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EXPLORING AND EXPLAINING VARIETIES OF SECRECY IN OGANIZATIONAL LIFE

Jana Costas & Chris Grey

DEPARTMENT OF ORGANIZATION
COPENHAGEN BUSINESS SCHOOL

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Exploring and Explaining Varieties of Secrecy in Organizational Life

Jana Costas (Free University Berlin) & Christopher Grey (University of Warwick)

Abstract

Secrecy is a common feature of organizational life, but has received very little attention within the organization studies literature. The paper draws upon sociological and organizational literature to propose a typological framework of the varieties of secrecy in organizations and illustrates these with empirical examples. A discussion of some of the theoretical consequences of secrecy for the study of identity and power is presented. Overall, it is suggested that secrets and secrecy offer a promising and hitherto under-explored avenue for organizational researchers.

Keywords

Secrets. Organizational Secrecy. Public Secret. WikiLeaks. Bletchley Park. Consultancy Firms.

Exploring and Explaining Varieties of Secrecy in Organizational Life

Introduction

Recently, the question of where new theories of organization are to be found has been raised (Suddaby, Hardy & Huy, 2011). One answer may be in seeking to explain ubiquitous but unexamined, or under-examined, facets of organizations; and one such facet is secrecy. Secrecy is commonplace within organizational life, whether in terms of confidential information about strategies, products, clients and employees; or in the more informal sense of gossip, information-trading and politicking. Yet the scholarly literature on organizations has little to say about secrets. Within five of the leading journals – *Academy of Management Journal*, *Academy of Management Review*, *Administrative Science Quarterly*, *Organization Science* and *Organization Studies* – only two papers (Schuster and Colletti, 1973; Hannah, 2005) have the words 'secret' or 'secrecy' in their keywords or titles.

Outside these journals, there has scarcely been more attention to secrets. Introducing a short special section on the subject, Jones (2008: 95) notes that "… secrets are rarely studied by organizational scholars", and one of the contributions points out that "secrets in organizations are pervasive [but] have not been studied in any systematic way" (Anand & Rosen, 2008: 97). Feldman (1988) is almost unique in locating secrecy as analytically central, in this case to a study of the politics of organizational decision making; elsewhere secrecy appears in passing or with little analytical weight being placed upon it. Thus, some consideration has been given to the protection of trade secrets (Liebeskind, 1997; Hannah, 2005, 2007), strategic and financial secrets (Rivkin, 2001; Gaa, 2009) and military secrets (Argyres, 1999). Other studies have touched on secrecy in studies of the management of information privacy (Milberg, Smith & Burke, 2000), innovation processes (Dougherty, 2001; Knott & Posen, 2009; Delerue & Lejeune, 2011) and resistance and limitations to knowledge-sharing (Haas & Park, 2010). A more sustained stream of work has been concerned with secrecy primarily in terms of whistleblowing and ethical behavior (White & Hanson, 2002; Ashforth & Anand, 2003; Anand & Rosen, 2008; Keane, 2008). In a somewhat related vein are studies of transparency, knowledge or corruption in organizations, which in various ways point towards forms of concealment,

lying and deception (Grover, 1993; Garsten & Lindh de Montaya, 2008; Ashforth et al, 2008). This in turn connects with a wider literature on 'organizational misconduct' within which secrecy can play a part in concealing wrongdoing (Greve, Palmer & Pozner, 2010: 69), although of course the keeping of secrets is not necessarily a matter of misconduct; indeed in some contexts it would rather be the *betrayal* of secrets that constitutes misconduct.

This constitutes a surprisingly limited body of work for so ubiquitous a feature of organizations, and nowhere within it is any sustained attempt to consider secrecy as a broad category of organizational theory and practice. From a sociological point of view this is particularly surprising. Georg Simmel (1906/1050) who undertook the foundational sociological analysis of secrecy regarded it as an inherent feature of social life, central to individual and group formation (cf. Feldman, 1988: 77) whilst Max Weber, in his classic account of bureaucracy, noted how such organizations are intimately associated with secrecy: "the concept of the 'official secret' is the specific invention of bureaucracy, and nothing is so fanatically defended by the bureaucracy …." (Weber, in Gerth & Mills, 1991: 233). Yet secrecy has all but disappeared in dominant accounts of organizations. For, whether understood as rationalised machines (Ritzer, 1996), post-bureaucratic networks of trust (Heckscher, 1994), sites of knowledge sharing (Adler, 2001; Alvesson, 2004), or of auditing (Power, 1997; Strathern, 2000), organizations are more usually associated with transparency, openness and accountability than with secrecy.

The purpose of this paper is to provide a preliminary explanation and exploration of how secrecy operates in organizations, with the aim of encouraging further work which gives attention to secrets and secrecy as organizational phenomena. In particular, we will first draw attention to the variety of ways in which secrets operate, ways which include but go beyond the Weberian emphasis on the 'official' secret, to the more informal and habituated sense, highlighted by Simmel, of secrecy as woven into the daily life of organizations. These classic sociological analyses are supplemented by consideration of the anthropological work of Michel Taussig on 'public secrecy'. In this way, we seek

to both 'borrow from' and 'blend' (Oswick, Fleming & Hanlon, 2011) theories to develop a heuristic typology of organizational secrecy, categorizing it in terms of formal, informal, private and public secrecy. As with all typologies, there are continuities as well as discontinuities between the categories, which we will indicate.

There are particular, and obvious, difficulties with the empirical study of secrecy and this paper is not such a study. However, to make the analysis less abstract, throughout the paper we will illustrate the different modes of secrecy by reference to three examples. Two of these draw upon our own organizational research: an historical study of a state intelligence organization, Bletchley Park during the Second World War (Author 2, 2012); and a series of qualitative studies of consulting and professional services firms (Author 1, 2009a, 2009b; Author 2, 1994, 2006). These examples are not presented, nor were they conducted, as case studies of secrecy but rather as sources of illustrations to illuminate the issues under discussion. The third source of illustrations is the publicly well-known one of WikiLeaks which since 2006 has placed issues of secrecy and the revelation of secrets centrally in the political spotlight through the public disclosure via the internet of various kinds of commercial, diplomatic and military documents.

We will briefly introduce these sources of illustrations as a prelude to working through the four-fold categorization of organizational secrets by reference to them, and in this way fill out the typology presented. A typology is not, of course, in itself a theorization of secrecy, but it can inform such theorization by virtue of clarifying the scope of the topic under discussion. Thus following the presentation of the typology we develop an analysis, based upon what the sociological literature suggests are key issues, of how secrecy intersects with identity and power in organizations. Whilst not exhaustive of how considerations of secrecy can inform organizational theory, we suggest that these are both illustrative but also especially important examples of how this can occur.

Overall, the article aims to make two contributions to the study of organizations. First, we bring the topic of secrecy on to the research agenda. It represents one of those phenomena, we suggest, that fundamentally shapes organizational life yet has not been explored in any systematic way or in depth. Indeed, the neglect of secrecy might be indicative of the ways in which our field has lost sight of asking more profound or fundamental questions concerning organizations, their nature and consequences (Hinings & Greenwood, 2002). A second contribution is to develop a framework for understanding organizational secrecy that provides insights into the diverse nature, dynamics and functioning of secrets and in this way not only propose further exploration but provide future researchers with a framework for doing so.

Organizational Secrecy

As a now classic philosophical analysis of secrecy suggests, a secret "conceals knowledge, information and/or behaviour from the view of others" (Bok, 1984: 5-6). The ways in which concealment may occur are varied, and in this section of the paper we seek to differentiate these, but before considering 'how' secrecy operates in organizations it is worth reflecting on 'why' it does so.

A recent treatment of organizational secrecy has stated that: "the foundation of all secrets, whether related to government or business, is to protect an informational asset perceived to be of high value – whether tactical or strategic" (Dufresne & Offstein, 2008: 103). These notions of concealment and protection of knowledge or behaviour must lie at the centre of any understanding of secrecy and are definitional to it. However, whilst helpful in characterizing many organizational secrets, such definitions immediately raise questions about the reasons for secrecy. For example, the keeping of secrets may protect nothing of, or even perceived as being of, much value at all – for example routine organizational gossip. Moreover, organizations characterized by a culture of secrecy are particularly prone to keeping secrets for their own sake rather than for their intrinsic value. This is well-illustrated by the case of government intelligence services, which might be taken as the strongest exemplar of 'official' informational secrets. Michael Herman occupies an unusual position in having been a senior practitioner in the UK's intelligence community who subsequently became a leading scholar in the

intelligence studies field. He points out that the very existence of strict secrecy bestows upon intelligence practitioners a feeling of 'specialness' into which newcomers are inducted through special rituals, secret language and elaborate precautions. In this way, he suggests that a deeply ingrained and lifelong sense of being a member of a privileged inner circle develops (Herman, 1996: 328-330). The consequence of such a culture can be to make secrecy the default position so that "in practice, peacetime secrecy is often overdone; special codewords and limited distributions become departments' badges and means of protecting and extending their territory." (Herman, 1996: 93)

It is therefore important to see secrecy not simply as a rational, functional exercise in organizational self-protection (although it may often be that) but also (potentially) as a habituated mode of organizing. Indeed, according to Weber, the jealous guarding of 'official secrets' in bureaucracy goes well beyond that of necessity and is rather an aspect of the protection of the power of functionaries, Herman's example of territory protection being a case in point.

This is supported by Canetti (1962) who argued that "secrecy lies at the very core of power" (1962: 290). He describes how those in power create webs of secrets that give the impression that only they are the ones who are in the know – something that is particularly pertinent in dictatorships (see also Zizek, 2005). The power of totalitarianism – part of what makes it total – is the assiduous collection by the authorities of secret files, collated by secret policemen. According to Canetti, individuals in power may also entrust others with certain secrets in order to test their loyalty and commitment. Weber's student Robert Michels' (1911/1958) classic work on elites, furthermore, suggests that it is an aspect of the constitution and functioning of such elites that they hold secrets.

The significance of this, beyond the question of the rational function of organizational secrecy in protecting valuable knowledge, is two-fold. Firstly, it accounts for the way that where there has been attention to secrecy in the organizational literature, this has very often been concerned with ethically dubious concealments perpetrated by organizations (or groups within organizations) for self-interested reasons, such as the protection of elite interests, and the associated practice of whistleblowing (Ashforth & Anand, 2003; Anand & Rosen, 2008; Keane, 2008; Greve, Palmer & Pozner, 2010).

These are important and interesting issues but only one dimension ('dirty secrets' so to speak) of organizational secrecy. Indeed, the most elaborate sociological treatment of secrecy, that of Georg Simmel (1906/1950), emphasized the need to approach secrecy not simply from the question of ethics: "we must not allow ourselves to be deceived by the manifold ethical negativeness of secrecy. Secrecy is a universal sociological form, which, as such, has nothing to do with the moral valuations of its contents" (Simmel, 1950: 463).

Secondly, the enmeshment of secrets with the formation of social groups points towards the social as well as the informational aspect of organizational secrecy. At the heart of Simmel's understanding of secrecy is the idea that the possession of secrets is intimately bound up with the construction of group *identities*: it marks a boundary between insiders and outsiders, between the privately shared and the public and in this way has a significance over and above whatever ostensible functionality it may possess for an organization (see also Goffman, 1959). Thus "not quite so evident are the attractions and values of the secret beyond its significance as a mere means – the peculiar attraction of formally secretive behaviour irrespective of its momentary content. In the first place, the strongly emphasized exclusion of all outsiders makes for a correspondingly strong feeling of possession …. [m]oreover, since the others are excluded from the possession … the converse suggests itself psychologically, namely that what is denied to many must have special value" (Simmel, 1950: 332).

This is precisely the phenomenon Herman observed in the intelligence services, and indeed he invokes Simmel to explain those observations. More generally, as Cooper (1990: 186) argues, the Simmelian insight into the social power of secrecy is akin to the demarcation of the sacred (another word linked etymologically to 'secret') and the profane. This is by no means fanciful as becomes very evident when considering how secrets are frequently given 'under oath' to be protected as one's sacred duty or, more prosaically, in the way that those who are not to be entrusted with secrets are said to be 'blacklisted'. In a less dramatic way, secrecy in organizations is clearly often bound up with group formations or political coalition-building which may or may not be functional to organizational effectiveness, for example in terms of decision-making (Feldman, 1988).

Drawing together these various points, we can say that an organizational secret can have at least three kinds of motivation: the concealment of something of value, the protection of interests, and the cementing of individual and group identity. These may co-exist, or be more or less important. For example, a secret, such as a military or commercial secret, may be held for clear reasons of functional value and only incidentally cement group identity. On the other hand, and at the other extreme, children will often form 'secret societies' the secrets held by which are of nugatory intrinsic value and which operate solely in order to create an in-group, deriving what value they have from that. The organizational analogue might be that of the kinds of habitual gossiping which have little real informational value but which act as markers between 'in' and 'out' crowds. If this explains the various reasons *why* secrets are held, what of the *way* in which they are held?

Towards a Typology of Secrecy

The most obvious kind of secrecy in organizations is that which we will call formal secrecy – the kind of secret indexed by the Weberian notion of the 'official secret'. It relates to the restricted possession of particular, tangible knowledge and, as such, is pervasive in organizations. Besides product knowledge, strategic plans and so forth, it may take the form of client confidentiality in the professions or data protection protocols, often as a result of legal or regulatory requirements (Milberg, Smith & Burke, 2000). At the level of state bureaucracy it may take the form of military and other security related secrets. Given that it is these state secrets which are nowadays normally referred to as 'official secrets' we instead use the term 'formal secrets' to refer to the whole array of ways in which organizations seek to restrict possession of tangible knowledge assets, whether or not they are state secrets.

But organizational secrecy is not only 'formal' in character. As with almost all aspects of organizational life, there are also informal processes at work. It is a commonplace experience in organizations (as in other spheres of life) for one employee to reveal some fact or story to another 'in confidence' on the understanding that it will not be repeated more widely. Such informal secrecy may

be no more than a conduit for gossip or complaint, although that is not to say that it is trivial for those engaging in it (Sotirin & Gottfried, 1999). It may on the other hand be a vehicle for coalition building or other forms of organizational politics, as is explicit in Feldman's (1988) study and implicit in many accounts of such politics (e.g. Buchanan & Badham, 1999).

What formal and informal secrecy have in common is that a secret is *articulated* within the organization or amongst some sub-group of the organization – those who are formally or informally 'in the know'. This may be contrasted with two further forms of secrecy which have as their key characteristic that they are *unspoken*. The first of these is very straightforward and may be described as a 'private' secret. This is the situation where an individual knows something but does not disclose it to anyone else at all. Such secrets are organizationally significant when they affect how their holder behaves within the organization. Examples might include where individuals conceal their sexuality, especially gay sexuality, for fear perhaps of discrimination or bullying (Ragins, Singh & Cornwell, 2007), or where women conceal the fact of being pregnant in the workplace, to avoid negative reactions (Gatrell, 2011). Private secrecy is different to formal and informal secrecy not just in the fact that it is not articulated, but in that it manifestly does not create in groups and out groups, since the secret is restricted to the individual holder.

A much more complex sort of unarticulated secret is the 'public secret', and as such it requires more extensive introduction. The concept was developed by the anthropologist Michel Taussig (1999), and utilised within anthropology and ethnography (e.g. Fletcher, 2010). Such a notion appears oxymoronical when secrecy is conceived of in formal terms, yet it refers to a situation in which something is simultaneously known and yet not-known (Simmel, 1906/1950), an unacknowledged and unacknowledgeable secret: "the public secret … can be defined as that which is generally known but cannot be articulated" (Taussig, 1999: 5-6). It is easiest to understand it in terms of political issues and probably the most extreme example would be that of the Nazi Holocaust. Within Germany, the disappearance of Jewish people was widely known and spoken about in terms of 'resettlement' yet

whilst most German people did not in a formal sense know about the genocide, it was, arguably, in some way 'known' at the same time (Goldhagen, 1996). This claim is not uncontroversial, of course, but what is certainly true is that even amongst the architects of the Holocaust at the Wannsee Conference, what was being planned was not openly spoken of but there can be no doubt that those involved knew of what they were (not) speaking (Browning, 2004). Whilst illustrative of the concept, public secrets in organizational contexts are of course rarely of such a horrific sort. In our adaptation of Taussig's concept we are primarily concerned with much more mundane matters, such as those of corporate culture discourses and practices.

Two preliminary points should be made about public secrecy. The first is minor, but worth saying to avoid confusion: public secrecy differs from the now familiar concept within organization studies of 'tacit knowledge' (Polyani, 1966). Knowledge of public secrets is indeed tacit, but, more than that, it has to remain tacit: it cannot be rendered explicit not just in principle – because by definition it is unarticulated - but in practice, because at the moment of becoming explicit it would cease to be secret. That is different to tacit knowledge which may in practice be made explicit; and although doing so would mean it was no longer tacit, it would still be knowledge (Nonaka & Takeuchi, 1995). To put it another way, knowledge which is tacit is only contingently tacit; public secrecy is necessarily secret. Public secrecy is indeed a form of secrecy and to that extent it and formal secrecy are variants of the same concept. That said, the second preliminary point is that the nature of public secrecy differs from other types of secrecy not just in the ways we will elaborate but in certain definitional ways. We referred earlier to Bok's definition of secrecy but at that point omitted to say that he conceives of the concealment of knowledge as "intentional" (Bok, 1984: 5). Public secrecy, for all that it may serve many purposes and may be socially structured in various ways, does not require intentionality. Moreover, public secrecy is not about a concealment from others, but concealment from 'ourselves' – that is, it must not be spoken even to those 'in the know'.

As well as differentiating these four forms of secrecy, and grouping them according to whether they entail articulated (formal, informal) or unspoken (private, public) secrets, there are a number of other dimensions to be considered, which cut across this grouping. Secrecy is in a sense a paradox in that it is about both concealment and sharing and it is from this dual character of secrecy that we draw our typological dimensions. Thus there are issues of who shares a secret and how they come to know about it. We use the intelligence-derived term 'indoctrination' to refer to this, and suggest that for any secret there is a 'mode of indoctrination' (i.e. how a secret comes to be known) and a 'scope of indoctrination' (i.e. who is privy to a secret). Allied to this are the process through which secrets are shared, which we call the 'process of indoctrination' and the way in which the secret is held, which we call the 'nature of indoctrination'. Beyond these, since all secrets are also about concealment, there are issues of who they are concealed from and therefore what would constitute their betrayal. Indeed it is noteworthy that many of such studies of organizational secrecy as do exist are concerned with the dilemma of whether to keep a secret or not (Schuster & Colletti, 1973; Hannah, 2005, 2007; Haas & Park, 2010). We call this dimension the 'mode of betrayal'. By the same token, the way in which secrets are concealed is relevant and we call this the 'method of protection'.

To summarise, we are suggesting that secrecy takes a variety of forms and has a variety of dimensions, which we tabulate below:

Insert Table 1 here

Later, we will 'populate' this typology by explaining how each type of secrecy operates with reference to some illustrative cases, but first we will explain these illustrations.

Illustrations of Secrecy in Organizations

Empirical investigations of organizational secrecy are by definition very difficult (cf. Greve, Palmer & Pozner, 2010: 69). This is perhaps the main reason why the phenomenon has been so little explored. In relation to formal secrecy the barriers are formidable: how does one access that which is concealed, often by force of law? To get around this, we take an historical case which is a near perfect

exemplification of formal secrecy. This case is that of Bletchley Park, the place where, in the Second World War, Allied codebreakers successfully decrypted Axis ciphers, most famously the Enigma ciphers. At the heart of the operation was highly specialised and esoteric cryptanalytic work. The work of Bletchley Park (more properly the Government Code and Cypher School or GC & CS) was conducted in complete secrecy – both from the outside world and through internal compartmentalization - which was maintained for 30 years thereafter by the 10,000 or so people who worked there but has now been declassified. It therefore presents an ideal vehicle for examining how formal secrecy works in organizations. The material drawn upon for this paper comes from a major research project on the organization of Bletchley Park, involving extensive analysis of archived documents, oral history testimony as well as a wide variety of secondary materials (Author 2, 2012).

In relation to public secrecy, the barriers are equally difficult but of a different sort: how does one access that which cannot be articulated? The only way of approaching this is through ethnographic and interpretative study in which public secrets may be, at least, discerned. The case we take is that of consulting firms. These are a good site to try to find examples of public secrecy precisely because they, unlike intelligence agencies, epitomize ostensibly open and 'unsecretive' organizations. The material drawn upon for this paper again comes from a larger research project, this time on identity and work practices in two global consulting firms, entailing 58 interviews, participant observations, focus groups with members across hierarchy levels and documentary analysis at the organizations (Author 1, 2009a, 2009b). Within these firms, the employees exist within a complex web of unspoken knowledge about how they must behave. We are not referring to the myriad of ways that people in all organizations navigate the informal order of work, but rather to the specific things which have to be known in order to make such a navigation but cannot be admitted, creating "a fundamental tension between knowledge and acknowledgment, personal awareness and public discourse" (Zerubavel, 2006: 3). The prime example of this is that in both of the firms it was publicly required that employees be 'authentic' in their daily behaviour, that they 'be themselves' and yet those employees knew – or, rather, in the manner of public secrets, they both knew and did not know – that this authenticity had to

be fabricated and enacted. This is different to the classic distinction between front-stage and back-stage (Goffman, 1959) in that it is about the erasure of that distinction.

Informal secrecy is rather easier to study in that, unlike public secrecy, it is at least capable of being articulated and, unlike formal secrecy, is not protected by weight of law. Again, qualitative and interpretive methods are most appropriate in that they allow interviewees to admit the interviewer into the circle of informally held knowledge. Indeed, it is very commonplace when interviewing in organizations to be given information with the request that it be held in confidence. To illustrate this form of secrecy, we draw examples both from the consulting cases and some previous studies of professional services firms (Author 2, 1994, 2006).

Finally, there is the case of private secrecy. This would seem to present insuperable barriers to empirical investigation since by definition it is knowledge held by individuals and not disclosed to anyone else. The moment it is disclosed to another it becomes, strictly speaking, a form of informal secrecy. Nevertheless, at that moment, the previous period of private secrecy may be glimpsed.

As well as these two research cases we will also use WikiLeaks as a source of examples: here the source of information is, precisely, that which is now in the public domain. WikiLeaks is the website, launched in 2006, of an internet activist organization led by Julian Assange which seeks to reveal material kept secret by governments, companies and the media. Its most high profile revelations came in 2010 with the publication of massive volumes of material about diplomatic and military secrets, especially those of the United States government. The WikiLeaks example is of different sort to the research cases in that whereas the latter are intended to illustrate the keeping of secrets, the former is an example of the betrayal of secrets. This is important because betrayal is the endemic vulnerability of all forms of secrecy, and self-evidently the only way to illustrate it is via a case where betrayal has in fact happened.

It should be stressed again that we are not presenting any of this empirical material as 'case studies' of secrecy (and hence we do not provide here methodological details, which are contained within the original studies cited); rather they are used highly selectively as *illustrations* of the concepts with which we are concerned.

An Explication of Varieties of Secrecy in Organizations

In this section, we work through the four forms of secrecy identified in the typology, drawing upon the illustrative cases just identified. As this explanation proceeds, key terms are highlighted in bold: these will then be carried forward to fill out the skeletal typology presented above.

Formal secrecy

The formal secret consists of tangible information, knowledge held by a limited number of people. It is revealed to others by the decision of those already 'in the know'. In the intelligence world, this revelatory decision has, since the mid-20th century and following US practice, been termed 'indoctrination'. At Bletchley Park there were at least two levels of secrecy. The first was a blanket prohibition imposed on all who worked there from saying anything at all about their work. This prohibition – backed up by force of law – did not constitute indoctrination into any particular secret and many of those who worked there knew little or nothing of a secret nature anyway: the prohibition was to prevent opposing intelligence services from piecing together from a myriad of disclosures what was happening. The second level of secrecy was indoctrination into specific secrets, most notably that the Enigma ciphers were being read. These two levels also point to a distinction between 'secretiveness' in a general sense (which is probably highly unusual in organizations) and 'secrecy' in the specific sense of control of particular pieces of information; but in both cases the boundary between knowing and not-knowing – the heart of the Simmelian notion of secrecy as demarcating in and out groups – consisted of a formalised and intentional moment of **revelation**.

The latter term is significant: indoctrination into formal secrets is always intentional. That is not say that secrets are always successfully kept – the Bletchley Park secret was certainly concealed from the Axis powers but was known to the Soviet Union due to the espionage activities of John Cairncross – but where they are not it is the result of a security leak: an unintended, unauthorised and for that matter unwelcome, disclosure. Moreover, security leaks, or the betrayal of formal secrets always take a single form, namely the disclosure to those who are not indoctrinated. This violation of the boundary between in and out groups may have many different motivations and consequences (and may be entirely unintentional). The case of an agent, acting for a foreign power, such as John Cairncross, is very different to the case of Gordon Welchman (one of Bletchley Park's leading figures) who told his clergyman father about his work - in every respect but one: they both involved disclosure to **outsiders** who were not officially in possession of the secret. In the same way, WikiLeaks' disclosures are based upon information passed to them by informants and published to the world at large.

For it is in the nature of formal secrecy that access to it is **restricted** to the indoctrinated group: indeed the expression 'restricted access' is, like indoctrination, an intelligence-derived expression. Such restriction is more than a tautological restatement of secrecy (and in this sense is different in the case of public secrecy) in that it is not simply a matter of concealment from those who *must* not know the secret but a restriction of access to those who *need* to know it. Thus the Bletchley Park secret was to be concealed from the Axis powers, but in pursuit of that concealment, was restricted not just from the general public but from most of those working there and from most government and military officials. The smaller the number of people in the know, it was correctly reasoned, the smaller the risk of a security leak. This is underlined by WikiLeaks: one reason why the leaks occurred was the much greater extent of knowledge-sharing within US intelligence agencies following 9/11, going beyond the narrow need to know principle of restriction to the smallest number possible. What that exact number is will of course vary from case to case, but it is always the case for a formal secret that the aim will be to restrict it to the smallest possible number. The more secret something is the smaller this number will be (for example, ultra secret material has more restricted access than top secret material which in turn has more restricted access than secret material).

The revelation of a formal secret to restricted groups is achieved intentionally, through a deliberate decision to indoctrinate and, as such, a part of its formal character is that this revelation is **recorded**. Indeed, a key way in which secrecy is maintained is via the existence of an explicit list of those authorised to receive particular kinds of information. Thus at Bletchley Park, those cleared to receive intelligence derived from Enigma were card indexed. In this particular way, formal secrecy is different to the other three modes of secrecy we have identified and the recording serves as a reminder of the specifically bureaucratic nature of 'official secrets'.

Because formal secrets are revealed to a restricted group of people, it makes sense to say that those people '**own**' the secret. Ownership is related to restriction for secrets just as it is for physical objects. We would not talk about anyone owning the air, because it is available to everyone and in this sense property rights do not apply, but formal secrets, like discrete objects are held as property, whether of the state (i.e. state secrets) or of corporations (i.e. trade secrets). This comparison is instructive because it points to the mode of enforcement of ownership. Just as ownership of property is contingent upon a **legal** framework that defines and enforces it, so too is formal secrecy[1]. This is manifestly the case with intelligence secrets such as those at Bletchley Park but it is also so in relation to employment contracts which enforce commercial confidentiality or professional regulations which require client confidentiality and so on. Violation of such secrets can and does result in legal sanction, although one of the issues raised by WikiLeaks is how effective such sanction can be in the internet age.

Public secrecy

Public secrecy is a more difficult concept to illustrate, given that it entails an inherent tension of knowing and not-knowing. An illustration from the consultancy firms related to the corporate culture discourses and practices of authenticity. These emphasized that people express an 'authentic', fun and playful persona at work, albeit in a manner that did not compromise being professional, driven and

[1] It might be said that illegal organizations, such as criminal gangs, terrorists, cartels and secret political societies, hold formal secrets which are not legally enforced, and this is true by definition given that such organizations are not legally constituted. In such case enforcement will be by coercive sanction outside the law, but this does not negate the fact that the secrets are of a formal rather than a public sort. See, for examples of such organizations, Erickson (1981), Baker & Faulkner (1993), Parker (2008).

self-disciplined. It was in the context of this manufactured authenticity culture that individuals referred to "*unspoken* rules" and maintained that "the whole definition of right and wrong [came] from the *unspoken*" (emphasis added). These remarks concerning the "unspoken" yet existing "rules", i.e. an absent-present web of rules, indicate the presence of public secrecy; individuals were supposed to act in 'authentic' ways as if they did not know that specific "definitions" of authenticity are in place. In other words, they were supposed to know not to know that such authenticity entailed 'inauthentic' discourses and practices.

In contrast to the formal secret, the public secret appears not as a moment of intentional revelation but rather as an **emergent** process of **realization**. The public secret is 'picked up' through interactions and within a process of socialization (Rodriguez & Ryave, 1992). Unlike the formal secret, there is no specific indoctrination, and yet indoctrination is an apposite word given that it carries both its technical meaning in the intelligence field as well as the more diffuse everyday meaning of the shaping of belief. Indeed, one consultant noted that "you are indoctrinated from day one" into the "views ... and assumptions" operating at the firm. These views and assumptions related to how employees were openly encouraged to "be themselves" at work and interact with management in informal and non-hierarchical ways, yet realize what such 'authenticity' is supposed to entail and where its limits lay. Clearly such an emergent process of realization and the very notion of the known but not-known character of public secrecy which is unspoken means that indoctrination is **unrecorded**.

The public secret is not restricted – that is central to its status as being 'public'. Certainly it will only be of interest to particular groups but within those groups knowledge is in principle **extended** across the group as a whole. There is no restriction to a privileged, need to know, segment of the organization, nor could there be since the secret is unspoken. Of course it may be the case that some members of the organization fail to 'pick it up', but this failure is not an artefact of concealment, instead reflecting the haziness of public secrecy with its twin features of knowing and not-knowing. This is exemplified by one consultant who noted that she "got feedback that I can be sometimes too

passionate, care too much about a project and ... get too involved in it and that when something goes wrong that I personally get upset". The failure of the consultant to acknowledge the public secret meant that she did not understand the fine line between fully embracing the corporate culture discourses and practices (e.g. always "being enthusiastic" about work) and knowing not to take them too seriously (e.g. not being "too passionate"). Similarly, in an earlier study of a professional services firm (Author, 1994: 489-491) an employee who was sacked was puzzled because her appraisals had consistently shown her performance to be "satisfactory". Yet it was a public secret, which she had not 'picked up', that the true meaning within the firm's culture was that 'satisfactory' really meant 'not good enough'

This haziness means that public secrets are not owned as a possession but are **shared**, though in an unstated manner, by virtue of membership of a community – indeed they help to shape and create that community. The only way in which public secrets can be protected is by **silence** and indeed part of the secret is the knowledge that this silence is expected, and the sanction for breaking it, whilst perhaps not very strong, is that of not 'fitting in' in some nebulous way. The way public secrecy operates is revealed by the remarks of one consultant concerning the cultural accent on displaying an authentic persona through being outspoken and proactive. She observed how "…sometimes it feels like everyone knows what is going on ... [for example when] I would go to my manager and say 'I have noticed that, you don't do that billing very well, can I help you with that?'…[a]nd they know that I am saying this because I want to be perceived as proactive and I know that, but at the same time it means that that is what you have to do in order to do well".

This highlights the workings of the public secret, namely that it requires a certain shared, though unstated, 'knowingness' amongst the organizational members; she acted as if "being proactive" came to her naturally, whilst "everyone [knew]", that is including herself, that it was managerially induced. Thus, whilst operating in a 'concealed' way, and in that sense, indeed, a form of secrecy, public secrecy has as its purpose (even if not intentionally designed for that reason) the communication of

information in a protected way in the sense that the communication takes the form of 'not saying' things which are nevertheless important to know if an organizational member is to operate effectively.

Since the public secret is shared in an extended way, it follows that its betrayal does not consist of revealing it to those who should not know it, but by speaking of it to those who already know of it. Violation consists of saying what should not be said to **insiders**, rather than to outsiders to whom in any case the secret would be of no interest[2]. That is, the public secret requires that individuals do not reveal it openly to themselves. Regarding this, one consultant observed that "the culture doesn't really allow you to be yourself and to say the exact truth... you have to use a whole sweep of words to disguise the truth". The reason for not "[saying] the exact truth" within the team is that, if the insiders openly stated the public secret, the very culture around authenticity would be undermined, i.e. people would acknowledge its 'inauthentic' nature.

Something very similar is at work in the world of diplomacy where, as WikiLeaks showed, widely shared and understood truths about international relations must nevertheless not be openly said even to those perfectly well aware of them. Indeed, US diplomats are not allowed to publically speak about the cables, as this would confirm their existence. Thus, in public discussions of WikiLeaks involving US officials 'everyone knows' that WikiLeaks has disclosed cables stemming from the US State Department, yet US officials cannot articulate this. More generally, it was striking that many of the WikiLeaks disclosures, for example about US officials' attitudes to various governments, really only confirmed what 'we all knew'. Indeed it has been argued that "[t]he only surprising thing about the WikiLeaks revelations is that they contain no surprises." (Zizek, 2011). Much of the information leaking out (e.g. concerning the Iraq war, Russian corruption or Arabian disapproval of the Iranian regime) had been part of public knowledge anyway, though without being so clearly stated and revealed. Yet the fact that these things were in some sense 'known' does not undermine the way that their not being *stated* was a matter of high value – as shown by the furious reaction of the US authorities to the disclosures.

[2] This feature of public secrecy is also of significance methodologically for it is what enables researchers to access public secrets: unlike formal secrets, telling public secrets to 'outsiders' does not violate them.

Informal Secrecy

Informal secrecy operates in a myriad of different ways but archetypically is marked by words such as 'I shouldn't really say this but …'; 'don't tell anyone I said this, but ….' and so on. As such it will be familiar to anyone who was worked in any organization, and requires little elaboration. Like formal secrecy, it is concerned with tangible information which can be articulated, and is articulated when it is **revealed**. In this way informal secrecy differs from public secrecy, even though both have an informal character, because, as discussed above, public secrets are *not* articulated or revealed. The revelation of an informal secret will typically take the form of a **conversational** disclosure by one person to another but based not upon need to know or upon any particular policy but rather to those **selected** by one individual and **shared** with one or more others. These others may well in turn share the secret with someone else, and there is no sense of there being any record kept of who has and has not been 'indoctrinated'. Indeed, the sharing off such secrets is, precisely, **off the record**. Within the consulting firms such informal secrecy was detected in that interviewees shared their future plan to leave the company with the researcher, whilst keeping this secret from other colleagues. They were worried that this would affect how the firm evaluated and remunerated them (Author 1, 2009a)

There will clearly be considerable variety in how extended or restricted informal secrets may be, and this is very much to do with context and the nature of relations. For example, it is commonplace for gossip to be passed on in confidence without any real expectation that this conversation will be respected in a literal way. Rather, the expectation is that it will not be passed to 'inappropriate' people (for example, the person who is the subject of gossip). This means that the betrayal of an informal secret is not really a matter of telling outsiders, as is the case with formal secrecy, but telling the wrong sort of insiders (in the consulting example this would be the team manager). Here we see clearly the role of secrecy in creating in and out groups, so that betrayal comes not from telling the secret but from telling it to someone who is not in the 'in group' – to '**outsider insiders**'. In other cases, the informal secret may indeed be intended not to be passed on at all, and this is likely to be signaled when the secret is told, and understood within the context of a particular relationship. The

way in which this type of secrecy is enforced is also necessarily informal and rests upon **trust**. Violations of trust are likely to be met with social sanctions, such as group exclusion, discrimination, ridicule, criticism or inducement of shame.

The WikiLeaks affair contained ample examples of the disclosure of informal secrecy (although more often was concerned with disclosing formal secrets). A case in point is the sharing of information concerning the German Christian – Free Democratic coalition government with US diplomats. Specifically, a member of the Free Democratic Party informed US diplomats about the disputes between the coalition parties as they were negotiating their governmental programme. From the coalition's point of view such disputes are treated as internal matters albeit not protected by law; that is, they are informal secrets which are not supposed to be shared with the public, as they could shed a bad light on the coalition's ability to govern the country (Spiegel 2010b).

A further illustration can be taken from one of the studies of a professional services firm (Author 2, 1994) it was found that those accepted by the firm were assigned 'offer grades', which is to say a ranking (A, B, C etc) of the quality of the accepted applicant. This was (in a limited sense) a formal secret, in the sense that knowledge of it was confined to those with bureaucratic access to the offer grades (namely the HR managers). It was also a public secret, in that it was widely understood, but rarely if ever discussed within the firm, that some staff had been marked down from the beginning as of higher status than others. But it was also an informal secret, in that those marked down in this way were given various 'coded signals', and on occasion told 'in terms', that they were amongst those regarded as having particularly good prospects. Such informal disclosure might have been purposeful, in that it entailed the expectation that the secret will become spread around the organization. As we argue below, in this way staff would be somewhat kept 'in check'. Moreover, the researcher was himself told, as an informal secret, that offer grades did indeed exist. So this is both an example of informal secrecy but also indicates, as we have been at pains to suggest, that different modes of secrecy can co-exist.

It is clear that informal secrecy is closely associated with the very widely explored phenomena of networking and social capital in organizations (e.g. Brass, 1995; Stohl, 1995; Author 2, 2006). Much of this entails the communication of information, for example of a technical nature (e.g. Papa, 1990) or relating to career opportunities (e.g. Seibert, Kramer & Leiden, 2001). Much of this communication is of an informal character (Dirsmith & Covaleski, 1995) and it is reasonable to speculate that at least some of this is in the nature of informal secrecy. There are many promising empirical lines of enquiry to follow here, but for present purposes the point would be that informal secrecy is not identical with networking and social capital formation in that by no means all of the latter is secretive, whilst informal secrecy is not necessarily to do with networking and social capital formation.

Private Secrecy

As indicated earlier, this type of secrecy is all but impossible to study empirically, and for that reason our remarks here will be brief. Earlier we used the example of a person who conceals their sexuality. Continuing with this example, we could say that 'indoctrination' comes in the form of an individual's **realization** of that sexuality both in itself and as something to be concealed and the process of **reflection** upon it. This reflection is of course **unrecorded** – unless perhaps in a private diary – and remains the property of the **individual**. In a sense a private secret is like a formal secret in that it is **owned** by the person who holds it, but in an extremely restricted sense: it is restricted to that single individual.

The disclosure of a private secret takes the form of its revelation to anyone else – were it to be so revealed then it would become an informal secret – and this is prevented solely by the **discretion** of the individual. One could easily, of course, envisage a situation in which what the individual believes to be a private secret is in fact perceived, or guessed, by others within the organization and has a currency as an informal secret or even as a public secret. Again the example of an unspoken sexuality is a commonplace one, in that such cases are often the subject of gossip and innuendo (i.e. an informal

secret), or just part of the unspoken knowledge within the organization (i.e. a public secret). On rare occasions a private secret of this sort might come to be a certain sort of formal secret: recently in the UK there have been several high profile examples of celebrities seeking legal injunctions to prevent the reporting of their sexual and private lives.

Secrets of this private type are presumably kept secret because their revelation would be in some way embarrassing or damaging to their holder and in this sense their protection is a way of protecting oneself from ridicule, discrimination or sanction. Indeed, in one recent high profile case – that of John Browne, the former CEO of BP – it appears to have been the case that it was precisely fear of ridicule and perceived stigma which led him to go to elaborate lengths to conceal his gay sexuality. It might also be said that a private secret of this type might be related to a public secret, for example an unspoken sense within an organization that homosexuality would be negatively evaluated. Indeed within one of the professional services firm studies (Author 2, 1994: 493) there was just such an oblique hint that homosexuality would be a barrier to reaching senior levels.

A Typology

Drawing together the explanation of the different types of secrecy provided in this section, we are now in a position to populate the typology we developed earlier:

Insert Table 2 here

It is clear that, as with all typologies, these modes are both distinct and overlapping. For example, formal and private secrecy, whilst in many respects different, are both concerned with the ownership of knowledge, whilst informal and public secrecy are concerned with its sharing. On the other hand, formal and informal secrecy, whilst in many respects different, are concerned with the articulation of knowledge; whereas in private and public secrecy knowledge is unspoken – and, if spoken, become transformed into a different type of secrecy. In other ways, for example in the way secrets are

protected, the four modes we have identified are distinct from each other. What they all share is the basic feature of secrecy identified by Bok (1984), namely the concealment of knowledge.

Discussion

Following Simmel (1950), our suggestion is that these various ways in which knowledge is concealed constitute a kind of 'hidden architecture' of organizations. Regardless of organizational structure, field of operations, organizational environment or any other variable, it is difficult to conceive of an organization which does not in some way and some degree contain within it some or all of the types of secrecy we have identified. Of course the nature, extent, operation and significance of secrecy will hugely vary and relate in all kinds of ways to things such as, indeed, structure, environment and field of operations. But the existence of secrecy in some form is, we propose, a common feature of all organizations and needs to be taken into account when studying organizations.

In this section we elaborate on some of the implications of organizational secrecy, namely on how bringing secrecy into focus can inform organizational research on identity and power. We concentrate on discussing these themes, as, according to the sociological literature, they are at the heart of any kind of secrecy, and, as our examples show, are empirically significant.

Secrecy and Identity

As has already been implied, one of the key consequences of secrecy is a delineation between those who know the secret(s) and those who do not know it, that is, between insiders (or, in the case of private secrecy, an insider) and outsiders. Thus, secrets are pertinent to the construction of group identity (Behr, 2006). In Simmel's words: "every relationship between two individuals or two groups will be characterized by the ratio of secrecy that is involved in it. Even when one of the parties does not notice the secret factor, yet the attitude of the concealer, and consequently the whole relationship, will be modified by it." (Simmel, 1950: 462).

We maintain that sharing a secret can constitute the very basis of a group's identity and the purpose of a secret might not be so much the protection of knowledge, but the constitution of a shared identity. An example from WikiLeaks can illustrate this. In Germany commentators noted how the motivation of German politicians to share insider information about the current government with US diplomats appears to have been the wish to create a special bond, i.e. shared group identity, with the US (Spiegel, 2010a). More generally, we suggest that the cementing of a group identity through secrecy seems particularly apparent in cases of formal secrets, as organizational members go through formal socialization processes to enter the group of those sharing a secret. Socialization usually involves an "initiation process [which] is long and full of many intermediate steps and tests of loyalty because the partially indoctrinated are a major point of vulnerability" (Hazelrigg, 1969: 325). Moreover, such socialization entails some form of cutting off relationships with individuals outside of group. At Bletchley Park, for instance, this meant that staff could not share any information about their work with friends and family.

The socialization process functions through the construction of clear social and cognitive boundaries between insiders and outsiders, i.e. those in the know versus those who do not know (see also Ashforth and Mael, 1989). Informal secrecy also involves socialization and the formation of social relationships. Whilst there is no recording of or systematic membership criteria for the in-group it is easy enough to see that when such secrets are shared conversationally part of that conversation may well consist of discussions of 'who else knows about this'. Given the fact that membership of the in-group involves being 'chosen', informal secrecy is perhaps more potent in the development of a sense of group identity and requires a greater degree of reciprocal trust than the more bureaucratically orchestrated procedures associated with formal secrecy.

In the case of public secrecy, this boundary is more subtle; the secret is not openly shared between individuals and the scope of indoctrination is broad. Nevertheless, as the illustration of the consultancy firms demonstrated, it is clear to those having picked up the secret who else is aware of it and who is

not. Private secrecy, alone, does not have the character of creating group identity, and whether the holder of a private secret feels positive or negative by having a unique knowledge presumably depends upon the nature of that knowledge and the psychopathology of the individual concerned. It is conceivable that possession of a guilty private secret serves to make the holder feel separated and estranged from others and in this way private secrecy and group identity could be antithetical.

The last case aside, as a secret constitutes a common point of identification of individuals in a group, the social cohesion amongst the group members is likely to be enhanced (Keane, 2008). Accompanying the sharing of a secret (whether in a stated or an unstated manner) are particular social norms, values and rules which group members take on, leading to a "peculiar degree of cohesion" (Simmel, 1950: 492). These are often manifested in certain group rituals (e.g. social meetings outside work) through which also reciprocal confidence and trust are fostered. Apart from social cohesion, secrecy increases the sense of distinctiveness of individual group members, which in turn positively affects their identification with the group (Ashforth and Mael, 1989). Knowing something that others do not know (and/or are not supposed to know) can provide people not only with the feelings of exclusivity and uniqueness, but also with the sense of control. Again Bletchley Park furnishes some interesting illustrations. For example, the group who knew the secret of Enigma "saw itself as – perhaps was – an elite within an elite" (Calvocoressi, 2001: 23). Or, again, at the time of D-Day some staff were indoctrinated into the timing of the Normandy invasion (individuals so indoctrinated were assigned the codeword 'bigoted'). One such staff member, interviewed for the project, recalled the sense of specialness she experienced – the "thrill" in her words - when, whilst off-duty at her accommodation, the other lodgers learned from the news broadcast that D-Day had occurred.

Such self-enhancement may depend on whether others perceive the individual and the group (or organization) they are part of to be distinct (Dutton, Dukerich and Harquail, 1994). This might suggest that members knowing a secret are prone to hint at the existence of such a secret (without providing the full information) to others not knowing about it, i.e. "there is desire to signalize one's own

superiority as compared with … others" (Simmel, 1950: 486). Those who are seen to be 'in the know' can be perceived as special in the eye of those not knowing the secret. This was conveyed in the interviews at the consultancy firms. Individuals, who seemed uncertain about the workings of public secrecy, remarked how others pointed out to them that "things are not as they appear" and "that you need to figure things out". Importantly, they were not told what exactly it is they have to "figure out", i.e. what was expected of them in this environment of public secrecy. In this way, the other person indicates to them that they are in the know and hence are distinct. In a rather different way, the use of formal codewords such as 'bigoted' at Bletchley Park presumably had the effect of making it known to those not so indoctrinated that there was differential knowledge of secrets: in this case, of course, the implication was exactly the opposite of the public secrecy case in that the expectation, indeed requirement, was that those not in the know would not 'figure it out'.

Overall, we propose that there is a mutually reinforcing relation between secrecy and group identity. Not only can organizational secrecy foster group identity constructions, but also inversely a group identity can be based on the very creation of secrecy. In this sense, the cementing of group identities can entail the purposeful and reflexive concealment of knowledge (even if this involves knowledge of little or no importance). Secrecy, more specifically the practice of keeping certain knowledge hidden, enhances the distinctiveness of a group or individual, as "[w]hat is withheld from the many appears to have a special value" (Simmel, 1950: 464). This can explain why individuals in power or elite groups like to cultivate an aura of secrecy, since the existence of secrecy – regardless of its actual content – creates a sense of exclusivity and powerfulness around them (Michels, 1958; Canetti, 1962). Indeed, it has been argued that the US State Department's engagement in secretive practices is related to its desire to retain the status of the world's only superpower, in that such secrecy (i.e. supposedly knowing more than others) is constitutive of being a superpower (Spiegel, 2010a). This is one dimension of the wider relationship between secrecy and power.

Secrecy and Power

Foucauldian inspired organizational research has shown the significance of power-knowledge interrelations, namely that the ways in which we know and understand things is always shaped by and also shapes forces of power (Knights, 2009). Our account of secrecy adds to this by pointing to the ways in which what we do *not* know or know but do not openly state can entail power effects. We maintain it is through *not* sharing and keeping certain knowledge hidden that power can also function. Four different ways of this interrelation between power and secrecy can be detected.

First, keeping knowledge secret involves the protection of interests. This is particularly evident in the case of Bletchley Park, where it allowed the British intelligence service to decipher German codes, giving them a significant advantage in the war. Secrecy can provide individuals, groups and organizations as a whole with strategic advantages and power over those who do not know. Hence, power can function through certain parties not knowing what others know. This reflects a Baconian (i.e. 'knowledge is power') rather a Foucauldian linkage of knowledge and power, and in that sense also reflects the sense in which formal secrecy entails the possession of knowledge. But the power of such knowledge is not intrinsic to it: it is context-dependent. Thus there is a certain life time of the power of a secret, contingent on the social, political and economic circumstances. This explains why WikiLeaks' disclosure of the cables is so politically explosive now as compared to in thirty years when they would be declassified and publically accessible and of, perhaps, little interest or controversy. Similarly, material on Bletchley Park is now largely declassified because it no longer has any military or technical value.

Second, the mechanisms of social exclusion and inclusion entail power effects. Not being part of the circle of those inducted into the secret, though knowing that such a secret exists can make individuals look up to those who are in the know, create a sense of dependency and also ask themselves how they have to be in order to be part of this circle. These kinds of cases are much more common in relation to informal and public secrecy than to formal secrecy because in the latter case indoctrination is by proceduralised revelation and based upon the need to know; whereas the former, being based upon

selective revelation and realization can also form the basis of an ambition to be 'in the know'. Public and informal secrecy can therefore make manifest social distinctions, for instance, in terms of hierarchy levels, sphere of influence and favoritism in organizations. This may also be true in relation to formal secrecy – with access being based upon seniority – but this is not borne out by the particular case of Bletchley Park where is was commonplace for security access to cut across hierarchical levels because of the 'need to know' requirement (thus some clerical workers knew far more than most cabinet ministers).

Third, secrecy can be used by managers and others to 'test' individuals' loyalty and reflexivity. Canetti (1962) describes how individual's loyalty is assessed by those in power, in that the latter share with individuals a secret and then observe whether the person keeps it to themselves or not. This insight is indeed highly pertinent to the Bletchley Park case because staff were vetted before being employed and in some cases again as they were given higher levels of security clearance. Moreover, security officers patrolled public places in the area, such as pubs, on the lookout for 'careless talk' to unauthorized people. This reminds one of the Orwellian scenario of 'big brother is watching you', where people cannot be sure who knows what, whom they can trust and who works for those in power. Of course, such a system seems exaggerated in the context of most organizations. However, experiences of uncertainty can be registered, as organizational members, knowing about secrets, are unsure who else knows about them and/or what secrecy requires them to do. The element of the forbidden, especially in relation to formal secrets, coupled with an experience of uncertainty might imply that people are, so to speak, kept in check. Here Simmel remarked that secretive groups exert "a highly efficient disciplinary influence upon … men" (1950: 473), and that often "obedience must be stimulated by the feeling of being subject to an intangible power… nowhere to be seen, but for that reason everywhere to be expected" (1950: 494). Following from this, individuals might feel observed and uncomfortable about sharing things with others and, moreover, inwardly reflect upon their behaviours and ways of relating to others – something that may hinder the creation of social forms of collectivity and hence of a group identity.

This reflexivity required in environments of secrecy is particularly pertinent with respect to informal and public secrets. Here individuals are expected to apprehend the informal socialization processes and act and engage with others in the team accordingly. What this entails is that people know and, importantly, control themselves when interacting with others (see also Garsten and Grey, 1997). This is exemplified in the consultancy firms where organizational members had to know that they have to be 'authentic' in a controlled way (e.g. 'passionate but not too passionate'). It is this reflexivity that management can use to 'test' which consultants were successfully socialized into the culture and which were not. Informal secrets similarly operate as a test, albeit not necessarily (or even usually) in relation to hierarchy: since this mode of secrecy is regulated through trust it follows that those who violate that trust are likely to be excluded from future sharing of informal secrets.

Fourth, we suggest that power and particularly public secrets intersect to the extent to which they enable organizations to produce a certain image without undermining the very opposite of this image. This is apparent in the case of the consultancy firms, where an 'authentic', free and open culture was celebrated whilst certain structures, rules and so forth were still in place. Taussig (1999) refers to this contradiction in maintaining that "it is precisely the role of secrecy, specifically public secrecy, to control and hence to harness the great powers of contradiction so that ideology can function" (1999: 268). This contradiction inherent in public secrecy may make it more difficult for individuals to critique certain organizational practices and discourses. For instance, in an 'authentic' organizational culture, how can individuals express concerns regarding 'authenticity'? Indeed, for the contemporary philosopher Zizek such publically known, though unarticulated contradictions constitute the structure of ideology; people are given the space to cynically relate to existing power structures, e.g. knowing that they are corrupt, but then still reproducing and thus not challenging them in their practices. In relation to WikiLeaks he notes that "the real disturbance [of WikiLeaks] was at the level of appearances: we can no longer pretend we don't know what everyone knows we know. This is the paradox of public space: even if everyone knows an unpleasant fact, saying it in public changes

everything…. What WikiLeaks threatens is the formal functioning of power. The true targets here weren't the dirty details and the individuals responsible for them; not those in power, in other words, so much as power itself, its structure." (Zizek, 2011: 9).

In outlining how secrecy and power are linked we do not mean to imply that secrets are fully controlled and controllable phenomena. For instance, public secrets can fail to function, as individuals lack the required reflexivity and hence take the publically celebrated discourses and practices too seriously. More generally, organizational members can undermine the workings of secrecy by revealing them to others (and themselves in the case of public secrets). Individuals can share the secrets with people so that these cease to represent secrets. This, indeed, is ultimately what happened with the disclosure of the Bletchley Park secrets in the 1970s. It is of course an epistemologically impossible point to establish whether, in the end, even the most tightly guarded secrets leak – by definition we only know of those cases where they have, in fact, done so.

In this sense, secrecy can also make organizations vulnerable. There is a constant "external danger of being discovered [which] is interwoven with the internal danger of self-discovery" (Simmel, 1950: 466). Again WikiLeaks illustrates the dangers of secrecy for organizations, as "the keeping of the secret is something so unstable [and] the temptations to betrayal are so manifold" (Simmel, 1950: 473). What made the US State Department vulnerable was not only the fact that such a great number of people had access to the cables, but also the growing dissatisfactions with the state of war in Iraq amongst the soldiers and also citizens (Spiegel, 2010c). This affair also shows how the power structure can fundamentally change between those holding the secret and those revealing them, as the first group can find themselves at the mercy of the latter. The greater the danger of a secrecy being disclosed, the more likely individuals, groups or organizations holding a secret might take precautionary actions to fight disclosure (this seems to be the case with the Bank of America [Süddeutsche, 2011]) or pre-emptively disclosing it themselves (this is exemplified by those individuals announcing their tax evasion activities through Swiss bank accounts).

Indeed, ultimately one might say that secrecy is inseparable from vulnerability because it always carries the danger of betrayal. The very fact that something is seen as worth concealing is suggestive of this vulnerability, whether it be that of the loss of military or commercial advantage, the embarrassment of having exchanged a piece of malicious gossip, or the searing pain of the revelation of a personal shame. That vulnerability and the insecurity associated with it are at the root of the power of secrets, making both their keeping and their betrayal so significant. It is for this reason that few are so reviled as those who betray secrets.

Conclusion

In this paper we have begun to open up what we hope is a potentially fascinating seam of analysis. It seems reasonable to suppose that secrecy within organizations is a very common phenomenon, yet it has been given little explicit, systematic attention within organization studies. Secrecy is relevant to a very wide range of organizational issues including product development, strategy, communication, networking and politics. In a more diffuse way, secrets are bound up with the multiple daily interchanges which collectively constitute the process of organizing. Secrets may sometimes be, in an 'objective' sense, trivial – office gossip and so on – but even in these cases the process of sharing and keeping secrets may be of some importance. For example, office gossip can create and cement group identities. In other cases, secrets and their disclosure may be of enormous and obvious importance to individuals, organizations or indeed whole nations.

Commonsensically, secrecy might be most obviously associated with the official secrets of governments or the trade secrets of companies, the things we have designated as 'formal secrets. It might even be tempting to think that these, somehow, are 'real' secrets. However, we have sought to suggest that these are but one category of secret. We have made sense of the range of organizational secrecy by providing a typology and illustrated this with various examples. At the heart of all four types of secret is the paradoxical dynamic of concealment and sharing. All secrets are definitionally

about concealment, but also entail sharing. For formal secrets, this sharing entails decisions to reveal their existence to approved recipients under rule-based protocols (e.g. 'need to know'); for informal secrets the decision to reveal is still present but not within such protocols, being a matter of off the record conversations. These two types of secret are both articulated by those who share them. By contrast, public and private secrets are unspoken and shared in the former case by a collective knowing and not-knowing. In the latter case, private secrets are not shared at all beyond the individual holding them, but even so must be 'admitted' by that individual (thus an unconscious desire, for example, would not be a private secret since the individual would be unaware of it and concealing it not simply from others but from him/herself).

The simultaneous concealment and sharing of secrets entails that the sharing be only with a restricted group of people. Thus all secrets are susceptible to betrayal if revealed to the 'wrong' people. In this sense secrecy necessarily constructs boundaries between groups: those in the know and those not in the know (or, in the case of private secrecy, a group of one). This is the core insight of Simmel's analysis of secrecy and from it flow many of the organizational effects. Relatedly, the boundary must be policed or regulated if a secret is to be a secret and again this will vary according to the type of secrecy. In particular, formal secrets alone are protected by sanction of law.

As with any typology, that of secrecy provided here is best understood as a continuum. Certainly the cases we have used to illustrate this typology seem to stand at opposite ends of a spectrum. On the one hand, there is the case of very rigidly enforced and formal secrecy as exemplified by Bletchley Park. On the other hand there is the far more fluid and ambiguous 'known but not known' public secrecy exemplified by the consulting firms. But it is important to stress that within each of these examples more than one type of secrecy is in operation. Thus the consulting firms also, no doubt, have commercially-sensitive formal secrets whilst, within Bletchley Park, there were public secrets such as, for example, some staff there were ear-marked to be evacuated to Canada if Britain were to be invaded but that this was never actually spoken of, just 'known'. Similarly, the WikiLeaks example is in one

sense a breach of formal secrecy (the revelation of classified material) but in another way a breach of public secrecy (revealing things 'everyone already knew'). We have used these examples to disclose the range of practices which are, despite their differences, in some sense variants of an overarching concept. They all capture a certain meaning of secrecy. We have sought to show how we can understand these varieties of secrecy by reference to the mode, scope, nature and process of indoctrination as well as the ways of protecting and betraying secrets. In this way we suggested both that they are varieties of *secrecy* and that there are *varieties* of secrecy.

Having done this, we were able to attempt a discussion of at least some of the most important theoretical implications of organizational secrecy. Here we have concentrated on the themes of group identity constructions and the operations of power. These lie at the heart of any secrecy, of whatever type. The sharing of secrets both creates and can be expressive of the division between insiders and outsiders: secrets bind people together and they exclude. Equally, secrets are a source of power, potentially great power, and a source of vulnerability, potentially great vulnerability. We sought to show how the dynamics of secrecy in these respects differ as between formal, informal, private and public secrecy, whilst having certain similarities. What is absolutely central is to understand that secrets are not just about the protection of valued informational assets: at the very least, such protection has a multiplicity of other consequences. There is clearly much more that needs to be done to establish and explore organizational secrecy – as indicated at the outset this is very much a preliminary analysis. In particular, there is a need for detailed empirical research on secrecy rather than simply 'raiding', as we have done, studies of organizations for illustrations of secrecy. Perhaps most challenging but potentially most rewarding will be sustained examination of public secrecy in organizations. Elusive as such secrets are, they would seem to open up for examination something beyond culture, something more like the 'ether' of organizations.

Why does any of this matter? Our answer is ultimately that it matters if we wish to understand organizations. Simmel (1950) suggests that secrecy is inherent in all social relations. If that is so then

is not unreasonable for us, along with others (Anand & Rosen, 2008; Jones, 2008), to claim that it is inherent in organizational relations. In any case, it seems intuitively and experientially plausible to think that this is so. If that claim is accepted, it is surely of note that it has been so little discussed within organization studies. One reason must be precisely because secrets are not readily accessible to study. Another reason may be that secrets are seen as anomalous problems: this is suggested by the fact that what literature there is on secrecy is mainly concerned with whistleblowing on ethically dubious practices. Only a few studies gesture towards something rather different: that secrets might be woven into the fabric of organizations (Feldman, 1988) and perhaps even be a virtue (DuFresne & Offstein, 2008).

This idea - that secrets are a kind of hidden, subterranean stream running in and through organizations rather than either a simple, functional protection of valuable resources or an anomalous exercise in the hiding of ethical failures – would seem to open up an enormous terrain for investigation. In recent years organization studies has benefitted from the establishment of what were once seen as rather marginal phenomena – for example emotions or sexuality – at or near the centre of analysis, in this way expanding both the empirical and theoretical range of the discipline. Secrecy seems to us to be rather similar: ubiquitous, important and yet, to date, rather neglected in the study of organizational life.

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Tables

	ARTICULATED		**UNSPOKEN**	
	Formal	**Informal**	**Private**	**Public**
Mode of indoctrination				
Scope of indoctrination				
Nature of indoctrination				

Process of indoctrination				
Mode of betrayal				
Method of protection				

Table 1: A Typology of Secrecy

	ARTICULATED		**UNSPOKEN**	
	Formal	**Informal**	**Private**	**Public**
Mode of indoctrination	Revelation	Revelation	Self-Realization	Realization
Scope of indoctrination	Restricted	Selected	Individual	Extended
Nature of indoctrination	Owned	Shared	Owned	Shared
Process of indoctrination	Intentional – on the record	Conversation – off the record	Reflection - unrecorded	Emergent – unrecorded
Mode of betrayal	To outsiders	To outsider-insiders	To outsiders	To insiders
Method of protection	Law	Trust	Discretion	Silence

Table 2: Populated Typology of Secrecy