Control

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Jens Rennstam
Lund University
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Control

JENS RENNSTAM

Lund University, Sweden

Abstract

Organizational control is broadly understood as the methods and processes used to determine what to do and how to do it in organizations. The entry presents five main types of control. *Direct control* is based on personal surveillance and thus concerns face-to-face orders from one person to another about what to do and how to do it. *Technical control* is when technology such as the assembly line guides the work. Under *bureaucratic control*, behavior is guided through rules and regulations. All these forms of control target behavior. Under *output control*, however, the employees' output is the target. Instead of controlling behavior, output control allows for a variety of behaviors as long as the desired output is produced. *Normative control*, in turn, targets the norms of the employees, attempting to affect what is considered to be good and bad, valuable and desirable. Communication scholars have theorized control as a communicative act, and in particular have contributed to the understanding of normative forms of control.

Organizational control is broadly understood as the methods and processes used to determine what to do and how to do it in organizations (e.g., Johnson & Gill, 1993, p. x). Often, organizational control is assumed to be managerial, that is, the methods and processes are assumed to be executed and designed by managers. Although this is the most common way of thinking about control in organizations, this entry embraces a broader understanding, allowing for not only managers but also other employees, artifacts, or structures outside the organization to be sources of control.

A well established classification of control methods makes a distinction between direct, technical, bureaucratic, output based, and normative forms of control (Edwards, 1979; Ouchi & Maguire, 1975). *Direct control* is based on personal surveillance and thus concerns face-to-face orders from one person to another about what to do and how to do it. *Technical control* is when technology does the same job (the typical example is the assembly line, which basically "tells" the workers on the line how to work). Under *bureaucratic control*, authority resides in rules and regulations which guide behavior. All these forms of control have the same target: the behavior of the employees of an organization. Under *output control*, however, the target is shifted to the employees' output. Instead of controlling behavior, output control allows for a variety of behaviors as long as the desired output is achieved. Output control may be exerted, for example, by setting production or profitability goals. *Normative control* changes the target of control again, this time to the norms of the employees. By attempting to affect what is considered to be good and bad, valuable and desirable, organizations influence their members through normative control. For a summary of these five forms of control, see Table 1.

Type of control	Target	Example of method	Metaphor
Direct	Behavior	Direct orders	N/A
Technical	Behavior	Use of assembly line, electronic surveillance	N/A
Bureaucratic	Behavior	Rules and regulations	Iron cage
Output control	Output/Results	Use of profit centers. Formulation of goals, measurement and correction.	Thermostat
Normative control	Norms and values	Recruitment. Socialization. Identity regulation. Prescription of premises.	Panopticon, glass cage

Table 1 Types of control, targets and metaphors

Theories of organizational control have influenced organizational communication scholarship. In particular, it was when theorization moved toward normative control that communication scholars started to get involved. Therefore they have contributed mainly to the understanding of this type of control, for instance through Deetz's (1992) work on control by consent and normalization; Barker's (1993) development of "concertive control," which is a form of normative control in teams; and Tompkins and Cheney's (1985) work on identification as unobtrusive control and a means to foster acceptance of organizational norms and premises. But in addition to these specific contributions, there is a clear communicative element in nearly all forms of control. This is obvious in direct control, where there is face-to-face communication between superiors and subordinates: directives are given and monitored and feedback is provided. But communication is also necessary to ensure that people know how to use the technology, follow rules, and understand norms in technical, bureaucratic, and normative control. Thus, communication plays an important role in the process of inculcating the rules and norms of the organization (Tompkins & Cheney, 1985, p. 198).

Although all the forms of control listed above exist and have always existed in most organizations, there is an element of chronology in the sense that the *emphasis* has moved from direct control via technical, bureaucratic, and output control toward normative control. This chronology is reflected in the more detailed outline of the control forms in the following. Note, however, that although the control forms are presented individually, they tend to coexist and interact in most organizations.

Direct control

Probably the best known reference to direct control is Taylor's *The Principles of Scientific Management* (1911). Taylor prescribes a very clear division of labor between managers who conceive of and control work, and workers who execute it. Managers are expected to describe in detail what workers should do and how they should do it. In Taylor's own words:

> The work of every workman is fully planned out by the management at least one day in advance, and each man receives in most cases complete written instructions, describing in detail the task which he is to accomplish, as well as the means to be used in doing the work. (p. 17)

Direct control dominated organizations in the early years of industrialization, when enterprises were relatively small and had not yet developed extensive machinery or systems of rules or norms. Control was thus exercised openly and authority resided in the person of the manager – or the foreman as he (for it was almost always a man at this time) was typically named. Direct control was common in railroad construction, for example. Typically, a foreman was the head of a team of workers and controlled their work directly. The control relationship was thus personal and direct, and depended greatly on the ability of the foreman to make the workers comply with his orders. When there was conflict and resistance, the foreman had rather limited organizational resources to draw on, and therefore often had to rely on personal authority and even physical strength to control the workers (Jacques, 1996).

When organizations grew in size and became factories, the foremen became managers and could rely more on their position for exerting control. The direct relationship between managers and workers remained, however. In factories influenced by scientific management, managers gave instructions on what to do and

how to do it, monitored workers' behavior, timed and analyzed their performance, and altered the instructions in search of efficiency.

Direct control was, and is, associated with a number of problems. From a critical point of view, this type of detailed control may alienate and reduce humans to machines that can be programmed and reprogrammed at the will of management. Put differently, it may be seen as inhumane to be controlled according to the principles of scientific management. From an efficiency point of view, direct control is often perceived as obtrusive and therefore tends to demotivate workers and give rise to resistance. Also, direct control is labor intensive because it requires many managers; and in large organizations, reliance on direct control is risky for owners because it depends very much on the competence and loyalty of the managers. Probably because of these efficiency related issues, in combination with technological advancement, more structural forms of control developed in the late 19th and early 20th centuries (Edwards, 1979).

Technical control

Under technical control, authority is no longer vested in the person of the manager but resides in the organization's physical structure, such as machinery and information technology. The typical example of technical control is the assembly line, where the line replaces the foreman. In other words, instead of a foreman communicating what to do, the line does that job.

A number of managerial problems were solved through this shift from personal to structural control. The obtrusiveness of direct control was avoided, and the number of managers could be reduced. In addition, some problems of resistance were solved. Under scientific management, Taylor and his disciples had noticed the problem of "soldiering" – that is, workers habitually producing less than their capacity in order to keep requirements down – as a way of resisting direct control. Technical control was a solution to this problem, because the assembly line set the pace.

Technical control was also associated with new managerial problems, however. The assembly line was vulnerable. If a group of workers on the line went on strike, the whole production system stopped. Thus, worker motivation was an issue. But neither direct nor technical control, in their early-20th-century versions,

had any mechanisms for motivation; they mainly relied on fear and punishment. In other words, control was exerted through sticks and not carrots.

From a critical point of view, the introduction of the assembly line hardly made working conditions better. Working on the line was probably even more inhumane than working under a foreman. Workers increasingly became reduced to cogs in the organizational machinery, and they had little conception of being parts of a larger production process. For example, compare the factory system of producing furniture with the craft system. The craftsperson bought wood and refined it by sawing, carving, filing, and polishing, and putting the pieces together into a chair. He or she could thus conceive of the whole labor process. The factory worker on the line, in contrast, did not have this overview and was not engaged in all the steps; instead, for instance, they placed prefabricated stool legs into predrilled holes in a board that would become the seat of a chair. Because of this monotonous and repetitive element, technical control through the assembly line is associated with alienation and deskilling.

Technical control may take many shapes and does not necessarily have to be alienating or deskilling, however. Today, information technology is an important source of technical control. IT systems and software participate in organizational control by monitoring us, instructing us, and providing frames for our behavior. This may be deskilling if we are blindly following the instructions of this technology, and disciplining if we are constantly under surveillance. But we are also often working *with* technology, and it is debatable whether technology should be seen as deskilling, disciplining, constraining, or enabling.

Bureaucratic control

The managerial problems associated with technical control – the vulnerability of the line and the absence of positive incentives – fostered the development of bureaucracy as a new form of structural control. Under technical control, authority resides in the physical structure of the organization; but under bureaucracy it resides in the *social* structure. Bureaucracy is based on rules: rules for who does what and how to do it and who is superior to whom, and rules for promotion procedures and wage scales. In other words, bureaucracy provides rules for the horizontal and vertical divisions of labor in the organization, and also for the organization's career

system. This positive incentive solved some of the problems of motivation associated with direct and technical control.

Weber (1922), arguably the most influential writer on bureaucracy, described it as a legally established impersonal order that extends to persons by giving them authority only insofar as they occupy a position in the organization that affords certain rights. Authority is thus present not in the person, but in the position or in the "office" (*Büro* in German). Weber contrasts this "legal authority" of bureaucracy, where obedience is owed to the office, with "traditional authority," where obedience is owed to a person who occupies a traditionally sanctioned position (such as a king), and with "charismatic authority," where obedience is owed to a person who is considered to be bestowed with a gift of grace (such as Jesus in Christianity).

Bureaucracy is thus characterized by rules, formalism, and impersonality. It is also associated with predictability. Modern bureaucracy was developed in the early 20th century, primarily in large manufacturing organizations and public administration, which operated in a relatively predictable environment where bureaucratic control could enable efficient production. The common association between bureaucracy and inefficiency ("red tape") is thus somewhat flawed. Under certain conditions, bureaucracy is highly efficient. In fact, Weber (p. 337) stressed that bureaucracy is "capable of attaining the highest degree of efficiency." This does not mean that Weber was an advocate of bureaucracy. He stressed that the statement about efficiency was made from a "purely technical point of view." Most notably, he also called bureaucracy an "iron cage" (see below).

Yet, bureaucracy is associated with efficiency problems for at least two reasons. First, bureaucracies are based on rigid systems of rules, rely on standardization and formalization, and are efficient as long as work processes can be described in detail and are instrumental in reaching organizational goals (Ouchi, 1980). But if the work processes are uncertain and there is a need for swift change, then bureaucracy is not very efficient. Consider, for instance, a company that develops technology for mobile phones. Although some standards for technology development exist, the process through which this is done cannot be specified in detail beforehand. Therefore, other forms of control, such as output and normative control, tend to be more efficient, because they allow for more flexibility. Second, bureaucracy is inefficient when outstanding performance and innovativeness are keys to organizational success. Bureaucracy's efficiency relies on predictability and

normalization of the average, and rewards rule following rather than outstanding performance. Therefore, organization that depends greatly on creativity and innovation – such as theater, music, and art but also research, technology development, preschool teaching, and various types of consultancy – is unlikely to reach its goals efficiently if it relies too much on bureaucracy.

From a critical perspective, bureaucratic control has been criticized for concentrating power at the top and constraining and demotivating employees. The bureaucratic system of rules has a tendency to form an organization that alienates its members because everything seems to be thought out in advance by the impersonal system, and there is little space for human agency. Weber pointed at this when he likened the bureaucracy to an "iron cage" (a translation of *stahlhartes Gehäuse*, that is, "shell hard as steel"). In addition, because of the fact that everybody is subject to the rules, bureaucracy gives the impression that there is no conflict between employers and employees, a conflict that critical theorists typically view as inherent in the capitalist system (Edwards, 1979). Under direct and technical control, this conflict was fairly open. The foreman who exercised control was an obvious target of complaints and dissatisfaction. But under bureaucratic control "the organization" takes up more space, and "we, the workers" take up less; the focus becomes "we, the organization." This move is possible because not only is work related behavior rewarded in the bureaucracy, but also, and perhaps primarily, behavior that supports the bureaucratic system. Critical scholars would argue that the image of unity is deceptive because it is the owners and people higher up in the organization that profit most when the employees follow the rules. The conflict between employers and employees thus remains, although it may not be visible because of all the rules.

Although the popularity of bureaucracy as an organizational form has declined somewhat – the heyday of bureaucracy lasted until about the 1980s – it is certainly still relevant today. Just consider the rise of service work, the fast food restaurant being the typical example, where employees are subordinated to detailed rules for how to approach customers, how to prepare the food, how and when to clean tables, and so on. A similar bureaucratic framework surrounds telemarketing work. This development in service work has even led some scholars to argue for a "McDonaldization" of society (Ritzer, 1998). But bureaucracy does not permeate only the apparently routinized service work in fast food restaurants and telemarketing companies, or large manufacturing firms and public administration,

which are the usual suspects. It also plays a central role in many "professional service firms," such as large management consultancies and law firms, with their intricate performance management systems and clear career ladders (Alvesson & Kärreman, 2004). These organizations display an intricate bureaucratic system for regulating advancement. Large consultancies often have several career steps – for instance, assistant, consultant, senior consultant, manager, senior manager, partner – and detailed descriptions of what is required to reach each step. The performance of the employees is systematically followed up, evaluated, and documented in files that are used to make decisions about promotion. The system is often referred to as "up or out," indicating that either employees advance through the hierarchy within a certain time, or they are asked, or expected, to leave. Thus, it would be premature to dismiss bureaucratic control as obsolete.

This does not imply that bureaucracies look the same today as in the 1960s, however. Research indicates that the contemporary bureaucracy is "softer" (Courpasson, 2000). This implies a version of bureaucracy that combines ideas of centralization and entrepreneurship, expressed in organizations that are top down but with fewer hierarchical levels and with employees who have more control over how to perform their tasks. Also, bureaucracy has been depicted as both constraining *and* enabling (Adler & Borys, 1996). That is, it may on the one hand be an iron cage, but on the other a source of clarity and support. Bureaucracy provides guidance and direction and clarifies responsibilities, which may relieve stress and help people be and feel more effective. For instance, bureaucracy can be a source of support for employees claiming their rights, when worker rights are part of the bureaucracy. Also, rules about who does what and who is in charge prevent role confusion, which may help people gain control over their work life. In addition, the rigidity associated with bureaucracy is desired in some types of organizations, especially where democratic values are treasured and quick decisions at the whim of single leaders are undesirable.

To sum up, bureaucratic control is still relevant for understanding how contemporary workplaces are controlled. The character of bureaucracy has moved in a softer and subtler direction, but traditional managerial privileges remain, such as the privilege to formulate goals and strategies, and the privilege to make decisions about reorganizations and the allocation of resources. Thus, while the workers have more

discretion when it comes to deciding how to do things, bureaucratic rules often regulate who can decide what to do and where to go.

Output control

Output control is based on the measurement of outputs (Ouchi & Maguire, 1975). Unlike direct, technical, and bureaucratic control, it is thus directed not toward employees' behavior, but toward the results of their work. Output can be controlled quantitatively as in the case of wages based on piecework, or qualitatively as when the functionality of output (such as an application for mobile phones) is measured.

To an extent, the rise of output control was a reaction to the inefficiencies of bureaucracy. In the 1970s and 1980s, when creativity, innovation, and responsiveness to environmental change became more important, the rigid structure of the bureaucracy became a barrier to efficiency and output control was seen as a way of creating more flexible organizations. Especially in complex work, where managerial knowledge about the work process is limited, it becomes difficult to set up detailed work rules. Consider, for instance, technology development. It is difficult to set up step-by-step rules for how to develop or apply new technology, and even if it were possible, the rules would constrain the flexibility that is needed for finding new solutions. But it is possible to measure the functionality of the new technology. Thus, if managerial knowledge of the production process is low, but it is possible to measure output, then output control is preferred (Ouchi, 1979). Or put differently, under conditions when it is difficult to control the behavior of employees through detailed instructions about how to perform various tasks, it is often argued that control should be directed toward the output of work rather than toward work itself.

A common method of applying output control is by establishing "business units" in large, divisionalized organizations (Mintzberg, 1989). Business units are parts of a larger organization and are responsible for their own costs or profits. For instance, the European division of an American car manufacturer may be a business unit. By setting profit goals and making the division responsible for these, but allowing it to develop its own methods and processes for achieving them, the mother organization communicates a certain level of responsible autonomy by measuring output but not behavior.

Another common way of practicing output control is by using a "balanced scorecard," which is basically an attempt to include more than the financial

dimension into the output control process (Kaplan & Norton, 1993). A typical balanced scorecard includes five dimensions: financial, internal processes, customers, learning/innovation, and people. The outputs are then evaluated through the use of measures such as profit (financial), inventory turnover (internal processes), customer satisfaction (customers), number of new products (learning/innovation), and personnel turnover (people).

The idea of output control largely builds on a cybernetic model of monitoring, rewarding, and punishing performance (Eisenhardt, 1985). A simple model of cybernetic output control is illustrated in Figure 1. Inputs may be people, technology, or raw materials, and outputs may be income, number and quality of produced units, or level of customer satisfaction. The idea is thus to avoid controlling behavior directly and instead measure the output and compare it to previously set objectives. If there is deviance between the output and the previously set objectives, then something needs to be adjusted.

Inputs => Transformation processes => Outputs
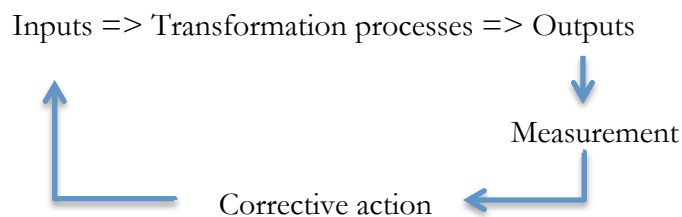
Measurement

Corrective action

Figure 1: The cybernetic output control process

Take a McDonald's restaurant as a simple example. Let's say that customer satisfaction is the desired output of an organizational change process, and the inputs are food, food processing technology, and personnel. When customer satisfaction is measured in a survey, managers discover that customers think the food is fine but they are dissatisfied with the service. Given this new information, the managers would develop a new training program to improve the service level.

The McDonald's example is simple but communicates the gist of output control according to the cybernetic model. It is about:

1   setting goals
2   measuring output
3   comparing output with the goals
4   taking corrective action.

The example illustrates not only the logic of the cybernetic model, however, but also its limits as a means of control. First, the model may be good for indicating problems, but it does not say very much about how to deal with them. In the McDonald's example, the survey may indicate that service level is a problem, but it says nothing about how to make employees more service minded. Second, and related, for something to be done about the problems, output control must be combined with other types of control. Thus, after having detected the service related problems at McDonald's, the managers will need behavior controls (or normative controls) in their attempts to change service behavior. Third, the model relies on somewhat unrealistic assumptions about measurability and rational decision making. It assumes that output can be measured and deviances from set goals detected, and that the detected deviances are the reason why the goals were not attained. There is thus an operationalization problem: it is overly simplified to operationalize organizational problems in terms of deviances in output. Last, and related, the cybernetic model of output control rests on a transmission model of communication that has been widely criticized by communication scholars. Communication is seen as a neutral tool through which the objective reality of inputs, transmission processes, and outputs is transmitted. The idea that communication, and language in general, not only transmits information about reality but also constitutes it, is thus not taken into consideration by the cybernetic model of output control.

Output control in police work is a classic example of these problems. The goal of most police organizations is to minimize crime. Every year the output of police work is measured in terms of, for example, the number of reported instances of domestic violence. When the numbers rise, it is assumed that there is more domestic violence, and the police organization is criticized for bad performance. But how do we know that the increased number of reports is due to increased violence, and that this in turn is because of bad police work? The increased numbers may be because societal norms have changed so that it has become more legitimate to report domestic violence. And the changed norms may in fact be due to *good* police work, because the police may be operating not only reactively by "catching" offenders, but also preventively by encouraging victims to report crime. In other words, the output does not necessarily say much about the input. Yet this information about the output is supposed to be used for adjusting the input, or the transformation process.

The point here is thus that output control may be a valuable indication that there are problems. But it is difficult to draw conclusions about the cause of the problems based on output control alone, and it says little about how to deal with these problems other than telling people to make sure they reach their target output. For this reason, few organizations rely on output control alone, but combine it with other methods.

Output control is popular in contemporary organizations. Advanced information technology makes it easy to quantify and measure output such as profit levels, customer satisfaction, crime rates, employee turnover, and performance in terms of number of finalized projects, publications, treated patients, and so on. The public sector has picked up output measurements as one of their key control methods. The rise of "new public management" as an ideal for managing public organizations – which includes a focus on setting up and measuring performance indicators – has probably contributed to this. Some commentators even claim that we live in an "audit society," where both qualitative and quantitative outputs are thoroughly measured and evaluated and individuals and organizations are increasingly required to account for their actions (Power, 1997).

Normative control

Under normative control, the target of control is shifted once more. Direct, technical, and bureaucratic control target employees' behaviors, and output control targets their results. Normative control, in turn, is directed at employees' norms, thoughts, and values (Barley & Kunda, 1992). Normative control is said to be more effective when it is difficult to measure output, and when bureaucratic rules fail to offer guidance because the work processes are difficult to predict (Ouchi, 1979). The idea of normative control is that under such conditions, efficiency can be reached by creating a normative community where people think the same way and value the same things, so that they need not be told what to do, or their output need not be measured. Put differently, control is achieved by creating a "strong culture," or in Ouchi's (1980) words, a "clan." There are many ways of attempting such culture building, but the main methods are by *recruiting* like-minded people or by *socializing* them to adopt the norms of the organization (Etzioni, 1961).

The theoretical underpinnings of normative control reside in culture theory. In the 1970s and 1980s, organizational theorists influenced by anthropology and

symbolic interactionism began to rethink the nature of organizations (e.g., Van Maanen, 1979). The view of the organization as a cybernetic system was abandoned in favor of an understanding of organizations as socially constructed systems of meaning. In other words, organizations were understood as cultures rather than machines or organisms (Morgan, 1986). As a result, there was more focus on understanding how organizations were held together through cultural artifacts such as language use, rituals and ceremonies, and objects. These artifacts are seen as symbols and thereby carriers of values and meaning. For instance, employees in a law firm tend to wear dark suits, which symbolize, among other things, rationality, professionalism, and correctness. Male police officers tend to shave their heads, which symbolize, among other things, aggressiveness and power. As these examples show, symbolism and meaning are ambiguous. In consequence, this theoretical perspective on control acknowledges ambiguity more than previous understandings.

However, it was not symbolic interactionists with their profound interest in the origin of social organization that popularized normative control. Instead, it was academics writing for managers, partly as a reflection of the surging Japanese industry of the time. Analyzing the Japanese key to success, Americans and others concluded that the Japanese secret was a "strong organizational culture," meaning that employees identified with and trusted their work organizations, and shared their values of flexibility, quality, and customer orientation. A strong culture, in turn, was associated with financial success. This message was picked up by managers, which resulted in less emphasis on rationalistic methods such as scientific management and cybernetic output control, and prompted the advent of various attempts at "culture change programs" intent on communicating the "core values" of the organization.

Although the popularity of organizational culture and thus normative control escalated in the 1980s, normative control as such was hardly a new thing. It is the main control form in religious and political movements – the church and the political party being ideal types of normatively controlled organizations (Etzioni, 1961). Thus, the control method was not new, but the news was that it was brought from religious and political organizations into business.

There was also an early version of normative control in the *human relations* movement in the 1930s, which was largely a reaction to the rationalistic ideas of scientific management (Barley & Kunda, 1992). Scholars started to question the assumption of scientific management that rigorous direct control would maximize

productivity. Instead, the relationships between employee well-being, group dynamics, and productivity were analyzed (e.g., Roethlisberger & Dickson, 1939). The general idea was that employee well-being increases employee morale, which will in turn lead to higher productivity. Based on this assumption there was corporate experimentation with strategies for motivation, satisfaction, and participatory decision making, but also leadership to "improve" group morale and align group dynamics with organizational goals (Barley & Kunda, 1992). These initiatives in many ways resembled the attempts at culture management from the 1980s onward.

The managerial idea of normative control rests on at least two assumptions (Barley & Kunda, 1992). First, it is assumed that output control and bureaucracy are insufficient for reaching efficiency in turbulent times. Bureaucracy is too rigid and output control rests on overly rational assumptions of measurability and correction. What if the "wrong" rules and the "wrong" goals and measurements are established? The chance of this happening increases with environmental turbulence. Efficiency, according to the managerialist branch of normative control, instead requires committed employees who make little distinction between their own welfare and the welfare of the organization. If this type of commitment can be achieved, then they will do what they can to help the organization, and no (or fewer) output or bureaucratic controls are needed. Second, it is assumed that normative communities (cultures) can be designed and manipulated by managers. As a result, the role of the manager shifted with the rise of normative control. Under bureaucratic control, managers design rules and work processes; under output control they monitor and evaluate; while under normative control they inculcate a sense of unity, trust, and shared beliefs.

These assumptions can be problematized, of course. A culture may be just as rigid as a bureaucracy, if not even more rigid, and therefore having the "wrong" culture when the environment changes and favors new sets of values and norms may be detrimental to an organization. Of course, the idea of being able to consciously and successfully design and manipulate a culture may be understood as managerial hubris rather than a realistic business strategy. Nevertheless, there are definitely *attempts* at designing cultures, and the resemblance between some organizations and clans is sometimes striking. Thus, there is no reason to doubt that organizations *are* cultures and that therefore in varying degrees they are controlled by norms. The

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extent to which these norms can be intentionally controlled is a matter of debate, however.

Another critique of normative control comes from critical organization scholars. The gist of the critique is that a "strong culture" not only enables the organization to solve its problems, but also constrains the employees' thinking and behavior. It essentially manufactures consent by normalizing a certain way of being and thinking (Deetz, 1992). In its most extreme version, normative control may be seen as "brainwash attempts" and the organization may be seen as a "psychic prison" for the employees (Morgan, 1986). The vocabulary of normative control – including concepts such as "commitment," "empowerment," and "teamwork" – is seen as deceptive, lulling employees into the belief that the organization's goals are really their own (e.g., Ezzamel & Willmott, 1998). Teamwork and commitment may mean giving up one's own interests, and empowerment may mean compulsion to many employees. This poststructuralist (mainly Foucauldian) perspective on control thus focuses primarily on managerial language use and how it fulfills employees' need for identity work. Other critical scholars – particularly those influenced by Marx – have focused more on how culture management draws attention away from inherent mechanisms in capitalism such as class struggle and the exploitation evident in the fact that the value of the workers' products exceeds their wages (see Jaros, 2001, for an outline of the debate between poststructuralists and Marxists).

Versions of normative control

Normative control comes in many shapes: it has been labeled ideological control, socio-ideological control, culture management, and clan control, to name a few. However, there are three shapes of normative control that merit separate treatment. They are subcategories of rather than synonyms for normative control. Two of them have attracted the attention of organizational communication scholars: identity regulation and concertive control. The third refers to unobtrusive control which distracts employees from obtrusive control.

Identity regulation

Identity regulation refers to managerial attempts at controlling the identification processes of organizational members. Control over employees' identification is a

version of normative control that has gained much attention over the past 20 years. Identification – in terms of "the perception of oneness with or belongingness to some human aggregate" (Ashforth & Mael, 1989, p. 21) – is likely to occur when people work in organizations. When we participate in work over an extended period, this is likely to affect our sense of self. Consider for example a person who becomes a police officer, a university professor, or a nurse. Their work is likely to affect how they think of themselves, irrespective of formal management initiatives. Identification is thus related to a "naturally occurring" process of socialization. Identity regulation, however, is a managerially initiated attempt at controlling this process.

Managers and scholars see lack of identification with the organization as a problem because it may reduce employee support and engagement for the organization (Ashforth & Mael, 1989). Lack of identification with the organization can arise for different reasons. It may be because identification with the profession rather than the organization is strong for certain professionals (e.g., engineers, lawyers, accountants, physicians, consultants, researchers), or because employees feel oneness with other "identity groups" whose identity is not aligned with that of the organization (e.g., a newly recruited management consultant who identifies with a parental social movement where time spent with your children is prioritized over hard work). The organization then becomes less important for the creation of a sense of self. Identity regulation is thus seen as a solution to this problem.

The argument for identity regulation resembles the argument for normative control and culture management. Identity based control gained popularity about 10 years after the culture management movement, however. In the late 1990s, it was seen as increasingly important to manage the "organizational identity" in order to create "an internalized cognitive structure of what the organization stands for and where it intends to go" because "the environment becomes ever more dynamic and complex" and "[a] sense of identity serves as a rudder for navigating difficult waters" (Albert, Ashforth, & Dutton, 2000, p. 13).

The idea of identity regulation is thus to align the identity of the employees with the identity of the organization by directing control toward the employees' sense of self (Alvesson & Willmott, 2002). Identity regulation may be attempted in various ways, for example:

- By associating knowledge or characteristics with organizational positions. For instance, firmness may be constructed as a prerequisite for being a good police officer. The image of the "firm" police officer is then thought to be input in the identity work of the organizational members, that is, their work with creating a sense of self; and if the "regulation" is successful, they will see themselves as firm and act firmly in their work. Identity is thus, on good grounds, assumed to inform behavior.

- By providing organizational members with a specific vocabulary of motives, implying what the preferred values of the members should be. For instance, organizations commonly stress the importance of being a team player, commitment, empowerment, or customer orientation. The idea, thus, is that this vocabulary influences the employees' identity work in a way that is favorable for the organization.

- By group categorization and affiliation. Identity is based on a perception of oneness with a certain group, and a perception of distinction from other groups. By emphasizing the division between "us" and "them" – "them" may be competitors, customers, other departments within an organization, or people of other religious beliefs, gender, sexual orientation, race, etc. – members may be encouraged to draw more on the organization in their identity work. For instance, by emphasizing the distinction between academics and nonacademics, members of universities may be encouraged to draw on the university and everything it stands for in their identity work. This, in turn, may tie them closer to the university and increase the likelihood that they act in line with the interests of the university.

Identity related control has attracted organizational communication scholars. For instance, Tompkins and Cheney (1985) studied the role of identification in organizations. They argue that identification with organizations is expressed in decision making. The result of organizational identification is that employees internalize the values of an organization and make decisions in accordance with its interests (see also Bullis & Tompkins, 1989). This idea of identification thus focuses on decision making, assuming that decisions in line with organizational interests are an expression of identification with the organization. Tompkins and Cheney also side with critical approaches to organization by associating identification with invisible or

"unobtrusive" forms of control. Similar to the critics of normative control, they argue that attempts to control identification may be "dangerous" and might sometimes be better understood as indoctrination.

Organizational communication scholars have also used and contributed to identity theory to analyze how occupational segregation is controlled, that is, how certain identities become associated with certain occupations. This is a type of control at a societal level, in which organizations participate. For instance, Ashcraft (2013) outlined a theory of how we not only gain identity from our work, which is the focus in most studies on identity related control, but also tend to judge work by the social identities associated with it. Ashcraft's point is that the nature and status of certain lines of work are partly controlled by the company it keeps. For instance, occupations that are mainly populated by White males, or are associated with White male symbolism, tend to gain higher status and pay. This is the result of an ongoing process of identification between certain bodies and certain lines of work.

Concertive control

Concertive control is a second version of normative control that has been developed by communication scholars. It refers to normative control that is not directly imposed by higher management, but is established by team members themselves. Concertive control was introduced by Tompkins and Cheney (1985) and developed by Barker (1993), who states that it

> represents a key shift in the locus of control from management to the workers themselves, who collaborate to develop the means of their own control … by reaching a negotiated consensus on how to shape their behavior according to a set of core values, such as the values found in a corporate vision statement. (p. 411)

Concertive control can be illustrated by an empirical example (Barker, 1993, 1999). The example also illustrates the movement between and the coexistence of different forms of control.

Barker studied a firm that wanted to introduce "team based organization." Several measures were taken, for instance: (1) the CEO's office was moved from a large room in the "executive wing" to a small space close to the factory floor; (2) the

staff were trained in "teamwork skills"; (3) the CEO selected one person from the "floor" to be the leader of a pilot team that would work according to the new method; (4) this employee then became responsible for implementing the new work methods in the whole factory. Also, the structure was changed and new work methods were introduced, as summarized in Table 2.

Structure of ISE before and after the Change to Teams

Before the change	After the change
1. Three levels of managerial hierarchy between the vice president and the manufacturing workers.	1. Managerial hierarchy extends directly from the manufacturing teams to the vice president.
2. Manufacturing assembly line organizes the plant. Workers manufacture boards according to their individual place on the line.	2. Team work areas organize the plant. Teams are responsible for complete fabrication, testing, and packaging of their assigned circuit boards.
3. Line and shift supervisors form the first managerial link.	3. Teams manage their own affairs, elect one person to coordinate information for them.
4. Workers have little input into work-related decisions. Managers make all decisions and give all directions.	4. Team members make their own decisions within guidelines set by management and the company vision statement. Teams have shared responsibility for their own productivity.
5. Management disciplines workers.	5. Team members discipline themselves.
6. Management interviews and hires all new workers.	6. Team members interview, hire and fire their own members.

Table 2: Adapted from Barker (1993, p. 417)

Previously the firm was controlled through a mix of technical, direct, and bureaucratic controls. The assembly line determined the pace of the work, and managers were appointed who controlled the workers directly and made decisions that affected their work. The bureaucratic element was represented by a system of rules controlling the vertical and horizontal divisions of labor. After the change, however, the hierarchy was flattened; the workers were allowed control of the assembly line, how to do their work, and even whom to hire and fire, within guidelines set by management. Thus, the organization became less rigid and the employees were allowed to develop their own norms for how to do good work for the organization. In other terms, concertive control was introduced.

The norms developed by the "self-managing teams" were later turned into rational rules, however. This, according to Barker, meant that the workers were still not freed from constraining rules imposed by an authority. The difference was simply that under bureaucratic control the authority was in the system, which directed and hierarchically arranged the social relations of the organization, whereas under concertive control the authority was in the norms of the team.

The example thus illustrates a number of control forms, how they may coexist, and how they may change over time. But it also illustrates that an emphasis on teamwork and empowerment – which are typically associated with more autonomy – does not necessarily mean that there is "less" control. Normative and concertive controls are somewhat seductive because they are usually not formulated as or even experienced as control. They are "unobtrusive" (Tompkins & Cheney, 1985), and they represent control by consent rather than by coercion (Deetz, 1992). Barker in fact argued that the control became *stronger* when teams were introduced, because the concertive control was unobtrusive and thus largely invisible to its targets. As he notes, under concertive control, employees are "both under the eye of the norm and *in* the eye of the norm, but from where they are, in the eye, all seems natural and as it should be" (1993, p. 435).

Because of this unobtrusiveness, normative control is often associated with Foucauldian ideas of control as governance rather than dominance. Normative control does not dominate because it does not fix people's behavior. Like culture, it governs rather by providing clues to what should be seen as good and bad, how to talk and think, and which knowledge to value. The talk, thinking, and knowledge are then more or less flexibly used in everyday work when we, as organizational members, make sense of organizational reality and make decisions about work. In other words, we use the organization's or the group's norms to control ourselves (Barker, 1999, p. 34).

Control by distraction

A third version of normative control illustrates how organizations may control employees not only by directing their behaviors, outputs, and norms, but also by distraction – by diverting their attention away from these forms of control. In a study of a call center, Fleming and Sturdy (2011) observed how employees were encouraged to "just be themselves" – to openly display their uniqueness in terms of

lifestyle, sexuality, or diverse identity – which created a sense of fun and openness. However, this unobtrusive managerial directive also obscured the fact that other controls, more obtrusive and traditional, were in place. This new type of normative control – stressing the norm that there is *no* control – thus operated in two ways: (1) it diverted attention from other forms of control, and (2) it made it possible for the organization to exploit the unique lifestyles, sexualities, and identities of the employees. By encouraging employees to display their uniqueness, the organization could make them perform better because they were not constrained by the homogenizing influence of other organizational controls. This means that the control focused on the "whole person," including their sociality, expressed through their lifestyle, sexuality, consumption, hobbies, and so on. For this reason, the emphasis on "just be yourself" is to be understood as freedom *around* control, rather than freedom *from* control (Fleming & Sturdy, 2011).

New forms of control and new metaphors

Control is often understood through metaphors, which is a way of making sense of more general tendencies – control in the grander scheme of things, as it were. It is also a way of encouraging open and more critical thinking about control.

Because of the shift toward more normative control forms, the root metaphors for understanding control have also changed (see Table 1 for a summary). Weber's "iron cage" was the metaphor for bureaucratic control, symbolizing the rigid bars of bureaucracy that let no one out. The metaphor for cybernetic output control was the thermostat, symbolizing the assumptions of measurability and adjustment to gain the right organizational "temperature." With the advent of normative control, and the popularity of the philosophy of Foucault (1977), the metaphor of "the panopticon" became increasingly popular. A panopticon is a circular prison with a tower in the middle and several prison yards stretching out from underneath the tower to the prison wall. The tower windows have mirror glass so that the prisoners cannot see the guard in the tower. But the guard can see the prisoners. Thus, they know that the guard *may* be watching them and therefore tend to behave *as if* they were constantly under surveillance. The metaphor of the panopticon thus symbolizes that there is something, an omnipresent eye, controlling us, but we do not know quite what it is – and it may even be ourselves.

Among other things, the metaphor of the panopticon has been used to investigate and make sense of surveillance. Sewell (1998) discusses the interaction of "vertical surveillance," referring to managerial electronic monitoring of work, and "horizontal surveillance," referring to peer group scrutiny. This interaction produces a particularly powerful form of control through the combination of bureaucratic ideals of efficiency and postbureaucratic ideals of normative control and worker autonomy. Both vertical and horizontal surveillance are often difficult to observe, which produces the panoptic effect that the employees know that they *may* be under surveillance, and therefore behave as if they always are.

Another metaphor that has been suggested to make sense of normative control is "the glass cage" (Gabriel, 2005). Unlike the impenetrable iron cage of bureaucracy, the glass cage symbolizes organizational members in an enclosure that is transparent, constantly on display, and exposed to managers, customers, colleagues, and even friends. It relates not least to the type of normative control suggested by Fleming and Sturdy (2011), discussed earlier, where the "whole person," including his/her lifestyle, sexuality, and hobbies, is on display. The image of glass refers to surveillance techniques, performance controls, reviews and appraisals, lists and rankings, 360-degree feedback, quality assessment and accreditation practices, open offices, and the gaze of friends through social networks such as Facebook and LinkedIn. It thus communicates even more transparency than the panopticon, and illustrates how control has shifted from rules and regulations that constrain a person's behavior, to the gaze of multiple actors that defines a person's identity.

Thus, the change in metaphors indicates that we have moved from a type of control that encapsulated people and guided their behavior directly, to a type of control that allows for improvisation, entrepreneurship, and autonomy under the scrutiny of multiple actors. These are generalizations that say something about the tendencies, but not the specificities, of the development of organizational control.

Resistance to control

Although this entry is about control, the notion of resistance also deserves some attention in order to clarify the meaning of control, and in order to indicate the role of communication scholarship in the debate on resistance to control. First, it is important to note that although control has been center stage in this entry, this does not mean that people obediently accept control attempts in organizations. People are

neither cogs in machinery nor cultural dupes; people resist. In early industrialization, people resisted foremen through physical violence. Later, organized labor resisted technical, bureaucratic, and output controls through strikes and work councils. Normative control is hard to resist through strikes because of its unobtrusiveness and subtleness. But terms like "corporate bullshit" and "management mumbo jumbo" indicate that many employees may silently resist the norms and values communicated by management. It is debatable whether this type of cynical attitude is to be seen as resistance or merely as a valve through which employees can let off steam, thereby avoiding "real" resistance (see Fleming & Spicer, 2008). The point remains that people may offer resistance to control attempts.

Second, scholars of organizational communication have contributed to the debate on resistance to control. One contribution of communication studies revolves around a critique of the dualism between control and resistance (Mumby, 2005). Researchers into resistance and control have a tendency to study either control or resistance, and to assume that either managerial control or worker resistance is effective. For instance, management research tends to assume that managers and their systems of control can actually control organizations and have the intended effects. Critical research tends either to assume that managerial control is ubiquitous and worker resistance is ineffective, or to present a somewhat romanticized image of workers' ability to resist. Mumby suggests a different view in which control and resistance are seen as coexisting, mutually constitutive, and constantly producing the power relations in organizations. Thus, control is a prerequisite for resistance and vice versa, and the question becomes how and with what consequences they interact.

In the vein of understanding control and resistance as dynamic constructs that are mutually constitutive, communication research has problematized the role of resistance and provided deeper insight into its role in the workplace. For example, Ashcraft (2005) showed in a study of airline pilots how control was directed toward captains through the introduction of new organizational philosophies that aimed to empower the cabin crew. This was perceived as a potential threat by the captains, because the empowerment discourse was initially associated with femininity, threatening the masculine symbolism associated with the occupation of pilot. The captains responded to the new philosophy not by overtly resisting it, however, but by embracing it. Yet, Ashcraft argued that understanding the captains' discourse only as compliance would be a simplification. It could also be seen as a form of resistance

because the captains managed to maintain their powerful position by drawing on discourses of fatherhood. Instead of understanding empowerment as a "feminine" practice, the captains described it in terms of a new form of fatherhood. Instead of the "omnipotent and omniscient father," the new pilot, within the empowerment discourse, was described as the "benevolent father" who chooses to "lengthen the leash" (p. 79). Thus, empowerment was basically coopted and masculinized, and rephrased as the captain's gift to his subordinates rather than a managerially imposed practice. In this way, the captains could maintain their power and their identity without *openly* resisting the managerial discourse of empowerment.

The example provides a number of insights regarding control and resistance. First, control–resistance relations in the workplace pertain not only to the relationship between managers and workers, but also to the relationship between workers and other workers (such as captains and other crew members). Second, resistance may alter power relations, but it may also preserve them (as in the case of the captains preserving their powerful position in the cabin). Third, resistance does not have to be overt; even the embracing of control attempts may be used to preserve power relations in the workplace. Fourth, the dialectic between control and resistance may be related to issues of occupational identity in the sense that resistance may result from perceived identity threats (thus, perceived attempts at identity regulation). The captains arguably perceived the empowerment discourse as a threat to the masculine symbolism associated with their occupation. By coopting the agency of the empowerment – describing the empowerment practices as their own – they constructed themselves as autonomous "fathers" rather than subordinate to institutional mandates. The final insight is that resistance may be quite subtle and can even operate through "professed consent" (p. 85).

In other words, Ashcraft explores the dialectic of control and resistance as suggested by Mumby, showing how resistance is an ambiguous construct that has consequences not only in terms of stopping or slowing down management control, but also in terms of identity and power relations between various occupational groups. The general contribution of organizational communication scholarship is thus to provide a dialectical, more nuanced, and less static view of the control–resistance relationship.

Future directions

Future research on control might take a number of different directions. One current trend is to focus on control that is not perceived, or even intended, as control. One example of this is the previously mentioned study by Fleming and Sturdy (2011), where "fun" side activities and the encouragement to self-express functioned as distractions from traditional forms of control. Thus, the side activities had controlling effects although they were not perceived as control. A different example is provided by Kamoche, Kannan, and Siebers (2014), who showed how the introduction of online knowledge sharing platforms had controlling effects on R&D scientists, although the scientists did not perceive the platforms as control. The online platforms were instrumental in developing a knowledge sharing norm that was part of the knowledge management system, but they were not perceived as such because they were enmeshed in a rhetoric of "facilitation." Similarly, Mazmanian, Orlikowski, and Yates (2013) found that although the introduction of mobile email devices was not perceived as control, it had controlling effects: in theory the devices were intended to enable work anywhere and anytime, whereas in practice the employees ended up using them everywhere and all the time. What these studies indicate is that control may not be framed as control, and that activities that are introduced to increase autonomy may sometimes have the opposite effect.

Another current trend is a turn to operative practice and the role of objects to make sense of organizational control. This is a turn away from empirical attention to what managers do, in favor of a focus on the sites where the actual production of goods and services takes place. Typically, knowledge and knowing take center stage, and the question of control relates to how knowledge is elicited from knowledgeable workers. In response to this question, practice based studies have shown how objects and systems of objects can enable knowing by orchestrating collective action (Scarbrough, Panourgias, & Nandhakumar, 2015) or by "interpellating" knowledge workers, that is, by inviting them to creatively interact with the objects to develop knowledge in order to solve organizational problems (Rennstam, 2012). These orchestrations and interpellations have controlling effects because in the processes of knowing, hierarchies of knowledge are established and rearranged, and direction is staked out. Thus, a general observation here is that the origin of control must reside not in formal management but in the practical accomplishments by which various actors, human as well as nonhuman, participate.

This latter practical turn in studies of control is also where communication scholarship has contributed and is likely to contribute in the future. For instance, the communicative constitution of organizations (CCO) perspective is largely aligned with practice based studies through the understanding of "control as inherent in knowing," and of organization as an ongoing practical accomplishment in which materiality is regarded as an actor (Kuhn & Jackson, 2008, p. 474). In particular, communication studies have much to say about how objects may participate in practices of control through their ability to "speak" on behalf of other actors, a notion that has been developed within the Montreal School of organizational communication and is often referred to as "ventriloquism" (e.g., Ashcraft, Kuhn, & Cooren, 2009).

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Jens Rennstam is associate professor at the Department of Business Administration, Lund University. His research interests include organizational control, particularly in knowledge intensive contexts, materiality in organizations, practice theory, gender and diversity, branding and qualitative methods. His work has appeared in journals such as *Gender, Work and Organization*, *Human Relations*, *Organization Studies*, *Research in the Sociology of Organizations*, and *Scandinavian Journal of Management*.