

Chapter 15

Power and Love

Recognizing the power of ‘those who make’ to achieve enhanced (safety) performances, through dedicated spaces for debate

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Abstract Building on other contributions, this chapter highlights how safety is a situated activity, which relies greatly on non-technical skills. As such, professionalizing in safety implies creating spaces for debate. In this context, the question of power is key to consider: indeed, professionalization is first a matter of identity, which in turn questions power, be it formal or informal. One of the key question is: ‘how to cope with increasingly powerful specialists in support functions?’. As an attempt to answer it, this chapter argues that shifting from a ‘love of power’ to the ‘power of love’ is the key to liberated organizations in which (safety) performances are enhanced. Giving more power and consideration to working teams and middle managers in the field by creating space to discuss rules and practices is a first step to doing so. A second, more in-depth, step implies a change of paradigm from a ‘simple’ steering of safety indicators to a broad empowering of employees, giving them vision and autonomy to do their jobs. This involves a “liberation” process by which the classical vision of hierarchal structures is reversed, and the importance of learning and knowledge is acknowledged as a key source of motivation.

Keywords Identity · Empowerment · Spaces for debate

15.1 Introduction

In introduction, let us recall the conclusions and key take-aways of the seminar¹:

¹The two-day international workshop mentioned in the preface, organized by FonCSI in November 2015 and highlight of the project that led to this book (editors’ note).

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1. Safety is only **one of the aspects of doing things well**, one way to arbitrate. There are others.
2. One of the key issues regarding professionalization in safety lies in the difference between **‘expert’ knowledge** (i.e. coming from safety support functions) and **‘field’ knowledge**. Expert knowledge should be used in situations that are not known, whereas it is often used in situations where it is not needed.
3. Safety has to do with **identity**. Call it Community of Practice, Craft group, trade... The importance of professional groups producing safety rules which are not of the same type as rules written by experts should be emphasized. In this respect, there is a clear **need for physical and temporal spaces** to foster meetings and discussions from and by field operators, in order to build safety rules.
4. One cannot talk about professionalization in safety without talking of the **attributes of safety culture**: having good professionals implies that organizations have the capacity to listen to bad news, fostering debates and controversies. Safety culture requires humility, as well as recognition that no one has all the answers.

In this context, the **question of power** appears to be central in terms of capacity of operators—individuals and collectives—to fully embrace both the issues arising in their day-to-day activities, including—but not limited to—safety, and the solutions they can find to tackle them. Indeed, all the above-mentioned aspects of the question of professionalization are related to power issues: individual power (to act on one’s reality in a given situation), formal and informal power (i.e. experts in support function vs. field operators), group power (deriving from a collective identity and a set of shared values), organizational power (i.e. power of the hierarchical structure in place).

This chapter aims to re-examine the academic contributions on the question of professionalization, trying to highlight the (sometimes hidden, but often omnipresent) role of power at stake in the process of professionalization. In a first part, the importance of creating spaces (both temporal and physical) for discussion and debate between operators is emphasized, in reference to Gherardi’s, Flin’s and Boccara’s contributions. The second part builds on Hayes’ and Ughetto’s chapters to highlight how the notion of power acts as a central driver as far as professionalization is concerned. Finally, a synthesis of key findings and possible ways forward is attempted in the third part.

15.2 Professionalizing in Safety Implies Creating Spaces for Debate

15.2.1 *Safety Is a Situated Activity...*

As shown by Silvia Gherardi in her chapter on safety as an emergent competence, safety is a social competence which is realized in practice, socially constructed,

innovated and transmitted. She proposes looking at “safety as a collective knowl-
edgeable doing, i.e. a competence embedded in working practices.” In other words,
safety is a **situated activity**. Therefore, the safety culture of an organization or
group of people is one of the distinctive features of professionalism, which itself
derives from the way contextualised situations are apprehended by workers.

In this context, Gherardi sees safety as having the following characteristics:

- Safety and practice cannot be separated, as the former derives from the latter.
- “Safety is performed in, by and through social relations”, including at the heart
of it, language as an essential medium.
- Safety is rooted in “practical knowledge”, i.e. based on tacit “competence-to-
act” (vs. knowledge to act), emerging from individual and collective identity.
- Safety is “dynamic”, “emergent from actions, and in constant evolution”. “It is
continually re-produced and negotiated.”

This approach has two main consequences when considering safety:

1. One should consider work practices first, rather than separating safety out from
local situations and contexts. This means privileging bottom-up, ‘describing’,
approaches rather than top-down, ‘prescribed’, ones.
2. Focus should be made on the capacity of individuals to discuss situations and
ways to tackle work, as safety is embedded in practices and emerges as a social
construct.

In other words, when talking about safety, one has necessarily to acknowledge
the importance of Non-Technical Skills (NTS), as introduced by Rhona Flin in her
chapter. NTS are indeed are the core of field expertise regarding work tasks, and
working safely (and efficiently).

15.2.2 ...Which Relies Greatly on Non-technical Skills

For Flin, **Non-Technical Skills (NTS)** are a necessary complement to expert,
technical skills in order to enhance safety and efficiency. In her mind, and in the
continuity of Gherardi’s thoughts, focus should be made on workplace behaviours
and work as performed on a given task. Indeed, there is no other way out of the
“safety bubble”, that is safety being seen, taught and performed as isolated and
distinct from normal operations.

In short, taking NTS into account depends on the ability to access detailed data
on the reality of what goes on in the field, with all its complexity. This may be
achieved by involving human and social sciences experts to identify NTS, and
performing training courses based on NTS, such as CRM (Crew Resource
Management) approaches, which are task-related.

In the end, safety is only one aspect of doing things well, one way to arbitrate.
There are others, all emerging from particular situations and contexts in which

individuals and teams are bathed, mobilizing technical as well as non-technical skills to tackle situations and issues to the best of their ability. As a consequence, when considering safety as being embedded in practices, it becomes necessary to have a grasp of the ‘global picture’, i.e. to understand the entire panel of constraints leading to the arbitrations made.

This, again, links back to the importance of having identified spaces to allow discussion on practices.

15.2.3 As such, Professionalization in Safety Requires Space for Debate

In the light of the above, if organizations are to have good professionals, this implies that they must be capable of listening to bad news, fostering debates and controversies. Safety culture requires humility, as well as recognition that no one has all the answers. To put it in a nutshell, providing **physical and temporal space for formal and informal discussion** is fundamental to enhancing safety—and overall performances—in the organization.

As Vincent Boccara puts it in his chapter on safety training, most often organizations tend to focus training on theoretical situations; the problem of this approach becomes: how to “make people able to deal with real-world situations rather than only know and applicate exogenous standards.” Therefore, safety is primarily a matter of organizing discussions and controversies inside the organization on how things (really) occur on the shopfloor.

Pascal Ughetto, in his chapter on empowering line managers, also emphasizes the importance of allowing room for controversies, in the way these are central to “exchange about the real activity, its risks, its opportunities, and therefore [to] accommodat[e] to actual working cultures.” There is a need at every level for room to intervene. Every group has a role to play to construct the problem so it can be recognized, and result in “a continuous process of rule creation.”

In other words, there is a clear need for fostering debates inside communities of practices, but also at the borders of these communities, on practices and ‘the way to work around here’. Indeed:

- Encouraging (formal and informal) discussions between operators—i.e. allowing time and installing rituals in the organization to do so—consists in a bottom-up approach essential to embed safety in real-work situations.
- Language is the first, essential social medium through which expertise can be shared, and therefore built. For example, sharing NTS by mentoring activities, or by “storytelling” (Hayes) how unusual events in the past were managed differently.
- Discussing practices is key to gaining efficiency, be it on safety or any other aspect; questioning rules and procedures, in other words the prescribing system,

in the light of daily practices and particularly their variability, can prove highly efficient for the organization and is worth the time investment.

- Finally, trying to embrace the global picture also means questioning practices at the frontiers of communities, through interactions between the various departments in the organization, particularly support functions. A better balance is required between top-down, prescribed rules and bottom-up, built-up responses to various situations.

15.3 The Question of Power Is Important to Consider in this Context

15.3.1 *Professionalization Is (also) a Matter of (Group) Identity*

As Jan Hayes describes in her chapter, professionalization is more than simply a matter of training; it is first a **matter of identity**. Be it communities of practice, craft groups or trades..., we have seen the importance of having professional groups sharing practices and producing safety rules which are not of the same type as rules written by experts. These groups share, and build together a common identity, strongly based on the type of activities performed: ‘what we do’ is ‘who we are’.

In this respect, as illustrated by Hayes, storytelling is a key component of social learning, as discussions on past events are full of learning material for peers. **Trust** is therefore of the greatest importance in order to create a favourable climate to make these discussions possible. This, again, emphasizes the need for spaces for debate.

In short, many employees in industries have a (shared) professional identity, emerging from social interactions. This identity remains largely unrecognized by organizations; yet, professionals ensure **mutual recognition** through various informal processes, all leading to professionalization processes. This identity, in turn, questions the role of power in the relations between different organization’s entities.

15.3.2 *Identity Questions Power (Formal or Informal)*

For Jan Hayes, top-down, hierarchal approaches are prevailing in most companies, whereby managers set the “rules” and people at the bottom simply follow the instructions. Yet, professional groups have a certain **power**, which derives from their **identity**; this power is often informal and not fully recognized, but this question is key, as it can explain the relative inaction inside companies when it

comes to improving safety, or any other performance. Indeed, as long as a decision does not fundamentally bring into question the identity (thus power) of a group of people (i.e. managers, safety experts, or operators), compromises can be found, although often leading to minute changes. But as soon as the identity and power of such a group is threatened, decision-making becomes more difficult, resulting in the preservation of a status-quo, thus a form of ‘social peace’ in the organization.

In this context, power translates firstly into *individual power*, i.e. the capacity of an individual to act in a given situation, towards a given goal, according to his or her values and perceptions, mobilizing technical and non-technical skills acquired from past experience, and taking into account various constraints, from which working in safety can be one of them. Secondly, *group power* derives from the collective identity of a community to which an individual belongs. Shared values and practices, storytelling and trust form the basis of this identity, which in turn translates into a shifting balance of power in the interactions between entities. Finally, these two forms of power can be *formal or informal* depending on whether their legitimacy is given by the structure (via hierarchal recognition e.g.) or by peers (recognizing expertise).

In this respect, the process of recognising professionalism (and thus power) is key. However, as Hayes pinpoints, research has shown the extent to which organizations rely on professional behaviour for ongoing safe operations and yet largely fail to understand or acknowledge this. Of course, power issues are at stake.

In brief, **competition for power** is emerging between entities in the organization, each seeking its own good according to its identity (Ughetto). But what about the common good, especially as far as safety is concerned? The common good of the company (e.g. in terms of cost of accidents), its members (e.g. victim of accidents), partners (subcontractors, clients, ...), but also the common good of external stakeholders (third parties). In other words, is power from the field operators given enough place, and does it translate into legitimate authority when it comes to matters of safety? Or is power perceived as a danger by those who hold the formal power, such as support functions or managers?

15.3.3 How to Cope with Increasingly Powerful Specialists in Support Functions?

Jan Hayes recognizes the existence of an injunction inside companies towards operators to be “good professionals”; yet, this injunction is rarely accompanied by:

1. a will to better understand the levers that can be triggered to allow this, and
2. means of doing so for operators (i.e. time and space for discussion and “social learning practices”, to begin with).

In short, “the forms of power in organisations increasingly limit the recognition of this expertise [i.e. of line managers as a support to real work activities and daily arbitrations]”, as Ughetto states,

In power relations within large organizations today, the power exercised by support functions – through the primacy of standards – deprives field managers of a great deal of [*leverage*] for action. This power, despite the diversion via participatory management, leaves little room for regular discussion of the relevance of organizational rules. However, rules – in particular safety rules – are not purely and simply “implemented”: they need to be discussed.

Indeed, for central management, recognizing the power of professionals in the field means potentially putting in danger their own. From a manager’s point of view, this can mean losing control to some extent. In their formal, “top-down”, conception of work, employees should merely apply rules; consequently, allowing time for discussion is a pure loss of time and money.

In the case of support functions, giving power to local teams can mean endangering their position in the organization, potentially leading, once again, to a loss of authority or control. Indeed, safety experts, by doing so, take the risk, as they see it, of ultimately losing the very meaning of their job. This can prove a paradox in some sense, as safety experts may eventually prevent safety enhancement by seeking to keep control of safety-related practices. This introduces a very fundamental question: how can their roles be rethought in such a way to prevent them from feeling threatened?

To conclude, let us retake Ughetto’s words:

To achieve this [common good across the organisation], it needs to be accepted that (...) introducing organisation into day-to-day operations, and notably the organisation of safety, is **not about implementing organisational rules** and letting them operate unchanged for a given time; **the issue is organising, a continual activity of organisation.**²

This can be achieved by redistributing power within the organization and reinventing work habits, shifting from the perception of safety-as-a-constraint to safety as ‘a way of doing things right’.

15.4 Shifting From’ Love of Power’ to ‘Power of Love’: The Key to Liberated Organizations in Which (Safety) Performances Are Enhanced?

To go a step further, let us introduce some possible suggestions for better managing this ‘continuous activity of organisation’ as phrased by Ughetto. To sum up, power issues at stake in every company based on hierarchal structures tend to limit the ability of operators to tackle situations and problems on their own. One of the first

²I emphasize.

steps is to give them more power to do so by creating spaces for discussion, as already stated in this chapter. Thus, the process of organizing work becomes more balanced between top-down, prescribed approaches, and a bottom-up vision of the real issues and best ways to tackle them.

Building on this first step, a change of paradigm may be introduced, by which power is shifted back to ‘those who really make safety’ (and more generally performance), considering their personal development and well-being as central. This leads to more autonomy in their daily decision-making, and in turn, to optimized professionalization processes, which are key to performance.

15.4.1 Giving More Power and Consideration to Working Teams and Middle Managers in the Field by Creating Spaces to Discuss Rules and Practices

Jan Hayes insists on the need to allow time for discussion of professional activities, as “professional learning is a profoundly social activity”. Yet, “many organizations are reluctant to allow time for such activities.” This is of course a question of time, but also of recognition that fostering safety goes through training good professionals, which in turn implies giving more power and consideration to local teams in the field.

As seen in this chapter, and in many other contributions, creating dedicated spaces is essential to allow discussion of rules and practices in the light of situations and constraints which are encountered by ‘those who make’ safety. This is firstly a matter of recognizing the importance of both the variability of situations met, and the daily arbitrations made by operators in order to maintain a good level of performance, safety included. But it is also a way to bring to light different group strategies leading to more or less safe practices, then putting into discussion these practices (Le Coze et al. 2012).

However, spaces for discussion are not enough; there is a clear need, in parallel, to support middle managers in coping with issues identified through feedback. As Ughetto rightly concludes, more power should also be given to middle managers

to do something with the complaints of their teams, to analyse the work, its constraints, how the teams go about getting things done, and to make proposals to their line managers and their teams.

To conclude, still using Ughetto’s words,

the key question is therefore how much space today’s organisations allow for experiment, for variability, and how much space they give middle managers to construct organisational rules, first of all by holding discussions within their teams and between those teams and support departments.

15.4.2 Towards a Change of Paradigm: From Steering Safety Indicators to Empowering Employees, Thus Giving Them Vision and Autonomy to Take on Their Jobs

Undoubtedly, there is a need for more debates on work. But even more so, the **work model** at stake in the company can be questioned: what should be improved in the system? Indicators, or practices? Thus, the question of shifting power back to the operators, leading to a paradigm change.

15.4.2.1 The Paradigm Change: Reversing the Classical Vision of Hierarchal Structures

As introduced earlier in this chapter, top-down, hierarchal, approaches most often prevail, whereby bottom-line employees follow the rules dictated by managers. This often leads to performance destruction, as the motivation expectations of the employees are not met: indeed, if operators are told what to do and how to do it, where is the motivation to work, and learn from its work? Of course, some space for self-organization can be found in today's companies; yet, the trend is that 'instructions' and 'rules' come from the 'top', representing ever more constraints hindering motivation to learn and work.

Given this widely prevalent hierarchal model, the paradigm change we propose comes from reversing this work structure by shifting back the power to field operators, as theorised by Brian Carney and Isaac Getz in their book "Freedom Inc.", based on many concrete examples of "liberated" firms. In such 'liberated companies', much more autonomy is given to employees in their daily work. In a climate of trust, employees are given the capacity for self-direction and self-motivation, or in other words the means and power to act and decide without referring to management or transverse functions. The latter then see their roles change, from a 'command and control' role to a more 'humble servant' role, in which they bring support and facilitation to 'those who make'.

In other words,

a place of work focusing on respect and liberty is much more natural than an environment based on mistrust and control. (...). Every morning, employees go to work, but many of them prefer saying they are going to take pleasure following a common dream, putting in place their initiatives. And coincidentally – or perhaps naturally – these organizations realize continuously better performances as their competitors. In other words, respect and liberty are keys to pleasure and success (Carney and Getz 2016).³

³"Freedom Inc.", preface of the new 2016 edition (author's translation).

15.4.2.2 The Importance of Learning and Knowledge, as a Key Source of Motivation

In short, self-motivation and self-direction are the key to empowering employees towards improved performances. And one of the key sources for motivation is learning; performances thus come in a great part from the capacity to learn, and share knowledge.

In one of his articles on the ‘knowledge economy’, Idriss Aberkane emphasizes the three rules governing knowledge exchanges:

1. Knowledge exchanges are positive sums: sharing knowledge means multiplying it.
2. Knowledge exchanges are not instantaneous; they take time.
3. Grouping knowledge creates knowledge: knowing A and B together is more than knowing A and knowing B separately.

On that basis, the flow of knowledge grows in proportion as a product of attention and time. And this product basically translates into love. Indeed,

in what circumstances do we give all our attention and our time to someone? When we are in love! We never learn as rapidly as when we are in love with some piece of knowledge (...). We should seriously take this into account in our education and in our companies (Aberkane 2014).⁴

In other words, when talking of professionalization in safety, one should bear in mind the importance of motivation, which itself mostly comes from a love of learning and knowledge. In the end, liberated companies in which employees are self-directed are most surely the best environments to promote love, therefore spaces of dedicated time and attention to allow the knowledge of situations and issues flow, in all their complexity and variability...

As a conclusion, balancing power inside companies through their ‘liberation’ should be a key move to promote love, thus shifting from the ‘love of power’ of some individuals to ‘power of love’ for all. In our opinion, enhancing knowledge and performances, including safety, clearly comes at that price.

15.5 Conclusion

This chapter has attempted to synthesize various contributions, highlighting several key elements:

- The need for contextualised, bottom-up approaches, as safety is a situated activity where non-technical skills play an essential role (Gherardi, Flin).

⁴“L’économie de la connaissance est notre nouvelle renaissance”, article from Idriss Aberkane (author’s translation).

- The importance of giving the power back to field operators by promoting discussions between peers about practices, stories, rules, constraints, etc. (Boccaro, Hayes, Ughetto).
- The key role of middle managers as a relay for processing feedback from the field (Ughetto).

It also appears that the question of power is key in the process of professionalizing employees in safety. Indeed, on the one hand it appears that physical and temporal spaces to allow practices to be discussed are essential for fostering improvements in a “continuous activity of organization” (Ughetto). Yet, it seems on the other hand that in most companies today the power of employees to do so is undermined by the weight of hierarchal structures tending to hinder initiatives. In other words, there are things which cannot be discussed, especially about the way to work safely, which appears to be all the contrary of professionalism.

In this context, and as a conclusion, we suggest two paths for improvement:

1. In a first one, we suggest, on a continuous improvement basis, to give more power and consideration to working teams and middle managers in the field by creating (physical and temporal) spaces to discuss rules and practices. This links back to Ughetto’s proposal to shift the way power is organized or distributed, allowing time for discussion and sensitizing support functions and middle management to the importance of listening to feedback and do something about it.
2. In a second one, we propose a paradigm change, questioning the very work model of most companies. Building on Carney’s and Getz’s examples, we believe that following a process of “liberation” in companies would facilitate enhanced knowledge sharing and collective learning. This in turn would enable the shift from a ‘love of power’ to the ‘power of love’, leading to better performances, including safety performances.

Whichever way is chosen in the end, acknowledging the power of ‘those who make’ remains the key for enhanced (safety) performances.

15.6 Disclaimer

The views and opinions expressed in this chapter are the sole responsibility of the author and may not reflect those of ENGIE.

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