

# Understanding Power

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## Ari Tikka

- MSc in structural mechanics 1986
- Software development 1990 - 1997
- Organizational development 1997 ->
  - Coach and organizer in large cultural change
  - Training programs for change agents and program managers
  - Group dynamics, reflective learning, coaching individuals and teams, retrospectives, ...
  - Flexible Company - Agile transformation support team of Nokia-Siemens Networks
- Ari Tikka Consulting since 2008

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# Scoping by intention: empowering

- An essential mechanism of power is to constrain
- Empowerment is to
  - become aware and choose consciously
  - free oneself and others from nonproductive constraints
- Preparing this presentation has been a trip to my own disempowerment - a great and painful learning.
- As we go on, please think of your own environment, yourself, managers, designers, testers, customers, end-users, investors, [www.AriTikka.com](http://www.AriTikka.com)

## Content of the presentation

- Models and mechanisms of power
  - Contradictory and overlapping
- Little about moral or fairness or judgement
- Consequences of power
- Reflecting own experiences
- Learning
  - Become aware and make sense
  - Get vocabulary and stories for the internal and external conversation
  - Change identity

# Some concepts

- Status
  - Position within a crowd using various vague measures. Weber: wealth, prestige and power.
- Status/power hierarchy - pecking order
- Power difference, power distance
  - Look for this, extremely significant
- Dominance
  - Behavioral. I can “make” you obey.
- Authority, authorization
  - Agreement to control resources

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# What is power?

- Power is the ability to act in order to fulfill one's own needs.
- Power is the individual's relative capacity to change others' states by providing or withholding resources or administering punishments.
- Power is constraining the enabling conversation (in the organization)

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# What is power?

- **Power manifests in relations**
- Who is needed more has more power
  - Dynamic balance, often asymmetric
- Power is always given. It can not be taken.
  - Gandhi: “They can torture me. They can break my bones. They can even kill me. Then they will have my dead body. Not my obedience.”
- Why do we give power way?

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## Power basis

- Rewarding power
  - I give power to you, believing you can do something good to me
- Coercive power
  - I give power to you, believing you can harm to me
- Expert power
  - I give power to you believing you know better than I
- Reference power
  - I give power to you, because I trust you
- Legitimate power - by agreement
  - I give power to you based on **implicit and/or explicit social contract**

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# Implicit and Explicit

Manipulation



Awareness

Actions  
**Intentions**  
Values  
Feelings  
Needs  
Assumptions  
**Mechanisms**  
...

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## Power of the culture

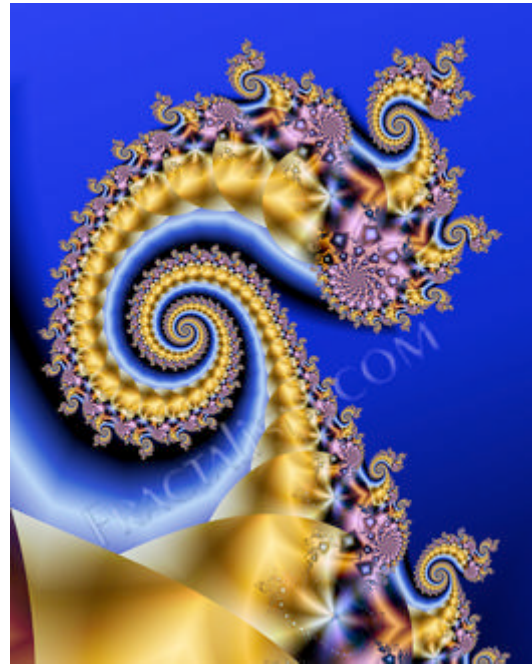
Organizational culture is the pattern of basic assumptions that a given group has invented, discovered or developed in learning to cope with its problems of external adaptation and internal integration, and that have worked well enough to be considered valid, and, therefore, to be taught to new members **as the correct way to perceive, think, and feel** in relation to those problems.

- Edgar Schein

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# Complexity perspective

- In a complex system consisting of
  - Intelligent agents
  - Interacting locally
- patterns emerge.
- External conversation
- Internal conversation



Butterfly wing effect

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# Social network of organizational roles



James Coplien, <http://jeffsutherland.com/scrum/20071029CoplienOrgPats.pdf>

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# Power in Complex responsive systems

- Power is constraining the enabling conversation.
- In this conversation power is individual's relative capacity to change others' states by providing or withholding resources or administering punishments.
- Empowering individual's to act in order to fulfill own needs.
- Mental images

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## Constraining?

- Constraining is a neutral mechanism like reducing degrees of freedom, creating structure, selecting or reducing complexity
- The purpose to use power may be enabling, and still the mechanism may be constraining.
- Constraining, may have selfish and/or altruistic purpose, may be more or less violent...
- For example giving is regulating resources, **adjusting** constraints
- Mental images constrain thinking

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# Power of mental images

- The established and outsiders. Us and them.
- Stigma talk, charisma talk and gossip
- Labeling
- Identity
- Pay attention to even small differences and give them the meaning to keep/increase power difference
- Think of organizational roles
  - Testers test, managers coordinate, designers code **because...** (add our stigma talk here)

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# Positive power of language

- Our consciousness is built of stories
- Isn't it strange, that starting a meeting by remembering success and contribution will create more positive results?
- Appreciative Inquiry

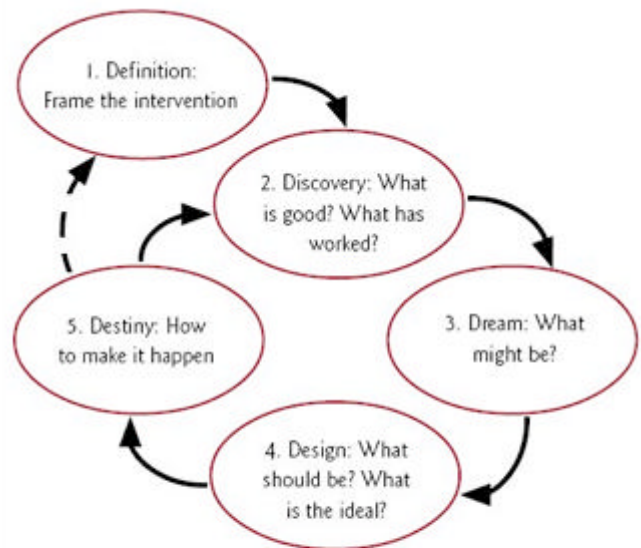
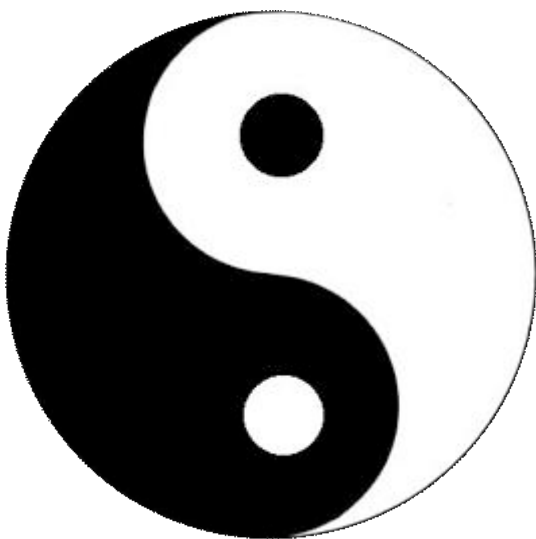


Figure 1. The appreciative inquiry '5-D' model (see Cooperrider et al., 2003; Watkins and Mohr, 2001; Whitney and Trosten-Bloom, 2003 and the AI Commons website)

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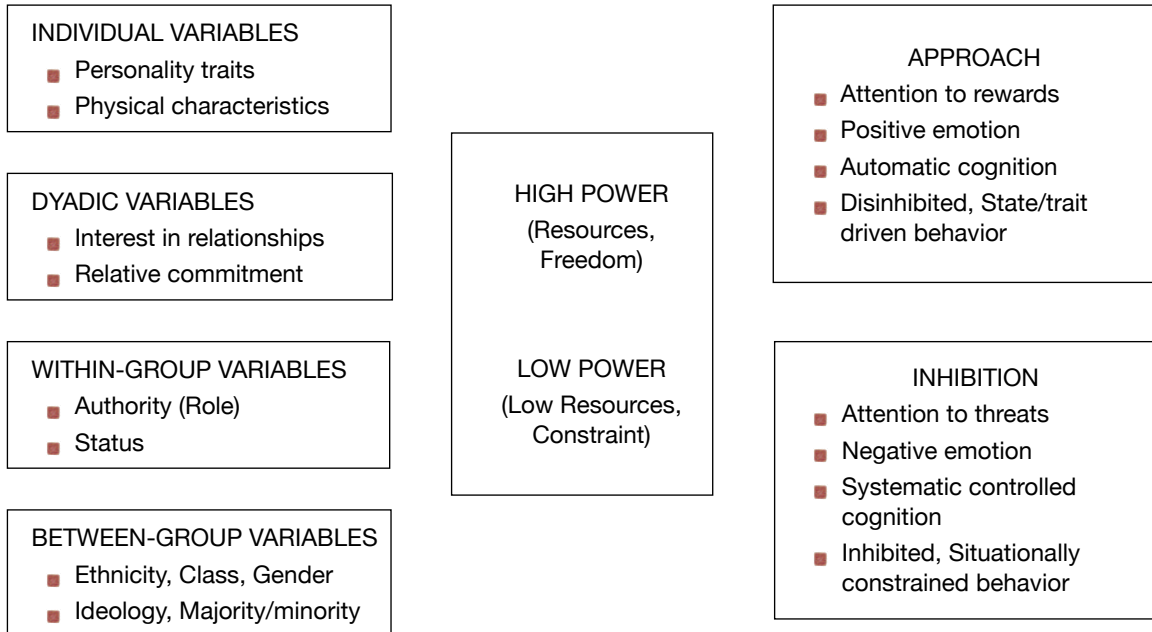
# Constraining the enabling?



- Chaos and Order
- Neurons activate or inhibit
- Creativity and Control
- Freud's Eros and Thanatos
- Approach and inhibition are fundamental dimensions of any organism
- Promotion and Prevention self-regulatory focus in behavior

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# The consequences of power to individuals



<http://ist-socrates.berkeley.edu/~keltner/publications/keltner.power.psychreview.2003.pdf>

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## Details of inhibition - approach

Domain	Approach	Inhibition
Evocative stimuli	Rewards	Punishment, uncertainty
Cognitive process	Incentive cognition, flexible strategies	Vigilant inspection, narrow focus
Motivational-emotional state	Positive emotion, affective aggression	Negative emotion, anxiety
Behavioral tendency	Approach goals	Interrupt behavior, inhibit
Neuroendocrine	Dopamine	Norepinephrine, cortisol
Autonomic nervous system	Heart rate	Electrodermal
Related constructs	Extraversion, impulsivity	Neuroticism, shyness

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# High Power - Low Power

<b>Affect</b>	High Power	Low Power
Mood	Positive, irritable	Negative, anxious, depressive
Discrete emotion	Desire, enthusiasm, pride	Awe, embarrassment, fear, guilt, gratitude, shame
Emotional disorders	Mania	Anxiety, depression

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# High Power - Low Power

<b>Object of attention</b>	High Power	Low Power
Valence of stimuli	Rewards, opportunities	Punishment, threats
Attention to self and others	Others as means to own ends	Self as means to others' ends

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# High Power - Low Power

<b>Cognitive domain</b>	High Power	Low Power
Perception of individuals	Stereotypes, inaccurate inferences	Individuating information, accurate inferences
Perception of groups	Out-group discrimination, in-group favoritism	In-group discrimination, out-group favoritism
Attribution to collective tasks	Self focus	Other focus
Attribution to others' actions	Dispositional	Situational

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# High Power - Low Power

<b>Social action</b>	High Power	Low Power
Content of behavior	Approach related	Inhibited
Determinants of behavior	Internal states, traits	Context
Reaction to social norms	Counternormative	Constrained by norms

<http://ist-socrates.berkeley.edu/~keltner/publications/keltner.power.psychreview.2003.pdf>

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# Power corrupts

- All power corrupts, but we need the electricity.
- Power corrupts. Absolute power is kind of neat. - John Lehman, Secretary of the Navy, 1981-1987
- Power tends to corrupt, and absolute power corrupts absolutely. - Lord Acton
- It is said that power corrupts, but actually it's more true that power attracts the corruptible. The sane are usually attracted by other things than power. - David Brin

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# Power corrupts

- Managers with high power tend to alienate from subordinates. Less hearing and caring.
- Exchange oriented use power to self-serving  
Communally oriented for altruistic fashion.
- Elevated power is
  - attributed with positive characteristics
  - perceived effective, dependence, freedom and control
- Elevated power increases the consistency and coherence of social behavior
  - Because you can be yourself

# Uncorrupt power

- Low power differences
  - Low-powered are encouraged to challenge
  - Open communication and conflict resolution
- Accountability
- Fear of loosing the power makes careful
  - Threat to the stability of the power structures lessens the experienced power of the high-powered.
- Social values

<http://ist-socrates.berkeley.edu/~keltner/publications/keltner.power.psychreview.2003.pdf>

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# Power of concepts and models

- Our senses and our conceptual thinking is capable to recognize only patterns that 1) we have and 2) we use
  - Simplifies the world
- You have a model in any case.
  - Every measurement or observation is based on an implicit or explicit model
- Choosing vocabulary (concepts and models) is using power
- Every model is wrong, some are useful.  
George Box

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# Inbuilt mechanisms (1)

- Whenever I feel strange - Alert!
  - Especially tired or dizzy
- Anxiety
  - Psycho-physical apocalyptic agony of uncertainty and separation
- Shame
  - The tool for social schooling
- Guilt
  - Causing pain to others
- Fear
  - Has a concrete instinctive or learned target
- Dependency
  - Comfort
  - Dominance

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# In-built mechanisms (2)

- Group instincts
  - Fear of abandonment or the death of the group
  - Group is so powerful, that even observing the group is forbidden
- Group dynamics
  - Groupthink
  - Communication patterns Dependency, Fight-flight, Pair-forming may provide escapes from reality
- Group development
  - Dependency is a tempting trap

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# Productive constraining

- Reserving dedicated space and time
  - Scrum iterations, therapy, retrospectives, zen meditation, The new new product development game
- Constraining Work In Process
  - Lean, Kanban
- Constraining (clearly defining) the goal
  - Open innovation
  - Scrum

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# Bad examples of constraining

- Micro-management in general
  - Introduce constraints that complicate and add friction
  - Amplify power difference
- Conflict avoidance
- Constraining by narrow organizational roles and responsibilities
- Measure and reward the performance of cognitive work
  - Frames the relation into an authority relation, increasing the power difference, triggering the inhibitive mechanisms within the individual worker

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# Leadership?

- Leading and being lead is a limited model
  - Choosing it is using power...
- In “reality” there is
  - Empowered self-organizing creativity constrained by power