intersubjective relations of those engaged in
discourse and states these idealized assumptions as necessary conditions for success (arriving at wise decisions, acting on those decisions).

Those risks dealt with directly by Habermas relate to potential barriers to engaging in communicative action when it is needed, when a question of what “ought” we to be doing as an institution has arisen. He mentions four potential and significant barriers to entering into communicative action: a lack of trust in the freedom to participate in communicative action (to speak, to question, to challenge authority) without fear of reprisals, a lack of sufficient communicative forums within an institution resulting in a structure in which individuals are placed in decision-making roles without being given the means to engage in discourse, the risk of followership within bureaucratic institutions, and the misappropriation of administrative systems to serve “normatively unfiltered” (what lovely understatement!) interest positions of those with administrative power. Each of these risks has at its root the impact of bureaucratization, steering media and power/knowledge complexes identified by Weber, Parsons and Foucault. Each results in action coordination that is de-coupled from moral judgment. One question to be examined through reflecting on the practice stories is whether Habermas’ approach provides sufficient means to mitigate these risks.

Habermas addresses the barriers to successfully engaging in discourse by specifying ideal assumptions that we are to strive for in our intersubjective relations. The risks can be understood to be insufficient perspectives entering into the discourse – he recommends discourse be pluralistic and close to the grass roots, a lack of transparency and
accessibility of the discourse – he recommends the discourse be public and universally accessible, the influence of administrative power on the outcomes of the discourse – he recommends the discourse be undisturbed by the effects of administrative power and permit only the rationally motivated force of the better argument (we’ll see just how easy that is as we look at practice), and the interference of individual strategic objectives – he presumes participants are free from the influence of their own strategic objectives. In these risks as well, the cautions of Weber, Parsons and Foucault are evident.

Finally, in considering barriers to acting on conclusions reached through communicative action, Habermas identifies three major concerns: misunderstandings resulting from different interpretations of the same words by different participants in the discourse – he assumes it is possible to ensure that speakers and hearers can understand a grammatical construction in the same way, that individuals do not hold themselves accountable for action consistent with the outcome of the discourse – he assumes that participants are willing to be mutually accountable to act on the basis of their intersubjective agreement, and that participants might not be willing to be bound to a commitment to support the rationally motivated force of the better argument – he assumes that participants will tie their agreement to the intersubjective recognition of criticizable validity claims.

Each of these risks has the potential to derail an effort to achieve the benefits of institutional governance organized according to the key principles identified earlier. As such, there must be some hope of mitigating their influence if there is to be any chance of achieving even an approximation of Habermas’ concept of social integration. In the
following chapter I will start to apply the concepts I've drawn from Habermas' analysis to my practice experiences in order to understand what they illuminate, and what they obscure, about what did transpire and how it might have been otherwise.
Habermas’ analysis leads me to some core principles about societal governance and administration that, in my experience, are at the same time compelling as an ideal and remote from the realities of operations within an educational bureaucracy. If we were to apply these principles, we would talk frequently about those issues on which we held differing views, truly listening to the views of all, seeking understanding, and we would often reach a consensus. There would be throughout that organization a feeling of the power that I have seen created in a small team when we are aligned in our goals and values. Those in administrative positions would view their roles as service to the collective will developed through discourse, and policy as the most recent statement of that will. They would conduct their duties ever alert to the possibility that we are encountering an unusual circumstance, new to us, and that policy is perhaps no longer completely adequate – and they would raise the matter for public discourse. Indeed, throughout the Institute – at formal marks review meetings at term end, at the Senate meetings, within departmental meetings discussing possible new ways to serve a changing learner community demographic – every one of us would remain aware of the rules that currently guide us, but always alert to our responsibility to identify those rules no longer appropriate in our new social reality. We as individuals would be comfortable, as we performed our roles, with the inherent tension between the drive to remain stable (follow those policies) and the drive to ensure just action (taking time for broader public discussion when a policy seems to be in question.) And finally, when we sat down for
those broad public discussions, we would all strive for reasoned, respectful debate and
guide our decision-making with the discourse principle as an accepted benchmark. An
idyllic picture? Absolutely. But nonetheless, I would argue, worth striving for. So the
question I am grappling with here is what could I do and what could others do to bring
our institution’s operations to more closely resemble that picture? What are the barriers
that stand in the way of this and how might their effects be minimized?

This chapter starts to answer those questions by examining my practice through the lens
of the principles drawn from Habermas’ work. Practice becomes the focus as I try to
understand why my practice realities differ from human action coordination as
envisioned by Habermas, whether I believe his principles would have produced different
and better results, and why we weren’t able to achieve, or even approach in most cases,
the ideal of these principles.

Applying Habermas to Interpret a Practice Story

Habermas is clearly describing a different context, but what makes it so? I will start to
test the Habermas principles against my practice and my practice against these principles
by addressing three questions. To what extent were the core principles in evidence in the
unfolding of events as described in this story? How might it have been different had they
been fully functional? What possible reasons can I find to explain why we acted as we
did rather than in ways consistent with these principles? I am in the initial descriptive
stages here, trying to identify what happened and why in one particular situation. Later analysis will deal with the question of how it might have been different.

In this examination I will focus on the program introduction story to see what lessons can be drawn from my reading of Habermas. There are many stories, just as painful as this one, that I could develop from my experience attempting to practice educational leadership within this setting. It is important to note that these stories have no villains, only victims, and that most people involved feel victimized by the conflicts inherent in these events and by their sense of loss of agency. They feel more like pawns on a chessboard than like individuals with the capacity to make a difference, to act on their situation. It is also important to note that a characteristic common to most of these stories is that although particular issues get “settled,” fundamental underlying questions of how we want to be as an institution are most often left hanging, not discussed, and in many cases their existence is not even acknowledged. I choose the program introduction story here because it entails a range of significant values conflicts, involves multiple levels of governance and administration, includes pragmatic, ethical and moral questions, and demonstrates the strength of the emotions and the divisiveness that can result when fundamental questions of value are at issue.

I’ll start with the first question. To what extent were the core principles in evidence in the unfolding of events as described in this story? Recalling from the previous chapter, the first core principle I drew from Habermas’ work is a conceptual distinction between communicative and strategic action – and the need for both within an institution. While I
and others did not have the language to express this distinction, I believe it was clear at
various points that we were dealing with substantive ethical/moral issues about what is
"good" for our institution to do and that at other points the issues were simply
instrumental (e.g., is there a way logistically to implement the application process
planned?). However, we lacked not only the language to understand the type of action
that was required to deal with these different classes of question. We also lacked a clear
understanding of who ought to be involved in the communicative or strategic action that
was required. I recall discussions with other administrative actors in which, while we
were aware of issues that needed to be resolved, we were unclear as to how and with
whom to conduct discussions to reach those resolutions. When forced by events to
attempt to resolve the issue, who was included probably revealed some assumptions we
all made about who should be involved. Even more fundamentally, we tended to operate
as an institution by having administrative players “manage” the forums of policy-making
by carefully managing what was discussed and through off-the-radar-screen discussions
amongst powerful players in these forums so that the public discussion, when it occurred,
was controlled to the extent possible. In summary, as an organization we do not clearly
distinguish between pragmatic and ethical or moral questions, we do not have sufficient
forums for discourse and we apply strategic action to curtail the possibility of discourse
in those forums which would apparently be intended for it. Our Senate, our Board, or
labour-management committees which deal with grievances all appear to me to be widely
viewed as forums in which the goal is to choreograph the discussions in such a way as to
avoid the uncertainty of discourse.
The second core principle drawn from Habermas is *the conceptual distinction between forms of power: communicative and administrative*. Without a doubt there existed at that time no language within the Institute that spoke of anything other than administrative power. In my experience, power was largely viewed as the exercising of strategic action, based on policy that was not questioned, and only in rare occurrences (in very local settings) was there recognition of ethical and moral questions and the invoking of discourse. This is curious when I consider that, like other educational institutions, ours believes it is collegial in its form of governance. That collegiality, however, was more often akin to strategic negotiations across various administrative bureaucracies: the educational line management, the faculty union, the support staff union, and the service area line management. On an institutional scale there was no real familiarity with the nature of communicative power, although at various moments throughout the Institute it is clear that communicative power was alive and well (such as during initial discussions with the Registrar’s office as we planned this new program). This reality meant that when a problem was identified (or in this case, a whole mess of problems) the institutional reaction was to apply administrative power, largely employing strategic action, to correct it. The problems were approached in an instrumental way (we assume we know what the desired end is – follow policy – and we are sorting through how to most expeditiously get to that end). When it appeared that the end was worthy of some debate, the approach was one of negotiation, which is consistent with strategic action and administrative power. There was great discomfort with the thought of throwing these questions out to any forum for open discussion.
Interestingly, in local settings in the months leading up to the initial program approval, there were examples of both communicative action and communicative power at work. As our team sat down with the various service providers, with the faculty union, with the executive, many of the substantive questions of policy, that were later raised but never openly debated, were actually debated amongst small groups as they worked through with us whether they were willing to support what we proposed and what alterations might make it more consistent with their views on the institutional values. Once these discourses concluded, generally in consensus, there was strong support in a number of corners of the Institute for the program.

The third and fourth core principles – the view of policy as the reification of the results of discourse that occurred in a particular social context, and the dual roles of citizenship – are very interesting to consider in light of experiences such as this practice story. Did this Institute recognize policy as context-dependent? Did the individuals in their various roles see themselves as both citizens of the law and lawmakers? The answer to both is yes and no. In the early discussions leading up to program approval that I referred to earlier, individuals in administrative roles for the most part were open to the notion that new situations require new interpretations of policy and sometimes departures from policy. However no common practice existed as to when it was appropriate to signal the institution – on a macro level – that some policy decisions and interpretations were being made down the ranks and that a more inclusive discourse was in order. There was, in my experience, a strong resistance to opening substantive issues to the uncertainty of discourse. Considering the concept of the three classes of discourse involved in
validating truth and rightness claims, although nowhere in the Institute was the language
to describe this concept spoken of, the essence of the concept was recognized and even
realized in part. Again, in those discussions in small groups leading through to program
approval, communicative action occurred, communicative reason was employed, and
tests of expedience, of “good for us as an Institute”, and of “just for all” were applied.

The “no” side of the answer was in evidence once the question of the program offering
became a contentious issue at the Senate. At that point, it appeared that policy became
engraved in stone and the role of the various members of the administrative bureaucracy
became one of assuring themselves that the program adhered to policy. Those at the top
were demanding it and administrators at less senior levels were trying to make it so.
Suggesting that the policies might be inappropriate for this new line of programming was
perceived as career limiting. The resolution adopted by the Senate favours the
interpretation that those taking issue with the program were equally satisfied with a
“policy as stonework” perspective and apparently viewed their job as making sure that
the administration was not playing fast and loose with established policy. Those
individuals accepted as a resolution the decision that a unique credential would be
awarded to these programs. The other substantive questions about whether we “ought” to
be involved in delivering cost-recovery programs were left unresolved in the Senate.
There was apparently no appetite for engaging in policy formulation discussions at that
juncture, and certainly none in any meeting I attended in formulating a response to the
concerns raised in the Senate. Also, considering recognition of the three classes of
discourse, once the problem was raised in the Senate all systems were geared to strategic
action and administrative power with the goal of making the program fit the policies, not revisiting and reformulating policy using any method. All issues were viewed as pragmatic and expedience was the validity test applied to the possible solutions.

The fifth core principle – *comfort with the inherent tension between facticity and validity* – is somewhat tough to assess in this situation with the information at hand. I would say that throughout the Institute there were sprinkled individuals who were comfortable that their jobs required balancing the goods of stability and justice and that this meant opening themselves to questions of what “ought” we to be doing in this situation rather than just what does the policy say. On the whole, my observation over the years was that facticity (or stability) was ranked very highly by the institutional culture. Uncontrollable and unpredictable public debate was virtually never in evidence and was seen as an uncomfortable state, one to be avoided. The very fact that no mention exists in the Senate minutes of what were described as rather heated discussions about this program would indicate that stability was valued over validity and that there was not comfort with the reality of the inherent tension between the two.

In summarizing the answer to the question of the evidence of the core principles of Habermas' model in this practice story, I would say that when the bureaucracy *qua* bureaucracy became involved the core principles went almost entirely “missing in action.” This is not meant to imply that these principles had been discussed and agreed to by the individuals in that bureaucracy. To my knowledge they had not been, so their absence was not a rejection of the principles so much as a demonstration that other ways
of being had become the norm in situations in which conflict arose in formal policy-making forums. However prior to that point in smaller, more local discussions there was indeed evidence of both the possibility and sometimes the achievement of the core principles. Curiously, once we had swung into bureaucratic “handling” of the issue even the local discussions changed in tone and content. Those who had previously been comfortable with the need for questioning policy and participating in discourse on the substantive questions of how we “ought” to be as an organization switched almost immediately into strategic action using pragmatics as the test for validation. I would like to make it clear that I was complicit in this response, falling back to the understood norm of strategic action.

On now to the second question. How might this practice story have been different had the core principles drawn from Habermas’ model been in evidence? Perhaps at the broadest level, had we all been practiced in these core principles then at the very initial stages of program development there would have been an understanding that because we were in territory not contemplated by existing policy both communicative action and strategic action were going to be required in structuring a desirable and feasible program model. We would have appreciated the need to enter into unpredictable discussions about matters of substance, accepting the uncertainty that would accompany that discourse. Those discussions would be understood to require broad representation of members of the Institute community. A sense of inclusiveness in establishing institutional norms and a comfort with the messiness of that process would have been present.
The effect of this would have been to make public and transparent the discussion of questions affecting the understanding of Institutional purpose and values. How long it would have taken is something I cannot guess at, however the apparently straightforward business approval and Registrar’s office approval of the program had a six month timeline during which the discourse just described would have had reasonable time to come to some conclusions. Would the conclusions reached have represented consensus or been decided by vote which is often backgrounded by negotiation? It is of course impossible to tell. However in either event would we have known more conclusively our collective will with respect to programs of this nature? Absolutely. Transparency and clarity of the conclusions reached would have been much improved.

The discourse that occurred would have included those directly involved with the program and those directly involved with the Senate, the policy formulating body of the Institute as it related to academic matters. Rather than having the discussion “managed” through the application of administrative power and strategic action within a forum for communicative action, those initiating the program and those forming policy would have been in direct discourse. The consequence of this would have been a greater sense of a working together to tackle a substantive question. There would have been less force and administrative power being applied, driven as it was by a need to restore stability of operations to control discussion and direct decisions.
Whether the conclusion reached was to allow or disallow cost-recovery programs, pluralistic perspectives would in likelihood have led to a recognition that policy adaptations were going to be needed to effectively represent the collective will regarding the issues being debated. These policy adaptations would be numerous if a new line of programming was now to be introduced. A substantial project would have been launched and thus there would have continued to be public discussion about any fundamental questions of value raised by programs such as these. If the discourse had led to the decision to disallow such programs, policy changes would have been less substantial.

Clearly the core principles would have made a significant difference, and a significant improvement, in the practice story described. Public discourse would have started early in the Senate and, on strategic issues, within the educational administrative group. A sense of inclusiveness would have developed. There would have been transparency of the discourse process and clarity on the decisions reached. There would have been more communicative power, that sense of alignment of purpose, and less need for administrative power or force. There would have been a recognition that we would be embarking on a long-haul project of policy formulation if we chose to implement a new type of programming.

I move now to the third question. What possible reasons can I find to explain why we acted as we did rather than in ways consistent with Habermas' model? Fundamentally in this story, the community that is our institution did not attempt to engage in institutional-level communicative action. I was certainly a contributor to that state of affairs. In
answering the question of why that reluctance existed we need first to understand the context within which this story occurred, the culture of the Institute as regards communicative action. For some long period of time leading up to this story communicative action had not been a part of our institutional governance system. This fact had led to a defacto decoupling of administrative power from communicative power with the predictable transformation of administrative power into force. Weber's contributions regarding the impacts of instrumental reason, bureaucratization and positional power would predict this state. And the consequence of this transformation of administrative power had produced a widespread loss of trust in the freedom to and safety of openly challenging decisions that related to questions of how we "ought" to be as an institution.

This loss of trust had four significant consequences that all contributed to our failure as an Institute to invoke discourse. The first of those consequences was that accompanying the lack of trust in the freedom to openly challenge was a corresponding tendency towards the safety of followership to which Habermas, Weber, Parsons and Foucault each refer. Obeying instructions, not questioning, supporting decisions that were taken, were all elements of the flight to followership. In short, within the community there had developed a culture of avoiding both raising contentious issues and entering into discourse because of the personal risks of questioning established norms.

The second impact of this culture of lack of trust was the formation of adversarial camps, particularly in those forums that were ostensibly in existence for the express purpose of
communicative action – most notably within the Senate. Amongst those adversarial camps two primary debating strategies were adopted. For those who lacked administrative power the strategy adopted can be characterized as guerrilla tactics in which the objective became to weaken and render less powerful another camp more than to resolve an issue. For those who possessed administrative power the strategy adopted, driven by a desire to maintain stability, was to use various tools of manipulation to contain, direct and control discussion if the threat of communicative action reared its head. In hindsight, I see that I had acquired quite a considerable toolkit myself!

The third impact of the loss of trust throughout the organization was that policy became feared as a vehicle for legitimating reprimands from those in positions of administrative power. Commonly in discussions (below the executive level) it was said that the institution punishes success and rewards inaction. The implication was that relying on policy, not questioning, was more valued than the risk taking and opening of contentious questions that is often required if one seeks to conceive of new approaches to our institutional operations. Whether justified or not, failing to follow policy had, in my experience, come to be seen as risky behaviour with the danger of incurring disfavour with and reprimands from powerful administrators. With this state of affairs, the goal of community members becomes that of adhering to policy in order to avoid negative consequences rather than serving the collective will through the informed application of policy along with the continued testing of policy for validity. For this reason, the concept of the dual roles of citizenship was not widely held within the Institute and hence any
impetus to call policy into question was largely lacking, particularly when an issue became contentious.

Finally, with the combined forces described above all conspiring to eliminate the practice of communicative action, the notion of communicative power gradually retreated from the collective memory of the institution (if indeed it had ever been present) leaving administrative power as the only form of power understood and widely employed within the Institute. With administrative power utilizing strategic action being the only form of power within the collective lifeworld, any problem or issue that arose was seen as requiring only administrative power to address and resolve it.

So to summarize my assessment of why the core principles were not employed, the simple answer is that we did not try it. We did not attempt communicative action at the institutional level. We did not try it because we were caught in a cycle: *it was not our culture as an Institute to employ communicative power in governance, we therefore had a lack of trust in the safety of communicative action* which led to reluctance to try it, adversarial methods of dealing with each other, and a loss of any sense of our roles as citizens which included policy formulation, *we therefore continued not to attempt it* and in so doing we were left with administrative power utilizing strategic action as the only form of power available to us.

In the latter stages of Chapter 3 I summarized those barriers to attempting discourse that Habermas raised in his discussion of the theory of communicative action as a basis for
structuring social integration. He describes four such barriers, three of which are explicitly identified in my personal assessment of the practice story being examined: a lack of trust in the freedom to participate in communicative action (to speak, to question, to challenge authority) without fear of reprisals, the risk of followership within bureaucratic institutions, and the misappropriation of administrative systems to serve “normatively unfiltered” interest positions of those with administrative power.

This latter point is in essence the reason that discourse was not in our culture. When reading Habermas independent of my actual practice experiences I interpreted the risk of misappropriation of administrative systems as necessarily having at its roots malicious intent or self-interest of administrators. An important clarification for me in considering this practice story was that I consider that neither malicious intent nor self-interest were behind the decoupling of administrative systems from communicative action. Instead I suspect that a core of senior administrators at some point focused on the goal of stability (perhaps in difficult times, perhaps from their understanding of their role). In any organization communicative action has potentially destabilizing outcomes but this is even more so in an organization in which the culture lacks the norm of respectful interaction in debate. Our particular educational institution would fall into that category and I suspect is not unusual in that characteristic. Discourse, even under the ideal speech situation assumptions, can still be emotionally charged and divisive. Remove the assumption of respectful interaction and the risk of emotions of participants spiraling out of control and creating chasms beyond hope of bridges becomes very high. I will speak more of this in Chapter 5. “Responsible” administrators valuing stability could therefore have seen this
risk as a serious threat, potentially causing them to view communicative action as harmful and in need of "managing."

The fourth barrier identified by Habermas is to some extent an additional insight in understanding the practice story described. He describes this barrier as a lack of sufficient communicative forums within an institution resulting in a structure in which individuals are placed in decision-making roles without being given the means to engage in discourse. In my analysis, I observed that in the initial stages of program review and approval it was clear to many of the individuals involved in the discussions that we were dealing with new situations that required new interpretations of policy and perhaps departures from policy. However I noted that there was neither a common practice nor an accessible forum for signaling the institution – on a macro level – that some policy decisions and interpretations were being made and that a more inclusive discourse was perhaps in order. The Senate, being a large and structured committee due to its broad scope, is not conducive to informal discourse in the formative stages of coming to an understanding of new situations and the ethical and moral issues raised. Sub-committees tend to be too narrow in scope to be effective for new situations that are far-reaching in their potential impact and are only accessible by formally raising an issue with the full Senate. It is perhaps the case that an additional, smaller, less formal communicative action forum would have provided a means for administrators dealing with policy issues related to this program to initiate more inclusive discourse which would ultimately have threaded its way up to the Senate.
In seeking to understand my practice experiences I have examined a particular story through the lens of the core principles drawn from Habermas' work. I have drawn some conclusions. The core principles were not in evidence within the practice story and therefore critical questions of how we want to be as an institution were not addressed; had the principles been in evidence those issues would have been wrestled with and resolved; the barriers to communicative action flagged by Habermas were, in fact, at play in this practice story. What is also becoming apparent in this examination of practice is that the forces of bureaucratization, positional power, systems, media, and power/knowledge complexes tend to be underplayed if I consider only the core principles I drew from Habermas' work. The principles are founded on an assumption of agency of individuals that invites a de-emphasizing of systems and structures. Habermas himself was very aware of these forces. He was, however, hopeful that his approach might mitigate them to some extent, opening the possibility of social coordination based on moral agency and discourse. In the next section I will foreground, instead of the core principles, the forces of systems and structures to see what is revealed about the feasibility of Habermas' approach within an existing context that was not developed with the core principles as its foundation.

Considering the Impacts of Systems and Structures

I will speak first about the broad impact of political, economic and administrative systems in shaping the opportunities for, and limits (either true or perceived) on, our institutional agency. I will then consider specifically the impacts of the media of money
and power, and of power/knowledge complexes. Finally, I’ll look for evidence of individual critical reflection and civil disobedience, as described by Foucault, in the actions of those involved in these events.

The influence of political systems is multi-tiered and interconnected. The New Democratic Party (NDP) was in power provincially at the time, not particularly inclined towards the interests of business and presenting themselves as the advocates for those lacking money, power and privilege. More than one member of the executive expressed to me reluctance to raise the visibility of our initiatives into cost-recovery programs with the Ministry, fearing that if asked for a ruling the Ministry would have felt obliged to rule against such offerings. Therefore, we conducted ourselves with the specific intention of avoiding drawing attention to these programs. (The more recent Liberal government, having a pro-business leaning, is wildly enthusiastic about programs such as these and would therefore have created a very different climate within the Institute when concern was raised about these programs.) This concern about the visibility of our move into cost-recovery programs must certainly have had an impact on those in positions of senior administrative power within the institution when the program introduction issue came before the Senate. The Board of Governors, a third governance body and also politically appointed, comprised almost entirely NDP supporters. Being quite operationally focused at the time, the Board presented a risk of closing off this line of programming. (That too has changed since the change in provincial government.) This underlying force of a political system that was disinclined towards the private sector likely was at play in the
general reluctance of administrators to revise policies to facilitate cost-recovery programs.

Equally interesting as the impact of political systems is the impact of economic systems (or market forces) on the unfolding of events in these stories. The very fact that we were entering into full cost recovery programs reflected the economic conditions of uncertain government funding and the increased demand created by labour market conditions. Similarly, the perspective of the union in resolving the grievance was no doubt coloured by the impact of the labour market. At that time, because of growth in the high-tech sector, all advanced technology program areas were having difficulty in hiring faculty. Had that not been the case, I wonder if we would have achieved an agreement that allowed us to continue to use the services of private sector teaching institutions. Indeed, the Dean may have never entered into that course of action had the labour market conditions been otherwise.

Turning to our administrative systems and structures, I believe they reflected a long-standing organization, bureaucratic in its operation and strongly valuing stability and process. This is not surprising in a bureaucracy. Administrative systems and processes were not designed for market responsive program development and implementation – the processes were cumbersome and slow. Often individuals with positional power spoke as if they viewed programs such as these, which required faster response, with distrust because they were inherently less stable and more difficult to administer. In addition, the systems and structures also reflected uneasy power balances amongst the Senate, the
senior executive, the unions and the functional management. As relationships were not necessarily strong between the various elements of this power balance, the activities of ongoing operational administration were often cumbersome and conflict-laden. These influences were felt in the program introduction story; one of our concerns about going to the Senate initially for program approval was timeliness and the resolution process adopted when objections were raised clearly reflected the adversarial climate. The process existing for grievance resolution was another result of the tensions amongst the various groups involved in administration.

This explicit consideration of systems influences on the events of the practice stories indicates a political environment working against the initiative of cost-recovery programs, creating a disinclination to discourse within the Institute because such discourse increased the chances of raising our actions to visibility and hence the risk of those actions being stopped. The economic system, conversely, was creating strong motivation within the executive of the Institute to pursue such programs (and strong demand by students). The executive, strongly motivated to pursue the programs, was disinclined to risk discourse that might derail the initiative. Administrative systems, along with the political system, presented barriers to the implementation of such programs. This fact promoted an inclination to strategic action on the part of those favouring the implementation of cost-recovery programs because, in the short run, strategic action was more expedient in reaching the desired ends than would have been the discourse necessary to achieve adjustments to the administrative systems and processes.
I turn now to look for evidence that money and power acted as steering media in these stories. Positional power existed at many levels – at the Ministry, within the Senate, at the executive levels of administration, within the union executive, and within the various functional units of the organization. In the program introduction story, it was the positional power of the Ministry that created the sensitivity amongst institutional executive to the surfacing of conflict about full cost-recovery programs. The result was a dis-inclination towards discourse. And in the resolution of the conflict that arose in the Senate, both power and money acted as steering mechanisms independent of mutual understanding creating the strong orientation toward rule following. Money was a steering mechanism in that the self-funded nature of these programs made them appealing to Institute executives and created an inclination towards strategic action that would make them possible. Positional power was used strategically in the Senate to disrupt the program approval. The Institute executives used their power to direct the resolution process independent of discourse. A final important observation here concerns the negative impact of this neutralizing of discourse and collective will formation. Many years after the initial introduction of the program there remains widespread uncertainty as to whether or not programs such as these are actually consistent with our institutional values. Those questions remain because, absent any need for mutual understanding in determining a course of action with respect to the program, no discourse occurred regarding the norms upon which we wish to ground our Institute.
In the grievance story, it was the exercise of positional power by the Dean in establishing the partnership agreements that created the situation of conflict. Likewise it was the exercise of positional power by both the labour relations department and the union that led to a near impasse in resolving the issue, and I cannot be blind to the fact that my own positional power affected the willingness of the union staff to respond to my request for discussion on the issue. They came to see me because of where I was placed in the organization. Money also acted as a steering media. It was a factor in the decision to launch the grievance (partnership delivery adversely affected both union dues and potential union jobs) and it was a factor in settling the grievance (the union spokespeople expressed a strong desire to avoid the costs of an arbitration hearing). I am indeed both acted on and an actor in the use of positional power and money to steer the operation of this bureaucracy. In both the grievance story and the program introduction story just discussed there is evidence of the ways in which power and money can direct individual actions independent of any agreement on purpose and values. In so doing, they can serve to effectively remove the need for discourse as a means of aligning the actions of individuals within an institution. They may be applied strategically and consciously, or they may arise from contextual forces of which there is not necessarily a conscious awareness. In either case, their impact is the same; discourse and moral agency as a means of coordinating our actions disappears.

The third element of this analysis of the impact of systems and structures is an examination of the stories for evidence of the impact of power/knowledge complexes. Some examples of this factor at work surface in the program introduction story.
Elements of a power/knowledge complex associated with business and free enterprise certainly conditioned my perspective on the worthiness of cost-recovery programs. The education executive officers involved clearly assumed, in making the decision to rescind program approval, that their knowledge (assessments of program validity) was correct and that there was little value in considering the knowledge of those who had proposed and approved the program. There was little will to challenge this assumption amongst those (both others and myself) called in to participate in correcting the “problem.” Also, the knowledge claimed by those individuals, about the Ministry policy on credential approval, was not questioned by those of us in positions of lesser administrative power although later developments proved this knowledge to be false. In the incubator story the power/knowledge complex that results from the normative male culture of the organization created a way of speaking that was accepted and respected; it also created a lack of acceptance of other ways of speaking. I suspect this was a factor in the way my own speech was heard, and there will be more on this question when I move in the next chapter to a look at the interpersonal dimensions of discourse. Both these stories confirm that within my practice setting, there are power/knowledge complexes that serve to leave certain knowledges unquestioned and that lead us to assumptions about others and ourselves that we accept as truth. Both these consequences create conditions in which the need for discourse is unrecognized. Uncertainty about truth and goodness claims does not even arise when we are under the domination of these power/knowledge complexes.

Finally, I examine the practice stories for evidence of Foucault’s argument for the importance of critical reflection and civil disobedience. In so doing, I see for the first
time some of my actions, and those of others, in a new light. Critical reflection and civil disobedience offer the possibility of resisting the forces of media and of power/knowledge complexes. In that respect they support the goal of societal coordination guided by moral agency. In the program introduction story I see, for instance, that my actions in strategically moving the program through to approval without involving the Senate could be considered an instance of civil disobedience. It was not quite an "in your face" form of civil disobedience but it was nonetheless clearly an acting out against what I perceived to be a slow moving and cumbersome process that was our program approval process through the Senate. I also see that in deciding to take that course of action, and in their support of my efforts in that regard, both others in the institution and I were critically reflecting on the appropriateness of existing systems and structures and were coming to the conclusion that change was warranted. And just as importantly, I see that those in the Senate objecting to our actions were in all likelihood doing so after their own critical reflection on the legitimacy of those actions. I begin to understand a bit more clearly why others within the Institute might view me as a renegade, and there goes my cloak of self-righteousness as a responsible and law-abiding member of our organizational community.

In this section I examined some of the events of my practice through the lens of systems and structures influences of which Weber, Parsons, Foucault and Habermas had identified. I did so because my sense, in considering practice in terms of the core principles drawn from Habermas' approach to achieving societal coordination based on
moral agency, was that I was failing to identify some of the forces that were acting against the possibility of realizing those core principles. I draw some conclusions.

Power/knowledge regimes inherent in existing systems and the steering media of money and power imbue the world in which we operate with forces of domination. I conclude that our first response must simply be to try to be more aware of these influences on our actions and on the actions of those around us. If nothing else, this offers me a more informed appreciation of what we are up against as we attempt to run counter to the existing forces of domination. It allows me to recognize the need to be strategic, to use purposive-rational reason, in assessing whether discourse is a “live option” in a given situation. It also causes me to contemplate that I may be forced to, if not justified in, couching ethical-moral issues in the guise of strategic concerns. An example of unknowingly doing just that is found in my discussions with the Registrar’s office on our use of qualitative assessment criteria in admissions. Rather than approaching this from a strictly ethical and moral perspective, I brought to the forefront a pragmatic question. I described the risk to us as an Institute if students who have paid high tuition fees fail to achieve the desired outcome, because they or too many others in the group were not suited for the program, and elect to lobby publicly about our performance as an educational institution. I suspect it was the power of the pragmatic issue, rather than the ethical and moral arguments, that allowed us out from the domination of existing admissions practices. Another important conclusion that I arrive at relative to the pervasiveness of domination is the fact that I can be part of the problem if I allow myself to fall into the trap of exercising my administrative power, such as it is, without a firm
grounding in notions of the collective will. I will reflect more on this in the concluding chapter.

I also have some different understandings about the possibilities for human agency when considering the powerful forces of the systems and structures within which we operate. First, I have a greater awareness of the extent to which bureaucracies desensitize us to our capacity for human agency. Our strong instinct for personal safety, and the pull of stability, breeds rule following and the acceptance of positional power within bureaucracies. The prominence of steering media of money and power, and the emphasis on strategic action, within bureaucracies creates an environment in which action coordination is decoupled from discourse on a frequent basis, dulling our sensitivity to the need for human agency in testing our possible actions through our individual and collective ethical/moral analysis. And the power/knowledge regimes inherent in bureaucracies act to restrict the range of possible options we consider, and indeed even the existence of the need to question, effectively again desensitizing us to our capacity for human agency. A second important observation for me about the possibility of human agency is Foucault’s argument regarding the need for critical reflection. The unrecognized domination of systems and power/knowledge regimes is such a powerful force on us that only through active critical reflection can we exercise our human agency and identify the possibilities for moral judgment and action. The third and final observation that I draw here is a greater understanding of the need for civil disobedience given the forces of domination that are operative in our institutional environments. While I have to admit I am still not comfortable either viewing myself in that role or in
condoning it in the actions of others, I do find myself more inclined to consider the possibility that it may be, in some circumstances, the best choice of action.

Summary

I will now describe the tentative conclusions drawn from this examination of practice. They relate first to the applicability of the core principles as a framework for structuring institutional governance and administration that is guided by valid norms and responsive to changing social realities. I will then summarize those considerations that appear to be inadequately developed in these core principles if we are seeking to apply them as an approach to institutional governance and administration.

I identify several aspects of these core principles that cause them to be applicable as a desirable approach to structuring institutional governance and administration:

1. The core principles offer a procedurally comprehensive approach to re-structuring the coordinating mechanisms of society, from determining the goals and norms to implementing the direction established. They give us a guidebook, as it were, to begin the process of structuring our processes in such a way as to construct just institutions that are both stable and responsive to changing social realities.

2. The principle of inclusiveness is honoured in these principles; all members of society are seen as contributors to and responsible for the nature of that society. By recognizing the need for all citizens to act both as subjects of the law and
lawmakers, the principles increase the chances of just functioning of the society and introduce the hopefulness of human agency.

3. By calling attention to the dual goals of stability and validity, the principles lead to a clearer understanding of the need for both administrative and communicative power. In specifying that administrative power must be grounded in the collective will, they offer a reminder to us of our need to exercise that power while remaining conscious of the normative underpinnings of policy.

4. By recognizing the possible impact of changing social realities and that this calls for a need to return to discourse, the principles emphasize the temporal and situational nature of a collective will and increase our understanding of the need to continually assess policy in terms of both its applicability and continued justification.

I turn now to those considerations that appear to be inadequately developed in these core principles if we are seeking a feasible approach to institutional governance and administration. In foregrounding the procedural in his approach to societal integration, Habermas, and these principles, give inadequate attention or weight to the barriers posed by the systems and structural forces that shape the environment within which we are operating. We are not constructing from a blank slate. We are acting from within an existing set of conditions that involve established systems and structures and that shape the possibilities for action that are open to us and the likely outcomes of that action. Examination of the practice stories has confirmed the impacts of systems and structures in these particular events. Habermas speaks of this risk as he describes the colonization
of the lifeworld and possible impact of normatively ungrounded systems, however he ascribes to discourse the power to offset these influences. Additionally, we are not a collection of like-minded, honourable, courageous, respectful individuals acting together in shaping our institution. The challenges and perils introduced by power differentials, social differentiation, fear of risk, strongly held and conflicting perspectives and values, and self-serving motivations are inadequately addressed by Habermas in his assumption of the conditions of our discourse. It is not that Habermas actually fails to see the risks posed by these realities, rather he chooses to play the economist and “assume” a starting condition that cannot exist. His ideal speech situation is, indeed, an ideal that can never be realized. What, then, is the impact of the actual reality of the personal and interpersonal dimensions of human interaction?

The practice story examined has demonstrated some of the pitfalls that are caused by these systems and interpersonal complications:

1. Inherent within bureaucratic, hierarchical organizations is the tendency to foster followership and a decoupling of action from questions of ethics and morality. Both positional power differentials and the desire for stability figure prominently in practice and contribute to both followership and this decoupling. And discourse can’t fix it if we can’t get to even attempting to engage in discourse.

2. The personal risk of communicative action is a powerful barrier to achieving a governance and administrative structure grounded in the core principles. Habermas asks that we assume courage, but the pull of personal safety is deep-seated and powerful. Habermas, I would argue, takes the motivation for human
agency as an assumption grounding his model and thus fails to address the question of “so why should I take the risk?”

3. Still concerning me is the question of consensus. Is it possible given the diversity of perspectives and of values that exist in any institution? Can there be such a thing as a collective will? And, if it is possible, is it desirable or does it represent the effective silencing of the perspectives of the less powerful?

4. Finally, I remain concerned about the possibility of agency, both from the perspective of why would an individual be motivated to take the risks and also from the perspective of the possibilities for individual impact given the systemic and interpersonal dimensions that complicate this business of societal integration.

With these questions and concerns in mind, I move in the following chapter to examine the work of a selection of scholars who foreground the personal and interpersonal dimensions of coordinating human action to achieve justice and stability.
CHAPTER FIVE:

POWER AND DISCOURSE THROUGH THE LENS OF THE INTERPERSONAL

In the stories and analysis in the previous chapters I have seen indications of some of the complexities of the intra and interpersonal which make the activity of coordinating human action just so difficult. In this chapter I aim to bring those complexities to the forefront in my analysis of practice. In doing so I will draw heavily on the work of two women whose writings foreground the intra and interpersonal dimension of societal integration: Hannah Arendt and Susan Bickford. Arendt is a scholar of tremendous stature whose adult lifetime was dedicated to the examination of what it is to be human and how humans create just societies. Bickford writes about the “exhilaration and exasperation” of discourse and of attempting social integration that honours pluralism and is grounded in moral agency. There is a tone, a quality, a joy and hopefulness to her writing that makes engaging with her ideas a very positive experience for me, just as it is with Arendt’s. The area of focus and the concepts formulated by Arendt and Bickford are also addressed by many others and I will draw on some of their work to augment this analysis. Amongst these sources will be work by Iris Marion Young, and Natasha Levinson. The chapter starts with a synopsis of the concepts and principles developed by Arendt and Bickford as they relate to power, discourse and agency. I will then examine some practice stories in the light of those concepts and principles in order to better understand those experiences. The chapter will conclude with my summary of what I have learned from these concepts about the application, in practice, of power and discourse.
In this chapter, both discourse and agency take a more primary position than does power and yet this discussion is central to my investigation of the challenge of coordinating human action to yield a stable and just community. Considering the role of discourse, I understand from Habermas’ work that societal integration requires both administrative power and communicative power and that we engage in both strategic and communicative action in our roles within an institution. I have also come to see, from the analysis of practice stories, that these two forms of action are often intermeshed and occurring in the same time and place. When I am acting strategically and with an understanding of my dual role as a “citizen,” I must ensure that I am “listening” for information and for perspectives that might call into question the validity of the goal I am pursuing. The “pathways” to the perspectives of others must remain open. Communicative action and discourse are thus foundational to power and to coordinating human action.

Consider now the role of agency and its relation to power and to societal integration. As unique human beings we represent the possibility of “making a difference” in the actions we take with others, of contributing to the justice and stability of the institutions within which we work. As we act, be it strategically or communicatively, we have the capability of bringing the uniqueness of our identity and therefore making things different because we were there. We cannot achieve just and stable organizations without the desire, willingness and courage of individuals to engage in the process of governance and administration, in other words, to exercise their capacity for human agency. And given
the willingness to exercise agency, the structures, processes and resources of institutions can actually serve to enhance agency. At the same time there are powerful forces that work against human agency. Established systems, structures, and power differentials can all work to mitigate the capacity for agency. Each of the scholars I draw from in this chapter examines the promise and the limitations of agency in an effort to inform the task of creating conditions in which citizens may engage discourse and the wise use of power to create more just and stable communities.

Arendt

Hannah Arendt, born in 1906 and raised a Jew in Eastern Europe, was in university during the rise of the Nazi party. Her close personal ties with Germans – both Jew and Gentile – meant that the tyranny of the Nazi regime and the atrocities of the Holocaust marked her for life. It launched her on a project that was to become her life’s work: seeking an understanding of the nature of the process whereby human beings – in interaction with one another – create, or fail to create, just societies. She sought, in other words, to understand first how individuals constitute their identity and then what conditions must be in place between people before just governments can exist. In Habermas’ words:

Her immediate intention was a systematic, and not a philological one, namely to solve those basic conceptual confusions which resulted from the specific modern temptation of reducing the political practice of citizens to just another kind of instrumental action or strategic interaction. (Habermas, 1980, p. 128)
Central to this task was a concern with how individuals constitute and exercise their identities in interaction with one another to form a society in which moral judgment prevailed over purely instrumental action. It is important to note that throughout her work she uses the masculine form in reference to people of either gender. This is understood to be an artifact of the times in which she lived and not as her privileging of male responsibilities and competencies over female. With that understanding, in this discussion of her work I leave her gender references as she wrote them.

Arendt explored throughout her works, but perhaps most comprehensively in *The Human Condition*, what it is to be a human being. Several significant concepts developed from this exploration: the distinction of labor, work and action, the significance of plurality, the condition of natality which created the capacity for human agency, and the interconnectedness of speech and truth. These concepts provide me new understandings regarding human agency and discourse. I will start with her distinction of labor, work and action that brings her to view action, what Habermas will later term discourse, as the foundational activity in politics.

Arendt’s classification of human activity was a reconceptualization of Aristotle’s poiesis-praxis distinction. She explored this examination in her effort to understand the nature of being distinctly human. Aristotle conceptualized poiesis as action intended to construct a product or object known to the fabricator before beginning to act. It is therefore purposive-rational or instrumental action. Praxis as conceptualized by Aristotle “aims at a different kind of end, a good and worthwhile life (*eudaimonia*) where ends and means
are integral to the end (how we go about leading such a life cannot be separated from that life)” (Coulter and Wiens, 2002, p. 4).

Re-conceptualizing Aristotle’s poiesis-praxis, Arendt classified human activity into three categories: labor, work and action. In *The Human Condition* (1958, pp. 7-9) she defines the basis of the categorization. For Arendt, poiesis comprises the two categories of labor and work. Labor is that activity that corresponds to the biological condition of the human body, to one’s survival. Labor assures the survival of both the individual and of the life of the species. Work is that activity that corresponds to the unnaturalness of human existence, that provides an “artificial” world of things. Work and its product provide a “measure of permanence and durability” – we produce artifacts, either concrete or conceptual, that survive the individual’s existence.

Praxis, Arendt re-conceptualized as “action” which she saw as “the only activity that goes on directly between men without the intermediary of things or matter” (Arendt, 1958, p. 9). It is what occurs when human beings engage in dialogue for the purpose of understanding and constituting both ourselves and our collective being. In Arendt’s view the only form of human activity that belonged in the world of politics was action. She does not focus on the administrative, or implementation, functions of politics. That she arrived at this view is not surprising when one considers her project, what launched her on this project, and her view of society as a collection of individuals in interaction with one another. The central issue for Arendt was how human beings – through collective public dialogue – come to understand themselves and to arrive at understandings and in
some cases agreements about the sort of society they wish to be. For her, action
represents freedom as it is the capacity of humans to make a difference in the world and
the responsibility that accompanies this possibility (Arendt, 1958, pp. 232-233). To
participate in action is to exercise agency.

Arendt’s notion of action, although it served as the basis for Habermas’ discourse
(Habermas, 1977, p. 6), has some characteristics that distinguish it. First, for Arendt
action is both how we constitute our own identity as well as our collective being.
Habermas’ conception of discourse deals primarily with the latter of those two purposes
and he addresses in less depth the identity-forming nature of communicative action.
Secondly, as a philosopher, Arendt was interested in the norms surrounding creating a
space for action more so than in how action is actually translated into the implementation
of the collective will. As a social theorist, Habermas was attempting to articulate a
framework for the steering and coordinating mechanisms of society. This difference in
purpose caused Habermas to emphasize more than Arendt the goal of reaching agreement
through communicative action while Arendt emphasized more the goal of mutual
understanding. Finally, consistent with her emphasis on determining collective will
exclusive of questions of implementation, for Arendt action alone constituted politics.
For Habermas, politics comprises both communicative and strategic action.

Arendt also introduced the dual concepts of plurality and natality in articulating the
characteristics of the human condition that must be honoured if action is to be possible.
These concepts are particularly important to developing my understanding of the
possibility of discourse. Plurality describes the dual truths of individual existence as formulated by Arendt: equality and distinctness. In *The Human Condition* (Arendt, 1958, p. 8) she describes this duality: “Plurality is the condition of human action because we are all the same, that is, human, in such a way that nobody is ever the same as anyone else who ever lived, lives, or will live.” This concept is a cornerstone of Arendt’s philosophical exploration because it warrants that all human beings have equal worth and each is distinct from any other. In defining plurality she sets the rationale for a principle of justice while recognizing the huge challenges that arise from the reality of the distinctness of each human being. Habermas acknowledges the influence of Arendt’s conception of plurality on his work (Habermas, 1980, p. 128). Interestingly though, he does not speak directly of plurality and its ramifications when describing his model of social order. Its influence, however, can be seen in his discourse principle, which speaks to the need for agreement amongst all potentially affected individuals.

Natality is the characteristic of the human condition that represents Arendt’s affirmation of human agency. Her development of this concept helps address the questions: why is agency important to the individual, why is it important to society, and what are some of the limitations on this capacity. In *The Human Condition* (Arendt, 1958, p. 9) Arendt writes “action has the closest connection to the human condition of natality; the new beginning inherent in birth can make itself felt in the world only because the newcomer possesses the capacity of beginning something anew, that is of acting.” Her hopefulness is expressed beautifully when she says:

>The miracle that saves the world, the realm of human affairs, from its normal, “natural” ruin is ultimately the fact of natality, in which the
faculty of action is ontologically rooted. It is, in other words, the birth of new men and the new beginning, the action they are capable of by virtue of being born. (Arendt, 1958, p. 247)

The concept of natality is not so much specifically articulated by Habermas as it is an assumption that underlies his project. In speaking of the influence of Arendt on his work he identifies the concept of natality as one of her major contributions, in that it confirms the phenomenon of an actor’s free will that is foundational to his model (Habermas, 1980, p. 128).

Arendt also speaks of the reality that our agency is not unconstrained (Arendt, 1958, pp. 221-236). In “Teaching in the Midst of Belatedness,” Natasha Levinson explores and provides a very accessible explanation of Arendt’s analysis regarding the constraints that exist. Every human comes into a world that already exists and that “effectively constitutes us as particular kinds of people” (Levinson, 1977, p. 437). This social identity positions us in relation to each other and in relation to the past and future in particular ways that are not of our making. Levinson describes two dangers that can arise from our response to this condition of belatedness: we feel overwhelmed by it and cease to attempt to transform ourselves and the ways in which we are perceived by others, or we remain unaware of it and operate as if there were no history influencing the ways in which others perceive us and, indeed, in which we perceive ourselves. Iris Marion Young describes this as “finding ourselves positioned, thrown, into the structured field of class, gender, race, nationality, religion… and we have no choice but to deal with this situation” (Young, 1997, p. 391). Young sees this as limiting but not dismantling the possibility of agency. “This positioning conditions who one is. But positioning neither determines nor defines individual identity. Individuals are agents: we constitute our own
identities, and each person's identity is unique" (Young, 1997, p. 392). Levinson also points out Arendt's recognition that plurality itself represents a defacto limitation on our agency insofar as "our efforts to initiate the new take place always in the midst of other acting beings whose very presence makes it unlikely that our initiatives will come to fruition" (Levinson, 1977, p. 437). Belatedness conditions both our perspective and the perspectives of others. In so doing it presents certain constraints on the exercise and effects of our agency.

The final concept included in this summary of Arendt’s view of what it is to be human serves also as a bridge to her thinking about the significance of the public realm in establishing human identity. Arendt believes that speech and truth are inextricably interwoven. In Men in Dark Times (Arendt, 1968, pp. 85-86) she says:

Truth itself is communicative, it disappears and cannot be conceived outside communication... Only in communication – between contemporaries as well as between the living and the dead – does truth reveal itself... A philosophy that conceives of truth and communication as one and the same thing has left the proverbial ivory tower of mere contemplation. Thinking becomes practical, though not pragmatic; it is a kind of practice between men, not a performance of one individual in his self-chosen solitude.

In other words, it is only through speaking with others that truth can be established. Habermas also believes in this interconnectivity of speech and truth. He develops this connection when describing the impact of the disintegration of widespread support for earlier "encompassing metaphysical systems" which had previously been viewed as providing a basis for judging the validity of truth claims. This disintegration demands instead a "post metaphysical" approach to reason, using language, social interaction, and notions of validity, to discursively arrive at judgments about truth claims.
Following on Arendt’s investigation of what it means to be human are a series of explorations related to the interactions of human beings in society. There are four concepts significant to this analysis of the interpersonal dimension of social coordination that relate directly to discourse: the necessity of participating in action, the unpredictability of action, the distinction between power and force, and the conditions necessary for democracy. These concepts deal with the motivation for agency, risks of and constraints on agency, and the relationship between communicative power and legitimacy.

Arendt maintains that participating in the public realm (in action or discourse) is a necessary pre-condition for maintaining human identity, thereby providing one compelling reason for exercising agency. In Men in Dark Times (Arendt, 1968, p. 15) she says “we humanize what is going on in the world and in ourselves only by speaking of it, and in the course of speaking of it we learn to be human.” And later, “both philosophy and politics concern everyone” (Arendt, 1968, p.74). For this reason they belong in the public realm where the human person and his ability to prove himself are what count… The philosopher – in contrast to the scientist – resembles the statesman in that he must answer for his opinions, that he is held responsible. (Arendt, 1968, pp. 74-75)

Through speaking and listening with others in public we establish our human identity. By being accountable for our listening, speaking and reasoning with others, we maintain the integrity of that identity. What I believe she is saying also is that failing to engage in action both allows ourselves to be objectified by others and leads us to view others as objects. In this principle Arendt provides the rationale for what is Habermas’ underlying
but unstated assumption in his model of social order: effectively achieving social order requires the participation of all members of the society in determining questions of truth and value. Social order requires moral agency.

The second key concept regarding human interaction is that action, or discourse, is dangerous due to its uncontrollable nature. The process of engaging in dialogue with others for the purpose of constituting both ourselves and our collective being generates a “threefold frustration: the unpredictability of its outcome, the irreversibility of the process, and the anonymity of its authors” (Arendt, 1958, p. 220).

That deeds possess such an enormous capacity for endurance, superior to every other man-made product, could be a matter of pride if men were able to bear its burden, the burden of irreversibility and unpredictability, from which the action process draws its very strength. That this is impossible, men have always known. They have known that he who acts never quite knows what he is doing, that he becomes “guilty” of consequences he never intended or even foresaw, that no matter how disastrous and unexpected the consequences of his deed he can never undo it. (Arendt, 1958, p. 233)

Because action consists of unconstrained intersubjective listening, speaking and truth seeking, it is unpredictable, irreversible and not attributable to any single individual. It thus runs counter to a desire for predictability, control, and accountability that Arendt claims is the result of mankind’s “obsession with smooth functioning and predictability” (Arendt, 1958, p. 220). As discussed earlier, Arendt recognizes a two-fold danger of action (to the individual’s identity, to the stability of society) while Habermas deals primarily with the latter. Arendt’s appreciation of the personal danger of action brings her to recognize the need for practicing action in local, safe settings before attempting it in more public forums. This has the benefit of allowing us to practice, amongst friends,
the art of opening for examination our understanding of truth and our values and of respectfully interacting with others on these issues. Our sense of self and our comfort with evolving that sense of self is therefore established in the more local, safe setting.

The third key concept regarding human interaction is Arendt’s understanding of power and its differentiation from force. Arendt conceives of power as the product of action and in existence only as long as the action is present. Power is essentially the state of collective agency. This conception is largely consistent with Habermas’ notion of communicative power. She differentiates power from force, which is the objectifying exerting of one human’s will over others.

Power is always, as we would say, a power potential and not an unchangeable, measurable, and reliable entity like force or strength. While strength is the natural quality of an individual seen in isolation, power springs up between men when they act together and vanishes the moment they disperse... If power were more than this potentiality in being together, it could be possessed like strength or applied like force instead of being dependent upon the unreliable and only temporary agreement of many wills and intentions. (Arendt, 1958, pp. 200-201)

Because Arendt’s focus is action, understanding action to constitute the realm of politics, she understands power only in the form of what Habermas terms communicative power.

She therefore does not conceptualize a power that is the normatively grounded exercise of positional power to implement the goals of society, or what Habermas would term administrative power.

In speaking of the conditions under which power can be created, Arendt says:

Power is actualized only where word and deed have not parted company, where words are not empty and deeds not brutal, where words are not used
to veil intentions but to disclose realities, and deeds are not used to violate and destroy but to establish relations and create new realities. (Arendt, 1958, p. 200)

Trust and integrity are therefore seen by Arendt as necessary pre-conditions to the creation of power.

Habermas also speaks of conditions necessary for communicative action to occur and touches on very similar themes. He speaks of the need for individuals involved to be mutually accountable to act on the basis of their agreement, a similar message to Arendt’s stipulation that word and deed have not parted company. He also speaks of the dangers of “perlocutionary” (secondary) effects possible with speech acts, specifically “those effects not grammatically legislated by the speech act and that could not be revealed to the participants in the communication without affecting their understanding and acceptance of the speech act offer” (Ashendon and Owen, 1999, p. 4). In a manner somewhat less direct than Arendt, I believe he is speaking of the danger of using speech acts to manipulate through deliberately failing to disclose effects that would cause the rejection of the proposed claim.

The final concept regarding human interaction significant to this exploration of the interpersonal dimensions of social order is Arendt’s exploration of the conditions necessary for democracy, which she understands as a society whose actions are guided by the moral judgment arising from the action of its citizens. This exploration is important to my investigation as it provides new insights into the conditions needed for moral agency to survive. In the terms of Habermas’ work she is dealing with the conditions necessary for governance to be achieved through the communicative action of all
members of the society. Although Arendt does not focus her exploration of social order on specific variations and forms of government, she does clearly investigate the democracy-tyranny dichotomy. Arendt sees tyranny as being rooted in force which “indeed one man alone can exert against his fellow men and of which one or few can possess a monopoly by acquiring the means of violence” and that “while violence can destroy power, it can never be a substitute for it” (Arendt, 1958, p. 202). This combination of force and powerlessness she saw as tyranny and tyrannies therefore depending on isolation, on a lack of action:

Montesquieu realized that the outstanding characteristic of tyranny was that it rested on isolation – on the isolation of the tyrant from his subjects and the isolation of the subjects from each other through mutual fear and suspicion – and hence tyranny was not one form of government among others but contradicted the essential human condition of plurality – the acting and speaking together, which is the condition of all forms of political organization. (Arendt, 1958, p. 202)

She wishes to understand how democracy can be nurtured and how conditions supportive of tyranny can be avoided. For my part, I want to understand how moral agency can be nurtured within institutions.

Arendt therefore believes that the necessary condition for democracy, that which saves us from tyranny, is participation in the public realm, in action:

More and more people in countries of the Western world, which since the decline of the ancient world has regarded freedom from politics as one of the basic freedoms, make use of this freedom and have retreated from the world and their obligations within it... But with each such retreat an almost demonstrable loss to the world takes place; what is lost is the specific and usually irreplaceable in-between which should have formed between this individual and his fellow men. (Arendt, 1968, p. 4)
Agency, Arendt contends, requires participation in politics. Within institutions, I understand this to mean that agency requires a willingness to engage in discourse on questions of values. She speaks of "dark times" that have led individuals to flee the responsibilities of participation in action, in politics:

"History knows many periods of dark times in which the public realm has been obscured and the world becomes so dubious that people have ceased to ask any more of politics than that it show due consideration for their vital interests and personal liberty." (Arendt, 1968, p. 11)

Arendt describes the phenomenon of "inner-emigration": "(P)ersons inside Germany who behaved as if they no longer belonged to the country, who felt like emigrants; and on the other hand it indicated that they had not in reality emigrated, but had withdrawn to an interior realm..." (Arendt, 1968, p. 19). I understand this to be a cautionary note about the risk of retreating into my own small portion or our Institute and attempting to avoid the dissonance and conflict that would arise if I instead raised some moral or ethical issue for public debate.

Among the core principles I have drawn from Habermas' work are two that embody the argument that Arendt is making that widespread participation in action is necessary for democracy: the need for communicative action within any model for social order and the significance of the dual roles of citizenship which necessarily leads to every citizen's participation in communicative action, in law-making. Arendt and Habermas, I believe, see eye to eye on this point.
Arendt's work brings into sharp focus for me the personal and interpersonal dimensions of Habermas' communicative action, what she termed simply action. Firstly she makes clear the conditions of our existence as human beings in this world: *plurality which is the distinctiveness and equality of all humans* (thereby understanding any society as constituting individuals each with their own values and perspectives, and all equal politically), *natality which is the affirmation of human agency*, *belatedness which is the fact that we operate in a world which is not of our making and that therefore has a tempering affect on our agency*. Secondly she makes clear the fact that *action is dangerous for us as individuals because of it is both identity-forming and uncontrollable*. Thirdly, she gives us compelling reasons as to why *we must engage in action: to maintain our human identity and to avoid tyranny*. And finally she attends to *our need as humans to feel trust, to maintain integrity, and to have safe places in which to practice if we are to be successful in engaging in communicative action*. These understandings drawn from Arendt's work bring clearer focus on our motivations and capacity for agency and the reality of constraints on our agency. They also provide a clearer understanding of the dangers of discourse and, hence, the conditions needed for discourse to occur. In a later section I will see what lessons can be drawn from considering practice stories in terms of these concepts.

Bickford

In the discussion that follows I draw primarily on Susan Bickford's work, which is centrally concerned with the personal and interpersonal dimensions of discourse and
power in the activity of coordinating human action. She brings particular clarity to the personal and interpersonal attributes needed to engage in discourse and hence is helpful in my understanding of my own actions and also the actions of others. Additionally, she articulates good reasons for the pursuit of consensus and addresses my concern about losing validity of decisions through a consensus in which the less powerful are marginalized. She integrates, along with her perspectives, many of the contributions of Arendt and also draws on those of Iris Marion Young. The result is a persuasive presentation of the challenges and pitfalls of discourse and democratic politics viewed from the perspective of the personal and the interpersonal. (I will speak in a moment of the relevance of democratic principles in an institutional bureaucracy.) Specifically, she brings focus to the importance of listening, to the requirement for respect and attention to social differentiation if we are to achieve relatedness, and to the desirability and feasibility of consensus. Before discussing her contributions in these areas, I will set the stage by describing Bickford’s understanding of politics, democracy and the role of discourse.

Like Arendt, Bickford limits politics to what Habermas would term governance, or the formation of a collective will. She does not deal with the implementation aspect of politics as Habermas does. She describes politics as “not simply about shared interests or shared conceptions of the good; it is how we decide what to do in the face of conflict about all these things” (Bickford, 1996, p. 11). Recognizing Arendt’s concept of plurality and the need for discourse to reach decisions in the face of conflicting perspectives, she says “politics requires self-involvement with others in action, where we
do not "draw back" but actively engage with one another with direction(s) and purpose(s)” (Bickford, 1996, p. 146). She also emphasizes the risk that strategic action can usurp discourse, saying “political problems can be “de-politicized” – that is, prevented from appearing in the public realm and addressed largely through elite debate which disregards or manipulates formal political processes” (Bickford, 1996, p. 179). The manipulation of the Senate discussions in the program introduction story is one example of this risk in action.

Bickford’s focus on democracy begs the question of why I would find discussions of democracy relevant to the operations of a bureaucratic institution. Why are the concepts drawn from her discussions about democratic deliberation directly relevant to my concern with agency, discourse, and legitimacy in a bureaucratic institution? Democracy, Bickford understands as that form of politics in which public deliberation can be used to make the crucial decisions regarding the steering of a society. Habermas also argued that only with democratic discourse as the basis for our governance and administrative processes can we achieve the dual goals of stability and justice. Following both Habermas and Bickford, I believe that stability and justice in an educational institution requires a system of governance and administration based in discourse. Therefore, Bickford’s concepts of democratic deliberation are relevant to my task of understanding how I might more successfully exercise agency to initiate respectful discourse for resolving conflicts.
Young further expands on the characteristics of a democracy, describing that politics:

> consists in a process of public discussion and decision-making that includes and affirms all particular social group perspectives in the society and draws on their situated knowledge as a resource for enlarging the understanding of everyone and moving beyond their own parochial interests. (Young, 1997, p. 399)

Democracy, she says, “is also a method for determining the best and most just solution to conflicts and other collective problems” (Young, 1997, p. 400). This is significant because it clearly articulates one reason consensus, in its legitimate form, is an important element of societal coordination. Consensus, ideally, allows us to enlarge our understanding, to move beyond our own parochial interests, in arriving at decisions that affirm all groups. In short, as a society we make more informed, more legitimate, decisions. This is not what occurred in the program introduction story when objections were raised at the Senate. It is, however, what I believe would have produced better decisions with greater long-term support. There are, as I have mentioned, risks associated with illegitimate consensus and I will speak of those later in this chapter.

Unlike Habermas, Bickford is very direct in stating that consensus is the goal of democratic deliberation. As we will see, she clearly recognizes the need for and value of mutual understanding, but she is unequivocal that the goal of deliberation is consensus. Deliberation, or discourse, “is figuring out an answer to a specific question: not “what is?” but “what should I (or we) do?” or “how should I (or we) act?” (Bickford, 1996, p.29). Bickford sees discourse as having the goal of coming to an agreement on action; we only deliberate about “things that are in our power and can be realized by action. We deliberate in order to act; hence the primacy of deliberation in ethics and politics which
are concerned with action” (Bickford, 1996, p. 27). Discourse requires that we come to perceive “what particulars are ‘relevant features of a situation’ and how seriously to consider each in determining a course of action” (Bickford, 1996, p. 30).

How is it that she believes we can achieve this legitimate form of consensus, given the condition of plurality that Arendt so clearly articulates? Bickford points out that “differing opinions are always characteristic of “man in the plural” (Bickford, 1996, 81). She quotes Arendt to reinforce the necessity of recognizing multiple perspectives:

the more people’s standpoints I have present in my mind while I am pondering a given issue, the better I can imagine how I would feel and think if I were in their place, the stronger will be my capacity for representative thinking, and the more valid my final conclusions. (Bickford, 1996, p. 82)

While thinking about what others’ perspectives might be is needed, “representative thinking can never replace attention to actual others’ opinions” (Bickford, 1996, pp. 80-86). Discourse is crucial in democratic politics and discourse requires active attention to others through listening. The full range of quality of listening is present in the practice stories. In the program introduction story, my anger at the email rescinding program approval effectively served as a powerful pair of earplugs when I later sat down with the staff manager from the executives’ offices to discuss the objections to the program as she had itemized them. In the grievance story, the quality of the listening in my first meeting with the union was somewhat constrained by our entrenched positions. Subsequent meetings saw the quality of listening move right up the scale to a place in which we were each open to hearing the others’ perspectives and valuing them. With a central focus on listening as the necessary condition to achieving discourse, Bickford also identifies other
personal attributes and characteristics of the interpersonal that are necessary for legitimate discourse. These offer additional guidance on my goal of better exercising agency to bring about respectful discourse. I therefore move in the next section to a discussion of these attributes. Bickford's focus on listening is a new contribution to my exploration of agency, discourse and power. She interweaves descriptions of both personal and interpersonal considerations that, while discussed by Habermas and Arendt, are given more significance in Bickford's exploration of discourse and legitimacy.

I understand two of the considerations raised by Bickford to be primarily dealing with personal attributes of an individual that are required by discourse: resisting the desire for control, and the linked attributes of courage and resilience. In order for genuine discourse to occur we must "resist the desire for complete control," Bickford contends, and this is an observation that both Habermas and Arendt have discussed. What is new for me in Bickford's discussion of this requirement is the irony in, and indeed the tension produced by, the fact that "what is behind that desire (a particular commitment) is what prompts us to political interaction in the first place" (Bickford, 1996, p. 5). In accepting this observation, agency, discourse and power become very much jumbled together and intertwined. I need agency, and administrative power perhaps, to bring about discourse. Yet the goals behind my exercising of agency tend to bring me to discourse with a disinclination to truly "cede the possibility of control" (Bickford, 1996, p. 5). On the other hand, my recognition of the potential in communicative power is at work in my inclination towards the attempt of discourse in the first place. There is the very real
possibility of an underlying conflict in my own motives becoming a barrier to discourse and I will speak more of this in my discussion of particular practice stories.

The linked characteristics of courage and resilience are the other essentially personal attributes that I take from Bickford as being necessary for discourse. These are also spoken of by Arendt and many others however Bickford’s work is particularly strong in personalizing, for the reader, the risks of discourse and the qualities of courage and resilience. She observes that “every free man” is “also capable of not distinguishing himself” and that “the quality that is essential for politics (beyond the shared capacity to start anew) is courage” (Bickford, 1996, p. 68). Individual courage to engage is a necessary pre-condition for politics. It is a pre-condition for agency and for discourse. There is a particular quality to this courage – a willingness to “follow arguments wherever they lead” (Bickford, 1996, p. 149). And why is this a quality of courage? What are the risks of listening? Bickford describes three: the possibility that what we hear will require change from us, we might be wrong, and we might perform badly (Bickford, 1996, p. 149). In my program introduction story, I lacked the courage to follow the argument where it leads when I chose in the initial program approval stage not to bring the program to the Senate for approval. I can recognize that all three of the risks described by Bickford might have influenced my thinking and caused me not to consider that perhaps such a radical departure in programming ought to be discussed at the Senate. Drawing from Aristotle, Bickford reminds us that “courage does not mean the absence of fear… Genuine courage involves a choice about how to act in the face of fear” (Bickford, 1996, p. 151).
I turn now to the conditions for discourse that are essentially interpersonal. For those of you getting ready to reach the end of this thesis I can sum up this discussion in one word – relatedness. Bickford highlights, again in a personally engaging manner, the need for relatedness if we are to achieve the possibility of discourse. Why is relatedness both necessary and so problematic? She points out that discourse is an effort that acknowledges plurality, "a separateness, a difference that may be the source of the conflict" and that at the same time "foregrounds the possibility of bridging that gap by devising a means of relatedness" (Bickford, 1996, p. 5). The capacity for discourse is predicated upon a capacity for relatedness, establishing as a goal "to try to create a path, a passage to another's experience" (Bickford, 1996, p. 148). Listening and respect, which entails attention to social and power differentials, are the characteristics Bickford describes as being central to relatedness. I will speak now of each of these.

The first of these characteristics is listening. She argues that too little attention has been paid to the primacy of listening as the foundation for discourse. "What governs and makes possible such adversarial communicative action is... a quality of attention inherent in the very practice of deliberation" (Bickford, 1996, p.25). Speaking of the need for consciousness about the quality of our listening, she says "listeners must be self-conscious about how they listen (and what they hear). Taking responsibility for listening, as an active and creative process, might serve to undermine certain hierarchies of language and voice" (Bickford, 1996, p. 128). And the consequence of that listening is relatedness, but a relatedness that does not give up our identity. "What I come to
understand is not simply the other’s perspective, but my perspective in light of his, and his in light of mine – I learn to know both myself and others” (Bickford, 1996, p. 147). It is therefore the condition of listening that Bickford sees as the cornerstone of democratic deliberation. “This book is an attempt to theorize democratic communicative interaction that depends not on the possibility of consensus but on the presence of listening… Listening – as part of a conception of adversarial communication – is a crucial political activity that enables us to give democratic shape to our being together in the world” (Bickford, 1996, pp. 18-19). Listening is what I almost didn’t do in the office allocation story and the consequences would have been serious had I followed my initial inclination and not really listened.

Relatedness also requires respect. Bickford draws on Arendt’s observations on respect in The Human Condition:

(W)hat love is its own, narrowly circumscribed sphere, respect is in the larger domain of human affairs… it is a regard for the person from the distance which the space of the world puts between us, and this regard is independent of qualities which we may admire or of achievements which we may highly esteem. (Arendt, 1958, p. 243)

What is significant for Bickford in this conception of respect is that it is “acknowledging others as different from us yet, like us, a unique who” (Bickford, 1996, p. 80). Without the foundation of respect, discourse is not possible.

Bickford surfaces an important element of respect when she describes the necessity for us to respond to the fact of social differentiation, of discrimination, and of differentials in power and privilege. Bickford cautions of our need to, in our interpersonal interactions,
be conscious of the threat posed by “ism’s” (racism, sexism, class discrimination, heterosexism), by social group differentiation, and by power differentials. This consciousness will hopefully lead us to be more mindful of how we regard others, of the fact that how we are regarded reflects social group differentiation, and of the extent to which power and privilege have the capacity to constrain the possibility of discourse. But the threats are real and are a manifestation of the concept of belatedness discussed earlier with Arendt’s work. In the program introduction story, my attitude towards the Senate, and theirs towards me, is affected by power differentials in an interesting way. In many regards the Senate is more powerful than our small unit and me, however we are fleet of foot and on the front line so we have the ability for action that it can take them a long time to respond to (if they ever notice it). This power situation tends to create camps and diminish the sense of relatedness both on the part of the Senate and on my part. The incubator story demonstrates how “ism’s” and social group differentiation gets in the way of relatedness. There are many possible contributors to an absence of relatedness, hence many ways of losing the possibility of discourse.

Examples of this caution are sprinkled throughout The Dissonance of Democracy. On page 20 she raises the fact that “different ways of speaking are associated with different social groups. Further, different ways of speaking are taken more or less seriously in a pattern that tends to reflect social inequality.” She addresses the general issue of “ism’s” and the specific issue of gender discrimination based on a hegemony of masculine norms (Bickford, 1996, pp. 96-102). Saying that “ism’s” “are among the forces that regulate who gets paid attention to, who/what gets heard and how,” she points out that what we
are affects who we are, that is, how we are perceived in the public realm. She discusses the social use of language, saying that “the norms that govern communication are not neutral, but rather highlight the ways of speaking of already powerful groups” (Bickford, 1996, pp. 96-97). Offering a specific example, she references findings by Sara Mills that “strategic use of hesitation and hedging may be used by female speakers… to indicate that they are not intending to silence other contributions, but they may be interpreted as displaying uncertainty and low self-esteem” (Bickford, 1996, pp. 99-100). She describes the result of stereotypes, that “the only kind of visibility stereotypes allow, then, is visibility as an object” (Bickford, 1996, p. 100). Finally, in a statement that recalls the earlier discussion of our possible responses to the reality of belatedness, she says that “in an inegalitarian society where race, class, gender and sexuality are relevant categories, not being seen – or not seeing oneself – as a member of a group is a marker of power and privilege” (Bickford, 1996, p. 102).

Young also addresses this caution regarding the impact of social differentiation on the possibility of discourse in her paper “Difference as a Resource for Democratic Communication” (1997). In it she highlights the benefits of learning to operate more mindfully in our world characterized by social differentiation. She identifies the fact that the “social positioning of group differentiation gives to individuals some shared perspectives on social life” and argues that “attention to social group differentiation is an important resource for democratic communication” (Young, 1997, p. 385). She sees our responsibility to be to develop a greater awareness and understanding of the potential impacts of social relations through speaking together. She makes a strong argument in
favour of a "politics of difference" as opposed to the claims by others that "everyone
should just be thought of as a unique individual person" saying that "oppressed groups
found that this humanist ideology resulted in ignoring rather than transcending the real
material consequences of social group difference" (Young, 1997, p. 386). Both Bickford
and Young would argue against Arendt's position that social differentiation ought to be
ignored in communicative action and instead argue that it is absolutely necessary to
remain conscious of these differentials if we are to have any hope of achieving discourse.

In reflecting on the work of Bickford, Young, and Levinson, I find that they firstly help
me to reconcile the tension between consensus and plurality by introducing the concept
of relatedness. In acknowledging the need for political deliberation to lead to decisions
on action, they articulate a view of discourse that both affirms our separateness, our
difference and foregrounds the possibility of bridging that gap. In focusing on
relatedness, they identify a key differentiator between legitimate and illegitimate
consensus. This gives me something to shoot for, as it were. The image of creating a
path, a passage to another's experience offers a perspective that helps me more clearly
assess my own behaviour in discourse. Secondly, they bring to the fore the need to be
willing to resist the desire for complete control as we enter into discourse but are the first
to speak of the curious contradiction that it is our desire for control that often brings us to
communicative action. Thirdly, these writers have caused me to see more clearly the
pervasive influence of social differentiation, ism's, and power differentials on both my
own actions and on those of others. This causes me to be more conscious of the human
dynamics in my interactions with others and of the extent to which the perspectives of the
privileged group (of which I am sometimes a part) shape the norms of a society or, in this case, an institution. Recognizing that how I am perceived is influenced by these factors can both help me in formulating my speech and action and, at the same time, temper my natural tendency to see agency as having no bounds. Finally, *their examination of the risks of genuine discourse, of the reality of fear, and their perspective that the courage called for is not the absence of fear* but acting in the face of fear helps me be less harsh on myself about those emotions I feel when encountering the need for discourse. I move now to an examination of my practice stories in light of the insights gathered from a look at the intra and interpersonal aspects of power and discourse.

Practice Stories, the Personal and the Interpersonal

There are five themes I draw from the conceptual resources just described that relate to my investigation of power, discourse, consensus and agency. I'll be considering my practice experiences in light of these themes. *The intertwining of strategic and communicative action* refers to my discovered concern that it is difficult to forego strategic objectives in discourse when it was those precise objectives that brought me to seek discourse. This is a complexity of the agency-discourse-power connectedness that I need to explore. *The consensus-plurality-relatedness challenge* refers to my observation that there may be in relatedness the hope of creating legitimate consensus. *The fear, courage and resilience issue* leads to an examination of my practice stories to uncover a better understanding of how fear, courage and resilience appeared and did not appear. *The agency-belatedness-hopefulness concern* refers to my observation that a better
appreciation of belatedness may lead to wiser and more successful attempts at agency. Finally, the impact of power and social group differentials on my actions and those of others is an examination of how discourse and agency have been influenced by these factors.

My concern with the intertwined nature of strategic and communicative action, and hence of administrative and communicative power, became more acute as I reread the practice stories in light of this chapter’s analysis and saw for the first time the extent to which my own actions were strategic. In fact, it appears that I’m strategic even about when I choose to attempt to initiate communicative action! The disturbing aspect of this observation is that I am recognizing that these strategic motivations, one might say manipulative, may cause me to be open to discourse myself only when I think I need it to accomplish some particular goal. Out the window goes that comfortable view of myself as a warm-hearted, open member of our institutional community who is unerringly alert to the need for us to question our norms and unfailingly willing to initiate and engage in discourse. So what actually is happening here? Let’s consider some practice stories.

The new program introduction story sees me happy to identify all the values questions that need to be addressed concerning this new line of programming – but only after I’ve been caught off-side and told not to proceed. In fact, I was quite aware of many of these values questions throughout the preparation of the program but was content to have the discussions locally only with those whose support I needed to move the program approval through the system. If you’d asked me, I would have had to acknowledge that
the Senate should have had the opportunity to deliberate on those questions of values but I kept my head down and moved forward very strategically. Doing otherwise would have meant greatly diminishing my level of control of the outcome. Or take the grievance story, in which I allowed what I knew would be strategic action to proceed between labour relations and the union until it became apparent that it wasn’t going to be successful and this might have negative consequences for my program area. The facilities stories are clear examples of my strategic approach to communicative action; I engaged in communicative action as a way of bringing people whose support I needed to a willingness to help in the creation of a new lab and I have never gone to the president and said “this Institute needs a values-based space allocation process.” And finally, in the values talk story, I struggled with opening myself to a derailing of our planned office design even though it was clear that there was a concern about the plan’s impact on the values of the group.

So what’s going on? Certainly the bureaucratic imperative of stability causes institutional systems and structures to set up very strong forces in favour of strategic action. It is also the case that being successful in realizing any challenging goal in such a bureaucracy requires the ability to “work the system,” to act strategically. Discourse starts with conflict… when we discover we have conflicting views on fundamental questions of values. It therefore is perhaps the case that in settings of practice, virtually all discourse is initiated because someone is acting strategically towards a goal and that action highlights the values conflict. So perhaps it is not “bad behaviour” of mine that I find myself inclined to engage in discourse when my strategic actions are in jeopardy.
What is important instead is that when I do enter into discourse I pay attention to the need to “follow the argument where it leads.” But what about the ethics of consciously choosing not to attempt to initiate discourse when I know it is desirable but I can get away without it? Experienced managers have told me it is a matter of asking “is this a hill you want to die on?” In other words, just how highly do you value the need to resolve a particular issue? I believe that is part of it; just how important is this question to the organization at this time? But the other part of considering my actions in such a situation is recognizing that I am still too unwilling to let things move more slowly, to risk having my goals not realized, in order that fundamental questions of values are deliberated. Finding the courage to take this risk for the benefit of greater justice and long-term stability will be another challenge.

I turn now to the second theme – consensus-plurality-relatedness. Is consensus on what we ought to do possible while honouring the condition of plurality? This tension I’ve experienced in practice between consensus and plurality has been eased in my mind by the concept of relatedness. I’m interested to see whether and how both the tension and the concept that “makes the hurt go away” appear in the practice stories. The fundamental question here is whether I am actually honouring the notion of plurality in situations of discourse in which my goal is consensus, and if so, is it relatedness that makes that happen?

I’ll start this time with the grievance story. That story is one in which I felt we did achieve consensus on action while respecting the condition of plurality. We were starting
from a pretty bad spot when I approached the union so what made it work out? To start
with there was a fair level of trust between a couple of the union staff with whom I
deliberated and me. The trust stemmed from previous encounters in which we each
found the other to be open and to operate with integrity. Also, highly to the credit of the
union staff involved, they actually were able to open themselves to listening to my
perspective even though this was an emotionally charged subject for them and there was
not a lot of trust in the “management” in general of the Institute. For my part, I think I
also paid attention to my listening. We were a small group in the discussions and I
believe, following Arendt, that those are easier conditions within which to attempt the
practice of discourse. I believe we also both showed respect for the other’s perspective
and tried to avoid the stereotyping that can come when dealing with individuals in other
“camps.” I would conclude from this that indeed relatedness is a key to the consensus-
plurality tension, but also that it is something that requires the active effort of all the
players and hence not controllable by me.

The second story I’d like to examine in terms of this theme is the values talk story. As
we developed our values, it is seems to me that our group had worked together long
enough that relatedness was already in place and that this is what made the process of
deliberating our values such an emotionally positive experience for us. Trust, respect,
listening, and ignoring social group differentiation had, over time, been established and
created that sense of relatedness. So while there were many times in the discussion when
there were different perspectives, I believe we were all engaged in building pathways to
the perspectives of others. And I would say that in part two of that story, the office space
question, there was a reduced sense of relatedness that, indeed, was probably the root cause of the perceived values conflict. I have one final observation on this question of relatedness and its contribution to resolving the consensus-plurality tension. This one I'm not so keen on because I don't like what it says about me. Given that the Senate has the importance that it does relative to values deliberation at the Institute, it would seem sensible that I put some effort into establishing conditions of relatedness with some of the Senate members. Instead, my natural tendency is to avoid taking that effort because it is not a particularly comfortable step for me to take. It seems that I had better re-think my tendency to allow my introverted nature to keep me from building the pathways that are important for values deliberations that might reasonably be anticipated.

Moving on now to the third theme, I examine the fear-courage-resilience issue that comes so sharply into focus through the writings of Arendt and Bickford. The exercising of power, either administrative or communicative, and the openness to discourse entail personal risk and require both courage and resilience: the courage to act and the strength to persevere in the face of setbacks. They require that individuals find the will to, as Arendt says, care enough about our world to engage as citizens. What I observe from these stories is that courage and resilience are required not only from me, in my actions, but also from the other players engaged in the conflict. And appreciating this fact starts to open the pathway for me to understand another's perspective.

In the rocky program implementation story it is clear that both courage and resilience were required of me from the time I stepped forward to propose the notion of a full cost-
recovery program. Those characteristics were called upon both in my strategic actions and in the situations of discourse in which I engaged with individual representatives from the various arms of the institution in gaining initial program approval: the Registrar’s office, the faculty union, the Deans and Vice-President of Education. Indeed this was clear to me at the time. I had less empathy for the fact that these engagements also required courage and resilience on the part of those representatives. Had I been clearer on this, I might have been more inclined to propose discussing the initiative with the Senate in its early planning stages. I might also have been less surprised when the explosion at the Senate led to a pulling away from discourse on the part of many of those representatives. There are instances in which I was more consciously aware of the extent to which courage and resilience were required on the part of the others with whom I was engaged. In the grievance story I believe I did appreciate the extent to which the union representatives displayed courage to openly engage with me in the discourse required to resolve the issue. However I lost sight of that in my reaction to the characterization of the resolution that they presented in the faculty union. It is, after all, understandable that they felt the need to position the resolution as a triumph over management. In the values story, it was my appreciation for the courage it took for the individual to raise the concern over planned office allocation that actually caused me to open the decision to reconsideration and to seek others’ perspectives. And there were times, too, when I lacked the resilience needed to engage in discourse. The incubator story is just such a case. I did not have the resilience to re-engage in the offer of discourse when it became clear to me that I was being heard in ways that ascribed the undesirable characteristic of “fearful” to me. Indeed I was fearful, but not in the sense that they assumed.
The fourth theme, *the agency-belatedness-hopefulness concern*, grapples with the question of to what extent agency is constrained by the fact of belatedness and is there reasonable cause for hopefulness about the potential for agency. There are numerous examples of the impact of belatedness in these practice stories. Are there grounds for hopefulness?

Let's start with some of the elements of the belatedness side of the question. I come to these situations with a background of many years of working in the private sector, a female, a disrespect for command and control management practices, and a strong inclination to deal with issues by “putting them on the table” for dialogue. These factors of my identity formation both shape my perspectives of the situations and ran contrary to the background experiences of many of the Institute staff. I was also socially positioned within the Institute: line and not staff, management and not union, female and not male, management and not executive. Each of these characteristics shapes others’ perspectives of me and my actions. They likewise shape my perspectives of others and their actions.

When concerns were raised about the cost-recovery program being developed, it is fair to guess that what individuals assumed of me was a business, not public good, focus. They might similarly have perceived a renegade orientation and disregard for policy; a perception, I have discovered, that may be somewhat justified. My gender would also cause some in the organization to feel less relatedness with me, and hence be less able to enter into genuine discourse. There is strong indication of these factors of belatedness being at play in my practice stories: the fact that no-one from the Senate came to speak
to me of their concerns, the disinclination of the various service areas to consider re-
examining their policies in light of this new form of program, the way in which I was 
heard in the incubator story. And I, for my part, was insufficiently aware of the extent to 
which belatedness affected both others’ actions and my perspectives of others. I too 
often fell into the trap of wanting to interact with others as if there were a clean slate.

So is there any cause for hopefulness? I believe there is and that it once again comes 
back to relatedness, and courage and resilience. Why was discourse with the faculty 
union possible? Because there were several union staff with whom I had already 
established a history of trust and respect. Why were we able to overcome the withdrawal 
of approval for the new program? The answer in part is because we collectively found 
the courage and resilience to work the matter through, albeit strategically. Why was the 
experience of articulating our values such a joy? Because there was a strong base of 
relatedness, trust and respect. Along with the centrality of relatedness, courage and 
resilience is the fact that there are compelling reasons driving us to exercise our agency: 
to maintain our identity and to make possible a just and stable organization. My sense is 
that many of us have an intuitive awareness of those reasons and that this accounts for the 
extent to which we see examples of the risks being taken. So, in the end, I conclude that 
hopefulness is justified, but it is a more tempered hopefulness than I have had before.

The final theme I want to explore is *the impact of power and social group differentials on 
discourse*. The power we are speaking of here is positional or administrative power.
Given the reality of power and social group differentials, and their potential to derail discourse, are there any understandings that might help to diminish their impact?

Power and social group differentials are at play in every story. Probably the first lesson for me as I look back at these stories is the importance of attending to those differentials. In some cases that attention might lead to strategic action, or it may highlight the need for working on the relatedness amongst the groups. But I am more aware now of the challenge of attending to those differentials even when I am in the category of "privileged," as indeed I was in most of these stories. I had more positional power than some of the other individuals involved in these stories and could easily have, for instance, simply responded to the individual concerned about the office plan that his concern was unfounded and our team values would not be diminished by the plan as developed. I cringe as I read this, but recognize that there was a strong part of me that wanted to respond in just that way. And had I done that, they would have felt the very same powerlessness, the very same doubts about justice, that I felt when the Institute executive would thank me for my facilities request presentation and tell me they would get back to me. The second important observation that I draw from considering this issue is that somehow I must find some courage to call attention to the power and social group differentials when I see them obstructing the possibility of discourse or the actualizing of justice. This is a difficult conclusion to grapple with for a couple of reasons. I suspect I may be as much a part of the problem as I am a part of the solution as often as not. So the first challenge will be attending to the issue more broadly than I have before. Also, I suspect that a fair amount of trust must exist in situations if there is to be anything gained
by raising attention to our practices of privileging particular positions or groups over others. It will require some strategic action on my part to identify those instances in which progress can be made by raising this issue for discourse.

The Application, in Practice, of Power and Discourse

It's a challenge, in concluding this chapter, to highlight just a few lessons about power and discourse in my practice settings that came from this investigation. I do so not to diminish the significance of others, but to reinforce in my own mind the lessons that have come to me with the greatest difficulty.

There are three such lessons. The first would be an awareness of the strategic aspects of my inclination to discourse and the need to maintain that awareness so that once I am involved in discourse I can more readily "cede the possibility of control," and so that I am more open to accepting an invitation to discourse when it appears not to suit my strategic objectives. The second would be a more conscious awareness of the limitations on agency, of the affects of belatedness and the impact of power and social group differentials on both strategic and communicative action. The final would be a better understanding of the reasonableness of the fear others and I have when encountering conflict and the need for discourse, and a greater recognition of the courage and resilience I am expecting of others as I enter into discourse.

I will wrap up this chapter with a curious observation. The analysis of power and discourse through the lens of the personal and interpersonal has made real in my
consciousness the fleeting nature of communicative power. There were many instances
in which we had it for a moment, and lost it a moment later. Looking at the interpersonal
dimension of our interactions brings clarity to this reality and some understandings as to
why that is so.
CHAPTER SIX:
RETURNING TO WHERE WE STARTED

As I started this research I was hoping, in the end, to arrive back to where I had started and to "know the place for the first time." Instead, I find that I have not arrived at the end of my exploring and do not have neat answers. And while I know the place somewhat better than I did at the outset, it seems I cannot ever hope to "know" it in the sense of having understandings that will provide me simple guides to follow in exercising power, in the practice of discourse, in exercising my capacity for agency. The hope of easy answers was rendered impossible by the complexities I have discovered. Rather, what I have found through the use of new conceptual tools is that I have a somewhat deeper understanding of the place of my practice and so an altered perspective from which to approach the pragmatic, ethical and moral questions that I encounter in that place. Also, unexpectedly and with some discomfort, I have arrived back at that place with a somewhat better understanding of my own location and characteristics as an individual. These understandings, I now realize, also provide a more informed perspective from which to assess my own inclinations in situations of conflict.

So in a sense this chapter is wrapping up the unwrappable. I have arrived, not at the end of all my exploring, but at a new place of beginning. And at this new beginning I will summarize some of the significant insights gained through this particular leg of a journey of exploration. I do so with full awareness that every coming day has the potential of new possibilities for understanding. I will speak of power, of discourse, and of agency. I
will also speak of this process of reflecting on my practice through the application of new conceptual tools.

On Power

My first concern in this research was to come to a better understanding of the exercise of power, on the part of others and on my own part, in coming to decisions on action in the face of fundamental questions of values. Discovering Habermas' notions of administrative and communicative power has helped me to see more clearly that there are two conceptually distinct forms of power and that different kinds of questions, pragmatic and ethical/moral, call for different forms of power. Examining my practice stories I have seen that these two forms of power are interwoven in virtually every situation of attempting to arrive at wise decisions for action. That pragmatic goals and strategic action are often the drivers causing me to seek discourse and the creation of communicative power was an unsettling insight. This realization brings me to view my own actions as a good deal less altruistic than I had previously liked to believe. I am also now inclined to be less critical of others when I find that strategic goals may be influencing their willingness to enter into discourse. I have a heightened awareness of my need to critically reflect on my responses when I am steering away from the possibility of communicative power because I perceive, in that power, the threat of derailing my strategic intentions. This critical reflection must incorporate the perspectives of others in different locations than I if I am to arrive at a fair determination of the need to attend to fundamental questions of values.
The work of Habermas, Arendt, Parsons and Foucault particularly brought me to a new understanding of the differentiation between power and force; administrative power becomes force, or domination, as soon as it ceases to have a normative grounding in the collective will. The understanding that tyrannies rest on force opens my eyes to a greater appreciation of the risks to achieving a just and stable organization if I allow myself to exercise administrative power that is not consistent with some collectively arrived at norms.

I have come to recognize for the first time the influences that can lead me into such “normatively unfiltered” administrative power: the impact of the lifeworld, steering media of money and power, power/knowledge complexes, and insufficient attention to the implications of plurality. Those beliefs, values, skills and attitudes that form my own lifeworld represent a significant potential for leading me into the exercise of such normatively unfiltered administrative power. They create in me a blindness to fundamental questions of values that exist relative to my chosen objectives. Followership on my part or on the part of others, which can arise from the steering media of money and power, also has the potential to lead me into normatively unfiltered strategic action. I can unknowingly create a fear of reprisals in those of lesser positional power in our organization, creating a disinclination on their part to question the normative underpinnings of some course of action I am following. My new awareness of the pervasiveness of power/knowledge complexes in our world and in our organizations demonstrates for me yet another possible source of followership in my actions and in the
actions of others. They, too, structure our individual and collective lifeworlds by creating unquestioned knowledges that serve to obscure very real questions of values. Policy, which I will speak of momentarily, is just one such instance of these knowledges. Finally, I have come to an awareness of the pervasive risks to normatively grounded administrative power of inattentiveness to the implications of plurality. Arendt, Bickford and Young have brought to the foreground for me the reality of the location-specific nature of knowledge and the uniqueness that is the result of the condition of natality. It is still too easy for me to disregard or to devalue the knowledge and perspectives of specific others, located differently from me as they are. I recognize that I will have to struggle to remain open to the knowledges and perspectives of others if I aim to avoid the pitfall of normatively untested administrative power.

Habermas' approach to linking communicative and administrative power through policy has caused me to understand differently the role and characteristics of policy in arriving at wise decisions on action. Viewing policy as the means whereby administrative power remains linked to a collective will, I can no longer operate with quite as much disdain for policy as I did at the outset of this research. At the same time, through Habermas' insight that policy can and should be the context-dependent expression of a collective will, I realize that my tendency to disregard policy that seems inappropriate to changing social realities is not without some foundation. What these two characteristics of policy clearly lead to is a greater appreciation on my part that it is not sufficient for me alone to make a determination that policy is unjustified or inapplicable. If I do so I am unjustifiably taking unto myself the right to determine collective will. Instead, I must be willing to
engage more broadly with others in our organization in discussions of policy justification and applicability, and of underlying values.

Finally, on the subject of power, I find that Habermas’ premise of the possibility and sustainability of a collective will seems somewhat idealistic when I consider it in light of the realities of my practice. There is in that term, “collective will,” a sense of durability that is attractive but not consistent with my experience. While I believe that we must strive to form some approximation of a collective will as we arrive at decisions on action, the fast changing social realities – both systems and interpersonal in nature – can and do very quickly erode support for that collective will. Instead of being surprised and frustrated by the impermanence of notions of a collective will, I now can accept the reality that we must continually return to discussions of that will in both small groups and larger communities of discourse. Habermas’ insights regarding the need for both stability and validity in societies that seek to survive and to remain just, and of the inherent tension between these two goals, come into even starker relief in my mind as I come to appreciate the fleeting nature of the collective will. The tension is indeed very great and is reconciled only by the resilience to keep returning to questions of values and the faith that long-term stability will ultimately be achieved only if we retain collectively accepted norms in guiding our actions.
My second concern in undertaking this research was to come to a better appreciation of the nature of discourse, dealing as it does with resolving fundamental values conflicts to arrive at decisions on action. While Habermas presents in his discourse principle a perspective of discourse that gives intellectual acknowledgment to the impact of plurality, he obscures the difference between mutual understanding and consensus and therefore minimizes, in my mind, the challenges and risks of seeking consensus. I therefore found in his work insufficient guidance on the tension between consensus and plurality.

It was Bickford who helped me understand why, indeed, I felt the need for consensus at all. She clearly articulated a perspective that our governance and administration is not just about shared concepts of the good, it is about coming to decisions on action in the midst of conflicting notions of values. Bickford’s synthesis of Arendt’s notions of plurality, Young’s appreciation of difference, and her own notions of listening, brought me to a new understanding of the absolute necessity of relatedness if we hope to achieve consensus that does not marginalize the perspectives of the less powerful. Her image of creating pathways to another’s experiences and her understanding that discourse based on relatedness both affirms the distance between us and offers a hope for bridging those differences create powerful images for me. These images offer me a guide for my own actions in discourse and a new appreciation of the need for me to work towards relatedness with “concrete others.” They also allow me to see clearly that discourse is not possible, absent relatedness, and that discourse requires others’ willingness to engage.
With that understanding, I believe I can be more realistic in my assessments of whether
and how discourse is possible in a given situation. This in turn leads to the insights I
have gathered regarding safe forums in which to practice discourse.

While Habermas dealt primarily with the risk that discourse presented to the goal of
societal stability, Arendt and Bickford bring great clarity to the risk that discourse
presents to our concept of self, to our identity. Arendt speaks of the identity forming
nature of discourse and Bickford speaks of the personal risks associated with discourse:
the possibility that what we hear will require change from us, we might be wrong, and we
might perform badly. Both of them, and indeed Habermas also, speak of the fact that
discourse requires others' willingness to engage and to operate with integrity. I therefore
come to understand the need for safe forums to practice discourse, and relatedness as the
essential quality for creating a safe forum. So what? So I have a lower expectation of the
possibility of achieving true discourse in a forum as open and disparate in its membership
as the Senate. I have a greater appreciation of the need to work within more local,
contained groups in developing conditions of relatedness and trust and in engaging in
discourse on substantive issues. I recognize a need to be more strategic about how I
might engage others in forming similar islands of relatedness, and in, over time,
improving our collective ability to retain relatedness and to foster conditions for
discourse in more public forums. And finally, I recognize that when genuine attempts at
relatedness fail due to another's unwillingness to engage or to function with integrity then
discourse is not an option. This, in turn, leads me to my third observation regarding
discourse; in certain situations, the wisest course of action may be to attempt principled negotiation as a surrogate for discourse.

Where relatedness is not present and seems unlikely to be achieved in the timeframe needed for arriving at a decision on action, where others are unwilling to engage in discourse, or when I have good reasons to doubt the integrity of the concrete other with whom I must come to intersubjective agreement, I now believe that principled negotiation may indeed offer the greatest hope for achieving some proximate of a collective will. When I speak of principled negotiation, what Habermas refers to as bargaining, I am speaking of an attempt to arrive at a decision, that honours and balances the interests of all involved, on action that can be supported by disparate parties. I do not suggest that such an approach absolves me of the responsibility to attempt to achieve relatedness, to seek those pathways to another’s perspectives, or to function with integrity myself. Rather, I suggest that these attitudes of mine must be applied first to the task of understanding the respective positions and then to the task of constructing possibilities for action that all might deem acceptable. The process is based on interests (or goals) and as such is more strategic than communicative, but has the dual benefits of circumventing deadlock while taking a small step towards the condition of relatedness.

A final observation on the potential of discourse in large organizations arises as I reflect on the nature of the forum that is the Senate; it is necessary that discourse be able to occur in this forum and yet the structural challenges that exist due to disparate interests and competing camps make discourse very difficult to achieve. Applying Arendt’s
notions of safe forums and Foucault's notions of loosening up the bureaucratic structures,
I wonder if it would be possible to create a small representative group of Senate members
tasked with hearing from and offering guidance to individuals who are grappling with
situations that bring policy into question. Structured in a looser fashion than is the Senate
as a formal body, might such a group offer a hope of creating safe forums for opening
discourse on fundamental questions of values that arise within our conduct of institutional
governance and administration? Seeing their activities as mentorship rather than formal
policy making and interpretation, might this make such a group more comfortable with
the destabilizing nature of discourse and also make groups and individuals within the
organization more comfortable with seeking both informed and pluralistic perspectives?
I do not know if such an approach is possible, nor what new pitfalls it might present, but I
am inclined to do some investigation to see if there are examples of a similar approach in
other institutions and, if there are, what the experiences have been.

On Agency

The third element of this research deals with the question of my agency as a member of a
bureaucratic educational institution when I encounter conflicting beliefs regarding our
values and norms, and my capacity for fostering conditions of respectful discourse. I
recognize that questions of and assumptions about agency intertwine with the
investigations of power and discourse and so this is not a distinct area of consideration.
Rather, the three are inextricably intermeshed. At the same time I have chosen to focus
on this area along with power and discourse because of the many experiences in which I
have found my belief in my agency to be misplaced and the few experiences in which I have found it to be validated. I wanted to come to a better understanding of whether and why agency is important, and also of what factors increase and what factors diminish my capacity for agency within a situation, in order to more wisely assess the possibilities for action that are open to me.

The works of both Arendt and Habermas have served to confirm my belief in the importance of human agency. Thanks to them I can clearly articulate two compelling reasons for me to attempt to exercise my human agency: to maintain my identity and to contribute to the possibility of a just and stable organization. So I am clear now as to why I feel compelled to the exercise of agency. What then about the limitations on that agency?

Levinson's description of belatedness as the condition that both characterizes the context and constrains the possibilities of agency was very powerful in its ability to describe my actual lived experiences. Considering my experiences in the light of the concept of belatedness, I see more clearly that my own perspectives and beliefs are conditioned by my social and structural positioning as are the perspectives and beliefs of others. Connecting Young's work on difference with the systems theorists' work on the impact of existing systems and structures and the powerful forces of domination that these establish, I have a greater appreciation of the ways in which the potential results of my agency are constrained. This is apparent in a number of the insights I have discussed above when examining the themes of power and discourse. I am more aware of how my
social and structural positioning conditions, both constraining and enhancing, the
capacity of my agency, and also conditions others’ capacities for agency.

I find that Habermas’ perspective of the dual roles of citizenship is another concept that
helps to clarify the responsibilities that accompany my capacity for agency. As both
subject of the law and lawmaker, I have the responsibility of acting in accordance with
established policy while remaining mindful of the continual need for interpreting and
assessing the appropriateness of those policies. Along with this second element of my
responsibility comes an obligation to engage in pluralistic discourse when encountering
policy that seems inappropriate to emerging social realities. This, I now better
understand, is not always easy to achieve. In my stories I have seen instances in which
the forces of followership are so great that discourse attempted would fall back to
acceptance of existing policy and pragmatic questions of implementation. I have
concluded that civil disobedience is in some cases the most feasible course of action open
to individuals who believe the established policies are wrong-headed. However
Habermas, Arendt and Bickford bring me to an appreciation that I have the obligation
when choosing such a course of action to test my notions of justice in some form of
pluralistic discourse. Although established forums for policy making may not offer such
an opportunity, it is possible for me to select individuals whose perspectives I know will
differ with mine in order to test my conclusions by having to “articulate good reasons in
public.” And in that process I must remain open to “follow the argument where it
leads.” That will not be easy.
The final concept I would like to discuss with respect to agency is the fear, courage and resilience that accompany my decisions about attempting human agency. I now have better tools with which to understand the nature of the fears I feel when situated in a conflict-laden location that calls for discourse. Fear of my emotional safety, fear of reprisals, fear of having my sense of self thrown into question, and fear of being wrong or of not performing well are amongst those fears. As a result of this research and reflection I can be more conscious of the fears I am reacting to, and also can better appreciate that being fearful is a natural accompaniment to discourse. I realize also that others with whom I am interacting are likely to be facing similar fears of their own. This realization is a step of understanding that contributes to the goal of relatedness. It helps me be gentler with myself, and with others, as we take tentative steps towards discourse. It also makes me more conscious of the need for courage, acting in the face of fear, and for resilience, being able to emotionally withstand the various forms of hostility that can result from treading into difficult territory.

In trying to wrap up the unwrappable I have spoken of power, of discourse and of agency. I have tried to pull together a series of reflections that describe how my understanding of the difficult task of leadership in situations of conflict has evolved as a result of this research. It is not concrete and definitive, and yet I now accept that my drive towards the concrete and definitive is both naïve and dangerous when operating in the territory that is the subject of this research. At the outset, Habermas' proceduralist approach to societal integration seemed a reasonable goal to aspire to. I now believe it to be an ideal I must strive for while maintaining an informed understanding that it cannot be realized and a
more comprehensive set of tools for crafting my action in situations that do not approximate "ideal." I conclude with a few comments on the portion of a journey that was this research.

On the Journey

I reflect now on my experiences with this research. I do so because it has been both much more valuable and much more difficult than I ever anticipated. More and more, practitioners in the Ed.D. program are choosing the path of research into their own practices and may encounter some of the difficulties that I did. It may give others some sense of comfort to know that they are not alone in their emotional responses.

I selected a conceptual rather than empirical research approach because, by the time I realized these were experiences that I needed to understand better, the experiences were history. I had not set up all the necessary empirical data gathering mechanisms that would have made other forms of research possible. However that is the reality of a practitioner's life. We get what we didn't expect, and we have to somehow turn that event into experience through critical reflection. I launched this research project because I felt compelled to try to turn some of these stories into experience. Experience that I could use to open up the possibility of "being otherwise."

As I have said earlier, my expectation was that I would better understand the actions of others in these situations. And I expected that my analysis would help me understand
neatly definable and measurable actions that I could take in similar situations to produce
different results. What I did not anticipate was the extent to which this analysis has led
me to actions that are not so neat and measurable and that are acting on myself, not on
others. To achieve different results in similar situations, I must change who I am. And
that is not a comfortable process. I have found I move from being unconscious of some
attribute or attitude of mine, to being aware of it and deeply despairing of it, to moving
beyond self-reprisal to an understanding of why I might be so, to finally being able to
move towards being otherwise. In some cases, it was the conceptual resources
themselves that helped me through this process and in others it was the caring support of
members of my supervisory committee that managed to help me move beyond despair. I
also suppose that the courage and resilience we are all capable of was a necessary
element if I was not to become lodged midstream in the process.

An amazing realization to me was finding that it is through writing about experiences that
we come to deeper understandings of those experiences. I may not have previously
admitted to my educational background, which included an M.Sc. in Computing Science.
The thesis I had completed for that degree was highly quantitative and technical-rational
in its analysis and before starting the thesis I needed to have worked out what the answer
was. This was the approach to research and to thesis writing with which I was
experienced. While many told me that a research project such as this was an entirely
different analytical process, I could not understand it until I had experienced it. While I
would start each section with a general direction and a notion of where I was going, I
inevitably discovered totally new ideas as I actually sat and composed. Often these ideas were substantially different than the notions with which I had started.

Another surprising learning for me was the extent to which situations look very different when viewed through the lens of different conceptual resources. This effect, which I had not anticipated, became apparent as soon I viewed the practice stories through the systems and structures lens after having first viewed them through a more proceduralist lens. It was reinforced again as I took up the conceptual resources focusing on the interpersonal dimensions of power, discourse and agency. This understanding, in itself, is a useful guide for my actions in the future.

Finally, I want to speak of hopefulness. The exercise of self-reflective conceptual research seems inherently to possess, for me, a hopefulness that I had not appreciated. Perhaps it is because its objective is one of creating the option of being otherwise. Perhaps it is because it results in identifying new possibilities for action. Perhaps it is because there is some comfort in confirming that we can, through critical self-reflection, arrive at better understandings that ultimately afford the possibility of achieving greater wisdom in our judgment. It is likely all of these. But whatever the cause, the hopefulness that I feel as I conclude this research is perhaps one of its greatest benefits.

I conclude this research activity with the full understanding that the next phase of research begins right now.
REFERENCES


