

**A Rhetorical Analysis of the Self Within an Organization: The  
Production & Reception of Discourse in a Canadian Bank**

by

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# **A Rhetorical Analysis of the Self Within an Organization: The Production & Reception of Discourse in a Canadian Bank**

## **Abstract**

Communication is a complex interaction drawing on multiple resources (social, economic, discursive), across different units of agency (individuals, organizations), towards multiple and often conflicting goals with not entirely predictable consequences. Yet we manage communication in organizations without much second thought – until a crisis occurs. A case study, conducted in a major Canadian bank, provides the opportunity to analyse perhaps the largest lending crisis in the bank’s history and the rhetorical strategies forming a significant part of the bank’s response.

The organizational nature of our society requires individuals to perform multiple roles, requiring multiple identities and resulting in a divided self. For coherence in texts, consistency in values ascribed to the self, and a concerted set of images for organizations, the divided self relies on rhetorical transformations.

Chapter 1 discusses contributions from Rhetoric, Social-Constructionist Theories of the Self, and Management Policy. Chapter 2 introduces the case and its methods, and develops a theoretical framework for analyzing the rhetoric of the interview transcripts. Chapter 3 provides background on banking. Together, these three chapters develop a contextually-sensitive, theorized approach to a rhetorical analysis of transcripts collected from interviews with bank employees. Specifically, they develop a systematic way to mark the interaction among discourse, the self and social structures. They do so, chiefly, by marking what the author terms the “Bracketing, Ranking, and Distancing” practices of discourse, practices designed to maintain stability within the self, and between the self and its organizational contexts.

Chapters 4 and 5 provide rhetorical analyses of interviews with employees, one in a reception regime, and one in a production regime. Both reveal tensions arising as the self oscillates between resistance to and compliance with organizational values. However, significant differences in resources, approaches and outcomes are revealed.

Chapters 6 and 7 provide conclusions about the dynamic workings of communication in an organizational society. The ability to use language to maintain a unified sense of self plays a pivotal role in our ability to survive in the midst of daily complexity.



product of our discourse) and social structures (rhetorical collectives, what organizational theorists view as systems representing patterns of relationships). They do so, chiefly, by marking what I have termed the “bracketing, ranking, and distancing” practices of discourse, practices designed to maintain stability within the self, and between the self and its organizational contexts.

Chapters 4 and 5 provide extensive rhetorical analyses of the interview texts. Chapter 4 focuses on an interview with the employee in a reception regime (someone who receives rather than generates a text), and analyzes the participant’s multiple identities, revealing the tensions faced by a divided self operating in an organizational complex. These tensions arise as the self oscillates between resistance to and compliance with organizational values, and participates in what Hodge and Kress call a “logonomic system” (higher level rules governing behaviours and both relying on and expressing an ideology at points of production and reception). The results reveal competing concerns and constant tensions involved in the management of multiple identities and point to a middle space between text and context, a space where considerable rhetorical action takes place, usually without anyone’s acknowledgment of its existence, let alone of its importance. In this space, relationships of power and ideology are acted out. Similarly, Chapter 5 provides for the text of an interview with a bank employee in a production regime. Again, the interview exhibits rhetorical transformations at points of tension caused by the desire to avoid incompatibilities arising from multiple identities. However this analysis begins to make visible significant differences in the resources, approaches and outcomes of the two participants.

Chapters 6 and 7 complete the dissertation with conclusions about what the interactions of discourse, the self and social structures – seen now through the variety of lenses provided by the analytical framework – reveal about the dynamic workings of communication in an organizational society. Chapter 6 compares the results of the analyses performed in the previous two chapters; despite numerous similarities, the participants experience very different outcomes, outcomes that demonstrate the nature and results of power differences. It concludes that the ability to maintain a unified sense of self – a function of language resources primarily – plays a pivotal role in our ability to survive in the midst of the complexity that surrounds us daily. Chapter 7 reflects on the implications of these findings for our society and for the role of rhetoric, and it reflects on the nature of the study itself.

## **Acknowledgements**

A student of rhetoric soon learns that invention is a social act, that the influences on each of us are myriad, certainly beyond our recognition and proper acknowledgement, and yet inseparable from everything we create. But the inability to be thorough is no excuse for neglecting the task altogether. Even to have an environment conducive to the pursuit of a major scholarly undertaking is a privilege. To be able to pursue a topic that involves both academic resources and those of a major corporation takes a great deal of cooperation and tolerance on both fronts.

In keeping with our confidentiality agreement, those who worked with me in the corporate world can't be mentioned by name. They have my respect and my thanks for making this research not only possible but fascinating. I can only hope that they will find my results as helpful for some of their many roles, as I have found their contributions for mine.

Breaking new ground with a dissertation usually means that more support than ever is needed from those who agree to give guidance. I am lucky to have the benefit of highly skilled academics and researchers in their own right who agreed to sit on my committee and help with the inevitable issues that arise from a research project taking place outside of university corridors. Among other things, Catherine Schryer steered my methods, made ethnography less intimidating, and kept alive my original interest in literacy. Glenn Stillar's advice on my somewhat non-traditional combination of analytical methods and his encouragement were invaluable. Frank Safayeni opened new avenues of exploration from his perspective in Management Science. Through him I gained a broader view of organizations, an area that promises to hold my interest in the years to come.

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This dissertation has been much more than an academic enterprise for me. It developed as I did over many years, as I questioned social structures, fighting some, resolving to support others. The integration of my developing ideas and my changing life

meant that many people were part of the process that led to the completion of this dissertation.

Don Roberts can't be thanked enough for his encouragement and his philosophical views on every topic. He could always be counted on to listen – even, or especially, in the wee hours when the loneliness of the long distance doctoral student was at its height. Donna Randall's voice mail also bore the brunt of my psychological needs and her returned calls provided the perspective and laughter I needed to go on.

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## 1. Introduction

*Here is the purest rhetorical pattern: speaker and hearer as partners in partisan jokes made at the expense of another. If you 'internalize' such a variety of motives, so that the same person can participate somewhat in all three positions, you get a complex individual of many voices. And though these may be treated, under the heading of Symbolic, as a concerto of principles mutually modifying one another, they may likewise be seen, from the standpoint of Rhetoric, as a parliamentary wrangle which the individual has put together somewhat as he puts together his fears and hopes, friendships and enmities, health and disease, or those tiny rebirths whereby, in being born to some new condition, he may be dying to a past condition, his development being dialectical, a series of terms in perpetual transformation.*

*Kenneth Burke, A Rhetoric of Motives*

Some 20 years ago I was introduced to the politics of literacy. As I learned about issues of power and domination, I also became familiar with the difficulties of measuring levels of literacy and developing training programs. Alert for possible solutions, I analysed the background information for a major study of literacy conducted by Statistics Canada. When I looked at information behind the published statistics, one curious detail held my interest: there were enough people with literacy skills at the high end of the continuum (approximately 16%) who could have been identified as a group of their own but who were instead classified as belonging to the largest group – the 62% described as able to “meet most everyday reading demands.”<sup>1</sup> While I could only speculate about why this group of people with advanced skills was not designated as a separate group, its existence did lead me to an exploration of communication in complex situations. Perhaps partly in my search for the dominators – for someone to picket – I became interested in people who had advanced literacy skills. How could we characterize these skills? What constitutes successful language practices? Ideas and questions about “advanced literacy” eventually became an interest in, and an investigation of, discourse – its production and reception.

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<sup>1</sup> Statistics Canada Survey of Literacy Skills Used in Daily Activities, October 1989.

The following chapters describe my methods, develop an analytical framework, use this framework to analyse the transcripts of two key interviews, and provide conclusions as to what the analysis tells us about successful language practices in an organizational context. I begin with a framework successfully applied by George Cheney<sup>2</sup> – a framework built on the key terms “rhetoric, identity and organization” – and adapt it to a major Canadian bank, a secular organization that plays a central role in our society. The bank finances businesses, governments, and individuals, creating and enforcing rules and systems that determine how we operate, and defining what is considered successful. Further, I attempt to extend Cheney’s scope to examine socialization and the connection between rhetoric and the knowledge created by our practices.

For this analysis, a specific rhetorical situation was chosen: the communications plan of the bank as it made a concentrated effort to improve its reputation and, hence, its share price. The plan was developed in response to publicity generated by a lending crisis – a crisis of such major proportions and with media coverage so negative that it seemed as if the very survival of the bank was in question. Keeping with traditional rhetorical scholarship, I identify key texts – one entitled *Planning for Improved Public Relations* and the other entitled *Our Beliefs*<sup>3</sup> – which directly influence this bank’s employees and are central to the plan’s role in addressing the situation by persuading various audiences of the bank’s success in its endeavors. Adopting the method followed by Cheney, I identify the multiple identities the bank must manage – sometimes by promoting and supporting these identities, sometimes by suppressing or denying them – in order to achieve its goals.

Along with the traditional focus on texts, I also explore the usual elements of context and its inseparable role in determining meaning and significance. Rhetorically,

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<sup>2</sup> George Cheney, *Rhetoric in an Organizational Society: Managing Multiple Identities* (Columbia: U of South Carolina P, 1991), pp. 2-3. Cheney makes a compelling case for the organizational nature of our society and demonstrates the implications this has for our language practices.

<sup>3</sup> All references to specific newsletters or publications have been changed, always with consideration for maintaining the intention of the original titles.

context is understood if setting is understood. In other words, both the speaker/writer and the listener/reader understand the context of language when they share a common perception of the situation giving rise to the text. Context provides clues to meaning and helps decide our responses. To provide the context for the rhetorical situations explored in this research, Chapter 3 describes the history of banking in Canada, including its relationship to international influences, and the history of the bank in question, with its many competing concerns. Understanding the context for the key texts reveals how they attempt to deal with the situations around them – what purpose they are meant to serve. It is possible, for example, to mark such things as the language of compliance and the strategies of resistance. It is possible to analyse issues related to the production of messages and compare them to those related to the reception of these same messages.

The competing concerns and the constant tensions involved in the management of multiple identities reveals the need for yet another analysis. The evidence points to a middle space between text and context, a space where considerable rhetorical action takes place without anyone's acknowledgment of its existence, let alone of its importance. It is somewhere in this space that the relationships of power and ideology are acted out.

### **Trouble in Paradise**

During separate interviews, the two main participants in my research frequently expressed pride in their work and the organization that employs them. Both believed they were making valuable contributions and were appreciated by their bosses. They often appeared to be in important jobs for which they were ideally suited. Yet both participants found reason to consider life outside the bank:<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> Details of the process used to select these employees as participants is provided in Chapter 2. Extensive analysis of the interviews is provided in Chapters 4 and 5. These quotations, and only these, have been modified to preserve the sense of the statements while shortening their length.



And now I am at the point where if they let me go tomorrow I will be more than happy to take their money and walk away. I've got the plan all set out, what I'll do, where I'll go. So, I mean, maybe it's a good thing when you get to that point that you have that attitude (Participant #1, Transcript 9-10).

Something tells me I'll probably want to look for another challenge in a couple of years. But it would probably be in doing the same kind of thing. One of the things I've always been interested in is working in the Third World, trying to do work for charity and help them turn their organization around or something (Participant #2, Transcript 25-26).

The apparent contradiction between their frequent expressions of support for the organization and their thoughts of leaving the organization altogether reveal conflicts for the participants. Despite these conflicts, however, the participants attempt to provide unified and consistent narrative accounts of their situations. This striving for unity creates sites of activity in the texts of the interviews, places where the participants attempt to transform situations to keep them from being incompatible with their sense of identity. But while rhetorical transformations<sup>5</sup> can be identified in both interviews, there are significant differences in the participants' resources, approaches and outcomes. Comparing and analysing these differences makes it possible to understand more about the dynamic workings of communication in an organizational society. By revealing how issues of identity operate in organizational complexes, this analysis reveals the interplay of discourse, the self and social structures.

## Communities

To discuss discourse, the self and social structures, we need to bring together the scholarly communities of Rhetoric, the area dealing with Social Theories of the Self, and

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<sup>5</sup> From the Latin *trans*, meaning *across, beyond, to or on the other side of*, and *formare*, meaning *to form*, transformation means the action of changing in form, shape or appearance. It involves an effort to keep a form fitting and to solve an incompatibility that would otherwise cause a discourse to lose its coherence and fail to "hang together." My use of the term takes into account contributions by Robert Hodge and Gunther Kress. Hodge and Kress use transformation to emphasize the "discontinuous aspects" of change, "that is a discontinuous progression from one structure to another." To keep a form fitting is to change the form of language without regard for what would usually be seen as continuous progression. See *Social Semiotics* (Ithaca: Cornell UP, 1988), pp. 264-265. Subsequent references are by "Semiotics" and page number, in parentheses, following the quotation. Hodge and Kress also make explicit the way in which presentations of reality are transformed as the language describing them are transformed. See *Language as Ideology* (London: Routledge, 1993), pp. 15-17. Subsequent references are by "Ideology" and page number, in parentheses, following the quotation.

Management Policy.<sup>6</sup> Social Theories of the Self begin with a focus on issues of the self and Management Policy on those of organizational behaviour – but it is Rhetorical Theory that contributes most to a discussion of language and its power relationships in an organizational society. Rhetorical Theory, after all, concerns itself with language as symbolic action and the ways in which discourse manifests social action. The field of Management Policy warrants consideration so we understand the organizational context in which discourse functions to create adherence, define roles and otherwise reproduce a system. And since people act as agents in the process, we also need to consider the construction of the social self, a self that uses symbols and is a product of them, as an integral part of the discussion. The contributions of all of these communities help to make visible the workings of successful communication – of advanced literacy practices in an organizational setting.

To identify and analyse the strategies people use to resolve incompatibilities that threaten successful communication, we need to identify in the texts transformations or sites of activity that occur in response to crises. These transformations can be marked with rhetorical inventories – tools for analysing features of a text. Those drawn from conversational analysis, critical discourse analysis, and narrative analysis prove most helpful. Together they take into account our story-telling nature, provide a description of texts and offer a method of studying the actions that constitute our social practices. They demonstrate that transformations are dependent on categories and the resources to flex these categories to avoid facing incompatibilities.

### *Rhetorical Theory*

Kenneth Burke's emphasis on language as symbolic action is ideal for studying the interaction of discourse, the self and social structures. He articulates the central role of

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<sup>6</sup> Just as Management Policy comes out of the broader field of Management Sciences and reflects contributions from other fields, the area dealing with Social Theories of the Self takes into account contributions from such fields as Philosophy, Psychology, Sociology, and Rhetoric.

rhetoric in the relationships of communities and individual participants when he says, “In parturition begins the centrality of the nervous system. The different nervous systems, through language and the ways of production, erect various communities of interests and insights, social communities varying in nature and scope. And out of the division and the community arises the ‘universal’ rhetorical situation.”<sup>7</sup> Our language, then, motivates us to create categories which are the basis for multiple communities, a process that is both ongoing and the source of many divisions. Because we must face our condition of alienation, one from another, and of belonging to “groups more or less at odds with one another,” “identification” is a key term in Burke’s multi-disciplinary study of human action: “to begin with ‘identification’ is ... to confront the implications of *division*.” Without divisions there would be no need to convince others and ourselves of common interests or shared substance – what Burke calls “consubstantiality” (Rhetoric 20-22).

Identification and consubstantiality are central to Burke’s system for analysing motives: “to deal with problems of motive is to deal with problems of substance.” Human action and interaction, with its attempts to make sense of experiences, are the subject of his dramatisitic pentad: a grammar that discusses motives in terms of act, scene, agent, agency and purpose.<sup>8</sup> Different ratios of the terms reveal different emphases; each ratio is a selection of terms, and its corresponding emphasis highlights one way of framing an experience and deflects others. Burke’s grammar of motives reveals how a choice of terms does more than simply describe an event – it also shapes the event by making use of the terms common to a particular way of viewing the world, a particular order. But to identify with a particular order and its accompanying hierarchy is to be divided from other orders. As Burke puts it, with language comes the concept of the negative and the production of hierarchies that motivate a drive for perfection, for movement up the hierarchy. In the

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<sup>7</sup> Kenneth Burke, *A Rhetoric of Motives* (Berkeley: U of California P, 1950), p. 146. Subsequent references are by "Rhetoric" and page number, in parentheses, following the quotation.

<sup>8</sup> Kenneth Burke, *A Grammar of Motives*, 1945:rpt.( Berkeley: U of California P, 1969), pp. 337, xv, 13-15.

differences between entities in the hierarchy are mysteries which encourage obedience and enable persuasion to occur by hiding differences and allowing the sharing of substance (Rhetoric 122, 141, 176-180). Social tension – which Burke calls guilt – results as the hierarchy unifies its members in pursuit of the ideal and divides them by ordering classes. But language can purge guilt as well as create it. Burke refers to the rhetoric of “rebirth”<sup>9</sup> to describe the transformations which take place as we attempt to resolve guilt by victimage or mortification – two means of purification through language. The redemption that results provides a temporary rest – the self has been purified through a transformation of identity.

Burke’s theory of rhetoric with its key terms of identification, unity, hierarchy, guilt, redemption, and transformation are particularly useful for this research with its concern for issues of identity operating in organizational complexes. The organizational nature of our society requires individuals to perform multiple roles that require, in turn, multiple identities and result in a divided self. The incompatibilities that arise are resolved, whole sets of human relations are made acceptable, and the individual is seemingly unified by forms of language and their accompanying social strategies. And while not eliminating the multiple identities we have to assume to be part of multiple communities, these strategies at least camouflage the tensions (guilt) and allow us acceptable responses (redemption). Our responses are transformations that resolve incompatibilities, if only temporarily. This working out of ways to act together is the purpose of rhetoric.

Although more restricted in scope than Burke, Chaim Perelman also makes a contribution to the study of incompatibilities and our attempts to resolve them. With his focus on practical argument, as opposed to formal reasoning, Perelman emphasizes the need for a “meeting of the minds” – persuasion occurs only if one begins with what is

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<sup>9</sup> Kenneth Burke, *The Philosophy of Literary Form: Studies in Symbolic Action*, 3<sup>rd</sup> ed. (Berkeley: U of California P, 1973), pp. 39-51, 203. Subsequent references are by “Literary” and page number, in parentheses, following the quotation.

considered self-evident truths before attempting to move the audience to act on a new position. Where Burke talks of identification, Perelman emphasizes adherence: “The aim of argumentation is not to deduce consequences from given premises; it is rather to elicit or increase the adherence of the members of an audience to theses that are presented for their consent.”<sup>10</sup> Perelman is also concerned with order, and especially with various argumentative strategies people adopt in order to avoid incompatibilities. In particular, Perelman discusses the “diplomatic,” the “practical” and the “logical” methods.<sup>11</sup> The diplomatic method disposes of an incompatibility by arranging for the situation not to arise or, if it does, by pretending in various ways not to notice it. The diplomatic attitude relies on a fantasy world that runs parallel to the real world and prevents conflicting situations in this world from coming into contact with those of the idealized fantasy world. The practical method starts with examples or instances which occur and assumes that their very existence is evidence for some unified structure into which they fit. With this method, order is built upwards from the specific instances and generalizations are made only as needed to cover the particular case and to demonstrate the existence of an ordering principle. The logical method of solving incompatibilities starts with the assertion that there is a single principle which informs things and defines the concept of a “proper” place for any example which occurs. This method assumes that if the ordering principle is kept pure, all circumstances derived from it will be compatible. This emphasis on the importance of an underlying principle deflects attention and separates the principle from any examples with which it is not consistent. It presupposes the existence of a hierarchy and relies on the agreement of the audience about the nature of the hierarchy. Perelman’s theory of argumentation, then, sheds light on ways of knowing and ways of acting together.

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<sup>10</sup> Chaim Perelman, *The Realm of Rhetoric*, trans. William Kluback (Notre Dame: U of Notre Dame P, 1982), pp.11, 9. Subsequent references are by “Perelman” and page number, in parentheses, following the quotation.

<sup>11</sup> Ch. Perelman and L. Olbrechts-Tyteca, *The New Rhetoric: A Treatise on Argumentation*, trans. John Wilkinson and Purcell Weaver (1958; Notre Dame: Notre Dame UP, 1971), p. 197-198. Subsequent references are by “New Rhetoric” and page number, in parentheses, following the quotation.

Narrative theory – with its focus on the way we create a linear organization of events into a unified story – is a branch of rhetoric with a special role to play in revealing how we act together. The stories we tell function as a resource for working out the relationships among the multiple aspects of our selves and the multiple communities with which we associate. Narrative takes what we do naturally – as Susanne Langer points out, “the first thing we *do* with images is to envisage a story”<sup>12</sup> – and makes of it a way of understanding social action. This process – an actor recounting an event and its outcome – is symbolic: it stands for something more or something else. For example, through the language of narratives we demonstrate values and choices. We also interact with one another to make sense of our world and to give meaning to our social actions. Steven Cohan and Linda Shires demonstrate that narrative texts are particularly rich as sites of struggle among various discourses.<sup>13</sup> The subject of narrative, “continually (re)activated and (re)positioned in the multiple discourses of culture, is an effect of signification.” They also emphasize the social nature of story telling conventions when they assert that conventions are cultural agreements about the relation of a sign and its meaning, and they conclude that stories structure the meanings by which a culture lives.

In some cases, narrative can be seen as a type of explanation. Charles Antaki points out the problems of defining what counts as explanation; however, for the purpose of this analysis, explanation can be taken to mean a claim to reveal what is “really” the case and information that “promises to reorient the framing of the event and the participants’ place within it.”<sup>14</sup> Although there is plenty of opportunity to provide explanations in narratives,

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<sup>12</sup> Susanne K. Langer, *Philosophy in a New Key: A Study in the Symbolism of Reason, Rite, and Art*, 3<sup>rd</sup> ed. (Cambridge: Harvard UP, 1957), p. 145. Langer, whose seminal works bring together the fields of aesthetics, psychology, philosophy, and science, explores the influence of language on human perception and develops a theory on the special nature of human feeling.

<sup>13</sup> Steven Cohan and Linda M. Shires, *Telling Stories* (New York: Routledge, 1988), p. 142. Subsequent references are by “Cohan” and page number, in parentheses, following the quotation.

<sup>14</sup> *Analysing Everyday Explanation: A Casebook of Methods*, ed. Charles Antaki, (London: SAGE Publications, 1988), p. 2. Subsequent references are by “Antaki” and page number, in parentheses, following the quotation.

explanations are often repeated in various, brief ways, forming a “reprise” of the underlying message of the text, rather than a complete story (Antaki 3). Through an analysis of stories and explanatory episodes, we can discover boundaries and categories, ways of grouping and dividing, which are the basis for the strategies we use to resolve incompatibilities. And since none of our resources are independent of our views and values, we need also to look at whose story is being told, an analysis which reveals underlying ideology and power structures. Even the choice of narrative or explanation is linked to issues of power: an explanation often draws on sanctioned discourse to impose an interpretation of events and definitions of reality; narrative often relies on characters who appear to speak for themselves. Because these power structures involve organizations we are again reminded that our transformations, our ways of creating unity, are social.

### Management Policy

How we act together is also the central concern of organizations and what can be called the field of management policy.<sup>15</sup> Cheney, who brings together organizations, rhetoric and identity, begins his analysis by asserting “It is a truism that we live in an organizational society.” Cheney here draws on the work of Max Weber, Kenneth Boulding, and Chester Barnard. Barnard in 1938 defined an organization as “a system of consciously coordinated activities or forces of two or more persons.” As Cheney points out, this definition with its emphasis on people acting together “recognizes communication as *constitutive* of organization” and the “communicative system as the essence of the organization” (2,3). Many others have built on Barnard’s definition to describe various facets of organizations.<sup>16</sup> Karl Weick, for example, chooses to emphasize the *activity* of

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<sup>15</sup> For this label I am indebted to Henry Mintzberg, who uses it to bring together issues of managerial work, organizational structure, and organizational power. See *The Rise and Fall of Strategic Planning* (Don Mills: Maxwell Macmillan Canada, 1994), pp. 1-2. Subsequent references are by “R&F” and page number, in parentheses following the quotation.

<sup>16</sup> For a survey of definitions see Geoffrey MacKechnie and Gemma Donnelly-Cox, “Metaphor in the Development of Organization Theory,” in *Metaphor and Organizations*, ed. David Grant and Cliff Oswick (London: SAGE Publications, 1996), pp. 37-52.

organizations by using the term “organizing,” which he defines as a “consensually validated grammar for reducing equivocality by means of sensible interlocked behaviours.”<sup>17</sup> He expands on his choice of “grammar” by likening it to “recipes for getting things done when one person alone can’t do them and recipes for interpreting what has been done” (Weick 4). Daniel Katz and Robert Kahn also emphasize the role of communication in the defining characteristics of organizations. Organizations are social systems representing patterns of relationships.<sup>18</sup> To study organizations, then, is to study the nature of our society and, specifically, the context for individuals acting together to reproduce a system that relies on communication.

The role of individuals in organizations is also of concern to Stafford Beer, an international consultant in management science, cybernetics and effective organization. More than two decades ago, Beer addressed the topic of problems in our society and what could be done about them. His contribution was first to note the nature of our organizations, not as entities but as “*dynamic and surviving systems*.”<sup>19</sup> The implication of this way of thinking is to see all the aspects of our society as “outputs” of the system. Our problems, then, are not examples of where the system is not working: rather they are the products of a system organized in such a way as to produce just these results. A second major contribution is Beer’s observation that our systems reduce responsibility where they should be increasing it. We use policies, for example, to do what managers should be doing – making decisions appropriate to their own area. As a result, Beer concludes, “the system is robbed of the crucial reference point without which it cannot learn, cannot adapt, cannot evolve.” He calls for fundamental changes in our modes of organization as opposed to the

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<sup>17</sup> Karl E. Weick, *The Social Psychology of Organizing* 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (Reading: Addison-Wesley Publishing, 1979), p. 3. Subsequent references are by “Weick” and page number, in parentheses, following the quotation.

<sup>18</sup> Daniel Katz and Robert L. Kahn, *The Social Psychology of Organizations* (New York: John Wiley & Sons, 1967), pp. 30-33, 390-392.

<sup>19</sup> Stafford Beer, *Designing Freedom* (Toronto: The Hunter Rose Company for CBC Publications, 1974), p. 3. Subsequent references are by “Beer” and page number, in parentheses, following the quotation.



seeming changes that come from “the adaptation of the bureaucracy in continuing to produce itself” (Beer 75, 80).

Beer’s emphasis on our need for individual responsibility – which he says can only come about when we demystify science and allow more people to share in its control – anticipates Henry Mintzberg’s recent emphasis on the problem of detachment.<sup>20</sup> Mintzberg, a highly recognized management theorist and former president of the Strategic Management Society, argues that the problem with strategic planning is that it “detaches planners, and . . . the managers who rely on it, from the strategy making process” (R&F 254, 267). After reviewing the various schools of thought on “strategic planning” he concludes that the term is an oxymoron:

Organizations turn out to be highly specialized instruments, whose capabilities for lateral extension often prove narrow indeed. Strategic changes must build on evident strengths, to be sure, but because they necessarily break new ground, must evidently tread into areas of weakness as well. Who can tell, without actually trying, if the strength will carry the organization through or the weakness will undermine its efforts? How, then, can any organization rely on some abstract conceptual exercise in an executive suite? Competencies have to be ‘core,’ no doubt; they have to be ‘distinctive’ too; and they must also be ‘in demand.’ But above all, competencies have to be applicable, and that can never be known without trying. We conclude, therefore, that strengths and weakness can be detached neither from each other, nor from specific contexts, or from the actions to which they are directed. Thought must take place in the context of action. (R&F 279)

Mintzberg’s findings – which make explicit the link between distinctions of positive and negative value and the context in which these distinctions occur – may constitute a breakthrough in thinking about management policy. As my research attempts to demonstrate, rhetorical theory can take this thinking to the next stage by making transparent the symbolic power of language and its role in the equation involving thought

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<sup>20</sup> However, Mintzberg, with the benefit of two more decades of watching systems develop, rejects any notion of a cybernetic model for organization. He says “Eventually it became clear that the systems offered no improved means to deal with the information overload of human brains; indeed, they often made matters worse.” He believes this emphasis on collecting data and separating the formulation of strategies from the implementation of them is akin to the “disassociation of thinking from acting that lies closer to the root of the problem” (299, 285).

and action. Mintzberg comes close to the rhetorical heart of the issue: he observes that “study after study has demonstrated that managers of every sort rely primarily on oral forms of communication, on the order of about 80 percent of their time” and he even goes so far as to ask “What makes speaking and listening so important to managers?” (R&F 258, 259). Mintzberg’s list of answers can be improved upon by an injection of rhetorical theory that can “unpack” terms like “intuition,” “competencies” and “anecdotal evidence” and make transparent the role of language in the dynamic workings of organizational behaviour.

### *Social Theories of the Self*

An organization requires a collective identity that nevertheless has to contend with many individual identities – it has to define itself for each of its many audiences and it has to persuade many individual members to share its interests. Cheney traces notions of identity over time to support his central point: “*the nature of organizational rhetoric . . . is the management of multiple identities*” (9). By identifying with an organization, individuals act together to define who they are. The area dealing with Social Theories of the Self recognizes, as Anthony Paul Kerby articulates, a self arising “out of signifying practices rather than existing prior to them as an autonomous Cartesian agent.”<sup>21</sup> And since each of us has many roles to play, each with its own set of values, the process of identification is fraught with conflicting desires. But as Kerby asserts, “unity of purpose and consistency of valuation form part of what it means to be a responsible moral agent” (56-57). It is not surprising, then, that we go to great lengths to define for ourselves, and to present to others, a unified identity.<sup>22</sup>

The complex process of building identity – which as Burke points out begins from the day we are born (Rhetoric 146) – is largely an unconscious one. To make the process more visible so we can learn how we constitute our selves, we need to understand

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<sup>21</sup> Anthony Paul Kerby, *Narrative and the Self* (Bloomington: Indiana UP, 1991), p. 1.

<sup>22</sup> For a detailed discussion of this topic see Erving Goffman, *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life* (Garden City: Doubleday Anchor Books, 1959).

relationships of language and power. It is through language, with its inherent categories arranged in hierarchies that rely on systems of power, that we build our identity.

Acknowledging his debt to Burke,<sup>23</sup> Cheney discusses the process of “socialization” in building identity: he says socialization is “both an individual and a collective process; it allows for the person to acquire and to use the cultural symbols available . . . while enabling the social order to reproduce itself” (9, 19). In other words, we are socialized from birth through language and exposed to issues of power. And although we all attempt to make use of cultural symbols to present a unified identity, we do not all share equally in the resources required to do so. Norman Fairclough, who combines linguistic analysis with social theories about language and power, advocates the term “members’ resources (MR),” to describe our store of prototypes residing in long term memory and available for our interpretative or production process.<sup>24</sup> Michel Foucault, who looks to history and social conditions for his analysis of power and knowledge, emphasizes that power is not democratically distributed. His work makes visible a system of power that dictates a role for each member of society and that ensures its own survival through these roles by sanctioning certain types of discourse and relationships.<sup>25</sup>

Theories surrounding the social construction of the self are further complicated by Michel de Certeau. The results of power differentials in our society tempt us to distinguish between the dominated and the dominant. But de Certeau points out that the dominated do not simply consume what they are given. Rather, they initiate a hidden form of production.<sup>26</sup> So de Certeau echoes Foucault’s assertion that power is “never in anybody’s

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<sup>23</sup> In particular, Cheney draws on Burke’s: *A Rhetoric of Motives; Permanence and Change: Attitudes Toward History;* and *Language as Symbolic Action.*

<sup>24</sup> Norman Fairclough, *Language and Power* (London: Longman Group, 1989), pp. 11, 24. Subsequent references are by “Fairclough” and page number, in parentheses, following the quotation.

<sup>25</sup> Michel Foucault, *Power/Knowledge: Selected Interviews and Other Writings 1927-1977*, trans. Colin Gordon, Leo Marshall, John Mepham, and Kate Soper, ed. Colin Gordon (New York: Pantheon, 1980), p. 98, 131. Subsequent references are by “P/K” and page number, in parentheses, following the quotation.

<sup>26</sup> Michel de Certeau, *The Practice of Everyday Life*, trans. Steven Rendall (Berkeley: U of California P, 1988), p. xiii. Subsequent references are by “de Certeau” and page number, in parentheses, following the quotation.

hands”: we simultaneously undergo and exercise power, but it is not democratically distributed (P/K 98). However, de Certeau takes the process one step further to point out that “the system of discipline and control which took shape in the nineteenth century . . . is today itself ‘vampirized’ by other procedures” (49). In other words, the dominated, or those who receive messages they did not produce, find ways to manipulate these forces or messages to make something new out of them, thereby exercising some degree of power.

### **Preview to the Framework**

While all three communities have a contribution to make to a discussion of discourse, the self and social structures, they each have different terminology. The framework developed in this dissertation coordinates these terminologies – under the meta-categories of bracketing, ranking and distancing – as it explores how and why transformations take place in response to crises.

While existing rhetorical theory was the basis for identifying the case, it was my experience of the case itself that gave rise to my analytical framework. After analysing the transcripts of interviews with the two key participants, I developed an inventory of their tactics for dealing with incompatibilities and used the inventory to create a number of interpretive categories. Out of these categories came the central thrust of my framework: a strategy for making visible the enormously complex process of creating a unified identity by locating the strategy used by participants to resolve incompatibilities. I choose to describe this strategy in parts – which I label bracketing, ranking and distancing – although all three occur simultaneously.

Bracketing, ranking and distancing are my terms to describe the process the participants use to transform meaning. All three parts rely on the placement of boundaries and categories and on the social order that establishes and preserves them. Bracketing implies separate entities – items carved out of their contexts – that are brought together because they fall within certain limits. It indicates grouping and dividing practices. Ranking

gives an order to entities by assigning them values. Distancing creates space by widening or lessening the gaps between entities and asks others to share the values and the world view that goes with them. Our understanding of language is tied to our ability to endow words with symbolic function. Depending on how we bracket, rank and distance an entity we allow it to be seen differently. An analysis of the quotation given earlier provides a brief example:<sup>27</sup>

And now I am at the point where if they let me go tomorrow I will be more than happy to take their money and walk away. I've got the plan all set out, what I'll do, where I'll go. So, I mean, maybe it's a good thing when you get to that point that you have that attitude (Participant #1, Transcript 9-10).

Bracketing is located by marking the frequent use of “I” and observing how it divides the participant from the bank – the “they” that will provide “their money” so the participant can pursue private plans. This grouping and dividing practice contrasts with the many times, in other parts of the interview, in which the participant identifies or groups herself with the bank – by the use of “we” – and it indicates an incompatibility. She wants to identify with the organization that claims so much of her time, but some of the bank’s practices cause her to create a separate group for herself on this occasion.

Ranking is located by marking words with positive and negative valence which the participant uses to order the entities identified through bracketing. In this example, the participant gives primacy to the sense of self capable of judging the bank’s actions, finding them unacceptable and making alternative arrangements. The use of modality – “I mean, maybe” – indicates a personal position and the use of “good” and “happy” ascribe positive values to it.

Distancing is located by marking indicators of social space between entities that result from bracketing and have values attached to them from ranking. This social space

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<sup>27</sup> This example is analysed in greater detail in Chapter 4 where it can be placed in its context and shown as part of a larger narrative.

can be all but invisible in the case of identification or very large where the participant wants to make a point of distinguishing herself. Issues of congregation and segregation can be determined from the distance between entities. The switch from “I” at the beginning of the quotation to the subject pronoun “you” at the end implies that what is good for the participant is good for people in general. All distance between the participant, others involved and audience is gone.

In summary, then, through a repositioning of brackets (to divide the bank from the participant) and the implied ranking (the participant’s position is of more value) and distancing (the participant congregates with those that have a higher understanding), the participant resolves an incompatibility. She still works for the organization (and has indicated on many occasions pride in her work and compliance with bank messages) but she is at “that point” where her personal views allow her to justify her position despite the negative aspects of the organization. The participant is also asking us to include ourselves with people in general – to share her position of solidarity, not with the bank as on many other occasions, but with those who have a higher understanding about life outside the bank.

The strategy of bracketing, ranking and distancing, as a way of analysing text to show how incompatibilities are resolved, also demonstrates how discourse and conversational analysis work with narrative analysis to reveal multiple levels of meaning. We can observe grammatical features and, following the tradition of Jonathan Edwards and Derek Potter, use discourse analysis to study “social practices and the actions that constitute them.”<sup>28</sup> But narrative analysis is particularly supportive of bracketing, ranking and distancing as a way of getting at assumptions about the nature of experience. Narrative

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<sup>28</sup> Jonathan Potter and Derek Edwards, “A Model of Discourse in Action,” *American Behavioral Scientist* 36.3 (1993): 383. Potter and Edwards review the many strands of discourse analysis and, for their approach, draw on the “Continental” tradition advocated by Foucault, the sociology of science work done by Gilbert and Mulkay (1984) and developments in conversation analysis advocated by those such as Atkinson and Heritage (1984).

is a site of intense activity: it involves values, grouping and dividing practices, and the playing out of large scale forces which are at work on the individual.

The model that emerges from the interviews – one with a senior executive who produced the primary texts and one with an employee who receives the texts and has to accommodate them in her everyday work – is then used to analyse them. Close readings of the transcripts of these two interviews help reveal those features of a text that would otherwise be passed over.

### **Rationale**

Although a great deal of exciting scholarship and insight is available, there is also a way in which organizational communication is under theorized. This dissertation attempts to integrate organizational and rhetorical theory and professional practices. It attempts to provide practitioners with some of the theoretical insights they need to do their jobs “reflectively” – some would say “honestly” – and it provides an example that gives currency and grounding to rhetorical theory. My framework allows for a detailed analysis of the kinds of texts that surround us daily and reveals some of the very survival skills we call upon to make our worlds acceptable.

If Isaiah Berlin – one of the great liberal thinkers of the twentieth century – is right, the study of competing values also contributes in its own way to the better functioning of our society. He says: “Values may easily clash within the breast of a single individual; and it does not follow that, if they do, some must be true and others false.”<sup>29</sup> He points out that there are benefits to our society in social or political collisions. In fact, Berlin goes so far as to say that these collisions are a “precondition for decent societies and morally acceptable behaviour.” The conflict they cause can be reduced by “promoting and preserving an uneasy equilibrium, which is constantly threatened and in constant need of repair” (Berlin

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<sup>29</sup> Isaiah Berlin, *The Crooked Timber of Humanity* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1991), p. 12. Subsequent references are by “Berlin” and page number, in parentheses, following the quotation.

19). My research provides very real examples of “collisions” for individuals, in this case associated with an organization centrally important to our society. At the same time, the analysis demonstrates the role of rhetorical theory and practice in “promoting and preserving the uneasy equilibrium” that allows our society to function in a way we deem acceptable. Along the way, social issues such as literacy are explored. To understand how literacy functions as a master code for knowing such things as the difference between strategies and tactics, for example, is to understand how certain kinds of language practices constitute social action. The subtler aspects of what is hardly conscious to us requires in-depth analysis, one that combines theory and actual practices in a critically conscious way.

This research project returns in the final analysis to where it began. It explores the complexity of successful communication, seen now through the variety of lenses provided by my analytical framework. I return to the assertion that our daily life, which is necessarily organizational in nature, consists of attempts at reconciling competing demands and identities. The nature of this messiness and the resources we draw upon to stabilize the situation are more clearly seen during a time of crisis when the relationships among discourse, the self and organizations are brought to the fore. I argue that rhetoric, and my research in particular, gives us a new way of approaching the complexity of human interaction in an organizational society.



## 2. Methods and Analytical Framework

*The apparent absence of narratives in reports of interview studies is an artifact of standard procedures for conducting, describing, and analyzing interviews: interviewers interrupt respondents' answers and thereby suppress expression of their stories; when they appear, stories go unrecorded because they are viewed as irrelevant to the specific aims of specific questions; and stories that make it through these barriers are discarded at stages of coding and analysis.*

*Elliot G. Mishler, Research Interviewing: Context and Narrative*

### Methods

#### *Introduction*

Every successful attempt to contribute to a field of scholarship has to demonstrate the soundness of its research method. The following sections describe details of the method I use to do the research, analyse the texts and develop the analytical framework which both arises from the methods and informs the interpretations. Drawing on Elliot Mishler's research, I approach the interviews as speech activities – “particular types of discourse regulated and guided by norms of appropriateness and relevance that are part of speakers' shared linguistic competences as members of a community.”<sup>30</sup> This approach places emphasis on the importance of careful transcriptions of taped interviews and the narrative features they display. The chapter begins with a rationale for the case study method. It discusses the qualitative nature of this case study and describes the procedures before introducing the analytical framework.

#### *The Case Study – a Rationale*

According to Robert Yin, an experimental psychologist and an acclaimed leader in non-laboratory social scientific methodology, “the distinctive need for case studies arises

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<sup>30</sup> Elliot Mishler, *Research Interviewing: Context and Narrative* (Cambridge: Harvard UP, 1986), p. 137.

out of the desire to understand complex social phenomena. In brief, the case study allows an investigation to retain the holistic and meaningful characteristics of real-life events.”<sup>31</sup> According to Yin’s definition, “A case study is an empirical inquiry that: investigates a contemporary phenomenon within its real-life context; when the boundaries between phenomenon and context are not clearly evident; and in which multiple sources of evidence are used” (23). As previous descriptions of the case make clear,<sup>32</sup> this research project meets Yin’s criteria: the bank’s effort to develop a communications plan in response to a major crisis is a contemporary phenomenon within a real-life context; the boundaries between phenomenon and context are not clear – as evidenced by the impossibility of isolating variables and the corresponding need to look at aspects of the case within its context; and there are multiple sources of evidence – key texts central to the bank’s communications plan, transcripts of interviews with bank employees, memos, press releases, newsletters and speeches.

One of the most important considerations for successful case study research is access to the relevant information. And to study the specific communications challenges of a particular Canadian bank requires a special degree of access to information that is often considered highly sensitive by the bank. While many documents are in the public domain or are available for the asking, the central elements of this case study are the result of personal interaction and my integration into the setting over an extended period of time. The idea for the research came about as a result of my employment in the area of public relations and fundraising, activities that brought me into contact with the bank, its publications, and many of its employees over the course of more than a decade. This exposure provided the background knowledge necessary to identify the case and allowed me quickly to establish trust and rapport with the participants.

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<sup>31</sup> Robert K. Yin, *Case Study Research: Design and Methods*, Rev. ed. (Newbury Park: SAGE Publications, 1989), p. 14.

<sup>32</sup> A more detailed description of banking in Canada, and the case study bank in particular, is provided in Chapter 3.

Case study research also requires the resources to adapt to the situation since, as Yin again points out, “relevant behaviors cannot be manipulated” (19). For example, once my research began, I had to accommodate the schedules of the participants, to accept whatever documents they would give me and, similarly, to do without those that they deemed too sensitive to show me, to allow them as much control over the interview process as they wanted, and to use judgement in my responses.

As the above description suggests, this case study relies on qualitative evidence. Drawing on an extensive body of research, Yin asserts that the “essence of qualitative research consists of two conditions: (a) the use of close-up, detailed observation of the natural world by the investigator, and (b) the attempt to avoid prior commitment to any theoretical model” (25). My high degree of access to the everyday language practices of those involved in a complex organization and my ability to accommodate the demands of the situation meets condition (a) and my analytical framework derives from the experience of the case itself rather than from any “prior commitment” to an existing theoretical model. Added to the case study model, with its reliance on qualitative evidence, is an emphasis on rhetorical analysis; the result of this combination is a rich opportunity to link rhetorical theory and practice.

### *Procedures*

The concern for establishing validity is a particularly common one for qualitative researchers.<sup>33</sup> This project makes use of document collection, interviews, and observation. Within document collection I gathered internal documents (memos, press releases, speeches, newsletters), and published reports – a search of the Canadian Business and Current Affairs electronic data base turned up over 250 examples of media coverage

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<sup>33</sup> See Mishler pp. 108-116. Mishler addresses the notion of validity in narrative accounts in particular, drawing on the work of Katz (1983), Levy (1981), and Campbell and Stanley (1963). Catherine Kohler Riessman also makes a contribution to this topic. She argues for attention to “trustworthiness” rather than “truth” in order to “move the process into the social world” as opposed to the world of “objective truths.” See *Narrative Analysis* (Newbury Park: SAGE Publications, 1993), pp. 64-69.

relevant to the time period covered by this research. Two types of interviews were conducted: preliminary, informal discussions over a period of two years<sup>34</sup> (involving employees at many levels and former employees); and in-depth, tape-recorded interviews. For the final interviews, I was careful to choose two very different participants: one responsible for the production of the bank documents I had identified as central to the research; and one who had to accommodate the messages of these documents in her work. The formal interviews lasted between 1.5 and 2 hours. Multiple sources of observation were obtained from my participation in numerous meetings on a variety of topics and from my access to employees at every level of the organization.

The following description of the chronology of the project also helps to introduce it. Relying on familiarity with events surrounding the crisis faced by the bank at the time of the collapse of one of the world's largest real estate development companies<sup>35</sup> and access to details of the communications strategy, I began my official research with a series of informal discussions with members and former members of the Public Relations staff. During this time I collected memos, speeches, newsletters and other documents relating to the bank's communication efforts. This back and forth lemniscate between texts and contexts led me to identify two documents – one entitled *Planning for Improved Public Relations* and the other entitled *Our Beliefs* – as central to the bank's communication plan and, therefore, as most relevant to the project.

The next step was to develop the questions that would form the basis of initial interviews with bank employees. Although I had not settled on the final research questions, I was confident that issues of language use, with a focus on literacy, combined with a further exploration of the actual job practices of bank employees, would be useful in the

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<sup>34</sup> These are the informal interviews conducted once my research began officially. Other informal discussions over the course of a decade provided background and made the research possible.

<sup>35</sup> The collapse of this company is considered by many in the field to be the biggest lending crisis in the bank's history. Further details are provided in Chapter 3.

process of doing so.<sup>36</sup> I obtained the consent of two senior executives in very different parts of the bank and a middle management staff member in the Public Relations office to conduct and tape record the interviews. After transcribing the interviews, I offered each participant the opportunity to review and make changes to the transcripts. In all cases, the participants started out making changes to remove such things as the “ah” and “um” indicators and to make their responses grammatically more correct. However, the size of the job caused them to stop after a few pages and instead ask for clarification on how the transcripts would be used. When they understood that everyone reading the transcripts would recognize their informal, conversational nature, they were content to let them stand.

Far from providing a simpler explanation of how communication works or does not work, the results of these initial interviews only revealed further and further levels of complexity. Among the surprises was the revelation that senior executives – those I started out thinking of as being in control of the process and the messages – were at most “managing” or “coping.” I was also struck by the similarity of issues affecting the organization and those affecting the “selves” who were involved. I was now ready to pose my research questions: How does communication actually work in a complex organization? What role do issues of production and reception play? What makes some people better able to succeed at communication than others? In other words, what constitutes successful literacy practice in an organizational context?

My next step was to conduct final interviews with two key participants: both had a familiarity with and an interest in the messages of the bank documents, one from having been primarily responsible for producing them, the other from having to work with or around these same messages. Based on notes from previous informal discussions with each of these participants, I developed a new set of questions and repeated the formal interview

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<sup>36</sup> See Appendix A.

process of taping and transcribing.<sup>37</sup> In Chapter 3, I use the perspectives provided by traditional rhetorical theories to provide an orientation to the archival texts, and to consider the persuasive role of intertexts – those texts referred to in the primary texts – and the paralanguage comprised of, for example, typography and layout. Audiences and their issues of time and place – who is doing the reading and when are they doing it – are, predictably, important considerations. Close readings of the transcripts of the final interviews are provided in Chapters 4 and 5.

### **Building an Analytical Framework**

Clearly, if analysis and interpretation of data are part of the case study, then we need a body of theory that explains the data. Orientation to the bank documents requires in an implicit way what analysis of the interviews requires more formally: technical vocabulary borrowed from the three communities and integrated into a framework that allows these communities to work together. The remainder of this chapter develops my analytical framework, showing how it is applicable, comprehensive, and integrated. Along the way I elaborate on the nature of the processes and terms themselves, and end with a preview of the remaining chapters.

As the discussion in Chapter 1 indicates, this research concerns itself with the relationships that emerge from the interaction of discourse, the self, and social structures. Binding them together and setting in motion a complex dance is a concern for unity on the part of the agents involved. This concern arises from the part/whole nature common to all three terms: discourse is divided because the self has to manage multiple identities in organizational complexes. In other words, multiple organizations with their own multiple

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<sup>37</sup> See Appendix B for the final interview questions. This study received approval from the University of Waterloo Office of Human Research and Animal Care. For confidentiality reasons, the full transcripts of both interviews are held back. Anyone wishing access to them is urged to contact the author. The transcripts will be released for research purposes only under strict conditions governing their use. Pseudonyms are used to protect the identity of the participants and other identifying features may have been changed. All references to specific newsletters or publications have been changed, always with consideration for maintaining the intention of the original titles.

identities cause the selves involved as agents to be divided and to produce divided texts. But to have multiple identities in our culture is to approach mental illness. Our striving for unity is an ongoing process.

Before exploring further the part/whole nature of discourse, the self and social structures, it is helpful to review the distinctions Hodge and Kress make between messages, texts and discourse. A “message” is about something that exists outside of itself and is connected to a world to which it refers in some way. “Texts” are concrete material objects comprised of clusters of messages, while “discourse” is “the site where social forms of organization engage with systems of signs in the production of texts, thus reproducing or changing sets of meanings and values which make up a culture” (Semiotics 5-6).

Fairclough expands on the distinction between “text” and “discourse.” Borrowing from Michael Halliday, Fairclough calls text “a product rather than a process” and uses discourse “to refer to the whole process of social interaction of which a text is just a part” (24-27). To study discourse, then, is to study the product of interaction or to find the traces of activity. Similarly, Burke identifies “act” as the key term in a method of analysis that provides “the most direct route to the study of human relations and human motives” and on which his notion of “dramatism” is centered.<sup>38</sup> As noted earlier, if there is an act, there must be an agent, a scene in which the agent acts, some means or agency used by the agent, and a purpose.

If we understand discourse as a process of social interaction, then we can look at texts – the concrete material objects – as the sites which will show traces of this interaction. Texts shape and are shaped by contexts: they are sites of social interaction, linked to the social structures that produce them and to the selves that are the agents of this process.

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<sup>38</sup> Kenneth Burke, *On Symbols and Society*, ed. Joseph R. Gusfield (Chicago: U of Chicago P, 1989), p. 135. Subsequent references are by “Symbols” and page number, in parentheses, following the quotation.

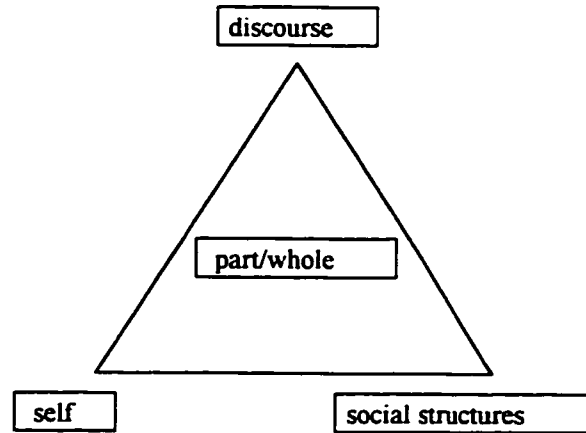


Figure 1: To understand successful communication practices in an organizational complex we need to understand the relationships which emerge from the interaction of discourse, the self and social structures, three terms bound together by a concern for unity arising from their common part/whole nature.

The part/whole nature of discourse manifests itself in the concern for coherence. From the Latin *co*, meaning *together*, and *hære*, meaning *to stick or cleave*, coherence is the action or fact of sticking together. It implies consistency in reasoning, or relating, so that one part of the discourse does not contradict the rest. In other words, to have coherence is to have a harmonious connection of several parts so that the whole, cleaves or “hangs together.” Fairclough draws on an extensive discussion of coherence – without attempting to be exhaustive – to emphasize not only how the parts of a text fit together but also the “need to figure out how the text fits in with your previous experience of the world” (78).<sup>39</sup> He distinguishes “local” coherence (“coherence relations within a particular part of the text”) from global coherence (“coherence relations which tie together the parts of a whole text”).

The striving for coherence in a discourse is exhibited in the strategies and perpetual transformations of terms which can be marked in a text. From the Latin *trans*, meaning *across, beyond, to or on the farther side of*, and *formare*, meaning *to form*, transformation means the action of changing in form, shape or appearance. It involves an effort to keep a

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<sup>39</sup> Fairclough makes clear that the connections we make between parts of a text or between a text and the world are made by us as interpreters; “they are not made by the text itself.”



form fitting and to solve an incompatibility that would otherwise cause a discourse to lose its coherence and fail to “hang together.” As noted previously,<sup>40</sup> my use of the term “transformation” takes into account contributions by Hodge and Kress, who use the term to emphasize the “discontinuous aspects” of change, “that is a discontinuous progression from one structure to another” (Semiotics 264-265). To keep a form fitting is to change the form of language without regard for what would usually be seen as continuous progression. Hodge and Kress also make explicit the way in which presentations of reality are transformed as the language describing them is transformed (Ideology 15-17).

The existence of transformations links discourse directly to the social structure which is its context. This social structure is also concerned with part/whole relationships that can be readily observed in its organizational nature. Organizations want to define themselves in such a way as to present a consistent image. At the same time they have many audiences and these audiences make conflicting demands. The multiplicity of organizations gives rise to multiple voices in the texts they produce. This in turn creates incompatibilities for the selves operating in these complexes. In fact, it is not possible to analyse the relationship between divided texts and the multiplicity of the social structures that give rise to them, or between coherence and organizations, without considering the inextricable role of the self that acts as the symbol-using agent in the entire process. And again the part/whole relationship is central to the analysis. Our identity as responsible moral agents depends on our sense of unity of purpose and consistency in our values. But multiple roles in an organizational society call for multiple identities and the divided self that results from the choices a participating agent is forced to make both gives rise to divided texts and is affected by an ongoing process of creating meaning.

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<sup>40</sup> See Chapter 1 for a discussion of this term.



### ***The Duality of Structure***

Before discussing the central thrust of my analytical framework – bracketing, ranking and distancing – it is important to elaborate on the nature of the processes and terms themselves. When we talk about the ways in which we use language to make sense of our world, we think primarily about our ability to frame the world in such a way as to make it compatible with views we already hold. Equally powerful but much less obvious are the ways in which language transforms us. Anthony Giddens’ theory of structuration gets at the heart of the matter. He offers “a conceptual scheme that allows one to understand both how actors are at the same time the creators of social systems yet created by them.”<sup>41</sup> Giddens refers to this situation as the “duality of structure” – “social structures are both constituted by human agency, and yet at the same time are the very medium of this constitution” (7). The implications of the duality of structure for my research is apparent in the various terms of the analytical framework. For example, when I position discursive rhetorical practices as resources a participant can call upon to stabilize a situation, I mean for it to be understood that the self using these practices is also a product of the practices. And when I show how organizations use rhetorical resources, I mean for us also to understand that rhetoric has produced these organizations.

### ***Bracketing, Ranking & Distancing***

While existing rhetorical theory was the basis for identifying the case, the experience of the case itself has given rise to my analytical framework. An inventory of tactics used by participants to deal with the incompatibilities they faced resulted in a number of interpretive categories. The strategy of bracketing, ranking and distancing recognizes the placement of boundaries and categories and the social order that establishes and preserves them. All three parts of the strategy are resources that allow for the

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<sup>41</sup> Anthony Giddens, “Structuration theory: past, present and future” in *Giddens’ Theory of Structuration: A Critical Appreciation*, ed. Christopher G.A. Bryant and David Jary (London: Routledge, 1991), p. 204.

transformation of meaning by definition. To define – derived from the Latin word for boundary – is to change the boundaries. In other words, depending on how we place the boundaries around an entity, we allow it to be seen in a different way. As a methodology, bracketing, ranking and distancing correspond respectively to description, interpretation, and broader social evaluation. The three terms give us a way of structuring what we say about language practices. Bracketing describes what is selected, ranking reveals the values which have been added to the selection, and distancing makes clear the participant’s world view, which others are asked to share by accepting these values. Since the addition of values is always based on those held by the self enacting the process, issues of identity can be teased out.

Bracketing implies separate entities – items carved out of their contexts – which are brought together because they fall within certain limits. So although they are separate, the entities within a bracket support one another and create solidarity through their similarities. This resource leaves open the possibility for downplaying the separateness of entities within the bracket and treating the group as one entity. The way we bracket things is neither given nor arbitrary: it is social. As Eviatar Zerubavel asserts, to be socialized “entails knowing which features are salient for differentiating items from one another and which ones ought to be ignored as irrelevant.”<sup>42</sup> The way we differentiate or make distinctions is based on our values. And when we apply values in our attempts to bracket things, we engage in ranking. Ranking according to our values gives an order to entities. It relies on a hierarchy and a shared sense of social order. Distancing also starts with bracketing and it too is a social function. Bracketing, with its practice of grouping and dividing, serves the distancing process of congregating and separating: when we apply values or social judgement to the results of bracketing we end up with “seemingly inevitable” categories. When we use distancing as a strategy, then, we rely on a widening or narrowing of perceived gaps

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<sup>42</sup> Eviatar Zerubavel, *The Fine Line: Making Distinctions in Everyday Life* (New York: The Free Press, 1991), p. 77.

between entities. All three parts of the strategy are resources precisely because they are ambiguous themselves – they divide and unite simultaneously. They make it possible for us to talk about the way in which participants are successful in complex communication by camouflaging incompatibilities that would otherwise disrupt their discourse.

### *Terministic Screens*

The three communities – Rhetoric, the area dealing with Social Theories of the Self, and Management Policy – all have ways of bracketing, ranking and distancing. Each community has a specialized vocabulary that highlights its particular view of reality and deflects attention from competing views. With his concept of “terministic screens,” Burke discusses the way our vocabulary filters experience: “Even if any given terminology is a *reflection* of reality, by its very nature as a terminology it must be a *selection* of reality; and to this extent it must function also as a *deflection* of reality” (Symbols 115). But because of the constant interplay of discourse, the self and social structures in the process of meaning making, we need to make connections among these terms and across the three communities from which they are derived. The strategy of bracketing, ranking and distancing provides this connecting function: the part/whole nature of each community is recognized and integrated into a unifying system; the strategy is applicable to each community and to their constant interaction; and it is comprehensive to the extent that it involves each of the communities. As a result of its nature as applicable, integrated, and comprehensive, the strategy supporting my framework makes it possible to start at any point in any one of the communities and gain access to any other point.

As the discussion so far has attempted to make clear, and as the analysis in the remaining chapters will show, the interaction of the three communities demonstrates that to make meaning is to construct an identity; it is social. If we begin with the vocabulary of Rhetoric, for example, we have to begin with identification, our desire to overcome divisions caused by our very human need to categorize. Divisions also raise the issue of

context and take us to the vocabulary of organizations. Organizations expose us to systems of differences and reward us for replicating them. What happens in social structures, then, is at once organizational and personal: we are able to replicate an organization's systems to the extent that we have what Fairclough calls members' resources (MR) that match the organization's requirements. But our desire to play roles in many communities causes incompatibilities that we are constantly trying to overcome. Pierre Bourdieu elaborates on the nature of our individual resources with his notion of habitus, "a set of *dispositions* which incline agents to act and react in certain ways."<sup>43</sup> Our habitus determines how successful we will be in effecting the transformations necessary to keep a form fitting, to avoid incompatibilities. As the discussion so far makes clear, part of literacy is the ability to stabilize and unify the self in the face of multiple identities occurring in organizational complexes. A high degree of literacy is the result of matching habitus to system. This match in turn results in a high degree of authority to reproduce a system and structure which ensures that these same resources are needed and rewarded.

With the notion of avoiding incompatibilities, we are squarely in the realm of Social Theories of the Self and are concerned with the self that acts as agent in the communication process. We have also returned to meaning making as an attempt to construct identity – to pull together into a unified whole the parts of the self divided by the organizational complexes in which we operate. A tracing out of terms, this time beginning with the vocabulary common to Social Theories of the Self, allows us to build on the notion of habitus and members' resources to explore the link between values, distinctions, and narrative. As previously noted, our primary way of constituting our selves and giving our selves an identity is through our talk – we regularly construct dramas or narratives that portray our roles as consistent and unified. Our life stories exhibit good ethos when they

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<sup>43</sup> Pierre Bourdieu, *Language & Symbolic Power*, trans. Gino Raymond and Matthew Adamson, ed. John B. Thompson (Cambridge: Harvard UP, 1982), p. 12. Subsequent references are by "L&SP" and page number, in parentheses, following the quotation.

show us making consistent moral choices. And as Richard Weaver points out, choices imply values.<sup>44</sup> We operate inside of a structure based on our categories and a whole system of choices follows. Once we apply values to our categories, we create distinctions.

As we create distinctions, we place ourselves on the hierarchy created by these distinctions and strive for progress. But, as Burke points out, we are always motivated by a desire to diffuse the divisions at the root of the process. With his notion of habitus, Bourdieu gives more emphasis to the way in which we acquire the resources to negotiate our position: unintentional learning, functioning below the level of consciousness, determines our level of competence and our facility for implementing strategies that reproduce conditions favorable to our progress. Because we can trade on these competencies, Bourdieu refers to them as the “capital”<sup>45</sup> that is exchanged for the right to declare which distinctions are most valuable. Our understanding of people comes not from classifying them, but from classifying their distinctions. Weaver sums it up by saying:

Civilization is measured by its power to create and enforce distinctions. Consequently there must be some source of discrimination, from which we bring ideas of order to bear on a fortuitous world. Knowledge and virtue constitute this source, and these two things, it must be said to the vexation of the sentimental optimists, are in their nature aristocracies. Participation in them is open to all: this much of the doctrine of equality is sound; but the participation will never occur in equal manner or degree, so that however we allow men to start in the world, we may be sure that as long as standards of quality exist, there will be a sorting out.<sup>46</sup>

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<sup>44</sup> Richard Weaver, *Language is Sermonic*, ed. Richard L. Johannesen, Rennard Strickland, and Ralph T. Eubanks (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State UP, 1970), p. 216. Subsequent references are by “Sermonic” and page number, in parentheses, following the quotation.

<sup>45</sup> Pierre Bourdieu and Jean-Claude Passeron, *Reproduction in Education, Society and Culture*, trans. R. Nice, 2<sup>nd</sup> English ed. (London: SAGE Publications, 1990), p. 11. Bourdieu discusses this concept more fully in Book II, pp. 71-106.

<sup>46</sup> Richard Weaver, *The Southern Tradition at Bay* (New Rochelle: Arlington House, 1968), p. 36. Weaver goes on, mistakenly I believe, to defend “exclusive minorities of the wise and good who will bear responsibility and enjoy prestige.” His view of hierarchy is that “[o]ut of the natural reverence for intellect and virtue there arises an impulse to segregation, which broadly results in coarser natures, that is, those of duller mental and moral sensibility, being lodged at the bottom and those of more refined at the top” (pp. 36-37).

Weaver's "sorting out" and Bourdieu's exchange of "capital" raise issues of unequal resources, issues of power and solidarity. Power is measured by the ability to control meaning or the prevailing representation of the world. Solidarity relies on mutual dependence and communities with common interests. The related issues of production and reception, discussed in detail below, can be analysed as two sides of the same process, involving competing ideologies. But the impurity of all these forces and the ongoing nature of the process makes communication especially complex.

### **The Role of Narrative**

In the discussion that follows, narrative is given a special role to play in the analysis of complex communication. I describe the role of narrative in my case study and its implications for my analytical framework. The case study at the centre of my research can be classified as belonging not only to "real life" but also to that subset which can be called "everyday" events. It is here that the majority of human interaction takes place, much of it complex and inadequately subjected to critical analysis. One of the reasons these complexities allude critical attention is that we tend to overlook the narrative accounts people give of their experiences. But narrative analysis, with its focus on the stories people tell, reveals sites of intense activity and can uncover many of the assumptions and beliefs we hold that would otherwise go unnoticed. We can determine, for example, whose voice has the primary role, who is allowed to speak, who you have to be to get the message, what focalization<sup>47</sup> takes place, how transformations occur, and what constitutes an event.

Narrative analysis, then, makes it possible to articulate the world view which precedes our telling of stories and to distinguish the variety of roles we perform on a daily

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<sup>47</sup> My use of this term agrees with Michael Toolan's notion of it as an "inescapable adoption of a (limited) perspective in narrative, a viewpoint from which things are seen, felt, understood, assessed." Toolan also suggests that "orientation" as a synonym for focalization may offer a "wider, less visual" meaning; however, he is reluctant to add another variant to the discussion. Toolan credits Genette (1980) with the term "focalization" and also acknowledges his debt to Bal (1985). See Michael J. Toolan, *Narrative: A Critical Linguistic Introduction* (London: Routledge, 1988), p. 68. Subsequent references are by "Toolan" and page number, in parentheses, following the quotation.



basis. As my analytical framework makes clear, our roles involve competing concerns and constant tensions, which we attempt to resolve primarily through the use of our language resources. The resulting evidence points to a middle space between text and context – a space where considerable rhetorical action takes place without anyone’s acknowledgment of the existence of this action, let alone of its importance. Somewhere in this space relationships of power and ideology are acted out. Using tools from critical discourse analysis and conversational analysis we can, for example, mark such things as the language of compliance and the strategies of resistance. This analysis, in turn, makes it possible to distinguish stories of production and stories of reception.

Hodge and Kress distinguish between “production regimes” and “reception regimes” to help demonstrate the importance of the “social dimension in understanding language structures and processes” (Semiotics 4,1). They assert that the producer of a message “relies on its recipients for it to function as intended.” It is not just that recipients have to *exist* for the message to have meaning; recipients must have a knowledge of “second-level” messages that tell them how to read the message. This higher level control mechanism Hodge and Kress call a “logonomic system,” which relies on and expresses an ideology, and prescribes behaviour. “Logonomic systems prescribe social semiotic behaviours at points of production and reception, so that we can distinguish between *production regimes* (rules constraining production) and *reception regimes* (rules constraining reception)” (Semiotics 4).

Narrative analysis of stories of production and stories of reception reveals various levels of social relationships and how, through rhetorical strategies, these levels are brought together into a unified whole that we all seem to need in order to articulate our life story. As Catherine Kohler Riessman asserts, the purpose of narrative analysis is “to see how respondents in interviews impose order on the flow of experience to make sense of events and actions in their lives. . . . Human agency and imagination determine what gets included

and excluded in narrativization, how events are plotted, and what they are supposed to mean. Individuals construct past events and actions in personal narratives to claim identities and construct lives” (2). In other words, narrative analysis is ideal for revealing relationships among discourse, the self and social structures – the three terms arising from the three communities encompassed by my analytical framework. Narrative analysis gives rise to my framework and the analysis then builds on the framework to provide further insights.

By using my interview questions as a guide – rather than as a way of imposing a rigid structure on the interview – I was able to allow the participants to control the length and nature of their responses. The results, as both Yin and Mishler would predict, are a series of narratives that contain specific episodes. After listening to tape recordings of the interviews and reading the transcripts of the interviews over and over again, I marked the boundaries of these episodes using tools from conversational analysis and critical discourse analysis, tools that expose the functions of particular patterns and parts of speech. This multi-layered approach recognizes a variety of levels of meaning and is sensitive to many of the features encompassed by Burke’s notion of dramatism and the possibilities of motive. Perhaps of most importance, this approach does not resort to rigid interpretations that, by their very nature, deny the inherent ambiguity of language and the multiplicity of meaning any analysis proposes to reveal.

The results of my analysis bring to the fore numerous features of the narratives: of most interest are those passages that reveal tensions and ambiguities and point to a variety of voices in a single text. The tensions reveal incompatibilities faced by the participants and are accompanied by strategies to resolve these incompatibilities. I was able to focus not just on what was said in official texts, but on how the participants talked about their own talk. The result of finding connections through my various approaches creates a context that exposes issues of power and struggles with competing desires. Put together, these

analytical tools demonstrate the ongoing nature of this process and its importance for our very survival in a complex world.

The complexity of our society can be demonstrated in the example of the case study bank. Canadian banks are large organizations that play a central role in our society, financing businesses, governments, and individuals, creating and enforcing rules and systems that have a significant impact on most members of our society. Because so many people interact with them and are subjected to their rules, banks also end up defining what is considered successful. The results of my analysis provide support for Cheney's assertion that "*Identity* is a preoccupation of contemporary Western society, and the *management of multiple identities* is a preoccupation of contemporary organizational life" (23). By noting how the interviewees each attempt to tell a complete story, we can make visible Burke's "wavering line" between identification and division – throwing into relief tensions we continually strive to overcome, and thus engaging in what Burke asserts is the basic motive for rhetoric (Rhetoric 45).

In summary, the stories we tell reveal the desire for identification that motivates our strategy for overcoming incompatibilities. Narrative, then, can be seen as the working out of large-scale forces: identification and division reveal grouping and dividing practices, values and distinctions reveal rankings, and more complex issues of power and solidarity reveal distancing practices. Together, bracketing, ranking and distancing across the three communities allow us to describe how we work out ways of acting together – the most social of activities and the purpose of Rhetoric.

The importance of working out ways to act together cannot be overstated. Because we are negotiating what amounts to an ongoing process of coping with the world around us, the stakes are high; there is a very real sense in which we are continually negotiating our survival. Our goal is to cope with the tensions that threaten our desire to act together and to have a consistent, unified life story. Through our stories we continually give impressions

of our selves, impressions we must control to be persuasive. The result is a constantly reconstituting process. For while we may all make use of categories, values, and distinctions, and all partake of the social process imbedded in narrative with its focus on identification and how we constitute our selves, we do not all have the same degree of skill in this process, of literacy. The organizational nature of our society means that the greatest success and rewards will come to those that can manage multiple identities in order to navigate the boundaries between various organizations and between personal identity and organizational identity. Seen this way, organizations function as the context for the social processes involving language and power. Organizations are the marketplace where our resources (MR) become a system of capital that can be exchanged. As Bourdieu says, "The competence adequate to produce sentences that are likely to be understood may be quite inadequate to produce sentences that are likely to be *listened to*, likely to be recognized as *acceptable* in all the situations in which there is occasion to speak." The more our habitus and resources (MR) dispose us toward possession of the dominant discourse, the more we can avail ourselves of the advantages of a system of differences that constitute a "linguistic market." In this way our competence functions as "linguistic capital, producing a *profit of distinction* on the occasion of each social exchange" (L&SP 55).

Not only is it intellectually attractive to arrive at such a theoretical integration, it is also promising for the development of a new way of approaching and understanding communication in an organizational society. By interconnecting these terms in a discussion of strategies of coherence supported by textual resources, we have another way to talk about talk, and a way of collecting that talk so it can be analysed by the concepts. Drawn from various disciplines, the concepts are sensitive to the multiplicity of discourse. As we move from bracketing, through ranking, to distancing, we gain closer and closer views of the complexity of communication. The creation of identity, then, can be seen as the ultimate rhetorical situation. Once we understand the forces at work in the process of

creating identity, we understand the complexities of communication and how it works to create a system with more advantages for some than for others.

### **Preview**

The remainder of the dissertation demonstrates the usefulness of my framework for analysing the kinds of texts that surround us on a daily basis and makes clear how this framework derives from such analysis. Before such a demonstration can take place, however, we need to understand the context for the rhetorical situations I have chosen. Chapter 3 describes the history of banking in Canada and of the case study bank. It reveals the purpose of the key documents I have identified and makes clear the role they play in the work of the bank employees whose interviews are then analysed. Chapter 4 is comprised of the analysis of the transcript of an interview with a bank employee who receives the bank documents and has to accommodate them in her work. Then, in Chapter 5, I conduct a similar analysis on the text of an interview with a producer of these same messages. Having covered issues of reception and production in detail, I provide conclusions in Chapter 6 about what the differences in the two interviews reveal about communication in a complex environment. In a final chapter I reflect on some of the implications of my findings and on the nature of this study itself.

### 3. Banking in Canada: Compromise and Competition

*When I go into a bank I get rattled. The clerks rattle me; the wickets rattle me; the sight of the money rattles me; everything rattles me.*

*The moment I cross the threshold of a bank and attempt to transact business there, I become an irresponsible idiot.*

*I knew this beforehand, but my salary had been raised to fifty dollars a month and I felt that the bank was the only place for it.*

*Stephen Leacock, My Financial Career*

*There is no business so neurotic, fanciful, scared of its own shadow, and downright loony as the money business.*

*Robertson Davies, What's Bred in the Bone*

#### Introduction

Starting in the mid-1990s, one of Canada's six principal chartered banks embarked on a major communications campaign to improve its reputation. Dozens of people and millions of dollars have been committed to the effort. The most senior officers of the bank gave initial endorsement to the initiative and continue to espouse its value. Everyone involved in its production is convinced that the ongoing communications campaign will contribute directly to the bank's primary goal: to increase its share price in the market place.

In many ways language and money have long been linked. Many of our metaphors involve financial terminology. We say that "time is money," and in various ways that people are commodities, and "language is money." We talk of someone's "bottom line," and of "ten-dollar words." Our everyday conversations are filled with references to "interest," "value," "earnings" and "stakes." Rarely do we get the chance to see firsthand an organization that takes this literally – that believes that the language it uses in its various communications can be translated into profits on a balance sheet. The communications

department of one of the largest banks in Canada – a bank employing over 45,000 people – provides rich rewards for those interested in learning more about what happens to rhetorical theory when it is put into practice in a complex environment.

This chapter provides important aspects of the context for the case study which forms the basis of my research. I examine first the social and economic climate for banking in Canada and then the situation of this bank in particular. The climate for this bank was linked to the national scene by the biggest crisis in the bank's history: the collapse of one of the world's largest real estate development companies. This crisis and the ensuing crisis of confidence on the part of the public were major factors in the bank's development of a new communications plan. I then introduce and explore the role of two documents that were central to this plan. The documents also form the basis of the interviews with bank employees. Two interviews were chosen for analysis because of their differing perspectives: one participant was involved in the production of the documents, and continues to develop the communications plan, while the other is a recipient who has to respond to the documents in the course of her work. We can understand the complexities and the challenges facing both the bank and the individuals who comprise it by first looking at the situation outside the organization.

## **Background to the Texts**

### ***Banking in Canada***

From novels to newspapers and from burgeoning business magazines to history lessons, the fickleness of investors and the volatility of the stock market are renowned. Equally well celebrated in Canada is the pressure on banks to be safe havens for the savings and investments of citizens of all economic strata. And Canadians are fortunate to have long enjoyed the peace of mind that comes from knowing our banks are predictable, stable and secure. We may not be entirely satisfied, but most of us consider ourselves well served. We grumble about high service fees, "bankers' hours," record profits and interest rates that

are too low on our savings and too high on our loans; but only the most eccentric of us choose our mattresses over a local savings account. Underpinning our sense of security is a belief that Canadian banks do not “fail.” Over the past few years, however, a number of incidents have shaken our trust and the resulting crisis of confidence has sparked reactions from many audiences.

Responding to these concerns, financial institutions and regulatory agencies have attempted to quell fears by explaining more about their positions and the rules that are in place to protect investors and other customers. Even casual newspaper readers will be familiar with the Office of the Superintendent of Financial Institutions (OSFI), which is both a watchdog to protect customers from ill-advised institutional practices, and a national protector of our financial system as a whole. While these two aims may seem hard to reconcile at times, one aspect of the work of OSFI clearly interests both banks and their customers: that of ensuring the health of the financial system.

Given Canada’s relatively small population, compared with that of the U.S., for example, it is remarkable that we have such large banks. While the U.S. has over 12,000 banks, our “Big Six,” as they are commonly referred to, employ approximately 220,000 people and had 1997 earnings in excess of \$7.5 billion.<sup>48</sup> The banks range in age from 129 to 181 years old. They are also remarkably similar in the eyes of the average citizen and are apt to be chosen for their location as much as for anything else. They, and the scattering of other small Canadian banks that make up our “Schedule A” or “Chartered” banks, are regulated by the Bank Act, administered by OSFI. Perhaps the most significant stipulation of the Bank Act, the one making Canadian banks most distinctively Canadian, is that which strictly limits the size and scope of foreign banks in this country.

As Canadians have learned about protection from foreign control and other rules of banking in Canada, and have at the same time watched events unfold that appear to indicate

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<sup>48</sup> Statistics are taken from bank Web sites and from calls to bank public relations offices.



that our financial institutions are less successful and skilled than they were previously thought to be, public scrutiny and outcry has mounted. The oil and gas crisis of the early 1980s was labeled an exceptional situation which would never be duplicated. It was followed, however, with huge losses in loans to “lesser developed countries” and then by real estate losses that made headlines around the world. We have also witnessed the collapse of the savings and loan institutions in the U.S. and compared it, however fairly, with the decline of trust companies in Canada. The collapse of a large insurance company, Confederation Life, exacerbated these fears and the failure of Barings Bank PLC in Britain spurred speculation that the increased use of much-heralded derivatives in Canada could cause a similar catastrophe here. While making it clear that no assurances could be given, the Superintendent of Financial Institutions attempted to respond and to put the danger from derivatives trading “into perspective.” In a newspaper article he was quoted as saying that losses from real estate have far exceeded losses from derivatives trading.<sup>49</sup> The effect of this statement was to throw yet another spotlight on the enormity of bank losses incurred in a period of time so short as to be memorable for the vast majority of Canadians.

The various problems of Canadian financial institutions have resulted in headline news because, no matter how complex the system or how small the customer, everyone feels the impact of economic decline. Articles in the popular press have speculated that for banks to be caught time and time again, they must be failing to practice diligence in their dealings or else they no longer understand the complexities of their own business.<sup>50</sup> At a time when competition is hailed as the saviour of our economy and touted as the key to future prosperity, banks have an unprecedented communications challenge.

In fact, if every era has its dominant themes, then the greatest movement of our era will almost certainly be the international focus of our society. Driven by economic

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<sup>49</sup> *The Financial Post*, April 8, 1995, p. 13.

<sup>50</sup> See, for example, *The Financial Post*, May 12, 1995, for a summary of financial institution problems and the concern that regulatory agencies are not doing their jobs.

considerations, borders are opening, alliances between former enemies are being formed, and communication is increasing even among countries with contrasting ideologies. The global market place is the market place of businesses of all sizes all over the world. Increased competition and the throwing off of trade restrictions are hailed as positive steps toward a new world order, free of artificial barriers. Banks have to explain to a very interested Canadian audience not only why they are still protected from foreign competition, but also why they appear to be less stable than ever before. On yet another front, they have to watch and respond to a growing effort from other countries to create a global financial services industry, governed by a common set of rules.

Rhetorical theorists, such as Cheney, recognize and discuss the challenges organizations face in managing the multiple messages that must be conveyed to a variety of audiences. Cheney discusses in detail a number of theories for managing organizational communications and points out the need for real life studies to provide examples of these theories in action and to add depth to the entire field of study. The bank provides just such an example.

### ***The Case Study Bank***

At a time when banking is under intense scrutiny and when banks appear to be struggling to keep up with changing complexities, the effort of any bank to communicate with its audiences could provide interesting examples of rhetorical theory in practice. The situation and response of the bank featured in my case study, however, make it an especially fruitful study. It figured prominently in a number of the debacles, playing the lead role in some of the biggest. It fell from favour in the press and perhaps for this reason, along with others, those charged with communications for the bank recognized the need to put resources toward a comprehensive strategy to manage these communications. The bank's responses to the crises varied in nature, sometimes as they tried different techniques, sometimes as they sustained changes in leadership.

During the oil and gas crisis of the early 1980s, the bank suffered losses that are estimated to be equivalent to their total capital base at the time. The then-chairman responded publicly by promising “never again.” The bank spent years working its way out of the debt, diversifying across sectors, and explaining the strategy to ensure his promise would be kept. Like other banks, this bank did suffer further losses, some of them considerable, especially in the highly public collapse of loans to developing countries. But none of these compared to their exposure in the early 1990s when they were again catapulted into the spot light with the collapse of one of the largest real estate development companies. The bank suffered losses of approximately \$1 billion. This time the response was “no comment.” Unfortunately for anyone concerned with the public relations effort of this major organization, the crisis coincided with a change in leadership at the bank. Many found it noteworthy that a promotion to “Chairman” was given to the man who had been responsible in his previous position for one of the worst lending decisions in the bank’s history.

At the time of this lending crisis, the theme of “accountability” had just gained momentum around the bank and in many other organizations and government bodies. The then-chairman was considered ruthless in his efforts to attack complacency and to make the bank more competitive. He railed about “middle management mush” and the need to “relentlessly and unceasingly push toward achieving a performance-driven culture.” Investors were angry about the bank’s heavy losses and employees were reported to be “deeply despondent” over the harsh words and actions of their chairman.

The new chairman made his debut in the *Globe and Mail*, four months after being appointed, by announcing that his bank was moving from a “traditional hierarchy” to an organization driven by “vision and values.” Bank managers would become “coaches” and would “turn the pyramid” to put customers on top: employees would “feel very comfortable” when they could “take charge of the customer and make honest and candid

statements to managers.” There was discussion of “flattened pyramids,” more employee participation, and “restructuring” of activities to make them more efficient and “cost effective.” While the new approach was a welcome relief to many employees, there was considerable skepticism in all audiences. After a year-long search for a new chairman, the incumbent was the obvious favorite of his predecessor, who was making the hiring decision and who appeared to be showing the limits of his belief in accountability. Bank analysts were also not impressed: “reality still has a way to go before catching up with the smart designer image,” and “he’s an organization man, very loyal, but he was definitely a follower.”

The new chairman also took a personal interest in bank communications. Within six weeks of his appointment he fired the vice president of this division. Their disagreement over the handling of the real estate lending crisis was a major factor in the severance. The chairman was anxious to know what plans Public Relations had for giving him a profile in the media and wanted to pursue an aggressive internal communications plan. The vice president and many of his staff, however, feared a tremendous backlash and worried that the “hypocrisy” would be obvious: the chairman had preached performance and accountability and had fired people who did not measure up in his estimation. After the real estate lending crisis, however, “there were craters at the top and no one paid for it.” The internal communications plan, they thought, amounted to “intellectual pornography.”

During a three month period, the new chairman issued five special editions of the internal newsletter. They were called *Looking Ahead*, each dedicated to one of the five “Major Catalysts for Success” (MCS). In these documents, the bank’s goal was

To be the pre-eminent Canadian financial services company.

Its vision was

Winning customer loyalty through service excellence.

It values were

Commitment to Stewardship  
Respect for Every Individual  
Encouragement of Initiative and Creativity  
Excellence in Everything We Do.

And the five Major Catalysts for Success were

Customer Satisfaction.  
People Management.  
Operational Capability.  
Risk Management.  
Sales Effectiveness.

In December 1992 the new chairman wrote to all his “colleagues” inside the bank to explain what he had been doing over the past six months and to announce that approximately 2,500 positions “across all levels of the organization” would be eliminated. He also announced a \$120 million special fund to support those who would be affected. Against the advice of the public relations staff, he decided not to issue a statement to the media. When the news leaked out within hours and made headlines, the chairman expressed surprise that anyone in the bank’s employ would have talked to the press.

In March of 1993, a new executive head of Public Relations was hired. His instructions were to “fix the image problem.” Looking back,<sup>51</sup> he describes the organization in those early days of his employment as “shell shocked” and “hemorrhaging.” At the time of this study, the chairman appeared more inclined to take advice on communications and had agreed to a number of initiatives suggested by the Vice President and his staff. After two years of “stabilizing,” during which the chairman’s profile was decreased as far as possible, a comprehensive communications plan was implemented. The two pivotal

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<sup>51</sup> Conversations with this executive head took place between 1995 and 1997.

documents in the first years of the plan<sup>52</sup> were an internal *Planning for Improved Public Relations* and an extensively circulated public document called *Our Beliefs*. Both publications relied heavily on extensive public opinion polling.

Some of the problems facing the bank, and some of the strategies they might consider, are presented by Cheney in *Rhetoric in an Organizational Society*. Cheney summarizes two problems that challenge most organizations: how to present messages to outsiders while maintaining authority with insiders, and how to appeal to tradition while adapting to meet changing times and circumstances. Consider then what is necessary when over 70% of the members of your “internal” audience are shareholders, when one of your largest clients is also a regulator of your industry, and when your customer list can be divided into categories which often compete with each other, to name just a few of the conflicting demands on the bank’s business and its communications.

### **An Organization Speaks: the Documents**

The two documents produced in the early years of the new communications plan – *Planning for Improved Public Relations* and *Our Beliefs* – were central to the bank’s efforts to provide a unified and credible story about itself to its many audiences. *Planning for Improved Public Relations* is a 16-page document, 8½ x 11 inches, printed on one side only of plain paper, prepared by the executive head of Public Relations and his staff. It was presented for approval to the Executive Committee of the bank, a small group of senior executives who needed to be persuaded that the effort was worthy both of taking to the Board of Directors for endorsement and, perhaps more difficult, of promoting to their managers and staff. The document entitled *Our Beliefs*, however, is an eight-page, professionally printed and bound booklet, using two colours and having a wide distribution. Its artistic borders are half tones of slate or stone and the screened image on both inside

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<sup>52</sup> The communications plan continues to evolve while maintaining its original core beliefs and values. And while these documents are still considered relevant, new documents have also been produced since the time of this study.

covers is of an ancient astronomy tool. These earth and sky images connote both a solid base and soaring aspirations. It was intended for all clients, shareholders, employees and other stakeholders.

An introduction to selected sections of the documents reveals a number of tensions, gaps and problems faced by a complex organization with a central role to play in our society. The sections were chosen for their direct statement of what the bank hoped to accomplish and how it planned to achieve these goals. These goals had implications for the employees who were participants in my research, affecting everything from the development of other documents to the structure of performance reviews. These sections were also chosen for the way in which they reveal both the bank's response to its communications problems and its attempt at redress. We learn about the bank's assessment of its situation and its view of the future.

### ***Planning for Improved Public Relations***

The bank's plan for improved public relations is a rhetorical strategy for dealing with multiple themes and audiences. It has 12 sections, covering the topics of Reputation (what it is, why and how it needs to be managed), Attitudes (survey results, public expectations, key findings), Communications Strategy, Themes and Messages, Implementation (audiences, activities), and Appendices (a selection of the survey results). An orientation to sections nine (Communications Strategy) and ten (Themes and Messages) of *Planning for Improved Public Relations* helps set the stage for the interviews which follow. These sections are interesting in the first instance because of the way in which the authors of the document – those working in Public Relations – speak for the entire organization. Other earlier parts of *Planning for Improved Public Relations* attempt more explicitly to establish the credibility and authority of the department<sup>53</sup> to assume this

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<sup>53</sup> On page 3, for example, a recipe for reputation management is given and followed by the statement "Public Relations has had such a process in place since the Spring of 1993." This date coincides with the hiring of the executive head who oversees this department and who wrote this document. One ingredient in

representative role but even in this short section the appeal to authority is reinforced. The authors do not say, for example, what their department's strategy on behalf of the bank will be, but rather that the "[Bank's] communications strategy" is the topic, that all bank employees are "our employees," and further that all of the recommended actions are steps that "we" must take.

These sections begin, then, with Public Relations having attached itself to the top of the hierarchy and having developed an institution-wide statement that sets out actions for the organization as a whole. The authors are also comfortable asserting that this strategy will be a long lasting one – "for the next three to five years" and "Building trust takes time and builds slowly. After several years. . . ." The authors also establish the institution's values by asserting that the strategy "will be based on three key themes: relevance, fairness and trust." Burke, drawing on Aristotle's discussion of topics and commonplaces, argues that such lists are really "a quick survey of opinion," "of the things that people generally consider persuasive"(Rhetoric 56). In the interviews – which begin by discussing these documents – we will learn more about the role of opinion and expectations and the intricate connections between the production and reception of the statements made in this document.

Public Relations, on behalf of the bank, is anxious to "induce cooperation" among its stakeholders. In fact, the plan for improved public relations is a responsive one: responsive to concerns of incompetence in the financial services industry, to public opinion

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the recipe for success is the integration of all communications activities, "including public relations programs, donations activities, sponsorships and media relations, government relations, investor relations, speeches and advertising." This reinforces the appropriateness of a reorganization of responsibilities, also in the Spring of 1993, which resulted in Public Relations taking over all of these areas. This is also the message of a later section: "All external messages to our various publics must be consistent with our strategy. This includes media relations, government relations, relations with various special interest groups, investor relations, speeches, special events and advertising" (p. 11). The earlier part of the document also states, "It follows then that we must have a detailed understanding of how banks are performing in the eyes of the public." Having made the case for public opinion polling, the document goes on to describe in the next section all the ways in which Public Relations has gathered public opinion and to give the results of these efforts.



rating this bank's reputation below that of their competitors, to the bank's poor share performance, and to their employees' growing disgruntlement. To address these concerns, "relevance, fairness and trust" are identified as safe places to take members of all these audiences – places where most people are likely to agree. As Burke demonstrates repeatedly throughout his work, such words function as the symbolic means of ideological identification that can both create cohesion within a community and maintain differences or divisions between communities (Rhetoric 44).

The overwhelming emphasis in *Planning for Improved Public Relations* is on creating unity within and among the various audiences of the bank. The "phased approach" begins with an emphasis on doing things "that are relevant in the eyes of our employees and the public." The second phase, that of building "trust," will take "several years of doing the right things and getting the right results." Only then will the third stage be achieved. This final stage is characterized by "a much closer alignment between [the Bank's] behavior and the public's expectations." Because there is so much work to do in bringing together the various members of the bank's audiences, very little emphasis is given at this time to asking bank employees or shareholders expressly to join together to fight a common enemy. When the ultimate objective of creating identification is achieved, the stage will be set for more aggressive appeals to all audiences to band together to conquer their counterparts at other Canadian banks or, as becomes clear in the interviews, to meet the threat of foreign competition. In the meantime, *Planning for Improved Public Relations* makes a comparison of this bank's ratings to those of the other major Canadian banks in an early part of the document<sup>54</sup> but stays focussed on the need for "communication, dialogue and

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<sup>54</sup> A comparison is given for "overall public favorability toward banks in October, 1993 and October, 1994." The numbers are as follows:

	Most Positive		Most Negative	
	'93	'94	'93	'94
Competitor A	27	26	12	10
Competitor B	15	14	10	12
This Bank	14	16	13	13

action” that will allow the bank to “understand public expectations and the public [to] understand the motives behind our behavior.”

Achieving success in reaching the third stage of the plan for improved public relations will not only be good for the bank but for society as well. This argument is expressly stated with the authority of public opinion behind it: “There is a strong belief that to the extent we are good at our business (supporting economic growth, small business, helping individuals succeed etc.) the entire community will benefit.” This appeal to a higher cause is also designed to persuade: while employees, shareholders, customers and the community at large must approve of the messages in this document, the first task of the authors is to get approval from senior management and the board of directors. Without the support of this primary audience, the strategy would never be revealed to the other audiences. The argument that “what is good for the bank is good for society” reinforces the appropriateness of the life work of this primary audience. They will also be rewarded further for following the recommendations and gaining the trust of Canadians in that they will have “redefined banking,” thereby showing leadership in their field on a national level.

The argument that “what is good for the bank is good for society” also functions as a maxim or a general statement about the nature of things. In addition to citing the research, making the statement explicitly as described above, and creating a catalogue of complementary themes and messages, the document also states that “there is an increasingly blurred distinction between customer service and public service.” What follows is an attempt to turn the maxim into an axiom:

“This [the bank’s service to the community] can be expressed in a simple formula:

$$\text{Customer Service} + \text{Public Service} = \text{Success}”$$

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Competitor C	10	8	9	8
Competitor D	9	10	11	10
Competitor E	8	11	9	5

The accompanying discussion of these results can only be described as gentle: “In general, customers tend to rate their own bank highest” and “It is also worth noting that [this bank’s] negative rating is quite high in proportion to its positive rating.”

Perelman points out that axioms are not topics of debate, and that anyone who does need to justify a choice of axiom should, as Aristotle said, resort to argumentation. “The aim of argumentation is not to deduce consequences from given premises; it is rather to elicit or increase the adherence of the members of an audience to theses that are presented for their consent”(Perelman 9). While the entire plan for improved public relations is a form of argumentation, the expression of a key premiss as an axiom serves to give the premiss the force of something which is not debatable. This strategy of persuasion also indicates the importance of this point in the document. Since Public Relations rarely deals directly with customers, “[C]ustomer service” will only improve with the cooperation of all the business units of the bank. Therefore, the plan for improved public relations will only be successful if Public Relations is able to negotiate the implementation of better customer service. This is also the message implied in an understated way in the caveat “We must be careful that as we execute the communications strategy, our messages do not get ahead of reality or we risk losing credibility” and in the theme “we are supporting and reinforcing hopes and visions of our customers.”

Serving customers by “supporting and reinforcing hopes” is just one of a number of themes that are recommended in section ten under the heading of “Stage One: Relevance and Fairness.” The section is comprised of a catalogue of themes and messages for stage one and the rewards that will accrue when “Stage Two: Building Trust” has been reached. A comparison of the themes and messages with the results of a public opinion poll shows the selectiveness of the plan for improved public relations. When asked what their priorities would be if they were running a bank, the respondents ranked “Open and Honest” at the top with 64% giving it the highest rating and “Flexible/Large borrowers” at the bottom with only 10% giving it the highest rating and 7% giving it the rating of “No Priority.”<sup>55</sup>

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<sup>55</sup> The results are available in Appendix C of the full “Planning for Improved Public Relations.” For confidentiality reasons, this document has been held back. Anyone wishing access to it, or any other document referred to in the study, is urged to contact the author. Documents will be released for research purposes only under strict conditions governing their use.

Not surprising then is the recommendation for the messages “we wish to be responsible and accountable” and “we are accessible.” The messages “we are working to help small business and young people” and “we are supporting and reinforcing hopes and visions of our customers” also correspond to highly rated “priorities.” Rated even higher than the latter two messages, however, is “Paying Fair Share/Taxes,” which is not mentioned in any way in the document.<sup>56</sup> Covering the overall concerns expressed by those surveyed are the messages “we are changing” and “the economy and the marketplace are changing rapidly and we are supporting that change.”

The rewards of adopting the suggested themes and messages are clearly stated: the bank will be able to show how it has “changed,” “to show proof of results,” hopes and visions will have become “reality” and the bank will be “much better known and understood.” The public warmth toward the bank is expressed metaphorically: “we [will] have melted away the block of ice that today surrounds our image in the eyes of many.” Less obvious, perhaps, is the offensive nature of the strategy. If the bank is successful it will ward off much more threatening actions: those of major regulators who could change the privileged conditions under which all Canadian banks operate.

Once *Planning for Improved Public Relations* received approval from the Senior Executive and Board of Directors, the next step was to create a document translating this strategy into messages suitable for all the bank’s audiences. An analysis of the central theme of this public document – the bank’s statement of values (see below) – reveals important aspects of the context facing the participants in my research. As noted previously, one participant is responsible for producing the value statement; the other has to work with and around it.

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<sup>56</sup> Except perhaps indirectly in the statement “In some cases, we may choose not to satisfy a particular group.” (p.2)

## ***Our Beliefs***

This document is comprised of a message from the chairman, brief statements of goals and vision, the value statement, and a listing and explanation of the bank's commitments to each of its four main audiences (customers, employees, the community, shareholders). Also included are an addendum that recognizes that certain companies in the bank group will have additional statements, and an endorsement from the Board of Directors.

As the interviews will demonstrate, the value statement is central to the issue of managing multiple identities. Consider the following quotation:

<p style="text-align: center;"><b>Our Values</b> Commitment to Stewardship Respect for Every Individual Encouragement of Initiative and Creativity Excellence in Everything We Do</p> <p>Our four values are the constant in a changing world. They set the standards for our conduct at [Bank] and provide guidance in our day-to-day decisions. With our employees' unwavering commitment to the values, individually and collectively, we will build higher levels of trust among our stakeholders and preserve our reputation, one of our most valuable assets.</p>
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The above statement forms the central theme of *Our Beliefs*, the bank's message to its "employees and the public" regarding "the core values and commitments that serve as a foundation for business activities." The very existence of such a statement – Our Values – immediately strikes a reader. It is an invitation to discover something that is usually considered internal, often unconsciously held, something that is personal and of great importance. The sharing of such "valuable" information creates a bond between the organization distributing the message and those who read it, find themselves included, and are asked to confirm it by agreeing that it describes the principles by which they live.

Cheney calls on Burke's metaphor of "constitution" as a starting point for researchers who want to find out what an organization "perceives itself to be – what it believes its truly important facets are."<sup>57</sup> The bank's statement of values is just such an authoritative text. It is put forward as "unanimously endorsed" by the Board of Directors and as the foundation of one of the bank's "most valuable assets." Furthermore, if we think of "constitution" as synonymous with "charter," we suddenly illuminate the underlying sacred nature of Canada's "chartered" banks, a condition which, as Cheney demonstrates, complicates the business of managing multiple identities, interests and positions. Nowhere does the sacred nature of banking become more obvious than in its relationship with the general public.

To manage its relationship with the public the bank has to emphasize its stability and permanence. Regardless of how well or how poorly the bank performs, Canadians want first to know that their deposits will always be there when they want them. The architecture of banks dominates the skylines of our large cities and is characterized by massive, solid features in traditional branches everywhere. The features of their rhetoric are similarly constructed. Towering promises are combined with conservative colours and solid, compact graphic presentations of their logos. And the language of their messages reinforces this image: "Our four values are the constant in a changing world." They promise to "build higher levels of trust . . . and preserve our reputation." The value given most prominence by its position in the list is "Commitment To Stewardship" which is further described as the bank's "primary responsibility . . . the security and care of assets entrusted" to them.

Shareholders are also concerned about stewardship; however, they are more inclined to take for granted the stability of banks and demand to see profitability, a

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<sup>57</sup> Kenneth Burke, *A Grammar of Motives* (1945:rpt., Berkeley: U of California P, 1969), p. 338.

condition directly proportional to the amount of risk taken. Shareholder interests are represented in the description of stewardship by the further promise to “create value.”

The introduction to *Our Beliefs* indicates that it is “aimed at giving everyone with an interest in [the bank] . . . a clear sense of who we are and what we stand for.” It is also designed “to provide guidance to all employees.” While the value of “Respect For Every Individual” could apply to audiences external to the bank – and indeed they are explicitly included – the elaboration of this value clearly indicates that the intended audience is that of employees. “We value diversity, recognizing that by bringing together our unique experiences and strengths as members of a team, we enrich our environment in the workplace and the community.”

The use of the words “our” and “we” signal the management of multiple identities. In the opening paragraph the corporate voice speaks of “our employees’ unwavering commitment” so that “we will build higher levels of trust.” And when discussing “Commitment To Stewardship,” “we expect all employees to honor that trust.” This is also the most persuasive voice, the voice of the priesthood, asking for devotion, sacrifice and faith.

As the document progresses, however, the interests of the corporation and those of the employees merge. Under “Respect For Every Individual,” “our unique experiences and strengths as members of a team” is an attempt to be inclusive. “Team” indicates a relative lack of hierarchy, a sense of mutual purpose. From there we are taken to “Encouragement Of Initiative And Creativity,” which is elaborated on with a skillful attempt at accommodation. The goals of the individual and the corporation are seen as synonymous. “Achieving personal and corporate growth requires a great willingness to recognize new possibilities.” In these few short sentences, Burke’s expanded classical view centered on his notion of “consubstantiality” is exemplified. Burke explains:

A is not identical with his colleague, B. But insofar as their interests are joined, A is *identified* with B. Or he may *identify himself* with B even when their interests are not joined, if he assumes that they are, or is persuaded to believe so. Here are the ambiguities of substance. In being identified with B, A is 'substantially one' with a person other than himself. Yet at the same time he remains unique, an individual locus of motives. (Rhetoric 20-21)

The bank's employees have "unique experiences" but at the same time "personal and corporate growth" are "substantially one," making the bank and its employees consubstantial.

This section of the bank document ends with the value of "Excellence in Everything We Do." "The greatest challenge before us is achieving our vision of excellence. We have an uncompromising determination to be the very best in everything we do." Any distinctions between levels of management and employees, between the corporation and individuals are now fully swept away. The values have become values held by one entity – the bank.

With the seemingly simple statement of four values, the bank has invoked God-terms with their accompanying demands for sacrifice, acknowledged the strength of individual readers, asserted the commonality of their interests, and promised great rewards in return for loyalty to the organization. In addition to its effective creation of consubstantiality among members of quite diverse audiences, the language used in reaching this position – "great willingness," "greatest challenge," "uncompromising determination," "the very best in everything," holds out the promise of achieving success in a great quest. The underlying narrative is called forth by previous difficulties and conflicts; it is an attempt to respond with explanations and promises of future improvements.

Also embedded in this document are many links to broader campaigns and rhetorical strategies. For example, in the statement "We value diversity" is a theme that has since become the focus of a major public relations effort within the bank. In a speech to a business group in a major Canadian city the chairman spoke of "wasting assets" by wasting "the diversity of . . . human intellectual capital." He asserted that "diversity, and how we



manage it, is a competitive advantage” for the bank, one that brings value to businesses and economies. Employees were given condensed versions of the speech and asked to participate in a sophisticated campaign called *Profiting from our Differences*. “Team leaders” were given handbooks to help them with the task. Included were statistics on the numbers of women and visible minorities, information on a “Champions of Diversity Award,” media relations hints, ideas on ways to share successes with others in the bank and suggestions for events. This campaign reinforced the notion of drawing employees together into one group synonymous with the bank.

### **An Organization Speaks: the People**

The above orientation to the two documents central to the bank’s communications plan indicates the complexity of the bank’s situation. The documents were part of a strategy to manage multiple identities. They responded to previous problems and attempted to provide solutions. With all this activity taking place in the documents, it was reasonable to assume that bank employees would have a great deal to say about them. This belief – in the importance of what people have to say about their interaction with the messages of the organization which claims so much of their time – drives the emphasis my research gives to analysing the texts of interviews with two employees.

## 4. The Case – Part I – Reception

*The presence and circulation of a representation (taught by preachers, educators, and popularizers as the key to socioeconomic advancement) tells us nothing about what it is for its users. We must first analyze its manipulation by users who are not its makers. Only then can we gauge the difference or similarity between the production of the image and the secondary production hidden in the process of its utilization.*

*Michel de Certeau, The Practice of Everyday Life*

### Introduction

The historical context provided by Chapter 3 shows the enormous complexity facing those who work in the Canadian banking industry. To understand how meaning is negotiated – and discourse is constructed – in complex organizations it is instructive to examine the bank’s attempts to manage its multiple identities and create enough coherence<sup>58</sup> in its documents to present itself as a unified entity. We also need to look more closely at the way individual participants in organizations negotiate meaning and attempt to create and maintain an identity for themselves. To help demonstrate the importance of discourse as a process of social negotiation and interaction, Hodge and Kress distinguish between “production regimes” and “reception regimes”.<sup>59</sup>

This chapter provides an analysis of the text of an interview with someone who receives the bank documents and has to accommodate them in her work. The discussion begins with an overview of production and reception and the related issues of power and solidarity. The analytic framework developed in Chapter 2 provides a structure for the

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<sup>58</sup> As Fairclough emphasizes, coherence is created, not by the texts themselves, but by readers/listeners who supply missing information to link parts of a document or a document to their experience of the world. See Chapter 2 for a more detailed discussion of this topic. My use of the term here is to emphasize the bank’s effort to take into account what it knows about the differing assumptions of its various audiences and to emphasize the aspects which will have the most chance of satisfying everyone.

<sup>59</sup> See Chapter 2 for a more detailed discussion of this topic.

analysis: relationships among discourse, the self and organizations are revealed using narrative analysis, conversational analysis, and critical discourse analysis.

Production is one of the prerogatives of dominant groups: their way of seeing the world is produced and reproduced in a process of message-making that strives to protect their interests. To control the meaning of messages is to control the prevailing representation of the world. As Hodge and Kress express it, a message is *about* something and “its meaning derives from this representative or mimetic function it performs.” The plane in which this representation of the world occurs they call the “mimetic plane.” But messages are also part of “the social process by which meaning is constructed and exchanged” and this social process occurs on what Hodge and Kress call the “semiotic plane.” In other words, messages in social semiotics are communicated by signs that represent the world on the mimetic plane, and are understood through socially constructed sign systems operating on the semiotic plane – the plane in “which meaning is constructed and exchanged.” “Texts,” concrete material objects comprised of clusters of messages, manifest both planes at once. Texts represent the world – are mimetic – and yet are produced by “discourse,” a social process in the semiotic plane. Discourse is the “site where social forms of organization engage with systems of signs in the production of texts, thus reproducing or changing sets of meanings and values which make up a culture” (Semiotics 5,6).

But the control of dominant groups over the meaning of messages relies on the cooperation of those who receive the messages. For this reason, dominant groups need both to exert power and yet also to sustain relationships of solidarity with those they dominate, and who will have their own interpretation of the world. As producers and receivers with competing visions of the world interact, their incompatibilities give rise to an “ideological complex,” a view of the world filtered through their various interests. This ideological complex is coded as rules which govern the way messages can be produced or

received (Semiotics 4,3). Producers use their dominant positions to ensure the protection of their own interests. Those who are dominated often manage to resist these interests. The points of skirmish between producers and receivers show up as incompatibilities in the texts arising out of social interaction. These incompatibilities represent clashes of ideologies and must be camouflaged if the social system is to be protected.

Texts, then, reveal traces of activity, of ideological complexes or competing visions of the world vying for position. These ideological complexes represent “the social order as simultaneously serving the interests of both dominant and subordinate.” For an ideological complex to operate in this dual way, however, recipients must have the ability to read “second-level” messages, an ability Hodge and Kress attribute to a “logonomic system,” a system that relies on and expresses ideology and that prescribes behaviour. “A logonomic system is a set of rules prescribing the conditions for production and reception of meanings,” rules which “specify who can claim to initiate (produce, communicate) or know (receive, understand) meanings about what topics under what circumstances and with what modalities (how, when, why)” (Semiotics 3,4). The rules are intended to make it appear that the system operates in everyone’s interest, thereby providing a way to overlook contradictions caused by competing visions of the world; but some people have more resources than others to draw upon for this task.

With this discussion, Hodge and Kress echo Foucault’s notion of the relationship between power and discourse. Foucault looks to the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries to find the origin of forms of power exercised through social production and social service. He suggests we should not ask “why certain people want to dominate” but rather “how things work at the level of on-going subjugation, at the level of those continuous and uninterrupted processes which subject our bodies, govern our gestures, dictate our behaviours etc.” He makes visible a system of power that dictates a role for each member of the society and that ensures its own survival through these roles. The system sanctions

certain types of discourse and relationships so that what becomes known as “truth” is that which will further the system: truth is linked “in a circular relation with systems of power which produce and sustain it” – it is a regime (Foucault, P/K 97, 133).

Observing and understanding how a regime of truth operates provides one convenient entry point into a complex rhetorical situation. Yet another point of entry is provided by de Certeau. He states that, “The presence and circulation of a representation (taught by preachers, educators, and popularizers as the key to socioeconomic advancement) tells us nothing about what it is for its users.” He believes, “We must first analyze its manipulation by users who are not its makers. Only then can we gauge the difference or similarity between the production of the image and the secondary production hidden in the process of its utilization” (de Certeau xiii). The hidden production by those in a reception regime demonstrates one way in which production and reception exist in a “duality of structure.”<sup>60</sup> There are elements of production in the process of reception, and production itself is not pure. As we will see in Chapter 5, which provides an analysis of the production of messages, those with the power to represent the world must take into account the receivers of this representation. The secondary production hidden in reception amounts to a survival skill. It is an ability to cope with someone else’s vision of the world by negotiating a meaning for this vision which does not require one to admit being in a dominated position.

Our attempts to create roles for ourselves compatible with our own vision of the world occur, then, despite conflicting pressures. At times these conflicts appear unresolvable – we find ourselves faced with choices, none of which will resolve the conflict we feel. Gregory Bateson’s theory of the “double bind” provides a way to think about this situation.<sup>61</sup> He asserts that “to act or be one end of a pattern of interaction is to propose the

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<sup>60</sup> Giddens’ theory of structuration and his notion of a duality of structure are discussed in more detail in Chapter 2.

<sup>61</sup> Gregory Bateson, *Steps to an Ecology of Mind* (New York: Ballantine, 1972), p. 201. Subsequent references are by “Bateson” and page number, in parentheses, following the quotation.

other end. A *context* is set for a certain class of response. This weaving of contexts and of messages that propose context – but which, like all messages whatsoever, have ‘meaning’ only by virtue of context – is the subject matter of the so-called double bind theory” (Bateson 275-6). Within organizations this double bind can occur at two levels: 1) organizations attempting to manage multiple identities can give mixed messages; 2) even when they do not, a single message can conflict with the values of individual employees. The latter case can be seen, for example, in the provision of rewards to employees who are successful at meeting the goals of the organization. One of these goals is to have loyal employees who follow company directives. But employees who meet this expectation may find themselves operating in such a way as to undermine their personal values. In this context, what organizations view as a reward – recognition for following company directives – may be seen by the employees as a breakdown in their personal values, a kind of “selling out.” Yet to think of one’s self as other than a loyal employee results in a similar internal conflict and this resulting “can’t win” situation constitutes a classic double bind. In other words, as Hodge and Kress would put it, employees operate in an ideological complex which produces contradictions and relies on a logonomic system or set of rules to deflect attention from these contradictions. When employees run out of resources to keep the logonomic system in the forefront, they have to face the contradictions and are apt to experience a double bind.

The discussion of discourse, our sense of self, and social structures provides a foundation for an analysis of the reception aspects of the bank documents. As Hodge and Kress would predict, the responses of those reading documents produced by others who are more powerful reveal a “set of meanings which are constantly involved in the social processes which are appropriate to that institution, and engaged in by significant classes of participant . . . . In these interactions and the texts that they produce, the set of meanings is constantly deployed, and in being deployed is at risk of disruption” (Semiotics 6). In the

analysis that follows in the remainder of this chapter, Taylor,<sup>62</sup> one of the bank's technical writers who receives the *Planning for Improved Public Relations* and *Our Beliefs* documents, talks about the social processes involved in the bank as she attempts to incorporate the bank's messages and directives into her work. The ongoing nature of this process – Hodge and Kress refer to messages as “constantly” involved or deployed – is revealed in the narrative structure of her discourse with its use of characters, its linear record of past events and other narrative features. As she talks about her work, her personal values, and those of the bank, she indicates both compliance – what Hodge and Kress call the deployment of meanings – and resistance or “disruption” of the meanings.

The framework provides structure for the analysis: I look first at the text of Taylor's interview as narrative – as a set of discursive resources spread out in time involving actors and events placed in a location and time sequence, resulting in a transformation. Cohan and Shires define temporality, narrating agency, focalization, and discourse as categories for analysing the re-presentation of the event. Since a narrative is presented in language, it also relies on grammar and the selection of other linguistic resources to make meaning and, like all selection, involves values and choices.

Within Taylor's narrative it is possible to identify episodes – stories with distinct beginnings and endings which can be marked using tools from conversational analysis and critical discourse analysis. Through an analysis of these episodes, we can discover boundaries and categories, ways of grouping and dividing, which are the basis for the strategies Taylor uses to create coherence in the discourse and to maintain her identity. My analysis focusses on traces of activity in the text – places where Taylor's language shows both tensions and her strategies for coping with them. And since none of the resources we

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<sup>62</sup> This is a pseudonym used to ensure confidentiality for the participant. Other identifying features may have been changed. For confidentiality reasons, the full transcript of the interview is held back. Anyone wishing access to it is urged to contact the author. The transcript will be released for research purposes only under strict conditions governing its use. All references to specific newsletters or publications have been changed, always with consideration for maintaining the intention of the original titles. The bold text indicates my remarks, with the interviewee's responses in regular font.

call upon to manage our multiple identities are independent of our views and values, we need also to look at whose story is being told, an analysis which reveals underlying ideology and power structures. Because these power structures involve organizations we are again reminded that our transformations, our ways of creating coherence, are social.

To illuminate the strength of Taylor's conflict, I begin by providing details on aspects of her compliance, followed by a similar review of her resistance. Since it is her resistance which reveals the nature of her crisis, this section is given considerable emphasis; two episodes from the text of her interview are analysed to provide insight into her understanding of an underlying order and to reveal both her general strategies of solving incompatibilities and the discursive tactics which support these strategies. A section entitled "Business is Business" reveals Taylor's underlying ordering principle and the most significant aspect of the symbolic action of the interview: the acceptance of limitations. A concluding section provides a summary of key points, returns to the issues of reception and power, and ends with a discussion of Taylor's ability to effect a "secondary production" – a resource that constitutes an important survival skill.

### **Compliance**

This section provides analyses of one narrative episodes and a number of additional passages where Taylor's explanations demonstrate compliance with the bank. Specifically, this section shows how bracketing, ranking and distancing reveal her strategy for solving incompatibilities. These incompatibilities occur because even when Taylor is able to demonstrate compliance with the bank's messages, she does so in response to concerns that she knows are widely held. Her compliance, then, causes her to present concerns as seeming incompatibilities rather than as actual ones. Each of the three parts can be identified and analysed even though they occur simultaneously. Each episode and explanation reveals a hierarchy that relies on Taylor's perception of boundaries in her selection of entities (bracketing), on the values she gives to entities by placing them in a



particular order (ranking), and on her invitation to us to share her vision of that order (distancing).

### ***Learning By Catastrophe***

One of Taylor's narrative episodes shows that she has been publicly supportive of the bank ever since she started working there. She demonstrates a fault of the bank – that it only learns by catastrophe – by telling a story about a time when the entire computer system of the bank failed and not even the simplest of transactions could take place. The central character in the episode is the personified bank. The bank experiences a process of improvement, a learning process, as it undergoes a transformation. Although, at the time the event occurred, Taylor was in a contract position and had been working for less than a week, she put the best possible face on the problem even to her long time friends as she told them “It’ll be up. It’ll be up.”

Well [the bank] tends to learn by catastrophe. When I first started – I think it may even have been on my first contract, I'd been there maybe five days – the entire system went down at the bank. Everything. You couldn't go to a machine and get money. You couldn't go to a branch and have them tell if you even *had* money with the bank. And it was a simple regression task that went tragically wrong on a long weekend, and they couldn't get it back up because of, you know, various system problems and antiquated systems, and there was no back up. So, the gist of it is that the bank spent untold millions creating the Markham computer centre and the Streetsville computer centre. Both secretly located. I don't know where the hell they are – I just know they are in Streetsville and Markham. The security is intense and they are mirror images of each other. Either one – if one was blown up the other one would be able to continue the entire processes of the bank without missing a beat. It would be completely transparent to everybody outside of the bank and most people within the bank as well. [Yup.] And that was the lesson learned, *that way*.

**I, I don't recall hearing any publicity about that.**

Well, they tried to keep it as quiet as they could, but it got out. And I remember getting phone calls from people – my friends at [another company]. I had just left the branch. My going away party on the Saturday – and it was Thursday and I remember getting calls at home saying “Oh ho, I guess nothing's working!” “It'll be up. It'll be up.” And I can remember calling branches because I was in a head office support role, um, and asking questions and they are like “Nothing's working! We can't do anything for anybody.” And when you think about it, I mean, that's the whole business. Heads rolled. Lots of people lost their jobs. *Loads* of people lost their jobs over that one, rightfully so. Nobody had anticipated this need, um, and somebody – [name's] predecessor, [name,] whom I understand was brought in to do this – to get these centres up. And out of the three – good, fast and cheap – they didn't take the cheap. Cheap was taken off the list in terms of creating these centres. So (Transcript #1, 11-12).

The episode is distinguishable by its form as an example: Taylor locates it at a particular time in the past – “When I first started” – and identifies the event – “the entire system went down at the bank” – which supports her assertion that the bank, the main actor in the story, “tends to learn by catastrophe.” She exits from the story for the first time when she gives a summary that brings her back to her entrance statement: “And that was the lesson learned, *that way*.” My comment serves as encouragement for her to continue the episode by providing more details. She again exits from the story with a final “So,” indicating that she has now summarized the situation, proved her point and is about to make a topic shift.

To understand Taylor’s narrative we can mark the text at points of tension or ambiguity and analyse her method of solving incompatibilities which arise at these points. Taylor’s strategy of bracketing, ranking and distancing relies on the placement of boundaries and categories and on the social order that establishes and preserves them. All three parts of the strategy allow for the transformation of meaning by definition. To define – derived from the Latin word for boundary – is to change the boundaries. In other words, depending on how we bracket, rank or distance an entity or event we allow it to be seen in a different way. For example, as we will see in detail in the next section, Taylor’s use of the subject pronoun “you” attempts to group together, at different times, bank employees who were fired, those who survived the ordeal, speaker, listener, and people in general. Brackets are shifted, repositioned as necessary, to reflect a new stance. In each episode, Taylor’s bracketing, ranking and distancing strategy can be viewed on two levels – a macro level of narrative or the story as a whole, and a micro level of grammar within her sentence structure. At the level of narrative she defines processes of improvement or deterioration, distinguishes characters and, of course, acts as a narrator or makes use of one.

As discussed in Chapter 2, although bracketing, ranking and distancing occur simultaneously, it is possible to view them as separate components for the purpose of

analysis. Bracketing implies separate entities – items carved out of their contexts – which are brought together because they fall within certain limits. So although they are separate, the entities within a bracket support one another and share similarities. The emphasis on similarities leaves open the possibility of downplaying the separateness of entities within the bracket and treating the group as one entity. The way we bracket things is neither given nor arbitrary: it is social.

### *Narrative Resources for Bracketing*

In this episode, Taylor's bracketing practice can be seen in two distinct ways. First she selects an incident she witnessed personally to exemplify her opinion, and she groups this incident with other crises. Second, within the episode itself, Taylor uses direct quotations to distinguish and then to separate characters from one another.

In the first indication of her bracketing practice, Taylor selects an incident and, at the same time, introduces the story with a sentence which functions as a **label**: "Well [the bank] tends to learn by catastrophe." Her introduction identifies the bank's story as a tale of crisis – the bank experiences catastrophes – but also alludes to a process of improvement – learning occurs. Taylor then divides the story into two groupings, one which describes the catastrophe while the other provides the remedy. She describes the catastrophe in such terms as "the entire system went down," "tragically wrong," "couldn't get it back up," "various system problems," "antiquated systems," and "no back up." She makes the transition to remedy with the phrase "So, the gist of it is." "So" indicates that she is summarizing the situation and getting ready to leave this topic, and "gist" indicates that she is selecting what she believes is the essence of the situation. Significantly – it demonstrates her compliance – Taylor groups the essence of the bank's situation with the remedy. As she describes the remedy she talks about the new computer centres in terms of "untold millions," "secretly located," "security is intense," "mirror images of each other," "without missing a beat," and "completely transparent." These terms, which normally have negative

connotations, are taken as positive by Taylor. The bank has taken steps, it has hired a helper, someone who “was brought in to do this – to get these centres up.” Her conclusion “And that was the lesson learned,” reinforces the transition to remedy – or “lesson learned” – via catastrophe, which she summarizes as “*that way*.”

Taylor’s second use of narrative resources in her bracketing strategy – her use of **direct quotations** to distinguish the characters – groups the characters with the processes she has identified. There are those outside the bank, friends at a competing financial institution who gloat: “Oh ho, I guess nothing’s working!” Taylor may call them friends but what we have been referring to as her bracketing practice indicates that they are her opponents now. They support the bank’s process of deterioration while she speaks reassuringly for its improvement: “It’ll be up. It’ll be up.” Other bank employees at the branches are grouped together. They are powerless to help but have shared concerns as they confirm that “Nothing’s working! We can’t do anything for anybody.” The voice Taylor gives to all these characters not only separates them from each other, it brackets them together and makes them distinct from another group whose voice we do not hear. Those deemed responsible for the problem are now former bank employees: “Heads rolled. Lots of people lost their jobs. *Loads* of people lost their jobs over that one, rightfully so.”

### *Ranking and Distancing*

When we apply values to our bracketing practices, we engage in ranking. Our values cause us to differentiate entities, to make distinctions between things on a positive/negative scale. The above examples of bracketing also reveal Taylor’s ranking strategy. At the level of narrative, for example, Taylor’s grouping of this catastrophe, which has a positive outcome, with the others we have discussed, gives the impression that the bank has learned from other crises. By choosing this example she can say something positive about the bank’s problems, many of which occur on an enormous scale.<sup>63</sup> In this

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<sup>63</sup> See Chapter 3 for a discussion of some of the bank’s biggest crises.

narrative episode, the bank undergoes a transformation: it moves from the crisis position it was in when it had “various system problems and antiquated systems, and there was no back up” to its present indestructible position indicated by her use of hyperbole – “if one was blown up” – to show that the bank is now prepared for even the most dramatic of situations.

Taylor’s use of direct quotations also reveals her ranking practice at the level of narrative. Her position is that of someone who can speak reassuringly for the bank, from the top of the hierarchy or “head”: “I was in a head office support role.” Those in the “branches” or the lower appendages are still part of the organization but they can only express their concern. Those who jeer are ranked lower yet – they are completely outside the organization – while those whose “heads rolled” are “disembodied” and lack the ability to speak at all.

We can also see Taylor’s ranking practices at the grammatical level. Her terms carry values, which are the hallmark of ranking. Those terms she groups with the crisis position are negative: the system had “problems” was “antiquated,” and “went down.” It was not possible to “get it back up,” things went “tragically wrong,” and there was “no back up.” From the context we know that spending “untold millions,” locating the new computer centres “secretly,” giving them “intense” security, and making them “mirror images of each other” are positive attributes. Instead of indicating excess and redundancy, these terms indicate a process of improvement. They constitute the remedy that allows for the pursuit of perfection, of continuation of the bank’s processes, indicated by her use of “without missing a beat,” and “completely transparent.”

Taylor’s bracketing and ranking practices also tell us something about her distancing practices and, consequently, about her social world. When we use distancing as a strategy we rely on a widening or narrowing of perceived gaps between entities. From the above examples we can draw conclusions about who is included in groups – bracketed –

with her and who is not. Her voice is grouped with the bank and divided from other employees and outsiders. And we can learn more about how she ranks those she does include. Her voice is at the top or “head” of the hierarchy, other bank employees are further down in the “branches,” and those unable to speak at all are lower yet. Taylor’s bracketing and ranking portray a social world in which she – even as a very new and junior employee – congregates with the bank and segregates herself from those who do not share the bank’s goals. In other words, the grouping and dividing practices of bracketing, with the application of values which is ranking, reveal the distancing strategy of congregating and segregating. All three resources are effective precisely because they are ambiguous themselves – they divide and create resemblance simultaneously. They make it possible for us to talk about the way in which we camouflage incompatibilities. Specifically, in this episode, Taylor’s bracketing, ranking and distancing strategy portrays the central character – the personified bank – as the hero of the story, as the character responsible for the remedy and worthy of her support. At the same time her strategy camouflages the incompatibility inherent in her situation, namely that she works for an organization which experiences catastrophes and that she sides with this organization against the position of her friends.

We can now look in more detail at what Taylor’s bracketing and ranking practices tell us about distancing – her view of the social order underlying her attempts to solve the incompatibilities in her discourse. Taylor’s grouping of characters with “head” office at the top of the hierarchy and her positive ranking of the bank’s actions – she agrees with the decision to fire those responsible for the problem – shows her close identification or solidarity with the bank. As Burke points out, hierarchy unifies its members in the perfection of the ideal while it divides them by creating separate classes with different modes of life. Because these modes of life are different from one another they have an aura

of mystery around them. Mystery preserves the hierarchy by making the differences seem desirable, thereby encoding obedience (Rhetoric 122, 141, 176-180).

We can see the effect of mystery at work in this episode as Taylor talks further about the bank's actions. She tells us that the bank spent "untold millions" on two "secretly located" computing centres. The centres are "mirror images of each other" and can function to replace each other "without missing a beat" and without anyone outside and most of those inside the bank knowing the changeover has occurred. This time Taylor's hierarchy of values is based on mystery – she honours the secretive aspects of the bank's actions by endowing them with an aura of power. She ranks the possible solutions as "good, fast and cheap" and says that "Cheap was taken off the list." Spending "untold millions" is given as an example of a "lesson learned," a description that indicates her approval. As Burke asserts, we are motivated by a sense of order: "to the extent that a social structure becomes differentiated with privileges to some that are denied to others, there are conditions for a kind of 'built in' pride" (Symbols 69). Taylor's pride is based on a sense of order which indicates that those higher in the bank hierarchy are privileged to make decisions about which they do not have to speak, decisions which are "untold" and "secret."

Taylor also invites her audience to share her distancing practice, to "think about it" and conclude as she does when she says "I mean, that's the whole business. Heads rolled. Lots of people lost their jobs. *Loads* of people lost their jobs over that one, rightfully so." Burke's framework built on the concepts of the negative, hierarchy, perfection, mystery, and the cycle of pollution, purification and redemption is now complete. Those who lost their jobs are endowed with responsibility for the problem. Their firing purifies the bank and allows it to recover, literally to buy back its position at the top of the hierarchy.

But despite the pride she expresses in her work and the support she exhibits for the bank, Taylor also manages to express varying degrees of disapproval. Quite often these

attitudes take the form of a higher level of understanding, of something understood but not always acknowledged in her daily activities, the sort of “second-level” messages to which Hodge and Kress refer.

## Resistance

In the opening, primarily descriptive section of the interview, Taylor reveals pride in her work. She describes her department’s method of setting performance targets as “ideal” and indicates that she works in an environment that fosters cooperation. But this cooperation, she later asserts, is the result of the solidarity she and her colleagues have built on their own. And as the interview progresses, her resistance to the bank’s “reality” – the reality of “big business” – plays a larger role in the narrative. She moves from seemingly flippant comments about “little fiefdoms” and an admission that “sometimes, to be honest, some of the [Major Catalysts for Success (MCSs)] you end up struggling to find things that will fit under them” (Transcript #1, 3, 5) to much more direct criticisms.

Taylor acknowledges the “top down” approach to determining the values set out in the bank documents and the MCSs derived from them:

I feel it is very much top down. Maybe it wasn't. I don't know when these were created or the process that went behind them but that was before I became a full-time employee and was – I won't say privy to them, but deemed important enough – as a contract worker you're not a member really of the organization so you don't, you're not really made to understand these things or given access to them, at least where I was that was not the case. Understandably so. Um, you know, it's top down, that this is what *the bank* says we should do and being part of *the bank* we will do it (Transcript #1, 6-7).

But she resists any impression of domination that this statement might give by adding: “I don't feel like I have any emotion invested in them in the sense that, they are there, um, I kind of operate with my own ethics which are pretty close to the ones that, you know, are listed here, but they take priority over the bank's” (Transcript #1, 7). In this case she brackets her “emotion,” her “ethics” separately from those of the bank and although they are “pretty close” to the ones listed in the bank documents she ranks hers higher: “they take



priority over the bank's." So although Taylor places herself on the same hierarchy with the bank – "this is what *the bank* says we should do and being part of *the bank* we will do it" – her distancing strategy invites us to view her values as superior even though her position of employment is lower than that of those who produced the document.

As Taylor has harsher things to say about times of conflict between the bank's values and her own, she adopts a pattern of telling stories. In one way this absolves her of personal responsibility for the criticism: she appears to let the events speak for themselves. However, she ventures her opinion about the way these events should be interpreted and, as the interview progresses, the conflict she feels becomes more evident. In the remainder of this section, two episodes – which I have entitled "Black Tuesday," and "A Place of One's Own" – provide evidence of the general strategies, the tactics of transformation and the ordering principle underlying Taylor's efforts to create stability for herself.

### ***Black Tuesday***

Nowhere in the interview are conflicting perspectives more clear than in an episode Taylor tells to illustrate how problematic the issue of loyalty can be.

And you know, you want somebody who feels loyalty and feels, you know, some sort of responsibility to the company; however, you know and I know in the real world that is not necessarily the way its going to work. So, and with the layoffs they had "Black Tuesday," where they had the –

**Is that what they call it, "Black Tuesday"?**

That's what I call it.

**Yeah?**

I sat next to two people who weren't there by noon.

**Oh, really?**

Uh huh. Both of whom have found jobs in the bank that are better suited to them; however, it was a – they try to involve people. And unfortunately the word got out that it was going to be on this particular Tuesday and they had lines of cabs waiting in the parking lot to take people home. You got hauled into a room if you were one of the developers who got let go. They took you off the LAN. I mean it's all, you know, it's the same everywhere and there are reasons for it and I understand it.

**So management arranged for cabs to be available in the parking lot [Yes.] to take people home [Yes.] after they were terminated?**

Yes. Basically you were escorted into a room and told you had lost your job. While you were in there your LAN connection was disconnected. You were told to pack up your desk while somebody watched you, you walked to the door, you turned in your pass, you were put in a cab, and away you went and that was it. 240 people in one day through the [name] area. So lots of people I know. It was pretty embarrassing after the fact because you called departments and you wouldn't know if people were there or not. And you sat at your desk waiting for the phone call. If you got called then you knew that that was it. And one of the fellows in my area who got let go, I genuinely liked a lot. He was a super guy. He's now working out West where he wanted to be so in that sense I am happy for him. And he was one of maybe, I think, 12 people that they thought they could find other positions for in the bank. The rest they just cut. Showed them the door. And I don't know, I mean, it's great to criticize but if you can't come up, if you can't come up with a better idea then you keep your mouth shut. But having sat and seen people do that and pack up and leave and people crying in the parking lots, and, you know, for the next few weeks calling departments and finding out people that you've been dealing with for the last eight months are just not there anymore. It's pretty difficult.

**Yeah. Huge impact, even on everyone who is left.**

Well yeah. More, more so on the people who left.

**You bet.**

The packages were fairly – were pretty generous from what I understand. So, I mean, I don't think – you know, that helps. [Right.] But, um, it's not like "Screw you." "After 20 years service, here's the door." "Here's your hat. What's your hurry?" It didn't quite get *that* bad, but it was a very tough day. And somehow I think, you know, you look at the –

**When was that?**

That was almost a year ago now, I think. Yeah. I'm just trying to think when – just before Christmas. It was November, almost a year ago. Um, yeah. It was not good. I don't know a better way to handle it so maybe I can't really offer any criticism of it. I don't know how else you would have done it. However, you know, when every single conference room in the entire building is booked by Vice Presidents for one day, when the word gets out and the numbers are being bandied about, it's very stressful, I find. Horrendously stressful. And now I am at the point where if they let me go tomorrow I will be more than happy to take their money and walk away. [Yeah.] I've got the plan all set out, what I'll do, where I'll go. [Yup.] So, I mean, maybe it's a good thing in that sense that you have, you know, when you get to that point that you have that attitude (Transcript #1, 9-10).

The episode is again bounded by its form as an example. Taylor introduces the event – the firing of 240 people in one day in her department – by giving it the label "Black Tuesday." She begins the story proper when she says: "So, and with the layoffs they had "Black Tuesday," where they had the – ." Her use of the word "so" signals a common

feature of conversational stories which Christine Cheepen and James Monaghan<sup>64</sup> call a “gentle topic ‘drift’ . . . where subtopics arise within a general topic, without disturbing the progress of that topic.” The general topic is the nature of the social contract between the bank and its employees and the drift – marked by “so” – takes us to the subtopic of “Black Tuesday” which Taylor chooses to exemplify her view of this relationship.

The episode could end with Taylor’s first summary of it and her conclusion: “it’s the same everywhere and there are reasons for it and I understand it.” But my reiteration of a few events results in Taylor providing a further elaboration of the details. My response provides an evaluation, an indication that my reaction is compatible with the one she desires me to have, one that agrees with her interpretation of events. “Conversational stories” are “essentially dialogic – that is, they are told, not through one long conversational turn taken by the ‘story-teller,’ but through a series of short turns by both ‘teller’ and ‘audience,’ often with the ‘audience’ providing questions to elicit more information, and sometimes even providing some of the information in the form of guesses or prompts – one part of the story frequently provided by the ‘audience’ being evaluation” (Cheepen 53). My questions are not asked because I did not hear what Taylor says the first time or because I do not believe her. Rather they indicate that I think her words are noteworthy and surprising: “**Is that what they call it, ‘Black Tuesday’?**” and “**Yeah?**” and “**Oh, really?**” And by the time I provide a formulation – “**So management arranged for cabs to be available in the parking lot [Yes.] to take people home [Yes.] after they were terminated?**” – which she punctuates with brief interruptions designed, not to stop me but to encourage me in my turn, Taylor has the evidence she needs, evidence that indicates my evaluation is congruent with her own. As a result she tells the story more adamantly and in more detail. Taylor exits from the expanded episode by reaching a

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<sup>64</sup> Christine Cheepen and James Monaghan. *Spoken English: A Practical Guide* (London: Pinter Press, 1990), p. 57. Subsequent references are by “Cheepen” and page number, in parentheses, following the quotation.

“conclusion” about how the event should be viewed: “So, I mean, maybe it’s a good thing in that sense that you have, you know, when you get to that point that you have that attitude.”

In this key episode, Taylor’s bracketing, ranking and distancing strategy can again be viewed on two levels – the level of narrative or the story as a whole, and the level of grammar within her sentence structure. At the level of narrative Taylor’s bracketing draws on the resources provided by process, characters, and narration. Remembering that bracketing, ranking and distancing occur simultaneously and are part of an ongoing process, we can nevertheless separate out examples of her bracketing practice.

The main characters in the episode are bank employees facing the threat of layoff, those actually let go, and the personified bank. Taylor sums up the story as a possible process of improvement – “maybe it’s a good thing” – for those who learn what the bank is capable of and secretly make plans for what they will do if the bank fires them. But the story is really one of deterioration: the bank loses the commitment of its employees, a large number of employees have lost their jobs, and those employees who kept their jobs suffered horrendous stress. The episode occurs at about the mid-point of the interview and functions as a crisis for Taylor.

### *Narrative Resources for Bracketing*

The **catalogue** of events in the expanded story groups together the steps in a procedure that involves characters in a particular outcome. Taylor selects the details of the firing procedure and groups them in such a way as to emphasize the impact they had on people: “Basically you were escorted into a room and told you had lost your job. While you were in there your LAN connection was disconnected. You were told to pack up your desk while somebody watched you, you walked to the door, you turned in your pass, you were put in a cab, and away you went and that was it. 240 people in one day through the [name] area.” Cohan and Shires would describe this as a combination of “enchaining” events –

placing them in back-to-back succession – and of “embedding” them – one event is inserted into the time of another, as with the case of people cleaning out their desks while supervisors look on (57).

Taylor often fails to separate internal **focalization** from external – to use Michael Toolan’s notion of the terms – and instead groups together everyone who was effected by “Black Tuesday.” Internal focalization occurs when the orientation or perspective in a narration is from inside the setting. External focalization is from an orientation outside the story (Toolan 69). In the expanded story of “Black Tuesday” the first and most frequent use of the pronouns “you” and “your” refer to the 240 people who were fired: “Basically you were escorted into a room and told you had lost your job. While you were in there your LAN connection was disconnected. You were told to pack up your desk while somebody watched you, you walked to the door, you turned in your pass, you were put in a cab, and away you went and that was it.” The next two uses of “you,” however, refer to those who did not get fired: “It was pretty embarrassing after the fact because you called departments and you wouldn’t know if people were there or not.” And the next use of “you” refers to everyone in the department: “And you sat at your desk waiting for the phone call. If you got called then you knew that that was it.” Though Taylor may not always notice her own focalization shifts, they show her managing her own multiple identities – she can empathize in several directions because she has several roles of her own.

Taylor’s **confession** divides her interests from those of the bank. Right at the end of the episode she says “And now I am at the point where if they let me go tomorrow I will be more than happy to take their money and walk away. [Yeah.] I’ve got the plan all set out, what I’ll do, where I’ll go.” In this short passage, the six uses of “I” and one of “me” clearly indicate that Taylor is operating in a very personal space. The bank is separate and

only marginally involved as the “they” which will provide “their money” so Taylor can pursue her private plans.

### *Grammatical Resources for Bracketing*

Taylor uses the grammatical resources provided by labeling, platitudes, modality, and passives as part of her bracketing strategy. The label, “Black Tuesday,” compresses certain aspects of the event and functions as a tactic of transformation – Taylor is literally changing the form of the event by omitting such details as who was responsible and when it occurred. The label groups the events into one day, leaving open the possibility that this day was an aberration in the overall nature of things. **Platitudes** such as “if you can’t come up with a better idea then you keep your mouth shut” and “it’s the same everywhere and there are reasons for it and I understand it” serve to group the bank’s actions with those that are commonplace and divide them from ones that are reprehensible or unnatural. A platitude is a stock phrase that presents a situation as “given” rather than in need of analysis. It functions as a convenient category that circulates through public discourse and puts a situation outside of scrutiny. **Modality** indicates a socially constructed perspective. Taylor’s use of the adverbs and adjectives “unfortunately,” “fairly,” “pretty,” “horrendously,” and the pattern suggested by her multiple uses of “I think,” “I mean,” “would,” and “could,” signal her personal perspective. She groups each event in the story with her opinion of how the event should be viewed. **Passives** consist of a form of the verb “be” followed by the past participle of the verb, they put the object in the grammatical subject position, and they often omit the agent of the action. When Taylor says “you were escorted into a room ... you were told to pack up your desk ... you turned in your pass, you were put in a cab, and away you went” she uses the subject pronoun “you” to group together not only herself but any audience member; and the passive verb form – “were escorted ... were told ... were put in” – makes it clear that the subject, the “you,” is to be viewed as a “pawn,” is coerced, while the “player” or actor tactfully goes unmentioned.

### Ranking and Distancing

The above examples of Taylor's bracketing at the levels of narrative and of grammar can also be analysed for their different ways of ranking, of applying values which give an order to the entities she has placed in brackets. In narratives we give positive value to processes of improvement and negative value to processes of deterioration. In Taylor's narrative, however, her merging of internal and external focalization indicates that she vacillates, that she can at times construct her identity as part of the "in" group – part of the bank which makes the decisions – as well as part of the "out" group – the group which can only sit and wait for its future to be decided by the bank.

Taylor's skill at managing her multiple identities contributes to the significance of her confession. It is so personal compared to her previous statements that it functions as a catharsis, diminishing the tension in such a way that it is hard to imagine how – in the ongoing process of constructing her identity – she will make her way back to identifying with the bank. In other words, by revealing her very personal feelings she gives primacy to that sense of her self that is capable of judging the bank's actions, finding them unacceptable, and making alternative arrangements. Taylor's use of modality also indicates her personal attitudes and is a sign of ranking in that these attitudes are based on values, on the ascription of positive and negative attributes. In this episode, Taylor moves toward her confession as she gradually increases the severity of her assessment of "Black Tuesday": she moves from ranking it as "pretty embarrassing," and "pretty difficult," to "a very tough day," "very stressful," and finally "horrendously stressful." By the end of the episode we come to understand more about the nature of the label "Black Tuesday," which heightens certain aspects of the event while it compacts others. The choice of adjective, "Black," makes an admission of a dark time and ranks this day below other typical days.

The catalogue of events also contributes to the strong, negative impression of the event. The catalogue is a feature of epic stories and it portrays "Black Tuesday" as an

occurrence of great proportions. Taylor indicates how quickly a momentous event occurred: the steps between sitting “at your desk,” being “escorted into a room,” and being “put in a cab” are summed up by “that was it.” She presents the steps of the firing process without commentary or justification, as if they can speak for themselves. Each step occurs in a mechanical, relentless progression where the action is ranked as swift and formalities are ranked as minimal. The use of passives, which omit the doer, contribute to the dehumanizing of the process and, like modality, allow subjective opinions based on the speaker’s or writer’s values to be presented as objective opinions. Add to this Taylor’s use of platitudes – “if you can’t come up with a better idea then you keep your mouth shut” and “it’s the same everywhere and there are reasons for it and I understand it” – and we are left with the impression that the underlying values are widely held and the ordering system applied by the bank is “natural” and widely ascribed to.

As we have seen before, Taylor’s bracketing and ranking practices also tell us something about her distancing practices. For example, use of the label “Black Tuesday” is a seeming act of compliance. After all, it appears to protect the perpetrators by omitting any indication of who is responsible for the events of the day. But the label is so striking in its imagery that it invites further discussion. It is a sign of Taylor’s wit and humour but it points squarely to a dark side of the bank. The significance of the label with its compliance/resistance conflict is further developed in the discussion that follows her use of this label. Taylor points out how close she came to being a victim of “Black Tuesday” when she says that she sat next to two people who were gone by noon. She swings to a positive note by pointing out that both people are now better off for having gone through the experience, that they now have jobs which suit them better. She seems about to criticize the action anyway: “however, it was a” – but stops, as if to correct herself, in mid sentence. “However” starts a conditional clause, indicating that it does not matter who happened to benefit, some other interpretation takes precedence. “However” also functions to combine



messages and when she realizes the incompatibility of the messages she was about to give, she breaks off and reverts to “they try to involve people.” Taylor’s use of the subject pronoun “they” signals that she believes it is obvious she is referring to the executives who make such decisions, a group separate from herself. This contrasts with the many other times she includes herself as part of the bank and uses “we.” But she once again swings back to a negative with the use of “unfortunately” to describe the undesirable way in which the firings were handled. “Unfortunately” indicates high modality and in such a way as to invite an audience to share this perspective. Still her belief in an underlying ordering principle – which will be discussed in detail later in this chapter – allows her to conclude that “it’s the same everywhere and there are reasons for it and I understand it.” These platitudes attempt to bring closure to the competing discourses caused by Taylor’s oscillating identities. The rhythm of the statements linked by “and” gives the impression of nested result clauses. She believes in a natural order that causes this condition everywhere: “it’s the same everywhere” becomes a platitude as a result of “there are reasons for it” and the result of this is that Taylor “understands.”

Taylor oscillates between seeing herself as someone segregated from the bank, someone who could only sit and wait to see what the bank would decide about her fate, and someone congregated with the bank, a member of an organization that had “reasons” for its actions. Her movement between internal and external focalization causes a merging of highly orientational perspectives. The frequent uses of “you” and “your” as she describes what steps were taken to fire 240 people in one day closes the distance between “our” perspective and “theirs” and invites us to empathize. It is easy to forget that Taylor is a survivor of “Black Tuesday.” This in itself indicates how much of an impact there was on everyone in the department. When I suggest – **“Huge impact, even on everyone who is left”** – Taylor agrees but diminishes it to “Well yeah. More, more so on the people who left.” Still, as her confession makes clear, a transformation takes place for her as well.

The rhetoric of diminishment occurs in other ways as well. Taylor attempts to diminish her right to say anything at all: “And I don’t know, I mean, it’s great to criticize but if you can’t come up, if you can’t come up with a better idea then you keep your mouth shut,” and later, “I don’t know a better way to handle it so maybe I can’t really offer any criticism of it. I don’t know how else you would have done it.” In both statements she begins with the personal subject pronoun “I” and ends with “you,” a tactic that decreases the distance between what the bank did and what the average person would have done. Taylor is expressing solidarity with a general population, thereby giving her statements the property of general truths. This distancing has the effect of turning events of the story we would consider as “kernels” (events which raise the possibility of other events thereby advancing or outlining a sequence of transformations) into “satellites” (events which maintain, retard or prolong the kernel events and can be reordered or replaced) (Cohan 54-55). Take for example the firing of 240 people, a dramatic feature of the story, worthy of kernel status. But after drawing our attention to this fact, Taylor focusses on the happy ending for 12 people who were placed in other jobs in the bank, and on one “super guy” whom she “genuinely liked a lot.” He is “now working out West where he wanted to be.” By giving these details about what the one person is like on a personal level – he’s a “super guy” – and what he really wants – to be “out West” – Taylor again adopts the point of view of one specific character. She attempts to transform the effect of the overall experience by giving emphasis to the positive aspects. Her use bracketing, ranking and distancing – identifying the situation of 12 people, evaluating their circumstances in positive terms, and inviting us to focus on this example rather than on the outcome for the rest of the 240 people who were fired – diminishes the negative aspects of the experience.

Overall, Taylor attempts to keep things connected. She puts boundaries around entities so as to limit their impact on her attempts to manage her multiple identities and maintain unity in her life. Only when these brackets defy repositioning, or fail to hold at all,

does Taylor have to face up to her double bind – a situation that brings on a personal crisis for her. “Horrendously stressful.” Taylor’s admission of the amount of stress she felt functions as a climax to the story. Despite her ability to oscillate between compliance and resistance to keep her situation framed in a tenable way, she has to face the enormity of this episode. In part, this climactic effect occurs because her distancing strategy closes the gap between those affected and members of her audience. While she is telling of something that happened in the past to people unknown to the audience, she gives the event “presence”<sup>65</sup> by emplotting the audience. And in her conclusion – “So, I mean, maybe it’s a good thing in that sense that you have, you know, when you get to that point that you have that attitude” – the switch from “I” to the subject pronoun “you” implies that what is good for her is what would be good for people in general. All distance between herself, those affected and her current audience is gone – she no longer oscillates between compliance and resistance. Through a repositioning of brackets and the implied ranking and distancing, Taylor indicates solidarity, not with the bank this time, but with those who have this higher understanding about life outside the bank.

By the end of the “Black Tuesday” episode, Taylor’s expressions of resistance far outweigh her positive comments. Her confession of how stressful the situation was and her suggestion that she is prepared to leave her position demonstrates a classic double bind. She can no longer manage the incompatibilities and has instead to suggest leaving the situation altogether. Despite seeming to tell a “balanced” story, Taylor has created a catalogue of painful events and punctuated her telling of them with such statements as:

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<sup>65</sup> Chaim Perelman uses this term to describe a technique useful in argumentation. He equates “presence” with “emphasis” and defines it as the ability to “evoke realities that are distant in time and space” – to make things distant appear to be present (Perelman 33-37).

The rest they just cut. Showed them the door.

But, um, it's not like "Screw you." "After 20 years service, here's the door." "Here's your hat. What's your hurry?" It didn't quite get *that* bad, but it was a very tough day.

I'm just trying to think when – just before Christmas (Transcript #1, 10).

Taylor had from the outset entitled this narrative "Black Tuesday." But only by the end of the story does the nature and full impact of its blackness become clear. The trajectory – or path from somewhere to somewhere else "with some sort of development and even a resolution, or conclusion" (Toolan 4) – would have been predictable except that Taylor's skillful use of resources allows for slippage and gives her a way to tell her story without seeming to assert more authority for the telling than her position with the bank allows.

### *A Place of One's Own*

Taylor's use of bracketing, ranking and distancing indicate her attempts to navigate the gaps caused by her "wavering line" between identification and division – what Burke calls the basic motive for rhetoric (Rhetoric 45). She finds ways to perform her duties to the organization – to comply – while maintaining some kind of unified identity or coherence in her sense of self – which necessitates her resistance to the organization. She is relentless in her ability to take advantage of "opportunities" (de Certeau xix). In the following episode, Taylor describes how she makes use of her work space to make a point that is missed entirely by the members of her audience for whom it is most intended. The episode occurs in a narrative account she gives to describe her response to one of the bank's campaigns to celebrate "diversity":

"Decorate your pod with things that talk about you." I did ours up as a grave yard this year. No joke. Office furniture grave yard. It's a pod of four. There are only two of us in there. We tend to be the two quietest workers in the department in the sense that neither of us make any noise. When we work, we just work right away and all the other empty furniture was put in the front room, in the front two pods. So we'd have executives who would come in and tour the department and, you know, [name] and I would be standing there at our desks and they'd walk right past us and not see us. So, fine. It'll just be a grave yard, nobody thinks anybody sits there or works there. We're really quiet. So I thought that was a perfect theme. It worked out quite well.

**Yeah. That's an interesting example of, um, finding ways to make your own statements within these campaigns that come in and are kind of imposed.**

Well, I mean, everybody did a really good job. I mean, we're rather creative. I mean, one group did themselves up as, you know, under-the-sea, and they drew, put big waves all over around their thing and a lobster trap, like a full sized, real lobster trap in their pod, and fish stuff.

**What's a pod, exactly?**

A pod is a, what we call a grouping of four offices, four cubicles [Okay.] together. A little pod. Um, part of me thinks it's, yeah, it's kind of fun for a day. It's a waste of my time. It's a waste of the bank's time, and frankly makes it look like a grade two classroom, which I really don't think is the wonderful professional image that you want to convey (Transcript #1, 16-17).

The episode begins with Taylor quoting the bank's directive – "Decorate your pod with things that talk about you" – and ends with her conclusion or assessment of how the directive should be viewed. The characters are Taylor, other members of her department, and bank executives.

### *Narrative and Grammatical Resources for Bracketing*

Taylor makes use of direct quotations, irony and anaphora as part of her bracketing practice. As noted in other episodes, her use of **direct quotations** gives voice to her characters and separates them from each other. In this case, the quotation, "Decorate your pod with things that talk about you" is an imperative that acts as the voice of authority, of "executives" who not only give directives but "who would come in and tour the department" to inspect the compliance. The quotation not only groups the executives together, it makes them distinct from the group of employees whose voice we do not hear. Most quiet of all are Taylor and the person who works at the desk beside her: "We tend to be the two quietest workers in the department in the sense that neither of us make any noise." Taylor's use of **irony** – when the actual meaning of what she says is in opposition to the literal meaning and the content does not match the tone – dramatizes the incidents she chooses to group together. Two empty office cubicles piled high with surplus furniture – no doubt as a result of staff firings – are transformed into the "decorations" and grouped

with the requirement of “things that talk about you.” **Anaphora** – with its repetition of the same word or group of words at the beginning of successive clauses – is used to create emphasis: “It’s a waste of my time. It’s a waste of the bank’s time.” In this example, Taylor selects time as a resource and makes a distinction between that belonging to her and that belonging to the bank.

### Ranking and Distancing

Taylor’s application of positive and negative values to the entities she brackets indicates her ranking practices and leads to a discussion of her social world or distancing practices. She indicates that she is proud of how she and her colleagues responded to the bank’s directive when she groups together this group of actors – “everybody” and “we” – with positive terms – “a really good job” and “creative.” But while this “good job” and creativity indicates one kind of hierarchy and a process of improvement for Taylor, she excludes her employer from this ranking. Instead she portrays the activity of decorating the office as a process of deterioration for the bank, something that belongs to a different, inverted hierarchy: “It’s a waste of my time. It’s a waste of the bank’s time, and frankly makes it look like a grade two classroom, which I really don’t think is the wonderful professional image that you want to convey.” So while the activity is endowed with positive terms for her as an individual, it is grouped with negative terms for her as a bank employee: a “waste” of “time” and something that makes the bank office “look like a grade two classroom.”

The same example reveals her distancing practices. Her choice of anaphora that repeats all but the possessive in a sentence tells us that both she and the bank share the result of having their time wasted. But the shared experience does not create solidarity. Instead it indicates greater distance between them and points to the bank’s inability to identify with the needs of its employees. So while the corporation is attempting to build unity, to make one body out of many individuals as the word “corporation” implies, the

effect on Taylor is to bring to the surface the “part” of her that is in conflict with the corporate identity. The overall effect is to distance her from those who try to make diversity – the condition of being unlike – into a cause for corporate unity. At the same time, her negative judgement provides resistance to the bank’s directive and its attempt to overlook her.

The source of Taylor’s need to assert her superior judgement comes, in this instance, from the bank’s failure to acknowledge her existence. Visiting executives toured her department and although she and her colleague stood at their desks, she says, “they’d walk right past us and not see us. So, fine. It’ll just be a grave yard, nobody thinks anybody sits there or works there. We’re really quiet. So I thought that was a perfect theme. It worked out quite well.” As de Certeau points out

a *tactic* is a calculated action determined by the absence of a proper locus. No delimitation of an exteriority, then, provides it with the condition necessary for autonomy. The space of a tactic is the space of the other. Thus it must play on and with a terrain imposed on it and organized by the law of a foreign power. It does not have the means to *keep to itself*, at a distance, in a position of withdrawal, foresight, and self-collection: it is a maneuver “within the enemy’s field of vision,” as von Bülow put it, and within enemy territory. It does not, therefore, have the options of planning general strategy and viewing the adversary as a whole within a district, visible, and objectifiable space. It operates in isolated actions, blow by blow. ... It can be where it is least expected. It is a guileful ruse. (36-37)

In de Certeau’s terms, Taylor’s statement is a tactic: she responds to the bank’s directive to decorate her office in such a way as to make a personal statement but her real objective is to make a statement about the bank. The reminders of staff firings – surplus furniture – are put forward as “things that talk about you.” “Blow by blow” Taylor creates a caricature of the situation she is describing. Her irony appears all the more intense when we compare it with the lack of understanding and response from those who are responsible for the decisions that “created” the setting. Because of her status in the company Taylor is not sanctioned to speak – she refers to a “so called open meeting, as open as all those

wonderful ones are where you sit there and don't say anything" (Transcript #1, 8) – but she finds ways to have a voice despite her lack of official status in a “regime of truth.” In fact, one of the reasons that the interview with Taylor is surprising in its dark outcome is because her resistance – what Foucault calls the “*insurrection of subjugated knowledges*” (P/K 131, 81) – takes place in myriad small ways that make it an especially “guileful ruse.”

### **Business is Business**

As the previous sections demonstrate, Taylor’s oscillation between compliance and resistance, her attempts at reconciling incompatibilities, all reveal resources she brings to stabilize her situation. In particular, she makes use of a general strategy of bracketing, ranking and distancing which can be observed at the levels of narrative and of grammar. To understand more about these resources it is helpful to consider the ordering principle underlying Taylor’s method of solving incompatibilities and to look further at some of her smaller scale tactics of transformation. This in turn gives further support to an acceptance of limitations as one of the most significant aspects of the symbolic action of the interview.

In a number of places, whether Taylor is speaking in narrative mode or by way of explanation, she refers to the workings of business:

But it is a business. And it is a big business ... [inextricably] tied to the community and there is no other, you know, and it has to be and it always will be and it should be (Transcript #1, 7).

I mean you are aware of it and you have to be aware of it as a business and you can't squander money. Just because it's a big business doesn't mean you can squander big money. It doesn't work that way. And I understand that (Transcript #1, 13).

But I think it's got to be looked at realistically. Because it is a business. As much as we would like to think we're . . . not (Transcript #1, 21).

I don't know, I guess it's just – because it, it tries to bill itself as something other than a business that it runs into problems (Transcript #1, 22).

Taylor’s reliance on the term “business” is key to her method of solving incompatibilities: it is a mantra which keeps her underlying ordering principle intact by functioning as the moral



to her stories. Perelman refers to this as the logical method of solving incompatibilities: it starts with the assertion that there is a single principle that informs things and defines the concept of a “proper” place for any example that occurs. The logical method assumes that if the ordering principle is kept pure, all circumstances derived from it will be compatible. This emphasis on the importance of an underlying principle deflects attention and separates the principle from any examples with which it is not consistent (New Rhetoric 197-198). It presupposes the existence of a hierarchy and relies on the agreement of the audience about the nature of the hierarchy.

In its attempt to deal with incompatibilities, the logical method of creating order draws on the resources provided by bracketing, ranking and distancing.<sup>66</sup> It relies on the placement of boundaries and categories and on the social order that establishes and preserves them. As we have seen in previous examples in this chapter, the way we bracket, rank or distance an entity serves to transform meaning by definition. This transformation in turn causes entities to be seen in a different way, in a way that camouflages incompatibilities. Further small-scale tactics of transformation are provided by the textual resources of narrative and grammar.

In Taylor’s comments cited above, the **apparent tautology** of “business is business” is implied. The idea that business is business is not meant to be a logical statement of self-identity. Rather it indicates a shifting of terms, to, as Perelman says, “explain something’s happening by reference to what normally happens, the particular case being considered as the expression of an essence” (136). When it does not act according to its business essence, the bank “runs into problems” (Transcript #1, 22). With one use of “business” Taylor groups or brackets such draconian practices as the firing that comprised “Black Tuesday”; with the other use of “business” she associates the need to cut costs in order to increase “Return on Equity (ROE),” which she calls “the true measure as to how

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<sup>66</sup> The same can be said about Perelman’s other two methods for dealing with incompatibilities, the diplomatic and the practical.

healthy you are” (Transcript #1, 12). With one use of “business” she groups executives who mistakenly think that celebrating diversity will draw people together while her view is that “It’s a waste of my time. It’s a waste of the bank’s time”; with the other use of “business” she associates executives who perform “stewardship” roles in an unqualified manner, with no “ifs, ands or buts.”

The same bracketing practice informs Taylor’s use of “business” at the grammatical level. The label “business” is used to group together *all* actions of the bank that come into conflict with the needs of individuals and justify them as necessary to the proper functioning of society. It does not leave open the possibility that any of the bank’s actions could occur for less desirable reasons.

Taylor’s use of **epistrophe** – the repetition of the same word or group of words at the ends of successive clauses – “But it is a business. And it is a big business.” – creates emphasis. The “it” which we understand to mean “the bank” receives less emphasis than “business.” In other words, the bank is but a subset of some greater entity – business – and it cannot be expected to act any differently than all other businesses.

We have just seen that epistrophe, labeling and an apparent tautology come together in Taylor’s use of “business”; this shifting of terms indicates the transformation of meaning by definition, a resource essential to the ability to make distinctions. To make distinctions is to add values, or ranking, to our bracketing practices. Taylor’s ranking practices associated with her definition of the bank as a “business” are more fully revealed in some of her surrounding comments. In one example, Taylor comments on the way in which the value statements in the documents we are discussing are produced and how she feels about the process. As noted before, she says “it’s top down, that this is what *the bank* says we should do and being part of *the bank* we will do it” and “I don’t feel like I have any emotion invested in them in the sense that, they are there, um, I kind of operate with my own ethics which are pretty close to the ones that, you know, are listed here, but they take

priority over the bank's" (Transcript #1, 7). Despite this direct statement ranking her values ahead of the bank's, she concludes with "Although I understand that – which is kind of interesting because the [survey results] say that the bank is anything but. But it is a business. And it is a big business." "Although" indicates the shift to an alternative position, and even the results of a public opinion poll at the back of *Planning for Improved Public Relations* do not deter her from the conclusion that business is business. The interests of individuals, her self included, must be sacrificed to – and, therefore, ranked lower than – the interests of business.

Taylor's distancing practice can now be articulated: her bracketing and ranking strategy acts as a justification for the bank and as a form of self-defense for her association with it. Sets of human relations are made acceptable as this form – of defining business – masks the tensions. She can distance herself from undesirable practices without distancing herself from the bank. Defining the situation as a business situation also indicates closure. The topic is not open for discussion and in this way forms a first principle which brings to conclusion, at least temporarily, the management of multiple identities.

While the first instance of Taylor's reliance on "business" as a transparent signifier – a term used by Hodge and Kress to indicate the features of narrative which naturalize the content and make it appear inevitable (Semiotics 230) – occurs early on in the interview, it occurs three more times in the last half. Taylor discusses the bank's poor performance as measured by its Return on Equity and speculates that it probably could do a better job of cutting costs. But immediately this hypothesis throws her into another contradiction: "I see areas that I think squander money. I see areas like mine that are tight fistled to the point of being ridiculous." She follows this with an example that throws into relief the discrepancies between her colleague and the executives hired *en mass* to handle derivatives:

I see some employees that I work with – one in particular who decided that it was far too expensive for him to bother taking his 25th anniversary plaque and gifts and whatever else that he – he decided to forego that for the company. Yet, you know in your heart of hearts, although it's not proposed, that people in other areas, you know, you see all these people who get, you know, the, the big boys. They had big articles in one

of the – I think it was in the News, which is the newsletter, about the guys that they brought up, you know all the derivatives, all these different things that they're doing there. [Right.] And I am sure these guys, you know, don't get told that they can't use the fancy paper, if they want it.

**Right. Or no covering pages on the faxes.**

Right. It makes sense. I mean, that I agree with. I also agree with the idea of turning the lights off at [head office tower] to save half a – a quarter – of a million dollars a year. I think that, that was a master stroke! I don't know who came up with that one. It just made such common sense.

**This is lights off at night?**

Yeah! (Transcript #1, 13).

She comes close to justifying the bank's actions in cutting its costs: "I mean you are aware of it and you have to be aware of it as a business and you can't squander money. Just because it's a big business doesn't mean you can squander big money. It doesn't work that way. And I understand that." But she shows herself capable of making distinctions, of applying values to categories in order to rank them – with yet another shift:

However, I look at that fellow in my department as a whole different thing, and I just, you know, I mean, if that's the attitude that's being brought across, I think it's a shame because if anybody deserved a 25-year plaque, it was this fellow. He's the kind of employee that the bank couldn't find if they looked for him. He's loyal to the point of – you know, he'd do away with small children if he was asked to, if it was requested of him (Transcript #1, 13 ).

Taylor's use of humour and irony draw attention to the discrepancy between the way things are and the way she thinks they ought to be. She draws me into her assumptions about what constitutes "common sense" and gives a seemingly flippant commentary on a serious subject. The same organization which has hired "big boys" in sizable numbers at a downtown location, is also responsible for "Black Tuesday" and another massive firing in more remote locations. The massive firing she can understand because a major error was committed: "And when you think about it, I mean, that's the whole business. Heads rolled. Lots of people lost their jobs. *Loads* of people lost their jobs over that one, rightfully so. Nobody had anticipated this need" (Transcript #1, 12). But she acknowledges that other major errors have been committed with different results: "The impression is if you are far

enough up the food chain, and you really make a big blunder, you'll do okay. [Name of then president] certainly did. He got bumped up to CEO." There is a powerful force to this way with words: executive positions are not just placed in a hierarchy, they are further up the "food chain." This allusion to evolution is a twist on the usual perspective, the natural order of things, which emphasizes the survival of the fittest: those who survive in this organization are not the fittest if good decision-making abilities are among the criteria. This is the second time she has referred to the promotion given to the then president, now CEO, right at the time of the largest loan losses the bank had experienced. Previously she says, "Yes, [name of then president] got a promotion out of it. It turned out quite well didn't it! Sorry" (Transcript #1, 11). Here she uses the CEO's first name and after acknowledging the effect of her interpretation, she adds, "Sorry." In this way Taylor turns her double bind – her "can't win" situation – into a "double profit" – a "can't lose" situation. In other words, she has managed both to exercise power (power of observation and analysis, power to speak) and to indicate lack of power (her apology for commenting on a situation that points clearly to the subservient role she and her colleagues have in comparison to those "higher up the food chain"). Her position is evidence of Foucault's assertion that, power is never in anybody's hands: we simultaneously exercise and undergo power, but it is not democratically distributed (P/K 98).

Taylor's two final appeals to the natural workings of business both occur in the final minutes of the interview. She comments on the results of the public opinion survey and goes so far as to say, "I don't want to say "No, we shouldn't be open and honest" because that sounds awful! [Yeah.] But I think it's got to be looked at realistically. Because it is a business. As much as we would like to think we're ... not." Her bracketing strategy implies that what "sounds awful" is "realistic" but justifiable because "it is a business." When public opinion, which highly influences the bank, does not agree with her views, she applies a ranking strategy: "Um, or maybe they should, which they seem to do, say "public be

damned” this is what we should do, we should support the society, we should support this, we should support the arts, we should do this, this, this, with moderation. [Yup.] So, there are contradictions within it, but” (Transcript #1, 21). Members of the public, one of the bank’s key audiences, are so far down the hierarchy as to “be damned.” And even as she acknowledges that “there are contradictions within it” she finally concludes:

I think the banks like things just the way they are. So, I mean if it’s a question of, you know, if they have to cater to public opinion to prevent, you know, another swell of, you know, outcry, this and that, um, then they will. Right? I have no doubt about it. Every industry does it. Banking should be and is no exception. [Yup.] I don’t know, I guess it’s just – a because it, it tries to bill itself as something other than a business that it runs into problems. [Yeah.] You know, “We’re this great big happy family and we’re going to help you.” Well, no, “You earn your money” and, you know – you know, “Neither a lender nor a borrower be!” [Right.] That pretty much, you know, sums it up (Transcript #1, 22).

“Neither a lender nor a borrower be!” This quotation from Shakespeare’s *Hamlet* indicates Taylor’s ultimate acceptance of limitations. Her logical method is based on the assertion that there is a single principle – in this case that business is business – which defines the concept of a proper place for every episode. She uses bracketing, ranking and distancing to resolve incompatibilities. And although this strategy breaks down and results in a crisis for her, Taylor ends by confirming her acceptance of limitations. Hodge and Kress describe this process of moving from a state of equilibrium, through disturbances, to a crisis, and back to a state of equilibrium as “the formula for the classic narrative of the status quo.” Taylor gives coherence, order and closure to her narrative with her appeal to the “natural” and inevitable state of business affairs. In so doing, she demonstrates how narrative works as “an effective and flexible strategy which particular societies can use to reproduce their value systems” (Semiotics 230).

## Conclusion

The need to manage multiple identities and to make inherent contradictions invisible is prevalent throughout the interview. The early part of the interview contains more descriptive information about the bank documents and more support for bank practices. At

about the mid-point of the interview, Taylor gives her rather surprising confession, that she is prepared to leave her job. Her remarks from that point on, while still consistent with her earlier positions and their inherent tensions, reveal a much clearer position and attitude. Taylor's confession clearly demonstrates the nexus of discourse, the self and social structures brought about by the part/whole nature common to all three terms. The confession expressed in the discourse is a product of parts in tension, searching for wholeness.<sup>67</sup> It reveals inner turmoil caused by an overwhelming desire for unity of disparate desires, brought to a level of crisis by a realization that the incompatibilities are too significant to surmount any longer. Taylor's social structure, the corporation – deriving from the Latin *corporare*, meaning to form into a body – itself can be defined as the forming of one body made up of many individuals. And it is this requirement that individual employees act as part of a whole which conflicts with Taylor's inner desire for unity, based on her own values and sense of identity, that causes her crisis. By the end of the interview, and the reflective practice it constitutes, Taylor can sum up the situation with confidence: banks are big businesses that like things the way they are and they are going to put resources into influencing public opinion accordingly. Her final caveat is “Neither a lender nor a borrower be.”

The process of the interview, with its balancing of tensions, combined with Taylor's resulting summation of the overall situation could function as an illustration of a classic Burkean tenet: “however ‘pure’ one's motives may be actually, the impurities of identification lurking about the edges of such situations introduce a typical Rhetorical wrangle of the sort that can never be settled once and for all, but belongs in the field of moral controversy where men properly seek to ‘prove opposites’” (Rhetoric 26). In other words, if Taylor were able to identify “purely” with the organization in which she works,

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<sup>67</sup> Kenneth Burke, in his analysis of St. Augustine's *Confessions*, discusses the “corporeality of the human animal” and the role of the part/whole relationship in confession. See Kenneth Burke, *The Rhetoric of Religion: Studies in Logology* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1961), pp. 81-86. Subsequent references are by “Religion” and page number, in parentheses, following the quotation.

there would be no tension. Similarly, if she did not identify with the organization at all, her separateness would also be pure. “But put identification and division ambiguously together, so that you cannot know for certain just where one ends and the other begins, and you have the characteristic invitation to rhetoric” (Rhetoric 25).

As the analysis in this chapter has shown, our “characteristic invitation to rhetoric” begins with Taylor describing her role and the work she does. She consistently projects confidence, even when she is pointing out her fallibility, or exercising self-censorship. Her expressiveness and use of humour allow her to maneuver skillfully between the opposing points of view she has to reconcile. Her logical method of dealing with incompatibilities allows her to find a proper place for every example. While maintaining an overall strategy of bracketing, ranking and distancing, Taylor uses the logical method to cling to her world view: she believes in an ordering principle that informs all things and results in a “proper” place for any example which occurs. She also believes herself to have choices and, as Weaver best explains, in exercising these choices she demonstrates her values (Sermonic 216) and the sense of dignity that comes from being a free agent. In the process Taylor defines her self, a basic human necessity that shapes our socialization and our view of who we really are.

Taylor struggles with strategies of compliance and those of resistance to the corporation’s own attempts to manage its multiple identities. Through the narrative episodes of “Black Tuesday” and “A Place of One’s Own” we see her expertly distancing herself, again using such tactics as modality, focalization, topic drift, and anaphora. This process results in a cathartic confession that takes us further into the ordering principle – the nature of business – which is the basis of her logical method of resolving incompatibilities. The analysis reveals an acceptance of limitations that constitutes the most significant aspect of the symbolic action of the discourse. This interpretation of symbolic action is further supported by evidence in the transcript which shows Taylor’s strong sense



of self, and its role as she struggles with the incompatibilities she faces on a daily basis. In the final analysis, Taylor resorts to an aphorism and returns to a state of equilibrium.

Taylor's considerable acumen at negotiating the gaps caused by the various aspects of her personal desires – and the corporate demands made on her – provides proof of the “secondary production hidden” in the use of a “representation.” For although Taylor is on the receiving end of the bank's representations, hers is not a passive role. Her strategies and tactics are survival skills, a form of “secondary production” (de Certeau xiii).

## 5. The Case – Part II – Production

*The phenomena of practice in organizations are crucially determined by the kinds of reality individuals create for themselves, the ways they frame and shape their worlds – and what happens when people with similar and different ways of framing reality come into collision.*

*Donald A. Schön, Educating the Reflective Practitioner*

### Introduction

So who are the people who contribute to such a tumultuous environment for Taylor and others like her? For the most part, as my analysis has shown, Taylor refers to these people as an unspecified “they,” who are often synonymous with “the bank.” We know that they are in positions that wield more power: Taylor tells us, for example, that “this is what *the bank* says we should do and being part of *the bank* we will do it” (Transcript #1, 7). But neither do discussions of similar issues with those wielding relatively more power – those who produced the documents which form the basis of my discussion with Taylor – result in a discourse free from tensions and ambiguities.

As discussed in detail in Chapter 4, production is, for the most part, the prerogative of dominant groups – their representation of the world is produced and reproduced in a process of message-making that strives to protect their interests. And while the dominated also effect a kind of production by devising their own use for the products foisted upon them, the dominant benefit from access to sanctioned channels. Those who have control over the representation of the world are “charged with saying what counts as true” (Foucault, P/K 131). But control over the meaning of messages relies on the cooperation of those who receive the messages. For this reason, those who are dominant need both to exert power and yet to sustain relationships of solidarity with those they dominate. Hodge and Kress refer to these two dimensions – power and solidarity – as the basic constituents of every social message system. Power is understood “as control by one social agent of the

behaviour of others. But solidarity is an effect of power just as power is an effect of solidarity.” It is solidarity – the sense of sharing substance, of mutual dependence which results in feelings of community – which makes a “single entity” and allows for the “effortless assertion of power” (Semiotics 39). In other words, those who have power to construct an organization (to advance their representation of the world) can also hold it together with such things as value statements, mission statements and reputation management strategies (can reproduce their representation of the world in a process of message-making). But for an organization to hold together there also has to be enough solidarity (shared substance) between the dominant and the dominated to create a hierarchy (a single entity) with an agreed upon place for everyone.

Bourdieu expresses the dialectical relationship between power and solidarity with his concept of “recognition” – symbolic capital is the recognition one group receives from another, recognition of the importance an utterance “attributes to itself.” Symbolic power or “imposition,” as he calls it, can function only if “all the social conditions are in place to ensure the production of appropriate senders and receivers, who are therefore agreed among themselves” (L&SP 72-73). But the relationship between senders and receivers is highly complex: whenever there is recognition there is also “misrecognition” – the “delegation of authority which confers its authority on authorized discourse.” In other words, by misrecognizing the arbitrariness of the authority of producers, receivers comply with a system that establishes and maintains their place as receivers. Messages cannot function as intended, Bourdieu asserts, unless the conditions which produce recognition are met: “the language of authority never governs without the collaboration of those it governs, without the help of the social mechanisms capable of producing this complicity, based on misrecognition, which is the basis of all authority” (L&SP 113). Clearly, then, power and solidarity each depends on the other – power is both the cause and effect of solidarity. Those with the power to produce messages also have to create solidarity which

in turn disguises the contradiction – the need for authorization from receivers – at the base of the power.

The need for solidarity implies the existence of a lack of solidarity – of resistance. Those who are dominated or, in other words, constrained by membership in a reception regime, have their own interpretation of the world. The feedback they provide to producers is built back into the message so that every text “is in a sense co-authored by the main participants.” Hodge and Kress describe this feedback process as a “double and contradictory necessity of the dominant groups and the resistant or oppositional portion of dominated groups.” The product of this process they term “an ideological complex” – a view of the world filtered through various interests and coded as rules which govern the way messages can be produced or received (Semiotics 39,3,4). In other words, because producers of messages rely on solidarity with those who receive the messages, producers must also account, to some degree, for all the voices, the “various interests” which resist their representation of the world. Resistance, then, produces an ideological complex but an ever-changing one. To maintain solidarity, producers are required to adjust constantly for the contributions made by receivers.

As this analysis shows, the relationship between power and solidarity and between production and reception is extremely complex. So how do we, as individual participants, manage this complexity? To operate successfully within a set of rules constraining the production and reception of documents, individual participants must call on their own set of resources. As we have seen, Fairclough defines “members’ resources (MR),” as a store of prototypes residing in long-term memory and available for our interpretative or production process. Fairclough elaborates on how our members’ resources relate to our interpretation of a situation. At the same time, he also provides evidence of the organizational nature of our society. He says that our interpretation of a situation happens in two stages: “In the first ... the interpreter arrives at a determination of the institutional

setting ... on the basis of a societal social order in her MR. That is, a societal social order divides total social space into so many institutional spaces, and any actual situation must first be placed institutionally in terms of this division. In the second stage ... the interpreter arrives at a determination of the situational setting ... on the basis of the institutional social order selected in stage 1” (Fairclough 24-25, 150). Included in our individual resources for making meaning, then, are assumptions about context – the placing of a situation.

Participants determine meaning based on their assumptions about what is allowable in a particular context, assumptions derived from the store of prototypes residing in long term memory.

Bourdieu elaborates on the nature of our individual resources with his notion of habitus, “a set of *dispositions* which incline agents to act and react in certain ways.” These dispositions are “inculcated, structured, durable, generative and transposable” – inculcated because they are acquired beginning in early childhood through many repeated approbations which then become second nature to us and actually influence how we hold our bodies; structured in that they reflect our specific social conditions; durable in that they are ingrained in a way that makes it exceedingly difficult even to be conscious of them, let alone to change them; and generative and transposable because they “generate practices and perceptions in fields other than those in which they were originally acquired” (L&SP 12-13). We manage the complexities of production and reception, of power and solidarity, because we have learned the patterns, we have learned, since birth, to recognize and misrecognize.

The existence of individual sets of resources and the development of a personal habitus is central to understanding the self and issues of identity. We have seen how the nature of our society dictates that we associate with various organizations, that we move in and out of roles, a process of defining and redefining who we are. What we think of as our self – as distinct from others – actually comes to seem more like our “selves” – a collective

having more to do with relationships among the parts than with unique traits. But as Kerby points out, “In our own lives, and in our own self-understanding, the achievement of unity is usually considered necessary for our identity; and in our social life, unity of purpose and consistency of valuation form part of what it means to be a responsible moral agent” (56-7). To achieve this necessary sense of unity, then, we have to manage our multiple identities. This is Cheney’s central point: “*the nature of organizational rhetoric . . . is the management of multiple identities*” (9). Since multiple identities bring with them competing demands, participants must call on their individual resources to negotiate the incompatibilities which arise and stand in the way of a unified sense of identity. The organizational nature of our society means that the greatest success and rewards will come to those who can manage multiple identities in order to navigate the boundaries between various organizations and between personal identity and organizational identity.

The primary way in which we, as symbol-using agents, negotiate our incompatibilities to produce identity is through language. Burke articulates the central role of rhetoric in the relationships of communities and individual participants when he says, “In parturition begins the centrality of the nervous system. The different nervous systems, through language and the ways of production, erect various communities of interests and insights, social communities varying in nature and scope. And out of the division and the community arises the ‘universal’ rhetorical situation” (Rhetoric 146). From birth, our separateness causes us to desire connection with a greater whole. Through language we create multiple communities and we camouflage the tensions that result from our multiple roles in these communities.

Organizations, striving to manage their multiple identities, function as the context for discourse, the process of social interaction which produces texts, the concrete material objects which exhibit signs of this interaction. Echoing Burke’s notion of the human body as the “original economic plant” (Rhetoric 146), Bourdieu describes the ways in which one

kind of capital can be exchanged for another. Organizations are the marketplace where our resources become a system of capital which can be exchanged. The more our habitus and resources dispose us toward possession of the dominant discourse, the more we can avail ourselves of the advantages of a system of differences that constitutes a “linguistic market.” As Bourdieu asserts, “The competence adequate to produce sentences that are likely to be understood may be quite inadequate to produce sentences that are likely to be *listened to*, likely to be recognized as *acceptable* in all the situations in which there is occasion to speak.” Those who have language skills consistently “recognized as acceptable” can exchange those skills for economic rewards in the work place and profit of other kinds in other fields. Competence functions as “linguistic capital, producing a profit of distinction on the occasion of each social exchange” (L&SP 55). Organizations expose us to systems of differences and reward us for replicating them.

Individual producers can trade on the imbalance of power that results from their possession of the dominant discourse but, like their reception counterparts, they too must manage multiple identities both on behalf of their organizations and personally. In summary, the part/whole nature of discourse, the self and organizations come together in the management of multiple identities; in the texts are traces of activity – most often places where we can mark tensions, ambiguities, and transformations – caused by the participant’s striving for coherence in the discourse. To cope with these incompatibilities, participants call upon their members’ resources to provide general strategies for bringing together the parts into a unified whole. These strategies, and the smaller scale tactics of transformation that can be marked in the text, rely for their effectiveness on an underlying order or belief in the nature of reality.

This chapter analyses the transcript of an interview with a senior executive in the bank who is responsible for the production of the *Our Beliefs* and *Planning for Improved Public Relations* documents. Again my framework provides the structure for the analysis: I

look first at the text of Johnson's<sup>68</sup> interview as narrative – as a set of discursive resources spread out in time involving actors and events placed in a location and time sequence, resulting in a transformation. Since a narrative is presented in language, it also relies on grammar and the selection of other linguistic resources to make meaning and, like all selection, involves values and choices.

Within Johnson's narrative it is possible to identify episodes – stories with distinct beginnings and endings that can be marked using tools from conversational analysis and critical discourse analysis. As demonstrated in the previous chapter, these episodes reveal boundaries and categories, ways of grouping and dividing, which are the basis for the strategies used by the participants in their attempts to create coherence in the discourse and to maintain their identities. Like Taylor, Johnson uses bracketing, ranking and distancing to create boundaries and categories and to establish and preserve the social order. To review, all three resources allow for the transformation of meaning by definition. In other words, depending on how we bracket, rank or distance an entity we allow it to be seen in a different way. But Johnson's discourse is different from Taylor's. What becomes clear as the interview progresses is that Johnson's narratives are much shorter and his emphasis is on present, ongoing processes, rather than events that happened in the past. In fact, his narratives can be seen primarily as having explanatory force.

While pointing out the problems of defining what counts as explanation, Charles Antaki nevertheless makes a convincing case for viewing explanation as 1) a claim to reveal what is “really” the case and 2) information that “promises to reorient the framing of the event and the participants' place within it” (2). Antaki champions the position that our

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<sup>68</sup> This is a pseudonym used to ensure confidentiality for the participant. Other identifying features may have been changed. Some discussion of his job and the situation he was hired into can be found in Chapter 3. For confidentiality reasons, the full transcript of the interview is held back. Anyone wishing access to it is urged to contact the author. The transcript will be released for research purposes only under strict conditions governing its use. All references to specific newsletters or publications have been changed, always with consideration for maintaining the intention of the original titles. The bold text indicates my remarks, with the interviewee's responses in regular font.



explanations are “coherent *wholes*, more or less well structured in and of themselves.” Because explanations are also “more or less moored in the network of [our] beliefs about life in general” they are often repeated in various ways, forming a “reprise of the general message of the publication.” Antaki also makes a distinction between everyday explanations and those that occur as part of the ideology of an organization: “Normally, the explanation giver describes something that is known to be a problem to both explainer and audience, and then proceeds to reveal something novel which explains it. In the closed world of ideological discourse, however, it is the explanation ... which is known and agreed by explainer and audience, and what is new is the particular problem that the writer has managed to use it to explain” (2,3). Johnson’s underlying ordering principle (discussed in detail later in this chapter) is based on popular notions of global competition. This principle is the basis of his explanations and Johnson returns to this touchstone whenever incompatibilities threaten the progress of his communications plan or his ability to manage multiple identities for himself and the bank.

Of course, explanations can be presented in narratives. As this chapter will demonstrate, however, Johnson’s ability to create processes causes him to rely frequently on explanation that is not fully narrative. Rather than presenting past events with characters who appear to speak for themselves, Johnson relies on his own voice and confidently expresses his views as if they were generally held principles on the nature of things. So while both explanation and narrative are symbolic, both offer methods of studying events that constitute social practices, and both show how respondents impose order on their world, explanation draws on sanctioned discourse to impose an interpretation of events and definitions of reality.

Whether speaking by way of explanation or occasionally in narrative mode, Johnson manages multiple identities for himself and for the bank. Within his general strategy of bracketing, ranking and distancing, he stabilizes his very complex situation with

a number of smaller scale tactics of transformation, tactics which allow him to change the appearance of a form so it will not cause a contradiction. He makes use of focalization, platitudes, anaphora, direct and indirect quotations, metaphor, nominalization, labeling, aphorisms, conditional statements and distinctions. These smaller scale tactics also reveal that Johnson, like Taylor, makes use of a logical method for dealing with incompatibilities. As noted previously, the logical method starts with the assertion that there is a single principle which informs things and defines the concept of a “proper” place for any example that occurs. Johnson’s narrative reveals an underlying belief in a scientifically ordered global economic system that both supports his discourse and is maintained by it.

In the remainder of the chapter I analyse narrative episodes and explanations under two headings, “Selling Up,” and “Selling Down,” to match distinctions Johnson makes about the way he organizes his work: “Yeah, well I had to sell up. Now I’m selling down. The execution is selling down. But there’s always selling up. It’s both ways” (Transcript #2, 14). When Johnson sells up he demonstrates his identification with the bank and exercises power. When he sells down he attempts to overcome resistance, to build solidarity. Each episode or explanation reveals a hierarchy. These hierarchies are based on Johnson’s perception of boundaries in his selection of entities (bracketing), on the values he gives to entities by placing them in a particular order (ranking), and on his invitation to us to share his vision of that order (distancing). The episodes and explanations also reveal the most significant aspect of the symbolic action of the discourse: the management of expectations. Before concluding, I give evidence of Johnson’s underlying ordering principle which relates to the nature of business on a global scale.

What becomes clear in this chapter is that Johnson, like Taylor, has considerable resources to bring to bear on the complex situations he faces on a daily basis. However, where Taylor experiences numerous double binds – situations in which she “can’t win” no matter what actions she takes, Johnson often effects a “double profit,” situations in which

he “can’t lose.” As Bourdieu points out, the more our habitus and resources dispose us toward possession of the dominant discourse, the more we can avail ourselves of the advantages of a system of differences that constitutes a “linguistic market.” Johnson’s competence functions as “linguistic capital, producing a *profit of distinction* on the occasion of each social exchange.” His habitus matches that required for a role in a production regime. Bourdieu also notes that “one of the most important constituents of this profit lies in the fact that it appears to be based on the qualities of the person alone” (L&SP 55,72,73). The following analysis provides support for this theory and sheds new light on the complexity of communication in an organizational society.

### **Power: Selling Up**

#### ***When I Arrived...***

The situation Johnson was hired into provides an important context for the expectations placed on him as a new member of the organization. He was hired from outside the bank to formulate the bank’s communications plan and fix problems that the chairman believed were caused by poor communications. The previous incumbent had been forced out and the position left vacant for many months. Johnson describes the situation:

... there was a lot of people who had been demoralized and leaderless and the bank had taken a real pounding on reputation. Um, and there was no plan. It was very reactive. It wasn’t proactive. Um, it wasn’t, I think, very integrated into the business. I mean it was, it was, ah, almost an afterthought to people. I don’t think it was seen as a strategic partner with the business. I don’t think that it was serving – I mean what I was told was it tended to – there were great people, great personalities and nice people and everything, but always sort of tended to under deliver on promises. Um, so you know there was a lot of that, uh. I think that the organization was a bit odd. It didn’t, it didn’t sort of emphasize excellence in, by striving for, you know, functional expertise. It was, it was a lot of, kind of project people who were doing a little bit of everything. It was hard to find where the accountabilities lay for things. Um, so that it was hard to, to sort of push and probe and nobody measured anything. Um, so, that was in here. Then there were a lot of the same problems that I discovered subsequently in the business (Transcript #2, 6).

Some of the problems “in the business” had a direct and immediate impact on the communications plan:

Well, um, [Chairman] came into the, ah, ah, chairmanship, um, at a time when the bank was taking significant loan losses for its real-estate portfolio – [name of real estate development company] being the most prominent. But I mean the entire – you had a global collapse of the real-estate industry which was almost like a 20-year correction over the course of about a year, or year-and-a-half. And [Chairman] was, came out of the corporate bank and had been in the corporate bank for the years when that real-estate portfolio had built up, and despite the fact that all other banks had, you know, experienced similar kinds – and I guess there was a slight difference in Canada. There were one or two banks that weren't quite as exposed on that. But certainly us and the [Other Bank] were major, had major exposure. And [Chairman], people were saying, you know, this guy was responsible for [the real estate lending crisis] and now he gets rewarded with a chairmanship. I mean what's this all about? So, ah, you know, [name of real estate development company] – I mean [name of real estate development company] was just dragging around everywhere. And so I deliberately recommended that [first name of Chairman] just keep his head down for awhile and what we had to do was sort of build back some results. And we couldn't really, we couldn't do much with him because we had that baggage. And so, ah, I mean really this piece that was in the Globe, ah, we started to roll him out now and there's going to be, there's a big piece in Canadian Business. You know, he's now, now that we've got some results under our belt, you know that's what I'm talking about – the change. We started with employees and then we went to, um, analysts and media and then – that's why you should see the video of the annual meeting, because it sort of pulls it all together. Ah, it sort of shows what it is that we're – you'll see that positioning – market leadership position. So we had to, you know, so it was, it was, yeah there was a kind of an expectation that I was going to come in and snap my fingers and fix this image, you know.

**I think you said at one time that it was like arriving at an accident and you just had to first start by stopping the bleeding.**

Exactly, yeah, that's right – calm the patient, you know. That's right. It certainly was that and, yeah, so we stopped the bleeding and calmed the patient and then we got the patient up on his feet but we didn't want to enter him in any races until we felt that he was fit enough to do it. And I think the company now is at that stage where it's seen as a leader in many ways and, you know, the numbers are coming and we are very methodically trying to not over-promise because we do have a reputation of tripping once in awhile. So – (Transcript #2, 9).

I have selected this extended excerpt as a narrative episode because in it Johnson tells of a major event – the collapse of a real estate development company which resulted in the largest loan losses ever for the bank and precipitated the development of a new communications plan. Johnson begins with a description of the state of affairs when he was hired and ends with the bank having undergone a transformation to a “stage where it's seen as a leader in many ways.” The main characters are the chairman, who is suffering from negative publicity, and Johnson, who has been hired to help turn around the situation. People in general are mentioned for their reactions to the chairman.

We can analyse Johnson's bracketing practice further to separate out not just characters, but processes and narration. As noted previously, bracketing implies separate entities – items we have carved out of their contexts – which are brought together because they fall within certain limits. So although they are separate, the entities within a bracket support one another and create solidarity through their similarities. This resource leaves open the possibility for downplaying the separateness of entities within the bracket and treating the group as one entity. The way we bracket things is neither given nor arbitrary: it is social.

### *Narrative and Grammatical Resources for Bracketing*

Johnson uses focalization, indirect quotations, metaphors, and nominalization as part of his bracketing practice. His **focalization** divides his narrative episode into an earlier time before he was hired, a transition time when he first arrived at the bank, and the present. The earlier time is marked by Johnson's use of the pronoun "he" and "his" to indicate that he is reporting on the chairman's situation. The transition time is reported with the use of "I" and "we" to indicate that Johnson is now included in the set of actors, but all references are to the past: "I deliberately recommended, what we had to do was, we couldn't do much, we had that baggage." When he reports on the present he uses "the company" and "we" in a merging of perspectives: "the company now is at that stage where it's seen as a leader in many ways and, you know, the numbers are coming and we are very methodically trying to not over-promise because we do have a reputation of tripping once in awhile." When Johnson has the most difficult things to say about the communications problem he was hired to fix, he groups the criticisms with a general population by using **indirect quotations**: "people were saying, you know, this guy was responsible for [our biggest loan loss] and now he gets rewarded with a chairmanship. I mean what's this all about?" By attributing the remarks to others he separates himself and his office from any role in the outcry. He also makes use of two **metaphors**. The first is of a witch doctor who

is expected “to come in and snap [his] fingers and fix this image.” Instead Johnson sees himself as a medical doctor who “stopped the bleeding and calmed the patient and then . . . got the patient up on his feet.” The metaphors separate him from any claim to be able to perform miracles and yet bracket him with trained professionals who perform a specialized role. Johnson’s **nominalization** in the use of “correction” condenses the collapse of the real estate industry in such a way as to deflect further thought about who or what is responsible. Nominalizations involve the labeling and condensing of entire events into single concepts. They delete time and perspective and make it impossible to determine who is responsible and who was affected. “Correction” functions as a label, grouping the events into one simplified process.

Johnson’s use of “so” to summarize the situation and prepare for a new phase – “And so I deliberately recommended that [first name of Chairman] just keep his head down for awhile” – is a “gentle topic ‘drift’ . . . where subtopics arise within a general topic, without disturbing the progress of that topic” (Cheepen 57). Johnson describes the process he put in place, marking the transition from the problem time before he arrived to their present success.

### *Ranking and Distancing*

When we apply values to our bracketing practices, we engage in ranking. Our values cause us to differentiate entities, to make distinctions between things on a positive/negative scale. The above examples can also be analysed to reveal Johnson’s ranking strategy. The bank’s problems before he arrived are described by such negative terms as loan losses, collapse and exposure. He modifies these descriptors with the adjectives significant, global and major, respectively, to indicate the increased degree of the problems. The indirect quotations tell us what people were saying in the transition time when Johnson first arrived. They indicate a problem – “[our biggest loan loss] was just dragging around everywhere” – but one that Johnson can manage with a strategy – he

suggests that the chairman “keep his head down for awhile.” By contrast, the present is a time of “change.” Johnson gives it positive attributes by indicating that they now have “some results” and are in a “market leadership position.”

Johnson’s bracketing and ranking practices also tell us something about his social world or distancing practices. From the above examples we can draw conclusions about who is included in groups – bracketed – with him and who is not. As noted previously, distancing takes the grouping and dividing practices of bracketing, and the application of values which is ranking, and makes of it a practice of congregating and segregating. When we use distancing as a strategy we rely on a widening or narrowing of perceived gaps between entities. All three parts of the strategy are resources precisely because they are ambiguous themselves – they divide and create resemblance simultaneously. They make it possible for us to talk about the way in which we camouflage incompatibilities. We can now look at what Johnson’s bracketing and ranking practices tell us about distancing – his view of the social order underlying his attempts to manage multiple identities and solve the incompatibilities in his discourse.

Early in his tenure Johnson had to convince the chairman that he should “keep his head down for awhile.” This was not the chairman’s first inclination. During the months that Johnson’s position had been vacant, the chairman issued five special editions of the internal newsletter. They were called *Looking Ahead*, each dedicated to one of the “Five Major Catalysts for Success.” And according to some of the staff, the chairman’s desire for “profile” had been an issue in the dismissal of Johnson’s predecessor.<sup>69</sup> Gaining favour with the chairman is clearly important for Johnson’s success and even his survival in his position. Because he has responsibility for a communication strategy that is visible within all areas of the bank and results in considerable public attention, Johnson has a high risk job. Many events in areas outside of Johnson’s control can affect the outcome of his plans and even

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<sup>69</sup> For a more detailed discussion of this topic, see Chapter 3.

when his plans are executed without major complications, other factors in the economy can negate any positive effect his work might have on share price, for example, which is thought to be the ultimate measure of the bank's success.

Since the degree of Johnson's success will be determined by the chairman, the chairman's view of what is important ultimately counts most in Johnson's performance evaluation. In this way, Johnson's success is closely tied to the success of the bank in the chairman's eyes. The chairman has already had a crisis of confidence in Johnson's predecessor, so it is not surprising that Johnson makes no overt claims to extraordinary knowledge. Instead he makes an implicit appeal to authority when he applies the metaphor of a medical doctor who "stopped the bleeding and calmed the patient," emphasizing intertextually – by association with texts in another domain – his special expertise and its importance to the very life of the organization. With his use of the pronoun "we" he indicates solidarity: there are others on his team, all working toward the same purpose and sharing the same goals. In other words, he can emphasize his specialized role or power as leader and yet also his solidarity with others. Together the team achieves a degree of unity through their common purpose of providing the bank with a considerable force of expertise to save its very existence.

Despite this rescue effort, others in the bank were not satisfied. Johnson says some people had "an expectation that I was going to come in and snap my fingers and fix this image." The metaphor of a witch doctor frames these demands as unreasonable. Later in the interview while discussing the communications plan, Johnson is more specific about the pressures he was under: "It took me almost a year actually. There was a lot of research. Yeah, it was almost a year. Some people thought that was a long time. They thought I should have had it fixed in two or three months" (Transcript #2, 15).



### *You've Got to Break Eggs...*

It becomes clear as the interview progresses that Johnson has had to do a lot of explaining. While he has overtly identified four audiences – customers, employees, the communities in which the bank does business, and shareholders – he has first worked on a separate audience consisting of the chairman and the Board of Directors: “Then it went up to the board – to management committee and the board” (Transcript #2, 14). This group approved the *Planning for Improved Public Relations* document which Johnson refers to as an “internal ... guidance document” and describes as “more of a strategic” document with “fairly limited circulation” – that of “senior management.” After obtaining senior management approval, the *Planning for Improved Public Relations* document is “translated into” the *Our Beliefs* booklet for the four stakeholder groups (Transcript #2, 1).

The role of the chairman and other senior executives as primary audience is clear in other ways as well. Johnson has had to work for a long time – “It’s really taken me two years” – to get to where he can say that there is “a recognition in the company that image and reputation are driven by those, by keeping those four stakeholders happy.” And it is with this audience that the department in its previous form “always sort of tended to under deliver on promises” (Transcript #2, 7, 5, 6). To manage the chairman’s expectations Johnson has to convince the chairman to share a view of the reality as Johnson has created it. He has been successful in getting the chairman to think of the bank’s audiences as he has defined them: “[the chairman] analyses everything now in terms of the four stakeholders. He just automatically does it. You know, his whole thinking – and you know when you get the chairman doing that, that – he’s out – he has a big effect on people” (Transcript #2, 25). With the chairman’s adherence to the plan, and hence his endorsement and promotion of the plan, the result will be “a big effect on people.”

Managing the chairman's expectations and reaction to public opinion is perhaps most crucial when Johnson determines that it is time for the chairman to start making public appearances again:

So, you know, one of the things you kind of learn from that is that if you're going to go out and you're going to take a prominent – you're going to take a position on a controversial issue, you're going to generate negative as well as positive. What you would – what you're also going to get is profile. And that was the first time we actually took [last name of Chairman] out. And he was quite, um ... But, ah, you know he was quite wounded by it, but, but I think, with hindsight, he began to realize when I showed him the numbers and what was happening – he's become much more educated now I think – and I don't mean that in a negative way, in any way, because he's a, he's a very bright guy – but he didn't understand, you know, trends, and he's much more sensitive to that now. I think he understands, that, um, you know you've got to, sort of, as you say, break eggs to make an omelette. So he's quite confident – he's a lot more confident now on his, ah, um – he recognizes that, that, ah, you know, if you're going to have a profile you're going to also be a target (Transcript #2, 11).

This passage has some features of a narrative episode: it begins and ends with Johnson's assertion that any prominent exposure in the media is going to attract both negative and positive coverage. In between, Johnson briefly relates the story of the first time he created a public role for the chairman in his communications plan. As a result of this event, the chairman undergoes a transformation. However, the passage functions much more as an explanation. It reveals something about Johnson's belief in the way processes work, it reveals categories, and, perhaps most of all, it describes an event in order to reframe it and the participants' place within it. Again, Johnson relies on bracketing, ranking and distancing to solve incompatibilities.

### Resources for Bracketing

Johnson makes use of an aphorism, a conditional statement, and a metaphor as part of his bracketing practice. His use of an **aphorism** – a short, pithy statement of a general truth drawn from science or experience – shows that his work with the chairman as audience was not over when the plan was accepted. Johnson has had to convince the chairman that “you've got to, sort of, as you say, break eggs to make an omelette.” He groups taking a controversial position with breaking eggs, with making an omelette, with

profile. Johnson also gets the same message across with a **conditional statement** beginning with “if” and implying a corresponding “then.” He says “if you’re going to have a profile you’re going to also be a target.” This statement adds to the previous grouping the **metaphor** of being a target. All Johnson’s resources act to state and restate that the responses the chairman received were normal ones, easily anticipated in the process of achieving profile.

### *Ranking and Distancing*

Johnson’s ranking practices can be seen in the choice of positive and negative terms to modify the entities he brackets. His aphorism takes the metaphor of a simple cooking concept and makes of it a truism: something which seems destructive – the breaking of eggs – can actually be reframed as something creative – the making of a relatively more complex meal. Together, the aphorism and the conditional statement indicate a transformation in the text – the negative publicity is not to be seen as the result of an error in judgement but rather as a “natural” outcome of the process which can be seen to have positive implications. Johnson’s reshaping of the negative publicity allows him to maintain his credibility. He did not anticipate the vitriolic response the chairman’s garnered from his first foray back into the public spotlight. He admits that he learned from the experience and that the chairman was “educated” by it. So even though Johnson’s plan did not go exactly the way he anticipated, his explanation allows him to recover and use positive terms to describe what “really” happened.

Johnson’s distancing strategy is so subtle and pervasive that it is easy to overlook. He is closely associated with the chairman. Johnson “showed him the numbers” and explained how they should be interpreted or, as he says, showed the chairman “what was happening.” The overall effect of Johnson’s efforts has been to move the chairman, step-by-step, from “wounded” to “educated” to “sensitive” to “confident.” And a confident chairman means that he is confident in carrying out his role in Johnson’s communications

plan, which in turn implies confidence in Johnson. As de Certeau points out, there is a “curious circularity” involved because to make people believe is to make them act, but the ability to make people act is precisely what makes people believe. In other words, “The *credibility* of a discourse is what first makes believers act in accordance with it.” And in this way, ethos “produces practitioners” (de Certeau 148). The chairman accepts Johnson’s plan and acts accordingly. And even though he does not have a good first experience he is persuaded by Johnson’s credibility that the response is to be expected. As a result of Johnson’s explanations, the chairman learns to interpret the response differently.

In de Certeau’s terms, the chairman’s need to be “educated” is the “paradox of authority,” which occurs when competence is exchanged for authority. Because his authority is “drawn out of its orbit by social demands and/or political responsibilities,” the chairman loses competence the more he gains authority (de Certeau 8). Johnson uses the same technique to bolster the chairman’s position of authority. When he reveals that the chairman was “wounded” he balances any show of weakness this might imply by pointing out that “he’s a very bright guy” and that Johnson’s claim to have “educated” him is not to be taken “in a negative way” (Transcript #2, 11).

Johnson’s final comment in the interview comes back to the chairman as audience. He sums up the outcome of his plan so far by saying, “Well, it was a tough sell but I think we have got it.” And to provide supporting evidence for his viewpoint he points to the final arbiter in this judgement: “Well, the chairman has accepted it all!” (Transcript #2, 27).

### **Solidarity: Selling Down**

In addition to managing the expectations of the Chairman, his colleagues and staff, Johnson also has to make the plan work by managing the expectations of the audiences he has overtly identified: “Yeah, well I had to sell up. Now I’m selling down. The execution is selling down” (Transcript #2, 14). With this distinction between selling up and selling down, Johnson is again using a general strategy of bracketing, ranking and distancing. He is

separating audiences, removing them from one context and creating another by grouping them according to a hierarchy within the bank. And his distinction between “up” and “down” is a ranking with “up” having more value in our culture. His use of the past tense – “had” – also indicates that “up” is the direction which warranted attention first.

Johnson’s logical approach starts with an emphasis on understanding the values and expectations of the receivers of the documents. He points to his definition of “good reputation” as written in *Planning for Improved Public Relations*: “Good reputation results when institutional values and behavior are closely aligned with (and seen to be closely aligned with) public values and expectations.” Feedback from various audiences, then, influences his approach to developing and maintaining the bank’s communications plan – “You know, and that’s, that’s basically it. So sometimes you’ve got to manage the expectations” (Transcript #2, 13). With the statement “that’s basically it,” Johnson uses the deictic “that” as the subject of the verb, giving his assertion the status of a fact. By using the adverb “basically” as an adjunct, Johnson implies that the concept is simple, that there is nothing more to reputation than what he has said in his definition. This contrast of implied simplicity with the enormously complex task of building a good reputation points to another tension in the text. Institutional values and public values are not always easily aligned, but Johnson has to see his job as possible and certainly wants to believe in the bank’s ability to develop a good reputation and its worthiness to do so. Carrying on with his thought, Johnson’s next sentence functions as a result clause: “So sometimes you’ve got to manage the expectations.”

In the analysis that follows we explore Johnson’s goal, on behalf of the bank, to be the “pre-eminent financial services institution.” His explanation of what “pre-eminence” means reveals the process he uses to develop his communications plan. In the second episode, which I have labeled Equipped to Defend, we learn more about Johnson’s response to the external forces he cannot control. The execution of his plan involves

aligning the bank's forces internally, a situation over which he can have some degree of control. And in the third episode, *Mea Culpa*, Johnson addresses what happens when the bank falls short of its ideals and what personal implications this has for him. Following these analyses, a new section, entitled *Global Competition*, summarizes Johnson's beliefs about "the way business works" and reveals his underlying ordering principle.

### *That's Pre-eminence*

In Johnson's efforts to "sell up," to get approval for his communications plan, we have seen considerable evidence to support the management of expectations as the most significant aspect of the symbolic action of the interview. As he begins to "sell down," to execute his plan, he also has to manage expectations. To discover what these expectations are, Johnson puts a great deal of emphasis on research or measurement. The stress on measurement is so pervasive throughout the interview that it warrants analysis for its explanatory function. In addition to noting that it took him "almost a year" to do "a lot of research," Johnson indicates on 18 occasions the role of these activities in all aspects of his department's functioning:

I developed a very simple document for position and driving on the four stakeholder groups . . . but built in a lot more measurements, um, based on this concept of the balanced score card . . . (Transcript #2, 2).

Like some of these measures are very clear measures. Some of them are still evolving. . . . [T]he more we get into it the more we realize that we have to do a lot more work on measurement. But ultimately what we'll have is an index of measures so that . . . it's balanced. . . . [I]t's important to have a broad range of measures (Transcript #2, 3).

It was hard to find where the accountabilities lay for things. Um, so that it was hard to, to sort of push and probe and nobody measured anything (Transcript #2, 6).

We hit an all time high last year and we've also hit an all time low – now this is since 1992 – since it's been measured. . . . Now we've done a lot of research too and we've sort of, kind of, delved into this love/hate relationship. And there very definitely is a love/hate relationship with, ah, with banks. While you're still getting these narrow – these narrow measures don't make us look very good sometimes, but then you look at these other things . . . (Transcript #2, 8).

And I think the company now is at that stage where it's seen as a leader in many ways and, you know, the numbers are coming and we are very methodically trying to not over-promise because we do have a reputation of tripping once in awhile (Transcript #2, 9).

It was 35 per cent, we had 35 per cent recall on the speech, that's what it was. And of those who recalled the speech, ah, 79 per cent agreed with the speech and I think 73 per cent said he should give more speeches like that. ... [W]e actually think that we had an effect on public opinion because the whole debate started about then. We were looking at the data and we knew that the issue was important ... So this is where opinion was when he gave the speech and then the next time they measured it was up here (Transcript #2, 10).

We identified this issue in our early research and that's why we are positioned for the whole jobs, and economic stuff, and we're going to be announcing a youth – micro-lending program for youth in another month (Transcript #2, 11).

[H]e began to realize when I showed him the numbers and what was happening – he's become much more educated now I think ... (Transcript #2, 11).

I mean if you get, if you get too far off public opinion then you're in trouble. ... I was working with somebody who was helping me on this thing and when we'd done a lot of interviews with – inside the bank, outside the bank, done public opinion research, employee research, and, um, we also, just kind of boiled it down ... (Transcript #2, 12).

[O]ne of the core beliefs of Canadians and our customers is the stability and security of, of deposits. I mean, you know, that showed up in our research (Transcript #2, 16).

Because we knew that public opinion was so, so much the other way against us and there was no point trying to be defensive about it (Transcript #2, 16).

[W]e've just done some research with the [staff survey], the Insiders Survey and we ... now exceed benchmark, ah, companies by wide margins in knowledge and understanding of our corporate, ah, strategy and need for change (Transcript #2, 17).

I didn't poll specifically on that because that's just one of many, many things we do (Transcript #2, 17).

[I]t's all this stuff I've been doing for the board – stuff I've been pulling in. I just had this. Oh there it is. See, "Poised for Change" – I mean this is, ah, this is RBC Dominion Securities – this is very influential analysts – I mean. It says, "Stock Rank – Buy" – ah, "[Bank] held." Now this is – we loved this one. "While [Other Bank] concentrated on Quebec and Canada ... [Bank]'s was on the changing business environment, especially in the financial services sector." So then, you know, all our messages got picked up (Transcript #2, 18).

Well we see from our surveys that job-fear is very high. So we've managed to scare the hell out of a lot of employees. ... But the research, ah, in other companies says that that's pretty typical (Transcript #2, 22).

So we don't really talk about loyalty in our Insiders Survey; we talk about pride. And the pride is up, actually. The pride in the company is up (Transcript #2, 22).

And I think, you know, we've found there is this love/hate relationship. Canadians, you know, as I've showed you there – we are still held in high esteem (Transcript #2, 23).

And so we're doing a lot of things around that – really putting an emphasis on measurement this year. [Yeah.] I'm going to hire somebody to do a measurement plan. If you know anybody that's good at measurement, let me know. But ... public relations measures are very difficult. Um, you know it's hard to show direct impact on the bottom line. But we are doing things like, we're measuring value, advertising value. When I do, ah, just for example, my monthly – I'll measure advertising values. So, you know, I can

say that, that, um, we did \$200,000 worth of advertising in our medium. [Yeah.] That was the value. Now this isn't a multiplier or anything. Most, most professionals measure that by three because they say, you know, you can't buy page one in a newspaper and it has more value because it's third party so it's worth three times the weight. So, you know, I would say – and you can see we kind of track, you know, we are sort of tracking a solid number two, occasionally number three. . . . So, so we're stressing a lot of measurement (Transcript #2, 23-24).

If we keep in mind that an explanation is “often a reprise of the general message of the publication,” (Antaki 3) then the second example in the above list is particularly worthy of analysis as an explanatory episode. It occurs early on in the interview and includes Johnson's explanation of the bank's goal, which it expects will be furthered by the communications plan he is developing. Consider the following:

So we want to be the pre-eminent financial services institution.

Does that, by the way, mean, um, do you have specifics that you mean by that? Do you mean the largest bank? The most profitable bank? The –

Well we're, ah – that's what that little document does. [Okay.] It says, “What we want to be is a market leader.”

Okay.

All right. We want to be a market leader. So we want to be a market leader with customers, we want to be a market leader with employees, we want to be a market leader in the communities we do business, and we want to be a market leader with shareholders. And we're defining how we would know when we're a market leader.

Okay.

And we're still – this is still evolving. Like some of these measures are very clear measures. Some of them are still evolving. And we're not even sure that we've got – well we know we don't have it all, we're not even – the more we get into it the more we realize that we have to do a lot more work on measurement. But ultimately what we'll have is an index of measures so that we, so that it's, so that it's balanced. When one thing gets out of whack – one thing you've got to remember is don't get driven off your strategy by, you know, a cyclical event. You know, you got to kind of stay the course. So that's why it's important to have a broad range of measures. So that if one – you know, there is, there is that sort of creaking door kind of natural tendency, you know, and you've got to watch you don't overreact to something and go off your strategy. Um. That's why we want to keep the balance with all the stakeholders. So that's basically – you say “what's pre-eminence?” That's pre-eminence. That's, that's how we define it (Transcript #2, 2-3).

I have marked this passage as an explanatory episode because it starts with Johnson's statement of the bank's goal – “to be the pre-eminent financial services institution” – and ends with his concluding statement on how he will know that this goal has been reached –



“So that’s basically – you say “what’s pre-eminence?” That’s pre-eminence. That’s, that’s how we define it.” Although Johnson draws on some narrative resources, the passage functions primarily as an explanation: it is about measurement as a way to reveal what public attitudes “really” are and the results promise to reorient the framing of the bank’s goals. The emphasis is as much on the process of transformation – the development of the measurement – as it is on the transformation itself. Again we can observe Johnson’s strategy of bracketing, ranking and distancing.

### Resources for Bracketing

Johnson uses focalization, platitudes, labeling, and anaphora as part of this bracketing practice. His **focalization** is consistently that of a member of the bank. He groups himself with the bank in his frequent use of the pronoun “we.” There are no uses of “I” and even the periodic uses of “you” or “your” still group Johnson with the bank and then go further to expand the group to include a universal audience. He also makes use of **platitudes**: “one thing you’ve got to remember is don’t get driven off your strategy by, you know, a cyclical event. You know, you got to kind of stay the course. So that’s why it’s important to have a broad range of measures. So that if one – you know, there is, there is that sort of creaking door kind of natural tendency, you know, and you’ve got to watch you don’t overreact to something and go off your strategy. Um. That’s why we want to keep the balance with all the stakeholders.” Platitudes are stock phrases which present a situation as “given” rather than in need of analysis. They function as a convenient category that circulates through public discourse and puts a situation outside of scrutiny. In this example, Johnson groups his and the bank’s actions with those that would be undertaken by any reasonable person: “stay the course, have a broad range of measures, keep the balance.” Those who oppose the bank are grouped into a separate entity associated with “driven off your strategy,” “cyclical event,” “creaking door kind of natural tendency,” and “overreact.” The **label**, “research” or “measurement,” compacts certain aspects of the

process and functions as a tactic of transformation. It groups together a wide range of responses to public opinion surveys, bringing together separate entities within limits Johnson defines, and encouraging us to focus on the results, rather than on questions about the appropriateness of such things as method and design. Johnson also defines pre-eminence in a series of nested labels which function to define and delimit further the world in which the bank operates: to have “pre-eminence” is to be “a market leader” with the four “stakeholder groups.” To be a “market leader” requires an “index of measures” that has to be “balanced.” And when the bank has “balance with all the stakeholders” then it will have “pre-eminence.” And the label “stakeholder groups” is itself a bracketing of the entire Canadian population into four distinct audiences, namely “customers ... employees ... the communities [in which] we do business, and ... shareholders.” The use of **anaphora** – “We want to be a market leader. So we want to be a market leader with customers, we want to be a market leader with employees, we want to be a market leader in the communities we do business, and we want to be a market leader with shareholders” – with its repetition of the same word or group of words at the beginning of successive clauses, is used to create emphasis. The repetition – five times in two sentences – gives a great deal of importance to the goal of market leadership and groups it with all the bank’s audiences.

### *Ranking and Distancing*

The above examples can also be analysed to reveal Johnson’s ranking strategy. The labels, combined with his focalization and use of anaphora, indicate a vision of perfection and a hierarchy in which the bank strives to achieve the highest position. In other words, he identifies himself squarely with the bank and his three uses of “pre-eminent” and seven of “leader” are positive terms to indicate their common, desirable goal. The dividing practice provided by the series of platitudes makes the bank’s goals seem like obvious commonplaces while those opposed are clearly negative. To give in to any “sort of creaking door kind of natural tendency” would be to “overreact” and let things get “out of

whack” (Transcript #2, 3). “Creaking” doors and things “out of whack” are readily acknowledged as undesirable, as a process of deterioration.

We can now look at what Johnson’s bracketing and ranking practices tell us about distancing – his view of the social order underlying his attempts to manage multiple identities and solve the incompatibilities in his discourse. Johnson’s focalization allows no distance between himself and the bank and his labels create solidarity by downplaying the differences among his audiences and in the results he gets from his research. The responses are treated as one entity, the entire Canadian population falls into four groups, and one label – “market leader” – is applied to the goal for each. In some other examples of Johnson’s use of “research” or “measurement,” the label also serves to imbue his work with the aura of academia and to distance him from other communications professionals – specifically his predecessor and the other members of his staff. For example, he describes the situation he found when he arrived: “It was hard to find where the accountabilities lay for things. Um, so that it was hard to, to sort of push and probe and nobody measured anything” (Transcript #2, 6).

Johnson’s explanation of the situation and his extensive use of measurement to support his view are reminiscent of Donald Schön’s assertion that practitioners are “worldmakers” since truth and effectiveness can only be talked about within a particular frame.<sup>70</sup> The frame which Johnson creates involves not only an understanding of how bank employees think and act, but covers an audience as broad as the Canadian public. Johnson has “[t]hrough countless acts of attention and inattention, naming, sensemaking, boundary setting, and control” made and maintained a world “matched to [his] professional knowledge and know-how” (ERP 36). Johnson’s worldmaking demonstrates his expert management of expectations. Many aspects of such a disparate audience are made invisible

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<sup>70</sup> Donald A. Schön, *Educating the Reflective Practitioner* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 1987), p. 218. Subsequent references are by “ERP” and page number, in parentheses, following the quotation. Schön borrows the term “worldmaker” from (Goodman 1978) (ERP 4, 36.).

and an enormously complex task can now be seen as manageable, making Johnson's position less tenuous. He and his department will now be held accountable for meeting criteria he has established. And as Schön describes it, "the phenomena of practice in organizations are crucially determined by the kinds of reality individuals create for themselves, the ways they frame and shape their worlds – and what happens when people with similar and different ways of framing reality come into collision" (ERP 322). Like the practitioners Schön observed, Johnson is confronted with a "messy, indeterminate situation" and he "set[s] the problem" by "choosing and naming the things he will notice."

It is this "setting" of the problem, and not just the solving of it, that deserves our attention. As we will see in greater detail in the next chapter, Johnson is able to double his profits – he has "the profit of saying and the profit of denying what is said by the way of saying it" (L&SP 143). He anticipates criticisms and problems and provides the answers in such a way as to give the impression that everything is going according to plan. Regardless of what problem the bank has, Johnson profits from introducing and explaining, rather than defending, his position. With his explanations Johnson does not attempt to formulate an easy way out of his responsibilities. Neither his sophisticated understanding of the issues nor his position in a complex organization would allow him to consider this as an option. Instead he adopts a practice of basing his communications plan on survey results that allows him to adopt the language of his audiences and feed back to them a reformulation of their own concerns. Because he passes on these concerns he can claim to know what is *really* the case, the first criterion of an explanation. The entire Canadian population has been bracketed into four groups and their responses to surveys have been distilled into a "broad range" of "balanced" measures. This reframing provides the second criterion of explanations. Even when his reframing does not immediately reveal a solution, it "lends

itself to a method of inquiry in which he has confidence.”<sup>71</sup> Again the result is that he can use his position of power to create solidarity, thereby bringing disparate parts into a unified whole and expertly managing the bank’s multiple identities.

### *Equipped to Defend*

It would be inconsistent with Johnson’s development of a scientific approach to measuring opinions and insisting on accountability if he attempted to hold the bank entirely blameless for its problems, especially for its negative ratings relative to other banks.<sup>72</sup> The contrast between working for a worthy institution on one hand, and his scientific approach which says that the effect of a bad reputation has to have a corresponding cause on the other hand, results in a tension that Johnson, as an expert practitioner, is compelled to resolve. He does this in two ways: first he identifies an area he believes he can safely criticize as the source of the problem; second he develops and implements a strategy to align employees in defense of the bank so that the problem will not recur.

Early in the interview Johnson identifies customer service as a problem for the bank:

And that, and that’s one of the biggest problems we’ve had – is on the customer satisfaction side. If we can get the customer issues right, a lot of the other stuff will, will be a lot easier. Because a lot of my media negatives are driven by customer service issues (Transcript #2, 5).

I emphasized in this piece – and this was written in ‘93 – that the most important thing was customer service. It’s interesting to go back on this thing now. ... customer service remains the top priority and the most important influence on our overall reputation. Um, and I only discovered later that that had really slipped. That, that there was not the focus on it. It’s really taken me two years to get, get, get us back on that focus by driving in the importance of it on reputation and that it’s really been –again, some of the things that I thought were a gimme it turns out weren’t (Transcript #2, 6-7).

... we’re still in the relevance phase. Um, and trust is, you know, we, we’ve screwed up so many things with customers that the trust isn’t there. But we’ve sort of moved into stage three in some ways because we’re starting to redefine banking (Transcript #2, 7).

<sup>71</sup> Donald A. Schön, *The Reflective Practitioner: How Professionals Think In Action* (New York: Basic Books, 1983), p. 134.

<sup>72</sup> Details on these comparisons are provided on page 52, note 54.

These explanatory statements put the emphasis on poor past performance in one area – that of customer service – and function as a scapegoat for many of the problems perceived by the public. Johnson brackets customer service with “a lot of the other stuff,” “overall reputation,” “a gimme,” and “starting to redefine banking.” The reference to a colloquial contraction of “give me,” which, combined with the article “a” – “a gimme” – implies a term often used in golf when a player’s ball lies so close to the hole that opponents concede the putt without its actually having been made. This turns out to be a most appropriate metaphor because although Johnson thought customer service was “a gimme,” he “discovered later that that had really slipped.” In other words, the word is not the action or the object. Instead of just being able to articulate the words and assume that the action would follow, the senior executives are continuing to hear from Johnson that further action is needed: “It’s really taken me two years to get, get, get us back on that focus.” Johnson ranks customer service with such modifiers as “the most important thing,” “top priority and the most important influence.” He distances the bank from success in this area by pointing out that customer service was not taken seriously enough to produce results. It is “one of the biggest problems,” causing a lot of “media negatives,” it “had really slipped,” and “there was not the focus on it.” Johnson’s bracketing, ranking and distancing strategy with its emphasis on poor past performance in the area of customer service solves an incompatibility for him. Poor customer service provides a scapegoat for all the problems perceived by the public. His strategy also demonstrates the way in which the negative – a lack of success or an antithesis to the positive – provides the basis for distinctions. According to Burke’s rhetoric of rebirth, guilt arising from the negatives in our language causes us to strive for purification and redemption”(Literary 39-51, 203). In Johnson’s case, customer service problems provide a focus for the bank’s redemption and rebirth into a new culture – the redefining of banking.

A second significant response Johnson makes to resolve the tension between his need to work for a worthy institution and the bank's poor reputation, is to align employees in defense of the bank so the problem will not recur:

**So what is the strategy with employees now? They started out receiving this "Our Beliefs" document.**

Keeping them informed. Plus the donations, community – getting involved in the community. We have employee ambassadors – the idea of equipping people. Um, part of the program – for example, we've got a program going to explain profitability and service charges which is sort of a long term program, but this kind of stuff we put into the branches at year end. [Right.] So, you know, really simple stuff and then you see more sophisticated stuff. You know, this is more sophisticated. And there's been other stuff that has been done as well. But. [Right.] You know, service charges so. I mean, this is really simple. This is stuff they can photocopy. And this – when I say employee ambassadors this means, and it's in the strategy, but equipping them with what I call, sort of, backyard fence kind of information. You know. so that when they're being under assault at the Christmas dinner table, or something, you know, they've got, they've got stuff. Or they can photocopy this and give it to customers. This is all part of, you know, equipping, making the, making the employees sort of – giving them the stuff to know what's going on, you know. so they can get out and defend the bank (Transcript #2, 18).

I have selected this passage as an explanatory episode because it starts with Johnson announcing the idea of "equipping people," continues with his description of what this means, and ends with a summary of the purpose of this activity. In describing this process, bank employees are reoriented from their position as one of four stakeholder groups to that of a group synonymous with the bank. Employees are part of the process Johnson develops – a process of improvement for the bank. Their new role as ambassadors helps transform customers to a condition of more support for bank activities.

Johnson's **metaphor** of employees as ambassadors portrays them as official, diplomatic messengers. Since ambassadors represent their governments to foreigners, the metaphor functions to group employees with the bank and divide them from those who require the explanations. But "getting involved in the community" also means going to war: these ambassadors are "under assault" and they need "equipping" so they can "defend" the bank. Since ambassadors are diplomats of the highest rank, Johnson's metaphor positions employees above the other stakeholder groups with which they have to interact. Unlike those they have to combat, employee ambassadors are equipped "to know what's going

on.” The distancing practice implied by Johnson’s bracketing and ranking in this case is especially interesting. By bracketing employees with the bank and ranking them as highly important, Johnson deflects attention from the fact that the enemy includes “customers,” family “at the Christmas dinner table,” and neighbours at the “backyard fence.”

Throughout the execution of this plan, Johnson continues to monitor the responses from employees:

Well, um, we’ve just done some research with the [staff survey], the Insiders Survey and we are, ah, the – we now exceed benchmark, ah, companies by wide margins in knowledge and understanding of our corporate, ah, strategy and need for change and all that kind of stuff. I’m just trying to see if I’ve got a copy here. Look at these numbers, “I understand how [Bank]’s goal and vision apply to me in my work” – 87 per cent. “I know what I can do” – 82 per cent.

**I saw the summary of that in your employee newsletter.**

“The person I report to has a clear vision of the future of [Bank].” I mean, these, these are extraordinary numbers, um, in comparison to other companies. Plus the empowerment – “I’m prepared to be held accountable for the decisions I make” – 93 per cent. I mean it’s, it’s – this just blew us away. Um, because we’ve had a really concerted effort on – you know, back to my point about how we started with employees? (Transcript #2, 17).

Despite this “extraordinary” level of success, Johnson also has discovered through his surveys that “job-fear is very high. So we’ve managed to scare the hell out of a lot of employees.” His consolation is that “the research, ah, in other companies says that that’s pretty typical. So, we’re not really any different than any other – I think really what we’re saying, ‘Well it’s there anyway. You might as well talk about it.’ You know” (Transcript #2, 22). He elaborates on the effort to “talk about it” when he says that “you have to have excellent ‘employment practices’ and you’ve got to communicate that to show – build a ‘two-way communication’ culture so you can eliminate fear.” The “two-way communication” culture implies a dialogue between the executives and the employees, between producers and receivers. It acknowledges that the exercise of power has gone too far – “we’ve managed to scare the hell out of a lot of employees” – and that in order to



restore the balance which protects this ability to exercise power, a concerted effort at building solidarity is needed. Johnson says:

This is what, this is the first time we've ever done this with the chairman – taking some really tough questions and, and getting him to answer them. You look at those. You look at those. Look at what they're saying: "What about downsizing?" And what about, "Hey, are the executives really, are they really toeing the line on this cost-cutting we've been doing on this, you know, more effective management of our expenditures? Are they doing that?" You know, "And what about all this vision and values? Does this stuff really apply to everybody?" I mean, these are real questions that were generated out of the Insiders Survey (Transcript #2, 20).

The "two-way communication" culture means that employees are "accountable for finding out what's going on too. So that the excuse isn't, 'Gee nobody told me.' I mean, the information's there and if you don't know, find out. Um, and ask somebody." But Johnson also understands that in order for this to happen "you've got to break down fear" and the bank has to respond: "what that implies is we're responsible for telling them."

The tension Johnson feels as he attempts to maintain a balance between power and solidarity is revealed in a number of ways. Although the chairman's name is on the newsletter article, indicating that these are his responses, and although he "never changed a word in these things," Johnson "wrestled with them" and had "an outsider write it to try to keep us a bit honest" (Transcript #2, 21). For example, when asked "Does this mean that every executive is complying with these new standards we've introduced over the last year?" the answer is: "Realistically speaking, this may not yet be the case in each and every instance; but, it *is* the intention and it *is* the goal."<sup>73</sup> When it comes to employee questions that cannot be answered with a list of positive results, Johnson wants the bank to "have the guts to tell them." But he quickly adds, "Now, we can't tell them everything, obviously. I mean a lot of stuff's confidential – there's competitive issues and everything. But you try to be as open as you can. So we're calling this an occasional feature – I'm not going to do it

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<sup>73</sup> "Making Progress," 1996. As noted previously, all document titles have been changed to ensure confidentiality; however, the new titles have been chosen to preserve the ideas portrayed by the original titles.

all the time but let's try to get the ball rolling" (Transcript #2, 21). Because job fear remains high among bank employees,<sup>74</sup> the bank's strategy is to emphasize a positive feature of its relationship with employees:

So we don't really talk about loyalty in our Insiders Survey; we talk about pride. And the pride is up, actually. The pride in the company is up. And so that's very positive. What that says is that, you know, our success – people like us to be successful. They feel better about being – and even though we're getting hammered – I would rather be hammered for being too, too profitable or being hammered for being successful, than being hammered for being unsuccessful. I mean at least you feel good. You've got some pride and success (Transcript #2, 23).

The picture that emerges is of a large employee group that is very well informed about the bank's goal and the part employees are expected to play in it – 87 percent responded positively to the statement, "I understand how [Bank]'s goal and vision apply to me in my work." And 82 per cent responded positively to the statement, "I know what I can do." At the same time, the employee group is aware of the public crisis of confidence – "we're getting hammered" – and is having one itself – "job-fear is very high." Because the public issue of most concern relates to profit levels, Johnson frames the situation as "being hammered for being successful." The emphasis on being "hammered" by the public because of high levels of profit contrasts with the world view Johnson gave earlier when he discussed the legitimate concerns Canadians have about customer service: "customer service remains the top priority and the most important influence on our overall reputation." What becomes clear is that Johnson has many competing concerns to manage in a very complex organization.

It is not surprising that Johnson has been successful in his job. He has developed a well coordinated, methodical plan to address a very difficult situation – the reputation management of a major Canadian bank. In the first episode of this section on Selling Down,

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<sup>74</sup> According to the results of the "Insiders Survey" only 16% of the respondents responded positively to "I am not concerned about my job security." And to the statement "If I do my job especially well I will increase my job security" only 31% responded positively. As noted previously, all document names have been changed to ensure confidentiality; however, the new titles have been chosen to reflect the ideas of the original titles.

or building solidarity, Johnson described the effort he puts into measuring needs and results – and it is hard to argue with efforts to learn more about affected audiences. In this second episode, Johnson describes what the bank is doing internally to defend itself – it is also hard to argue with the goals of customer service and excellent employment practices. He takes the entire Canadian population with its plethora of competing concerns about banking and finds a response that will meet with as little resistance as possible.

Despite his success, however, Johnson also experiences tensions and ambiguities similar to those experienced by Taylor. In the following episode we learn about the bank's strategy when it has to admit failure, and we learn more about the resources Johnson brings to resolve the incompatibilities that arise from his competing sets of personal values.

### *Mea Culpa*

Johnson acknowledges that much of the criticism leveled at banks is due to the close involvement Canadians have with banks – “the bank is a corporation that everybody has a personal experience with” – and to the financial uncertainty faced by many: “people are so uncertain about their own economic situation they are saying, ‘Why are those banks – ’ it’s not just banks – ‘Why are those corporations making all this money.’” At various times during the interview he characterizes Canadians:

Um, and, ah, one thing about Canadians, ah, they are very practical I think – Canadians are very, kind of, practical, pragmatic, and that is a difficult issue but, um, while the sort of knee jerk reaction from the left is, you know: “yadda yadda yadda corporate agenda,” basically Canadians have got a lot of common sense and they know that you cannot go on forever and continue to spend, you know, 40 per cent more than you got coming in (Transcript #2, 12).

I mean, I don't think Canadians, um, really expect that we're going to, sort of, give away the shop. You know, one of the most, one of the core beliefs of Canadians and our customers is the stability and security of, of deposits. I mean, you know, that showed up in our research. I mean that's, I mean that's core. They want to trust their banking system. And so, they, they know that, that it shouldn't be *that* easy to borrow money. Because they don't like it when we take big loan losses (Transcript #2, 16).

And I think, you know, we've found there is this love/hate relationship. Canadians, you know, as I've showed you there – we are still held in high esteem. It's just that the problem now seems to be that there's so much uncertainty that people just say, I mean, about their own – I mean people are so uncertain about their own economic situation they are saying, “Why are those banks –” it's not just banks – “Why are those

corporations making all this money.” Now banks happen to be the biggest, among the biggest corporations in North America. You know, and also the bank is a corporation that everybody has a personal experience with. I mean Bombardier? What the hell do people know about Bombardier? (Transcript #2, 23).

In these statements, Johnson sheds light on the nature of the “love/hate relationship” which Canadians have with their banks. The reference to “yadda yadda yadda corporate agenda,” is a reference to a popular comic strip<sup>75</sup> which makes clear that, no matter what is said, we do not hear anything but what is most important to us. Those who always find a “corporate agenda” in the messages are those who have a “knee jerk reaction from the left.” They are portrayed as the minority when compared to “practical, pragmatic” Canadians who understand “difficult issue[s]” and have “a lot of common sense.”

In public opinion polls, Canadians hold bankers “in high esteem” but they have also shown themselves capable of mounting significant protests. In response to one public protest, in this case over the seeming reluctance of all banks to lend to small business, one of the executives of Johnson’s bank is called upon to appear before a government committee on business.<sup>76</sup> Johnson relates the story as follows:

He went in and totally surprised them because he went in and did a “mea culpa.” He said, “You’re right, we haven’t been doing a good enough job.” Because we knew that public opinion was so, so much the other way against us and there was no point trying to be defensive about it. I mean, you might as well just, “Yeah, you’re right. Let’s fix it.”

**And what was the response to that?**

They were totally disarmed because they went in gunning for bear. You know, and this guy says, “Hey we’re all on the same team here. I agree with you.” It just blew them away, actually. He has a great reputation in Ottawa. In fact, subsequent hearings that he appeared at, I mean, he is now seen as the leader in the banking industry and actually moving the bank off – the banking industry off a very stubborn position on a number of things. So he won a lot of points (Transcript #2, 16).

<sup>75</sup> “The Far Side” by Gary Larson. One comic portrays what your dog hears when you talk to it: “yadda yadda yadda Rover yadda yadda Rover.” Another portrays what your cat hears: “yadda yadda yadda yadda yadda.”

<sup>76</sup> After reporting on progress relating to small business lending, the president, suggested that they all “turn the page on the past” and look instead at “what each of us needs to do so that small business ... prospers.” He acknowledged the “continual tightrope” that governments have to walk as they search for a balance between “revenue requirements on the one hand, and reducing the tax burden on the other.” Since this search for balance is something banks and governments have in common, the president suggested they would all have a better chance of finding solutions if “we support each other’s efforts.”

I have chosen this passage as a narrative episode because it involves Johnson's telling of an event that happened in the past and resulted in a process of improvement for the bank. An analysis of Johnson's bracketing, ranking and distancing strategy provides further evidence of the resources he brings to solving incompatibilities and creating unity in his discourse.

### *Narrative and Grammatical Resources for Bracketing*

Johnson makes use of direct quotations, focalization, metaphor and labeling as part of his bracketing practice. His **direct quotations** separate out the central character in his story. By attributing the voice to the president, Johnson can speak for the bank without presuming to take responsibility for the action. The bank president says "You're right, we haven't been doing a good enough job," "Yeah, you're right. Let's fix it." and "Hey we're all on the same team here. I agree with you." The ambiguity of the dividing practice allows Johnson to move back and forth between his position as a representative of the bank and his position on the bank hierarchy below that of the president. The **focalization** in these quotations begins by dividing the bank – the "we" – from the government which is siding with public opinion – the "you." It then moves to grouping the bank and the government together with the use of "us" and an inclusive "we" in "Let's fix it." and "Hey we're all on the same team here." The **metaphor** of a hunting expedition can be seen in the use of "disarmed," and "gunning for bear." But the event becomes more sporting with the use of "same team," "leader" and "won a lot of points." Again Johnson starts by putting the bank in opposition to the government and moves to bracketing them together. When Johnson says that the president "went in and did a 'mea culpa'" he uses "mea culpa" as a **label** for the event. This reference to a term meaning "I am guilty," normally used in a religious confession, groups this event with a kind of sanctity and a particular outcome. It implies that the bank recognizes it made an error and will be forgiven.

### *Ranking and Distancing*

The above examples also exhibit Johnson's ranking practice. By first separating the bank from the government and then aspiring to bring them together as one entity, Johnson reveals the nature of one of the bank's hierarchies. The president's effort to improve the bank's position will only come about if he can persuade the government that they are on the same "team" rather than opponents. By making a separate entity of the government, which he labels "you," and giving it the position of "right," Johnson ranks the government above the "we" that has not "been doing a good enough job" and has the public "so much the other way against us." The reference to "mea culpa" indicates an admission of guilt made to those in the hierarchy who can demand a command performance from the president of one of the largest banks in the country. The metaphor of disarming those who "went in gunning for bear" portrays the bank as prey while the metaphor of winning "a lot of points" revises the contest to one in which the bank and its predators are more equally matched. From this position, the president moved to "Hey we're all on the same team here. I agree with you." The effect resulted in an invitation for the president to stay on the team and help negotiate with other banks: "he is now seen as the leader in the banking industry and actually moving the bank off – the banking industry off a very stubborn position on a number of things." Paradoxically, the public – those usually considered part of a reception regime – forced the government to step in and demand changes from the bank – an organization with superior power to produce. In this inverted hierarchy we again see the dynamic workings of power and solidarity. Receivers have used resistance to diminish the bank's power in a particular instance. And by agreeing, the bank builds solidarity and can continue to exercise its power in an ongoing way: "he is now seen as the leader in the banking industry."

The process which started with the admission of past mistakes, and then moved to identification with the problems politicians face with their constituents, is a clear example

of distancing, of the attempt to remove the division that alienates, in this case, a speaker from his audience and a bank from its regulators. Instead of attempting to move the audience of politicians and policy makers to a “meeting of the minds” that starts with the bank’s position on minimizing risk, the president adopts a strategy of adhering to the side of public opinion which wants banks to lend more readily to small businesses. Johnson applauds this approach because it gives the bank an audience in common with that of the committee. Politicians obviously look to their constituents – the public – to decide what issues to pursue. As Burke says, “to begin with ‘identification’ is ... to confront the implications of *division*.” We have to face our condition of alienation, one from another, and of belonging to “groups more or less at odds with one another” (Rhetoric 22). By appealing to his audience to recognize that they share *substantially* the same problem, the president at once calls on the resource of consubstantiality and identifies “an enemy shared in common.” Continuing this line of analysis reveals a chain of events which Burke summarizes as, “If order, then guilt; if guilt, then need for redemption; but any such payment is victimage” (Symbols 281, 280). In other words, for this case specifically, if hierarchy, then “*mea culpa*”; if “*mea culpa*,” then need for better lending policies for small business; but any such change will result in higher risks and corresponding loan losses. Paradoxically, even with this result which seems to constitute a promise to fail at one of the central tenets of successful banking, the speech is considered a success.

The cleansing that results from a public admission of previous wrong-doing and the establishment of an “enemy in common” brings together the politicians and the bank. “Identification is compensatory to division”(Rhetoric 22). But the enemy in common is the public – members of the four stakeholder groups and the audience for the bank’s values, which include “Respect for Every Individual.” As we have seen, Johnson’s view of the public is that they are imbued with “good old fashioned common sense”:

I don't think Canadians, um, really expect that we're going to, sort of, give away the shop. You know, one of the most, one of the core beliefs of Canadians and our customers is the stability and security of, of deposits. I mean, you know, that showed up in our research. I mean that's, I mean that's core. They want to trust their banking system. And so, they, they know that, that it shouldn't be *that* easy to borrow money. Because they don't like it when we take big loan losses (Transcript #2, 16).

Contradictions of these proportions are part of the very system in which the bank operates, and individuals – like Johnson and Taylor – constantly face the tensions that result. But over and over Johnson effects double profits by reframing events – he profits once from being in a position to create processes others have to enact, and a second time from observing the outcome and having the authority to present it as desirable. To understand more about Johnson's resources for solving the incompatibilities he faces on a daily basis it is helpful to explore his underlying ordering principle. As Antaki notes, "Normally, the explanation giver describes something that is known to be a problem to both explainer and audience, and then proceeds to reveal something novel which explains it. In the closed world of explicitly ideological discourse, however, it is the explanation . . . which is well known and agreed by explainer and audience, and what is new is the particular problem that the writer has managed to use it to explain" (3). As we will see, Johnson's underlying ordering principle resonates with popular notions of business and economics – but the problems to which he applies the principle are novel. This application of popular principles to new problems is part of Johnson's attempt to reframe a situation to ensure its compatibility with his view of how things really are.

### **Global Competition**

As the preceding analyses have shown, the process of managing expectations proves to be fraught with conflicting demands and competing strategies. Johnson oscillates between instigating processes he has developed and measuring the results, between exercising power and building solidarity. He makes use of a general strategy of bracketing, ranking and distancing which can be observed in occasional narrative episodes and



extensive explanatory episodes. Like Taylor, he relies on an underlying ordering principle to guide his logical method of solving incompatibilities. With the logical method, as long as the ordering principle is kept pure, all circumstances derived from it will be compatible. Before comparing Taylor's situation with Johnson's, however, it is helpful to look more closely at Johnson's underlying ordering principle – the workings of business in a global economy.

On the many occasions in which Johnson explains the way things “really” are, he relies on common assumptions about the way business works on a global scale. Like many explanations, Johnson's acts as a reprise or a repeated theme of the interview:

Well, we talk about the four things that are driving change in – well they're driving change in all industries, but particularly in our business. Technology, reregulation and globalization, competition, and demographics. You know those four interact very, very, very powerfully (Transcript #2, 4).

But I mean the entire – you had a global collapse of the real-estate industry which was almost like a 20-year correction over the course of about a year, or year-and-a-half (Transcript #2, 9).

And that's part of an overall economic transition. I mean, that's what modern economies do. They go from low value to high value. At least the successful economies do (Transcript #2, 14).

And we're sort of doing the things that you would expect a major, global corporation to do in terms of our – the way we operate (Transcript #2, 23).

As noted previously, Johnson makes a distinction between kinds of events – some he says are relevant to the bank's “strategy” and some are “cyclical,” tempting you to go off “course”: “one thing you've got to remember is don't get driven off your strategy by, you know, a cyclical event. You know, you got to kind of stay the course” (Transcript #2, 3). The metaphor of driving a course or track can be associated with elements of danger if you do not “stay the course” as well as elements of urgency to compete and not let others force you “off your strategy.” When Johnson describes a cyclical event that could distract the bank from its strategy, he provides a classic explanation and one that reveals details about his underlying ordering principle:

Well right now, for example, there's a huge issue around profitability and the perception that banks are downsizing. Um, now, we have to be sensitive to that, but we also have to – we can't lose sight of the fact that we are under tremendous threat from global competitors who are more efficient than we are. And just because we happen to be at the point in the cycle now where we are profitable we may go into, go to the next part of the cycle and become, you know, relatively less profitable, and that's the way business works. You know, it's not always straight up. The business cycle works in such a way that you have ups and downs. Well, you know, the great fear is that you don't have to – that if you don't start changing when you're strong, then you won't have the strength to change, you know, when you're weak. So that's an example which you have to be – you can't lose sight of the issues that are, that you've identified from a strategic perspective (Transcript #2, 3).

This passage can be analysed as an explanatory episode because it contains Johnson's view of reality and it attempts to reorient the framing of the bank's financial position and its firing decisions. Johnson introduces the passage as an example and exits from it with a summary indicated by "So that's an example." Johnson's management of multiple identities and ability to resolve incompatibilities can again be seen in his general strategy of bracketing, ranking and distancing.

### Resources for Bracketing

Johnson makes use of distinctions, a conditional statement, platitudes and labeling, as part of his bracketing practice. He makes a **distinction** between events "that you've identified from a strategic perspective" and all others when he says: "The changes we are making are strategic changes, not tactical." To paraphrase a popular dictionary definition,<sup>77</sup> strategy and tactic are opposites, both related to military activities, literally or figuratively. Strategy is the art of war; the management of armies in a campaign; the art of imposing upon the enemy the place and time and conditions for fighting, preferred by oneself. Strategic bombing, for example, is designed to destroy the enemy's internal economy and morale. Tactics, however, are carried out in immediate *support of* military or naval operations. They are skillful devices, adroitly planned, and brief or local in nature. Johnson groups the bank's plans with strategy and long term outcomes and he divides them from short-sighted actions.

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<sup>77</sup> See the *Concise Oxford Dictionary*

Another of Johnson's distinctions is revealed in his example: "there's a huge issue around profitability and the perception that banks are downsizing." When he indicates that there is a "perception" that banks are downsizing, he invokes the common contrast between perception and reality. The bank's strategy calls for firing people and cutting costs so as to be competitive in the international arena. But those without positions to determine strategy, and those losing their positions, have mounted pressure for banks to account for these actions in times of record-breaking profits.<sup>78</sup> Johnson says "we have to be sensitive to that" and then goes on to add "but we also have to – we can't lose sight of the fact that we are under tremendous threat from global competitors who are more efficient than we are." The conjunction "but" indicates a topic shift. What follows is more of Johnson's ordering principle, which is also the alternative, official point of view that holds sway in the entire Canadian banking industry. In other words, Johnson leaves open the possibility that while this "huge issue around profitability" is founded on perceptions, it is not necessarily also founded on reality.

Johnson's **conditional statement** – "if you don't start changing when you're strong, then you won't have the strength to change, you know, when you're weak" – gives the impression of causality. The statement acts as a general principle – the use of "you" refers to a universal audience – which further indicates his view of the nature of things. Johnson groups the bank's current actions and situation with a time of strength and by using the if/then form to presume causality he implies that the bank has a certain responsibility to act before this time passes. His use of **platitudes** also gives the impression of things taking a natural course: "that's the way business works . . . it's not always straight up. The business cycle works in such a way that you have ups and downs." As stock

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<sup>78</sup> Media coverage of the profits of all Canadian banks has been extensive, radio programs asked listeners to call in and voice their opinions, and analysts agree that the outcry forced the government to reconsider pending changes in regulations which would contribute further to the banks' profitability. One such change, the ability to sell insurance through the branches, was under review and due to be reported on but became the subject of such intense lobbying on all sides that it was held for further study. Further details on this and related issues of banking in Canada can be found in Chapter 3.

phrases, platitudes function as convenient categories which circulate through public discourse and put situations outside of scrutiny. In this case, Johnson groups change – “ups and downs” – with the natural state of business: business has a “cycle” as a normal aspect of its workings. The label “global competitors” in Johnson’s statement – “we can’t lose sight of the fact that we are under tremendous threat from global competitors who are more efficient than we are” – groups together foreign companies, higher efficiency, and a threat to Canadian banks. Paradoxically, at a time of support for free trade and international competition, this label invokes a threat of pending disaster to all Canadians and is used to defend the privileged position which banks enjoy. It is to this touchstone of international competition that Johnson returns whenever progress toward the newly sanctioned culture of the organization is threatened.

### *Ranking and Distancing*

Ranking, or the application of values to the results of bracketing, is especially visible in the distinctions Johnson makes. “Strategy” is associated with superlatives such as “vital,” “crucial,” “imperative” and “important.” Words associated with “tactics” include the lesser comparatives: “expedient,” “advisable,” and “appropriate.” By grouping the bank’s changes with strategy, Johnson is at the same time ranking them as superior to other kinds of changes. The emphasis on strategy attempts to transform actions that get criticized into ones that are above criticism because they are attached to a vision of the future, a far-sighted plan. When Johnson makes a distinction between perception and reality, he also engages in ranking. In our society, seeing is believing: seeing constitutes reality, while perceptions are subjective and questionable. His conditional statement positions the bank in a time of strength which, combined with his bracketing practice, portrays its actions as more positive than those that would occur at a time of weakness. Johnson’s labels also show his ranking since, in our society, competition is considered desirable. It is thought to result in the survival of the fittest and hence to promote a sense of progress. The threat is

“tremendous” and the competitors are “global” and “more efficient.” To invoke the threat of global competitors, then, is to rank them as a major force to contend with, one that requires the bank to take strong steps.

The severity of the situation is supported by another comment that Johnson makes later in the interview. When he is talking about the crisis that led to the need for a communications plan he says, “you had a global collapse of the real-estate industry which was almost like a 20-year correction over the course of about a year, or year-and-a-half” (Transcript #2, 9). The use of “global” as a quantifier does not allow for any partitive structure and hence for any part of the globe to be exempt. And while trends can be anticipated over 20 years, Johnson makes it clear that for 20 years of activity to occur in “about a year, or year-and-a-half” is not something anyone could be expected to anticipate. He uses a term common in the financial services industry – “correction” – to indicate that a downward trend is a return to a more accurate state, one in keeping with acknowledged or established standards. The overall impression, then, is that things have returned to a more accurate state but that the bank could not have been expected to prepare for this state because it happened too fast.

Through his bracketing and ranking, we can also understand Johnson’s distancing practices. If strategic and tactical are military terms, then Johnson’s battle scene takes place between what de Certeau would call the “marginality of a majority” and the bank as a large privileged organization. For all of Johnson’s efforts to bring together his four audiences and align them with the bank, the distances he has to overcome are at times as wide apart as enemies on a battlefield. As de Certeau puts it, “Marginality is today no longer limited to minority groups, but is rather massive and pervasive; this cultural activity of the non-producers of culture, an activity that is unsigned, unreadable, and unsymbolized, remains the only one possible for all those who nevertheless buy and pay for the showy products through which a productivist economy articulates itself. Marginality is becoming universal.

A marginal group has now become a silent majority” (de Certeau xvi). But although this mass of people lack a sanctioned voice and positions of power, they are not entirely without resources. As de Certeau says, they depend on time and are “always on the watch for opportunities that must be seized ‘on the wing’” (xix). In Johnson’s life, the marginalized majority have created “a huge issue around profitability and the perception that banks are downsizing.” Johnson has to respond to this show of resistance on behalf of the bank and attempt to bring the opposing forces to a common understanding of the need to join with the bank in order to face an enemy in common, the global competitors.

In summary, this explanatory episode and the supporting comments Johnson makes at other times in the interview position the bank as operating responsibly – “that’s the way business works” – in the face of threats that are beyond its control. Johnson’s understanding of these forces is portrayed as a higher level of understanding that obliges him to stick to his strategy, to “stay the course” – despite pressure to do otherwise. The bank’s lack of control over external forces and the complexity of the situation are built into Johnson’s underlying ordering principle, a principle on which he draws to stabilize tensions and ambiguities.

## **Conclusion**

Throughout the interview, Johnson, like Taylor, attempts to manage multiple identities and to make inherent contradictions invisible. Johnson has to be concerned with the bank’s multiple audiences and their competing needs. He has to stake his reputation and his job on the creation of a plan that is affected by many factors over which he has no control. He has to balance the bank’s negative media reports – and even its own admission of failure – with his need to believe he works for a worthy institution.

We see Johnson exercise power as he creates processes. We also see him attempt to build solidarity by measuring opinions and incorporating them into his plan. And he is very successful. As a producer, with a sanctioned voice and channels of distribution, he has

created a position and developed strategies to manage resistance. But although the gap between those with sanctioned voices and those without is considerable, the analysis in this and the previous chapter make clear that the distance between production and reception is not always as gaping as it may first seem. As de Certeau warns, efforts to undertake measurements and statistical studies “tell us virtually nothing about the currents in this sea theoretically governed by the institutional frameworks that it in fact gradually erodes and displaces.” “What is counted is *what* is used, not the *ways* of using” (de Certeau 34, 35). Measurement may “tell us virtually nothing” about how officially sanctioned messages are used, but it does provide the feedback producers need to build solidarity and hence reduce resistance. In other words, the limits of power are reached when the forces of resistance become strong enough to invert a hierarchy. When producers exert more power than receivers expect of them, receivers can combine their resistance by joining together and using their majority to force changes. In this way, a producer’s need to build solidarity – in order not to be overcome by the resistance – gives some degree of power to receivers.

To maintain a sense of identity in the face of all this complexity we rely on our resources – primarily our language practices – not only to construct meaning but to transform situations, to keep forms fitting in such a way as to resolve the incompatibilities that arise. This analysis returns us to Fairclough’s link between members’ resources and the interpretation of a situation. He asserts that our interpretation of a situation happens in two stages: “In the first ... the interpreter arrives at a determination of the institutional setting ... on the basis of a societal social order in her MR. That is, a societal social order divides total social space into so many institutional spaces, and any actual situation must first be placed institutionally in terms of this division. In the second stage ... the interpreter arrives at a determination of the situational setting ... on the basis of the institutional social order selected in stage 1” (Fairclough 24-25, 150). Because Johnson’s resources match his job – he is a product of the system he is called upon to reproduce – he is confident of the context

in which the bank operates. And the bank's context – a global economy – allows him to find a place for any particular situation that occurs.

Johnson has all the advantages of the dominant discourse and sanctioned channels. His is the language of management. The distinctions he makes – between the tactical and the strategic (Transcript #2, 4), between running a department integrated into the business and one functioning in isolation, between being reactive and being proactive (Transcript #2, 6) – are less concerned with events that happened in the past than they are with process. As a result, Johnson relies less on narrative than on explanation – claims to reveal what is “really” the case and a reorienting of events and the roles of participants. His explanations call again and again on his belief in an underlying ordering system. Because he also believes that his underlying principle is widely shared, he anticipates that his audience will accept his extension of the principle to the particular problem he faces. Antaki describes this situation – in which the explanation is “well known and agreed by explainer and audience, and what is new is the particular problem that the writer has managed to use it to explain” – as belonging to the closed world of ideological discourse (2,3).

The problems Johnson faces are extensive and complicated. In the episodes analysed in this chapter, for example, Johnson describes the bank's largest lending crisis, the high level of fear among its employees, its extensive and very negative media coverage, the vitriolic response the chairman received when Johnson first sent him back into a public forum, the assault employees face because they work for the bank, and the government's demand that the banks do a better job of lending to small business. Johnson's explanations are his attempt to give an “accounting” of these events. Michael J. Cody and Margaret L. McLaughlin discuss various kinds of accounting, which they define as “the way in which *failure events* are managed in social interaction.” Johnson's accounting constitutes a “justification” – his explanations take “the form ‘I am responsible, but I deny that an offence was committed’” (Antaki 113). He talks about the problem events but he reframes



them as normal outcomes of the global economic system. The lending crisis is caused by “a global collapse of the real-estate industry which was almost like a 20-year correction over the course of about a year, or year-and-a-half.” Employee fear is to be expected: research “in other companies says that that’s pretty typical. So, we’re not really any different.” The reaction received by the chairman is a normal part of gaining profile: “if you’re going to have a profile you’re going to also be a target.” And the government’s demands were met so the chairman “is now seen as the leader in the banking industry.”

Whether talking in narrative mode or by way of explanation, Johnson’s distinctions rely on competing categories and reveal hierarchies that are based on the perception of boundaries in the selection of entities (bracketing), on the values given to entities by placing them in a particular order (ranking), and on the invitation to us to share a vision of that order (distancing). The episodes also reveal the most significant aspect of the symbolic action of the discourse: the management of expectations.

Johnson concludes the interview with a final reflection on the nature of his work for the bank:

The only thing I would want to add is that, you know, the old analogy about turning around the super-tanker is pretty – I mean it’s a huge organization. And, it is – I mean, you know, we’re changing the culture of this organization. We’re changing, I mean – we’re going through major, major changes and it’s, it’s, you know – I’ve already said it, but it’s – you’ve got to, just got to keep at it. You can’t, you can’t – it’s like Sisyphus, you know. Sometimes the rock rolls back on you but you’ve got to go back up again, you know (Transcript #2, 27).

Johnson uses the metaphor of “turning around the super-tanker” to describe the enormity of the challenge facing the bank. It’s “a huge organization” which is “changing the culture.” He sees his job as having mythic proportions – “it’s like Sisyphus.” And he shifts from using the pronoun “we” to an inclusive “you.” This indefinite pronoun implies a relationship of solidarity with all audiences.

Like Taylor, Johnson returns at the end of the interview to a state of equilibrium. While he has not faced double binds and exhibited a crisis as she has, he has revealed

disturbances and made use of various rhetorical strategies to resolve them. And while Taylor gives coherence, order and closure to her narrative by appealing to the “natural” and inevitable state of business affairs, Johnson achieves a similar outcome by emplotting himself in an narrative with epic proportions. He has to have the determination and stamina of “Sisyphus” to do his job. He also needs specialized skills of a physician to provide expert advice to an organization with the proportions of a “super-tanker” undertaking the challenges of a tight maneuver. Johnson’s stability comes from identification with the process: “you’ve got to, just got to keep at it. You can’t, you can’t – it’s like Sisyphus, you know. Sometimes the rock rolls back on you but you’ve got to go back up again, you know.” It also comes from a sense of personal involvement – he may not be able to stop the rock from rolling back but he is confident that he can “go back up again.”

## 6. Theoretical Reflections: Who Is Entitled to Negotiate?

*The engagement between society and individual is what must be understood if literacy is to contribute toward goals of betterment. Chaim Perelman in The New Rhetoric, for example, speaks of a 'community of minds' that agrees to certain rules of argument and thus functions on the basis of those agreements. Communities of minds is an appealing notion; yet negotiations among minds amount to struggles between those who can win and those who cannot. To put it another way, in American society the struggle is between those who can read and write and those who cannot or have no opportunity to, and the struggle is over who is entitled to negotiate.*

*J. Elspeth Stuckey, The Violence of Literacy*

### Introduction

As Chapters 4 and 5 demonstrate, Taylor and Johnson both need to manage multiple identities and both have considerable resources for the task. The transcripts of their interviews exhibit rhetorical transformations at points of tension caused by their desires to avoid incompatibilities arising from their multiple identities. They each employ a logical method of resolving these incompatibilities, a method assuming that if an underlying ordering principle is kept pure, all circumstances derived from it will be compatible. Even their underlying ordering principles are similar: both have to do with the nature of business. But there are significant differences in their resources, approaches and outcomes. An exploration of these differences amplifies what we have learned about the dynamic workings of communication in an organizational society. It also brings together the interplay of discourse, the self and social structures seen now through the variety of lenses provided by my analytical framework.

Chapter 4 makes visible Taylor's "wavering line" between division and identification and the strength of her conflicting desires. We see her both comply and resist and skillfully oscillate between the two positions, thereby negotiating multiple identities in

what Burke calls the “dancing of an attitude” (Symbols 79). And while not eliminating the multiple identities, these strategies at least camouflage the tensions and create a space in which Taylor can find acceptable responses to the incompatibilities she faces. Her incompatibilities arise from her need to feel pride in her work and her contradictory need to rise above the organization at times, even if this means having to leave her position altogether. As the analysis of Taylor’s interview demonstrates, she relies heavily on narrative accounts of events around her to support her views on the bank’s communications. Taylor’s stories are a way of letting events “speak for themselves,” of giving voice to other characters and inviting us to judge the situation for ourselves. But occasionally Taylor is unable to find a way around the conflict she faces and instead experiences a double bind.

In Chapter 5 we observe the tensions and conflicts experienced by Johnson. Like Taylor on the reception side, Johnson too must manage multiple identities. But Johnson has been hired to rescue the bank from its communications crisis. His position requires him to reproduce the organization’s system of differences, its ways of making distinctions. To be successful, he has to balance issues of power and solidarity. Johnson’s approach to discussing the bank’s communications plan does not involve telling stories about events – although he does that occasionally; rather he relies on an explanation of current, ongoing processes. He has created some of the processes and integrated them into the system as he observes it around him. He is confident about the way things work at many levels. His confidence in his methods allows Johnson to double his profits: on numerous occasions he has “the profit of saying and the profit of denying what is said by the way of saying it” (L&SP 143). As we will see in greater detail, Johnson can profit both by admitting mistakes and by reframing these mistakes so they appear to be the normal workings of a plan. This resource is not totally unavailable to Taylor but, as we have seen, it is an exception for her. Johnson, by contrast, benefits from a double profit as a regular feature of

his discourse. To understand the significance of this contrast we need first to examine the instances of Taylor's double binds and Johnson's double profits, and then to explore the relationship between these concepts.

After describing the differences between double binds and double profits as an illumination of the power differences between Taylor and Johnson, this chapter expands on the nature of the social structures that give rise to these differences and are produced by them. In a section called "Dualities of Structure," the impurity and the ongoing nature of the forces at work in the interplay of discourse, the self and social structures are described. One final difference between Johnson and Taylor – a difference in notions of place – demonstrates the complexity of communication in an organizational society. The chapter ends where the dissertation began – with a discussion of the self and the role of rhetoric in our very survival.

### **Taylor: Double Bind**

The repetitive nature of Taylor's swings between compliance and resistance and the obvious importance of her ability to manage her multiple identities makes Bateson's double bind theory worth further investigation. For while he is concerned with the double bind as a symptom of situations that contribute to schizophrenia, the communications analysis he uses and the conclusions he reaches shed light on the less extreme situations presented by Taylor. In either case there is an attempt to make acceptable whole sets of human relations using forms of language and their accompanying social strategies. And lest we think that it is far too extreme to think of schizophrenia as having anything in common with the stress caused by the need to manage multiple identities, we would do well to remember Susanne Langer's assertion that "to constrain a man against his principles ... is to endanger his attitude toward the world" and to threaten his mental stability (290). Bateson himself posits that "schizophrenia involves general principles which are important in all communication

and therefore many informative similarities can be found in ‘normal’ communication situations” (222).

As noted at the beginning of Chapter 4, Bateson describes the classic double bind as a “can’t win” situation. More specifically, he characterizes it as 1) involving an intense relationship, one in which it is vitally important for the person affected to discriminate accurately what sort of message is being communicated so that an appropriate response can be made, 2) the other person in the relationship is expressing two orders of message and one of these denies the other, and 3) the affected individual is unable to comment on the messages being expressed or otherwise negotiate what order of message to respond to (Bateson 208). As the section entitled “Black Tuesday” shows, Taylor’s oscillation occasionally leads to just such a crisis. After discussing in detail the bank’s procedure for firing 240 people on one day in her area, she is unable to smooth over the incompatibilities with her usual strategy of bracketing, ranking and distancing. The double bind this puts her in causes her to think about removing herself from the situation altogether. She says “And now I am at the point where if they let me go tomorrow I will be more than happy to take their money and walk away. [Yeah.] I’ve got the plan all set out, what I’ll do, where I’ll go” (Transcript #1, 10). Bateson’s three identifying features are clearly present: 1) Taylor’s position in the bank is very important to her – the risk of losing her job causes her a great deal of stress, 2) the bank gives conflicting messages – in this case it publishes a value statement that includes “Respect for Every Individual” and yet it allows draconian firing practices, and 3) Taylor is unable to find a response other than voluntarily to leave her position.

Taylor experiences a double bind at one other point in the interview. This time her response is to stop talking altogether and then to resume by changing the direction of the conversation. The following exchange reminds us of the complexity of her situation and shows just how many resources she has to draw on:

**(Interviewer) Right. What I'd like to focus on out of these documents to start with is the *Our Beliefs* booklet which outlines the, uh, key values of the bank. Just go to this page, "Our Values." Um, how familiar is this document to you?**

**(Bank Employee) It is very familiar. Um, Throughout the department and throughout the building I work in, every floor has in one corner or another a listing of "Our Goals," "Our Vision," "Our Values." They are everywhere.**

**Posted?**

**Posted. Posted on the walls. Posted within departments. Um, they are everywhere basically. [Okay.] I am very familiar with these (Transcript #1, 1).**

The interviewee's department is located in a very large, factory-like building on an expressway in the North end of the city, while the Public Relations Office that produced the document is housed downtown in the executive office building, a massive and ornate tower. Despite the distance, the absence of any direct reporting structure or direct contact, and the fact that the bank has over 38,000 employees in Canada alone, Taylor calls the document "ubiquitous" (Transcript #1, 3). She also provides further information on her opinion of the impact of the document on bank employees:

**Okay. And how serious would you say the bank is to, um, to this document and the ideas it has inside? They have obviously done a pretty thorough job of getting it distributed.**

**Yes, they have and the messages are out there. And I think it comes down to individuals in certain positions as to whether or not they apply this, um, to what they do. You know, talking – you can talk the talk, but do you walk the walk? And it varies from individual to individual. And some people really do seem to hold it. And I think for me, they're obvious enough that if you are going to be a conscientious person in business who wants to work well with others, and continue to work well with them, these, these are things that you should be following already. I mean, I don't think they are anything that's this earth shattering. I think the people who don't seem to follow these, or don't want to, or for whatever reason – couching this very well, aren't I?!**

**This is totally confidential. No one will even know I interviewed you, so in case that makes a difference.**

**I know. Some people just don't. And whether it's a question of not knowing this or just their personality that this is just not conducive to the way they do things or the way they prefer to do business or deal with people. I don't know (Transcript #1, 2-3).**

In order to understand how Taylor's self imposed interruption – “I think the people who don't seem to follow these, or don't want to, or for whatever reason – couching this very well, aren't I?!” – constitutes a double bind, we must review the multiple identities she has to manage, the incompatibilities that arise from these multiple identities, the resources she brings to the effort, and what happens when her resources are inadequate for the task. As the following analysis shows, Taylor makes use of the textual resources of anaphora, distinctions, ellipses, euphemisms, turn-taking, disclaimers, cynicism and irony. These tactics of transformation and the rhetorical theory that further elucidates them support the logical method and the underlying ordering principle that Taylor uses to help stabilize the situation.

To begin with, Taylor's use of anaphora – “Posted. Posted on the walls. Posted within departments” – indicates that the value statement is not only present in one posting but is posted in many places. Anaphora, the repetition of the same word or group of words at the beginning of successive clauses, is used to create emphasis or a strong emotional effect. In this example, emphasis is built up by the short, staccato quality of the repeated word – “Posted” – positioned in a place of primacy at the beginning of the sentence. But the emphatic quality of Taylor's statement creates an incompatibility with her opinion that the values are not “anything that's this earth shattering.” The incompatibility marks a transformation – Taylor's discourse marks the bank's form and creates a slight discounting. The bank insists on the importance of the value statement, putting up repeated postings as if the information is news worthy. Taylor's discourse leaves open the possibility that she is expressing some disapproval of what she sees as inordinate effort on the bank's part. As we have seen, Taylor does not have the authority or power to get rid of the value statement, but she does resist it in various ways.

Not only does Taylor agree that the bank has **“done a pretty thorough job of getting [the value statement] distributed”** but she adds, “and the messages are out



there.” With this statement she is making a distinction – identifying categories that are ranked according to an underlying value system. In this case, the distinction is marked by ellipses – the omission of words implied by the context. When she says “and the messages are out there,” we understand that not only are the “messages” circulating “out there,” but they are also understood “out there.” The conjunction “and,” along with the context, draws our attention to this difference between the distribution of the value statement and the reception of it. In other words, the physical document is widely circulated *and* the messages of the document are well understood. She then goes on to add a third, and perhaps more subtle, level of distinction: she focusses on how the document was received and begins to discuss how much commitment or adherence there is to the messages.

The notion of adherence illuminates another transformation in the discourse. By producing the document, Public Relations effectively demonstrates the principle Perelman describes in his discussion on how to increase the adherence of an audience to theses that are presented for their consent: when a large audience is involved, persuasion will occur only if one begins with what will be considered self-evident truths. Only from this “meeting of the minds” can one attempt to move on to the new position one wants the audience to be convinced of and to act on (Perelman 11). Public Relations has chosen to emphasize four values: “Commitment to Stewardship,” “Respect for Every Individual,” “Encouragement of Initiative and Creativity,” and “Excellence in Everything We Do.” As we have seen, Taylor says, “I think for me, they’re obvious enough that if you are going to be a conscientious person in business who wants to work well with others, and continue to work well with them, these, these are things that you should be following already. I mean, I don’t think they are anything that’s this earth shattering.” The bank hopes that the adherence its diverse, multiple audiences can be expected to have to such universal values will result in a similar adherence to the organization that espouses these values. If this occurs then employees will view the bank’s interests as synonymous with – or, in Burkean

terms, as consubstantial with – their own interests and the process of identification will have a solid foundation.

But even at this early stage of the interview, Taylor acknowledges some of the conflict and contradictions inherent in the messages of the bank's communication strategy and in her situation. She makes, for example, a seemingly conditional statement, marked by the if/then form – “if you are going to be a conscientious person in business who wants to work well with others, and continue to work well with them, these, these are things that you should be following already.” This statement also reveals a ranking, a hierarchy of values: specifying the categories of those who want “to work well with others” and those who are “conscientious” implies the existence of those who do not have these values. The conditional form of the statement would seem to indicate that *if* people already understand the hierarchy, *if* they are part of the culture, *then* they will be motivated by the terms and will not need to be reminded. But for Taylor the values listed in the document are “obvious.” So although Taylor presents the situation as a matter of choice, to her way of thinking there is really no option – to “work well with others, and continue to work well with them” is, to her way of thinking, a requirement. For those who do not think this way, the posting of value statements is not going to help and Taylor can only allude to the existence of such employees in a euphemistic way.

The obviousness or naturalness of the values in Taylor's opinion sheds further light on her earlier discounting of the bank's efforts to post the values statement in so many places. Taylor has an affinity to the bank's documented hierarchy – its values are her values – so she does not need to be told in such an overt way by the bank to hold these values. But although she has been trying to avoid acknowledging it, Taylor also has to admit that not everyone in the bank is conscientious: “I think it comes down to individuals in certain positions as to whether or not they apply this, um, to what they do. You know, talking – you can talk the talk, but do you walk the walk? And it varies from individual to

individual.” Taylor *embodies* the values; she can “walk the walk” while others only “talk the talk.”

Burke’s principle of “mortification” – the “subjection of the passions and appetites ... an extreme form of ‘self-control,’ the deliberate, disciplinary ‘slaying’ of any motive that, for ‘doctrinal’ reasons, one thinks of as unruly” – helps shed light on the dynamic process which occurs as a result of the interaction of social structures and the self. Again, it is the striving for unity in the face of multiplicity that drives the process of meaning creation. As Burke says, “The principle of Mortification is particularly crucial to conditions of empire, which act simultaneously to awaken all sorts of odd and exacting appetites, while at the same time imposing equally odd and exacting obstacles to their fulfillment. ... The mortified must, with one aspect of himself, be saying no to another aspect of himself” (Religion 190). In order to be conscientious within the corporate structure, to meet the conditions of the empire, Taylor has had to make personal sacrifices, to “say no” to other aspects of herself. By alluding to those who do not make such sacrifices, Taylor simultaneously uses bracketing to create a group, ranking to lessen the value of this group, and distancing to separate herself from it. By creating this distance, she purifies herself and is stabilized by the resulting feelings.

But this distancing also creates an incompatibility for Taylor, who has identified herself with the organization and who wants to be a skilled and loyal member of it. Again, Bateson’s three identifying features are present: 1) Taylor’s attitude toward her work is very important to her – she ranks being a conscientious member of the bank above all others, 2) Taylor has to face an incompatibility between her desire to work for an organization comprised of conscientious people and her awareness that not everyone in the bank is conscientious, and 3) Taylor is unable to find a response other than to stop talking, to acknowledge her interruption and to change the topic. As she becomes aware of her double bind, her discussion comes to a halt: “I think the people who don’t seem to follow

these, or don't want to, or for whatever reason – couching this very well, aren't I?!" It appears that any reason she might give for the actions of those who do not adhere to the bank's values would force her to acknowledge an untenable situation. The low modality indicated by "I think," "seem," and her uses of "or," allows Taylor to avoid ascription of a direct motive for those at the bottom of the hierarchy. In a euphemistic way, she gestures to a whole set of possibilities to soften her admission that there are people without the values she believes are necessary.

Taylor also diverts attention away from her acknowledgment of problems with some people in her organization by tacking on a question at the very end of her euphemistic statement. When she says – "couching this very well, aren't I?!" she shifts the burden of the next statement to me. This turn-taking strategy gives her time to think, allows her to stop the direction of the topic she is discussing and provides a transition opportunity to a new topic. When I acknowledge her discomfort by responding with reassurances of the confidentiality she can count on, she replies: "I know. Some people just don't. And whether it's a question of not knowing this or just their personality that this is just not conducive to the way they do things or the way they prefer to do business or deal with people. I don't know" (Transcript #1, 3). She defends her motives: the quick "I know" suggests that she does not need to be reminded of the protection of confidentiality – that the reason for the halt in her train of thought was not fear of discovery. Her very next sentence shifts from the subject of confidentiality to the subject of those who do not adhere to the bank's values: "Some people just don't." To support her lack of fear as a motive, she reiterates her observation that such people exist, she speculates on why they behave as they do, and in yet another twist, she ends with a disclaimer: "I don't know."

If Cheepen and Monaghan are right, Taylor's question – "couching this very well, aren't I?!" – may well signal her request that I collaborate in the exchange and make it more of a "conversational story"(53). The question is actually a declarative sentence with a

question tag, to use Fairclough's categories (46), which gives it the effect of making an assertion and asking for confirmation. But it is not just that Taylor wants me to agree that she is "couching" things; rather she is giving me an opportunity to express my evaluation of her position or stance. As noted previously, "conversational stories" are "essentially dialogic – that is, they are told, not through one long conversational turn taken by the 'story-teller,' but through a series of short turns by both 'teller' and 'audience,' often with the 'audience' providing questions to elicit more information, and sometimes even providing some of the information in the form of guesses or prompts – one part of the story frequently provided by the 'audience' being evaluation" (Cheepen 53). When I fail to answer the question, I fail to indicate my reaction to what she has said and to give her the support she needs to carry this topic further.

This analysis of one declarative sentence, or sentence fragment, with a question tag reveals the intertextuality of the discourse. Taylor halts, asks me to provide an evaluation, instead receives assurances and encouragement to carry on alone, defends her motives, adds evidence to support her motives, then ends with a disclaimer. Her experience in her job does not allow for the kind of outlet her personal values require her to have. She is caught in a bind because of her multiple identities. She knows she is supposed to believe the ideals, she wants to be a good employee and she wants to be a good person: "I just don't – it's not 'Oh, does this fit with Respect for the Individual?' No. I respect individuals personally so it does – or at least I hope I do." At the same time she expresses cynicism about the actions of others in the bank who "talk the talk" but do not "walk the walk." With this attitude she attempts to distance herself from these people and from participating in actions that could give rise to such a situation. Her vision of the hierarchy and her position on it is a way of creating coherence. But the pattern it creates is not stable. She has to manage her multiple identities and cope with a wide range of motives and messages. Her bind is a double bind: she cannot reconcile the pride she takes in her participation in

the organization which employs her and rewards her, with the knowledge she has of the less desirable aspects of this same organization and its treatment of her. When Foucault uses the term “double bind” he points out that not only are the dominated caught in this no-win situation, but they actively help to reproduce the situation in which they are caught.<sup>79</sup> In Taylor’s case, the situation also has an element of irony in that her attempts to reconstruct her self as separate from the self constructed by the bank’s documents – the one who needs to be reminded about how to “be a conscientious person in business who wants to work well with others, and continue to work well with them” – can only be done in relation to and, specifically, by contrast to the terms of the bank’s documents.

### **Johnson: Double Profit**

As the interviews with Taylor and Johnson both make clear, organizations are the marketplace where our resources become a system of capital that can be exchanged. It is worth quoting Bourdieu yet again in this context: “The competence adequate to produce sentences that are likely to be understood may be quite inadequate to produce sentences that are likely to be *listened to*, likely to be recognized as *acceptable* in all the situations in which there is occasion to speak.” The more our habitus and resources dispose us toward possession of the dominant discourse, the more we can avail ourselves of the advantages of a system of differences that constitutes a “linguistic market.” In this way our competence functions as “linguistic capital, producing a *profit of distinction* on the occasion of each social exchange.” Bourdieu notes, however, that “one of the most important constituents of this profit lies in the fact that it appears to be based on the qualities of the person alone” (L&SP 55,72,73).

Johnson’s habitus enables him to respond to the demands of his position and to benefit from doing what comes naturally to him. Because along with acquiring skills and experience in previous jobs, Johnson has throughout his life acquired knowledge without

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<sup>79</sup> Michel Foucault “The Subject and Power” Critical Inquiry 8 (1982): 777-795.

conceptualizing it. And while this building up of resources occurs for everyone, it is not distributed equally. Bourdieu makes explicit the relationship of bodily hexis and language practices to the social conditions in which they were acquired. In Johnson's case, his habitus matches the requirements of the production regime he is called upon to maintain. As a result, even when a solution is not readily apparent to him, Johnson is able to apply "a method of inquiry in which he has confidence" (Schön, RP 134). This confidence is linked to a duality of structure: Johnson is both a product and a producer of the social system around him. As Bourdieu would say, Johnson is an "authorized representative." He seems to possess in himself the source of power which actually comes from his "access to the legitimate instruments of expression, and therefore the participation in the authority of the institution" (L&SP 111, 109).

Johnson's confidence is evident in his description of how the bank's three key values were chosen:

Um, it was a, just a – I was working with somebody who was helping me on this thing and when we'd done a lot of interviews with – inside the bank, outside the bank, done public opinion research, employee research, and, um, we also, just kind of boiled it down and basically people were saying, "Get real." You know, "Start doing things that are important." You know, and you can see, well you know and you sort of say, "Gee this is – people are saying you should be doing more of this." And so we said, "Well you know, in other words, the bank's got to be more relevant." So we just sort of hit on that. And then they say, you know "The bank's screwing us on service charges. You're doing this – you're not serving small business, you know, you're not, ah, you're not, ah, standing behind me when I'm in trouble." So, you know, what's that? That's trust. You know. So I mean we just kind of built it that way. So it wasn't, it wasn't showing up in any, you know – there were no picket signs outside saying, "relevance and fairness and trust." And fairness, well fairness is fundamental (Transcript #2, 12-13).

Although a lot of research had been done, the interpretation of what the bank's audiences want is left to Johnson. He uses hyperbole to indicate that the choice of "relevance and fairness and trust" was not so obvious that it could be read off of "picket signs outside." It is Johnson's judgement that turns the imperative "Start doing things that are important" into "relevance" and turns "The bank's screwing us on service charges. You're doing this – you're not serving small business, you know, you're not, ah, you're not, ah, standing

behind me when I'm in trouble" into "trust." And fairness is chosen because, as Johnson says, in his estimation "fairness is fundamental."

Johnson's approach demonstrates "knowing-in-action." His arrival on the scene, his analysis of the situation, and the communications plan he subsequently formulates are indications of his confidence in his approach. Schön elaborates on this concept by pointing out that the "knowing is *in* the action" and that we are "characteristically unable to make it verbally explicit." Central to this is our ability to "reflect-*in*-action," which occurs when we reflect in the midst of action without interrupting it. In other words, "our thinking serves to reshape what we are doing while we are doing it" (ERP 25, 26).

The reshaping of Johnson's activity is apparent at many points in the interview. At times he talks about what they have learned:

I think we've certainly done building the relevance phase, we're still in the relevance phase. Um, and trust is, you know, we, we've screwed up so many things with customers that the trust isn't there. But we've sort of moved into stage three in some ways because we're starting to redefine banking (Transcript #2, 7).

So, you know, one of the things you kind of learn from that is that if you're going to go out and you're going to take a prominent – you're going to take a position on a controversial issue, you're going to generate negative as well as positive. What you would – what you're also going to get is profile (Transcript #2, 11).

At other times he emphasizes how much the plan has evolved:

Yes, but the whole thing has evolved ... the thing has been, um, simplified and made more complex at the same time (Transcript #2, 2).

But now what has evolved I think is a recognition in the company that image and reputation are driven by those, by keeping those four stakeholders happy (Transcript #2, 5).

... it's evolved like it should but I, but everything in there is still relevant today (Transcript #2, 15).

In these comments Johnson effects a double profit: he has "the profit of saying and the profit of denying what is said by the way of saying it" (L&SP 143). With the use of the verb "evolved," he evokes the Darwinian notion of the survival of the fittest. Changes to the plan are framed, not as indications of errors, but as the working of a successful plan. He



is able both to profit from admitting mistakes – “we’ve screwed up so many things with customers that the trust isn’t there” – and to profit from creating the solution, a plan that has “evolved like it should.”

Johnson’s ability to produce documents, to manipulate meanings and to reframe the world in which he has to operate are indications of his survival skills. He is able to bring a specialized approach to production, reducing the task of creating a plan for improved public relations to one of grouping and dividing audiences, ranking messages and undertaking measurement to determine degrees of success and changes to the strategy. Johnson readily admits that his measurements, the very criteria by which he measures success, are not stable: “Some of them are still evolving. And we’re not even sure that we’ve got – well we know we don’t have it all, we’re not even – the more we get into it the more we realize that we have to do a lot more work on measurement.” Even as he tries to bring a degree of scientific method – a method our culture imbues with value even without analysing the principles behind it – to the development of his communications plan, he has to acknowledge that there are gaps and tensions. When he says, “we’re not even” – and interrupts himself, it is tempting to complete the sentence with “we’re not even close.” This interpretation is furthered by his next admission that they “have to do a lot more work on measurement.” Again he doubles his profits: he anticipates criticisms and problems and provides the answers in such a way as to give the impression that everything is going according to plan. Regardless of what problem the bank has, Johnson profits from introducing and explaining, rather than defending, his position.

As we have seen, Taylor and Johnson are both able to call upon their resources to transform situations – to keep forms fitting in such a way as to resolve incompatibilities. Their transformations indicate a kind of power linked to their social settings. As a producer, Johnson is in a position to profit when receivers recognize his authority and attach importance to his messages. At the same time he profits from “misrecognition” – the

“delegation of authority which confers its authority on authorized discourse.” Messages cannot function as intended, Bourdieu asserts, unless the conditions that produce recognition are met: “the language of authority never governs without the collaboration of those it governs, without the help of the social mechanisms capable of producing this complicity, based on misrecognition, which is the basis of all authority” (L&SP 113). But not just receivers participate in the misrecognition. Producers and receivers recognize aspects of their own roles and the roles played by the other. At the same time, producers and receivers both misrecognize those aspects that would make visible aspects of domination or repression. As noted earlier, Bourdieu summarizes the working of symbolic power with his notion of “imposition,” which he says can function only if “all the social conditions are in place to ensure the production of appropriate senders and receivers, who are therefore agreed among themselves” (L&SP 72-73).

### **Dualities of Structure**

The recognition and misrecognition that result in double profits for Johnson and double binds for Taylor takes us back to where we began with issues of compliance and resistance, those of power and solidarity, and the links between discourse, the self and social structures. Both the double bind and the double profit are features of organizations, of symbolic systems. As Stafford Beer points out, organizations are not entities so much as they are “*dynamic and surviving systems*” (3). Double binds and double profits – like all other outputs – should not be viewed as examples of where the system is not working: rather they are the products of a system organized in such a way as to produce just these results.

So what can we now say we know about this system or the social structures which are the context for communication? A reminder of Giddens’ notion of the “duality of structure” is perhaps the most profitable place to begin: “social structures are both constituted by human agency, and yet at the same time are the very medium of this

constitution” (7). We recognize and misrecognize in order to reproduce the system that has produced us. We have seen the impurity of identification and division, the very motive for rhetoric. We have seen the way in which production and reception each contain elements of the other. The intricacies of production and reception revolve around the relationship of compliance and resistance to power and solidarity. Those with the most power to produce messages do not want to meet with resistance so they find ways to build solidarity with receivers in a bid to earn their compliance. Resistance translates into a form of secondary production by giving power to receivers and forcing gestures of solidarity from producers. This ability to effect a form of secondary production constitutes a survival skill for receivers. And because the process of interaction between production and reception, between compliance and resistance, and between power and solidarity is never complete, the movement of all these forces creates spaces in which all participants can manage their multiple identities and gloss over incompatibilities.

### **A Sense of Place**

But similarities do not result in equalities. The difference in resources between those in a production regime and those in a reception regime are responsible for the contrast between double binds and double profits. We can gain yet another perspective on the differing resources of production and reception by comparing the underlying ordering principles of Taylor and Johnson. Chapter 4 provides an analysis of Taylor’s reliance on the working of business to solve incompatibilities. Using a number of small-scale tactics, Taylor transforms the meaning of “business” to naturalize her circumstances and make them appear inevitable.

Johnson also relies on the workings of business to solve his incompatibilities. But Johnson’s resources to manage his situation are what de Certeau calls the hallmarks of a distinction between the “proper” and the “other:”

The “proper” is *a triumph of place over time*. It allows one to capitalize acquired advantages, to prepare future expansions, and thus to give oneself a certain independence with respect to the variability of circumstances. . . . It is also a mastery of places through sight. The division of space makes possible a *panoptic practice* proceeding from a place whence the eye can transform foreign forces into objects that can be observed and measured, and thus control and “include” them within its scope of vision. To be able to see (far into the distance) is also to be able to predict. . . . It would be legitimate to define *the power of knowledge* by this ability to transform the uncertainties of history into readable spaces. But it would be more correct to recognize in these “strategies” a specific type of knowledge, one sustained and determined by the power to provide oneself with one’s own place. . . . In other words, *a certain power is the precondition of this knowledge* and not merely its effect or its attribute. . . . It produces itself in and through this knowledge. (36)

The scope of Johnson’s underlying ordering principle involves a view of the entire world and an expansive time frame. The bank is a “global corporation” subject to changes driven by “technology, reregulation and globalization, competition and demographics.” His panoptic practice measures and controls in order to prepare for the future.

Over and over we see Johnson make distinctions that call upon the value our society places on preparing for the future. Our society advocates the importance of long term planning over short term. Johnson justifies the bank’s position and focusses attention on future implications by aligning the bank’s plans with the long term: “you don’t manage short term profit. The changes we are making are strategic changes, not tactical” (Transcript #2, 4). And when discussing the distinction he makes between reputation and image he furthers this notion of preparing for the future and of being visionary:

I see them as, as, you know, totally intertwined. Reputation is something that is sort of almost something you manage on a day-by-day, hour-by-hour basis, and image is something that is created as a result of a whole lot of – you know, it’s – image is more of an impression. The two are – I don’t make a big distinction between the two – reputation and image. Um, I mean, I think we are trying to portray an image of leadership. You wouldn’t necessarily have a reputation. Reputation tends to be more, more tactical. I think more short term (Transcript #2, 5).

The “panoptic practice” of transforming foreign forces into something measurable and controllable is also perfectly demonstrated when Johnson describes a multi-million

dollar project that he says is part of the bank's strategy to "redefine banking." He describes it as

a strategic change in which we are moving from, um, high labour intensive transaction processes to technologically intensive transaction processes, and labour intensive financial management. And, and that is because of demographic change. Well, we talk about the four things that are driving change in – well they're driving change in all industries, but particularly in our business. Technology, reregulation and globalization, competition, and demographics. You know those four interact very, very, very powerfully. You think – the thing about demographics – you know the aging population. They need a lot more financial counselling. The products that they need and the services they need are more complex so we have to respond to that (Transcript #2, 4).

The "uncertainties of history" have become readable and even predictable through public opinion polling in the present and the study of "demographics" for the future. Just as Johnson makes his audience of the entire Canadian population into a more manageable "four stakeholder groups," so he and his colleagues simplify their view of the forces they face in society by categorizing them under four labels: "technology, reregulation and globalization, competition, and demographics." These forces are widely discussed in our society so the bank can expect its audience to associate with these terms a great deal of the uncertainty they feel. This effect demonstrates the strength of Johnson's underlying ordering principle – the workings of business in a global economy. Significantly, "reregulation and globalization" are considered as a single item. But "reregulation" focusses on keeping as much government protection from competition as possible, while "globalization" implies support for a free market economy with much reduced barriers to trade. To be at once protected *and* given access to new areas of business under the label of "free trade" has some members of the public confused and suspicious. There is a growing concern that those in our society who are least able to afford it, will pay twice so that large organizations can profit twice: governments that subsidize the work of these organizations have less money for the social safety net and yet more people require the safety net when

these same organizations are cutting costs and firing people.<sup>80</sup> And even those who are not paying attention to the cost implications of both the protection and the competition are vocal in their concern that banks are “downsizing” at the same time as they are announcing record-breaking profits.

Johnson’s “triumph of place over time” contrasts sharply with what we know about Taylor’s influence on place. In the episode entitled “A Place of One’s Own,” we observed Taylor’s efforts to transform her work space in order to make a point that was missed entirely by the members of her audience for whom it was most intended. She responds to the bank’s directive to “Decorate your pod with things that talk about you” by piling up surplus office furniture – the result of staff firings – to make a furniture grave yard. Touring executives – assuming Taylor and her colleagues are celebrating “diversity” – fail to recognize the pile of furniture for what it is – Taylor’s “tactic,” her statement even when she cannot have a sanctioned voice. Her overall assessment of the activity is that even though she and her colleagues are very creative, “It’s a waste of my time. It’s a waste of the bank’s time.”

Every example presented by Taylor and Johnson indicates the complexity of communication in an organizational society. Cheney points out that the corporation allows individuals to speak with a collective voice while retaining anonymity<sup>81</sup> and symbolic detachment but it also requires that the corporate message be identified with everyone who is part of the organization (1, 4). His study of the resulting management of multiple identities includes recognition of and a concern for the role of individuals in an organizational society, but focusses primarily on the challenges facing organizations. The

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<sup>80</sup> Noam Chomsky provides an analysis of these economic and social forces. In his article “From Containment to Rollback” (*Z Magazine*, June 1996) he argues that “changes in the international economy in the past 25 years ... have enabled the decision-making classes to move from containment of the threat of democracy and human rights to rollback of the despised social contract that had been won by long and often bitter popular struggle.”

<sup>81</sup> Cheney makes an interesting observation: “among the corresponding terms for ‘Inc.’ in French and Spanish are ‘S.A.’, *société anonyme* or *sociedad anónima*, respectively; that is, anonymous society” (4).

perspective of individuals provided by my research indicates that a sense of self, of unity in identity, plays a pivotal role in our ability to survive in the midst of the complexity which surrounds us.

### **A Strong Sense of Self**

To have multiple personalities or selves in our culture is to approach a state of mental illness. As Kerby points out, “In our own lives, and in our own self-understanding, the achievement of unity is usually considered necessary for our identity; and in our social life, unity of purpose and consistency of valuation form part of what it means to be a responsible moral agent” (56-7). For both Johnson and Taylor, the more pressure there is to identify with the bank and with the person who is successful on the job, the more guilt there is for the individual who needs a unified and consistent life story. And the more guilt and tension there is, the more need there is to revert to the values which make up a sense of personal identity. As Burke says, “Here are the ambiguities of substance. In being identified with B, A is 'substantially one' with a person other than himself. Yet at the same time he remains unique, an individual locus of motives” (Rhetoric 21).

### ***Taylor***

Through her repeated efforts to stabilize her situation, Taylor attempts to “suture” (Cohan 162), to close the gap between, the parts of her discourse, her self and her organization into some form of unity. When she can, she matches her habitus to the organization; when she cannot resolve incompatibilities to make the match, she demonstrates that she is a moral agent beyond that called for by the bank. Only when all her personal strategies fail does she consider leaving the bank altogether.

One of the primary examples of Taylor’s ability to match her habitus to that required by the bank occurs in the following excerpt. She again applies a strategy of bracketing, ranking and distancing as she indicates approval for the way division occurs in

the organization. In this example, she indicates that what is good for the organization is also good for her:

Um, and then what happens is it kind of gets split up within the department according to your specialty, um, as well as we try to be product aligned. So you tend to write all the communications on one subject. Um, which, which kind of helps because you get a little more knowledge of the background of what the topic is. And that's from both the analysts' side and the writers' side. It's aligned right through. And depending on how things fall you will get so much of the pie that's yours to make sure you take care of it (Transcript #1, 4).

The brackets Taylor puts around special skills allow her to rank this division of duties positively: a split “according to your specialty” results in something that “helps,” something that provides “a little more knowledge” and something that you can “take care of.” When this division occurs, then everything is “aligned right through.” In other words, if things are divided properly, then everything is in line. Taylor presents this as a paradigm of the ideal for herself and for the organization’s behaviour. The organization’s multiple identities and her own divided self come together in this example.

The “I” of Taylor’s narratives is confident in making judgements. When asked more about the role of the Major Catalysts for Success which are derived from the values as stated in the bank documents, Taylor attempts to suture the gap between herself as the central character and the bank as the central character. One way she does this is to indicate unity of purpose. For example, although the goal-setting exercises are stipulated by the bank, Taylor indicates that they are personally motivated as well. She says, “I think it’s a method of organizing how your team goes as opposed to dictating it” (Transcript #1, 5). The bank’s production of the “method” is grouped with positive terms: it helps in “organizing” as opposed to “dictating” the effort. And the effort is a team exercise, indicating cooperation and a common purpose.

One of the reasons Taylor has confidence in her ability to narrate the stories she tells is that she has paid her dues in a number of ways to the system she believes in and



helps to maintain. She started her employment with the bank in a contract position which did not entitle her to have a voice:

I don't know when these were created or the process that went behind them but that was before I became a full-time employee and was – I won't say privy to them, but deemed important enough – as a contract worker you're not a member really of the organization so you don't, you're not really made to understand these things or given access to them, at least where I was that was not the case. Understandably so (Transcript #1, 6-7).

Taylor believes in a justifiable, an “understandable” order: a “contract” worker is “not a member really of the organization” nor “deemed important enough” to understand or have access to the production of the bank’s values and goals. She does not need to be concerned about the origin of the values and goals because at the time they were chosen she was not in a position – “a full-time” position – to have that responsibility.

Although she is not afraid to speak for herself or to comment on the actions of those around her, she takes care not to speak for others directly: “Well, I think it probably is best just to speak for myself. I’m not too sure about other people.” But as she reflects on the Major Catalysts for Success, she does venture an opinion about their impact on others when she says, “the one in particular that always stands out, that always gives people the most problems because it’s the most ill-defined term is ‘Stewardship’” (Transcript #1, 6, 5). She is confident of her judgement in other areas as well. In a discussion of the bank’s efforts to save money, she comments on the decision not to use cover pages on materials sent by facsimile: “It makes sense. I mean, that I agree with. I also agree with the idea of turning the lights off at [head office tower] to save half a – a quarter – of a million dollars a year. I think that, that was a master stroke! I don’t know who came up with that one. It just made such common sense” (Transcript #1, 13). The multiple uses of “I” make clear that she is operating in a personal space and that she is comfortable stating her opinion; however, her reference to “common sense” indicates that she believes her view of reality is something she shares with the bank – and her audience. Her use of irony – when the actual

meaning of what she says is in opposition to the literal meaning and the content does not match the tone – when she states “that was a master stroke” could be interpreted as a distancing move but she has already indicated that she does not “know who came up with that one.” Her disclaimer leaves open the possibility that it was someone further down the hierarchy, perhaps someone who is not even employed at the bank any longer. There are things Taylor agrees with and things she does not agree with. Because she has paid her dues and has an underlying ordering principle, she is comfortable making these distinctions forcefully.

Taylor is now not only a full-time employee and one who enjoys the goal-setting and performance review process as described above, but she also is a leader in the very socially acceptable activity of charitable giving – a “selfless” act that provides a personal sense of well being. She applauds much of what the bank does in this area but does not restrict her efforts on behalf of charity to those causes the bank sanctions. Discussing public opinion of the bank’s charitable giving strategy, Taylor says, “I’m thinking in terms of the arts funding. I think it is very important to fund it; however, *the public* does not. So, I mean, in that case, I don’t think they should follow it [public opinion].” And later she comes back to the same topic more forcefully: “maybe they should, which they seem to do, say “public be damned” this is what we should do, we should support the society, we should support this, we should support the arts, we should do this, this, this, with moderation” (Transcript #1, 14, 21). Taylor sutures her position with that of the bank in this example and emphasizes it by contrast with public opinion. She starts out with the pronoun “they” – “maybe they should, which they seem to do” – but moves to “we” for many of her next indications of agent. She gives a nod to “moderation,” which indicates a lessening of the distance she has created between the bank and the public with her suggestion that the bank’s attitude in the area of charitable giving should be one of leadership, one that says “public be damned.”

Rather than wait for the bank to show leadership, Taylor and her colleagues undertake a number of charitable activities that she says are “employee activities but I don’t think they are so much sanctioned by the bank” (Transcript #1, 17). She supports the efforts of others:

I actually ended up donating to that too, because I got, “Aw, come on, give us something” – they managed to outfit a women’s shelter with toiletries for everybody in there, because obviously most women when they leave don’t have time to pack a few things. [Right.] Um, toys for all the kids in there. A VCR for them, whole selection of video tapes for the kids, like you know, Disney stuff and um, magazines for every one of the women and, you know, all kinds of really great stuff for them. And I mean, that’s a couple of thousand dollars, not to mention the time and effort it took to put these things together, for somebody to go shopping. [Yup.] And my Pinocchio video, that was my contribution. [Oh great.] I bought Pinocchio and stuffed that in there as well. [Great.] So I mean, I think there’s lots of stuff that’s done, an immense amount of stuff that’s done (Transcript #1, 17-18).

And even among her impressive colleagues, she participates more than most: “I just spent the weekend in Stratford last weekend and, you know, by supporting Stratford you are also supporting the school groups who can come in and see them. So kids are exposed to that. The, you know, merchants in the area – you’re supporting Stratford, not just the festival.” The bank’s capitulation to public pressure leads her to conclude that “you can’t lead and be told what to do. You have to pick one or the other. And I see that as kind of waffling.” She justifies her criticism of the bank and her own contrasting position by saying,

I think they will look more at what the public would say they support. Um, I don’t see them giving a lot of money to, you know, alcohol rehab., or drug rehabilitation. Because, of course, those are not problems the public wants to deal with. But it’s much nicer to say that you are helping underprivileged kids [Right.] or whatever else, which is the nice thing about the United Way because you end up supporting those people. And most people don’t realize it, unless you specify, your money goes to – like I support the women’s shelter with donations that come off my pay. [Right.] I specified that, that that’s where that money goes. [Right.] Um, most people don’t (Transcript #1, 18, 15, 19).

Taylor’s personal values constitute the framework that she relies on time and again as a key factor in her identity. She is a moral agent beyond that called for by her role in the bank. She understands more than “most people” and rises above common public concerns to deal with problems of greater substance.

The outcome of our narrative analysis reveals a strong sense of self, which constitutes a survival skill for Taylor. Her stories are a way of coming to terms – literally and figuratively – with her situation. Stories have a beginning, a middle and an end, which implies a kind of coherence or closure that Kerby contends “is not only a literary device but is a fundamental way (perhaps *the* fundamental way) in which human events are understood” (6). When she faces a double bind because of her high level of commitment to the organization and an equally high but contradictory level of resistance to its domination of her, her stories show her determination to present a unified identity. She understands the value of her association with a large organization and forgives it for many of its inherent problems and contradictions. Her narratives select what will be considered a primary concern and what will constitute “out-of-frame activity”<sup>82</sup> which can be ignored. Taylor understands the bank’s need, as Cheney says, to manage multiple identities and shows that she can do the same herself. This ability itself becomes a resource that gives her strength and provides unity in the face of a divided self.

Taylor’s attempts to construct her identity as a loyal bank employee, who also is a moral agent beyond that called for by the bank, are part of an ongoing process. As Chapter 4 demonstrates, her discourse plays a large part in the process. It is also important to remember that the process is a social one. Taylor makes many decisions about who she should be based on what is expected of her. When she talks about making her duties fit the bank’s values she says “I just don’t – it’s not ‘Oh, does this fit with Respect for the Individual?’ No. I respect individuals personally so it does – or at least I hope I do” (Transcript #1, 7). By expressing her fallibility – “or at least I hope I do” – Taylor exhibits what Bourdieu calls “self-censorship” (L&SP 77). She modifies her strong statement about her own values in such a way as to indicate that she may not be in a position accurately to judge this quality in herself. Bourdieu asserts that it is “acceptability, and not some form of

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<sup>82</sup> Erving Goffman, *Frame Analysis* (Cambridge: Harvard UP, 1974), p. 201.

rational calculation oriented towards the maximization of symbolic profits, which, by encouraging one to take account of the probable value of discourse during the process of production, determines corrections and all forms of self-censorship – the concessions one makes to a social world by accepting to make oneself acceptable in it” (L&SP 77). Taylor’s construction of her identity is social – it takes into account what will be considered acceptable for someone in her position and what her audience will approve of.

But despite the many forms Taylor uses to bracket things, to keep them connected, her habitus provides a practical sense of limits. There is only so far she can be stretched, and the bank moves from its position at the top of the hierarchy when it oversteps this boundary and threatens her sense of self respect. Her confession occurs when her double bind becomes clear and she can no longer keep the bank in a positive position. Correspondingly, she also has to face the prospect of giving up her own position. When she says she is “at the point where if they let me go tomorrow I will be more than happy to take their money and walk away” (Transcript #1, 10) she makes visible a different ranking. Now it is her personal values and self respect that are given the primary position. She constructs her identity despite opposition. She increases the distance between the organization and her self, and between the organization’s values and her own. These divisions become marks of distinction when she dramatizes them.

The difficulty of constructing a narrative when acceptance of limitations constitutes the most significant aspect of the symbolic action of the discourse is made clear in the example of “Black Tuesday.” Taylor’s willingness to leave the bank is positioned as a process of improvement: “So, I mean, maybe it’s a good thing in that sense that you have, you know, when you get to that point that you have that attitude” (Transcript #1, 10). But the only way that leaving her position at the bank can be seen as a process of improvement is if we recognize a self that is not first and foremost a good corporate employee. The categories available to her self constitute multiple identities and she must be able to

oscillate quickly between them to keep her statements from being overt contradictions. The process of improvement for a good employee is increased responsibility for the advancement of the organization through participation in department, team and personal goals. “And you have one or two meetings, depending on how your manager works it, throughout the year to make sure that you are on track. And at the end of the year, um, you are rated as to whether or not you met those goals. And the goals are organized by MCSs” (Transcript #1, 4). Outstanding efforts in these areas make possible a promotion and yet further responsibilities. The direct opposition of these two processes of improvement – advancement for the good employee and a willingness to leave the position altogether for the person who believes in respect for every individual – disturb the narrative and result in contradicting discourses. In the shifting of discourses and categories there is a middle space: Taylor wants her career to advance but she also wants to avoid personal deterioration. She works to match habitus to organization and then to overcome it.

### *Johnson*

Johnson also demonstrates that a unified sense of self or personal identity is his primary concern. Despite repeated indications of his success in his job, Johnson is concerned about his identity beyond the bank. His “individual locus of motives” causes him to make the time to tell the following story, even though he has been indicating how pressured for time he is at this late stage of the interview. I had already indicated that the interview was complete from my point of view: **“Okay, I think that is about the last thing, um, I wanted to ask about. I may come back to you again with some as, as I keep going but I’m getting closer to the end. Is there anything you want to add about your work, what you’re doing, what you see as most important?”** (Transcript #2, 25) but Johnson has some further thoughts which result in his most personal statements of the interview. He has just answered my question about whether there are times when his personal values and priorities come into conflict with those of the bank:

Um, not really, um. I mean, I'm trying to make the bank relevant, um, and I'm trying to make the bank responsive to the community and, you know, I'm trying – and that's my mission. And that's what I'm trying to do and I'm making some headway. Am I making enough headway? No. Am I satisfied? No. Do I think I've made progress? Yes. Um, and I'll be further ahead, you know, next month than I am today, but it's slow, it's very slow (Transcript #2, 25).

The following story then comes to mind, perhaps because my question reminded him of how he responded the last time similar issues were put to him.

Well, I mean I, I said – I had a dinner with a friend of mine the other night – a journalist. He's a bit cynical and, you know, always giving me a hard time about being a banker. He knew me when I was a journalist. I've known him for years. And, ah, and I said to him, "Well, you know, I mean, I'm inside seizing the means of production." You know, I mean, what I'm – I mean, I don't think that if someone argued: "You're working for a bank," that somehow "you've sold out or you're not really working in the interests of the people, ah, you know the community." And I would say, "Au contraire. I'm inside the bank working for the interests of the people and the community." You know? [Right.] And, ah, and that's – you know, I once did some work, ah, that did some psychological tests that were part of a – back years ago when I was – would have been in the mid '80s when I was at Southam. And, ah – so, you know, you've seen these profiles that they do and everything. They sent me some back and this woman – you do these battery of tests all morning. You know, about four or five hours of these things and you go off for lunch. And then you meet this person you've never seen before and they proceed to tell you all about yourself, you know. Anyway, one of the things she said was that I had a sort of high social conscience and that I would be good in the "helping" professions. Um, and I still sort of bring that value – I mean, I don't know if I'm going to stay in banking for the rest of my career. I mean, I've been having fun. Something tells me I'll probably want to look for another challenge in a couple of years, you know. I mean, it's just kind of like "Let's get this thing on track and let somebody else run it" – and go off and, you know, look for another challenge. But, ah, you know it would probably be in doing the same kind of thing. I mean, it would, you know – one of the things I've always been interested in is working in the Third World. You know, and for, you know – going down maybe, maybe, sort of trying to do work for that charity and help, you know, help them, kind of, turn their organization around or something, you know (Transcript #2, 25-26).

As Johnson moves into a more personal space, a different social order is emphasized. Instead of identifying with the bank, Johnson now emphasizes his similarity with those who are critical of big business. Johnson brings to his job a "high social conscience" and an aptitude for the "'helping' professions." He has had to defend his work from those who are "cynical" and who give him a "hard time about being a banker." He summarizes the criticism and his defense: "I don't think that if someone argued: 'You're working for a bank,' that somehow 'you've sold out or you're not really working in the interests of the people, ah, you know the community.' And I would say, 'Au contraire. I'm

inside the bank working for the interests of the people and the community.” His reference to being “inside the bank” indicates a distinction he makes that further emphasizes his earlier assertion that he is “inside seizing the means of production.” Control of the “means of production” and distribution of goods is a common reference to the tenets of socialism. Johnson may speak in less than flattering terms about the “left” and its “knee jerk reaction” which causes it to find a “corporate agenda” in everything, but he implies that this is only true of a small portion of the public, that the average person is “practical” and “pragmatic” (Transcript #2, 12). Johnson wants there to be a common social good that he can work toward while working in the interests of the bank, one of the bastions of capitalism. He acts as an apologist for the bank and provides all bank employees with materials that will allow them to “get out and defend the bank” (Transcript #2, 19), but he also wants to work for “the interests of the people and the community.”

Johnson’s interest in “balance” is one of the ways he resolves the tensions inherent in his position. To compensate for the frustrating behaviour “toward customers,” Johnson uses “balance” as a label to emphasize his contribution. Again he interrupts himself as he mentions it by reverting to the audiences that have needs that often conflict: “So, I mean that’s why what I have done, I think, is brought in this sort of balanced, you know – that – nobody thought of the stakeholder groups before I got here.” Early in the interview he has described “this concept of the balanced score card” (Transcript #2, 2) and referred me to a source of information on what he means by it.<sup>83</sup> Using this system “companies go through an intensive process to identify their core set of goals, usually in a variety of areas beyond the traditional finance realm, such as satisfying employees and customers. . . . Many of the corporate goals – employee satisfaction, for example – can be difficult to quantify with useful measurements, requiring careful design to find a workable measuring system.” The article goes on to say that “One of the keys of balancing the scorecard is to assign the

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<sup>83</sup> “Firms use scorecards to make the grade,” *Globe & Mail*, March 13, 1996.



appropriate weight the company wants to put on areas that can be inherently contradictory, such as cost-cutting as opposed to achieving 100-per-cent customer satisfaction.” Johnson brought this notion to the bank before it had started to appear in the popular press and he refers to it a number of times throughout the interview:

ultimately what we’ll have is an index of measures so that we, so that it’s, so that it’s balanced (Transcript #2, 3).

we want to keep the balance with all the stakeholders (Transcript #2, 3).

I think we tried to convey a sense of partnership and balance . . . (Transcript #2, 16).

Johnson has to interpret the discourses around him which come from many sources and are often contradictory, and then to produce texts that stabilize the resulting tensions. He has to manage the multiple identities of the bank, and to manage the personal tensions he experiences because of his knowledge of the “trade-offs” that must be made with every decision.

Johnson does not want to sell out – on those like his journalist friend whose primary concern is for the welfare of individuals who do not have positions of power in our society – by buying in completely to the bank’s agenda. Instead he takes the time to emphasize his own values and his ability to envision a life separate from that of the bank. What seems acceptable to Johnson is a world in which he can make use of his personal abilities and values to make a contribution that will be valued. He wants to leave open the possibility of future work for a “charity” or “in the Third World,” but in the meantime he is successful at his role in a large organization. By way of final summary he adds yet another point about his role: “My job here as a doctor is to, you know, I can prescribe what you have to do, recommend what you have to do, but if you don’t do it, don’t come and complain to me that you’re not healthy, you know?” (Transcript #2, 27). This return to his earlier metaphor of a doctor now takes a slightly modified form. Johnson’s job of managing expectations culminates in this statement. Once he discusses the future possibility of leaving

the bank – of cashing in his chips rather than selling out – he appears even more comfortable asserting his authority and more confident in his role: “if you don’t do it, don’t come and complain to me that you’re not healthy.” A different hierarchy is now in place, one that positions the bank lower and his personal values higher. The pronoun “you” does not include him, there is no mention of his team, and he indicates that he is not sympathetic to complaints from those who do not heed his advice. Johnson’s statement implies – for the first time – that the “you” he is exerting power over includes those further up the bank hierarchy – those who are in a position of relying on him for advice.

As humans, we want to develop and hold a world view that offers us a framework and provides guidance and stability for our choices and actions. As Bateson’s double bind research indicates, there are severe consequences when we feel “in the wrong” regarding our rules for making sense of an important relationship (278). It is not surprising then, that we go to incredible lengths to create consistency for ourselves. Neither is it surprising that this process is a difficult one that we must commit and recommit ourselves to every day. As Isaiah Berlin points out, “Values may easily clash within the breast of a single individual; and it does not follow that, if they do, some must be true and others false.” Berlin goes so far as to say that this is in some ways a desirable situation. He points out the benefits of social or political collisions – which can “be minimised by promoting and preserving an uneasy equilibrium, which is constantly threatened and in constant need of repair” as a “precondition for decent societies and morally acceptable behaviour” (Berlin 12, 19).

A decent society and morally acceptable behaviour are clearly important to both Taylor and Johnson and the transformations traceable in the text of their interviews reveal their attempts to create stability and unity in the face of “political collisions.” They also demonstrate that they have many resources to call on as they negotiate the “wavering line” between division and identification. For Taylor, these resources are a kind of “secondary production” which allow her to survive an enormously complex situation. Only when her

strategies fail to camouflage the incompatibilities in her situation does she experience a double bind. The personal crisis which accompanies her double bind causes her to think of leaving the bank. For Johnson, the “waving line” allows him to identify with two hierarchies – one constructed by the bank and one constructed by those like his journalist friend who oppose the bank. When Johnson talks about leaving the bank he effects a double profit – he steps from a position of success in one hierarchy to a position of success in another.

## 7. A Last Word

*As to the criterion of fairness, the manager – or any individual, in whatever he does – ought to be ready to take responsibility for his own decisions. ... I have repeatedly argued that fundamental change in our modes of organization is essential. Merely to juggle with existing forms simply increases the swing of the oscillating pendulum that never can find its stable state. And, as I have mentioned before, this means the system is robbed of the crucial reference point without which it cannot learn, cannot adapt, cannot evolve.*

*Stafford Beer, Designing Freedom*

It seems fitting, as a last word, to return to the role of rhetoric. My research has provided a way of analysing the texts which surround us on a daily basis. When rhetorical theory is brought into such immediate contact with the situations of our everyday life, the result is a clearer view of our motives and the strategies we employ to mediate the complexities of our lives. This analysis in turn reveals aspects of our ideologies and displays the choices we are really making but have been allowed to name in such a way as to conceal what are often their inherent contradictions.

And while the relationships among discourse, the self and social structures may be clearer for the examples I have given, it is also important to determine whether we have made any contribution to understanding, and perhaps solving, the problems of our society. As Burke and Goffman both conclude, understanding a problem does not necessarily free us from the problem, but it does make it harder not to implicate ourselves. We need to be aware and reflective or there is no chance for improvement to take place.

The organizational nature of our society often lulls us into thinking that as long as our actions stay within the bounds of official policies or accepted procedures, we have fulfilled our responsibilities. Major societal problems can then comfortably be relegated to unspecified organizations to handle. But as Burke argues, we have to face our condition of alienation, one from another, and of belonging to “groups more or less at odds with one

another” (Rhetoric 22). By taking some of the mystery out of everyday language practices, thereby making visible the social action constituted by these practices, we can equip more people to understand when things are going wrong, when the level of alienation is no longer conducive to an “uneasy equilibrium” (Berlin 19). Rhetorical theory provides a way of identifying change that does not result in any true alteration. Only in this way can we demand improvements, both from ourselves and from others. Only in this way can we be “response-able.”

More than most organizations, banking in Canada constitutes a mammoth effort of a sacred nature. Although Mintzberg does not address banks specifically, one of his categories of organizations – the ideological organization – describes them well: they have powerful cultures, distinctive histories, tend to elicit strong commitment from their people, and rely for coordination on the standardization of norms through socialization and indoctrination (R&F 412-413). As we have seen in Chapter 3, our banks face enormously conflicting demands and have to manage multiple identities. Their communications plans have to take into account a long history with its characteristic traditions and expectations as well as a modern understanding of how these same traits have to change if the organization is to survive. Using the tools developed in this research, communications professionals, and especially those in Canadian banks, can adapt or add to the theoretical framework that informs their everyday practices. The communication professionals in the specific bank I studied will be able to add my findings to their own and judge the nature of the resources they are expecting of their audiences.

The specific example of textual and conversational analysis of the *Planning for Improved Public Relations* and its companion, the *Our Beliefs* booklet reveals a great deal about the hidden action of both production and reception. It reminds us that, as de Certeau claims, “Both rhetoric and everyday practices can be defined as internal manipulations of a system – that of language or that of an established order.” Referring to “the ruses,

displacements, ellipses, etc., that scientific reason has eliminated from operational discourses,” he concludes that “[s]o quick, so perspicacious in recognizing them in the discourse of the raconteur and the peddler, the ear of the peasant or worker can discern in a way of speaking a way of treating the received language. ... It distinguishes in these linguistic turns a style of thought and of action – that is models of practice” (de Certeau 23-24). As previously noted, resistance translates into a form of secondary production and constitutes a survival skill. Producers find ways to build solidarity with receivers in a bid to win their compliance. The process of interaction between production and reception is never complete.

Understanding models of practice improves the reflective ability of communications professionals. Hearing directly from both the production and reception ends of an important and far-reaching communications plan helps us to adopt a double vision. As Mintzberg advocates, “Hard information is often limited in scope, lacking richness and often failing to encompass important noneconomic and nonquantitative factors. ... This is why a conversation with a single disgruntled customer can sometimes be worth more than a major marketing research report” (R&F 259).

Narrative analysis benefits from its close association with rhetorical theory, which can enrich the possibilities for understanding motives. As the case study I have chosen demonstrates, it can be argued that rhetoric’s role in serving society lies predominantly in its ability to connect people with their actions. And when rhetoric discovers human processes of trial and error that accompany the kind of tensions observable in our discourse, we would do well to remember Mintzberg’s interpretation of the process of strategy making:

Strategy making is an immensely complex process involving the most sophisticated, subtle, and at times subconscious of human cognitive and social processes. We know that it must draw on all kinds of informational inputs, many of them nonquantifiable and accessible only to strategists who are connected to the details rather than detached from them. We know that the dynamics of the

context have repeatedly defied any efforts to force the process into a predetermined schedule or onto a predetermined track. Strategies inevitably exhibit some emergent qualities, and even when largely deliberate, often appear less formally planned than informally visionary. And learning, in the form of fits and starts as well as discoveries based on serendipitous events and the recognition of unexpected patterns, inevitably plays a key role, if not *the* key role in the development of all strategies that are novel. Accordingly, we know that the process requires insight, creativity, and synthesis, the very things that formalization discourages. (R&F 227)

As my case study shows, the strategy of negotiating everyday situations in our organizational society can and should be included in this description. In the process of joining organizational theory with rhetoric, rhetorical theory gains a new perspective from which to view the connections among discourse, the self and social structures. It also gains the status of a “tool” for a much broader audience of practitioners. There are many highly skilled practitioners of good will who want to make contributions that will satisfy their desire to see improvements in the world around them. I can think of no better aspiration for rhetorical theory than to contribute to our professional knowledge so that the world we make and maintain to match our resources, as Schön describes it, has a higher sensitivity to the issues of control and communication that are part of any system. In other words, our worldmaking is informed and contributes to the health of a system that attempts to share the benefits with the largest number of people.

### **The Researcher's Dilemma**

Throughout the research and writing of this dissertation the author has struggled with her own multiple identities. As a literacy program volunteer she was concerned with identifying and converting the oppressors, who seemed content to relegate large numbers of people in our society to positions which rendered them voiceless. As a manager with more than 17 years experience, she wanted to understand why so many people at all levels of organizations fail to take responsibility for their actions. It seemed impossible that people could devote the majority of their waking hours to something without insisting that

improvements or some tangible good for our society should come of it. As an academic agent she wanted to learn more about the role of rhetorical theory in everyday life, to bring some objectivity to the study of language practices as they related to rhetorical theory, and to meld rhetoric with organizational theory in order to enrich this valuable field of scholarship. And as a professional with her own business, she hoped to act as a broker between theory and professional practice in order to explore the possibilities of cooperation for mutual benefit.

But even to study the rhetoric of an organization requires assimilation into the culture of the organization and the working lives of the people who make up the organization. Was I perhaps just an apologist for the business practices of the organization and people who were assisting my research? The sense of potential corruptibility can be likened to the turning of an intelligence agent:

When, say, the British discover that one of their diplomats is a Russian spy and imprison him for forty-two years, and then five years later he escapes, what are the Russians to think? Is he their man and the information he gave them reliable? Was he all along a double agent, feeding them false information and then imprisoned briefly to give false assurances that he had not been working for the British? Was he loyal to Russia but discovered by the British and, unbeknownst to himself, given false information to feed to the Russians? Has he been allowed to escape so that the Russians would wrongly think that he had really been working for the British and therefore that his information had been false? And the British themselves, to know what import the Russians gave to this spy's information, must know whether indeed, the Russians think their man was really their man, and, if so, whether or not this had been known from the start by the British. (Weick 172)

This example may over-dramatize the situation somewhat, but it does serve to emphasize the nature of what Weick calls the "equivocality"<sup>84</sup> that organizations confront

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<sup>84</sup> Significantly, Weick says "when we assert that organizations confront equivocality, we mean that organizations live in an environment of puns. The image we want to capture is not that of an environment that is disordered, indeterminant (sic), and chaotic. Instead, we want to capture the image of an environment that is rich in the possible connections that could be imposed on an equally rich assortment of possible punctuated variables."



(174), that my case study has shown individuals in organizations confront, and that I as the researcher tumultuously share in. As Cheney demonstrates, you have to be part of an organization if your criticism of it is to have any positive results (39). And Fairclough's notion of "local coherence" emphasizes the need to talk the organization's own particular language if you are to understand how events and their descriptions are to be interpreted (143-144). And as rhetoricians know, learning to speak the language entails more than a change in vocabulary; it brings with it a change in perspective and solidarity with a new discourse community. Certainly there is pressure to return something of value to those who have assisted and even welcomed you, who have, in some cases, risked a great many repercussions by speaking about their concerns and sharing documents.

In the end, however, the contradictions and conflicts I felt helped bring me to the realization that it is the unstable parts of our narratives that reveal the most important aspects of our social system. For it is precisely here that we confront our problems and demonstrate what resources we can bring to bear on them. The knowledge we gain from being able to observe this process in action allows us to be reflective and to take responsibility. We not only live with our society, we also contribute to it. To get to Isaiah Berlin's "decent societies and morally acceptable behaviour" (19) we need to search out instability while becoming suspicious of consistency.

# Appendix A

## Questions for Preliminary Interviews

1. Would you please confirm your business title and organization?
2. How long have you had this position?
3. What are your major responsibilities in this position?
4. What is your role in the strategic planning which takes place for this organization?
5. How do you define literacy?
6. Do you think we have a literacy crisis? (Explain.)
7. What is your reaction to the ideas in the attached statement? Do you think that literacy is becoming “bifurcated”?
8. Who is responsible for ensuring that the population is literate? Is the education system? Parents? Business?
9. What responsibility does business have for improving the skills of its employees?
10. Does your company have any programs to teach people how to write documents?
11. How many employees need advanced literacy skills to work here? Are there some who don't need to have much in the way of literacy skills?
12. At the beginning you defined literacy as \_\_\_\_\_ and said \_\_\_\_\_. Is there anything you would like to add to that now?

## Appendix B

### Questions Used As Guidelines for Final Interviews

1. Please describe the office in which you work and your role.
2. Please discuss your impressions of the two documents: *Planning for Improved Public Relations* and *Our Beliefs*. (titles changed for confidentiality)
3. How do these documents relate to your work?
4. What has been the response to these documents?
5. Is the bank responsive to the public – what is the relationship between the bank and the public?
6. How would you characterize the relationship between employees and executives in the bank.
7. How do you go about performing the specific duties of your job? (What is the process for creating a document? Doing other tasks?)
8. What skills/qualities make it possible for you to do your job?
9. What is the role of specific campaigns or projects directed at employees?
10. What is the role of “learning” in the bank?
11. Do you experience any areas of conflict with the bank? How do your personal views relate to the views you see expressed by the bank?
12. Is there anything you want to add? (about your work, what you’re doing, what you see as important)

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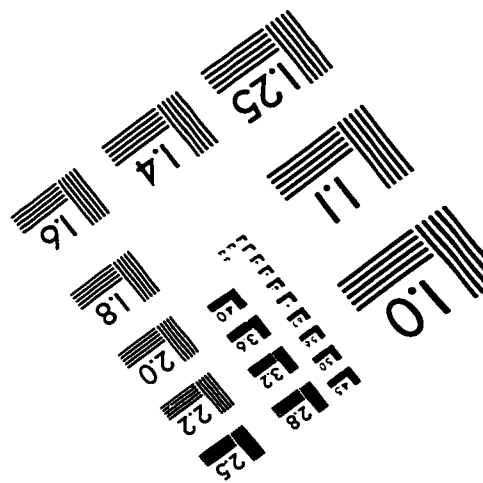
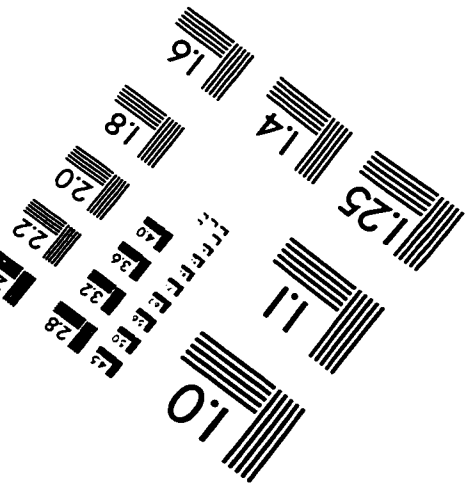
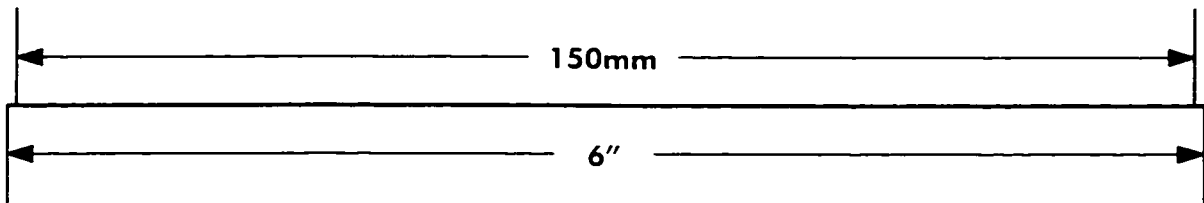
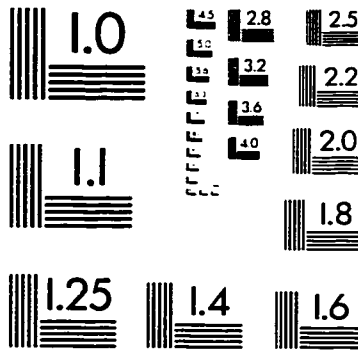
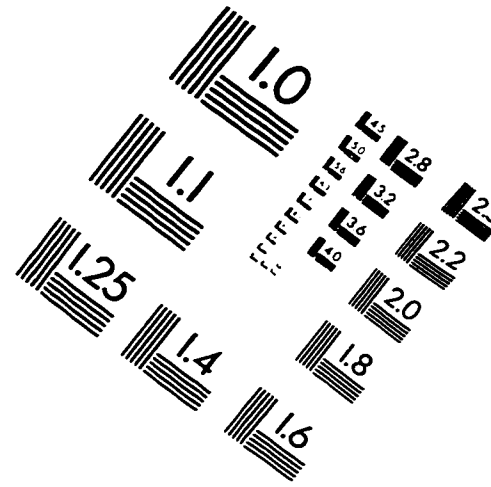
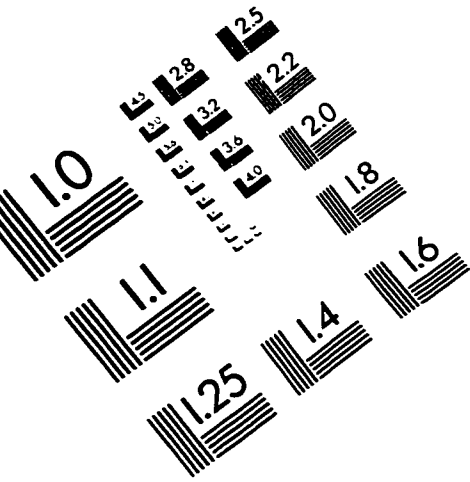
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