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Contesting Ownership: Employee-Ownership, Staff Participation in the English Care Sector

ABSTRACT

This article investigates how care workers understood ownership and experienced employee-ownership through the exercise of workplace participation and control. To date much of the scholarly work has focused on formal governance arrangements, types of participation and the limitations of worker control, in particular debating the validity of the degeneration thesis. Furthermore, studies tend to be concentrated on small-scale cooperatives or specific marginal examples, but employee-owned enterprises have also been introduced in other sectors, including in English health, social care and well-being sectors. By drawing on two case studies providing care services, this study brings new insights by centring on how staff understood, embraced, and subsequently contested the foundational concept of ownership. The subsequent implications for intraorganisational conflict and the lived experience of staff are explored within a theoretical framework based on (1) how different social science disciplines embrace the concept of ownership, (2) workplace participation within employee-owned entities and (3) the unique characteristics of care services. The paper's originality lies in combining new empirical data in the context of these three areas. This contribution enhances our understanding of how employees interpret being "an owner", as well as informing scholarly and public-policy debates about the future models for care provision.

1. Introduction

A long tradition of critiques of managerial capitalism (including cooperative movements, guild socialism and anarcho-syndicalism) have valued employee-ownership as an alternative organising model. A contested concept in Western intellectual history, employee-ownership also divides critical scholars who seek to challenge both existing hegemonic business models and the public-versus-private sector binary[1] (Parker, Fournier and Reedy, 2007). Some are optimistic about the extent that it can afford self-management and worker control (Storey, Basterretxea and Salaman, 2014), while others anticipate degeneration into bureaucratic managerialism without constant vigilance (Kokkinidis, 2015; Unterrainer et al., 2022). Further, many are sceptical about ownership itself, which they regard as an instance of possessive individualism (Kasmir, 1996). To date, empirical inquiry has largely focused on small "radical" organisations and a few large retail or manufacturing entities such as The John Lewis Partnership (JLP) and the Mondragon corporation (Cathcart, 2013; Basterretxea, Heras-Saizarbitoria and Lertxundi, 2019)[2]. More recently studies have considered opportunities for cooperatives in new technological industries, whereas contemporary debates are rising concerns about a possible diminution of employee ownership rights due to external investment into the JLP (Sensi, 2023). However, these studies miss large existing (and growing) areas of modern economies such as care, where employee-ownership models have been trialled.

Public Service Mutuals (PSMs) providing care services in England (and the UK) are a case in point. With the legal status of Community Interest Companies (CICs), these entities are no longer state-owned but continue to deliver public services (Howieson, 2015; Gov.uk, 2021). Although some services have recently been returned to state ownership, in 2022 there were 128 PSMs across a wide range of sectors[3]. Opinions about PSMs have been mixed (Conroy, 2018; Shields, 2018). Supportive views depict them as much-needed innovative organisational forms that can improve services, have a positive social impact, and also offer a significant degree of staff influence. By contrast, mistrustful accounts doubt they entail anything other than new forms of managerialism that have defined most public sector reform programmes (Tudor-Hart, 2010).

Overall, there is equivocality about the place of employee-ownership as an alternative to managerialism within critical scholarship. A gap in our understanding remains in how ownership (and employee-ownership) is understood by care staff and how these perspectives influence the experience of participation and control. We maintain that without an appreciation of the literature surrounding: (1) participation and control within employee-owned entities, (2) the unique features of care work, and (3) disciplinary disputes and recent debates about social forms of

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[1]   The terms employee, worker and staff are used interchangeably. Although it is acknowledged that in employment law a distinction is made between employee and worker.

[2]   Both the JLP and the Mondragon corporation have been the focus of research from a wide range of social scientists due to their longevity, size, employee ownership structure, and commitment to staff participation.

[3]   Freedom of Information request to The Department for Culture, Media and Sport, February 2023.

ownership, it is difficult to address these questions. Although adding ambiguity and complexity in the review of literature and empirical analysis, these three topics must be considered together to appreciate the uniqueness of managerialism with care settings and the ambiguity of ownership. This paper contributes to recent discussions about the value and ontology of ownership within New Cooperativism (Wren and Ridley-Duff, 2021; Ridley-Duff and O'Shaughnessy, 2022; Vieta and Lionais, 2022) and its role in democratic enterprises (Unterrainer et al., 2022), and future organisational models for care (Defourny and Nyssens, 2013; Pestoff and Saito, 2021). Moreover, what it means to be an owner is a central element of the recent controversial proposals to reorganise The JLP (Davies, 2023).

2. Literature review

2.1. Employee-ownership, participation and control

The enduring scholarly debates about ownership and its relationship with participation and control are wide ranging and complex. For example, Wright (2012) and Kociatkiewicz, Kostera and Parker (2021), highlighted employee-ownership as part of a bundle of ideas on what "real utopia" might entail. In these optimistic imaginaries, employee-ownership is seen as potentially abolishing the separation of authority and control in the labour process and one of the ways in which more democratic and worker-led organisations come into existence. Workplace participation involves a wide range of practices and manifestations including the episodic sharing of basic information by management as well as long-term engagement processes and decision-making by staff (Gunn, 2011). Thus, participation only becomes worker's control when the allocation of surpluses, strategic direction and day-to-day work is no longer within the sole remit of management, external investors or state authorities (Heras-Saizarbitoria, 2014). Participation engenders control when it is widespread, direct and continuous, and is closely linked to notions of workplace democracy.

Although control too has multiple forms, worker's control in particular involves prefigurative discussions about organisational ends and the denaturalisation of assumptions about the primacy of management (Thompson and van den Broek, 2010). Crucially, under employee-ownership, these forms of control *change sides*. Rather than management exercising them to dominate employees, workers use them to plan and coordinate work themselves. Employee-ownership commonly allows for each worker to have one equal share and vote, regardless of pay levels, training or length of service. It thereby furnishes workers with equal status and formal, legal, organisational and economic powers because managers are now accountable to workers *as* their owners. In doing so, it reverses conventional owner-manager-worker hierarchies. For its supporters the coordination of work does need managers and can be achieved without hierarchy. This is because who owns, controls, produces and benefits from work are the same group.

A key distinction within these debates is between indirect representation and direct participatory forms. In the former workers choose other workers to represent them, whereas the latter employee-owners are directly and personally involved. Voting by worker-owners is an important example. As a form of participation, it can be both representative (e.g., election of staff representatives) and direct (e.g., plebiscites on the distribution of surpluses).

Significantly to our debate, there is significant criticism of employee-ownership from scholars simultaneously critical of conventional managerialism. They argue over time representative systems reinforce hierarchism and disempower workers; while positive depictions of empowerment are false and romanticise organisational life (Kasmir, 1996). Ultimately employee-owned entities do not ensure greater unity, authentic staff control or reduced conflict. Rather ownership is an empty signifier; at best overly ambitious (because it fails to deliver on democratic claims); or at worse, camouflage for increased surveillance and imposed self-discipline (Kokkinidis, 2015).

Longitudinal investigations into the Mondragon and JLP have also offered nuanced conclusions with evidence of *both* democratic practice and regression to managerialism (Paranque and Willmott, 2014; Storey, Basterretxea and Salaman, 2014). Pendleton and Robinson (2015) concluded ownership increased employees' influence, but shareholding did not necessarily translate into substantial individual or collective power. Clearly under employee-ownership there is *potential* for structural and cultural change to challenge existing managerialism norms. In terms of enabling change, for Salaman and Storey (2016) the moral purpose of ownership (i.e., the belief that better ways of working are not only valuable but possible because they embryonically exist) needs to be recognised, and periodically revigorated. Rather than despair at employees' lack of engagement despite opportunities, supportive observers advocate training and actions to address the entrenched asymmetric information and inequality brought by existing hierarchies and occupations. Acknowledging implementation remains difficult (and non-managerial working is slow to emerge) is essential for King and Land (2018). In particular, Yeoman (2017) highlighted the time required for these organisations to achieve *de facto* new ways of working from their initial start *de jure* date while Unterrainer et al. (2022) explored the lifecycle of democratic enterprises[4].

At the intersection of theoretically and methodologically varied literatures, employee-ownership emerges either as a valued exemplar with emancipating potential or a model spiralling inevitably to failure and irrelevance. Moreover, its place within critiques of managerialism is ambiguous and contested. As eminent sociologist Wright (2012) concluded: employee-ownership exists in liminal spaces, offering the possibility of "real" utopia while also having a Janus-face with "dual-realties" of conflicting values.

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[4]   It is beyond our scope here, but it can be argued that debates within organisational scholarship regarding the normative justification and contemporary achievability of staff participation and control reflect paradoxes described within political science. For example, Honig (2007) described neatly the problems of holding democratic processes in high normative regard while working with recipients who are not always willing or capable to exercise these powers and processes effectively.

2.2. Ownership and care work

Although these scholarly and practitioner debates embrace all workplaces, the sector also shapes the purpose, processes and outcomes of employee-ownership. Firstly, we focus on the wider definition of care to include clinical, social and emotional well-being support. Although medical and hospital-based care is predominately funded and provided by the NHS, many aspects of non-hospital community-based care, social care, non-medical and support have always been provided by local government, charities, social enterprises, voluntary community groups as well as conventional for-profit privately-owned businesses. The prime example being General Practice. While we acknowledge the NHS has recently returned to an integrated area-based organisational model (whereby the difference between its organisations have been de-emphasised) a wide range of PSMs remain.

The encroachment of managerialism and internal markets into the care sector has also been widely discussed under the New Public Management debates (Cumbers and McMaster, 2012) and more recently corporatisation (Turner and Wright, 2022). However, it is worth noting the long tradition of politically Left thinking that critiques centralised state-ownership (Hirst, 2001) and the history of mutualism within welfare (Howieson, 2015)[5]. Importantly, the Ownership Commission (launched by the last Labour Government) promoted employee-ownership across all areas of the economy (Nuttall, 2012). The PSM Development Programme created in 2010 (and expanded in 2018) allowed staff to buy equity in their organisations through 1 GBP shares. Rather than privatisation, Le Grand and Roberts (2018) saw public services being provided free at the point of delivery, by worker owned entities as forms of socialist practice, workplace autonomy and self-management.

Empirical studies have also emphasized the absence of genuine staff participation within publicly owned entities. In their study of NHS Foundation Trusts, Allen et al. (2012) noted despite national policy and local managers emphasising participation, many workers saw no benefit in joining weak, indirect forms of engagement initiated by hierarchies. Suggesting formal legal ownership may be crucial, they argued being simply an "employee" was insufficient. Pestoff's (2017) study of social care employee-ownership also argued ownership promoted positive perceptions of the self and fostered democratic decision-making with users and fellow workers.

Rather than depict PSMs as simply a compromise between the dominant public and private characteristics, empirical analysis has also emphasised their non-managerial values and practices. Hall, Miller and Millar (2016) and Vickers et al. (2017) observed their hybridity, with aspects of professionalism maintained simultaneously with certain public service values, prompting a rethink of conventional conceptions of "public" or "private". For Shields (2018), PSMs go beyond received

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[5]   Contrary to popular perceptions (largely derived from UK party political positions) criticism of centralised state-ownership has always been important to socialist thinking and practice. For example, influential socialist libertarian, Fabian and Labour Party activist, GDH Cole (1917), argued for localised forms of staff ownership as a practical demonstration of non-hierarchical cooperative work. More recently, Wainwright (2018) also proscribed the idea of "in and against the state" and more democratic forms of collective ownership.

wisdoms of the public sector as bureaucratic, inert and process-driven and the private sector as responsive, innovative and risk-taking. These studies suggest a reframing of work norms occurs, where the emphasis shifts from financial gain for shareholders (or performance defined by state officials) towards interdependent and personal relationships between co-workers, users and local communities. Yet many accounts have also been highly critical of social enterprises (including PSMs) providing public services (Myers, 2017). These studies have focused on the lack of support from staff for mutualisation, the absence of authentic participation in practice and the indivisibility of social enterprises and private corporations (Birchall, 2011).

In addition to debates within organisational scholarship, care work itself also has distinctive implications for employee-ownership. Firstly, care has been described as the archetypical service industry, with a multifaceted division of labour requiring cognitively complex and codified knowledge gained through extensive training, combined with the application of tacit knowledge acquired through user interaction (Adams, 2015). With low capitalisation, care is essentially relational where notions of "professionalism" and control over delivery are central to how organisations operate, and care is provided. Notwithstanding pressure from external forces (such as national guidelines and patient advocacy), a professional's influence remains significant with limitations to control by policy hierarchies and managers. For example, studies using both labour process theory and the governmentality framework show how professions have not remained isolated or easily succumbed to management (Bolton and Wibberley, 2014; Petrakaki, Barber and Waring, 2018)[6].

Moreover, participation in organisational life beyond individual practice is not about becoming "like" management but protecting autonomy, retaining influence, and reconciling discretion within system co-ordination. Although it is acknowledged that not all care work is professionalised, it is clear some have had relative success in maintaining control. However, this raises questions about whether employee-ownership brings about *further* empowerment for workers or makes a discernible difference to participation. For example, the maintenance of Taylorist working practices is the key reason for the *failure* of the employee-owned enterprises for Basterretxea, Heras-Saizarbitoria and Lertxundi (2019).

2.3. New and old debates about ownership

In this third strand we explore how ownership has been debated within different social science disciplines as well as highlighting recent New Cooperativism debates (Roy, Dey and Teasdale, 2021). Crucially, we find questions about who owns what, why and for what purposes are (and have always been) important to how we organise work. Despite complexity and the lack any unifying multi-disciplinary typology, broad positions are identifiable.

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[6]   It is acknowledged that for many sociologists of health, the danger of expert power *over* service users is more prevalent. However, we take the position that managerialism remains a more undesirable approach which is not the answer to the disadvantages of professional power. Furthermore, it is unlikely that service users and the wider public citizenry can engage effectively if staff themselves are excluded (Pestoff and Saito, 2021).

From jurisprudence perspectives it is self-evident that ownership is about property, exclusive unambiguous boundaries, exploitation of assets and control through the judicial system (Waldron, 2004). Scholarly and practitioner debates are often focused on interpreting ownership as a Rights-based phenomenon in both law and practice. In contrast, mainstream management scholarship see ownership as characterised by the term staff *buy-in*; an obligation to care about what management plans and prioritises for resolving. Thus, ownership morphs into responsibility; a duty to satisfactorily perform or complete a task assigned by someone else rather than created by one's own promise (Manz and Sims, 1995). Further, managerial forms seek from staff not ownership, but stewardship. For Block (2013) a *good* employee is like a steward; one who is attentive, diligent and committed to deliver specific tasks. Although distinct, both perspectives see ownership about being attached to someone else's property and being accountable to owners for performance[7]. This summary is of course a simplification, but it highlights how for many owning cannot be divorced from individual possessiveness.

Nevertheless, there are other perspectives each claiming the "real" essence of ownership. Psychological ownership is a state in which people feel attached to and perceive their organisation possessively (Pierce, Kostova and Dirks, 2001). For psychologists, ownership as practised is more important than abstract concepts; how do employees feel about their job and organisation? Organisational studies have also argued psychological ownership positively alters workforce attitudes, behaviour and practices, ultimately reducing the likelihood of organisational failure and for the commitment of nursing staff in particular (Heponiemi et al., 2011). Although debates continue, psychologists maintain that ownership may be felt by individuals, but it is collectively experienced and nurtured while also related to feelings of control over work (Liu et al., 2012). With particular reference to organisations implementing democratic practices, Unterrainer et al. (2022) refer to the psychological commitment new staff owners have to the ownership and the idea of cooperative working.

Anthropologists see ownership as a collective process of place making; a special type of physical and social space which people mutually inhabit, sense is theirs, which may or may not be their residence, home, property or contain productive means (Brightman, Fausto and Grotti, 2016). Both Souleles (2020) and Wren (2020) suggest employee-ownership culture is heterogeneous and intertwined with kinship, security, self-identity, territoriality and worth. Owner-democratic governance is contrasted sharply with both stewardship models of well-meaning managers and Weberian hierarchical command and control structures. Significantly this approach does not conform to traditional Western accounts that interpret primitive societies as lands without property (and therefore lacking in discussions about ownership). Political scientists also see ownership as something experienced and enacted collectively and as a key

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[7] We do not analyse the stewardship or custodianship. Although they are popular terms to describe how something can be held in trust its application is problematic. The terms are essentially legally derived, focused on looking after an object/place for the "true" owner. It denotes subordination to the instructions of those who possess. Interestingly neither term was mentioned by participants.

generative force shaping society. For Pierson (2013), its more equal distribution is a prerequisite for wider societal participation and the "good society". In addition to a tradition of describing the negative implications of private property, political science does not just focus on the material benefits obtained from gaining legal ownership, but ownership as a process for nurturing non-instrumental values, mutuality and engagement.

Further challenges to our ontological assumptions about ownership have been raised by Ireland and Pillay (2010) who argue the corporation is a legal person (or subject) in law and therefore cannot be owned by anyone. It is in effect a commons in which stakeholders argue about property-like claims. Building upon this perspective, critical scholars Veldman and Willmott (2013) argued ownership by shareholders is therefore a legal fiction and we should not conflate ownership of shares with ownership of corporate assets. Under liberal/economic versions of the corporation, ownership of shares has become a performative myth. In other words, ownership is not even a legal phenomenon.

Questions of ontology have also been given recent scholarly attention within New Cooperativism. Many have placed ownership centrally, claiming it matters as an important precondition for organisational and societal transformational including most relevantly in the provision of welfare (Borzaga and Galera, 2016). Recent work on "Fairshares" by Ridley-Duff et al. (2020) and Defourny and Nyssens (2013) have also provided significant insights to how different types of owners can contribute to organisational outcomes and social innovation, while also enabling benefits are justly distributed.

Understanding the hidden critical origins of the recent New Cooperativism debates is essential for Ridley-Duff and Bull (2019), Roy, Dey and Teasdale, (2021), and Vieta and Lionais (2022). For them social forms of ownership have always offered radical alternatives to managerialism by enfranchising both labour, communities and users. In earlier studies Ridley-Duff and Southcombe (2012) also made an important distinction between *philanthropic social aims* which are tested by the amount of social benefits achieved; and the claim to *socialise work* through transforming owner-manager-labour relationships and democratising workplaces. Socialising work (or re-embedding work locally in a Polanyian sense) is not merely about increasing staff input into corporate decisions and/or producing surpluses for social causes, but about increasing staff autonomy, decreasing organisational inequality, encouraging non-market forms of accountability and the wider societal context (Roy et al., 2021). Moreover, for Varman and Chakrabarti (2004) continuous and ongoing prefigurative debates about values and priorities are not just aspects of employee-ownership they are its essential characteristic.

Within these New Cooperativism debates, care services are sometimes seen as "old" producer-led industries. However, with its increasing size within advanced economies as well as its topicality due to the well documented problems of privately owned care provision, the sector remains important (Fotaki et al., 2023).

2.4. Literature conclusion

As we have shown recent scholarly debates have connections with persistent, wide ranging and complex debates about the meaning of ownership. Clearly there is a difference between ownership as a state of *being* (owning as category, you either are an owner or you are not) and *becoming* (the process of owning as an experience). While debates testify to the continued fascination with ownership, there is however no consensus about what ownership means and whether it is important.

Undoubtedly proponents of New Cooperativism echo anthropological and political interpretations by seeing ownership as the capacity for relationships; and owning as a process enabling staff to judge the gap between practice and normative ideals of justice, equality and fairness. Despite previous scholarship there is a need for further research to inform our discussions on how workers understand ownership (and owning) in the care sector and what difference (if any) does "being" an owner make? (Howieson, 2015; Wren and Ridley-Duff, 2021).

3. Research context and methods

We investigated the aforementioned themes drawing on data from two organisations, under the pseudonyms Red City and Blue County. Both combined publicly and community-owned provision before becoming employee-owned social enterprises in the form of CICs as part of the national PSM Development Programme.

Red City and Blue County were created by their respective health and local authorities and existing community providers based on a rejection of a merger with an existing public sector body or tendering to a privately-owned provider. The new employee-owned bodies were justified based on business cases claiming new enterprises would generate greater innovation, autonomy and empowerment, which would in-turn improve efficiency and responsiveness to users. By April 2011 staff were transferred to the new organisation with an opt-in scheme for employees to purchase one share for 1 GBP. The percentage of staff who took shares was Red City 65% and Blue County 70%. The former organisation served a largely urban population while the latter a semi-rural locality. Both organisations provided community health services and care services and employed over 1,000 clinicians, social workers, therapists, counsellors, youth workers and other supporting roles with yearly income between 40-60 million GBP.

Fieldwork was carried out between September 2017 and August 2021 and included: (1) documentary analysis, (2) interviews, (3) focus groups and (4) non-participant observation[8]. Firstly, a wide range of relevant documents provided the important environmental, economic and

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[8] Our research sponsors included trade union representatives, the elected staff councils and senior management. Please note, all participants were given fictional names in the later empirical sections of the paper.

policy context. These included strategies, governance arrangements, organograms, engagement programmes, annual reports, websites and social media.

Secondly, interviews were conducted with 28 staff members, three senior managers and 25 professional, support and administrative staff[9]. Table 1 below shows participants by organisation, title/role and ownership status.

Thirdly, two 90-minute group discussions with frontline care staff were conducted in each organisation as detailed in Table 2 below.

Overall, 41 staff members were involved in interviews and group discussions. 28 (68%) were owners and 13 (32%) non-owners, which was broadly in line with the distribution across the organisations. Furthermore, participants were recruited across a wide range in occupations, departments, ages, geography settings and length of service. Although this study does not claim to be representative in statistical terms, the sample ensured different occupations and positions were involved, including members of traditionally underrepresented groups such as care assistants.

Fourthly, the first author spent four separate blocks of time, 16 days in total in each organisation, observing meetings in their real-life settings, shadowing individuals and teams, obtaining artefacts and a sense of non-verbal gestures and ergonomic layouts. Observation was valuable in uncovering how governance systems worked in practice and the relationship between formal processes and worker experiences.

To develop our findings, at first, we focused on understanding each dataset separately by clarifying how participants described their experience, the local context and key phrases used. Although a formal grounded theory approach was not pursued, open and thematic coding was completed early and subsequently revised iteratively (Evers and van Staa, 2010). After an initial 22 codes were identified, data was organized into draft themes shared for discussion with participants. To illustrate, we reflected on how participants' viewed documents asking: Was it considered to have authority? What truth claims did it make, or was it merely giving instruction? The business cases produced to justify the new ownership forms (described earlier) was central to this initial exploration[10].

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[9]   The authors acknowledge debates about what constitutes "a manager" within care settings. Is a social worker who supervises other professional staff, manages a budget while also providing some care services directly to users, a manager or care professional? For this study, a senior management post is defined as a corporate role in which the employee is not required to hold any recognised health and care qualification and does not perform direct care. Senior managers are either Board directors or work directly to those who are. In contrast, service coordinators and support managers are not classified as senior management because they work in service delivery departments. See Kippist and Fitzgerald (2009) for further a discussion.

[10]   Initial codes included broad topics such as "ownership as an end or as a process", while final themes were more specific such as "the role of employee-ownership to managerialism and professionalism".

Table 1. Interviewees participants

Red City Interviewees

No.	Job Title/Role	Owner
1	Clinical Service Coordinator	No
2	Governance Manager	No
3	Clinical Service Coordinator (Therapist)	Yes
4	Clinical Service Coordinator (Nurse)	Yes
5	Strategy Coordinator	Yes
6	Clinical Trainer (Nurse)	Yes
7	Human Resources Manager	Yes
8	Project Manager and Carer	No
9	Social Worker Practitioner	Yes
10	Director of Finance	Yes
11	Medical Doctor	Yes
12	Social Worker Practitioner	Yes
13	Trade Union Rep & Physiotherapist	Yes
14	Trade Union Rep & Nurse	No
15	Nurse	Yes
16	Nurse (and former Social Worker)	Yes
17	Healthcare Assistant	No

Blue County Interviewees

No.	Job Title/Role	Owner
1	Occupational Therapist Practitioner	Yes
2	Director of Organisational Development	Yes
3	Medical Doctor	No
4	Finance Officer	Yes
5	Occupational Therapist Team Leader	Yes
6	Director of Finance	Yes
7	Business Analyst	No
8	Clinical Trainer (Nurse)	Yes
9	Senior Nurse	Yes
10	Senior Nurse	No
11	Care Coordinator	Yes

Table 2. Discussion group participants

Red City Participants

No.	Job Title/Role	Owner
1	Senior Therapist	Yes
2	Senior Therapist	Yes
3	Senior Therapist	No
4	Therapist	No
5	Therapist	No
6	Therapist	Yes
7	Therapist	No
8	Therapist	Yes
9	Therapist	Yes
10	Therapist	Yes

Blue County Participants

No.	Job Title/Role	Owner
1	Healthcare Assistants	No
2	Healthcare Assistants	Yes
3	Healthcare Assistants	Yes

Using critical realist approaches to analysis, we progressed to searching themes across datasets and identifying possible causes and outcomes of ownership (O'Mahoney and Vincent, 2014). This stage involved the synthesis of findings into a discussion document for our research sponsors and participants. By engaging participants in the emerging themes, we were able to reinforce reciprocity and also engender further dialogue between the data and the theoretical framework applied. This ensured the move from descriptive to explanatory analysis easier. Discussion groups played an important role in exploring themes and tentative findings with participants, while key word searches in case study documents were helpful in understanding change over time. Re-reading initial accounts and conducting follow-up conversations with interviewees were used to challenge and refine conclusions as well as capture information overlooked (Caronna, 2010)[11].

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[11] We accept there are limitations to our study. Firstly, the research focuses on staff ownership and does not seek to address questions of wider stakeholder/consumer/user ownership, see Yeoman (2017). Secondly, we accept qualitative case studies cannot make statistically generalisable claims. However, we maintain these approaches are suited to understanding the experiences of staff and the nature and impact of ownership within care settings.

4. Findings

Our empirical findings are presented in three sections. First, we describe the formal organisational changes, along with the ways they are meant to enable participation and control. Subsequently we discuss worker experiences in practice.

4.1. Formal changes to ownership, participation and control

Employee-ownership brought about alterations in the way Red City and Blue County were governed, in structure, processes and channels for participation and control. The initial categorical change involved the principle of employee-ownership i.e., distributed equity with the organisations becoming legally owned by staff as exclusive shareholders, having been offered equity for 1 GBP on a "one-member-one share" basis. All shares were held directly by staff and were non-transferrable. A second novelty was The Articles of Association. Typically referred to as "The Articles" this set of formal rules defined who was eligible to be an owner, internal decision-making and information rights, director appointments, voting procedures and rights to surplus distribution.

Distinctively, new mechanisms were introduced to enable owner-participation with two institutional bodies central to indirect representation: Staff Representative Councils (SRC) and the new Executive Boards. The SRC was led by a chair and eight governors, the latter covering the key service departments and elected by owners every two-three years through a single transferable voting system. The Councils had the authority to approve and remove Board directors, review past performance, and decide on strategies and employment terms and conditions. Lastly, the Executive Boards comprised of directors, non-executives and staff representatives and were responsible for achieving goals endorsed by the Annual General Meeting (AGM) (and monitored by the SRC).

Taken together, these changes were designed to be the means for owner control through scrutinizing management, representing owner views, channeling communication to-and-from the Board and making important decisions. While these bodies and processes provided indirect channels, they were accompanied by four mechanisms for direct participation: (1) monthly service meetings (MSMs), (2) sortation, (3) votes on key decisions and (4) AGMs.

Firstly, MSMs involved service coordinators (who replaced the old title/role of department manager), clinical/social work directors, elected staff-governors, a Board director and departmental staff-owners formally meeting every four weeks. The MSM involved three new elements: (1) employee-owners and their representatives being physically present; (2) formal evaluation of executives' performance against their objectives; and (3) two-way communication regarding corporate-wide and departmental issues. The meetings were instigated to ensure owner participation was as close as possible to everyday work while also being a continuous process for staff engagement in operational coordination and strategy formation.

Secondly, sortation (a method of identifying people for collective duties from a random sample of owners, often referred to as equality-by-lot), provided further direct participation. Both Red

City and Blue County established joint project groups to consider corporate and departmental strategies. Thirdly, both enterprises used organizational-wide ballots to decide on the distribution of surplus every year. Finally, the AGM provided a platform for participation in decision-making and the accountability of management. Any owner could submit a question and each director responding verbally during the meeting (and later in written form). This direct face-to-face method for accountability was enshrined in the Articles and departed significantly from practice in the public and private sectors. Overall, these mechanisms challenged dominant assumptions about the unique value, skill and neutrality of management.

The publicly declared visions for these new entities were also contained in their original business cases, and as we show these documents were not purely managerial; they contained theoretical concepts, practical promises and initiated processes which were unforeseen and radical. Despite the importance of new "owner" arrangements, these changes also need to be investigated in terms of the experiences of those they were meant to empower i.e., staff.

4.2. Worker experiences of participation and control

Despite the formal changes, conflict and contestation around the meaning of ownership and participation remained. Rather than mere implementation "cliches", we suggest conflict related to both the inherent contestability of ownership and the significant repository of economic power intrinsic in its transfer. Below we present data on three real-life examples, namely: (1) voting on organisational decisions; (2) direct worker control over service delivery; and (3) departmental conflict.

4.2.1. Employee-owner experiences of voting

In September 2017, Red City included all owners in a ballot to decide not only the distribution of a planned surplus but also the options for achieving their business plans for the next two years. First, in "Vote 1", employee-owners were balloted on the options for distributing surplus. They included a 1% pay rise, 400 GBP lump sum to all owners, allocation to financial reserves, reinvestment in service delivery across all units, or continual subsidies to loss-making units. In a second ballot, "Vote 2" owners were invited to identify how the surplus would be achieved. The list of options included changing the provider of occupational health, altering how annual leave is booked from April-to-March to individual birthdays, increasing income from new service developments (including private patients or selling the loss-making supported employment service). Prior to the votes, workshops, written materials and face-to-face meetings with staff representatives and management provided detailed information. Importantly alternatives were not fixed, and changes were made in response to feedback.

A closer look at how the two votes that were carried out reveals the uncertainties and tensions in participation. These came in two major intertwined forms. Firstly, there were significant difficulties with execution such as insufficient pre-voting information and preparation, logistics complexity

and the lack of technology deployed. Secondly, many complained the range of issues voted on were not focused on what they felt was important or wanted to exert control over; that is there were reservations about the domain and range of decisions that the owners were empowered to directly contribute to. Overall, the reception of (and feelings towards) voting on major organisational issues were ambivalent. Although participants valued casting a vote, it did not mean it was a universally positive experience reflecting its contestability.

In terms of turnout, in both votes out of the eligible 601 employee-owners the number of votes cast was 269, a 44% turnout. Out of 29 service teams, 68% had at least one vote cast and 81% of all owners were involved in pre-voting engagements. For Vote 1, the results were option 1 a 1% pay rise, (with lower salaried staff receiving 1.25%) first to option 2 (continued cross-subsidisation). For Vote 2, a change to the occupational health provider was identified combined with commitment to seek further income from new commissioners. The results showed how owners did not simply vote for increasing their own financial renumeration but sought to maintain services within the new organisation regardless of financial performance. The logistics of voting also imposed limitations e.g., with a paper-based voting system and administrative costs very high, the case for deepening and expanding voting was difficult. Furthermore, individual ballots did not always lead to a further expansion of owner voting which was highlighted in interviews as signs of limited direct participation and disengagement. In addition, differences on whether "participation" should be a time-limited exercise, or a wider continuous discussion were apparent[12].

Most staff were aware that non-conventional ways of decision-making required greater information transparency as well as staff commitment and time to understand the issues. This shift in responsibility and knowledge was brought up repeatedly with respect to the lack of preparation (*"At first I did not know about it and I am sure many just didn't think it was important or that real"*, Strategy lead and owner James). Despite these problems, participants were able to distinguish between whether the right decision/option was taken; and whether it was right in principle to include staff in decisions of this type. For those who voted, being involved was just as important (if not more so) than the outcome because they were for the first time involved in resource allocation. Many owners made the contrast with public sector centralised decision-making. Nurse Karen saw the votes as new participation opportunities: "*I think some very quiet people have plucked up courage to speak and have many useful things to say and we have never given them a platform to speak, whereas they do now.*" For many, being an owner gave staff, who had previously not felt confident to engage in organisational life beyond their own service area, the status to do so.

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[12]   In both organisations Vote 1-type elections continued (i.e., owners voting on the distribution of surpluses took place annually). For example, they continued during COVID-19 via mixed in-person and paper-based processes. Direct polling of owners about *how* surpluses would be achieved (Vote 2) were less frequent. However, this did not mean participation stopped, rather these options and decisions continued in different forms. They were replaced by employee-owner discussion and voting at the AGMs on the annual business plan.

Crucially the legitimacy of the votes was accepted, with management making no attempt to overturn decisions. Control over surplus distribution was highly valued and was not seen as merely superficial or symbolic. Overall staff expressed conditional support for voting not because it was worthless and irrelevant but because they demanded *more* and greater levels of participation. Reflecting on the vote, therapist Rebecca declared: "*Well it was a bit more fundamental than a vote, let's say, we challenged and were challenged by having a surplus at all, what does it mean, why have we got one? Where has it come from?*" Her perspective showed disagreement about both the content of decisions (do we invest in this new service?) but also at the prefigurative level (why a surplus, what is our purpose?). Instead of the internalisation of management priorities, argument abounded. By raising expectations and giving more opportunities for expressing differences, conflict was ever-present both reproducing and confronting managerialism.

4.2.2. Employee-owner experience of frontline service delivery

While being valued, staff overwhelmingly questioned whether the transfer of shares had helped them gain greater direction over their day-to-day work; the core aspect of their occupational identify and most desired area of control. For example, in response to being asked to describe their ideal organisation, owner therapist William, declared: "*It's about small teams how we treat patients in front of them...it's not high-level meetings.*" For William, ownership of work should involve professionals formed around patients/users, scheduling work together with referrers, controlling their budgets, reviewing performance against plan and developing strategies. Staff typically described ownership as a participative and active process of self-organisation, rather than taking responsibility for problems defined by management. Properly instigated owning was not "outside" and "beyond" their own work, but constant, ongoing, immediate and practical engagement. In contrast, representation was portrayed as slow, distant and superfluous. Although having representatives was welcomed, employee control over corporate issues was not only limited in practice but of secondary concern compared to control over care.

For many the governance system (which was meant to be the embodiment of ownership) was an administrative burden, disconnected from ordinary staff and lacking in influence over embedded inequality and hierarchies. To counter this tendency, sortation and MSMs were used. In particular during a MSM, we observed a disagreement concerning management performance between two nurse-owners (Rose and Claire) and service lead Rachael (non-owner). After the meeting, we asked Claire for her reflections: "*You need to remember that although there is still some top-down direction, the Board and management have to engage before strategy is agreed. On the other hand, we also have to remember staff cannot do everything the same as managers before.*" When we saw Rachael later the same day, she did not want to comment although visibly upset. We telephoned the next day and asked for her perspective: "*I would like to say it is really unclear what I do and who I work for anymore, is it up or down or sideways?*" For Rachael, more decisions were increasingly being made by others, but she was still accountable. In addition to the ambiguity

("*up or down or sideways*"), this vignette provides insights into the face-to-face nature of control as Rose and Claire were not absent, passive and quiescent owners. Beyond this quarrel between individuals, staff used the new mechanisms to renegotiate the manager-staff relationship and attempted to deliver the "promise" outlined in the business cases that management now worked for (and were accountable to) owners. Staff simultaneously bemoaned the lack of difference ownership made to their day-to-day work, while also valuing direct face-to-face contact over the remoteness of "*someone else representing you*" (Nurse, Rose). Legitimacy for decision-making came not from being a member of staff (or even having professional status or expertise) but by being *owners*.

4.2.3. The Articles and contesting ownership

As implementation proceeded, interpretations multiplied. For administrator Michelle, shareholding and the Articles were the essence of the organisation: "*They are the fundamental backbone of the organisation. It's like a constitution.*" Proudly defining them as a "*fundamental*", Michelle revealed the importance of the legal actuality of shareholding. By using a biological-body allegory ("*back-bone*") she also suggested something behind the surface, hidden to the naked eye but an underpinning skeleton for practice and behaviour. From this viewpoint, ownership was seen as essentially about individual possession. Moreover, senior management saw participation limited in scope to areas *specifically* codified in the Articles and its division of powers; with an emphasis on staff as shareholders, not as producers or citizens. Low priority was given to altering work processes because the conventional chain of command remained. Management may be *more* accountable, but owners have responsibilities to accept reasonable direction, follow due process and make "*tough decisions*" (Senior Nurse, Jennifer).

Although legalist versions of owning and senior managers' views were distinct, they were also mutually supportive; focusing on how staff were expected as shareholders to engage in specific and limited participation events for instrumental purposes. In these two mutually supportive narratives, ownership was sold to staff as empowerment; enabling them to take control as long as they accepted financial viability and performance targets. In Figure 1 the Red City SRC chair described what being a shareholder meant; reiterating that taking control and using opportunities brought both personal happiness and better patient care[13].

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[13] The Red City SRC chair provided consent for the research and publication.

Figure 1. Chair of Staff Representative Council Annual Statement
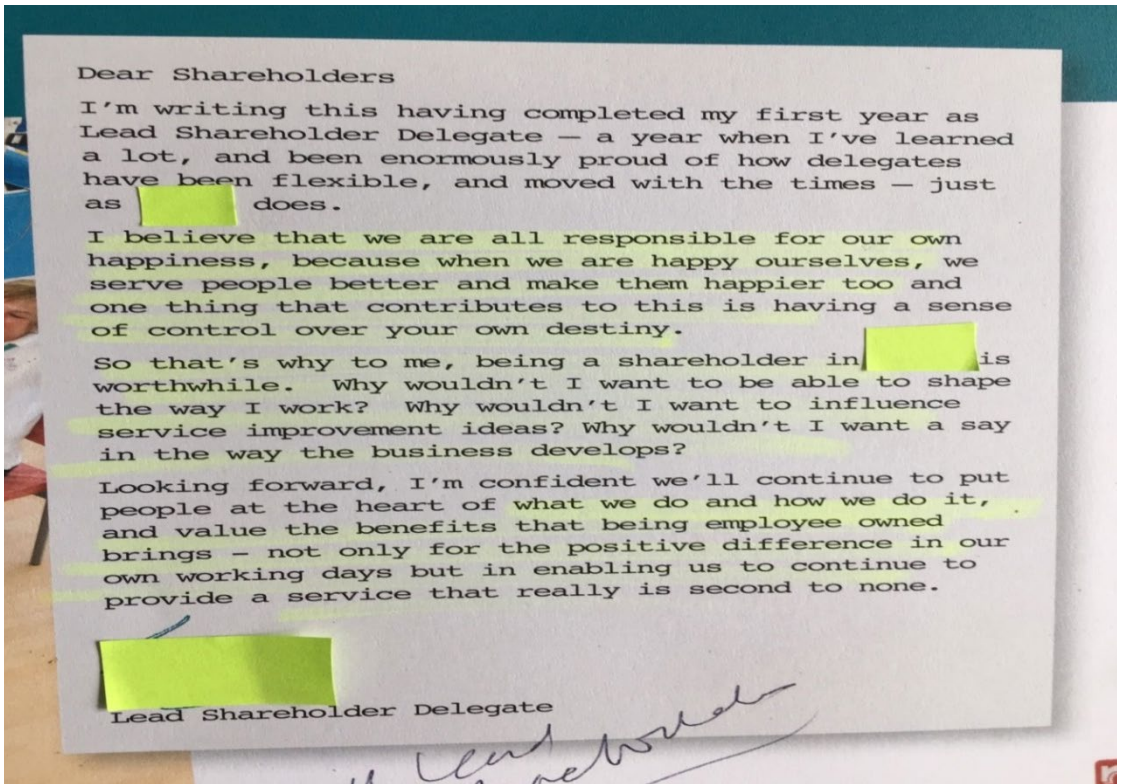
By claiming we are all responsible for our own well-being, the obligation to engage and develop is placed directly on employee-owners themselves. Passivity and highlighting problems without offering solutions was considered as whingeing. The delineation between moaning (as unjustified fault-finding from those critical of all change) and warranted criticism of the genuineness of participation was absence. For her, owning and getting engaged was an attribute infused with a moral purpose; participation is good, important and valued, while a lack of engagement is bad.

Although it is easy to poke fun at the grandiose claims and inspirational rhetoric, this shows how employee-ownership was never considered *another* corporate restructure. Employee-ownership was organisational activism with a moral duty to engage emotionally as respected partners in a joint venture. These claims were based on both extrinsic grounds (i.e., increasing levels of productivity and patient and organisational outcomes) and intrinsic grounds (i.e., reducing work alienation and increasing staff well-being); reflecting the tension between social aims and work socialisation raised by Ridley-Duff and Southcombe (2012) and democratic and stewardship governance by Pestoff and Saito (2021). Clearly, conflict over whether the intensity of participation was an expression of managerialism (imposing work intensification) or more positively (as a reflection of the normative benefits of engagement and commitment required for organisational citizenship) was evident at the start.

4.2.4. Conflict and other forms of ownership

Rather than simply acquiescing or disengaging, we observed contestation reflecting different disciplinary traditions. For example, participants' often articulated ownership as a sense of attachment to, possession of and identification with the organisation, as described by therapist Catherine. "*I feel the organisation is mine and my colleagues, and we own it…would I feel the same in an organisation in which I was not an owner? No, I don't think I would. I have tried to debate why myself and failed a lot. But to me ownership does matter because I really do feel it is mine, I own that chunk.*" For Catherine understanding whether it mattered was something worth pursuing, even though it was difficult ("*failed a lot*"). Owning was also exceptional for its propensity to encourage attachment (my "*chunk*"). Although these psychological readings challenged managerialism, they did occasionally use similar language such as "*taking-on responsibility*" (Nurse, Georgina). However, ownership did not mean staff focused on finding solutions to problems pre-determined *by* hierarchies. They were not becoming more managerial or accepting uncritically a "commercial mindset" (Yeoman, 2017). Following Liu et al. (2012), attachment is not an outcome easily captured by management, it was achieved through staff perceptions of due process, the just distribution of organisational benefits and a positive impact on users. Those with high levels of psychological ownership did not simply have responsibility *to* (or worked *in*) the organisation; they felt they *were* the organisation. What mattered was the psychological state of *being* engaged ("*it's ours because we are consulted on a lot of things*" Therapist, Lola). Furthermore, Georgina and Catherine are also emphasising the temporality of disputes and conflict. Firstly, ownership is a process of becoming, as staff improve their communicative capacity over time. Secondly, ownership changes the scope, type and language of intraorganizational conflict so new debates, conflicts and solutions emerge.

Contestation and conflict also grew as informants gave ownership a collective meaning emphasising the discovery of shared values and its role as a prerequisite for the organisation operating in a more egalitarian basis. These viewpoints highlighted the intensity and quality of relationships between staff-owners and how participation helped address the complexities of consensus building and coordinating diverse services. By radicalising the original business case, some focused on the widest possible expansion of participating to address perceptions of unaccountability, inequality and unnecessary hierarchy. Ownership represented more than being employed for social worker Elizabeth: "*I have a sense of being part of something on a more of an equal basis…more than just this entity employs me.*" Hereby ownership took on a democratic "*equal*" character through one-person-one-share-one-vote processes and focusing on the relationship between owners together with their agency to collectively determine the future. It is by using our knowledge to create and inhabit a special place ("*along with everybody else*" Elizabeth) that staff ensure the organisation acts in ways congruent with a normative ideal and its public aims. For her, ownership eroded the traditional distinctions between owner-manager-employee and involved debate without recourse to hierarchical decision-making. Although initiated by the formal transfer; ownership was not about possessing a legal entity (a share); or being an individual shareholder (a category); or even taking responsibility for predetermined instrumental ends (managerial). Following Brightman, Fausto and Grotti (2016), ownership was relational and involved commensality.

Ownership mattered for Elizabeth because it became real through the practical choices made by staff and not defined by understanding abstract legal principles. As nurse-owner Susan described with evangelical energy and democratic zeal: "*Irrespective of pay, grade and professional or status have an equal vote, in terms of the significant things we do…. the Board may earn more than me or whatever, but they cannot own more than me.*" For Susan, what employees owned was a public good, being both dynamic (as employee owners actively engaged, the more confident and assertive they became in controlling management) and cumulative (the greater the number of staff who took ownership and the more owners engaged, the more it mattered). Simply put, if ownership was more valuable the more people had it and the more it was used (i.e., a shareable good which does not degrade or become diluted through wider distribution) it was not scare or possessable. Shares were not mere passive registers of wealth but artefacts of relationships. Ontologically, ownership was something you do, not simply something you have.

4.3. Summary

For some ownership moved beyond engagement as a method to predetermined goals and towards an expansionist view of workplace democracy and work socialisation. Although these interpretations did not describe the experience for all staff; they do outline the ideal constructs which were used to critique other conceptualisations and practice.

5. Discussion

In this section we explore the empirical data in relation to both our survey of the literature and its implications for our theoretical understanding of ownership. In particular, we engage with Wren and Ridley-Duff's (2021) research agenda, namely: Question 3 (what do they own?) and Questions 4 and 5 (what is the subjective experience of employees-owners and how is workplace culture changed?).

Firstly, our study highlighted new data reflecting the different disciplinary perspectives and the contested nature of employee-ownership. Complex implementation problems were compounded by conflict about its ontological meaning and its relationship with participation and control. Beginning with legal and managerial approaches, alternatives emerged related to psychological, anthropological, and political forms. It is no doubt predictable to be presented with a study revealing struggles surrounding definitions, however conflict was more substantial than disagreements about delivery "cliches"; rather employee-ownership remained ambiguous, disputed, and "Janus-facing" (Ji, 2019).

As alternative interpretations emerged, they illustrated the gaps between: (1) different ideals inherent within the initial business cases, (2) participants' experience of practice, and (3) the radical traditional of worker's control. Management was not able to deliver on their original promises, let

alone address staff desire for control over frontline work or normative aspirations of democratic workplaces. Not only promiscuous; ownership also evoked positive associations: Participants wanted more of it, without agreeing what it was. We therefore uphold Pestoff and Saito's (2021) reflection: alternative socially owned care organisations have a potential role in challenging managerialism and traditional relations of organisational power. As these new embryonic non-managerial practices emerged, staff experienced changes in workplace culture. Therefore, we also suggest its radical potential is underestimated by scholars such as Turner and Wright (2022), who do not consider the contestability of ownership and the empirical evidence of an initial (but nevertheless important) transfer of power brought about legal ownership by employees. Following Yeoman (2017), these cultural shifts are central to staff identification with their organisation.

In governance, employee-ownership brought about new participative mechanisms which had traditionally been absent, reflecting aspects of Wren's (2020) and Souleles' (2020) analysis of ownership culture. For many, equal shares created a sense of equality which gave staff the status, confidence, and mandate to confront managerialism. However, staff control was partial, unstable and nascent. Owners influenced decisions previously the sole remit of management as well as becoming more cooperative by sharing their unique "front-line" knowledge. Hence, we confirm the qualified endorsement of the critical value of employee-ownership by Storey, Basterretxea and Salaman (2014); because it can simultaneously reproduce *and* challenge managerialism. Gaining ownership had been for a *precondition* for the possibility of staff control, but insufficient in isolation.

The empirical material also highlighted how for staff, autonomy over their practice was key to job satisfaction and perceptions of control and service quality (Pestoff and Saito, 2013). Clearly having ownership did not meet staff expectations for control over care work while direct participation was infrequent. Control was never handed over by management because employees "owned" shares; it was not a gift bestowed on them simply because they became shareholders, but something struggled for (Cathcart, 2013). In this regard, the study reflects existing literature which highlight the struggles of maintaining (let alone expanding) non-managerial working and the influence of external markets or policy. Further, we build upon previous health sociology (which focuses on the professionalism/management interface) by introducing a new dynamic: employee-ownership.

Despite their intensity and reflection of local context, these discussions about ownership were not purely abstract or un-theorised common sense. They involved users engaging in and offering competing ontological versions of what ownership is (and might be) and whether it mattered (Wren and Ridley-Duff, 2021). We suggest arguments concluding that ownership has been rectified (and simply a fiction) go too far (Veldman and Willmott, 2013). We have shown, ownership was contested, and managers could not simply ignore or marginalise employee-owners, particularly if they were care professionals (Pestoff and Saito, 2021). Employee-owners had tangible (however partial and embryonic) influence based on the economic and structural power owning shares contained.

Further, arguments about "fiction" accepts the dominance of legal interpretations of ownership. We maintain our analysis of the lived experience of employee-owners and examples of non-managerial working supersede abstract debates about the meaning of corporation law,

legal entities and "fictions". For example, owning legally corporate "assets" is different from owning what is important in organisations. Care work is rarely about physical assets or even less tangible intellectual property; but defined by tacit and embedded networks of social and productive relationships. Therefore, consideration of alternative ownership forms within care requires an understanding of jurisprudence but must also work beyond it. Moreover, we suggest these questions often invite an account of causality i.e., whether it makes something happen, enables, or generates outcomes. Therefore, the research priorities established by Wren and Ridley-Duff (2021) might best addressed by methods informed by critical realism (and particularly its understanding of "generative" social forces as both simultaneously influential but also non-linear in causation) (O'Mahoney and Vincent, 2014).

To aid theoretical reflection, four areas of contestation are outlined in Table 3 below. They act as the conceptual and practical battleground for dispute, with each disciplinary interpretation having something different to say on each topic. Further they are not simply thematic findings often found in qualitative studies. Rather, the table begins an exploration of the areas of argument and the interactions of different ownership(s). By elucidating how different scholarly traditions comprehended the phenomena of ownership and what areas of contestation exist, we provide an initial step in creating a conceptual framework previously absence.

As Table 3 shows, this study does offer suggested areas of further research particularly in relation to how scholars conceptualise intraorganizational conflicts[14]. There is a tendency to see divergence as simply the clash of competing logics with employee-owners (and other actors) tasked with understanding and compromising. This study suggests we must not be too optimistic that through further empiricism, logic and normative reasoning a single definition (and organisational form) for ownership is possible. Collaborating Honig (2007), employee-owned enterprises may have "incommensurable logics", where contestation is not simply disagreement about means or the process of arguing about it in application. Rather, contested concepts are manifested in recurring debates which can be reimagined with new language and settings.

In critical realist terms, it is the change in material power (represented through legal ownership) that alters the organisational debate. Further, we suggest employee-ownership does not simply embody a new organisational language (in contrast to managerialism and professionalism) but a shift in power which is not a "fiction". These changes, including new owner identities are problematic for managers seeking to co-op staff into their priorities and create an instant organisational consensus. Although ownership is not a guarantee, it is a generative power with the *potential* for creating non-managerial ways of working (O'Mahoney and Vincent, 2014).

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[14] Please note, this paper is not an application of Gallie's (1956) essentially contested concept system to ownership, however this approach may offer future research opportunities to alternative organisational scholars.

Table 3. Contested topics

Topics	Explanation
Staff participation and control	All ownership forms make claims to increase staff participation and control, although they disagreed about its scope and importance.
	Management sought to minimise the link with notions of workplace democracy and would describe ownership as limited by the constitution (The Articles) and merely "giving opportunities to engage".
	Whereas non-managers often depicted ownership assertively as staff having the power to decide. Moreover, participation for most staff was not only seen as a synonym for control, but also intrinsically valuable and a concrete artifact of equality (particularly for low-status employees).
Value through meeting social aims or socialising work	Legal and managerial versions argued ownership created social value by meeting social aims, and not by socialising work. For senior managers considerations of how work should be radically reorganised were not the primary concern.
	In contrast, for many non-managerial informants the purpose of employee-ownership was precisely to oppose instrumental thinking and to offer alternatives by transforming workplace relationships. Questions of what meaningful work is and how it comes about are crucial to both our analysis of staff discussions and future research about ownership.
Normative exceptionalism	When participants described employee-ownership in multiple ways, they also highlighted claims being made for its exceptionalism and role as an organisational exemplar.
	Private, public, social, third-way, in-between hybrid; its location within the typology of organisational forms was vigorously disputed.
	For non-managerial owners they were clear in their sense of exceptionalism, while resisting ferociously claims that their organisation was transmuting into a conventional privately-owned company or public sector bureaucracy.
Alternative or new form of managerialism?	Conflict transpired about the extent to which being an owner disrupted or replaced conventional managerialism. Under employee-ownership, managers were formally accountable to (and could be ultimately removed by) owners. However, it was less clear how this would be enacted in practice; and the ways it altered day-to-day management behaviour and work coordination.
	While non-ownership (and indifference to shareholding) existed; others embraced being an owner as they sought a more radical worker's control interpretation. For these staff being an employee-owner and practising ownership, became a way of resisting managerialism and not another way of implementing it.

6. Conclusion

Within the scholarly context of contestation surrounding ownership as well as the contemporary debates about future forms of social ownership, this paper has considered its implementation in two English care providers using qualitative case study methods. Based on new empirical data, our study has explored important concepts regarding the role of ownership in care settings as well as innovation in employee participation. By asking questions of how staff understood its meaning, we

argue that existing literature lacks an appreciation of different ownership(s) and underestimates the radical value of employee-ownership.

We maintain to understand how ownership was understood, enacted, and contested by care staff, it is essential to incorporate scholarship about: participation and control within employee-owned enterprises, the uniqueness of care work, and different disciplinary viewpoints. We contend that maintaining a wider understanding of ownership (despite its contested nature) does not hinder effective public policy or social science but allows for a more realistic exploration of the phenomena.

In the context of contemporary policy discussions about care provision (Pestoff and Saito, 2021) and the broader New Cooperativism debate (Wren and Ridley-Duff, 2021), we contribute by embracing contestation, and avoiding utopian polemics or overly negative conclusions. As a result, we can begin to understand ownership's role in challenging managerialism in a more subtle manner. For staff, employee-ownership was not a simple answer to their organisational problems, nor an example of individuals possessing property. Rather, it was something to be collectively explored and continually debated.

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