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RESEARCH ARTICLE

Rethinking Power and Human Management Practices: A Foucauldian and Psychopolitical Perspective

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Abstract: This article examines the intersection of power relations and human management practices in modern organizations, utilizing a Foucauldian and psychopolitical framework. The objective is to explore how contemporary organizations employ psychological mechanisms, disciplinary techniques, and self-regulation strategies to influence employee behavior and professional identity. Unlike traditional hierarchical models of power, this study presents power as a relational and diffuse force embedded in organizational discourse, digital surveillance, and emotional governance. The research methodology involves documentary analysis of a range of materials, including academic literature, corporate policies, and case studies. This enables an exploration of how psychological discourse, performance evaluations, and corporate ideologies function as tools of control, shaping employee actions and identities. Findings suggest that modern organizations use subtle power mechanisms, such as emotional intelligence training and algorithmic management, to promote self-regulation and voluntary compliance with corporate expectations, rather than relying solely on coercion or direct authority. The study contributes to organizational studies, critical management theory, and industrial psychology by offering a comprehensive analysis of power in contemporary labor settings. It highlights how managerial control is internalized by employees, shaping their perceptions of autonomy and productivity. This research emphasizes the need for organizations to reconsider the ethical implications of surveillance, performance monitoring, and emotional labor management. Future research should explore alternative governance models and investigate how artificial intelligence and resistance strategies influence power dynamics in workplaces.

Keywords: Power relations, Foucauldian, psychopolitics, workplace governance, self-regulation, disciplinary mechanisms

INTRODUCTION

Power has long been a central concept in social sciences, yet its definition remains contested and multifaceted. As Han (2017) suggests, theoretical chaos continues to surround the concept of power, as it is simultaneously associated with oppression and communication, freedom and coercion, legality and arbitrariness. The complexity of power arises from its dynamic nature, which manifests differently depending on structural conditions and contextual variables. While traditional views often perceive power as a hierarchical imposition of authority, critical perspectives–especially those grounded in Foucauldian analysis–emphasize power as a dispersed and relational force that operates through discourse, subjectivation, and disciplinary mechanisms (Foucault, 1988, 2001). Thus, to understand contemporary labor dynamics, it is essential to analyze power not as a static possession but as an evolving set of strategies embedded within organizational practices.

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Foucault (1980) argues that the exercise of power is contingent on the production of truth and the mechanisms that sustain it. This article, therefore, critically engages with the Foucauldian concepts of power, subjectivity, discourse, and dispositifs (apparatuses) to examine their role in shaping human management practices in contemporary organizations. The study builds upon previous works on organizational culture, labor subjectivities, and the ideological effects of managerial discourse (Porras Velásquez, 2015, 2017). By integrating Foucauldian and psychopolitical perspectives, this research aims to illuminate the ways in which psychological discourse functions as a disciplinary mechanism that reinforces specific labor identities and managerial ideologies (Han, 2021). The goal is to offer a theoretical and analytical framework that can be applied beyond the psychoanalytic clinic, extending into broader organizational and managerial contexts.

In modern organizational literature, power relations are widely acknowledged as a fundamental component of workplace dynamics (Pfeffer, 1992; Mintzberg, 1993). Power influences decision-making processes, employee behaviors, and the overall structure of organizations. Unlike classical management theories that conceptualize organizations as rational systems driven by efficiency, contemporary perspectives recognize that workplace interactions are deeply embedded in socio-political and psychological structures (Rodríguez, 1992). Organizations

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are not merely technical entities but complex social systems characterized by competing interests, negotiations, and relational dynamics (Clegg, 1989). Power, therefore, is not an incidental element of organizational life but an inherent and structuring force that shapes labor practices, governance, and employee subjectivities.

From a psychological standpoint, understanding power relations within the workplace is crucial for organizational psychologists seeking to analyze how labor relations are established, maintained, and transformed. As argued by Porras Velásquez and Parra D′Aleman (2018), power dynamics are deeply intertwined with formal and informal organizational structures, shaping the roles and expectations of employees. Additionally, power relations contribute to the regulation of behavior, knowledge production, and the construction of organizational ideologies (Foucault, 1980; Rahim, 1988). These dynamics have significant implications for employee well-being, motivation, and resistance to managerial control (Blanch, 2007).

A critical examination of power in the workplace must also account for the impact of coalitions, influence processes, and resistance strategies. Organizational change is often shaped by the interplay between dominant power structures and collective efforts to negotiate or resist them (Clegg et al., 2006). Power, as Foucault (1980) contends, is not merely repressive but also productive–it shapes identities, discourses, and systems of governance. Consequently, labor relations cannot be understood solely through the lens of conflict between capital and labor but must be analyzed in terms of the subtle and often invisible mechanisms of control, surveillance, and self-regulation that define contemporary work environments (Han, 2017).

Since the Industrial Revolution, labor relations have been structured around wage systems, task specialization, and hierarchical distributions of authority. These historical configurations continue to shape contemporary workspaces, reinforcing social stratifications and power asymmetries (Weber, 1979). The division of labor and the organizational structuring of authority serve as key mechanisms through which power operates, dictating not only the distribution of responsibilities but also the ways in which employees perceive their roles and obligations (Schein, 1991). Power, in this sense, is not just about explicit authority but also about the internalization of norms and expectations that condition employee behavior.

Building on Foucault′s concept of power as a relational force, this article argues that managerial strategies serve as dispositifs–apparatuses that regulate conduct and discipline workers through subtle and sophisticated means (Foucault, 2001). These mechanisms operate through psychological discourse, corporate culture, and performance evaluation systems that shape employee identities and reinforce managerial ideologies (Porras Velásquez, 2020). As Han (2021) highlights in his critique of psychopolitics, modern power techniques no longer rely solely on coercion but instead operate through self-surveillance and voluntary compliance. Workers become complicit in their own subjugation by internalizing corporate values and aligning their aspirations with organizational goals.

Thus, the present study seeks to address fundamental questions about the role of psychology as a discursive practice that constructs both regimes of truth and subjects of power within labor organizations. How do contemporary management practices shape employee subjectivities? To what extent do psychological discourses function as disciplinary mechanisms that govern workers′ thoughts and behaviors? And what forms of resistance or alternative subjectivities emerge within these power structures? By engaging with these questions, this article contributes to the growing body of literature that critically examines power dynamics in the workplace from an interdisciplinary perspective, integrating insights from psychology, management studies, and critical theory.

In sum, power relations in organizations extend beyond hierarchical structures and formal authority–they permeate everyday interactions, influence managerial strategies, and shape the lived experiences of employees. As organizations continue to evolve, it becomes increasingly important to analyze how power operates through discourse, governance practices, and self-regulatory mechanisms. By situating human management practices within a Foucauldian and psychopolitical framework, this study provides a critical lens through which to understand the ways in which power, subjectivity, and organizational control intersect in the contemporary workplace.

CLASSICAL PERSPECTIVE

The study of power has long been a cornerstone of organizational theory, evolving from classical conceptualizations that emphasize hierarchy and authority to modern perspectives that explore relational dynamics and subjectivity (Foucault, 1980; Han, 2017). Classical theories of power, rooted in Weberian sociology and early organizational studies, largely defined power as a fixed attribute possessed by individuals or groups in structured hierarchies (Weber, 1979; Dahl, 1957). In contrast, contemporary perspectives argue that power is fluid, embedded in discourse, and operationalized through social interactions (Foucault, 1988; Clegg, 1989). This section provides a comparative analysis of these paradigms, clarifies key conceptual distinctions such as "socialized power" and "personalized power," and offers concrete examples of classical power practices within organizations.

The classical paradigm of power predominantly views authority as a centralized force, typically vested in formal structures such as bureaucracies or managerial hierarchies (Mintzberg, 1993). This paradigm aligns with Max Weber′s (1979) typology of legitimate authority, which categorizes power into three distinct forms: traditional authority (based on customs and heritage), charismatic authority (derived from personal influence and leadership traits), and rational-legal authority (rooted in formal rules and institutional structures). These classical frameworks positioned power as a stable, top-down mechanism in which superiors exercised control over subordinates to enforce compliance and efficiency.

One of the most widely accepted classical definitions of power is provided by Robert Dahl (1957), who states that "power designates the ability of one person (A) to influence the behavior of another person (B), so that B does something they would not otherwise do" (p. 203). This definition aligns with the individualistic model of power, which assumes that power is a possession held by those in authority. The structural model of power, as developed by French and Raven (1959), expands this framework by identifying five bases of power: reward power, coercive power, legitimate power, referent power, and expert power. Later, Raven (1990) introduced a sixth category, informational power, emphasizing how control over knowledge contributes to influence.

However, these early models faced criticism for oversimplifying power dynamics and failing to account for socio-cultural, economic, and political contexts that shape

labor relations (Munduate, Guerra, & Martínez, 2001). Critics argue that classical views reduce power to explicit command-and-control mechanisms, neglecting the subtler, decentralized, and discursive forms of influence that pervade contemporary organizations (Clegg et al., 2006; Han, 2021).

A critical distinction within classical power theories is the differentiation between socialized power and personalized power (McClelland & Burnham, 1976). Personalized power refers to power exerted for individual benefit, often associated with authoritarian leadership styles and self-serving managerial behavior (Pfeffer, 1992). In contrast, socialized power is exercised in a way that benefits the collective, fostering collaboration, shared goals, and organizational development (Rodríguez & González, 2008).

For example, a leader who centralizes decision-making and suppresses dissent operates within a personalized power framework, leveraging coercion and hierarchical control. Conversely, a manager who empowers employees, encourages participation in decision-making, and aligns their authority with organizational values exemplifies socialized power (Peiró & Meliá, 1999). This distinction remains highly relevant in contemporary leadership studies, as modern organizations increasingly prioritize participatory management over rigid, command-driven structures (Blanch, 2007).

Historically, organizations have implemented structured power practices that align with classical paradigms, emphasizing hierarchical control, standardization, and managerial authority. One of the most prominent examples is bureaucratic control and formal authority, which is rooted in Weberian rational-legal authority. Bureaucratic structures establish power relations through hierarchical reporting lines, written policies, and strict adherence to procedures (Weber, 1979). These mechanisms ensure organizational stability, consistency, and predictability by defining roles and responsibilities within rigid frameworks. Government institutions and military organizations exemplify this form of control, as they operate within strict chains of command and formalized decision-making channels that limit individual discretion.

Another foundational classical power practice is Taylorism and scientific management, developed by Frederick Taylor (1911) to enhance efficiency through task specialization, close supervision, and managerial oversight (Schein, 1991). Taylorism is characterized by the division of labor into repetitive tasks, detailed performance monitoring, and a clear separation between planning and execution. The assembly line manufacturing system, pioneered by companies like Ford, epitomizes this approach, where workers perform standardized, repetitive functions under strict managerial direction to maximize productivity and minimize inefficiencies. While this model significantly improved output, it also led to criticisms regarding worker alienation and the suppression of creativity.

Additionally, authoritarian leadership and direct supervision have been central to classical organizational power structures. Traditional leadership models favor a top-down approach, where managers unilaterally make decisions and expect unquestioned compliance from employees (Mintzberg, 1993). This form of leadership was dominant in early industrial organizations, such as Ford Motor Company in the early 20th century, where strict discipline and rigid managerial control ensured high productivity levels. Employees were expected to follow orders without deviation, reinforcing a culture of obedience and predictability.

While these classical power practices were effective in structured, industrial work environments, modern organizations operate within increasingly complex and dynamic landscapes that necessitate more flexible and participatory approaches to power (Clegg et al., 2006; Han, 2021). Contemporary workplaces recognize the limitations of rigid hierarchical control and emphasize collaboration, employee autonomy, and adaptive leadership. Consequently, understanding classical power practices provides a critical foundation for analyzing how traditional mechanisms of control evolve to meet the demands of modern organizational settings.

Contemporary organizational theories challenge classical models by redefining power as a relational force rather than a fixed possession (Foucault, 1980). Unlike Weberian frameworks, which position power as a tool for dominance, Foucauldian perspectives emphasize power as a network of relations embedded in discourse, knowledge production, and self-regulation (Foucault, 1988).

For instance, in today's workplaces, performance evaluation systems, corporate culture initiatives, and psychological assessments function as disciplinary devices that shape employee behavior through implicit forms of control rather than direct coercion (Porras Velásquez, 2020). These mechanisms align with Byung-Chul Han's (2017) critique of psychopolitics, where power operates not through force, but through the self-imposed internalization of corporate ideals. Moreover, modern power dynamics acknowledge the agency of workers, who navigate organizational structures through negotiation, resistance, and adaptation (Clegg, 1989). Employees are no longer passive recipients of managerial directives but active participants in constructing workplace realities (Rodríguez, 1992).

The classical perspective on power, with its emphasis on hierarchy, formal authority, and coercive mechanisms, laid the foundation for organizational studies but has been increasingly challenged by contemporary paradigms that view power as relational, dispersed, and embedded in discourse. While classical models such as Weber's authority types, Dahl's individual influence framework, and French & Raven's bases of power remain relevant, they require integration with modern perspectives that account for the complexity of workplace interactions. By contrasting personalized vs. socialized power and illustrating classical power practices in organizations, this section highlights the evolution of power from rigid, top-down control mechanisms to fluid, participatory, and discursive processes. Understanding this transition is crucial for rethinking human management practices and recognizing how power operates in contemporary labor settings.

THE NEW POWER TECHNIQUES

In contemporary organizational studies, the concept of power has evolved from traditional hierarchical structures to more nuanced and pervasive techniques of influence. Unlike classical paradigms, which emphasize authority and coercion, modern power techniques operate through subtle mechanisms that shape behavior, identity, and decision-making processes. Byung-Chul Han (2021) introduces the notion of psychopolitics, a form of power that infiltrates the psychological sphere, turning the mind into the primary site of control and production. This shift marks a transition from disciplinary power–characterized

by external surveillance and rigid control–to a more sophisticated form of self-regulation and voluntary subjugation. In this framework, individuals do not merely obey commands; rather, they internalize corporate values, aligning their aspirations with organizational objectives.

According to Han (2017), psychopolitics is a system of domination that no longer relies on physical repression but instead deploys seductive and intelligent power. This form of governance makes individuals willingly submit to structures of control under the illusion of autonomy and self-determination. Unlike traditional disciplinary power, which enforces compliance through punishment or external surveillance, psychopolitical power capitalizes on self-surveillance and voluntary discipline. Employees, for instance, are encouraged to engage in continuous self-improvement, aligning their personal ambitions with corporate goals while unknowingly reinforcing managerial authority. This transformation is particularly evident in workplace technologies that track productivity, wellness programs that promote self-optimization, and digital platforms that encourage hyper-communication (Zuboff, 2019).

One of the most striking examples of modern power techniques is the role of Big Data in organizational control. In contemporary workplaces, data-driven management tools function as disciplinary devices that reinforce corporate governance while appearing to empower employees. Algorithms monitor employee performance, digital surveillance tools assess workplace engagement, and social media analytics evaluate professional reputation. These technologies create an illusion of transparency and accountability while subtly enforcing compliance with corporate norms (Scholz, 2017). Han (2021) argues that this mode of control is particularly insidious because it bypasses direct coercion, instead leading individuals to participate in their own subjugation.

This shift in power dynamics aligns with Michel Foucault's (1988) concept of governmentality, which describes how power operates through dispersed networks rather than centralized institutions. Unlike the classical model of sovereign power, where authority is exercised from a single dominant position, contemporary power is diffused through institutions, discourses, and technologies. In the workplace, this is manifested in performance-based incentives, self-management frameworks, and participatory management styles that ostensibly grant employees greater freedom while maintaining underlying control structures (Clegg et al., 2006).

Furthermore, Foucault (2001) conceptualizes the disciplinary society as one that enforces compliance through structured norms, while Han (2017) extends this argument to the neoliberal era, where power techniques foster an environment of self-exploitation. Employees are encouraged to see themselves as entrepreneurs of the self, investing in their own productivity and well-being, often at the expense of their personal lives. This phenomenon is evident in corporate wellness programs that promote mindfulness, resilience training, and emotional intelligence as means to optimize performance, ultimately transferring responsibility for stress and burnout from organizational structures to individuals themselves (Cabanas & Illouz, 2019).

Another critical aspect of contemporary power techniques is the manipulation of affective labor. Arlie Hochschild (1983) introduced the concept of emotional labor, wherein employees are required to manage their emotions to align with organizational expectations. In today's corporate environment, this has evolved into a more pervasive form of affective governance, where emotions, attitudes, and even mental well-being are subject to corporate regulation. Employees are encouraged to engage in positivity culture, self-motivation exercises, and continuous personal branding efforts, all of which serve managerial interests while appearing as self-initiated practices (Gill, 2017).

A significant consequence of these new power techniques is the erosion of resistance mechanisms. Traditional forms of resistance, such as labor strikes or unionization, were directed against visible power structures. However, in the age of psychopolitics, power is internalized, making resistance more complex. As Han (2021) argues, modern power functions in a way that makes individuals believe they are acting freely, even when their choices are shaped by external forces. This illusion of autonomy weakens collective forms of opposition, as individuals increasingly focus on self-improvement rather than structural change.

In summary, the new power techniques in organizations represent a profound shift from hierarchical control to dispersed, psychological, and data-driven governance. Rather than relying on explicit authority, modern organizations deploy strategies that encourage individuals to regulate themselves in alignment with corporate objectives. The integration of psychopolitical governance, Big Data surveillance, self-exploitation, and affective labor has fundamentally redefined power relations in contemporary workplaces. Understanding these transformations is crucial for critically engaging with organizational structures and developing strategies for empowerment and resistance in the digital age.

THE STRATEGIC PARADIGM OF POWER

The strategic paradigm, which is Foucault's analytical proposal, is characterized, among other things, by the following five propositions. Firstly, he maintains that power is not something that is acquired, power is exercised in the game of mobile and non-egalitarian relationships; There are no areas without power or that escape your control. It can be said that the entire society is a complex of power relations, or as Foucault says: Power is everywhere; It is not that it encompasses everything, but that it comes from everywhere. Power is not an institution, and it is not a structure, it is not a certain power that some would be endowed with: it is the name that lends itself to a complex strategic situation in a given society (Foucault, 1988, p.13).

Secondly, power relations are immanent to other types of relationships (economic, knowledge, sexual), they constitute the conditions and effects of inequalities and imbalances in all the interstices of the social fabric: Between a man and a woman, in a family, between a teacher and his student, between the one who knows and the one who does not know, power relations occur that are not the pure and simple projection of the great power of the sovereign over individuals; They are rather the shifting and concrete ground on which that power is embedded (Foucault, 1988, p.15).

Thirdly, power, unlike the legal paradigm, comes from below; there is no general matrix that fully accounts for power relations; rather, diffuse lines of force are formed throughout the social system that must be studied, since it takes the form of techniques and promotes instruments of material intervention. Fourthly, power is not totally, nor does it have to always be, negative (focused on repression) but can have a productive aspect because it promotes particular subjectivities, regulates and configures fields of possibility through actions and knowledge. "What makes power grip, that it is accepted, is simply that it does not

weigh only as a force that says no, but in fact goes through it, produces things, induces pleasure, forms knowledge, produces discourses" (Foucault, 1988, p.18).

Finally, fifthly, Michel Foucault is going to say that power is a network in which the subject is trapped. For this reason, resistance is everywhere within the social network of power. In short, "resistance exists because it is where power is: it is therefore, like it, multiple and integrable in global strategies" (Foucault, 1988, p.17). Furthermore, this strategic conception of power also reveals the subtle transformation of the forms of repression towards the signs that configure the disciplinary norm that shapes the mind; Discipline is a general formula of domination that is based on the meticulous control of the subject through systematic examination, spatial distribution and normalization. Consequently, where there are power relations there is resistance as a dynamic strategy of social and subjective transformation.

POWER RELATIONS

Power relations are a fundamental aspect of social and organizational dynamics, shaping interactions, decision-making processes, and individual subjectivities. Michel Foucault (1988) contends that power is not a fixed possession but a set of strategic relations that influence behaviors, identities, and institutional structures. Unlike classical perspectives that equate power with hierarchical authority, contemporary analyses recognize that power is exercised through discourse, knowledge production, and self-regulation. In this section, we clarify the distinctions between power relations, communication relations, and objective capacities, illustrate how power operates in organizational settings, and examine the psychological impact of power on employee well-being.

Foucault (1988) distinguishes between power relations, communication relations, and objective capacities as distinct yet interconnected dimensions of social interaction. Power relations refer to the ability of individuals or institutions to shape the actions of others through influence, discipline, or governance. These relations are dynamic and contingent upon socio-historical contexts, rather than being solely rooted in coercion or dominance (Foucault, 1980). Communication relations, in contrast, involve the transmission of information, meaning, and discourse through language, symbols, or media. While communication can facilitate power, it does not inherently constitute power unless it exerts control over thought, behavior, or institutional structures (Lukes, 2005). Objective capacities pertain to technical or material capabilities that enable individuals or organizations to perform specific tasks, such as technological advancements or economic resources. Unlike power, which is relational and situational, objective capacities function independently of social hierarchies (Dahl, 1957).

In the workplace, these distinctions manifest in different ways. A manager may have the objective capacity to implement new technology but lacks the power relations necessary to ensure employee adoption. Conversely, an employee with strong communication relations may influence colleagues without holding a formal leadership position. Recognizing these differences helps refine our understanding of how authority is exercised and resisted within organizations (Pfeffer, 1992).

Power relations shape every aspect of organizational life, from decision-making structures to workplace culture and employee interactions. In hierarchical organizations, power is typically formalized through management roles, policies, and corporate governance frameworks (Mintzberg, 1993). However, power is not merely a top-down phenomenon; it is also diffused through informal networks, peer influence, and knowledge production (Clegg et al., 2006).

For example, performance evaluation systems exemplify how power operates beyond direct supervision. Employees may internalize corporate expectations, altering their behaviors to align with performance metrics without explicit managerial pressure. This aligns with Foucault's (2001) concept of disciplinary power, where individuals regulate themselves in anticipation of surveillance. Similarly, team dynamics demonstrate the interplay between formal authority and social influence. A junior employee with specialized knowledge may wield substantial influence within a group, despite lacking hierarchical power (French & Raven, 1959).

A notable case study illustrating power relations in organizations is Google's Project Oxygen, which sought to identify effective leadership behaviors through data analytics. The findings revealed that employees responded more positively to leaders who fostered collaboration and autonomy rather than those who exerted rigid control (Garvin, 2013). This example underscores how contemporary organizations leverage power relations to enhance employee engagement, often moving away from coercive methods toward more participatory governance.

Power relations significantly affect employee well-being, influencing stress levels, job satisfaction, and overall mental health (Blanch, 2007). Research in organizational psychology indicates that authoritarian leadership and coercive workplace structures contribute to burnout, reduced motivation, and psychological distress (Rahim, 1988). Conversely, environments that promote shared power, participatory decision-making, and psychological safety foster resilience and job satisfaction (Han, 2021).

Foucault's (1988) notion of biopower–where power extends into the regulation of life, emotions, and bodies–is particularly relevant in contemporary workplaces. Employee wellness programs, mindfulness training, and emotional intelligence workshops are often framed as initiatives to support well-being. However, critics argue that these programs function as subtle disciplinary mechanisms, shifting responsibility for workplace stress from structural factors to individual employees (Cabanas & Illouz, 2019). This reflects Byung-Chul Han's (2017) critique of psychopolitics, where power operates through self-discipline and voluntary compliance rather than direct coercion.

An example of this is the rise of digital surveillance tools in remote work environments. While organizations justify these tools as mechanisms for productivity enhancement, they also create conditions of panoptic anxiety, where employees self-regulate their actions due to the possibility of constant monitoring (Zuboff, 2019). This highlights how power relations extend beyond direct managerial oversight, embedding themselves into everyday workplace experiences.

EXERCISE OF POWER IN SOCIAL SETTINGS

Power is not solely an instrument of domination but a relational dynamic shaping social interactions. Foucault (1998; 1999; 2001) describes power as a network of influence rather than a fixed possession, operating through discourse, governance, and psychological conditioning. In organizations, power relations extend beyond hierarchical authority to include negotiation, participation, and self-regulation. This section examines the balance between power and freedom, strategies for fostering healthier work

environments, and the psychological impact of power on employees.

Foucault (2001) asserts that power is exercised over free subjects, creating a field of possibilities for action, resistance, or compliance. In the workplace, freedom within power relations emerges through negotiated authority and participatory decision-making. Organizations like Google promote distributed power, allowing employees to influence corporate direction while maintaining managerial oversight (Garvin, 2013). However, this perceived autonomy may function as a subtle mechanism of control, aligning individual aspirations with corporate interests (Han, 2017).

The gig economy exemplifies this paradox. Platforms like Uber grant workers autonomy in choosing assignments but regulate access through algorithmic visibility and performance metrics, subtly enforcing compliance (Zuboff, 2019). These cases illustrate how power relations shape workplace autonomy while embedding forms of surveillance and control.

To foster healthier work environments, organizations must implement power strategies that balance authority with employee well-being. One effective approach is empowering leadership, particularly through servant leadership, which prioritizes participatory decision-making and employee development (Greenleaf, 1977). This leadership style shifts the focus from control to collaboration, fostering an inclusive culture where employees feel valued and motivated. Additionally, transparent communication plays a crucial role in minimizing manipulative power structures. Open governance models, such as Patagonia's radical transparency, build trust by providing employees with clear insights into corporate decision-making processes, ultimately increasing organizational accountability (Kleindorfer et al., 2005).

Another essential strategy is the implementation of fair reward systems that ensure performance evaluations are equitable and free from hierarchical biases. Peer-based performance reviews have been shown to enhance collaboration and reduce managerial favoritism, creating a more just and inclusive work environment (Pfeffer, 1992). Beyond fair evaluations, flexible work arrangements contribute to healthier workplaces by shifting the focus from micromanagement to results. Results-oriented work environments (ROWE), for example, emphasize productivity over rigid schedules, giving employees greater autonomy and increasing motivation (Moen et al., 2011).

Finally, ensuring psychological safety within teams is essential for fostering innovation and employee engagement. Research by Google has identified psychological safety as a critical factor in high-performing teams, as it enables employees to express ideas and concerns without fear of retaliation or judgment (Edmondson, 1999). When organizations prioritize psychological safety, employees are more likely to contribute creatively, engage in constructive discussions, and feel a sense of belonging in the workplace. By integrating these strategies–empowering leadership, transparent communication, fair reward systems, flexible work arrangements, and psychological safety–organizations can cultivate healthier work environments that balance power dynamics while supporting employee well-being.

Power relations significantly affect workplace mental health. Authoritarian structures contribute to stress, burnout, and disengagement (Rahim, 1988), whereas shared power models enhance motivation and resilience (Blanch, 2007). Excessive managerial control fosters learned helplessness, where employees feel powerless in decision-making (Seligman, 1972). Conversely, workplaces that cultivate psychological ownership increase job satisfaction and innovation (Pierce et al., 2001).

Digital monitoring further complicates power relations. While performance-tracking tools are marketed as productivity enhancers, they can induce panoptic anxiety, where employees self-regulate under the possibility of constant surveillance (Zuboff, 2019). Organizations must balance efficiency with ethical responsibility to avoid eroding employee trust.

Power in social settings, particularly in organizations, extends beyond coercion to include influence, discourse, and psychological conditioning. Recognizing the balance between control and autonomy allows organizations to develop ethical governance strategies that enhance employee engagement and well-being. As workplaces evolve, critically assessing power relations ensures sustainable, inclusive, and psychologically safe environments.

RELATIONSHIPS BETWEEN POWER DEVICES AND HUMAN MANAGEMENT PRACTICES

To begin, Foucault asserts that the individual is undoubtedly the fictitious atom of an ideological representation of society; but it is also a reality manufactured by this specific technology of power called discipline. However, before addressing the topic of human management practices, itself as a discourse, scientific discipline and device of disciplinary power, a brief description of the concept of device will be made, mainly from Agamben and Foucault.

WHAT IS A DEVICE?

A device (dispositif), as conceptualized by Michel Foucault (1980), refers to an intricate network of discourses, institutions, laws, administrative measures, scientific statements, and moral propositions that function strategically within power relations. In simpler terms, a device is a mechanism that shapes human behavior and subjectivity by regulating actions, influencing thought patterns, and structuring the social order. As Agamben (2006) further elaborates, devices serve as instruments of control that guide, capture, and mold individuals into subjects that conform to a particular social and political framework.

In organizational settings, devices function as tools of governance that discipline workers, regulate behaviors, and shape professional identities. They are not merely external mechanisms but deeply embedded structures that individuals internalize, influencing their ways of thinking and acting. These mechanisms operate through discursive formations that establish norms, expectations, and performance standards. For example, corporate culture initiatives, workplace surveillance technologies, and human resource management systems all function as devices that condition employee behavior while maintaining managerial control.

One of the most prominent examples of devices in human management practices is performance evaluation systems. Traditionally, performance assessments were designed to measure employee productivity and efficiency. However, from a Foucauldian perspective, they serve a more profound function–they operate as disciplinary devices that induce workers to self-regulate their actions in anticipation of surveillance (Foucault, 1988).

Consider the case of Google's Project Oxygen, a data-driven initiative designed to optimize managerial effectiveness through systematic performance reviews. While positioned as an objective tool for improving leadership quality, the project subtly reinforces corporate ideologies by encouraging employees to align their professional goals with organizational expectations (Garvin, 2013). In this way, performance evaluations become a technology of power that disciplines workers by making them complicit in their own governance.

Similarly, the gig economy exemplifies how digital platforms function as devices that shape worker behavior. Platforms like Uber and TaskRabbit use algorithmic performance tracking, rating systems, and automated feedback loops to influence worker decisions, fostering self-discipline while maintaining managerial control at a distance (Zuboff, 2019). These digital devices create an illusion of autonomy while subtly enforcing compliance with platform rules.

Devices do not merely regulate actions; they shape worker subjectivity–how individuals see themselves in relation to their work and their organization. Foucault's (2001) concept of governmentality suggests that modern power operates by encouraging individuals to govern themselves in accordance with institutional norms. In the workplace, this manifests through professional development programs, self-improvement workshops, and corporate wellness initiatives, all of which promote a specific version of the ideal worker, productive, resilient, and adaptable.

For instance, corporate training programs on emotional intelligence and leadership do more than enhance professional skills; they shape workers into self-regulating subjects who internalize managerial expectations (Cabanas & Illouz, 2019). Similarly, mindfulness programs in companies such as Apple and Google are framed as wellness initiatives but serve as mechanisms that help employees manage stress without questioning the structural conditions that create it (Han, 2017). These programs subtly shift responsibility for workplace well-being from the organization to the individual, reinforcing psychopolitical power structures.

Devices are essential tools of power in modern organizations, shaping worker behavior, reinforcing corporate ideologies, and regulating professional identities. They function not through direct coercion but through subtle mechanisms that encourage individuals to align their aspirations with institutional objectives. From performance evaluations to digital surveillance, corporate wellness programs to algorithmic management, devices govern workers in ways that are often invisible yet deeply influential. Recognizing the role of devices in organizational settings allows for a critical examination of how power operates in contemporary work environments and opens possibilities for resistance and alternative modes of subjectivation.

WHAT ARE HUMAN MANAGEMENT PRACTICES?

Human management practices have undergone significant transformations over time, evolving from traditional personnel administration to strategic mechanisms that shape worker subjectivity, organizational culture, and power relations. Historically, these practices were largely bureaucratic, focusing on recruitment, training, and performance evaluation as administrative functions (Weber, 1979; Schein, 1991). However, contemporary approaches integrate psychological discourse, governance techniques, and corporate ideology to regulate workforce behavior in more nuanced ways (Foucault, 1988; Han, 2017). This section examines the shift from traditional to modern human management practices, their connection to power relations, and their practical implications for employees and organizations.

Traditionally, human management practices were rooted in Taylorism and Scientific Management, where efficiency and productivity were prioritized over worker autonomy (Taylor, 1911). Classical human resource functions–such as recruitment, selection, training, performance evaluation, and remuneration–were designed primarily to streamline workflow and maximize output (Rodríguez, 1992). These practices reflected bureaucratic control, where authority was centralized, decision-making was rigid, and employees were expected to adhere to strict operational procedures (Weber, 1979).

In contrast, modern human management practices have shifted towards strategic human resource management (SHRM), emphasizing flexibility, employee engagement, and workplace well-being. The integration of psychopolitics (Han, 2017) and corporate culture initiatives reflects how power now operates through self-governance rather than external coercion. Companies like Google, for instance, adopt participatory decision-making models and performance-driven cultures, where employees internalize corporate values and align their professional identities with organizational goals (Garvin, 2013). While these models appear empowering, they subtly reinforce managerial control by making workers active participants in their own regulation.

A notable example of this shift is the increasing use of algorithmic management in gig economy platforms such as Uber and Amazon Mechanical Turk. These systems use data-driven performance tracking, automated feedback, and rating mechanisms to influence worker behavior while maintaining the illusion of autonomy (Zuboff, 2019). Unlike traditional direct supervision, modern human management devices operate at a distance, subtly conditioning workers through digital surveillance and gamified productivity incentives.

Human management practices are deeply intertwined with power relations, as they function as disciplinary mechanisms that structure workplace interactions and employee subjectivities. Foucault (1980) argues that power operates not through coercion alone but through the production of knowledge and discourse that shape individuals' behaviors and perceptions of themselves. In this sense, human management practices are not merely administrative tools but dispositifs (apparatuses) that govern the workforce.

For instance, performance evaluation systems function as disciplinary devices that encourage self-surveillance and self-discipline (Foucault, 1988). Employees internalize expectations of productivity and efficiency, modifying their behavior in anticipation of assessment. In highly competitive corporate environments, the fear of underperformance or negative evaluations reinforces conformity to managerial expectations, limiting workers' capacity to challenge authority (Porras Velásquez, 2017).

Similarly, corporate leadership development programs often promote specific personality traits, such as emotional intelligence and resilience, reinforcing the idea that workers must adapt rather than critique organizational structures (Cabanas & Illouz, 2019). By encouraging employees to self-optimize through training, mindfulness initiatives, and coaching, organizations shift the burden of well-being from structural change to individual responsibility (Han, 2017). These practices ensure compliance not through direct orders but through

internalized norms that workers perceive as personal and professional growth.

The transition from traditional to modern human management practices carries profound implications for both employees and organizations. While contemporary models emphasize autonomy, flexibility, and engagement, they simultaneously introduce challenges related to psychological well-being, power asymmetry, and workplace ethics. These complexities manifest in various ways, shaping how workers experience control, stress, and opportunities for resistance within organizational structures.

One major tension lies in the illusion of workplace autonomy versus hidden control. Modern HR practices often promote flexibility and self-management; however, algorithmic monitoring and corporate incentive structures subtly direct worker behavior (Zuboff, 2019). Employees may perceive increased agency in decision-making while still operating within predefined corporate frameworks that regulate their choices. This paradox is particularly evident in gig economy platforms, where workers seemingly control their schedules yet remain subject to automated performance evaluations and algorithmic task distribution, effectively limiting their autonomy.

Additionally, emotional and psychological governance has become a central feature of modern workplaces. Many organizations implement programs focusing on emotional intelligence, resilience, and mindfulness, which encourage workers to manage stress individually rather than addressing systemic workplace pressures (Cabanas & Illouz, 2019). These initiatives, while appearing to support employee well-being, shift the responsibility for mental health from organizational structures to personal self-discipline, reinforcing corporate ideologies that prioritize productivity over structural reform. Employees are subtly conditioned to internalize workplace struggles as individual challenges rather than systemic issues, further entrenching corporate power over personal well-being.

Another critical consequence of contemporary management practices is the intensification of performance metrics and psychological pressure. Organizations increasingly rely on continuous monitoring and data-driven performance reviews, fostering environments of self-surveillance and competition (Foucault, 2001). While these systems aim to enhance efficiency, they also create heightened stress, anxiety, and burnout, as employees strive to meet often unattainable productivity expectations (Rahim, 1988). This psychological burden not only affects individual mental health but also reinforces hierarchical structures by making workers dependent on constant validation and approval from management.

Despite these power imbalances, workers also develop strategies of resistance and alternative governance models. Traditional labor movements and collective bargaining efforts continue to challenge exploitative management practices, advocating for greater worker protections and ethical leadership initiatives (Clegg et al., 2006). Additionally, the rise of worker-led cooperatives represents a direct challenge to hierarchical corporate structures. These models, which redistribute decision-making power among employees, offer an alternative governance framework that emphasizes collaboration, shared leadership, and economic democracy. Such approaches signal the possibility of reimagining power dynamics in the workplace, creating environments that prioritize both organizational efficiency and worker autonomy.

Human management practices have evolved from bureaucratic personnel administration to sophisticated governance mechanisms that regulate worker subjectivity and workplace culture. While modern practices promote engagement, flexibility, and professional development, they also function as subtle disciplinary devices that encourage self-regulation and reinforce corporate ideologies. Understanding the interplay between human management practices and power relations is essential for critically assessing how organizations shape workforce behavior and decision-making processes. As workplaces continue to integrate psychopolitical governance, digital surveillance, and self-optimization cultures, it is crucial to examine their long-term implications on worker well-being, autonomy, and agency.

Implications for Organizational Studies

The implications of these findings are significant for organizational psychology, human resource management, and leadership studies. First, they challenge the conventional notion that modern workplaces are becoming more democratic and participatory. Instead, they reveal that power in organizations has become more insidious, shifting from hierarchical command to networked governance (Clegg et al., 2006). By understanding power as a relational and discursive force, scholars and practitioners can critically assess how organizational policies contribute to workplace inequalities, psychological distress, and workforce fragmentation.

Moreover, this study underscores the need to rethink traditional human resource management strategies. Organizations should reassess the ethical dimensions of digital surveillance, performance evaluation systems, and algorithmic decision-making. While these tools are often justified as efficiency-enhancing mechanisms, they also have profound psychological and social consequences that can erode worker autonomy, well-being, and agency (Zuboff, 2019). Employers must recognize the ethical responsibility of ensuring that power structures do not exploit workers under the guise of flexibility and empowerment.

CONCLUSIONS

This study has critically examined the intersection of power relations and human management practices through a Foucauldian and psychopolitical perspective. The analysis highlights how modern organizations employ disciplinary mechanisms, governance techniques, and psychological discourse to regulate worker subjectivity, reinforce managerial ideologies, and shape professional identities. These power structures do not solely function through explicit coercion but operate through self-surveillance, voluntary compliance, and corporate cultural narratives that normalize managerial expectations.

The findings suggest that human management practices have evolved from bureaucratic, hierarchical models to subtler, more pervasive forms of psychopolitical control. Traditional power mechanisms, such as bureaucratic authority, scientific management, and authoritarian leadership, have given way to algorithmic monitoring, performance-based self-regulation, and emotional governance. Contemporary workplaces no longer rely on external enforcement alone but integrate technologies of power that make workers complicit in their own regulation. This transformation aligns with Foucault's (1988) assertion that power is not merely repressive but

productive–it shapes subjectivities, governs behaviors, and dictates what is considered "normal" within an organizational setting.

Additionally, the study illustrates that power relations are deeply embedded in communication structures, workplace policies, and digital surveillance systems, where psychopolitical governance encourages employees to internalize corporate goals as personal ambitions (Han, 2017). These mechanisms create an illusion of autonomy while subtly reinforcing workplace hierarchies and managerial control. Furthermore, self-optimization initiatives, emotional intelligence programs, and corporate wellness strategies serve as disciplinary devices that shift the burden of well-being from organizational structures to individual workers, reinforcing neoliberal ideals of productivity and personal responsibility.

Recommendations for Future Research

Future research should explore alternative governance models that prioritize worker agency and challenge exploitative power relations in modern workplaces. One promising area of study is worker-led cooperatives, which offer a democratic alternative to hierarchical corporate structures by redistributing decision-making power among employees. Investigating the effectiveness of these models can provide valuable insights into how organizations can foster more equitable labor relations while maintaining productivity and innovation.

Another critical area of research is the role of artificial intelligence (AI) and algorithmic management in shaping labor relations. As digital technologies become increasingly embedded in human resource practices, it is essential to examine how AI-driven decision-making influences hiring, performance evaluation, and workplace surveillance. Understanding the implications of algorithmic management can help organizations and policymakers develop ethical guidelines that mitigate biases, power asymmetries, and the erosion of worker autonomy.

Additionally, future studies should assess the psychological effects of self-surveillance and digital monitoring on employee well-being. Many contemporary workplaces implement performance-tracking technologies that encourage self-regulation, often leading to increased stress, anxiety, and burnout. Researching how these mechanisms affect workers' mental health and job satisfaction can contribute to a more nuanced understanding of how power operates in digital labor environments.

Finally, further investigation is needed into how contemporary power strategies influence resistance movements within organizations. As corporate control mechanisms become more sophisticated, employees are developing new forms of collective action and workplace activism. Exploring these resistance strategies–such as union revitalization, digital organizing, and ethical leadership movements–can provide crucial insights into how workers navigate and challenge contemporary power structures. To deepen these discussions, interdisciplinary approaches that integrate critical management studies, psychology, and political theory can offer a more comprehensive analysis of how workplaces manufacture consent, shape professional identities, and perpetuate neoliberal ideologies. By bridging these fields, future research can contribute to more ethical and sustainable labor practices that prioritize worker empowerment and organizational justice.

In conclusion, power relations in organizations do not merely dictate how work is done but also shape how workers perceive themselves, their value, and their role within the system. The illusion of autonomy, productivity mandates, and self-surveillance mechanisms ensure that employees willingly conform to managerial expectations, often at the expense of their psychological well-being. Recognizing these dynamics is crucial for developing more ethical, sustainable, and humane workplace policies that respect worker agency rather than exploit it.

Ultimately, this study reaffirms that the exercise of power in organizations is not simply about authority but about the production of truth, subjectivities, and behavioral norms. The challenge moving forward is to critically examine and contest these power structures, ensuring that future workplaces foster genuine autonomy, psychological safety, and equitable labor practices.

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