

Stories and the Rhetoric of Contrariety: Subtexts of Organizing (Change)

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Stories are an important part of organizational life that scholars have studied from many different perspectives. In this paper, we contribute a new way of exploring the meaning of stories. We use a concept from classical rhetoric, the enthymeme, to help reveal the particular underlying “logic” contained in the story form, and we show that the construction of this logic accounts, in part, for the engaging nature of the stories. We show that storytellers use enthymemes in the construction of their stories and also that scholars can use enthymemes to analyze stories. Understanding the enthymeme and its use in the story form enables interpreters to disentangle the argument often embedded in a story and to surface meanings that are implicit and powerful. In this paper, we focus attention on and examine such implicit meanings in four organizational stories of change in two city administrations, in order to illustrate the role of enthymeme in organizational rhetoric.

Key words: Organizational Stories; Organizational Change; Narrative Analysis; Rhetoric; Enthymeme; Opposition; Subtext; Tenets of Faith; Closure

Stories are a common phenomenon in everyday life. Researchers have proposed and used many different approaches to interpret them, allowing us to see the power of stories and to understand more about the work they perform in various contexts.¹ In this paper, we approach stories as a form of rhetoric, based on the understanding that people often use stories to convince or instruct.

We explore particularly those aspects of stories that are unstated but implied. This focus stems from the insight of narrative analysis that one of the things that make a story powerful is the participation of the audience in the story. At a minimum, the reader must be willing to believe the story, but also is often required to complete the story.² In the extreme, a convincing story is constructed in such a way that the audience can fill in much of what they need to be convinced.

Aristotle (*Rhetoric*, 1.2, 1357a17–21) also made this observation about the role of the audience in relation to the enthymeme, a form of rhetorical logic that we explore in some depth in this paper. The enthymeme is an element of classical rhetoric not often utilized in

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¹Examples of story analysis can be found in the following texts: Alvesson and Sköldbberg, 2000; Barthes, 1977; Bennett and Feldman, 1981; Czarniawska, 1997; Gabriel, 2000; Martin, Feldman, Hatch, and Sitkin, 1983; Morrill, Yalda, Adelman, Musheno and Bejarano, 2000; Propp, 1968.

²McCloskey, 1990, emphasizes that readers must believe the story; Boje, 1991; Boland and Shultze, 1995; DiMaggio, 1995; Bruner, 1990, discuss the participation of the reader in constructing convincing stories.

rhetorical analyses. As we will show, understanding the use of the enthymeme in the story form has the capability of eliciting precisely the implicit aspects of this discourse.

While managerial practice is sometimes referred to as rhetorical or “mere rhetoric”, our analysis goes beyond these pejorative statements to focus on how the “since...since...therefore” structure of logic can be embedded in the “then...then...then” structure of a story told in conversation to make or illustrate a point.³ We build on an understanding of organizational, and particularly managerial, discourse as deeply rhetorical in the sense that it involves the art of convincing people to accept both ways of thinking and courses of action (Brunsson, 1985; Boland and Schultze, 1995). We show how the enthymemes supported by other elements of rhetoric are used in engaging stories and how the researcher can use the understanding of these rhetorical elements to reveal how managers and other organizational actors engage in these acts of persuasion.

THE FRAMEWORK OF INTERPRETATION

Classical rhetoric has a concept that focuses our attention on the implicit. It is called the enthymeme. Generally and somewhat roughly speaking, an enthymeme in classical rhetoric is an incomplete or “careless” logical inference, or syllogism. The main source of classical rhetoric is found in various writings by Aristotle (in particular his *Rhetoric*). The notion of “enthymeme” in Aristotle includes two main aspects, one or (most characteristically) both of which may be at hand. First, enthymeme in classical rhetoric provides an argument, or more formally, a syllogism, one of whose parts is missing (Aristotle, *Rhetoric* I.2, 135716–17). Often, and most typically, the missing part is the major premise, but sometimes it may also be the minor premise or even the conclusion. This is the aspect of enthymeme in classical rhetoric most commonly used in the modern era to define enthymeme (Corbett and Connors, 1999).

Although this is certainly a very important property of the enthymeme, it is also a bit one-sided in that there is a second property of enthymeme in classical antiquity, which has not been to the same extent noticed or acknowledged by modern scholars. This second property of enthymeme in classical rhetoric is that its conclusion is not logically necessary, but may be plausible – likely, probabilistic, or even apparent rather than real. First, according to Aristotle (*Rhetoric*, II, 25; *Prior Analytics*, II.27), the enthymeme typically builds on commonplaces – commonly held beliefs that are usually true, but not to the exclusion of alternative possibilities. Such elements of enthymemes include “probabilities, examples... signs” (Aristotle, *Rhetoric* I.2, 1402b13–14). Second, the logic of the enthymeme may be apparent, not real (Aristotle, *Prior Analytics*, II, 27). Hence, in the typical case, the enthymeme is fallible, or as Aristotle (*ibid.*) says “refutable” – that is, it is plausible but not universally or necessarily true, and may therefore be objected to, rationally discussed, and critiqued. As a truncated and reasonable, rather than formal and strictly logical, line of argument, the enthymeme constitutes a vital but neglected part of everyday speech.

Aristotle describes enthymeme as the “most effective of the means of persuasion” (*Rhetoric* I.1, 1355a7–8) and notes, “Speeches that rely on examples are as persuasive as the other kind, but those which rely on enthymemes excite the louder applause” (*Rhetoric* I.2, 1356b23–25). Though contrasted in this comparison, examples are not inconsistent with enthymemes, but as we will see, are often embedded in them within a story. As a result, the story becomes even more cogent with the cumulative convincing effects of the enthymeme and the example.

³We are indebted to an anonymous review for these formulations of the two structures.

The effect on the audience of the enthymeme was important to Aristotle. For him, “the audience is more than a target, more than a consumer. It is midway between a public and a constituency – a kind of collaborative agency for making ongoing judgments” (Farrell, 1993: 96). The enthymeme provides an opportunity for this collaboration. Enthymeme, according to Aristotle, “must consist of few propositions, fewer often than those which make up a primary deduction. For if any of these propositions is a familiar fact, there is no need even to mention it; *the hearer adds it himself*”. (*Rhetoric* I.2, 1357a17–21, emphasis added). Part of the persuasive quality of the enthymeme, then, is that the audience supplies some of the information. Presumably what the audience supplies, the audience also believes or will be induced to believe.

As an example of enthymeme, take the following argument: “Tom has not studied diligently for his exam, so Tom will not pass his exam” (adapted from Corbett and Connors, 1999). This argument is in the form of an enthymeme. It differs in two ways from the classical syllogism: “All humans are mortal. Socrates is a human. Hence, Socrates is mortal”. In the classical syllogism, both premises are included and the conclusion follows with logical necessity from the premises. In the above enthymeme, by contrast, the (major) premise of the argument is absent, and the conclusion follows only probabilistically from the premise(s). The major, omitted or implicit, premise of this argument is: “Students who do not study diligently will not pass the exam.” The minor premise is “Tom has not studied for his exam.” The conclusion is “Tom will not pass the exam.” Stating the major premise explicitly immediately reveals its controversial nature since students may, of course, pass their exams without studying diligently (for instance by being very intelligent, or clever, or lucky, or by cheating, or . . .). Therefore, the argument is not logically binding, but only probabilistic or plausible. Thus, this argument illustrates both features of an enthymeme.

Through the construction of this simple argument, the audience is invited to contribute or at least assent to, the major premise that students who do not study diligently will not pass the exam. Stating the major premise would likely make it easier for listeners to dispute the logic of the argument with the many reasons that students may succeed in their exams despite not studying. If the premise were explicit, it would be likely to invite questions, resulting in both displacing the attention of the listener from the conclusion to the major premise and reducing the credibility of the argument.⁴ Because the controversial major premise is absent, however, it is harder to dispute the argument. In a less simplistic case than this example, which we provided for illustrative reasons, it may be even more difficult. As such, the argument is more convincing (and more appealing) than it would be if the major premise were explicit. Beyond this, including the major premise in telling the story of Tom’s likely failure would make it a very odd and pedantic communication. Aristotle pointed out that this, in itself, would decrease its ability to persuade (Aristotle, *Rhetoric*, II: 22).

In the interpretations below, we note that several other rhetorical elements often support the enthymemes we find in these stories. The most common of these is Opposition. Opposition often combines with the enthymeme to define or reinforce the meaning of the missing premise. It serves to indicate the existence of something “other” and hidden, underlying, rather than simple and apparent. Both rhetorics and semiotics recognize that one way of creating meaning in discourse is through implicit attention to opposites. Among the typical kinds of arguments that rhetoric identifies, for instance, is the *Topos*⁵ of Contrariety. The logic of this line of argument is that if one thing is wrong, then its opposite should be right (Aristotle, *Rhetoric*, II, 23, 1397a7–19). Use of this *Topos* in a story can create a sense of what is right about

⁴Bennett and Feldman, 1981, have shown that when stories are told in such a way that they raise questions, they decrease the credibility of the story.

⁵See below for a discussion of the *Topos* concept.

something without ever talking about it, only by talking about what is wrong with its opposite. The reverse (creating a sense of wrongness) can also occur.

Semiotics also identifies opposition as a fundamental feature of creating meaning. Opposition is one of the three underlying structures or relationships between the sign and the signified, the other two being metonymy and metaphor (Eco, 1976: 279). Where opposition reigns, the sign has meaning because of what it is not. For example, a sign saying "Exit" only has meaning in the context of other signs or other potential signs that say "Entrance". Thus, what you are meant to do when you see the sign "Exit" makes sense because of your understanding that you are inside of something and, therefore, there is presumably an entrance as well as an exit. In this same sense, opposition can be used in a story to imply a condition without discussing it.

Topoi, Exemplars, and Signs are also often important to constructing the meaning of stories. Topoi are kinds of arguments (literally "places" of argument), including contrariety, similarity, antecedent and consequent arguments (Aristotle, *Topics*).⁶ Exemplars are examples often found embedded in enthymemes. Signs are indications of something else (for instance, smoke of fire). These will be explained further as they occur in the text below.

ANALYZING STORIES

In the following, we present the interpretation of four stories told by actors engaged in change processes in two city administrations – the object of a major, ongoing research project. Stories about change, revolving around critical and therefore often controversial events in an organization's life, can be expected to provide a particularly rich source of examples of organizational rhetoric. Many organizational stories, of course, are not about change and change stories are not necessary for the form of interpretation we propose.

The four stories were chosen for their coherence and similarity in subject matter. When we first interpreted them, we were surprised at how easy it was to identify inferential arguments within them. As the reader will see, the implicit messages of the stories quickly became clear. In the following interpretations, we have focused on the main lines of argument. This by no means excludes supplementary interpretations, as enrichments and ramifications of the analysis. We have found interesting side themes and secondary enthymemes in all four stories, which we have not included for reasons of space.

We have divided the following examination into two sections. The "Reading" section focuses on how the story is constructed and the storytellers' use of rhetorical elements. In so doing we surface the implied meanings in the story. In what follows, these implied parts of the inferences are marked out by italics. The "Discussion" section illustrates how the researcher can use this information. One use is to explore the implied premises and to examine whether they are indeed controversial. A second use is to understand why the story is nonetheless persuasive.

First Story: The Amazing Book of Rules

Trust was one thing that was lacking in this division of [The] Water [Department] before. And so I'm trying to see us lean more toward that of we're living by values rather than by power and rule because the regime before was very much rule and guideline and there was a file this thick of rules and policies and guidelines. It just

⁶The Greek "Topos" (plural Topoi) is often translated as "topic", but even though the words are etymologically the same, the meaning has been diluted in English as compared to the Greek original, and so as to avoid confusion, we use the former, original term (following, for example, Farrell, 1993).

amazed me. One thing happened and there was a rule for everybody. Now we deal with things individually and people individually and try to always make our decisions based on what's best for the customer and the service delivery. So, it's a new way of thinking (W___, November, 1998, emphasis added).

Reading

This story rests on a fundamental opposition between old ways and new ways. The old ways were living by power and rule. When one thing happened, there was a rule for everybody. This made it difficult to do what's best for the customer. The new way is living by values, dealing with things individually, and by trust. This makes it easier to do what's best for the customer. The opposition is explicit in this story. What is implicit here is the connection between doing what's best for the customer and either living by rules and guidelines or living by trust and values. The storyteller uses enthymemes in making this connection.

Two arguments, linked by a third, underlying, are available in this piece of discourse. As it turns out, each of the inferential arguments is an enthymeme with some portion of the argument implicit, as indicated below in italics. The following is the first argument:

Living by trust and values makes it easier to do what's best for the customer. Now we live by trust and values. Therefore it is easier to serve the customer.

Here the major premise is the missing part, the implicit assumption for the listener pre-critically and subconsciously to fill in. The second inference that constitutes the argument is the obverse of the first and, thus, makes clear the opposition in the story.

Living by rules and guidelines makes it difficult to do what's best for the customer. We used to live by rules. Therefore we used to have a hard time serving the customer.

Here both the major premise and the conclusion are missing. The "bridging" argument is the implicit inference that relates to the (explicit) opposition.

Living by rules and guidelines makes it difficult to do what's best for the customer. Living by trust and values is the opposite of living by rules and guidelines. Therefore living by trust and values makes it easier to do what's best for the customer.

This last argument is entirely implicit. Not a single statement in the argument was explicitly made by the storyteller. Yet it captures the meaning of the story. The argument relies on the Topos of contrariety to carry the meaning. Recall that this Topos says that if one thing is wrong, then its opposite should be right. Thus, the understanding we come away with is that since governing by rules constitutes bad management, then its opposite, relating by trust, should constitute good or 'excellent' management.

The Amazing Book of Rules constitutes a supplementary rhetorical finesse, that of an *Exemplar*. An Exemplar (paradeigma), according to Aristotle is an example used as a concrete illustration to reinforce an argument. A precedent is a typical case of Exemplar, but there are others.⁷ The Exemplar strengthens and illustrates the case made: Look how bad the previous organizational regime must have been – it even had this incredibly thick book of rules. Note also that the Exemplar comes in the midst of the story – the most strategic place in a text, according to classical rhetorics. In the following sentence, the interlocutor even gives a cue to the listener: "It just AMAZED me". This sentence points to and draws the listener's attention to the book of rules as something to be considered bizarre. Otherwise, the listener might not interpret a large book of rules in a bureaucracy as unusual.

⁷Inspired by Kuhn, 1962, we use the term "Exemplar" to distinguish the meaning of the concept from the more general term "example", which in the rhetoric literature is the more common English translation of the Greek "paradeigma".

Discussion

Viewed from the interpreter's perspective, the whole line of argument in the story certainly appears plausible, even to the degree of being convincing, but it does so by force of its rhetorical power. The implied premises:

Living by trust and values makes it easier to do what's best for the customer. Living by rules and guidelines makes it difficult to do what's best for the customer.

are very powerful. Indeed, anyone who cares about doing what is best for the customer is convinced that we must throw out the rulebook and live by trust and values, making decisions on a case-by-case basis.

Making these premises explicit makes them appear somewhat less cogent. Whether living by rules or by values is better is a question that could provoke considerable controversy among both scholars and practitioners. It is not clear why trust and values is better, though these words are more appealing in general than rules and guidelines. Moreover, one wonders whether these premises are true in all circumstances or only in certain contexts. Scholars have found that, in contexts of low uncertainty, governing by rule is more efficient than ruling by more informal means (Burns and Stalker, 1961; Weick, 1995; Sköldbberg, 2002). More particularly, when it comes to serving the customer, governing by rule under low uncertainty serves to eliminate arbitrary service behavior (see, for example, Thomson, 1967). So the major premises of the enthymemes are by no means all-embracing, self-evident, or axiomatically true, but may apply or not in the given case.

Moreover, governing by values may not always be as favorable as it sounds, since a classical difficulty as pointed out by philosophers of ethics is that the values may clash. As opposed to governing by rules, governing by values may also open the way for governing by double standards of morality, hypocrisy, etc. All this may hurt the relationships between people in the organization, and through this indirectly also the customer. Such double standards may also directly hurt the relationship with the customer. Furthermore, it can be argued that trust might often be a dangerous policy since it exposes the organization to the risk of free-riders (cf. the "rational choice" and "public choice" theories). Therefore, the first inferential argument may be less compelling than we might be tempted to conclude from the story.

As a means to promote the change from one state of affairs to another, however, the oppositions and enthymemes used in this story certainly possess a very strong rhetorical force. The Topos of Contrariety is not binding, or necessary, but the important thing is that it should be, or sound, *plausible*. And so it appears here, even to the point of being convincing. Combined by and strengthened with the Exemplar of the "Amazing book of rules", this makes it very hard to resist.

Second Story: Ol' Tommy

But that's the way we've managed. Somebody makes a mistake or screws up and embarrasses us, or whatever, we write a general order. And . . . officers that have been around here for thirty years, put a name on . . . half those general orders. This is written because ol' Tommy did this. That's not the way we do managing, but that's what's [happened for] 30–35 years, and I know that's the way management did in many of those 35 years and, it doesn't make sense, and officers know that. They don't like it, not the officers, the employees—all civilian, most ranks, they know that most of the general orders were written because one guy screwed up and they would never do it that way. They do it the right way. You don't even need a general order to tell them to do it the right way, they do it right anyway (N_ __, November 1998).

Reading

Again the conflict is between old ways and new. In this story the employees have more agency than in the previous story. The bad employee has a name – Tommy. The good employees have an inner sense of morality – they don't need a general order, they do it right anyway. What is implicit in this story is the effect of the management style on the employees. We are told that the employees will do it right without a general order, and we are told that employees don't like the old management style, but we are not told what people do when they are under the old management style.

The underlying argument in this story can be represented in the following inference:

Employees don't need a lot of general orders to do the work right. We no longer write a lot of general orders.
Therefore, our employees do the work right.

The conclusion of this argument is implicit in the story. The storyteller has already gone out on a limb by saying that employees don't need a lot of general orders to do the work right. Whatever doubt the audience has is focused on this statement. Once this statement is allowed to pass, however, the conclusion follows naturally.

The second argument follows from the opposition explicit in the story:

Employees are less effective when they have to follow a lot of general orders. We used to have a lot of general orders. Therefore we used to be less effective.

In this case both the major premise and the conclusion are missing.

The relationship between individual employees who commit errors, which become the occasion for rules, provides the basis for yet another inferential argument. This argument is based on a Sign, another rhetorical feature that can be used to support an argument (recall that a Sign is an indication of something else, as smoke, of fire, or fever, of illness). The storyteller tells us that each rule is the Sign of an individual's error rather than a Sign of a general problem. Making a rule that everyone has to follow implies that the management is dealing with a general problem. Making rules based on individual errors is bad (or at least erroneous) management. Thus we have another argument, with a Sign playing an important role in the premise and the conclusion:

Each rule is the Sign of an individual's error. Making everyone change their behavior on the basis of an individual's errors is bad management. Hence rules are the Sign of bad management.

The above interpretation evidences an interesting circularity in this story's subtext linking the various rhetoric devices to the reflexive categories of opposition. It begins with Ol' Tommy, the singular bad employee who commits errors. This Exemplar comes in the midst of the story and serves to increase the credibility of the argument, reinforcing the general rhetoric of the enthymemes by way of concrete illustration. The storyteller constructs a kind of prototypical example to substantiate his/her point.

The badness is transmitted to management by means of the system of general rules. This general badness of management in the unreformed state of the organization is effectively contrasted to the general goodness (*i.e.* faultlessness) of the employees, and the resolution of this contradiction is management without general orders, as the storyteller points out in the last line of the story. The closing of the circle consists in the new way of management, the content of which is elegantly left to the listeners to fill in, and is only – tantalizingly briefly – hinted at in the rhetorically important middle of the story: “[T]hat's not the way we do managing...” (contrasted to “... that's the way we've managed”). Thus, the opposing pairs of good and bad, old and new, and general and individual, are circularly employed in a rhetorical scheme serving to promote the interest in moving from a non-desired state of organizing to a more desired one.

Discussion

The issues made visible by the reading of this story are similar to those in the previous story. Both stories reject rules as a basis for managing and promote, instead, the use of the employees' inner sense of morality. As in the previous story, this story begs the question of the circumstances in which morality is more appropriate than rules as well as the potential problems with conflicting moralities or employees whose inner sense of morality leads them to do things that others might consider immoral.

It is, of course, possible to break out of the rhetorical circle and this whole line of argument if we try to jump off the rhetorical movement of the story, and instead give a little critical thought to what is taken for granted to be "good" and "bad" in the context of the story. Are, for instance, written orders always bad, and the absence of written orders always good? Not necessarily: much organizational research has shown that written orders, and more generally formalization and bureaucracy, may indeed be beneficial, given conditions of low uncertainty. Under such circumstances, lack of written orders and of other aspects of formalization may actually be counter-productive (Sköldbberg, 2002). But even under high uncertainty – for instance in a modern knowledge enterprise – writing and textualization may be a way to keep the company together when conditions are turbulent or even chaotic (Maravelias, 2001). So the taken-for-granted assumption that the absence of general written orders is good and their presence is bad, at closer scrutiny becomes a highly questionable truth – something which may or may not be the case.

Third Story: The Time Clocks

We took the time clock out of the water repair division. There were endless fights about it . . . people coming in a minute late and finally the department head and I sat down and we discussed all the options and Herman Miller and Steelcase were doing away with time clocks and I said, look if somebody on my crew is late, they know where I go for coffee. They'll be there. If they haven't called they'll be there by the time coffee's over and they'll know where the job is. What's the big deal? And again I personally hate time clocks. He said, okay, we'll experiment. We'll pull the time clocks off for six months. I said you know that doesn't work. It really doesn't. What you've got to do is say, *no more time clocks*. You're responsible for being here at 7:00 in the morning and you're responsible for leaving at 3:30 unless you're working over time and those are the parameters I'm giving you. Those are the contractual parameters. Accept that responsibility. He said you're right. He made an announcement. He said the time clocks are coming out. This took a couple of years to get to this point. Time clocks are coming out and they're not coming back. We're done.

Immediately, the people who were always running late started getting there five minutes before the hour, and the people who were complaining about if you take the time clocks out those people will be later, started running five minutes later than they had because they didn't have to get there early enough to punch in and then go stand by the door and see who was late. We really did have people like that. But suddenly they were responsible for themselves. I was with a person who was always late. The first three months he was never late. He was one of those people who started getting there at five to. And one day he was three minutes late and one of the snitch types went right to the boss. He said so and so was three minutes late and I saw him coming in and on my watch he was three minutes late. The boss who was a strict disciplinarian went directly to the department head, see look at this, one time in three months. And the boss said, number one, if that person was late he will come and talk to me. Number two, I don't want any of our employees checking on any other of our employees and I think it was wrong for you to bring it to me and I want it ended right now. And that employee (the one who was late) that afternoon that employee went to the department head and said, look, I had a problem . . . a traffic problem. I'm sorry I was three minutes late this morning and it won't happen again. That guy has now gone for over two years and never been late (B____, November, 1998, emphasis added).

Reading

Like the second story, the third is, among other things, a story about good and bad management and good and bad employees. The good employee is never late – not even three minutes late. If the good employee is three minutes late, he tells his boss why and makes sure

that he doesn't delay the work of the team (they know where I drink coffee means they can find me before we start work). Bad employees are snitches and spend their time keeping track of other employees rather than doing their work. Bad managers use time clocks to keep track of their employees and listen to snitches. Time clocks turn good employees into bad ones and bad employees into "good" ones. Time clocks give some employees the opportunity to come early and snitch. Good managers trust their employees to be responsible and get rid of time clocks. When they get rid of time clocks, employees take responsibility and come to work on time. But getting rid of time clocks does not entirely get rid of snitches. The moral of the story is that good management leads to good employees – "that guy has now gone for over two years and never been late".

The time clock is clearly used here as a Sign of Bad Management. So the first argument would run as follows:

The use of time clocks is a Sign of Bad Management. We used to have time clocks. Therefore we used to have Bad Management.

Though the storyteller does not use these words, all of this argument is explicit in the story. What is not explicit is what makes time clocks a Sign of bad management. The answer is that time clocks lead to employees who are concerned with time clocks or the appearance of using time rather than with time and how they use it to do their work. The storyteller creates a bifurcated world in which one can pay attention either to the appearance of time or to the use of time. This focuses our attention on two groups of people for whom the effect of the time clock is to displace responsibility for behavior. One group is the people who come late because time clocks do not motivate them to come to work on time. The comment the storyteller makes that "they know where I go to coffee, they will be there" implies that a personal relationship does motivate these people to be on time. The other is the snitches who are motivated by the time clock not only to come to work on time but also to tell on other employees. It is not clear why the latter group are so motivated as presumably the time clock already provides management with information about who is late and who is on time or even early. The implicit understanding conveyed through the story is that these two groups act in the way they do because they are not taking responsibility for their own behavior. Time clocks encourage this lack of responsibility. Thus, we have the second argument, which is an enthymeme as the major premise is implicit in the text.

Using methods of managerial control like time clocks and listening to snitches leads to employees not taking responsibility for their own behavior. We used to use time clocks and listen to snitches. Therefore we used to encourage people not to take responsibility for their own behavior.

The contrary of this argument (hence the opposite enthymeme) is also present in the story:

Not using methods of managerial control like time clocks and listening to snitches leads to employees taking responsibility for their own behavior. We stopped using time clocks and listening to snitches. Therefore our employees take responsibility for their own behavior.

When employees take responsibility for their behavior, they do things like come to work on time. So, interestingly, the time-clocks lead to belatedness among the employees, and the abolishment of time-clocks leads to punctuality. In this play of contrasts, everything leads to its very opposite.

The moral is reinforced by an Exemplar: in the new organization, built on individual responsibility, snitches are not rewarded as they were in the old organization. The case of an employee, who is snubbed for snitching in the new organization, is given to illustrate a contrast; the employee who was told upon is promoted to the status of a time-hero, who, having failed once, never does so again.

In the general play of opposites in this story, time-clocks lead to lack of punctuality, while the lack of time-clocks leads to punctuality. Time-clocks are a Sign of Bad Management, and

Good Management involves the abolishment of time-clocks. Secondly, we are told that the presence of time-clocks leads to other cases of absence of good behavior, namely snitching amongst employees, while the absence of time-clocks leads to the presence of good behavior, and the absence of snitching, etc. (where cases of the latter yet occurs, they are quickly subdued). So, bad management via time-clocks leads to bad employees, but this in turn produces a reaction in the form of improved (good) management, which abolishes the time-clocks and hence produces good employees. These last, in turn, by taking their own responsibility – in contrast to the pre-change non-responsible employees – produce the kind of behavior (reporting when coming late) that stamps out bad behavior in employees. And so the rhetorical circle with its play of opposites is closed.

Discussion

Can the rhetorical circle be opened? Well, it is difficult, especially for people who, like the authors, also happen to dislike time-clocks. But the reading helps by revealing the implicit assumptions that both storyteller and audience need to accept in order for the story to be persuasive. Keeping in mind the non-necessary, merely contingent, character of the current lines of argument we can always ask whether the absence of time-clocks really must lead to good behavior just because the presence of these devices evidently has been compatible with some forms of bad behavior. In the first place, it is not shown that it was actually the time-clocks which led to the lack of punctuality. Other factors may have been paramount here. And so, it is by no means certain that the abolishment of time-clocks must lead to punctuality any more than it is clear that having time clocks must lead to a lack of punctuality.

Moreover, the line of argument centers a lot around responsibility and self-control. Against control of self and individual responsibility is posed control by others and non-responsibility, *i.e.*, lack of inner discipline. But it is by no means a binding conclusion that self-control is good, merely because lack of self-discipline is bad (granted we accept the latter). They can both be bad, it may be argued, for instance because strong self-discipline leads to compulsive behavior and therefore is counterproductive for the organization. Perhaps a modicum of self-discipline and external control combined is best? At least, this is how we can argue, showing that the moral of the third story is not as self-evident as it would appear at first sight from its circular, rhetoric play of opposites. Yet, this very self-evident character is of course what makes it compelling and efficient as a device for constructing the closed-loop discourse of the new state of organizing.

Fourth Story: Weekend Work in Bermuda Shorts

One little example, towards the end of this process when the consultant produces the final plan a member of my staff and CDOT [Charlotte Department of Transportation] staff sort of looked at it, and this was on a Friday when they got it, they said this is not acceptable. This will not fly. Keep in mind, I am gone, Del [the Deputy City Manager] is gone, no other department director was around. No management people are here. They made the decision that they were going to call that consultant, get them here on the weekend. They worked all Saturday, all Sunday and most of Sunday night because we had to have the final plan Monday morning. When we all got here they were all wandering around here in Bermuda shorts and T-shirts and laying against the wall, but they delivered that product. That's what I call an empowered organization (C___, November 1998).

Reading

This is another story, like the time clock story, that focuses on the lack of need for direct supervision of employees. The employees in this story are “empowered” and the story

informs us of both how hard such employees work and, therefore, why it is worthwhile to have such employees. These empowered employees ride in on their white horses to save the organization from some inept consultants. They give up their weekend without even the knowledge of their supervisors. An explicit opposition in this story is between the competent and empowered employees (and their organization) and the incompetent consultants. An implicit opposition is between the unempowered organization and the empowered one. If empowered employees come to the rescue of your organization, it is implied that unempowered employees will not. The moral is that an empowered workforce is a worthwhile investment.

This whole story is clearly an Exemplar – it even says so in the first line. The Exemplar is used to support the argument in favor of the new organization, something which is forcefully stated in the last line: “That’s what I call an empowered organization”. Built into the Exemplar are a couple of enthymemes. In the first, the major premise is implicit. In the second the entire inferential argument is implicit.

Employees who can act on their own can save your organization from problems associated with incompetent work. Empowered employees do not need direct supervision. Therefore empowered employees can rescue your organization.

Employees need to be able to act on their own to help the organization. Unempowered employees cannot act on their own. Therefore, unempowered employees cannot help the organization.

Discussion

It is very hard to argue against this Exemplar; it so to speak closes in on itself, and in this sense, it is very efficient as a way of promoting change in the desired direction. Yet, something can be said. People who work on their own can not only save your organization, but also destroy it. Witness the famous Nick Leeson case, where a major British bank went into bankruptcy, after an employee in Singapore had used his power to work on his own with options. If such an extreme case is made possible by empowerment, how much easier then for more trivial, less dramatic cases of malpractice. This only goes to show that the premises of the enthymemes are plausible, probabilistic, rather than necessary or binding. It can also be questioned whether unempowered employees never can – or do -- go beyond their orders and act in favor of the organization. For instance, in the military, in times of war, successful disobedience of rules or orders not suited to the particular situation is often rewarded by advancement or medals for the initiative even though disobedience is generally severely sanctioned. Through the reading we present here, we can endeavor to at least partially break the grip of this powerful story, and thus let it be highlighted through distanciation, while still acknowledging that it works with great efficiency to promote the interest in organizational change, and to build the whole discursive structure needed to uphold and reproduce this change.

GENERAL DISCUSSION

When we make explicit an implicit premise of an enthymeme, the message of a story can be highlighted, reflected upon, discussed, and put into a wider perspective, rather than just being accepted without further consideration because of its rhetorical power. We have already shown this in the discussion of each story, but the following takes this result one step further. In what follows, we show what comes out of looking at a set of stories. The four stories analyzed above are from two different city administrations that are both trying to bring about

similar changes. We propose that, by pooling the implicit arguments made in these stories, we can begin to understand some of the premises of the change process in these organizations.

The detailed readings allow us to cull from the stories tenets of faith that are entirely implicit. These are statements that the storyteller either takes for granted or expects others to take for granted. Researchers, therefore, can interpret these tenets as reflecting an ideology and can compare sets of these statements across multiple stories. Analyses of these tenets could reveal commonalities and differences across organizations, across managers within an organization, across levels of management, across management and labor or across any relevant divide.

We have listed all of the implicit tenets culled from the stories analyzed above in the Appendix to this paper. Though there are relatively few and a full analysis of multiple interviews would produce many more,⁸ we can already perceive themes. There are, for instance, tenets that summarize the state of the organization, either the previous state or the new one. There are also quite a few tenets about motivation. Below we list the tenets implicit in the stories about what motivates employees to provide customer service, to take responsibility for their own behavior and to act on their own to help their organization.

- *Living by trust and values makes it easier to do what's best for the customer.*
- *Living by rules and guidelines makes it difficult to do what's best for the customer.⁹*
- *Employees are less effective when they have to follow a lot of general orders.*
- *Using methods of managerial control like time clocks and listening to snitches leads to employees not taking responsibility for their own behavior.*
- *Not using methods of managerial control like time clocks and listening to snitches leads to employees taking responsibility for their own behavior.*
- *Employees who can act on their own can save your organization from problems associated with incompetent work.*
- *Unempowered employees cannot act on their own.*

These tenets provide a relatively consistent and idiosyncratic interpretation of how motivation operates in organizations. The tenets suggest that these storytellers think that the organization is better off when employees act on their own and take responsibility for their own behavior. Employees are presumed to be motivated to do what's best for the organization. They take more responsibility and are better able to do their jobs when there are not a lot of rules or other structures constraining their actions. This understanding of motivation suggests and supports actions that the organization can take to bring about change.

Any of these tenets, of course, is subject to scrutiny. Theories of motivation are notoriously difficult to verify because of the variety of ways that different people act in different contexts (Bozeman, 1993). Furthermore, whether the actions suggested are ones that will promote change in the direction desired by these storytellers – more productive and responsive employees – is clearly a matter of assertion rather than fact.

For managers it is nonetheless essential to have theories of motivation to guide their behavior. From this perspective, we might consider these tenets about motivation to be Maxims in the sense of classical rhetoric. A *Maxim* (Gr. *gnoma*, Lat. *sententia*), is a statement about universal matters with ethical bearing and is often used as part of – premise or conclusion to – an argument (Aristotle, *Rhetoric*, II, 21). What is especially interesting about Maxims as related to management/organization is their focus on practical wisdom. They provide a basis for action and, moreover, a basis that has ethical standing. In his *Nicomachean Ethics*, book 6, for instance, Aristotle describes *phronesis*, practical wisdom, as

⁸Analysis of the 150 stories that were produced from the same set of interviews that these four stories came from, produced over 700 enthymemes, or syllogisms in which at least one premise or the conclusion was implicit.

⁹This statement was used as the major premise for two enthymemes.

a way of finding for oneself in a concrete situation of action the outcome conducive to good life, by mediating between the universal and the particular.¹⁰ This is also described in terms of deliberation and self-interest – the good life is one's own. Here is the connection to management. Management is very much a question of deliberation, of practical wisdom, of finding out what is good for one's corporation or organization – the “larger self” of the manager. Hence the Maxims represent what is in the self-interest of this larger self of the manager or the organization.

These Maxims have the potential to be self-fulfilling prophecies. Tenets about motivation, in particular, have the ability to create the reality they espouse (Weick, 1979: 159ff). If people are convinced that they are motivated by trust or by an absence of rules or time-clocks, then they will be. A similar phenomenon has been reported in decision-making, in which commitment to implementing the decision can be as important as the specific decision in bringing about success (Brunsson, 1985). In general, belief that an action is appropriate and will yield desired results is likely to be related to success in many domains of management.

It is important, therefore, for the stories to be convincing and to create beliefs consistent with the storyteller's view of how the organization needs to change. We see in these stories both the expression of implicit theories of motivation and also an ability to express them in a way that is persuasive. Storytellers cannot, of course, create these perceptions out of whole cloth. For the story to be effective, the audience must both supply and accept these statements. If the statements are too far removed from the audience's underlying assumptions, then the story would simply lack credibility.¹¹ For this reason, the existence of examples they can use to focus attention on the relationship they implicitly support is important. As we have pointed out, however, the implicitness of the connections between belief and outcome is also important. Explicit attention to the connection may lead people to question it.

Closure

The picture that emerges from our stories can be described as basically one of *semantic closure* (Pattee, 1982, 1995). The use of inter-linked chains of rhetorically closed loops produces belief in the new organization that is self-sustaining and galvanized against possible doubts or objections. This is effected through the enthymemes, and their associated rhetorical devices – Topoi, Signs, Exemplars, and Maxims. These are combined in an effective way with the trope (or rhetorical figure) of irony, as expressed in the oppositions permeating the text. The dynamic oppositions – good vs. bad management, old vs. new organization, self-control vs. control by others, rules vs. trust, etc. etc. – are used to carry the audience/listener inexorably further on a discursive track, which is often (but not always) circular, leaving very little time for him or her to stop and think. The listener is incessantly brought back and forth between the two sides of an opposition, or to new oppositions and from them back to previous ones, so that he or she is caught in a veritable rhetorical treadmill or semantic closure. In the following, we describe in greater detail the role of opposition.

The Role of Opposition

In terms of tropes, or rhetorical figures (of which metonymy and metaphor are two), “opposition” can be identified with the trope of irony, since this is the rhetorical figure

¹⁰Cf. Bernstein, 1983; Flyvbjerg, 2001; Gadamer, 1960/1989.

¹¹We are grateful to Calvin Morrill for this comment. Bennett and Feldman, 1981, also claim that the more questions stories raise in the minds of the audience, the less credible they are.

dealing with oppositions and contradiction. If metaphor is the trope of similarity, and metonymy that of contiguity, then irony is the trope of opposition. After all, what is said in irony is the very opposite of what is meant. Stories are ironic that rely on the kind of opposition when one appears to be talking about one thing (the exit), all the time drawing the audience's attention to something else (the entrance). This gives a clue to excavating the hidden subtext of a piece of discourse.

We do not take oppositions as structurally rigid dichotomies, but as fluid polarity aspects, reflecting and transmuting into each other (Hegel, 1813/1969, Part 2, Book 2). These are categories, one side of which only has meaning in terms of its "other", that which it is not.¹² Thus, the presence of one side is only possible through its absent other. Or even more Derridean: the absence of one side is present in its other.¹³ In the same vein, we use in the present paper oppositions not as static dichotomies, but as dynamic polarities, opposite sides presupposing and transmuting into each other. As we have seen in the stories above, they do so by making use of enthymeme and the rhetorical devices associated with it.

In the stories presented earlier, for example, the new good management only makes sense in the context of the old bad management. What is good in the new good management cannot be understood without understanding what was bad in the bad old management, and what, according to the stories, was bad in the bad old management conversely points forward to what is good in the good new management. The new management is the opposite of the old management, so of course, if the old management was bad, the new management must be the opposite of bad, namely good. And so it is good by virtue of being the opposite of the old management that the new management is good, while on the other hand the "badness" of the old management is seen by contrast with the new, good management. In this way, there is an ongoing reflexive play in the story texts between the two poles of good new management and bad old management – a reflexive play that by its circular character rhetorically serves to convince the listener of the "goodness" of the present state of affairs. These rhetorical devices make the discourse more dynamic and carry the audience along an evolving track, which is often (though not always) circular in character. In the stories explored here, these dynamics serve to move the audience into the machinery of the rhetorical devices, hence creating a process in the mind of the listener, whereby he or she is transported along different stations to arrive at the social promotion desired (in this case of organizational change).

More importantly still, we view the reflexive categories at their most typical in terms of what is observed in opposition to what is underlying and more significant, essential. Reflexivity "... is the domain in which we see things not just by themselves, 'immediately', but as founded on an underlying basis. This is the realm of mediacy ...". (Taylor, 1975: 258). Hegel describes this not as a stationary state but as a process of mediation – of differentiation – between the apparent, observed and the essential, underlying. In the stories studied, what is underlying is the subtext, the line of argument, the rhetorics of enthymeme; and what is manifest is the story as told, the often fragmented and disconnected words of the narrator. The dialectics or mediation between these two is what makes the whole rhetorical process work, because the story-as-told refers back to, and convinces by means of, the hidden rhetoric; while the hidden rhetoric, with its enthymemes (and Topoi, and Exemplars, and Signs) is nothing – or rather, could not possibly work – without the manifest story-as-told. There is another story told implicitly than the one that is superficially told, but the one that is told implicitly is not one that can be told explicitly, for it would not be convincing. Thus, paradoxically and ironically, the "real" story told is not the story really told; and the story really told is the one that must be told, for the "real" story would not work. But without the

¹²Hence the term reflexion: one side is, as it were, "reflected" in the other.

¹³Derrida, 1976, was, of course, much inspired by Hegel – who in turn paid heavy tribute to Aristotle.

“real” story, there is no point in telling the story that is really told. Thus, the stories cannot be “reduced” to the underlying lines of argument, any more than the underlying lines of argument can be neglected for the sake of the manifest stories. They are both necessary and reflected into – mediated by – each other.

The reliance on fluid opposites also saves the rhetorical analyses from the well-known fate that has befallen classical rhetorics ever since antiquity – that of progressive desiccation and rigidification, something which has tended to marginalize it increasingly. The “new rhetorics” (Perelman, 1979; Perelman and Olbrechts-Tyteca, 1969) has revived the moribund and peripheral field of rhetorics, infusing it with modern social-science knowledge. Unfortunately it has often done so at the price of letting the rich treasure of classical rhetorical theories, concepts, and suggestions remain buried under the mountain of modernist ridicule previously heaped on it, instead of mining it for its almost inexhaustible reservoir of ideas. The ossification of the classical rhetorical notions themselves have contributed to this, and imbuing them with dynamic contraries in the spirit of irony and dialectics thus appears as a necessity, in order to breathe new life into them.

CONCLUSIONS

In the stories studied, we have observed that managers and other actors often “leave out” things, making the story even more compelling for the audience, which is set to work to fill in the underlying, missing parts. Managers, like politicians, often argue along lines of plausibility rather than logically binding necessity. The relation between narrative and enthymeme in organizational and political discourse should therefore be interesting to study. It is our general, albeit so far tentative, contention that the enthymeme, and associated rhetorical devices are very much present in the stories used in a variety of organizational and political contexts. The use of classical rhetorics to analyze and interpret managerial and more generally organizational discourse is not well represented in the literature¹⁴ and so these rhetorical methods might open up a new field of research in the areas mentioned.

The semantic closure produced through the interconnection between irony and enthymeme referred to in the General Discussion can have positive and negative effects on organizations. The positive side of this is that it considerably strengthens the organization in its new form, making it easy to propagate the overarching “myths” (Jönsson and Lundin, 1977; Meyer and Rowan, 1977; Brunsson, 1985) necessary for the organization to direct and coordinate its efforts towards a common endeavor. In this way, the tensions within and between the various oppositions of the discourse are balanced by the possibility of a united vision, with the rhetorics of semantic closure as the mediating factor. What ensues is a discursive system whose resilience and strength is dependent upon this very balance between local forces of fragmentation and global forces of integrating expansion.¹⁵

The power of the enthymeme can have negative effects on organizations as well. If it has the potential to empower some beliefs, then it also has the potential to suppress other beliefs. The power to forestall possible doubts and objections is also the power to function in hegemonic ways.¹⁶ Suppression of questioning can lead to such negative outcomes as groupthink (Janis, 1982). Another negative effect from the perspective of people trying to

¹⁴We are talking about classical rhetorics here. Of course, newer rhetorics are represented by, for instance, Morgan, 1986, in his best-selling book, where he studies organizations and root metaphors (a concept of more recent date than the rhetorics of classical antiquity).

¹⁵For a discussion of similar systems, see, for instance Fuller, 1998.

¹⁶We are grateful to Calvin Morrill for pointing this out.

bring about particular states of the organization through the use of enthymeme is the potential for stories that subvert these states (Morrill and Owen-Smith, 2000). Managers who try to bring about change, for instance, may quickly find that those who resist these changes are equally capable of producing stories that use the enthymeme to create semantic closure.

The intricate relationships and interactions between this rhetoric of the discursive system and other, more non-discursive aspects of the organization (between what can be said and what can be seen, Deleuze, 1988) remain to be further explored. How, precisely, does the hidden rhetoric of organizational stories color the (relative) "hardware" of organizations, such as the arrangements of technology, inventory cycles, production, physical equipment, buildings, etc., and how is it in turn influenced by these? Also, what happens in the "grey zone" between discursive and non-discursive practices, where they overlap? There is not only colouring, influence, and overlappings between these two, but also *struggle*, and *confrontation* (Deleuze, 1988). For instance, the bloc of technology and people using it may actively operate so as to divert the thrust of hidden rhetorics into other, more suitable channels, or put up various barriers to it, or even revert it. On the other hand, the hidden rhetorics may work so as to subvert even the architecture of a work place. All this is highly interesting – but it is also, as the saying goes, another story.

Acknowledgements

The authors are grateful to Ruth Nicole Brown, Barbara Czarniawska, Jane Dutton, Debra Horner, Calvin Morrill, Miriam Salzer-Möring, Dvora Yanow, the members of the Narrative Reading Group at the University of Michigan and anonymous reviewers for reading and commenting on this paper.

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APPENDIX: COMPREHENSIVE LIST OF TENETS

Below follows a more comprehensive list of tenets than the sample given in the main text. Statements marked with an asterisk were originally concluding statements in the argument. The "therefore" has been removed from the beginning of these statements. In this way, we retain the information about the (concluding) position of the statement in the argument while focusing attention on the content of the claim rather than its position. When minor premises or conclusions follow a major premise, the latter are indented so as to indicate the relationship.

- *Living by trust and values makes it easier to do what's best for the customer.*
- *Living by rules and guidelines makes it difficult to do what's best for the customer.*¹⁷
 - *Living by trust and values is the opposite of living by rules and guidelines.*
 - *Living by trust and values makes it easier to do what's best for the customer.**
- *Employees are less effective when they have to follow a lot of general orders.*
- *Each rule is the Sign of an individual's error.*
 - *Making everyone change their behavior on the basis of an individual's errors is bad management.*
 - *Rules are the Sign of bad management.**
- *Using methods of managerial control like time clocks and listening to snitches leads to employees not taking responsibility for their own behavior.*
- *Not using methods of managerial control like time clocks and listening to snitches leads to employees taking responsibility for their own behavior.*
- *Employees who can act on their own can save your organization from problems associated with incompetent work.*
- *Employees need to be able to act on their own to help the organization.*
 - *Unempowered employees cannot act on their own.*
 - *Unempowered employees cannot help the organization.**
- *We used to have a hard time serving the customer.**
- *Our employees do the work right.**
- *We used to be less effective.**

¹⁷This statement was used as the major premise for two enthymemes.

