leadership within a given organization, constraining the kinds of alternative stories which can be articulated.

Against the backdrop of these reported aspects of the every day, lived experience of managers, supervisors, and employees was the promotion of an entirely different and new discourse from the senior levels of the organization. A promotional video spoke of the importance of teamwork, integrity, respect for diversity and differing learning styles. The preferred picture of the division as disseminated via this video stood in stark contrast to some vital aspects of the lived experience of many organizational actors with whom I had spoken. The discourse promoted by the video elevated the importance of education, collaboration and integrated teamwork yet did not address how this could happen within a culture still dominated by scientific management structures and practices. The fact that upper management were not dictating the terms through which these changes would occur allowed for organizational actors to become partners in the process. Such an approach is considered by organizational change theorists to be a precondition for effective and lasting organizational development (Beer et al., 1990).

It was hoped that our design of a participatory leadership development process, attentive to the distribution of the material and symbolic resources of power and their effects, could crack open the window represented by the video, facilitating organizational actors to speak to their preferred experiences of leadership whilst respecting that the accounts they could give in public would necessarily be constrained by the matrix of social relations within the public domain of the conferences.

Role of the Design Team

A crucial feature in the design of this particular project was the composition of the team responsible for co-creating the conference and assessing its effects. Design team members were, in effect, peers to conference participants. They therefore not only had a very high level of commitment to the success of the leadership development process but were also representative of the company as informants in relation to the organizational culture, its strengths, weaknesses and possibilities for change. Furthermore, they were also diverse in terms of organizational function, gender and “race”.

Previously, I noted that certain organizational issues seem to be too dangerous to speak to openly and directly. They can only be inferred by listening to what may be unsaid in an environment where one would expect them to be high on the agenda. This was the case in this company concerning the issue of “race”, particularly in light of the large number of employees and managers of color. I was able to use design team meetings as a venue within which such issues could be openly discussed and receive suggestions as to how to address their complexity without potentially exposing already vulnerable populations to harm (Srivastva, S. 1993).

Emerging Stories From the Team Inquiry Process

In keeping with the spirit of the Team Inquiry process, I am presenting the major elements of common stories generated through the interviews, expressed in a form which
loosely adapts the structure of the narrative interview as a means of organizing the data (Combs and Freedman, 1996). It is grouped under the following headings,

1. Dominant Practices of Management and Leadership
3. Employees as Consultants, Employees Teach Supervisors and Managers about Leadership

I have also broken down the themes further in order to give space to the different kinds of stories which emerged from the different social locations of this work context.

The process of moving from interviews to reflection/inquiry teams to TIC fishbowl groups or listening teams generated a lot of rich relational data (Park, 1997), suggestive of the ways in which the expression of particular experiences moved and affected those who were “outsider-witnesses” (White, 1997). I hope to capture a sense of the richness of this data by including comments made across all of these dialogical and multilogical settings, where appropriate.

**Dominant Practices of Management and Leadership**

**Shop Floor Employees Perspectives**

Karen, a craftworker and one of few women of color women on the shop floor spoke of her experiences with sexism in her workplace that she felt were linked to a lack of discipline and control.

Her complaints centered around the disrespect that she received as a female craftworker from both peers and supervisors.

Karen described disputes with her supervisor where he flatly refused to take her complaints related to the discrimination she was experiencing seriously. She spoke of how she feared being labeled a “troublemaker” by others on the shop floor.

When asked what kept her going in the midst of such a hostile work environment, she described the sense of gratification she derived from working with her hands, constructing a product with tools that had taken her time to develop mastery over. Furthermore, she derived satisfaction from doing a male defined job, sometimes better than the men with whom she worked.

In the listening team report outs which followed these interviews, other women appreciated Karen’s courage in speaking out, adding to her voice their own stories of discrimination within the organization thereby lessening not only hers but also their sense of isolation and private pain. Her stories were met with expressions of incredulity from some of the male managers and supervisors, which prompted other male managers to speak out, attesting to their witnessing of abusive behaviors directed at female employees.

James, a shop floor employee spoke of the improvements that he had noticed over the years in terms of supervisory skills and styles. He had worked with some good and some not so good supervisors. James remarked upon the favoritism that some supervisors demonstrated to other employees.

Janice, a white female craftworker, had been interviewed.

She had been very much “on the bubble,” with new developments. She had not been promoted and an equal opportunity was not in the cards.

On the more negative side, her skill level and team leaders, who were male, did not see her in limbo between those who had been laid off and that as an employee whose skills were respected.

Fred, a white male, used to work as a “troubleshooter” who was good at the job of dealing with work issues. He had been laid off but was back in work. He had been able to move into a new job with the shop and gotten a pay raise. He didn’t like the work, he would work 12 hour days but he enjoyed being a supervisor.

Furthermore, he was working in the office administrative side of the shop with the shop administration. After he got back to work, he had to go from work physical and then back to work.

Gina, an African American woman, had been “over” her. A mile away from her when her boss was around. She thought her boss was a jerk but after her boss was gone she felt that her manager was treating her better.

Paul, an African American, had worked for a mechanic shop where he had been a very little competent. He was putting themselves out lack of a supervisor who was a jerk. He was a jerk which involved not
demonstrated to certain employees over others, linking this to employee’s “race”. This behavior was described by him as “cliquish”, affecting how the supervisor was seen by other employees. He felt that this lead to a sense of mistrust that spread out among the craftworkers.

Office Employees Perspectives

Janice, a white female office employee was pregnant with her third child when interviewed.

She had been with the company for several years and reported some positive new developments. She was now working as part of a team where everyone had an equal vote and an equal opportunity to speak.

On the more negative side, she spoke of receiving conflicting demands from managers and team leaders, a common example of one of the growing pains associated with being in a limbo between different organizational and management/leadership styles. She stated that as an employee, she needed her boss to demonstrate that she was trusted and respected.

Fred, a white male employee who had recently moved from the shop floor to an office job spoke about the different treatment he received in his new position. He spoke of experiencing “culture shock” in his move to office work after many years as a craftworker. He said that he was treated with more respect and not “like a kid” as he had been on the shop floor. Like many craftworkers, while working on the shop floor he had felt like there was always someone looking over his shoulder and monitoring his work. In his current position, he felt trusted to get on with his job.

Furthermore, Fred noticed that, environmentally, a lot of things were different when working in the office than on the shop floor. The office seemed quiet when compared with the shop and he was now able to wear clean clothes. He no longer arrived home from work physically exhausted with a headache after working sometimes 8-17 hours a day.

Gina, an African-American white collar employee, spoke of managers who “watch over” her. A mother of small children, she spoke of the additional strains placed upon her when her boss is unable to understand that her children come first. Additionally, though formally she was entitled to work flextime, in practice this was hard to do as she felt that her manager would use this as a strike against her.

Supervisors Perspectives

Paul, an African-Caribbean supervisor who had worked his way up from being mechanic spoke about his own experiences of working with supervisors who had had very little competence and who, as a result, covered up their lack of knowledge by not putting themselves into a position where they might be seen to be ignorant. He spoke of a supervisor who avoided meeting with employees in a group. He also avoided situations which involved reading company directives to employees out loud.
Angela spoke of the level of intimidation and fears of retribution experienced by some of the employees because many supervisors failed to treat them with respect.

**Manager’s Perspectives**

Ellen, a white female senior executive spoke of her former “take charge, autocratic style”, saying that she used to be heavy handed in relations with the people who reported to her. When asked by a TIC whether she felt it had been hard for her as a woman to be in a male dominated field, she replied that it had been.

Another white female senior executive in human resources, Sharon, spoke of her sense that she was in a position where she was “allowed” to have a relational style as human resources is seen as “women’s work”. She felt that this attitude was unproductive for the company. This point was taken up in one of the reflection/inquiry teams where some of the members worked within HR. It was felt that human resources are viewed as the site to which all employee relations problems should be taken.

This was reinforced in a TIC fishbowl session where a TIC expressed that some members of his reflection/inquiry team had felt that Sharon’s skills were appropriate in her department but not right for theirs.

**The Development of Alternative Plots, How Managers and Supervisors Gained Influence Over Dominant Management and Leadership Practices**

In the above section, a picture of the somewhat uneven dominant management practices and their effects were described.

In this section I track the development of designated managers and supervisors stories, looking at what strengths, skills, competencies and wisdoms, rooted in relations with significant figures in their lives, various organizational actors drew on to positively influence the development of their own styles of leading within the constraints of the prevailing organizational structure. It is important to note that the skills identified here were also those viewed as preferred practices by the consulting employees who were not present during these interviews with managers and supervisors. These will be discussed in the next subsection.

**Supervisors Perspectives**

Angela is a highly respected Asian-American supervisor, one of few on the shop floor. A mother of four children and an active member of her community, Angela described how she learned about leadership through both parenting her children and through being involved as a leader in her community. She spoke of the importance of making herself available to craftworkers. She stressed the importance of being respectful and open, thereby encouraging workers with problems to feel free to approach her, and minimizing their fears of retribution. Angela told stories about male craftworkers who had broken down in tears in her office.

**Power, Control**

The Team in return expressed curiosity from employees; how did they handle the degree of change and the resistance made to the changes? They had been trained to be accepted by the change and by the necessity of change. Following the changes, they surveyed their staff to discover what their needs might be related to the work. The survey results showed that increasing self acceptance than personal relationships.

Paul spoke about the change process with a key employee in his group, about how he had let him know how he felt. He explained that the effects of the change process had been positive for both him and the group, he said that the effects on him were positive. He said that the effects on the group were positive for both him and the group.

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Henry, an Arab-American supervisor, spoke of how his own experience had been a “different one.”

He stated that during a period when he had been expected of him a lot, when he had been working hard, when he had been expected to do a lot. He said that he had been working hard, when he had been expected to do a lot.

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The Team Inquiry process generated a lot of respect for Angela. Questions of curiosity from conference participants included wondering as to how she was able to handle the degree of stress associated with her job on top of the commitments she had made to the community. They wondered how male supervisors' differing experiences might be related to the fact that they may be seen as being more “conditional” in their acceptance than they perceived women to be. Angela modeled for supervisors, regardless of gender, how it is possible to “get the job done” whilst valuing workers.

Paul spoke about the effects of having managers that he respected, respect and believe in him. He talked about a particular person for whom he had worked and how this man had let him know that he was valued by placing a high degree of trust in him. He felt that the effects of having this manager believe in him had influenced him to carry out his job well and with a positive attitude. This had left Paul with a legacy which he used in his work with a very large and diverse team.

He spoke about the importance of making time for all those who reported to him, every day, taking extra time to listen to those who may not be able to express themselves very clearly in English. He stressed the importance of respect and sensitivity to the needs of workers and described some of the ways he works with employees who are having a hard time. For example, he spoke of taking a walk with an employee who was having difficulties in his personal life. Paul had found ways of motivating each worker to do their best, helping them to set goals for themselves and being sensitive to when individual workers might be burned out.

He traced these ways of being to the ease of communication he had experienced in his family and with his friends.

When asked what effects this way of leading might ultimately have on his team, he said that he thought it encouraged them to be self-managing.

He also stated that he would like to think that the employees who reported to him would remember him as a good leader that they had respected.

Managers Perspectives

Henry, an Arab-American manager who several employees had suggested we interview, spoke of how his own experiences as a craftworker on the shop floor guided him to want to be a “different kind of leader”.

He stated that he had struggled early on in his working life to figure out what was expected of him as an employee who had left school with “no skills”. However, Henry had worked his way up to a management position and had been able to retain a strong sense of the challenges he’d faced in earlier years. He was able to use this as a source of empathy with those who reported to him.

He remembered times that he’d made mistakes as a worker, and remembered what he had needed from his boss. He now tries to create a working environment which encourages open communication and trust so employees feel free to share their concerns.
Henry attributed some of his skills as a leader to what he’d learned from his father. An immigrant from a poor farming family, his uneducated father successfully juggled his demanding work with family life. His way of coping with multiple tasks had influenced Henry’s style of working with the multiple demands placed upon him in his position.

John, a senior white male executive, when asked about his best experiences of working with leaders when he was an employee drew a blank. Like almost all the other managers and supervisors who were interviewed, he had learned about managing as a result of many bad experiences where he worked with leaders who were autocratic and abusive. He said that he learned to be “subordinated to the style of the boss”. He dealt with this was by leaving his position in order to find a better working situation. Though far from being an ideal solution, John’s story had a strong impact on the conference participants.

An interview with a design team member which took place after the conference demonstrated the tone of the multilogue which came out of the Team Inquiry process.

Interviewer,
Were there any surprises for you in some of the things that you heard from people?

Interviewee,
Yeh, I was really impressed by John Jones, how he so honestly said that, if it’s not working get out, get another position. It’s not the end of the world.

Interviewer,
Was that a surprise to you?

Interviewee,
To hear it from him. I’ve always had that thought in my mind and I’m happy here, but if I was laid off I know I’d succeed somewhere else, and that was, that validated my feelings that you don’t have to stay somewhere, you have a choice. . . You don’t expect someone, not that he’s any better, but you don’t expect someone at that level to say those kinds of things. You usually just put up with the system or whoever is your boss. You just put up with it.

Ellen, the female senior executive who had described herself as moving away from a formerly autocratic management style told of what had influenced her to change her leadership practices. She described herself as having “softened” and changed through “simply burning myself out” and, significantly, through the guidance of a mentor who helped her to change her life and her priorities.

Ellen’s story also met with a powerful response from the Team Inquiry process. During the subsequent TIC “fishbowl” session, one white male office employee made a personal comment about Ellen, stating that she had “always seemed unapproachable”. He went on to say that hearing from her had helped him to understand where she was coming from. This personal comment seemed out of keeping with the spirit of the process, where comments were not directed outwards.

The incident led to one of the design team members to re-examine what had happened, linking the abysmal lack of clarity and misunderstanding.

We discussed the effects of such an environment, by relations of power. A personal comment about Ellen could make this condition increasingly damaging to Ellen? However, if it was being seen to be appropriate, and the comment itself therefore seemed within the acceptable limits of a representative of the organization.

One team member asked, if by a colleague who was now a representative of his conversation opened up.

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James had worked for this organization’s best experiences were with its worst employees. That employees could be.”

He advised the staff to have a positive attitude towards any race, to treat employees with respect, and to recognize them as individuals.

He said that superior’s role was to develop leadership skills.
Power, Control & Organisational Silence

process, where comments made are rooted within one's own experiences and curiosity and not directed out to the personal behaviors of others.

The incident led to over an hour's worth of conversation and dialogue within the design team wherein we generated multiple viewpoints as to the meaning of what had happened, linking the event to issues of gender, social class, power and potential lack of clarity and misunderstanding as to how to offer feedback as a TIC.

We discussed the complexity of the issues involved; how was the interaction shaped by relations of power? Would this particular male employee have felt as free to make a personal comment about a male senior executive? Could the fact that this comment was made be seen as a powerful testimonial to the process because an employee felt that he could make this comment in the presence of a senior executive? Was the incident damaging to Ellen? Furthermore, the issue of managers and supervisors at all levels being seen to be approachable was a theme which ran through all of the conferences and it therefore seemed very important that the issue was emerging in "real time" while more representatives of the whole system were present.

One team member told us that as a result of this incident, she had been approached by a colleague who told her that he had found her to be unapproachable. This had led to conversation opening up between them.

Employees as Consultants, How to Be a Leader

The interviews with employees were designed to position them as consultants to managers and supervisors. In order to lessen their fears about what they could say, we ensured that none of their own managers and supervisors were present. In general, the "advice" offered by employees, whether on the shop floor or in the office was consistent with what we heard as preferred practices of leadership by supervisors and managers, e.g. treat employees with respect; trust them and their expertise; don't micromanage; recognize them as individuals.

Shop Floor Perspectives

James had worked with several different managers since being at this workplace. His best experiences were those with managers who delegated authority out and who trusted that employees could generate solutions to their own problems.

He advised the supervisors and managers who were listening to him that they need to greet people in the mornings, and demonstrate that they have a good attitude towards people.

He said that supervisors and managers needed to avoid making harsh statements towards any race. He said that this kind of behavior will lead to this kind of manager being seen as someone to avoid.

He stated that watching a good leader helped him to be able to develop his own leadership skills. For James, preferred leadership behaviors from managers and
supervisors enable workers to do their jobs better. When working with a good, respectful leader, he felt inspired to meet that person’s level of expectation.

Karen stated that managers need to make sure that there is discipline on the shop floor so that abusive incidents are less likely to take place. She felt that managers need to make it clear that they are there, not only for supervisors but also for employees. Furthermore, supervisors need to show their appreciation for workers by letting them know when they have done a job well and by demonstrating respect. Such respect would make this a good place to work, a place in which one could feel comfortable and a place where you would not have to worry as to whether you’d have a job the next day.

Frank, a white male craftworker stated that supervisors and managers needed to think before speaking in the context of working within a highly diverse workplace.

He stated that that the best managers were those that were strong, both technically and socially. He said that it was rare to find this combination in a manager. When asked what this would look like, he explained that such a person would not only know what’s expected from the customer but could also communicate ideas in a way that didn’t intimidate workers or make them feel slighted in any way. Such a person could demonstrate that he or she was in charge, while still making sure that the work was a team effort.

Office Workers Perspectives

Gina spoke of having several good experiences of working with managers. Those which had been the best had been when working with managers who got to know her as a person, trusted her and valued what she had to say. If she had a problem, they helped her and didn’t direct her to someone else. She offered poor communication and not saying “good morning” to employees as warning signs of bad management. She had known some managers to not even know the names of their employees and suggested that this was a good place to begin.

She suggested that as a parent and as an employee, a flexible schedule would help her. However, she needed managers to know that when at work, she gave her job 100% of her effort and concentration.

Janice stated that her best experiences with leaders were in the team with whom she was currently working. She felt that they offered each other a lot of support. All team members were given information as to the Division’s goals, allowing a sense of inclusion in the process. She is asked for feedback and her ideas are solicited concerning given projects. She has a sense that she and her manager mutually manage each other. She felt that this level of trust in her enabled her to gain a sense of responsibility for her job which led her to give more to her work.

She advised that an environment needed to be created so that managers knew how to handle employees needs. Some suggestions which she made in this regard included starting a pilot project around flextime, learning more about how to reduce office based time by the use of telecommuting and by helping employees to cope with competing needs of team leaders and general managers.
Tony, an African-American office based worker said that leaders need to recognize the individual capacity of team members and to get everybody on board in order to achieve long term goals. Furthermore, in turbulent working environments such as at this site, the achievement of certain tasks may be beyond the control of individual employees. Leaders need to recognize this and not blame employees for not being able to achieve the impossible.

He stressed the need for people to be made to feel important. One way of doing this was by leaders recognizing people’s qualities. For Tony, the effects of this style of leading led to a boost of employee morale.

Preferred Pictures of Leadership

A common profile of preferred leadership attributes was generated, reflective of feedback from the multiple social locations of organizational actors. Additionally, we generated a detailed and clear picture of larger organizational structural changes which needed to take place if these preferred practices were to be actualized. This data is being used to design further organizational change initiatives.

Implications for Praxis

In this article I have argued that social constructionist approaches to consulting need to be more attentive to the effects of the distribution of the material and symbolic resources of power and control on the development and articulation of preferred organizational stories. I have described an alternative way in which we as consultants can use our resources as outsiders to design organizational change processes that elevate marginalized and silenced organizational voices and stories for the benefit of the organization as a whole by bringing them into the center of change processes. I have emphasized the importance of creating contexts within which “taboo” stories can be opened up. Central to this is the use of pre-interviews or “pre-tellings” as a means to confidentially consult with interviewees as to the ways in which the deployment of material and symbolic resources of power might affect which stories can and cannot be told as well as defining some limits around how they can be told within the public domain.

Consistent with the tenets of Team Inquiry, we need to create contexts within which we can critically reflect upon our work as consultants within organizations. Working in a participatory fashion in “insider/outside” teams (Bartunek & Louis, 1996) provides an excellent opportunity to secure space for such reflection as well as to increase accountability for one’s work within the organization.

What I had neither the time nor space to discuss here were other vital aspects of this issue, including the ways in which new “postmodern” management practices can act as “colonizers” of the self, extending scientific management via subjecting organizational actors to informal forms of surveillance, including surveillance from other team members (Casey, 1995; Rose, 1990; Howard, 1985). However, I believe that the Team Inquiry approach can take us closer to addressing the conundrums thrown up by
working within the heart of organizations which manifest the most oppressive features of scientific management, whilst struggling, however pragmatically, in the direction of increasing the knowledge base of employees, developing relational forms of leadership and flattening their hierarchies.

These conundrums position organizational change practitioners within the seat of a contradiction; though we may be asked to facilitate the creation of “learning organizations” (Argyris & Schon, 1978; Senge, 1990) which draw upon the knowledge and experience of local organizational actors, we can find ourselves working within environments which have, via lengthy socioeconomic and historical processes, produced ways of being, thinking and doing which are antithetical to the creation of optimal conditions for the co-construction and circulation of alternative, especially marginalized stories. Furthermore, the ultimate conundrum remains for me, expressed in Ramsey and Calvert’s (1994) fundamental concerns about the underlying nature of hierarchies as organizational structures which are, by definition, patriarchal and associated with the unequal distribution of material and symbolic resources of power.

The move towards flattened hierarchy (or towards other creative forms of organization) has, ultimately, to penetrate all levels of an organization’s structure. Though processes such as Team Inquiry can be viewed as facilitating the conceptualization of such alternatives, ultimately these are inextricably related to larger changes within the broader global socioeconomic environment.

However, Team Inquiry is a process designed to create contexts within which organizational actors can initially raise concerns “off the record”. They are active in shaping the team inquiry process, thereby contributing to the terms through which “silenced” issues can be addressed. The opening of silenced narratives has the potential to transform stories rooted in pain and isolation into stories of survival and its associated skills, enhancing of the lived experience of the organizational community as a whole.

Painful stories, for example that of Karen’s isolation and sense of powerlessness as she struggled to be heard could not only be respected and honored but could also open a context within which other women and men could join with her. In so doing, private pain could potentially be transformed into a source for communal learning, community building, healing and workplace change.

Such an approach breaks with constraining dominant forms of “expert-based” consulting practice, publicly honoring alternative knowledges. Furthermore, it is able to confront the contradictory messages and demands associated with current organizational structures from the multiple and (equally contradictory) perspectives of organizational actors and can be seen as enhancing already existing social constructionist consulting practices.

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Private pain, public pain. We are all in this together. We are all connected to the body, to each other. We are all connected to the violence.

Thinking about the three images of our culture. Hard Copy. Entropy. Wall. These are devoted to public pain. Radio has its own kind of pain. It’s important. However, I don’t think my own activism and engagements with the community are as significant as those from most. From the body to the soul to the skin to private pain for some. Why, and in how many ways do we engage with each other? Our pain? Our needs? Our treatment? I do believe that we are all unique individuals with our own pain and practices — the person and the others. Let me explain.

Our dominant, dominant discourse is of beliefs, and meanings. However, we have various orientations — there is “one” in the world (one discourse). Why do they all exist and this discourse? We do not believe in their existence. They do not come from the authoritative discourse. They are not made of any human being. They are not made of any rational being. We can explore anything with each other. Furthermore, we can explore anything with each other. Objectivity, a fiction, is thus written into the strong-hold of science.