"I'm a great networker"; exploring the activities of male and female training managers in English public sector health and social care agencies

by

Dr Linda Bell

Principal Lecturer

School of Health & Social Sciences, Middlesex University

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For further information please contact:
Dr Linda Bell
School of Health & Social Sciences
Middlesex University
Queensway
Enfield
Middlesex
England
EN3 4SA

l.bell@mdx.ac.uk
020 8411 5476

ABSTRACT

This paper develops work from the 'Training to Communicate' research project (1999 – 2001) which explored 'communication' training needs and provision in health and social care agencies in London and South East England. Seventeen interviews were conducted with male and female managers who were responsible for key aspects of training (workforce development) in health trusts or social services departments in England.

Previous analysis (Bell, 2005) suggests while interviewees clearly identified with 'new (managerial) occupational knowledges and identities' some appeared in a marginal or ambiguous position between 'new' occupational knowledges and identities, and 'old' identities based on occupational /practitioner expertise (Clarke & Newman, 1997). Aspects of this positioning appeared to be gendered, with female interviewees embracing the 'new' managerialist identity(ies) more readily as they produced interview narratives of how training 'came to be as it was' in their organization (Bell, 2005). This mirrors work by Morley (2003) or Deem (2003) on gendered performances in higher education contexts.

This paper further examines potentially gendered aspects of how interviewees discussed collaborative processes such as networking, managing relationships with other 'senior' and 'middle' managers within the organizational hierarchy, and broader 'political' awareness to justify their own positions, responsibilities and performances as 'training' experts.

Introduction

This paper develops work from the 'Training to Communicate' research project (1999 – 2001) which explored 'communication' training needs and provision in health and social care agencies in London and South East England. As discussed below, this was a mixed-method study which included a cross sectional, questionnaire-based survey followed by semi-structured interviews. Seventeen interviews were conducted with female and male managers who were responsible for key aspects of training (workforce development) in their employing organizations (National Health Service (NHS) Trusts or local authority-based social services departments in southern England[1]). In this paper I explore potentially gendered aspects of how these interviewees discussed collaborative processes such as networking, managing relationships with other 'senior' and 'middle' managers within the organizational hierarchy, and broader 'political' awareness which the interviewees used to justify their own positions, responsibilities and performances as 'training' experts. My approach is primarily sociological and anthropological, as I attempt (using a broadly feminist approach) to unravel the meanings which managers' attached to their activities (see also Deem, 2003; Morley, 2003). At an organizational level, I aim to suggest how my findings may link with other theories, relevant to these kinds of public sector organizations, about professional networking (Gleeson & Knights, 2006; Burt, 2004, 1998), social capital (Adkins & Skeggs, 2004; Gargiulo & Benassi, 2000) and organizational change (Ford & Harding, 2004; McGrath & Krackhardt, 2003).

Training within health or social care public sector organizations in the UK

In the UK there has been an ongoing debate about the significance of links and partnerships within and between agencies concerned with health and social services (welfare), whether in terms of professional or 'service user' concerns (Ovretveit, Mathias & Thompson (1997); Weinstein, Whittington & Leiba, 2003); as a response to specific welfare problems (e.g. Lauder, W, ,Anderson, I & Barclay, A (2005); Bliss, Cowley, & While (2000) or to shared/interprofessional educational issues (Carpenter & Hewstone, 1996; Whittington & Bell, 2001). For this reason, the research discussed here was set in this multi-agency context, and included participants from health trusts, public sector social care agencies and relevant independent sector organizations (which are frequently responsible, as 'partners', for some aspects of health or care services delivery in the UK). Partnership concerns are thus spread

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[1] Another four interviews were carried out with independent sector representatives; due to the more specialized nature of these organizations, these interviews will not be included in this analysis.

across very complex arenas of health or social care service delivery, and education / training (workforce development) for professional and non- professional staff alike.

The UK Department of Health, other government departments and relevant organizations are concerned with ensuring that all members of the workforce in these health or social care sectors are 'appropriately skilled and qualified'. Such organizations currently include 'Skills for Care and development'[2] (the sector skills council for social care, children and young people) and the 28 regionally based Strategic Health Authorities, which include workforce development consortia or directorates[3] with responsibilities for developing skills and training in the National Health service. These complex arrangements have changed considerably over the past decade, as the framework of hospital and primary care trusts and social care organizations (which was the focus of our research) has also evolved into its current shape.

We should also note here in these health or social care contexts what Webb has called a

"rapidly feminising workforce, resulting from restructuring which has enabled significant progressive change in gendered employment relations for women with graduate or similar credentials". (Webb, 2001, p.833).

According to Webb's figures, for example women were holding 49% of local government posts as managers and administrators (Webb, 2001, p.831).

This study picks up training managers' narratives at a particular moment in this past decade, yet despite changing contexts I would argue that the discourses which are revealed remain pertinent in current situations. At a more individualised level, we can add to these organizational contexts the varied professional profiles of

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[2] 'Skills for Care and development' is an alliance of organizations, licensed by the (UK) Department for Education and Skills (DfES), promoting the use of National Occupational Standards, appropriate qualifications frameworks and workforce planning, recruitment and retention. The alliance consists of 'Skills for Care' (formerly Training Organization for Personal Social Services') dealing with adult care; Children's Workforce Development Council (England); and councils for care/social care in Wales, Northern Ireland and Scotland. As a sector skills council it currently represents the needs of 60,000 employers and 2.5 million workers in the public and independent sectors.

[3] The aims of these consortia or directorates will vary by region but would include working with local NHS and non-NHS member employers to plan for an appropriate workforce, to meet local healthcare needs; working in partnership with the Department of Health, local education providers and community services to commission healthcare education (including monitoring student placements); and supporting local healthcare providers in workforce development, education and training.

interviewees taking part in this study (see Figure 2) and the various kinds of 'social capital' they had developed, for example through activities or contacts made in their present or previous jobs. As I discussed in a previous paper (Bell, 2005) this places research participants between 'new' managerialist identities relating to their current role as training experts within the organization (which many seemed content to accept) and their 'old' identities (as discussed by Clarke & Newman, 1997) that were based on occupational /practitioner expertise, for example as teacher, college lecturer/ educationalist, nurse, or housing manager. (We will see below, how this notion of building social capital is theorised with work on social networks in organizational contexts).

Returning to the point (above) about 'feminisation' of the workforce in health and social care contexts, I note an interesting theoretical discussion by Adkins (2004) of relevance to the current analysis. Adkins questions whether the apparent reworking of gender identities in such employment contexts (and the potential impact on the development of social capital) does represent what has been seen as a 'detraditionalization of gender' (for example, as proposed by Illouz, 1997):

"The feminisation of the economic field is therefore not only widely understood to constitute new forms of power for women through a re-valuing of the skills of femininity at work but also to signal a reworking of gender identities and gender relations …..widely understood to concern a detraditionalization of gender in late modernity. [Adkins suggests] …..rather than detraditionalizing, reflexivity is tied into the arrangements of gender …[and] a critical reflexive stance towards gender is increasingly characteristic of gender [a 'habit' of gender] in late modernity. (Adkins, 2004, pp. 201 – 202).

This argument resonates with some of the points by Morley (2003)(see below) i.e. that gender is still tied in firmly to the processes we observe in these 'managerialist' contexts.

Training to Communicate research project: objectives and methods

The research material discussed in this paper was gathered between 1999 and 2001 and the overall project was funded by Middlesex University. We explored 'communication' training needs and provision in the United Kingdom within London and South east region health and social care agencies, whose clients include speech- and/or language impaired adults. It was important that we did not go into the study with too many preconceptions about what 'training' means as an activity within these organizations since we wanted to explore participants' views of the activity in which they were engaged. However we also needed to identify certain aspects of training

and ask specific questions of our respondents in order to lay out a descriptive map of what kinds of training activity were going on 'on the ground'. This suggested a 'mixed' research methodology would be required and the project was therefore carried out in stages (see below and Figure 1).

The research explored links between (a) staff training needs in 'communication' generally and (b) specific training requirements for effective interaction with adults with speech- and language-impairments. As the focus was on those purchasing and providing workplace training in 'communication' for statutory and independent sector health / social care agencies in the region, as a third aim we explored c) how these training managers discussed their own activities and constructed their identities as training 'experts'.

We took a broad view by focusing on training which was "work-based" (i.e. occurring mainly in the workplace, not primarily college or university based) and included training for staff at all levels, managerial and frontline (including professionals and unqualified staff). In practice, our focus on 'communication' meant we gathered material on aspects of training and staff development including organizational 'induction' and other organizationally-based training involving 'customer care'. We received some material about specialist clinical or professional education and training, and managers discussed links to these forms of educational activity as part of the overall remit of their work.

As a first stage to the project, we designed and piloted a questionnaire and carried out a descriptive, cross-sectional *postal survey* of all relevant statutory, voluntary and private sector health and social care agencies in the London and Southeast England region. This began in February 2000. (See Figure 1 for sample and response details, by gender)

All survey respondents had some key responsibility for training and staff development either for their whole organization (usually if there was a separate training department) or else for a large section of it. Due to our emphasis on communication training, both our interviewees and the larger number of survey respondents held responsibilities mainly for statutory/mandatory and general organizational and managerial training. However some also had responsibilities for aspects of clinical/specific professional training, depending on their own specialism e.g. in nursing or social work.

This first phase of the project was followed by *semi-structured, in-depth interviews* of 21 survey respondents covering all sectors (See Figure 1), 17 being with representatives form local authority social services or NHS Trusts. As shown in Figure 2, these interviewees had varied job titles but had similar responsibilities across varied health or social care contexts.

As described previously (Bell, 2005)

I refer to the material taken from these interview transcriptions as 'narratives', since these can be seen as a series of multi-layered constructions which each tell the interviewee's story of how training came to be as it was in the specific context under investigation at the time of interview.   This fits Elliott's definition of three key characteristics of narratives – they are *chronological* (representations of sequences of events), *meaningful* (i.e. they make sense to the interviewee, who then tries to evaluate and convey this meaning to the listener; and *social*, since they produced for a specific audience (in this case, an interviewer from a research project which concerns training for communication in health or social care agencies[4])   (Elliott, 2005, p. 4).

In analysing these narratives I have made use of Mauthner & Doucet's (1998) work describing the processes involved in using a combination of four readings of each transcript[5]:

- o   Reading 1 - for the plot and for our responses to the narrative
- o   Reading 2 - for the voice of the 'I' [how the interviewee speaks about her/himself]
- o   Reading 3 - for relationships
- o   Reading 4 - placing people within cultural contexts and social structures

This enables an in-depth understanding of each narrative before more specific overarching themes are derived and analysed.

Organizations, networks and social capital in changing times

In a previous paper I described how, when this research project was carried out,

"health and social care services were engaged in extensive reorganization as part of wider managerialist agendas: discourses of 'change', 'excellence' and 'quality' (Clarke & Newman, 1997) therefore pervaded all aspects of work in these organizations" (From abstract, Bell, 2005)

I also explained in that paper (Bell, 2005) how

"Themes of quality, constant change and continuous improvement were evident in the narratives of both male and female interviewees. Most of these interviewees clearly identified with the 'new (managerial) occupational knowledges and identities'…..; however some were also engaged in, or had previously worked as, staff with occupational expertise (as noted above) and so the kinds of tensions

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[4] "While the speaker can be understood as responsible for producing a narrative with an acceptable evaluation, the addressee or audience must collaborate by demonstrating that the evaluation has been understood' (Elliott, op cit. p.9)

[5] Derived from the work of Carol Gilligan (1982*) In a different voice: psychological theory and women's development.* Cambs, MA, Harvard University Press

suggested by Clarke and Newman (1997) between 'old' and 'new' are especially pertinent to those narratives. Nearly all of the interviewees discuss and explain at length, for example, how they cope with the fast changing environments that they manage, and how they try to meet the sometimes conflicting expectations of their organizations, various professionals and wider ethical and governance requirements " (Bell, 2005, p. 15)

In the current paper I therefore wanted to look more closely at what interviewees said about collaborative processes; these encompassed networking, managing relationships with other 'senior' and 'middle' managers within the organizational hierarchy, and broader 'political' awareness to justify their own positions, responsibilities and performances as 'training' experts. As I discussed in a previous paper, to which readers are also referred, (Bell,2004) time and temporalities were key areas in this research for understanding processes such as the active management of training; in that paper I drew upon theoretical frameworks relevant to time, that are still useful in this paper, but these will not be focused on here.

Gender dimensions, particularly to the identified 'continuous improvement' discourse in particular, were already theorized by Morley in her study of higher education settings, who notes (following Walkerdine):

   . 'femininity is performance, and girls are socialized to perform with diligence and
   conscientiousness. Women's gender socialization makes them particularly well
   schooled players in quality assurance' (Morley, 2003,. pp. 157-8)

Deem (2003) also discusses gender dimensions of management in higher education settings in the UK, which raises further possibilities for applying some of these insights to broader 'educational' settings occurring in work-based contexts.

Before discussing specific findings from this research project, I turn to some other recent theoretical explorations of networking, social capital and organizational change, which are relevant to the present discussion. Although the current study did not involve collecting detailed social network data, the literature relating to social networks and the generation of social capital in organizations has suggested several points which we can explore within the interview material. Granovetter's seminal paper (1973) and later work (1983) had already suggested that it was important to consider at the strength and usefulness of 'weak ties' in a person's network, and this laid the groundwork for some more recent theories about social networks in organizations[6]. Gargiulo & Benassi (2000) provide a useful synopsis of recent work

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[6] There have also been studies of networking across organizations that are directly relevant to the present research, for example Whittington (1983)

on how social networks may be considered to create social capital in organizational contexts. They compare the notions of

"*network closure* (Coleman 1988) [which] stresses the role of cohesive ties in fostering a normative environment that facilitates cooperation. [and] *Structural hole theory* (Burt 1992) sees cohesive ties as a source of rigidity that hinders the coordination of complex organizational tasks.". (Abstract)

Looking further at Burt's work (Burt, 2004) we see he suggests that: "Brokerage across the structural holes between groups provides a vision of options otherwise unseen, which is the mechanism by which brokerage becomes social capital" (Burt, 2004, Abstract).

In an earlier paper (Burt, 1998) Burt had also suggested some potential gender inequalities in the acquisition and application of social capital in organizations. This argument is not based on the idea of innate sex differences, but on the notion of 'insiders and outsiders'. Burt suggests that whereas we might expect those in an organization who are perceived as 'outsiders' (including women in some cases) to 'do better' in generating social capital when they can construct their own cohesive networks, this causes problems if as a result they are unable to span 'structural holes' between groups. As he suggests in the quote (above) according to this theory brokerage across 'structural holes' is essential in generating social capital. He suggests that in organizations where women may find they have a 'legitimacy problem', they will do better if they can 'borrow' social capital and network links, for example from a sponsor. Another way of thinking about this issue would be to reconsider (with Coleman) what benefits might be gained from building up cohesive, supportive ties. As Gargiulo & Benassi (2000) comment, there must surely be trade offs between the relative 'safety' of a cohesive network and the flexibility of one that has structural holes and is more dispersed.

Considering networks at a broader organizational level raises the issue of whether understanding their structure can assist understanding of, or even facilitate change in, organization(s) (assuming we are willing to stay with this 'structural' approach, for the time being). McGrath & Krackhardt (2003) for example discuss suggest that there are three useful models of change relating to organizational networks:

"the E-I model predicts that cross-departmental friendship ties will help generate positive response to change in organizations by fostering trust and shared identity".

"The viscosity model predicts that introducing controversial (not clearly good or bad) change into the periphery of an organization and carefully regulating the interaction of innovators and nonadopters provides the best chance that it will diffuse successfully.

"..the structural leverage theory presents a mathematical model that supports broad diffusion of clearly superior change, informing as many people as possible about the change"   McGrath & Krackhardt (2003)

Exploring the narratives of the interviewees in the Training to Communicate project does suggest initially that they were working with differing notions of how change could be spread through the organization, which resonate with these different network models; this also seemed to have connections with the way each person talked about their own networking or brokerage activities.

However, thus far we have been discussing networks as if they are fairly concrete entities which support expressions of strategic action and this raises the frequently, historically invoked binary conceptualisation of 'structure versus agency'. I suggest here that it may be problematic to try and separate out the structure of networks from what goes on within them via the links between people. In these particular contexts that I have already described as replete with discourses of change and 'continuous improvement', does it make any sense to perpetuate this underlying theoretical dichotomy? Perhaps we should question whether or how we can view these interviewees as acting 'strategically' as rational actors within organisational structures? Some researchers such as Gleeson & Knights (2006) also find the 'structure versus agency' dichotomy unhelpful in relation to public sector professionals and try to present an argument for transcending this dualism. They suggest that it is a mistake to see public sector professionals as either de-professionalised 'victims' of managerialism or audit culture, or else as strategic operators (but see also Dent & Whitehead (eds), 2002. Instead they call for :

  "a *relational* understanding of political interest and regime change that intersects
  professional and public issues at different levels" (Gleeson & Knights (2006),
  p.290)

This would offer 'a way of understanding *emerging constructions of professionalism* through which practitioners are more likely to find their authority and legitimacy'. (Gleeson & Knights, op.cit, p.291) (my emphasis).

In addition to this argument, Ford & Harding's (2004) work is useful in suggesting that these *emerging constructions* may occur within amorphous contexts which may be perceived differently by managers compared to other kinds of staff. In Ford & Harding's own study (concerning the merger of two large teaching hospitals), front line workers saw the idea of work 'place' as location based (and this had very little connection with an overarching view of 'the organisation') whereas managers appeared to focus their organisational activities in 'space not place'[7]

> "There is no gap in [an example] narrative between the manager's discussion of the management structure and her own place – the management structure 'crosses the sites' , so the manager has to be 'in two places at once'. The two are identical: the manager and the management structure are mimetic. The management structure is both akin to a grid superimposed upon the organization with the manager moving across, around and within it, and to the manager's embodied presence. The manager represents herself in her narrative as both subject and object". (Ford & Harding, 2004, p. 822)

Ford and Harding, looking at similar types of organization to some of those in the present study (large hospitals) also go as far as to suggest here is a situation where

> 'the boundaries of the self and those of the organization merge and disappear, rendering managers subordinate and subservient …..There is no agentive manager within an organizational structure; there is rather an organization inscribed upon the body of the manager, each collapsed into the other' (Ford & Harding, op cit, p. 827)

This argument is potentially useful for understanding the activities of the managers in the current study who deal with training /workforce development; they try to facilitate learning by front line staff about their statutory and other responsibilities, and are engaged in spreading messages ('communication') from senior management across the organization, including messages about staff members' position(s) in that organisation. These activities are taking place across spaces that clearly relate to the managers' constructions of their own identities as training experts. However I had already noted in previous work on this project that

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[7] This work is derived from a post-modern reading of the theories of Henri Lefebvre (1974/ trans 1991) *The production of space* Oxford: Blackwell

> When attempting to 'construct' narratives in this analysis I have often found it difficult to separate out comments relating to the individual's responsibilities from the generally more extensive narrative around what the department or employing agency did. In some cases this voice of the 'I'[8] was not very clearly expressed and a more collective voice tended to be expressed. (Bell, 2005, p. 12)

My suggestion would be (following Ford & Harding) that we should look in the narratives for these representations which present and construct management forms and embodied, gendered and performed professional identities, apparently simultaneously. In doing this, we can explore the potentially gendered nature of these constructions.

I will now draw more closely upon the current project narratives and discuss some of the findings relevant to these issues

"I'm a great networker…."; training managers constructing their professional spaces /identities

The four readings (Mauthner & Doucet, 1998) that I used to identify themes from the interviews had already resulted in my discussion of discourses of *quality, constant change* and *continuous improvement*, as examined in Bell (2005). The present exploration of the narratives draws upon the theoretical insights about networks, social capital, and emerging constructions of self/organization discussed above. I suggest that different managers were speaking about collaborative processes and their professional spaces /identities in terms of some combination of these additional discourses :

Corporacy within a 'bounded' sphere
Mediating across structural gaps (or 'holes')
Strategic professionalism

The combination and expression of these discourses did vary between interviewees, and included gendered elements, although some managers (and their organisations) did 'fit' more easily into only one. These identified discourses are intended to *collapse* (following Ford & Harding) what appear to be the separate elements of how managers viewed and spoke about their networks of contacts, their organizational and 'political' environment(s) or structures, and how they viewed and discussed their own professionalism. This enables further connections to be drawn by exploring, for example, what were the trade offs between the relative 'safety' of what were

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[8] Drawn out partly through the second reading involved in Mauthner and Doucet's framework.

perceived as cohesive networks and the flexibility of those having structural holes that are more dispersed (as identified earlier, Gargiulo & Benassi (2000).

Looking at these processes has further implications, as I have already suggested, for the ways in which these managers were working with notions of how change could be spread through the organization[9], which resonates with the different network models identified by McGrath & Krackhardt (2003)

Corporacy within a 'bounded' sphere

As an example illustrating how this discourse strongly pervaded one narrative, bringing together the individual, the kinds of organisational spaces and the activities within them, we can draw upon this account by a female Corporate Development and Training manager[10] in a local authority (social services department).

> *Interviewee A* **"….**even where I was before I was part of a team I wasn't a, a lone person, we were quite specialised because there's, for example there's somebody, my counterpart who works with children and families and my counterpart who actually met you at the lift, erm, who's the mental health person so we have specialisms, erm, becoming part of a corporate team means that we have, erm, you know our scope is, is is huge (it is huge yes) er, and that's, I mean it's er, I suppose at times it's er, it's quite er..
> *Interviewer:* There's a lot of collective responsibility?
> *Interviewee A* There's a, there is a lot of.. responsibility for, a huge number of people and a large and complex organisation (yeh) but the other side of that is that it's, it's also very exciting, and there are things that you can do at kind of corporate level that..
> *Interviewer:* Mm, do you feel supported?
> *Interviewee A* ..Erm...... (more so than before?)...... I am, I am well supported, I am well supported, but I think, I mean....... yeh I mean I think I'm well supported in the corporate team, I think I was quite well supported before, but I, (right) but it's, but it's different now.."

One interesting element in this narrative is that despite the corporate focus this interviewee speaks personally and her individual voice is not merged within 'corporate' activities, compared to how these were described by other interviewees. However, she also describes the activities involved in 'training in the organization' as having merged with that organization itself, which she interprets in terms of business or corporacy:

> *Interviewee A*: I also think that, training is becoming, seen as more part of the organisation and less as a kind of add-on..
> *Interviewer* I see, yes, it's become intrinsic.

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[9] As I noted in Bell (2005) in general "Managers (both male and female) often seemed to present themselves as agents of change, bringing 'the message' about using training and staff development in new and more effective ways to other colleagues who may be reluctant to accept this" (p.9)

[10] In this case, even the job title exudes 'corporacy'

> *Interviewee A:*   In the actual processes of the organisation… and if I tell you that the book I'm currently reading is called Training as a Business... I wouldn't have been reading that book 10 years ago, firstly it wouldn't have been written, and I wouldn't have been reading it, and I think that really encapsulates the, the shift that we're seeing..

In other parts of this narrative we see the organization being viewed as a 'bounded' space although there are some complexities around how far the training activities she is involved in go beyond that sphere:

> " our service users if you like are the people who come on, any training we might deliver, they use our, they access the training and development services that we provide (yes, these are staff members?) that's er staff members or members of partner organisations (yes), erm or occasionally service users as well, but in addition to that, indirectly, what the purpose of our activity is to enable staff, to actually provide a better service a good service, to the residents of [the borough]"

Despite the description of particular contacts or activities *within* the organization, and the indication that 'outsiders' can come in to access training, in this particular narrative any discussion of personal networking or mediation is conspicuous by its absence. This seems to be an example where the (perceived) cohesiveness of the organization itself, coupled with collective adherence to *quality* and *continuous improvement* discourses within it, reflects the individual's feeling of safety epitomized by the phrase 'I am well supported'.

Another way to read this narrative is to say that, unlike the kinds of organization identified by Burt (Burt, 1998) where women may find they have a 'legitimacy problem', this setting reflects Webb's (2001) notion of a 'feminising workforce' and this potentially offers women greater opportunities for advancement and the generation of sufficient social capital to enable this interviewee feel she is helping to carry through clearly superior[11] revolutionary changes:

> *Interviewee A*: "I also think that's [training is] part of a bigger, a bigger revolution which is taking place in the, in the workplace, I think our workplace has changed like all workplaces have changed (yes) and there is greater recognition that, you need to be constantly, I mean these words like re-skilling and up-skilling you know, …about ensuring that people really do have the capacity to, be able to move from job to job, to be more flexible to be more adaptable, erm, to be positive about, you know, the constant change that they now have to work in.."

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[11] Perhaps akin to the model of 'structural leverage theory' identified earlier by McGrath & Krackhardt (2003)

However, Morley's (2003) and Deem's (2003) work also seem to support my earlier suggestion that in this kind of context women managers, like this interviewee, might be positive about organizational or professional changes but in doing so they display 'a more accepting 'performative' voice reflecting quality or continuing improvement discourses' (Bell, 2005, p.13)

As a comparison to this narrative, we might draw upon the account provided by a male Head of Training and Development Unit (*Interviewee B*) in an NHS Trust. Although the focus here is also on 'corporacy', this is cast particularly in terms of the interviewee's own 'domain' within the organization, reflecting his own professional 'self' and which he describes as :

> one of the best departments in, [the area] and I don't say that lightly, and I say that, purely and simply based on the fact that we are exceptionally well staffed, we are well resourced and we have full support of the Chief Executive Board, erm, I have never worked in an organisation that er has invested so much in training, …I mean it really is, and, we've also won contracts and therefore allows us to expand even further (that's good) and that's why, smaller trusts are actually buying into our training

An important part of building up the reputation of this department was personal networking, facilitated by the interviewee and his colleague having recently joined the NHS and having maintained previous contacts. On this point the narrative is moving towards another discourse focused more on 'structural gaps':

> *Interviewee B:* "To access, [training courses] we've got, contacts (sure), erm, I'm new to the NHS so's my, pointing over there he's not there at the moment, my colleague is (yeh) erm, we have contacts on the outside, (sure), what we'll actually do if we want someone with a specialism we will look around and see what's on the market, …invite people in, to see what they're like, like I did with the erm, a signing course recently and ……[ ]…..then we like them, we give them a trial, and if we like them, we bring them back.
> *Interviewer:* Right, so you wouldn't go to another hospital trust and ask them whether they'd tried something would you or..?
> *Interviewee B*:   Yes, yeh, oh that's, yes we'd ask around, for example with the person that we brought in recently we , the erm Director of Occupational Health said he had a great contact and this person was magic (yes), bring this person in and we did oh yes we use all, we do, *we do networks*" (my emphasis)

Mediating across structural gaps (or 'holes')

As in the last quote, several of the narratives fitted a discourse of 'mediating' or 'facilitating' and it became clear from a close reading of these interview texts that in these examples the interviewee felt s/he was mediating across wide networks or organizational 'spaces' involving what Burt has theorised as 'structural holes'. As discussed earlier, this mediating

activity was an integral part of the emerging construction of interviewees' own professional identities and social capital: .

"I'm a great networker*"   Female Head of Training and Development*

In the next narrative example, this discourse is partly combined with a focus on 'corporacy', yet the interviewee is also aware that she is facilitating links across 'space not place', working within and across less bounded spheres; however she is somewhat pessimistic about what she defines as a lack of corporacy for front line staff she deals with who are more 'location' focused (Ford & Harding, 2004) :

> *Interviewee C:* In a Trust such as this there is always a communication problem because there are 2500 people and they're spread across a large geographical area and there's not always a sense of corporacy, individuals do not always feel, I think that's the right word, because they're based in different places. So they'll be based in [their own agency] that's where they stand in their work, day in, day out, so the sense of corporacy is towards that organisation. We're just a name, or the people who pay them. Now I don't know whether that matters or not really. But in terms of communication, because we have a lot of staff out and about who may not ever come together…….., communication is quite difficult sometimes
> *Female Training and Development manager*

Despite these comments this interviewee was able to describe how she found that effective communication *was* a vehicle for facilitating links between different spaces. What we might term social capital relevant to training activity is being built up via personal network contacts:

> *Interviewee C:* "…many of us have links with other organisations, so if someone says, 'well I want someone to work with me on ....', someone else will say, 'well I'm working with X and they're very good, and I'd recommend them', or, 'in another hospital such and such is happening and that works very well, we could ask them to talk to us', it's very much how things work in the health service, personal recommendation is most important.

However social capital can also be built up via other 'links with the community',. The interview passage below also supports the idea that sometimes "the boundaries of the self and those of the organization merge and disappear" (Ford & Harding, op cit). For example here it is interesting that when the interviewee speaks of 'service' she merges notions of training services with health (direct) services) in presenting common goals towards achieving 'valuable, effective and efficient' outcomes:

> *Interviewee C:* "There's a big emphasis at the moment on working in partnership and to do that you need to be able to communicate well, to be able to understand what service is needed of you, what service is wanted of you and what is possible to be provided and I think therefore all the service providers, whoever they might be, whether, they're the directors who are managing the services, or whether they're the people at grass roots level providing, *need to have those links with the community* in order to understand what provision we should be making and if what we are providing is valuable, effective and efficient.

In another part of her interview narrative this interviewee describes as part of her responsibilities the processes involved in filtering ideas about change through the organization[12]. In this sense 'training' is merged as part of the overall organizational activity. This involves engaging and coping with micro-political issues (Morley, 2003) which she defines in terms of 'speculation & rumour' :

> *Interviewee C* "….it changes all so very quickly and this is one of the things that the Trust has to deal with because changes happen very rapidly and at a Director and a Board level. Those changes are known about and some preparation may be made to communicate that information to staff, but then that's overtaken by events because something happens and impacts on that change and there's some new event and we need to change that information and give them some new information and I think one of the issues is how we take the information that we have and translate it and filter it in a way that makes sense to staff who are not sitting at the top table and who don't have every day that information coming in, but who use it and want to know what's happening. So maybe once a week, once a month, I don't know, they'll need an update, (pause), But you have to remember that they're not in contact with that information except at that point when you're delivering it so there's a big gap between when they first have the information and when they're now getting the information update. In between there's lots of rumour and speculation and conjecture, and it's managing all of that, really"

In another example, the interviewee (D) a Development and training manager who has been in post for 6 years, is very aware of structural gaps in the networks within her organization. She discusses her view that understanding of the political processes involved at different levels in the organization can facilitate training as well as bringing about organizational changes, but she also echoes Interviewee C's misgivings about a lack of 'corporacy' and political awareness in her colleagues:

> *Interviewee D:* ". I guess the not very hidden agenda [for the organization] is about changing the way that particularly middle managers think, and, and the way that they approach the leadership task.
> *Interviewer*:   What changes do you feel are necessary?
>
> *Interviewee D:* I would say that..... I mean there are a few things that come to mind, the first one is that... there's a very narrow focus, about, the area that they, that leaders specifically are looking at so, for instance a ward manager, her focus is, purely, almost in a blinkered way, in her area, . along with that is the ability to.... to give the impression of having political awareness, and that's a really big issues for us here, er so because the focus is narrow, it's quite blinkered, it means that there isn't much corporacy, and there isn't much what I think of as wisdom really about how you work in a political environment, and those things together mean, that there is a real breakdown between top management and middle management.
>
> *Interviewer* :   Can you, talk a little bit more about, what you mean by, political awareness, political context in which these things are, need to be aware of....

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[12]   We might see this in terms of the E-I model of change which makes use of cross organizational ties, although these seem to be formalised rather than necessarily based on informal networking.

Interviewee D Well, I mean actually that's a really good question because, one of my jobs of course is to go out there and find out what senior managers think, political awareness means because they're saying that's what [training] these people need, and to be honest with you the, the, the sort of, ideas that come back are.... kind of limited, you know when you ask people what does it mean, there's kind of er, well, I don't know, it's just political awareness. It seems to come down to, having helicopter vision is something that's often quoted, having an eye, having an eye to the bigger picture, whilst running your area, understanding how your area fits into the bigger picture, and understanding perhaps what some of the, higher level priorities are, around the Trust and, particularly in terms of you know the clamouring for resources understanding that, that sometimes you won't get the resources you want because actually there are higher priorities   ………………………………………………….

Interviewer: Yes... well, with regard to what you say, you're saying about this, political, awareness, it must throw up some specific [training] problems?

Interviewee D The fundamental problem is the definition.. what would we be looking for, if these people were politically aware, what would we see that we don't see now? How would it be different? Erm, we did some work on behavioural competences which kind of started to unpack that, the problem with them is, that, much of it is down to subjective judgement as to whether somebody... behaves in that way or not

'Strategic professionalism'

In the examples above, whilst interviewees may have had their own professional 'agendas', and were mediating across gaps or structural holes, these activities were very much in the context of supporting the 'corporate' aims of the organization, as we have already noted, based in discourses of constant change and continuous improvement.

I have identified an additional discourse of 'strategic professionalism' ; these are examples where we might see managers acting in a more individualised or even 'subversive' way, in parallel to these organisational, collaborative discourses which, Ford & Harding suggest, can render managers' 'subordinate and subservient'. In two examples below (one male and one female) the manager was very clearly *not* subservient to any agenda other than their own sense of professionalism. These were the mavericks, people who had been in post for a relatively long period, who knew what they wanted to do and did it.   However their relationships with the employing organizations were complex. In the first example, the male manager (E) bemoaned his employer's failure to support his work by supplying promised information which would enable him to provide an effective training service; later in the interview he turns out to be supplying a consultancy service as a sideline which supports developments and

changes[13] he wants to make to the training service and which is based on his own personal professionalism:

> *Interviewee E* "they invite me to more sessions to train ,the people who are with the other Trusts in observation skills, and……, that again is going to be done on a, that will be on a private basis, …because it is outside of my normal... the scope of my, work here, and, and I'll be quite, honest with you, once I've learnt the use of my skills ………
> *Interviewer:*   …..so again they're drawing on your expertise to... someone that they, have contact with knowing the work and then they can draw on, on that,
>
> *Interviewee E* Yes, so that's we tend to work as, organisations like that, erm, if there's someone we know who's good we bring them in, and one of the, in terms of (?), I've been around this area for, erm, probably about 15 years so I *know*, erm, (right, yes), and I'm staying here, around this area so business has got a degree of stability for them and for me because my name keeps cropping up , we could do with some of that, erm, and I'm known, so I'm, quite lucky "

In the second example the (female) manager takes a very personal interest in having a professional 'overview' of everything that is going on both within her organization and across other linked agencies, including education providers. She has even managed to persuade these organizations to change their curricula to suit her own vision of what is required by her organization.   In this case the manager and her organization are 'merged' and yet she describes the work in terms of her own authority and 'struggle': she is the complete opposite of a public sector manager who is rendered 'subordinate and subservient' by organizational requirements

> *Interviewee F:* '…..although my post was created to have an overview of all training and development across the Trust, as I'm sure you will have picked up you know there are certain professions that are very precious about their development (yes) and like to hold that back so, it's been a long long struggle but I'm really pleased to say that with the commitment of the executive team etc we now have a situation where I, co-manage nurse education, co-manage medical education, .. as well as the central training department so we really do have a complete overview.
>
> *Interviewee F* : '…since, I I've been co-managing that in the last 2 years and we have really started to influence their [university] curriculum………, so, we're getting there (yes) it's like British Rail but we will get there British Rail never did (ha ha)
>
> *Interviewee F:* I've actually been in development for 20 years and I've got a really good portfolio of people that I dip into and use….

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[13] Is this an example of a viscosity model of change ? (McGrath & Krackhardt (2003) - instigated by the manager rather than via the organization itself.

Conclusions

The three discourses I have identified within these narratives help to represent managers' explanations of the *collaborative processes* in which they take part within and beyond their organizations. Indeed, following Ford and Harding's (2004) analysis, we can see how the organizations and the managers' identities might be seen as 'merged'. The material available from this study allows us to consider what Gleeson and Knights (2006) have called "a *relational* understanding of political interest" when considering training managers' activities. Burt's (1998, 2004) work has been useful in showing up the importance of 'structural gaps' in networks for facilitating or mediating, suggesting the continuing possibility of some degree of agency. In this context it draws attention to how interviewees might be seen partially acting as agents across different spaces, and not just as behaving as if they were 'subordinate and subservient'.

Does this mean that in these contexts we should reject Gleeson and Knights' (2006) attempts to transcend 'structure/agency dualism'? I am not sure. I did find places and spaces where managers and their organizations appeared to merge, where their professional identities and organizational processes were so entwined as to be inseparable. But I also felt a discourse of strategic professionalism was being generated by some interviewees and was breaking through in surprising ways to allow managers to develop personal strategic power which was anything but a sign of subservience.

My earlier contention (Bell, 2005) was that it was women managers who seemed more readily accepting of discourses of continuous improvement and change; in the analysis for this paper it was women who were perhaps more inclined to see themselves as 'facilitators' within corporate settings. Even more clearly, some female interviewees (notably some who had been in post for a long time) seemed to value the cohesiveness which came with a focus on bounded structures and corporacy. To that extent I think I have found gender differences in the ways in which these managers spoke about their collaborative work. However others (both male and female) had disrupted this emphasis on corporacy by taking a more strategic professional and entrepreneurial approach across wider spaces. To this extent they were the least likely to 'merge' with their organizations. Further research in these health and social care sectors which draws directly upon social network data might enable deeper understanding of some of these contradictions.

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FIGURE ONE   TRAINING TO COMMUNICATE PROJECT

SURVEY SAMPLE AND RESPONSES (BY GENDER)

We surveyed all relevant agencies in the London and southeast region as follows:

SURVEY SAMPLE

LOCAL AUTHORITY/SOCIAL SERVICES   n = 40 (Women = 26, Men = 14)

NHS TRUSTS   n = 75   (Women = 54,   Men = 21)

INDEPENDENT SECTOR   n = 39 (Women = 24, Men = 15)

Completed questionnaires were received from a total of **76** agency representatives as follows:

SURVEY RESPONSES

LOCAL AUTHORITY /SOCIAL SERVICES n = 21 (Women = 13,   Men = 8)
NHS TRUSTS;   n= 28 (Women = 19,   Men = 9)
INDEPENDENT SECTOR n = 27 (Women = 14, Men = 9, + 4 gender not known)

<u>Training brochures and other documentary materials</u> were also collected from a number of the agencies we surveyed, and these were subsequently discussed in interviews:

◊ from 7 Local Authority Social Services or Social Services & Housing departments;

◊ from 14 NHS Hospital or community health Trusts;

◊ and from 3 agencies in the independent sector

INTERVIEW PHASE

<u>Semi-structured, in-depth interviews</u> were carried out with 21 survey respondents covering all sectors.

◊ 6 from Local Authority Social Services or Social Services & Housing departments;

◊ 11 from NHS Hospital or community Health Trusts; and

◊ 4 from the independent sector - voluntary or private organizations

FIGURE TWO – INTERVIEWEE PROFILES

Job title	Organization type & code	Gender	Time in current post
Acting Head, Staff Development Unit (*Organization development adviser*)	S08 Social services	Female	1 year (temporary), returning shortly to substantive post
Training Manager	S11 Social services	Female	2-5 years
Head of Social Services Training	S16 Social services and housing	Male	5-10 years
Staff Development Manager	S18 Social services	Female	Just over 1 year
Corporate Development and Training manager	S27 Social services	Female	10+ years
Training and Development Manager	S28 Housing and social services	Male	>1yr but <2 years
Head of Training and Development	T05 Hospital (NHS) Trust	Female	2-5 years
Training and Development Manager	T11 Hospital (NHS) Trust	Male	Just over 1 year
Training Advisor	T17 Community NHS Trust	Female	8 months
Head of staff Development	T20 Hospital (NHS) Trust	Female	6 years
Head of Training and Development Unit	T26 Hospital (NHS) Trust	Male	>1yr but <2 years
Training and Development manager	T36 Community (NHS) Trust	Female	2-5 years
Deputy Nurse Director, Staff Development	T41 Hospital (NHS) Trust	Female	6-12 months
Training and Development Manager	T43 Hospital (NHS) Trust	Male	>1yr but <2 years
Training Manager	T54 Hospital (NHS) Trust	Male	9 years
Development and Training Manager	T74 Hospital (NHS) Trust	Female	6 years
Education and Training Manager	T99 Hospital (NHS) Trust	Female	>1yr but <2 years