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**RHETORICAL RULES AND ORGANIZATION-CULTURE:
IDENTIFICATION, MAINTENANCE, CHANGE**

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By Maryan S. Schall and George L. Shapiro

ABSTRACT

Organizations can be characterized as value-driven, choice-making, stakeholder-impacted, uncertainty-ridden, segmented-but-interdependent systems operating in an environment of scarce resources. As such, they can usefully be understood and managed as rhetorical cultures, that is, as systems of values and beliefs which underlie the means by which members and internal groups attempt to influence others in the service of their own preferred outcomes. Both cultures and rhetoric are rule-governed and guided. By determining the rules of the symbols, verbal and nonverbal, used to “induce cooperation” in any given organizational context, it is possible to identify the organization-culture, and to manage that culture, either by rhetorically reinforcing the current rules or by changing those rules by changing the rhetorical lines of argument (the who, what, where, when, how) that are rewarded. *Thus rhetoric is at once the initiator, the vehicle, and the outcome of organization-culture.* This paper develops this rationale, provides models and examples to support it, and suggests how organization-cultures can be identified and managed from a rhetorical framework.

Organizations are not the rational, orderly entities that some would have us believe (Mangham, 1979, p. 74).

Instead, organizations are more realistically addressed as persuasive communities networks of individuals and groups engaged in influencing one another toward their own ends. To influence successfully, organizational members must not overstep the generally-unstated bounds of propriety mandated by the organization-as-culture.

The purpose of this paper is to present a perspective on organizations-as-cultures that elaborates on those introductory statements. The perspective enables the identification and differentiation of organization-cultures by articulating the invisible rulebook that governs and guides an organization's influence processes -- the rules of organizational rhetoric. The perspective also develops rhetorical means for maintaining and changing cultures.

We base our perspective on three assumptions: (1) Organizations can be usefully identified, understood, and experienced as cultures. [We believe it is more realistic, if more difficult, to deal with the culture concept as something an organization IS rather than as something an organization HAS (Smircich, 1983) and have attempted to develop our perspective in that mode. To reinforce that approach, we will refer to the discussion topic as organization-culture rather than as organizational culture.] (2) Both cultural maintenance and cultural change are vital issues for organization-cultures: cultural maintenance to enable predictability, cultural change to enable adaptability. (3) Rhetoric is an essential and prevalent process in creating, maintaining, and changing organization-cultures.

DEFINITIONS: ORGANIZATION-CULTURE, RHETORIC, RULES

Culture, rhetoric, and rules have been variously defined. In general, definitions of culture deal with shared values and beliefs; definitions of rhetoric deal with the intention to persuade or influence; definitions of rules deal with prescriptiveness. Their association is

apparent in those general terms alone: it often requires “appropriate” (prescribed) persuasion, influence, or negotiation for people to create, sustain, and transfer shared values and beliefs.

Organization-Culture: Culture has been defined as everything from “webs of significance” (Geertz, 1973) to “the way we do things around here” (Uttal, 1983). Our working definition of organization-culture is: An interlocking system of shared values, beliefs, and assumptions that shapes the expectations, behaviors, and understandings of organizational members about their organizational experience, through the mediation of often unarticulated, prescriptive rules. The culture allows the acceptance of seemingly contradictory beliefs through a process of rule prioritization or through shared rationalizations. Repeated patterned experience establishes and sustains organization-cultures. They are continuously reenacted and reinforced (or renegotiated) through ordinary behavior and thus are more accurately understood as processes than as states.

Organizations seldom constitute one monolithic culture. Instead, they are generally composed of numerous (sub)cultures (Sathe, 1983). These multi-mini-cultures can be distinguished by members’ compliance with some (or many) different rhetorical rules. Attempts to induce cooperation across these cultures may be problematic; influence strategies seen as appropriate and expected in one culture may be puzzling or suspect in another.

The mini-cultures may be bounded by work unit, tenure, race, gender, profession, common outside interest -- or, importantly, by status. Members of top management, for instance, may share an organizational influence reality that bears little resemblance to the everyday experience of employees at other status levels. When, as is often the case, top management makes public pronouncements about “who we are and what’s important here” that don’t coincide with the daily experience of employees at the lower organizational levels, the latter are likely to think that those pronouncements only describe the “way it is at the top,” or they will assign the pronouncements to the realm of

empty words (“mere rhetoric”). In light of the above, we have found it useful to distinguish between espoused and enacted (operative) cultures, while noting that the two may overlap or even, in some rare instances, coincide.

Rhetoric: Rhetoric was defined by Aristotle as “the faculty of observing in any given case the available means of persuasion” (Scott & Brock, 1972, p. 11). Aristotle’s “available means” were ethos (appeals based on the character and credibility of the persuader), logos (appeals based on evidence and reason), and pathos (appeals directed to the emotions of the persuadee). Burke (1962, p. 567) stated that rhetoric “is rooted in an essential function of language itself,... the essential use of language as a symbolic means of inducing cooperation in beings that by nature respond to symbols.” Scott and Brock (1972, p. 6) echo Burke in their definition: “the human effort to induce cooperation through the use of symbols.” Campbell (1972, p. 2) describes rhetoric as “persuasive discourses, written and oral, that alter attitudes and actions” and puts it squarely into a cultural framework by stating that it is “concerned with the values that individuals and societies should adopt, with the implications of those values, and with the means to express or attain those values.”

Our working definition of rhetoric is: Any communication element, explicit or implicit, verbal or nonverbal, intended to induce cooperation in the service of the sender’s preferred outcomes. Rhetorical activities in organizations can be understood as cultural performances -- enactments of the values, beliefs, and assumptions shared by members of an organization-culture that are intended to influence choices.

We gratefully acknowledge the works of Aristotle on lines of argument; Toulmin on structure of argument (see Brockreide & Ehninger, 1960); and Miller, Boster, Roloff, & Seibold (1977), Schenck-Hamlin, Wiseman, and Georgacarackos (1982), and Kipnis et al. (1980), among others, on the development of generic compliance strategies. Our interest, however, is more specific and contextual than any of these others. It involves discovering the particular arguments which must be made to successfully induce cooperation in specific

organizational cultures or subcultures.

Rules: Students of cultures, organizational or societal, have frequently noted that cultures are transformed into behavior through the agency of tacitly understood prescriptive and proscriptive “rules.” In organizations, the rules govern the “ought’s” and “ought not’s” of behavior. Conversely, these normative rules act as warrants for interpreting behavior; they allow observers of behavior to assign culturally-salient meanings to it (Spradley, 1979; Geertz, 1973; Goodenough, 1970). Bilmes (1976, p. 45) contends that “different cultures not only have different normative rules but ... members of any one culture interpret particular situations and actions in a way different from members of any other.” He adds that “People orient, construct, and explain their behavior by reference to the rules.”

According to one prevalent theoretic perspective, communication is also rule governed and guided. Pearce, Cronen, Cushman and other communication scholars argue that social interaction takes place according to “communication rules [that] form general and specific patterns which provide the basis for the explanation, prediction, and control of communication behavior” (Pearce & Cushman, 1977, p. 5).

Our working definition of organization-culture rules is: The tacit understandings that prescribe appropriate interactive behavior among members of a given organizational group.

The Synthesis: Organizations, Culture, Communication, Rhetoric, and Rules

It is almost a cliché to state that communication is essential to organizing and to organizations. Without communication it is impossible to organize and to carry out organizational functions (Wiio, Goldhaber, & Yates, 1980). Communication is also essential to cultures. Indeed, Hall (1959, p. 191) contends that “culture is communication and communication is culture.” Others have referred to culture as the “residue of communication” (Pacanowsky & O’Donnell-Trujillo 1982, p. 123). Bormann (1983, p. 99) states that organizational artifacts and technology are cultural requirements but that

“without communication, these components would not result in a culture.” We go a step farther and claim that rhetoric is the particular form of communication that most importantly allows these components to result in an organization-culture -- that rhetoric is the pervasive and vital type of communicating occurring in organization-cultures.

If one accepts, as we do, that rhetorical communication and organizations are inseparable phenomena and that organizations can be fruitfully understood as rules-generating and complying cultures, the concepts of organization, culture, rhetoric, and rules blend into a systemic whole, with each vitalizing and reinforcing the other. The rhetorical rules indicate who, in a given organization, may/should/must send what messages to whom, where, when, and how in order to induce cooperation toward the sender’s preferred outcomes. They prescribe the appropriate lines of argument -- the language, metaphor, symbols, channels, and styles of communication in a given organization -- all of which have rhetorical implications. They guide organizational rhetoric in ways deemed appropriate by organizational members.

RHETORIC AS THE ESSENTIAL ORGANIZING/ENCULTURATING PROCESS

Five integrated characteristics basic to organization-cultures determine rhetoric’s position as the essential process in organization-culture building and sustaining.

1. Organizational members are socialized to conform to the organization-culture.

New organizational members are taught, explicitly and implicitly, to comply with the rules currently operative in the organization-culture. Thus, they are induced to cooperate with the current value-belief system through rhetorical means and coincidentally learn which specific rhetorical techniques and lines-of-argument will successfully induce cooperation toward preferred outcomes in a given organizational context.

2. Organizational members continually make choices, articulated as decisions, in a context of uncertainty.

Decision making is a pervasive organizational activity essential to its functioning

(Simon, 1957). Uncertainty is a fact of organizational life because all decisions are future-oriented; the future can never be fully known; and thus all decisions are based on incomplete information.

Choices made eliminate other choices, favored by some, and therefore require rhetorical activity. The choices/decision are made in accordance with some form of acceptable persuasive behavior -- that which enacts the culture. The incompleteness of organizational information creates a void which must be filled in order to set priorities and to make decisions. It is filled by rhetoric that reflects cultural values, beliefs, and assumptions.

3. To increase control and predictability/decrease uncertainty organizations need to induce the cooperation of outside stakeholders.

Customers must be persuaded to purchase products. Stockholders must be persuaded to continue holding their ownership in the company. The financial community must be persuaded that the organization is a solid investment. Regulatory bodies must be persuaded not to unduly restrict, unsympathetically control, or heavily tax the organization. Unions must be persuaded to enter into cooperative contracts. Suppliers must be persuaded to give the organization preferential or at least equal treatment with their other customers.

4. Organization-cultures are characterized by segmentalization (sub-cultures) and specialization (division of labor). Organizational members must induce the cooperation of other internal organizational members/groups in order to accomplish their own goals.

Given the complexity of modern organizations, seldom is a single individual or group able to accomplish its goals without the cooperation of other individuals or groups over whom they have little or no authority (Kotter, 1979). Effective rhetors will cope with dependencies by persuading others to cooperate to help them reach their goals, using arguments and styles that reflect the organizational code of conduct.

5. Organization-cultures are characterized by internal competition for valued resources.

Different organizational groups act as vested interest groups, competing for scarce resources. Kanter (1983, p. 61) states that in organizations, “there will be multiple views reflecting the many others trying to shape organizational purposes.” The group (or individual) which can most successfully induce others’ cooperation in the service of its own preferred outcomes will gain and retain the resources wanted to accomplish its goals.

An additional problem associated with specialization and segmentalization is the need to persuade units which perceive themselves as separate entities to work as unified wholes. Organizational leaders attempt to bring about that unity by using rhetoric to increase employees identification with overarching organizational goals (Peters & Waterman, 1982).

ORGANIZATIONAL RHETORIC: DEEP AND SURFACE LEVELS

Rhetoric operates at both deep and surface levels. The surface level is behavioral and thus observable: the verbal and nonverbal symbols organizational members use, see, and hear that induce cooperation. Verbally, it might be a persuasive plea: “If we don’t make this deadline, Jones will have our hides!” Nonverbally, it might be the persuasive appearance of the president’s office: huge walnut desk, original works of art on the walls, lush carpeting on the floor. Nonverbal influence messages also include those implied in vocal rate, pitch, and tone. At the surface level, rhetorical actors must behave in ways that count as playing by the rules, that is, they must stay within the perceived bounds of propriety, in order to induce cooperation.

The deep level is cultural and thus nonobservable: it encompasses the assumption set that governs (1) what is negotiable in this organization-culture (in the Roman Catholic church, the divinity of Christ is not open to debate), (2) what criteria will be used to determine which influence-components succeed in inducing cooperation (the rules of the organizational rhetoric), and (3) who will determine 1 and 2 (the “Rules Committee”) and what processes they will use to do so.

The deep level of rhetoric in any organization-culture could be thought of as the center of a series of often-overlapping concentric circles representing ever more encompassing cultures (see Figure 1). The shared meanings in any cultural circle is bounded by the core assumptions of those that surround it and, in turn, bound those that fall within its confines. The rules of an organization-subculture are bounded by the most important assumptions of its organization-culture, its community, its industry, its society, our Greco-Roman heritage, and Judeo-Christian philosophy.

An illustration might focus on the incidence of women in management. Until recently, women were seldom seen in organizational management roles (and, of course, they still rarely fill top management positions). Organizational “players” complied with the rule that men should manage organizations and women should support men’s managerial careers -- on-the-job in clerical functions or off-the-job by staying out of the workforce. The Rules Committee that altered this rule was made up, in part, of governmental agencies. These agencies responded to the environment, in this case, the women’s movement, by legislating Affirmative Action and equal pay for equal work, which in turn resulted in the dominant coalitions (Rules Committees) of individual organization-cultures reviewing and changing their organizational “rules” about women-in-management. The change was consistent with the U.S. cultural value of equality, the Greco-Roman belief in rewarding competence, and the Judeo-Christian philosophy of respect for the individual.

The women-in-management issue is also useful as an example of the distinction between espoused and enacted rules. Many organizations espouse the following line of argument: We should and will develop the managerial skills of our female employees and promote them into positions of real authority. At the same time they enact a different line of argument: We will appear to develop the managerial skills of our female employees, but channel them into positions of little authority. In these cases, that which is practiced is inconsistent with that which is preached. The operative rhetoric -- the elements or argument that are really at work in a given organization -- differs from that publicly

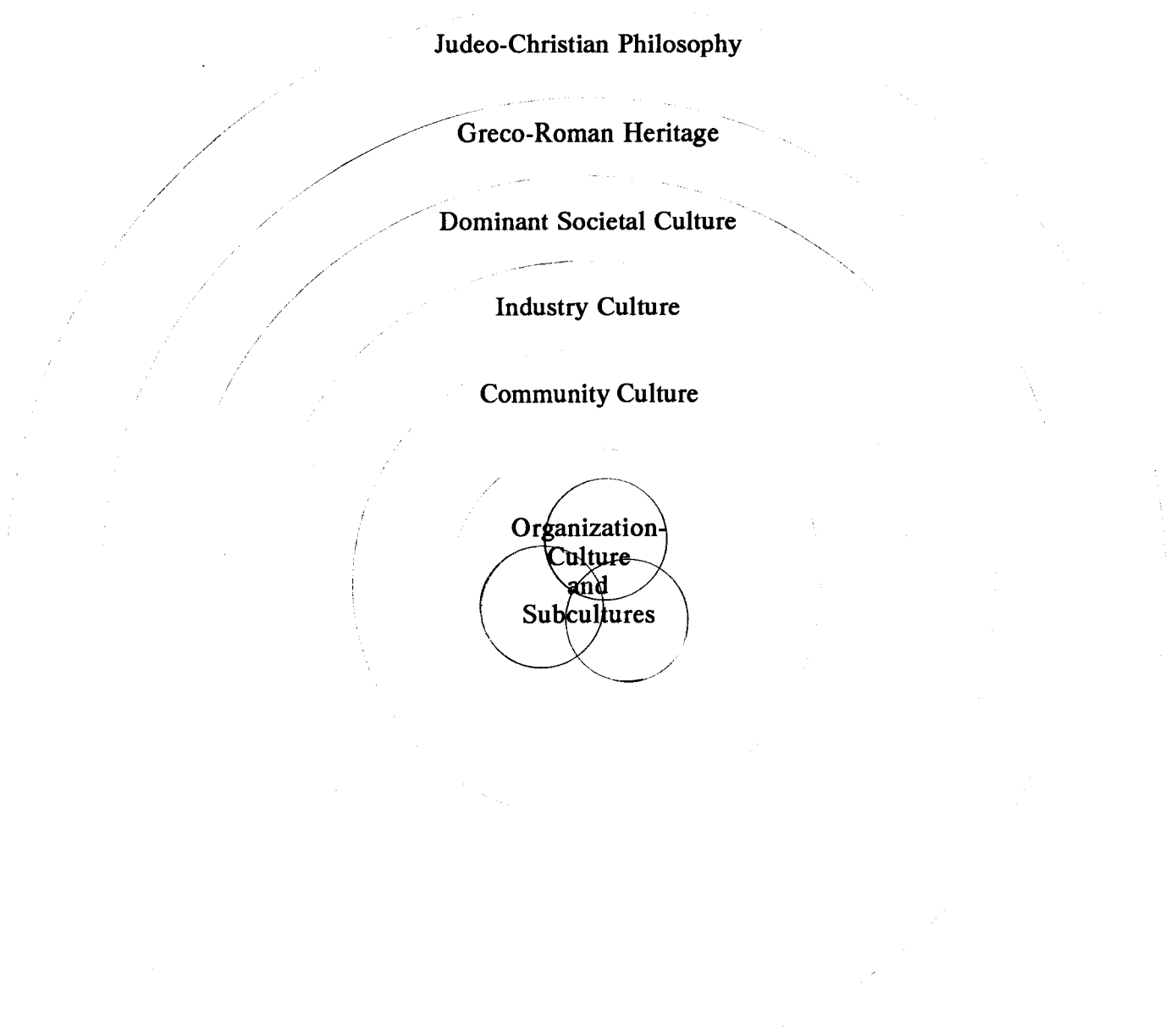


Figure 1.
CONCENTRIC CULTURAL CIRCLES BOUNDING ORGANIZATION-CULTURES
AND SUBCULTURES

acclaimed. Organizational insiders who “win” (induce others’ cooperation to their own preferred outcomes) know the difference and act in accordance with the operative rules.

IDENTIFYING CULTURES: LINES OF ARGUMENT

Rhetorical elements integral to the line of argument have a journalistic flavor because they deal not only with the what (the claim: message content/appeal) but also with who is making the claim and who is receiving it, how it is presented (style/channel), where it is made, and when it is made. Who makes what claim to whom in what manner and in what context will have important implications for its persuasiveness.

In one of a series of interviews we’ve conducted recently with executives of organizations undergoing major change, we noted the following line of argument.

Who: Senders: Principal corporate officers of a major financial services company.

Receivers: Top management of the operating groups.

What: Message: In order to maximize corporate resources, which is necessary to remain competitive in today’s market, operating groups now and in the future will function as one multi-unit enterprise, with centralized systems and common strategies, instead of in their traditional posture of highly independent, competing units.

How: One-to-one interactions; written statements.

Where: Throughout the organization’s many locations; at Management Committee meetings.

When: Over the past 1 1/2 years.

Rhetorical Rule: To influence line officers to change their operations from a decentralized to a centralized posture, top management must frequently and consistently emphasize the necessity of acting in accordance with their mandated direction.

Value/Belief: Value: Compliance with top management’s direction.

Belief: Top management will fire those who don’t comply with its direction.

A recent newspaper article (Meyer, 1984) reports on a non-spoken symbol targeted at inducing cooperation.

Who: Sender: Stephen L. Pistner, CEO of the ailing (but apparently recovering) Montgomery Ward.

Receivers: Anyone who walks into Pistner's office.

What: "No surprises." Meaning that none of Wards' problems are to be hidden from Pistner or from other top management people. "...outdated merchandise, poor store locations, dull presentation of goods, antiquated distribution system, and over-staffed operations" (Meyer, 1984, p. 4M), Pistner wants to know about them all.

How: A small sign embossed with the phrase: No Surprises.

Where: Prominently placed on Pistner's desk.

When: Whenever someone sees the sign or comments on it.

Rhetorical Rule: To influence Pistner (and by implication, top management), employees should move the bad news up.

Value/Belief: Value: Problem acknowledgement and solution.

Belief: We won't accomplish a turnaround without openly sharing information about our problems. Problems shared early are solved early.

The story of the sign has traveled throughout the company. It has become the embodiment of a line of argument that will induce cooperation at Ward's.

Sometimes style is the most persuasive element in a line of argument. That appears to be the case with a Minneapolis real-estate developer, Robert Boisclair (Rybak, 1984). Boisclair is described by clients as shy but tenacious and determined. Says one, "He just keeps coming back and coming back until he finally gets what he wants." His message is unchanged; it's the "how" that finally persuades. Not surprisingly, others in his organization have been enculturated to the style. They interact with potential clients in much the same manner as Boisclair -- low key but tenacious. The rhetorical rule operating here is that to convince outsiders, you should be persistent without being pushy. The

underlying cultural belief is that winners hang in there, no matter what; the value is perseverance.

INSIDER IDENTIFICATION OF RHETORICAL RULES

The analysis steps discussed above may appear to be ponderous and difficult. Actually, we all, as symbol-using and meaning-assigning beings, are constantly and unconsciously submitting influence messages (our own and others') to these interpretive steps, thus allowing us to evaluate the appropriateness and persuasiveness of symbols and actions. The difficulty often lies in articulating the operant rules, values, and beliefs and in synthesizing them into a coherent description of the culture (Schall, 1983). Yet articulation appears to be a necessary, or at the very least a desirable, step in the management (planned maintenance or change) of organization-cultures.

Rhetorical cultural clues, however, abound in ordinary organizational interactions. Insiders who want to "learn the ropes," that is, to discover the operative rules of influence in their group, can do so by paying attention to what's going on around them and noting patterns of behavior.

Insiders (or organizational researchers) can become more sensitive to the rhetorical rules that reflect their group or organization-culture by:

- Determining what the last ten people promoted in the organization have in common.
What are the shared understandings about why they were so rewarded?
 - Listening for "should" statements and questioning them. ("Why is it that I/she/he should do that?") the "should" statement will identify the rule; the answer to the "why" question will surface the underlying value or belief.
 - Listening for excuses or justifications given for behavior. They will indicate that a rule was broken. E.g. "Look, I'm sorry I couldn't support your proposal after I'd said I would, but it was clear it didn't have a chance when the V.P. opposed it."
- Rule 1. To induce cooperation here, you should keep your promises (value:

integrity).

Rule 2. [The higher priority rule.] To avoid losing the V.P.'s cooperation, you should favor his/her position over that of a lower status person (value: deference to the hierarchy).

- Listening to gossip to discover what kinds of influence behaviors are applauded, condoned, despised.

- Observing behavior in meetings, formal and informal, and in other gathering places (coffee rooms, the office area, lunch and after-work "spots"): Whose ideas are accepted or rejected and why? Who allies with whom and why? Who and what is focused on? Ignored? Why?

- Recruiting an oldtimer to instruct you on "how to get things done here."

- Paying attention to corrections given both to you and to others. What task "mistakes" are corrected and how? What relationship "mistakes" are corrected and how? What, if any, reasons are given for the correction?

- Listening to stories that circulate and recirculate about influential people or events in the organization (current and past) and asking about the moral of the stories.

- Noting the rites of passage in the group. What marks someone's passage from outsider to insider? What value is suggested by the ritual? E.g. "You know you've made it when the gang asks you to join them for a beer after work."

Rule: To influence others, you must have allies based on camaraderie (value: alliances, coworker friendship).

- Observing how the workplace looks: what do people put on their walls and desks? (Family pictures, diplomas and awards, posters, traditional or contemporary fine art?) Which of these symbols influence others? Why?

- At budget allocation times, what arguments by whom win funding? Why?

**DISCOVERING THE RHETORICAL RULES OF THE ORGANIZATION-CULTURE AS
A RESEARCHER**

“Living in” the organization’s “place” as a participant observer is an especially useful method for gathering insider-based data. It will allow the researcher to make use of all the observational techniques suggested above for the organizational insider. Other data gathering possibilities are (1) unstructured or semi-structured interviews, (2) written or oral survey instruments, either pre-developed (see Allen & Dyer, 1973; Handy, 1978) or tailored to the specific group (Schall, 1983), or (3) focus group discussions. Whatever method is used, when conducting organization-culture studies from a rhetorical perspective, it is imperative to discover the answers to the following questions:

- 1) Who is it necessary to influence around here to accomplish which important goals, personal and organizational?
What resources do those individuals control?
Why are those resources valued?
- 2) What intellectual posture is most likely to influence those people (that is, what sort of appeal will they respond to most favorably)? Idealistic? Pragmatic? Analytic? Realistic? Conceptual? How is that posture translated into behavior?
- 4) What personal style is most likely to influence them: Dramatic? Unemotional? Inspirational? Caring? Humorous? Assertive?
- 5) What channel is most likely to convey the message in a way that will be influential? Face-to-face informal meetings? Formal meetings? Telephone? Written memo? Written report? Another person (if so, who and why?)
- 6) Considering all the above, what are the rhetorical prescriptions and proscriptions (rules) for various groups here?
- 7) What values/beliefs underlie those rules?

If researchers claim to be identifying the culture from an insider perspective, they

should confirm their analysis by subjecting it to verification by a stipulated consensus of insiders. Researchers may, of course, choose to identify organization-cultures from some other perspective; e.g. that of the customer, the supplier, or the financial analyst. In such cases, the chosen perspective should be identified and validated by a representative consensus of the perspective group. (The researcher may also present his/her own “trained-observer” perspective on the organization-culture.) If consensual validation is not reached, it may mean that a number of subcultures are operative in the group or that the group is characterized by dissensus. Either of the latter cases may warrant further culture-based research in the subject group.

MANAGING ORGANIZATION-CULTURE RHETORICALLY: PLANNED

MAINTENANCE AND PLANNED CHANGE

Planned change in organizational behavior is rarely successful and is arguably impossible without considerable pressure from change in wider cultural scripts (Mangham, 1979, p. 142).

It is reasonable to propose, however, that an effective set of change tools is actually embedded in senior management’s daily message sending and receiving activities and that these tools can be managed in such a way as to energize and redirect ... business and government institutions. The tools will be characterized as symbols, patterns, and settings ... (Peters, 1978, p. 3).

We agree with both Mangham and Peters and see rhetoric as a necessary, if perhaps not sufficient, instrument both for planned maintenance of organization-culture and for planned organization-culture change. Desired components of organization-cultures can be maintained by reinforcing behavior that reflects the currently operative rhetorical rules which support those components. In the broadest sense, reinforcement will occur through culturally salient sanctions: rule compliance will be positively sanctioned; rule defiance will be negatively sanctioned. As Blumer (1969, p. 19) argues: “It is highly important to recognize that the established patterns of group life do not carry on by themselves but are dependent for their continuity on recurrent affirmative definition”.

In direct counterpoint to planned cultural maintenance through rewarding established rhetorical performance (rule reenactment and rule reinforcement), particular components of organization-cultures can be changed by altering the operative rules (rule modification or elimination). Planned rule alteration requires knowing what the rules are, determining what you want them to be, specifying what behavior counts as enacting both, and then reinforcing new behaviors through positive sanction and eliminating unwanted behaviors through negative sanction -- or by ignoring it (ignoring it will rob it of significance).

It is critical to remind ourselves that the only way to observe culture is through behavior and artifacts. We infer culture -- and thus culture maintenance or change -- through that which is observed. If certain behaviors and artifacts continue to be rewarded and prized, we can assume that the culture is sustaining; if new behaviors and artifacts are rewarded and prized, we can assume that the culture is changing. Thus cultural components can be maintained or changed, that is, organization-cultures can be managed, by promoting and rewarding behaviors that “count as” enactments of the desired value-based rules.

For instance, a CEO wants his direct reports to perform more as a cooperative team (value: top management teamwork) and less as competitive stars, their traditional posture (value: individual visibility/achievement). He gives strong rhetorical emphasis to the teamwork issue. If his direct reports then decide to base a greater proportion of their future annual bonuses on the performance of the group as a whole, the CEO should praise their joint-initiative and their team-oriented decision, then reinforce both by giving the direct reports an extra bonus point for having instituted the change in compensation policy.

To induce major planned change, then, some group of credible organizational members -- those with organizational power, formal or informal -- must be able to distance themselves from familiar organizational patterns, the cultural “givens.” By distancing themselves, they will be in a position to recognize these culture-based givens as the results of past choices. As choices, they are open to change. Such distancing may be

initiated by respected outsiders, but must be absorbed and acted upon by a dominant coalition of insiders if a planned cultural change is to be accomplished. Furthermore, this group most promote the change trigger -- the needs-claim about particular conditions that require organizational change. For change to occur, a “new way” must be envisioned with wanted rules and behavior articulated, modeled, and when noted reinforced. As Kanter (1983, p. 279) states: “The ultimate skill for change mastery ... consists of the ability to conceive, construct, and convert into new behavior a new view of organizational reality.”

Organization-culture management benefits from a knowledge of and ability to comply with rhetorical meta-rules; the rhetorical rules for changing organizational rhetoric and thus for changing the organization-culture. (Lee Iacocca provides a recent dramatic example.) Organization-cultures will be managed, then, by those who not only recognize cultures as choice phenomena but who are also willing and able to engage themselves in the rhetorical activities outlined below. Given our perspective, these activities require a working knowledge of the currently operative value-belief system (the existing organization-culture) AND the desired value-belief system (the model culture).

RHETORICAL META-RULES FOR CULTURAL MAINTENANCE AND CHANGE

1. Build a case for the desirability of cultural change (or maintenance) supported by internal or external evidence. When change is desired, trigger a felt-need for it by demonstrating a change in a critical organizational condition, and indicate that the old ways will not allow an effective response to the new condition.

Rhetorical meta-rule: To induce cooperation in managing culture, provide the group to be influenced with internally- and externally-based evidence supporting the desired values, beliefs, and rules.

2. Develop a statement of mission and philosophy that clearly articulates the desired organization-culture’s values and beliefs. Provide forums for identification and discussion of meanings and behaviors associated at all organizational levels with the

mission and philosophy. Determine what behaviors “count as” the desired values-in-action throughout the organization-culture. If meanings differ on important issues, negotiate until all involved share and accept meanings and their implications for behavior.

Rhetorical meta-rule: To induce cooperation toward fulfilling an organizational mission, work together to determine key issues and to reach consensus on their behavioral meanings.

3. Consistently behave (send behavioral messages) in ways accepted as counting as the desired values, per 2 above, and demonstrate that you expect others to behave in those ways by articulating those expectations and by rewarding those who fulfill those expectations. These actions are particularly salient to top management people, who must continuously demonstrate their commitment to the desired values/beliefs. They must act as rhetorical role models.

Rhetorical meta-rule: To induce cooperation toward cultural maintenance/change, consistently act in ways other’s agree count as enactment of the mission/philosophy, state your value-based expectations of others clearly, and reward others appropriately for meeting those expectations.

4. Identify the gaps between the actual and the desired cultural elements; prioritize gap reduction areas. Consistently stress the need for change in the most critical areas. Consider ease of change; the accomplishment of some relatively easy change-goals will encourage further effort. Celebrate goal attainment.

Rhetorical meta-rule: To induce cooperation toward change in organization-culture, continuously stress key change needs, and celebrate change goals reached.

5. Identify reasons for the desired culture. Determine how to verbalize those reasons in ways likely to maximize their acceptance -- what words, metaphors, style, lines of argument are most likely to convince. Know your audience, their reference groups, historical attitude toward organizational issues, motives, habits, interests. Use

logical, psychological, or personal approaches, as appropriate, to appeal to their interests. Explain how the desired culture change (or continuance) will advance those interests. Always remember that people do things for their reasons, not for yours (Bormann et al., 1982).

Rhetorical meta-rule: To induce cooperation toward cultural change, present the desired change in ways appealing to the message receiver.

6. Recruit key people to help promote the desired culture. Especially, identify informal leaders/heroes who could either sabotage or facilitate culture-management efforts. Per item 5 above, enlist their aid as active advocates of the management/change process.

Rhetorical meta-rule: To induce cooperation of the larger group, build visible alliances with highly credible organizational members.

7. Cultivate the imagination of coworkers. Verbally visualize the desired culture in realistically dramatic ways, reminding members that they are part of a larger entity. Refer repeatedly to unifying organizational symbols/heroes (historic and current) that support the desired culture.

Rhetorical meta-rule: To induce cooperation toward developing the desired organization-culture, present your vision of the desired culture compellingly.

8. Seed recalcitrant areas with people who have internalized the desired culture and who have demonstrated their ability to communicate its values effectively. Support “seed” persons to keep them from going “native.”

Rhetorical meta-rule: To induce cooperation to change in all areas of the organization, position and visibly support effective adherents/converts where they can help most.

9. Develop and display nonverbal symbols that capture the desired culture; explain their significance to help establish shared meaning (e.g. to stress unity, develop a singly company logo to be used by all operating units, replacing individual logos). Concretize values in the physical design and accoutrements of the workspace. Use organizational settings to dramatize the desired culture (e.g. create comfortably

furnished open spaces to encourage informal information exchange, if information exchange is to be encouraged).

Rhetorical meta-rule: To induce cooperation, send congruent verbal and nonverbal messages.

10. Structure agendas to focus on desired vision/values by positioning these matters first or last. Make sure they are included in some form on all agendas.

Rhetorical meta-rule: To induce cooperation to culture maintenance/change, the desired concepts must be positioned for maximum attention.

11. Announce a reordering of priorities to reflect the desired culture (priorities of goals, time, budget, other resources). Discard procedures/structures that deny desired values and state your value-based reasons for doing so.

Rhetorical meta-rule: To induce cooperation to culture maintenance/change, evidence must be given about how stated organizational priorities reflect desired values.

12. Develop job descriptions and selection, training, and promotion criteria that stress experience and behaviors consistent with the desired culture. Especially, use criteria consistent with the desired culture to assess performance.

Rhetorical meta-rule: To induce cooperation to culture maintenance/change, determine performance expectations and reward performances that promote the desired culture.

13. Bring in credible, respected outsiders to discuss and encourage the desired culture with insiders.

Rhetorical meta-rule: To induce cooperation toward culture maintenance/change, provide opportunities for employees to associate with respected outsiders who actively advocate the desired culture.

CONCLUSION

We believe that organization-cultures will respond positively to external change to the extent that the organization is willing and able to adopt a “learner” posture -- to

continually learn about itself and its larger environment. If organizational members, especially top management, acknowledge the shaping effects of rhetorical rules and reinforce influence behaviors that complement organizational self-learning in terms of its larger environment, external change is likely to be accommodated effectively, either through cultural shifts or assimilations. It is the learners who will influence the future; the learned will be equipped only to influence a world that no longer exists.

In summary, whether by importing new members who embody the desired organizational ethos or by reprogramming old ones, cultural change will occur when new meanings are accepted about what is important and what works here, so that new formulations are possible. The establishment of new meanings and new formulations are possible only through communication. Attempts to establish new meanings or to reinforce current understandings are acts of rhetoric. The acts are performances highly relevant to organizational experience and seem to us to be fruitfully addressed as a key process in the reenactment or reformulation of organization-cultures. Understanding and managing organizational rhetoric, then, is a useful focus for identifying, maintaining, and changing organization-cultures.

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