Resources, Resourcing, and Ampliative Cycles in Organizations

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Abstract and Keywords

This chapter presents an overview of resourcing theory, comparing it with other perspectives such as resource dependence and the resource based view of the firm. After developing an understanding of the basic tenets of resourcing theory, the chapter goes on to explicate three mechanisms of resourcing in context that arise from recent empirical research and are likely to be of value to positive organizational scholars. The chapter concludes with an exploration of how the endogenous nature of resourcing and the potential for ampliative cycles can support positive spirals, a subject of vital interest to those studying positive organizational scholarship.

Keywords: Resources, practices, resourcing, organizational process, organizational change

Having resources is generally considered crucial for success in any context, and the study of resources has long had a central role in organizational scholarship. This focus on resources has given rise to several perspectives on organizations and organizing, such as resource dependence (Pfeffer, 1982; Pfeffer & Salancik, 1978), the resource-based view of the firm (Barney, 1991, 2001), dynamic capabilities realized through organizational processes (Eisenhardt & Martin, 2000; Teece, Pisano, & Shuen, 1997), and resourcing as an organizational process (Brickson & Lemmon, 2009; Feldman, 2004; Howard-Grenville, 2007; Quinn & Worline, 2008; Spreitzer, Sutcliffe, Dutton, Sonenshein, & Grant, 2005).

This chapter focuses primarily on resourcing as an organizational process because of its potential to contribute to positive organizational scholarship. Although it is in the nature of resources that they can be used for good or for evil (and often for both simultaneously), we argue that understanding the process of resourcing is a powerful tool for scholars and managers who want to promote positive spirals in organizations. Understanding the process of resourcing contributes to positive spirals in two ways. First, it enables managers and other organizational participants to understand how they can use the process endogenously to create ampliative cycles. Ampliative is a term that has been used primarily in logic and is based on the Latin verb meaning to enlarge. Webster’s unabridged dictionary defines ampliative as: “Enlarging a conception by adding to that which is already known or received” (1998). Ampliative cycles enlarge the outcome of the process. Second, understanding the resourcing process can help managers and other organizational participants to separate the evaluation of the process from the evaluation of the outcome and thus promote attention not only to whether the process is ampliative but also to whether the outcome is desirable.

This chapter is organized around some central questions in the study of resources. The first section explores how resourcing theory influences our ideas about what constitutes a resource and how our actions create resources. The second section describes three mechanisms of resourcing that are commonly available in organizations and in everyday life. The third (p. 630) section explores ampliative cycles and positive outcomes. The chapter concludes with a discussion of some questions raised by resourcing theory that are important in the development of POS.
What Is Resourcing?

The most typical view of resources in organization theory, adopted in resource dependence theories (Pfeffer & Salancik, 1978) and in the resource-based view of the firm (Barney, 1991), imagines them as tangible or intangible assets that can be possessed or owned (Amit & Shoemaker, 1993; Barney, 1991; Penrose, 1959; Wang, 2009). This view suggests that resources are valuable because of some innate qualities contained within them. In keeping with this view, Eisenhardt and Martin (2000, p. 1107) define resources as “specific physical (e.g., specialized equipment, geographic location), human (e.g., expertise in chemistry), and organizational (e.g., superior sales force) assets that can be used to implement value creating strategies.” The resource-based view of the firm argues that the innate qualities of resources are highly valuable: “competitive advantage derives from the resources and capabilities a firm controls that are valuable, rare, imperfectly imitable, and not substitutable” (Barney, Wright, & Ketchen, 2001, p. 625).

Resourcing theory defines resources differently. Feldman (2004) suggests that the typical view of resources hinders scholars’ understanding of how resources are useful in organizations because it focuses on the innate features of assets, rather than how they are brought into use. Resourcing theory points to a definition of resources focusing on how organizational members take up and use assets as they pursue activities in line with what they wish to make happen in the world. This more expansive and less innate characterization leads to a new definition of a resource as anything that allows an actor to enact a schema (Feldman, 2004; Feldman & Orlikowski, forthcoming, Sewell, 1992).1 This way of defining resources acknowledges that things have innate qualities (e.g., rocks are heavy) and that these qualities give them potential as resources (e.g., rocks can be used as building material). Resourcing theory emphasizes that, until action is taken to use these qualities, the thing does not fulfill its potential and become a resource, or what we refer to as a resource in use (e.g., rocks just sit there until people develop the ability to use rocks to build). Moreover, how the potential resource is used determines what kind of a resource it becomes or what is resourced (e.g., rocks can be used to build bridges and resource connections or to build fortresses and resource defense).2

Resourcing in “Real Life”: Making Meatballs Without Meat

To illustrate the differences in these definitions of resources as possessing innate qualities versus resources as enacted through use, we invite you to engage in a thought experiment with us. Imagine you are a homemaker during World War II. You want to make meatballs for dinner, a favorite family meal. Because of the war, however, your family is working with ration points that allow you to purchase only a small amount of meat (see Cohen, 1991). Rationing ensures that there is not enough meat to make all the meatballs you need. What would you do next? Different theories of resources make different predictions about your behavior. Theories of resource dependence (Pfeffer & Salancik, 1978) might predict that the homemaker would skip making meatballs and make something else for the family meal, since meat is the key resource in meatballs and it is scarce.

In contrast with resource dependence, theories of dynamic capabilities (Eisenhardt & Martin, 2000; Teece et al., 1997) make a slightly different prediction. According to this body of theory, as a capable homemaker who is adapting to rationing, you might recognize that meatballs are a family favorite and therefore focus on accumulating rationing stamps in adaptable ways. Thus, you could serve meatballs, but less often, making them a rare and special treat for the family. This theory predicts that you can make meatballs during rationing, but only infrequently, after accumulating and leveraging resources in certain ways.

Theories of resourcing offer a third prediction, in part because this body of theory posits the relationship between resources and action as it is lived in practice. In this view, your cooking practices themselves provide an array of alternative actions for your use (de Certeau, 1984). Although it is true that you don’t have meat, you do have bread. You do some experimenting with adding the bread to the meat. You toast it and crumble it and add bread crumbs to the meat in order to stretch it. You even add some new ingredients like tomato sauce to help preserve flavor. You make meatballs for the family meal—it just turns out that they don’t contain much meat. But, in fact, your family likes these modified meatballs, maybe even more than they liked the originals.

Thus, theories of resourcing provide an explanation for how homemakers cooking under rationing were able to continue to serve meatballs regularly as a favorite family meal. Using everyday experience and experiments in cooking practices, they came up with new ways of making meatballs. Such experiments in practice

(p. 631)
are suggested in the historical record of the time, with governmental rationing boards offering ration-friendly recipes, *Good Housekeeping Magazine* printing a section on rationed foods in 1943, and a wartime edition of *The American Woman's Cook Book* offering recipes and advice for homemakers coping with rationing (Cohen, 1991). As theory focused on the relationship between asset and action, resourcing explains how different assets are taken up and put into use as new resources that enable homemakers to continue to enact the schema (or framework) of meatballs. The meatball story illustrates a number of ways in which redefining resources as related to practices affects our understanding of how resources are constituted.

The active transformation of potential resources into resources in use

Theories of resourcing posit that potential resources only become resources, or what we will term *resources in use*, when they are used to enact some schema or framework (Feldman, 2004). In the meatball story, bread was not initially related to the activity of making meatballs—it was not a resource in use to enact the meatball framework. By virtue of changes in their circumstances, however, and through practices of cooking that involved experimentation with different techniques, homemakers hit upon ways to incorporate bread into meatballs. In resourcing theory, it is these cooking practices that transformed bread from a potential resource to a resource in use. Emphasizing practices as central to resources is a unique and important aspect of theories of resourcing.

In the abstract, it may appear that by focusing on practices we may be creating an absurd situation in which anything can be defined as a resource. Although it is true that our approach may expand the range of potential resources, the connection to practice is in itself a boundary. Here again, our meatball example is useful. There are many things besides meat that can be used to create meatballs, but there are also many things that would not be potentially useful in making meatballs. Shards of glass, pellets of metal, or rat poison immediately jump to mind. We could put such things into meatballs, but it would stretch the limits of credibility to serve the result as a family meal. This suggests that the designation of resource is not just about the innate qualities of a material or nonmaterial asset, but about the nature of the relationship between the asset and what it helps to create. Rat poison does not help to create a family meal, and therefore is not a potential resource in the meatball framework. In contrast to rat poison or shards of glass, however, we can think of many things (e.g., olives, hummus, tabouli) that could be put into meatballs and still help to create a family meal, even though they are not ordinarily associated with this food. These are what we refer to as *potential resources* because they could be taken up and put to use in creating meatballs. In other words, these potential resources could be turned into resources in use. The result would be a different kind of meatball that would nonetheless be a way of creating the family meal. In sum, then, resourcing theory suggests that potential resources become resources in use when they are taken up in enacting a framework. In this way, resourcing theory expands our focus from the innate qualities of things to include how those things are used (resourcing) and what they are used for (what is being resourced).

Resourcing as a dynamic process

In showing meatballs as a metaphor for resourcing the family meal, we do not want to imply that frameworks exist independent of their enactment through resourcing. Indeed, our meatball story illustrates that the process is not one of matching two static objects (ingredients and meatballs), but of mutual adjustment between potential resources and emerging frameworks. In the meatball example, by incorporating bread into their meatballs, World War II-era homemakers did not just shift bread from a potential resource to a resource in use, they also changed the meatballs themselves. Families liked the “meatless” meatballs so much that homemakers turned the modified meatballs into a staple of family meals even after the war effort had ended. When the war ended and rationing was over, everyone had enough meat to go back to making meatballs without the bread, but few did. Stretching the meat during rationing has changed meatballs, and meatballs themselves, for good.

Resourcing cycles can be endogenous

Seeing the dynamic nature of resources as a key feature in the process of resource use leads to our final point about resourcing—that resourcing cycles can (p. 632) connect everyday actions to something larger, making them important in understanding complex organizing dynamics. In our meatballs example, what seems like a relatively simple action, adding bread to meat, and the resulting resource of a “meatless meatball” is actually tied to a much larger organizing effort of supporting the war effort. Figure 47.1 shows a collage of images from the World War II era that make an explicit link between daily home activities, such as cooking, and victory in the
broader war effort. One war poster urged families to change their eating patterns to support the war effort by proclaiming: “Be patriotic, sign your country’s pledge to save the food.” In this way, cooking meatballs without meat becomes linked to something larger than the family meal. Meatless meatballs aren’t simply an effort to feed the family, but also become part of the broader organizing to support the war effort. As shown in Figure 47.1, new ways of resourcing family life became an important part of government efforts to direct resources to the war effort.

Other ways of reducing the use of meat (not making meatballs or making them infrequently) would also serve the needs of the country. Being able to reduce the use of meat in a way that produced a popular food, however, contributes to a sense of being able to overcome obstacles, whether the obstacle is scarce meat or enemies of the state. Although making meatballs with little meat was only a small part of the war effort, that homemakers could use their practices on the home front was a significant enough contribution to prompt General MacArthur to write an encouraging preface to the *Victory Cookbook*.

**Comparing the Resourcing View with Other Approaches to Resources**

We have used the description of homemakers making meatballs under rationing to accomplish two aims. Our first aim was to introduce the main concepts from theories of resourcing and demonstrate them in use. Our second aim was to set the stage for a comparison of the conceptualization of resources across different theoretical views. In this section, we draw those comparisons out more fully.
resources: theories of resource dependence (e.g., Pfeffer, 1982; Pfeffer & Salancik, 1978), theories of dynamic capabilities that arise from a resource-based view of the firm (e.g., Barney, 2001; Eisenhardt & Martin, 2000; Teece, Pisano, & Shuen, 1997), and theories of resourcing (e.g., Feldman, 2004; Howard-Grenville, 2007; Quinn & Worline, 2008). The left column of Figure 47.2 (p. 633) conveys the main assumptions about resources that stem from theories of resource dependence. Particularly notable in this theory is the primary assumption that the ability to accomplish something (e.g., making meatballs) depends on the availability of particular resources (e.g., meat). Following this assumption, approaches to explanations that adopt the resource dependence view posit competition for scarce resources and the cessation of activity when those resources are absent. Thus, the prediction from a resource dependence view that, without meat, meatballs become scarce and unlikely as the family meal.

The right column of Figure 47.2 conveys the main ideas about resources that follow from resource-based views of the firm, and especially the dynamic capabilities approach that emerges from the resource-based view. The resource-based view suggests that the organization, system, or firm (in this case the family) possesses resources as assets with innate qualities that make them valuable because they allow for certain kinds of capabilities (in this case, meat is a resource that allows homemakers to feed the family). In this theoretical view, when the environment changes, the resources available to the organization or firm (e.g., family) are also altered, and the organization must read the environment and understand it well enough to respond with appropriate resource management (Simons, Hitt, & Ireland, 2007). Organizations that successfully adapt to the changed resource environment exhibit a dynamic capability (Eisenhardt & Martin, 2000); in this case, the dynamic capability is feeding the family during rationing. From this theoretical perspective, we might understand variation in the success of families eating under rationing by specifying that successful families engage in actions like accumulating, stabilizing, or mobilizing assets such as meat in order to structure, bundle, or leverage their resources (Simons, Hitt, & Ireland, 2007). Beyond these actions in relation to the environment, though, we would not necessarily be able to explain much about how the capability is created or enacted in the family.

The middle column of Figure 47.2 depicts resourcing theory. The figure helps make the distinctions between the theoretical perspectives clear by placing them in side-by-side comparison. Figure 47.2 conveys the uniqueness of resourcing theory in that it portrays the significance of specific actions that people (or sometimes machines) take in the organization or firm that enable a dynamic capability. In our example, people took actions to create potential resources and undertook experiments in practice that allowed them to move new assets from potential resources to resources in use to make meatballs. These microprocesses underlie the production of the capability and produce variations in outcomes; in this case, a family meal with meatballs with an Italian flavor (with tomato and onion) or our hypothetical Lebanese meatball with tabouli and hummus. By focusing on specific action and the transformation of potential resources into resources in use, resourcing theory not only reveals microprocesses that remain invisible in the other perspectives, but also turns attention to the changes in practice that lie behind innovations, changes that would be observed as outcomes from the resource-based view.

Although action is either implicit or explicit in all of the theories described in Figure 47.2, each of the theories reveals a different focus on the relationship between resources and action. Resource dependence theories (in the left column) see the taking of actions as dependent on the availability of resources with specific innate qualities. Resource-based views of the firm and dynamic capabilities in organizations (in the right column) posit actions at the level of the organization or firm that affect the availability of resources. Firms accumulate, bundle, and leverage resources to respond to environmental uncertainty (Simons, Hitt, & Ireland, 2007). Because the resource-based view emphasizes actions of the firm to respond to demands of the external environment, this theory tends to focus on the role of managers as agents who work on behalf of the firm. Thus, it is mostly managerial or executive action that is of consequence (e.g., Simons et al., 2007).

The focus of resourcing theory, by contrast, is on actions in organizations (specific, identifiable actions taken by specific people (or sometimes machines, such as computers) at specific times and places) rather than the actions of organizations in relation to their environments. This focus broadens the emphasis to actors throughout an organization by emphasizing practices as a way of understanding how a firm accomplishes outcomes. This broadens the explanatory power of resourcing theory in relation to practices and experiments in practice that emerge from the “bottom up” to generate change in organizations. Resourcing theory reveals that these practices have endogenous dynamics—they differ according to the ways in which people in organizations engage in them—that are consequential for the development of the practice and for understanding the microdynamics of production.
Mechanisms of Resourcing

Regardless of their view of the essence of resources, most organizational theories agree that it is hard to do much of anything without them—in other words, resources must be put to use. In the prior section, we established that theories of resourcing are likely to consider a broad range of actions as consequential in relation to resources. We also showed that these actions are likely to be oriented toward the microdynamics of productivity and relevant to internal organizational processes. In this section, we build on those assumptions to flesh out an important conceptual move in resourcing theory: the transition from potential resources to resources in use. The question of how potential resources become resources in use reveals action as key to the way in which resources are taken up and become valuable (Feldman, 2004; Goldsworthy, 2010; Howard-Grenville, 2007; Quinn & Worline, 2008; Feldman & Quick, 2009).

To illustrate the central role of action in generating the value of resources as they are taken up and used, we draw upon research related to three resourcing mechanisms in organizations. We find these three mechanisms important for POS scholars for two reasons: First, they emerge from the broad domain of recent POS research as empirically based examples of resourcing theory and how it explains the relationship of resources and action; second, they illustrate the potential of resourcing theory to (p. 635) expand organizational scholars’ views of the relationship between resources and action. In this section, we review these three specific mechanisms and how they unfold in context, showing the relationship of action to potential resources and resources in use. These specific mechanisms help illustrate ways that resourcing contributes to the development of internal organizational capabilities (broadly defined) and constitutes process in relation to significant outcomes. These mechanisms are illustrative, but are not an exhaustive set. We feel confident that many other mechanisms are likely to emerge as scholars engage in research that combines resourcing theory and POS.

Mutual Adjusting As a Mechanism for Resourcing

A focus on the move from potential resource to resource in use makes clear that simply having something available doesn’t mean it will be taken up and used. In addition, resourcing theory helps make clear that how something is taken up and used impacts the available frameworks for organizing. Thus, resourcing offers a view into a recursive relationship between a resource in use and the framework it energizes. Mutual adjusting as a resourcing mechanism helps illuminate the link between resources in use and frameworks for organizing by showing how potential resources and frameworks are adjusted to one another in the context of practice. This mechanism operates in contrast with matching—an activity in which one static concept is compared to another. In doing matching, we might think of a hammer and the need to build a house. We ask: “Does this tool match the job I need to do?” When the answer is affirmative, as, for instance, when we need to pound nails, we would use the tool. Otherwise it would sit idle. Contrast this with the notion of mutual adjusting, in which both the tool and the framework for its use are mutually adjusting to one another in ways that give rise to new potential resources.

The concept of mutual adjusting as a mechanism for resourcing is developed in an organizational context by Jaquith (2009), who describes the ways that teachers identify, take up, and use instructional resources in school contexts. Jaquith calls this process “fitting” instructional resources to their context for use, and makes clear that fitting resources to contexts involves an ongoing, recursive relationship between the resource in use and the framework that the resource is energizing. Jaquith suggests that teachers employ a combination of their sense of the instructional purpose, the content of their lessons, the structure of their schools or classrooms, and the nature of their participants to fit or adjust instructional resources to the framework of student learning. Jaquith’s study suggests that mutual adjusting as a mechanism for resourcing in organizations is likely to involve agentic actors who evaluate, compare, and fit potential resources with their unique purposes, knowledge, existing structures, and relationships to shape the resource in use and the frameworks that they want to energize.

As an example of mutual adjusting as a mechanism for resourcing, Jaquith (2009) describes how teachers take up and use tools for generating classroom participation to energize a community of learners in the classroom. “Equity sticks” are a tool created by instructional designers in which teachers write each student’s name on a wooden stick, similar to a Popsicle stick, and draw sticks at random as a way of passing the floor. Equity sticks became useful for teachers to attempt to create fair distributions of turn-taking in their classrooms. Jaquith explores how equity sticks became a resource that was relatively easy for teachers to take up and use, showing that teachers adjust the use of the equity sticks to their particular classrooms in active and agentic ways that take into account
their purposes, the content of their lessons, and characteristics of their students. For instance, teachers may begin using equity sticks with what they think of as “low-stakes” participation—questions that students find easy to answer from their own experience—as a way of energizing safety and support in the classroom community.

Jaquith’s teachers hint that the example can be expanded. For instance, this low-stakes participation and the safety and support it generates becomes a potential resource. Teachers can take up and use the safety and support in a variety of ways, including using the equity sticks differently to facilitate different learning processes. The teacher might draw a stick and ask that student multiple questions to help engage critical thinking. Once this critical thinking becomes available as a potential resource in the classroom, along with safety and support, the students and teachers may then adjust their use of the equity sticks again, perhaps dividing the large bundle of sticks into small bundles as a way to form discussion groups that resource learning through conversation and peer-to-peer interaction. As peer relationships and peer-based conversation become potential resources in the classroom, the small groups may then again adjust the use equity (p. 636) sticks use. This process of mutual adjustment can continue indefinitely.

Although these different ways of promoting participation are familiar to people who have attempted to manage the floor in a classroom, the equity sticks example makes the mechanism of mutual adjusting between resource in use and framework for organizing tangible and visible. Equity sticks were designed as a tool with one use in mind. Through their practices, however, teachers and students adjust the tool to their purposes, similar to any technology in use (Orlikowski, 2000), and new frameworks become available. As they do so, the resource in use energizes the framework in ways that make new potential resources available and creates new possibilities for action.

Although Jaquith’s (2009) study is situated in education, the mechanism of mutual adjusting in the recursive relationship between resources in use and frameworks is likely to generalize theoretically in many organizational contexts. People are likely to consider an amalgam of their purposes, content, structure, and relationships as they undertake actions that enable them to adjust resources in use to frameworks for organizing (Jaquith, 2009). In relation to any tool, members of organizations must agentically adjust the tool as potential resource to resource in use and then adjust the resource in use in relation to the frameworks that become available and that they want to energize. In the process of this mutual adjusting between resources in use and frameworks for organizing, a resource in use is altered at the same time that the resource in use continuously alters the nature of the framework it is used to energize. This process of mutual adjusting is likely to be of interest to POS scholars who want to understand how resources are taken up and used to energize positive frameworks such as community, safety and support, and learning.

**Juxtaposing As a Mechanism for Resourcing**

To juxtapose is “to place close together or side by side” (Random House Dictionary, 2010). Recent research on processes of cultural change in organizations (Howard-Grenville, Golden-Biddle, Irwin, & Mao, 2010) emphasizes the action of juxtaposing as an important means by which actors in organizations create resources and energize frameworks to facilitate change. Howard-Grenville and colleagues (2010) suggest that organizational actors who create cultural change use mundane or everyday settings to actively bring together different symbolic forms, juxtaposing the familiar with the unfamiliar in a way that creates liminality as a resource for change. In terms of resourcing theory, mundane or everyday events such as workshops are potential resources that are taken up and used by change agents within the framework of the organizational culture as a site for actively juxtaposing familiar and unfamiliar symbols in context. The use of these everyday organizational events as a resource for juxtaposing the old and the new gives rise to a new resource, liminality, defined as a sense of being between. This new sense of being between things in turn becomes available as a potential resource for changing the cultural repertoires in the organization.

Howard-Grenville and colleagues (2010) report a case of culture change in a health care context, in which one change agent used a strategy retreat to bring different principles for organizing into juxtaposition, using practices such as encouraging people from all levels to contribute, diminishing emphasis on formal boundaries, and inviting interaction focused on people’s visions and hopes for the organization rather than their particular roles or status. The retreat became a site for the emergence of liminality—a sense of being between or at the threshold of things (Turner, 1967). By using the retreat to resource liminality, the leader helped to create an experience in which
participants could safely try out new or different possibilities for being and doing in the organization. The authors also report on a case of culture change in an athletic wear firm, in which a central change agent who did not occupy a formal leadership or executive position organized workshops that tied branding and supply chain management issues to carbon scenarios and oil use, thus juxtaposing sustainability issues with everyday business concerns. The change agent actively made use of an everyday event, such as a business planning workshop, as a resource for juxtaposing familiar considerations with unfamiliar issues. The juxtaposition of business planning questions and sustainability issues created a sense of liminality for participants—being in between the issues in a new way that opened a threshold for seeing differently. Experiencing the liminal in the athletic wear company became a resource in use as people took up the opportunity to see the business differently and used it to interact in new ways, form new insights, and make new meanings of sustainability in relation to their business plan, ultimately contributing to change in the culture of the organization.

Although Howard-Grenville and colleagues (2010) propose juxtaposing as a mechanism for resourcing cultural change, we would suggest here (p. 637) that juxtaposing as a resourcing mechanism is likely to be theoretically generalizable, and thus put into specific types of use in different contexts in a variety of ways. As one example, consider that many organizations and managers seek to promote learning by bringing together cross-functional teams (Parker, 2003). Managers in essence create a context for resourcing knowing by juxtaposing people with different practices. Focusing on juxtaposition as the important mechanism sheds light on different ways that these teams may actually generate (or fail to generate) potential resources. Simply bringing people into proximity isn’t likely to work well for energizing the knowledge creation framework, because proximity doesn’t necessarily juxtapose ways of knowing. In the cross-functional teams example, bringing people together without practices that help them easily share their different knowledge domains can resource frustration and withdrawal rather than enthusiasm and engagement (Parker, 2003). Practices by which the context enables people to place their knowledge “side by side”—or juxtapose how they work—enable new ways of knowing and doing work. Practices that facilitate the juxtaposition of different repertoires for thinking, feeling, and acting are able to generate resources by enriching the available frameworks for knowing. For instance, work on boundary objects has shown that some kinds of objects and some uses of objects promote more fruitful juxtaposition than not using objects or using them in ways that are primarily based on confirming existing power relations or knowledge structures (Bechky, 2003; Carlile, 2002, 2004). This resourcing mechanism could be useful for scholars of POS who want to understand the processes underlying instances of positive organizational change.

**Narrating As a Mechanism for Resourcing**

Narratives are central to social life, in part because they provide a means of ordering events into a past, present, and future, and in so doing, enable people to know and make sense of the world around them (Ricoeur, 1984). In a study of the response of the passengers on United Flight 93 to the hijacking of the plane on September 11, 2001, Quinn and Worline (2008) suggest narrating as a central mechanism for resourcing. Narrating is action that transforms potential resources to resources in use by altering the framework or what is being resourced (Cooren, 2000; Quinn & Worline, 2008). The case evidence from Flight 93 suggests that passengers used everyday practices to create a narrative of the situation that made possible actions that were different from the actions they would have taken before creating this narrative. Specifically, using their communications with people outside the plane about the elapsed time and the fate of the other hijacked planes, the passengers were able to generate a narrative that they were in the midst of a hijacking that was likely to end disastrously. As earlier hijackings had ended in ransom demands rather than suicide attacks, creating this new narrative was an important move in this resourcing cycle.

The passengers were able to use this narrative to resource a sense of shared or collective identity, where before they had been separate individuals who happened to be in the same plane. The collective identity became a resource in use for generating collective action. The sense of “we” was critical to energizing a framework of resistance in which they acted together to launch a counterattack on the hijackers with all of the passengers sharing a common fate.

Collective identity is one key to showing how people aboard the plane began to narrate new possible actions as part of a framework of resistance, and how this framework enabled people to shift from victims of a hijacking to active participants in a counterattack. Quinn and Worline (2008) mark particular moments that reveal the process
of collective identity moving from potential resource to resource in use aboard the plane, energizing a framework of resistance. For instance, one passenger was overheard by his wife saying “We have to do something!” This statement drew upon a shift that had already taken place as passengers began referring to themselves as a collective “we” rather than an individual “I” and energized the resistance framework through a call to action. The resourcing cycle aboard Flight 93 was generative enough to allow a group of strangers to become a collective capable of imagining and enacting previously unthinkable collective action within a narrow and highly stressful timeframe.

The powerful example of a generative resourcing cycle aboard Flight 93 suggests that narrative may be a resourcing mechanism of particular interest to POS scholars interested in generativity and change. Narrating is a powerful mechanism for resourcing in that it draws upon language, which is one of the most readily available potential resources in organizations (Weick, 1995). Because a large part of managing is talking, understanding how particular communication acts transform potential resources to resources in use, and how the resulting narratives (p. 638) energize certain frameworks, is central to research in POS. This mechanism is likely to be of particular interest to POS scholars who want to understand the processes by which managers, leaders, and organization members use language and positive stories to help shape new realities that resource different frameworks for organizing.

### Endogenous Resourcing, Ampliative Cycles and Positive Outcomes

Scholars have noted that a framework or schema in one context can be a resource in another (Barney, 2001; Eisenhardt & Schoonhoven, 1996; Leblebici, 1991; Sewell, 1992). Resourcing theory helps us to see that action is an essential feature of this relationship. As we showed in the previous section, action is the driving force that creates, alters, and combines assets with frameworks. Here, we point out that action is also essential for the creation of ampliative cycles through endogenous resourcing, which involves using a resourced framework as a new resource.

The examples of resourcing mechanisms in organizational contexts provide illustrations of endogenous resourcing or the ways that resourced frameworks can become resources for other frameworks. They also illustrate a somewhat different point: that the endogenous resourcing can be ampliative. This feature of resourcing theory is particularly important for understanding the productivity of resourcing, and therefore for highlighting its relevance to POS. What makes endogenous resourcing ampliative is that the potential resources created in the recursive resourcing cycles are harnessed to move in a general direction, thereby keeping the resourcing cycles in motion and further enlarging the available potential resources. We use the term ampliative to refer to resourcing cycles that grow in a general direction, providing more energy for what one might refer to as a meta-framework or a larger framework that the resourcing cycles contribute to (Feldman & Quick, 2009).

### Examples of Ampliative Cycles

The passengers aboard Flight 93 on September 11, 2001, engaged in resourcing cycles that energized individual identities and emotion in a bewildering situation (Quinn & Worline, 2008). They used these identities and emotions as potential resources in new resourcing cycles that helped them create a collective narrative of the duress they faced aboard the plane, and that narrative in turn became a potential resource that they took up to enact collective action in response to the hijacking (Quinn & Worline, 2008). The agentic and improvisational actions of people aboard the plane kept the overlapping cycles of resourcing going and moved them in a general direction of constructive opposition to the situation (Quinn & Worline, 2008). Since the initial hijackings, we have seen several instances of passengers on airplanes intervening in actions that could have had disastrous outcomes. This observation raises the possibility that the narrative of Flight 93 has resourced a framework of dispersed courage and responsibility for flight safety in which passengers take action that would previously have been unthinkable or inappropriate.

In the example of the use of equity sticks in classrooms, we described how the simple tool of a participation routine could produce a different kind of classroom with more engaged learners, who then could be engaged in more critical thinking. In that case, the equity sticks were repurposed for use in the new framework (critical thinking) and combined with the more engaged learners that had been produced in the previous resourcing cycle. The equity...
sticks can be used in such a way that a new potential resource (engaged learners) emerges. These engaged learners can be considered an endpoint, but they can also be used in another resourcing cycle. Many readers of this chapter are likely to be teachers who can appreciate how much more you can teach when the students are engaged than when they are not. If teachers use the equity sticks routine simply to randomize participation, so that the people at the beginning or end of the alphabet are not always being called first (or last), then they have resourced the framework of more equitable participation, but they have not used the resource endogenously to create an ampliative cycle. Indeed, such a use of the equity sticks may produce resources that make teaching and learning more difficult, if, for instance, students come to dread the randomness and uncertainty of the equity stick process. For the cycle to be ampliative, the framework energized (engaged learners) must be picked up (with or without the equity sticks) and used as a resource to extend a meta-framework, which in this case might be the kinds of learning or the extent of learning in the classroom.

**Positive and Negative Outcomes**

As the illustration of using equity sticks simply to randomize roll-calling indicates, endogenous resourcing is not always ampliative. Another illustration arose in the context of public engagement in a Midwestern city (Feldman & Quick, 2009). The city had developed a track record for inclusive engagement of residents in decision making over a period of several years, when the city managers decided to confront their budget problems by eliciting participation in a survey. The survey met the scientific standards for such data gathering, but fell short of the expectations of the community members for engagement in deliberative decision making. As a result, the community responded negatively to the survey process, as well as to the proposed budget based on the survey results. Angry members of the community began to organize a process that entailed opportunities for discussion and engagement. In this way, anger over the survey became a new resource that energized the community. From the perspective of the city managers, this endogenous resourcing was not an ampliative cycle, as the engagement of the community in the mode of us versus them is limiting in the long run if the goal is for the residents to work with government toward the solution of community problems. The result could have been years of antagonistic relations that would make it more difficult to develop and implement constructive ideas.

The next move by the city management shows the utility of understanding the resourcing cycle. They asked the most vocal critics of the unpopular survey process to advise them about how to organize a process that would engage the community in a more constructive manner; in this way, they used the energy associated with the anger that they had inadvertently generated as an unexpected resource. They worked with these critics, now advisors, providing them with information they requested and following suggestions they made. Through these actions, they showed both the critics/advisors and other community members their intent to be part of and work with the community rather than to manipulate or do an end-run around the community. Although one interpretation is that the managers simply bought off the most vocal critics, the resulting budget required the city managers to take action they did not want to take. It also, however, produced something they cared even about more—a return to constructive engagement. The move showed the ability to manage the resourcing flow to produce an ampliative cycle, in this case increasing the breadth of the engaged community and strengthening ties across the community.

**Resourcing and Positive Organizational Scholarship**

Resourcing theory is relevant to POS for several reasons. First, the awareness of resourcing dynamics on the part of organizational participants affects their ability to engage these dynamics constructively. Although endogenous and ampliative resourcing dynamics may occur as unintended consequences, the ability to recognize and direct resourcing enables people to make choices about what they would like to promote. We recognize that there is much legitimate debate about what outcomes are positive. The lack of awareness of resourcing dynamics, however, tends to support assumptions of inevitability about the direction of resourcing, which are unwarranted. Understanding the consequentiality of action creates opportunities not only to direct actions toward specific outcomes, but also to surface subjective valuations about what is positive and for whom.

In our examples, the outcomes that are amplified through endogenous resourcing are ones that many people would find positive—greater ability to stand up to terrorism, deeper learning, stronger and more engaged communities. The ability to produce ampliative cycles, however, does not necessarily produce positive outcomes. One of the strengths of focusing on the process is the ability to separate evaluation of the process from evaluation...
of the outcome. Indeed, an essential question raised by resourcing theory is “what is being resourced?” Because resourcing theory focuses on the relationship between potential resources, actions, and frameworks rather than the innate qualities of things, it shows that resources can only be judged as good or bad in the context of their use.

**Future Directions**

We see many future directions for research stemming from resourcing theory, some of which we have identified above. Here, we briefly discuss five promising ideas for developing resourcing theory in relation to POS.

1. **Develop and explore potential synergies between different theoretical views of resources, particularly between dynamic capabilities and resourcing theory.** Research on dynamic capabilities in organizations would benefit from a focus on the microdynamics of such capabilities, as would much of the research centered in the resource-based view of the firm, as articulated by Sirmon et al. (2007):

   "Unfortunately, there is minimal theory explaining “how” managers/firms transform resources to create value (Priem & Butler, 2001). Therefore, the RBV [resource-based view] requires further elaboration to explain the link between the management of resources and the creation of value. (Sirmon, Hitt & Ireland, 2007, p. 273)."

(p.640) Resourcing theory offers a powerful view into the resource dynamics in organizations, representing a potential site of synergy between resourcing and the resource-based view of the firm. Resourcing theory also provides a way of theorizing how dynamic capabilities emerge and change, which is crucial for further development of the body of research (Eisenhardt & Martin, 2000). Many POS scholars are interested in understanding more about the emergence and processes involved in cultivating positive dynamic capabilities such as innovation or resilience.

2. **Develop the potential for resourcing theory to inform how innovation happens and how people and firms respond to change.** Many POS scholars are interested in practices that help sustain positive organizational change. Scholars interested in the microdynamics of innovation and change in organizations could benefit from taking up resourcing theory, because the resourcing view reveals the incremental nature of the experimentation involved in getting from “what do I have?” to “what actions can I take to create outcomes I care about?” As a result, resourcing theory provides a potentially valuable way of understanding how innovations happen and the role of everyday action in innovation and in other positive organizational change.

3. **Pursue more research on ampliative cycles and how they unfold in different contexts.** The concepts of endogenous resourcing and ampliative cycles have a great deal of potential for POS, especially for scholars interested in virtuous cycles, positive spirals, and broaden-and-build theories of positive emotion in organizations (e.g., Fredrickson, 2003). Finding out more about how these cycles can be used to perpetuate and enlarge the values we most want to promote in organizations might involve exploring questions about, for instance, the kinds of meta-frameworks that lend themselves to ampliative cycles. We have identified courage, learning, and community building possibilities, and we imagine further research could identify many more.

4. **Explore the agentic ability to alter the direction of resourcing cycles.** Recent research has shown that organizational participants can agentially direct the resourcing cycle such that energy can be diverted from negative cycles and directed to more positive cycles (Feldman & Quick, 2009). This agentic ability involves recognizing and engaging resourcing cycles that are often unpredictable and generate surprising results (Howard-Grenville et al., 2010). Scholars interested in managing positive change could benefit from looking more closely into organizational members’ abilities to direct resourcing cycles as a skill that could be understood, explained, and developed within organizations.

5. **Examine the availability of practices in specific contexts.** Resourcing theory makes clear that the ability to resource positive frameworks depends on the availability of practices or the ability to create practices that enable people to take up potential resources to energize these frameworks. Yet, we know little about how practices become available or whether practices available in specific contexts (e.g., health or education) are able to energize positive frameworks. The seeding of practices that can energize positive frameworks in and through organizations is an important potential area of new research.
References


change. *Organization Science.* (Manuscript under review.)


**Notes:**

(1.) Based on Sewell’s 1992 definition of resource as “anything that can be used as a source of power in social interaction” (1992, p. 9).

(2.) This example was developed by Torsten Schmidt, University of St. Gallen. We are grateful to him for the use of the example.

(3.) We use the term framework (rather than schema as Feldman [2004] did) to refer to what a resource helps to
create. We could also have used *schema*. Framework has the disadvantage of appearing to be static; schema’s association with matters cognitive is also problematic.

(4.) We might also note that stretching food with various additives has become a standard feature of American processed foods since World War II and is one of the distinctions between American food and European food. This resourcing has benefited corporations but appears to have produced negative health outcomes.

(5.) Previous scholarship has used the term *cascade* to refer to these ampliative cycles or spirals (Feldman & Quick, 2009; Feldman & Khademian, 2003).

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