Traditional views of organizational communication have fallen short because they misapprehended and oversimplified the realities of rhetorical behavior in organizations and because they offered weak theoretical underpinnings for the study of business communication. Recent developments in rhetorical theory spearheaded by the work of Toulmin, Perelman, Polanyi, and others offer a coherent, theoretically sound, and productive way of analyzing discourse in organizations. Applying constructs of the "new rhetoric" to the study of sample documents from a representative organizational situation illustrates the importance of consensus building as a tacit communication purpose, reveals the decision-making process involving the text's audience, and demonstrates the central role of context or situation in shaping discourse. Rhetoric in organizations, just as in other "rational enterprises" (such as the disciplines of science and law), reveals underlying paradigms that are determined by the nature of communal behavior and by the nature of thinking man.

Rhetoric and Rational Enterprises

Reassessing Discourse in Organizations

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Richard McKeon's vision of rhetoric as an "architectonic productive art" (1971, p. 44) presupposes a fundamental commonality in human cognition and communication across cultures and through time. Such a presupposition is a philosophical necessity if people are ever to have rational grounds for achieving consensus in everyday life. Toulmin (1972) argues extensively and persuasively for this view, as well as for its limits of validity. The process by which

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consensus is reached is of vital importance in the everyday world of business—and yet until recently the working assumptions behind communication in business organizations have been misleadingly simplistic. The traditional theories presented communication in business either as manipulation—the art of influencing people through "rhetoric"—or as merely mechanical—the transfer, more or less successful, of data.

We would like to argue both the appropriateness and the practical fruitfulness of using the tools of rhetorical analysis to investigate communication in business. First, we will show connections between contemporary rhetorical theory on the one hand and administrative and psychological analyses of communication in business organizations on the other. Second, we will use a prototypical rhetorical situation in a computer time-sharing company to demonstrate how the applications of rhetorical theory can enrich our understanding of this field of rational enterprise. As our case study will show, it is possible to use constructs developed by Perelman, Polanyi, Toulmin, and other theorists for the productive analysis of specific business documents, identifying the rhetorical elements that mirror and influence the decision-making process of the document's audience. We believe that the theory and pedagogy of business and technical communication require not only revision but reorientation in the light of contemporary rhetorical theory.

In our age, society in general has experienced an increasing fragmentation of knowledge and increasing difficulty in arriving at productive consensus in practical life (Booth, 1974; Cushman & Tompkins, 1980). The response, in rhetorical theory and in practice, has been to call for a rhetoric that would go beyond ornamentation and manipulation to provide a rationale and a practically useful methodology for producing consensus among people of dissimilar values, attitudes, and beliefs. As Young (1980) has pointed out, this new rhetoric is clearly still in its infancy, with theorists propounding widely differing programs and methodologies. Still, several common characteristics are apparent: they are a process-oriented search for consensus from within the group rather than a product-oriented effort to impose a predetermined conclusion from without, an integrative approach, and a situational, concrete orientation.

Almost every modern theorist has approached rhetoric from a communal perspective. They have been following the lead of Perelman, who revolutionized rhetorical study in the twentieth century by examining argumentation from the perspective of the community rather than from that of the individual rhetor. Asking how argument

influences us rather than how we can use it to influence others, he used specific, concrete situations to produce an analysis of techniques and operations of argumentation held to be valid not only across disciplines but across cultures.

The integrative approach to rhetoric as a metadiscipline is also widespread. McKeon (1971) appealed for the development of a rhetoric that would unite the fragmented specializations of human knowledge into a single "art" of cognition and communication that could be used to direct not only theoretical research but also practical communal action. Kinneavy (1970) has produced what is probably the best known of the many contemporary rhetorical "metatheories" that attempt to unite all forms of discourse into a single plan.

Finally, a situational, concrete orientation, the basis of rhetoric's practical usefulness, has become increasingly evident in the last decade. Bitzer's (1968) argument that the situation determines the rhetor's response drew immediate protest as an oversimplification, but also opened the way to discussing rhetorical acts as resulting from the interaction of the various constituents of the rhetorical situation. Booth (1974) is representative in his attempt to work out the grounds for productive consensus in the public domain. Weimer (1977), however, criticizes Booth and other new rhetoricians as "neojustificationists" who merely update the ancient rule of truth from the certain to the probable. Cushman and Tompkins (1980) start from the concrete reality of the rhetorical situation—the diversity of values, the difficulty of communicating knowledge, the need for a universal ethical standard—to infer the characteristics of an effective rhetoric. Consigny (1974, p. 180) argues for a rhetoric that is at once a "heuristic art of discovery" and a "managerial art of controlling real situations" and bringing them to a successful resolution.

The contemporary attempt to take a communal perspective, to define rhetorical situations in psychological, ethical, and behavioral terms, and to analyze them in concrete detail has produced theoretical constructs that can be applied to new contexts. Particularly useful for our purposes are Perelman's rhetorical theory, because of its applicability to the analysis of specific elements of discourse, and the work on the rhetoric of scientific communities done by Polanyi (1962, 1966), Kuhn (1970), and Toulmin (1972), because their work sheds light on the way a given rhetorical community affects a specific communication, both in its genesis and in its effect.

All this is clearly relevant to business organizations, which are, after all, communities in which the need for consensus is becoming increasingly apparent. And the process by which consensus is

reached—that is, how decisions are made—is receiving increasing attention in business. In fact, clear parallels can be seen between rhetorical theory on the one hand and the development of management communication theory on the other. Traditional management communication texts saw communication as essentially the overt or covert attempt of one person to influence another or a group of others. Communication was viewed as essentially unidirectional and top-down: one traditional text (Bentley, 1953) titled a chapter on employee newsletters "Making the Employees Company-Minded." Other texts routinely designated communication as "a management tool." This orientation clearly parallels the orientation of traditional rhetoric, in which the rhetor stood outside the audience he or she was attempting to influence. Today, however, management communication texts recognize the importance of fully mutual and bottom-up communication, not merely in Japanese-style quality circles, but in routine, day-to-day interactions, and have adopted a change in focus from the individual communicator to the group as the primary source of information and of decision making. Take, for example, employee appraisals. Originally ad hoc meetings called at the manager's discretion, they eventually came to be seen as opportunities for mutual enlightenment and mutual goal setting. Timm (1980) describes the contemporary approach. Moreover, the organization itself is increasingly seen as interdependent with its social environment (Parkinson & Rowe, 1977; de la Mare, 1979; d'Aprix, 1977). Contemporary texts on negotiation (Fisher & Ury, 1981; Filley, 1977) operate from the premise that the only really successful resolution is one in which both sides win.

Actually, the very idea that decision making requires theoretical explanation is relatively new (Janis & Mann, 1977, chap. 2). The traditional model of decision making as a response to communication was the "rational economic man." It was assumed that when people— particularly managers—were being "objective," they would reliably choose the best course of action (within the limits of the information available to them). This best course was usually defined as the course most likely to yield the highest economic return. Later, in an effort to enable managers to more accurately weight a greater number of variables, strategies for "optimizing" decisions by weighing all the alternatives were developed (Young, 1966). But the flaws in this concept of decision making soon became apparent. Not only does "optimizing" require an enormous expenditure of time and energy; in real life, humans experience all sorts of limitations, not only emotional but cognitive, on their ability to think rationally (Miller &

Starr, 1967; Simon, 1976). Furthermore, economic considerations are by no means as influential as popular myth would have us believe, even among managers in business. One study of vice presidents of Fortune 500 companies indicates that considerations such as the organization's long-term social relations or its traditions often outweigh considerations of profit with upper-echelon managers (Stanger, 1969). Uttal (1983) presents a more popular treatment of the same issue.

At the same time that management theorists are investigating the psychological aspects of communication, psychologists are discovering the powerful influence of the rhetorical characteristics of a piece of discourse on the audience's perception of a situation and consequent response to it. The power of concrete as opposed to abstract representation appears to be overwhelming, even with a relatively sophisticated audience. People typically ignore a statistically significant but abstract presentation of information in favor of concrete, but less valid, personal encounters. Students selecting courses, for example, respond more to a few comments from one or two other students than to compilations of course evaluations by hundreds of students; managers, given detailed descriptions of disastrous but improbable consequences of a course of action, tend to rate those consequences as much more likely than they really are; even research psychologists tend to ignore statistical probability in their research, often making predictions on the basis of early results from a single sample (Nisbett, Borgida, Crandall, & Reed, 1976; Kahneman & Tversky, 1973; Tversky & Kahneman, 1974).

One important recent article amasses further evidence of this bias toward the concrete in human perception and judgment and then goes on to discuss the social implications of this bias (Tversky & Kahneman, 1971). Another study (Slovic, Fischloff, & Lichtenstein, 1976) reports that people appear to assess the probability of a scenario—a chain of events—on the basis of the average probability of all the events, rather than on the probability of the least likely event in the chain. The authors point out that political writers sometimes play on this popular tendency by constructing graphic but elaborately contrived and hence unlikely scenarios of disaster to sway public opinion. Nisbett et al. (1976, p. 132) conclude: "If people are unmoved by the sorts of dry, statistical data that are dear to the hearts of scientists and policy planners, then social and technological progress must be impeded unless effective, concrete, emotionally interesting ways of communicating conclusions are developed." Not only do rhetorical theorists envision rhetoric as playing a fundamental role in the process

of social consensus seeking, from another perspective, psychologists who once saw decision making as a primarily individual activity now recognize the social exigencies that determine rhetorical response.

In summary, then, both rhetorical theory and recent practice are taking a cross-disciplinary approach to analyzing discourse, and rhetoric is beginning to be seen in practice, as well as in theory, as shaping social processes: a genuinely "architectonic productive art."

A PROTOTYPICAL EXAMPLE:
TEXT AND ANALYSIS

We are arguing that this regenerated rhetoric has immediate practical applicability to the field of organizational communication, which patently needs a more comprehensive theoretical base as well as better tools for more specific analysis of actual discourse acts. Just as in society at large we appear to be developing a new conception of communication that addresses the demands of a pluralistic, interdependent, rapidly changing world, so in organizations there is a need to understand (and ultimately to formulate) communication in a new way.

The recent developments in the study of rhetoric, psychology, and administrative behavior that are discussed above indicate that the traditional ways of describing and teaching organizational communication fall short. In particular, the old approach oversimplifies and underestimates the influence of rhetorical behavior in making "good" decisions (i.e., those that are practical, mutual, and superior to alternatives) possible, and in producing understanding and consensus among parties with diverse interests and values. It also neglects the power of communication to engage rhetors with their community and prompt them to exercise the choices that make them more fully human. In Perelman and Olbrechts-Tyteca's (1969, p. 514) words, "Only the existence of an argumentation that is neither compelling nor arbitrary can give meaning to human freedom, a state in which a reasonable choice can be exercised. . . . The [new] theory of argumentation will help to develop what a logic of value judgments has tried in vain to provide, namely the justification of the possibility of a human community in the sphere of action when this justification cannot be based on a reality or objective truth."

Reviewing a particular case of communication in the organization will serve to illustrate the advantages of examining organizational discourse in the light of this new rhetoric.

COMPUTYME

MEMORANDUM

DATE:

TO:

FROM: Frank ------

SUBJECT: STARCOM TRIP

October 16 and 17 were spent at STARCOM headquarters in Washington at a P.77
class taught by Peggy Carr. The room was barely adequate to hold the 26-27
people in attendance. It seemed the demand for P.77 knowledge was quite high;
however what it turned out to be was STARCOM force feeding their people to a
large extent. The approximate distribution of bodies in attendance was:

                    15 STARCOM
                     2 ITT
                     2 RCA
                     6 XEROX
                     1 FLEXOVAN
                     1 COMPUTYME

The class material was derived entirely from the P.77 DOCUMENTATION SERVICE.
Had I not read it so avidly in the past the course would have been a fine over-
view of P 77. As it was I learned very little new. Not to say it wasn't worth
it for me. i think the contacts made were worthwhile as were the bits and pieces
picked up on where Starcom's going and how fast.

Starcom has a big job to do and like us they too are having trouble finding people
adequate to meet the challenge. Peggy is their central technical heavy in network
design. This is good, for she is an extremely knowledgeable individual. However,
if you want courses taught, it's Peggy who teaches them; if you want consulting
help, it's Peggy who consults; if you want installation help, it's Peggy again;
debugging help, Peggy. She is spread very thin and yet still must manage her
primary duties of specifying and evaluating network direction and growth.

Starcom growth--into new areas--is stifled due to its refusal or inability to
target an area and move towards it. Why? I got the impression that a good deal
of it is political influence from without. They are hesitant to install new
features unless agreement can be reached with other packet carriers as to whether
their directions are in line. This is certainly part of the reason that 2780 support
and block mode terminal support is so very slow in coming. Also, the P.77 standard
is suffering growing pains. Revisions are hard to get adopted as problems with the
current standard are found.

I have several pages of point type notes that I will not attempt to turn into
prose, but I will cite a few that I thought were interesting.

        *When Starcom installs the Q-1000's they will drop the current ARPA
        level 0 and install P.88 to interconnect their network modes. They
        feel this should be adequate to do the routing within the network.
        I'm very surprised at this.

        *Starcom is the only network that does end-to-end acknowledgments
        within the backbone net. In view of this I believe we will need to
        do it ourselves at level 4.

        *Starcom is having a devil of a time with their bit-stuffing inter-
        face. Their choice of the INTEL chip was a bad one, says Peggy.

Figure 1.   Frank's Original Memo

*In a conversation with Peggy the byte VS bit interface was discussed.
The preponderance of new products will be built to follow the P.77
HDLC standard. We should seriously consider going that way. However,
I would recommend developing the software to run on the current ISI
as well as an enhanced ISI should we decide to build one.

*Future P.77 will allow extended numbering at both the frame and
packet level.

*Addressing within a private network is very restrictive. I hoped
that P.88 might change that. Peggy would have hoped so also; however,
such is not the case. Some representation on the various CCITT
committees by persons in the private sector may have been (still could
be?) beneficial. (I got this impression more than once.)

*The fact that Starcom does not support the P.77 permanent virtual
circuit concept will give us some problems in doing host-to-host.
Minor ones, however.

*Although Starcom does echoing in the network they cannot adequately
do our deferred type echoing. The algorithms they currently use in
the BPO are insufficient. Peggy said they are evaluating other options
because "the pressure is on." Block mode terminal support would not
be affected by this inadequacy....when they get it.

*DATAPAC has a large influence on the way Starcom does things technically.
However, I don't know whether theirs is a positive or negative influence.
It seemed that if DATAPAC is doing something (e.g. 3270 support) Starcom
will find an alternate means of doing it. Clearly, there are both
good and bad results in this approach.

In all, the trip was a worthwhile experience not so much as a result of the
knowledged derived from the formal course, but as a result of the contacts made
and the peripheral information gained.

Figure 1.   Continued

We first encountered the texts analyzed in this section when we
were teaching a report-writing seminar for managers at the head-
quarters of an international computer services firm we shall call
Computyme. The first text (Figure 1) is a memo written by Frank, a
mid-level manager at Computyme who participated in our seminar,
when reporting on a recent business trip he had made to a supplier and
potential subsidiary of Computyme, "Starcom." As Frank's memo
to his fellow managers makes clear, the trip to Starcom offered him an
unexpected opportunity to take a look into Starcom's corporate
strategy in addition to providing him with the formal technical
instruction in the P.77 Documentation Service that occasioned his
trip. Starcom's technical capabilities and future growth plans ("where
Starcom's going and how fast," in Frank's words) were of special
interest to Computyme because Computyme intended to use Starcom
as a key vendor. Frank's memo reflects his understanding of potential

problems in this corporate relationship, as evidenced by his uneasiness about Starcom's very obvious growing pains. He mentions several areas of concern in passing: Starcom's personnel restrictions, best illustrated by the overextension of Peggy; several of Starcom's technical limitations; the pressure on Starcom from competitors and current suppliers; erratic long-range planning; and the incompatibility of Starcom's product with Computyme's technical standards and corporate goals.

When the other managers at Computyme gathered to discuss Frank's memo, it was clear that all understood and took very seriously its latent message: Starcom had a number of problems that contraindicated Computyme's corporate intentions and therefore bore close watching. Still, there was an undercurrent of dissatisfaction about the memo that crystallized around the group's efforts to rewrite it. As a starting point, we suggested that they give Frank's loose notes a more apparent structure. With this in mind, several managers tried—but failed—to compose new versions that would satisfy those present. Typically these efforts yielded cleaner formats and more explicit statements of the document's original purpose, but no significant reorientation of the writer to the rhetorical task or to the audience. The following outline of one of these false starts will serve to illustrate how superficial or merely cosmetic the initial revisions were:

  (I) Information about Starcom
       (A) Manpower problems
       (B) Rumors
       (C) Changing standards
  (II) The P.77 Course
       (A) Content
       (B) Participants

Although these writers all attempted to impose some structure on the information that the original let flow out indiscriminately, they chose either the traditional narrative order of the trip report or a simple categorization by topic. In no case was the information hierarchically structured; either it was linked together in chains, or it was sorted in piles, like construction materials ready for use. Furthermore, these revisions showed the writers generally discarding most of the organizational gossip in the original, not knowing how to fit its potential significance into the conventions of a trip report. What remained was what struck them as most objectively imposing, as indisputably "information": facts, however insignificant or undeveloped, but not

inferences, however provocative. They were comfortable with the concrete, discrete bits of data, uneasy with more abstract, speculative, or stray items not directly related to the purpose of the trip. As writers, they found themselves locked into a limiting mind frame. As potential readers of the report, all found the original and the revisions alike, unsatisfying and inconclusive.

Then, however, one of the managers who had been working on the text independently—we will call her Anna—outlined a revision (Figure 2) that produced immediate and universal acceptance. There was a certain drama and shared surprise in this outcome; this was not a group of followers easily led, but seasoned managers accustomed to fairly independent and creative thinking. But because Anna's text was somehow commonly recognized as more "right" and compelling, it commanded a full and willing concurrence from its normally contentious listeners. Anna's version was, in fact, the memo Frank *thought* he had written in the beginning, as he later remarked to us. We wanted to know what had happened.

A comparison of the two documents revealed fundamental differences. Frank's original has the appearance of an intelligent but hasty series of recollected impressions. His references to his "point-type notes" and to "bits and pieces picked up" underscore the miscellaneous quality of the message. His conception of the corporate information gathered as "peripheral" to the central purpose of the trip (and therefore of the trip report) keep him from demonstrating what made it, in his words, "interesting" and "worthwhile." His opening suggests that he is at pains to set the stage for the parade of facts that dominate the report; the first paragraph has a strongly narrative quality and focuses on dates, places, and a carefully reconstructed cast of characters. These facts are not necessarily organizationally irrelevant, but Frank offers no rationale for providing them.

Visually, too, Frank's presentation offers little guidance to its rhetorical structure. There are no headings, enumeration, or lead transitions (except for the weak "In all" in the final paragraph). The only visually arresting feature happens to be the textually unexploited list of participants in the Starcom seminar. The unnumbered listing of facts that occupies the second half of the memo reinforces the miscellaneous impression.

Internally, the memo shows evidence of careful observation and sound, if undeveloped, inferences about Starcom's potential liabilities as a Computyme vendor. However, the procession of facts and inferences does not add up to any dominant assertion, point of view, or

COMPUTYME

M E M O R A N D U M

DATE:
TO:
FROM: Frank ------
SUBJECT: STARCOM TRIP

I went to Starcom to take a P.77 class, but the basic value of the trip was
the information I gathered talking to Starcom people outside of class. This
memo summarizes my concerns about Starcom's current technical status. Overall
I still believe Starcom is a viable vendor, but I feel it is important that
the information I gathered be analyzed in the overall context of our plans
to use Starcom as a vendor for our long-term network strategy.

The basic problem areas, in order of importance, are:

        *Starcom's future development plans

        *Starcom's current technical difficulties

        *Starcom's current technical restrictions

I will discuss each problem area in detail.

Starcom's future development plans.
        1) Political problem--unclear
        2) P.77 standard development
        3) Synchronous support on public network

Starcom's current technical difficulties.
        1) Can't find people--currently only Peggy
        2) Bit-stuffing interface
        3) International

Starcom's technical restrictions.
        1) P.88 for routing(?)
        2) end-to-end acknowledgement--level 4
        3) HDLC standard
        4) addressing within a private network
        5) permanent virtual circuit
        6) deferred echoing

Conclusion

Figure 2.   Anna's Outlined Version

organizing principle. The memo languishes at the level of a catalogue of odd facts, assembled because they are putatively "interesting."

Anna's version begins where Frank's leaves off. It marshals the same array of facts but subordinates them to specific considerations, which the opening of the memo makes explicit: "I feel it is important that the information I gathered be analyzed in the overall context of our plans to use Starcom as a vendor for our long-term network strategy." Although Frank had a buried and legitimate purpose—to demonstrate that "the trip was a worthwhile experience"—Anna's purpose claimed more organizational significance because it zeroed in on a specific rationale for gathering and reporting observations about Starcom's health; it is clear to her and to the reader what "worthwhile" means in this case. Furthermore, her statement of purpose is more overtly argumentative, more explicitly set forth ("This memo summarizes my concerns"), and more predictive of the memo's contents and structure.

Anna's version uses previews (as in paragraphs 2 and 3) and redundancy to signal to the reader how her thoughts are organized. Indeed, the information is highly structured. Several types of logical frames operate simultaneously and hierarchically to order the message and make it both coherent and memorable to the reader: categories of problem areas (classification), order of importance (sequence), a veiled problem/consequence (cause/effect) pattern, and, in the document as a whole, general-to-particular order. None of these is gratuitous or contrived. All contribute to the message's authority and impact.

The appearance of Anna's version also promises a logical structure, one that puts facts in a hierarchy. Headings, enumeration, indentation, spacing, repetition of key words, and parallel structure are used purposefully to segment the data logically and create layers of generality. Moreover, the visual structure of the document corresponds to its rhetorical structure; there are no misleading signals or inconsistencies, as in Frank's original version. It should perhaps be said that Frank's original trip report was not, as comparison with Anna's revised report tends to imply, inept or uninformative; it was too narrowly conceived given the weight of his observations and the demands of the rhetorical situation. Anna's version succeeded where Frank's did not—not because she was a paragon of rhetorical competence, but because she took into account the tacit questions of the audience.

Although we have only the outline of Anna's proposed revision of Frank's memo, we can anticipate where the promised discussion of

each problem area would occur and how this information would be shown to affect existing plans to use Starcom as a long-term vendor. Because she sees her role not as an information carrier but as an analyst and problem solver, she chose not to see the memo as a perfunctory trip report written to justify company expenditures, record an event, or document the traveler's time. Instead, her memo is designed to advance her own preliminary assessment of Starcom's viability as a vendor and participate in ongoing processes of decision making and strategic planning at Computyme. What Anna did, in short, was to reconceive the original rhetorical situation. The group at Computyme achieved consensus through being offered a "version"—a vision—of the trip that was powerful enough to elicit strong agreement. Henry Johnstone's (1970, p. 359) description of the prototypical rhetorical situation fits this situation well: "[Rhetoric's] purpose is not to incite its hearer to action—even the action of adopting some specific belief. Instead, rhetoric totally recruits the hearer" to a new vision of reality.

Popular mythology notwithstanding, this process of achieving consensus is by far the most common function of communication in organizations. Yet the power of tacit arguments underlying "factual" presentations has received little attention in communication theory.

To examine the specific rhetorical qualities of Anna's version, two perspectives are available: first, the document itself and, second, the social context (Bitzer's "situation") in which it was formed. Because Perelman's *New Rhetoric* is the first and principal text of the new rhetoric, and because it contains the most thoroughgoing analysis to date of specific verbal structures in discourse, we will use it in analyzing the rhetorical qualities of the written report. For our analysis of the social context of the memo, we will supplement Perelman with some of the recent work in cognitive and social psychology and with a brief excursion into the philosophy of science, where the question of how scientific communities build consensus has provoked fruitful investigation.

The Document Itself

As we have indicated, the factual content and essential message of Anna's version are similar to Frank's. Accordingly, the parts of Perelman's vast treatise that most directly apply to these reports are the sections on the selection and presentation of data and on assessing the relative strength and fullness of arguments.

The rhetorical qualities of Anna's report that most strongly differentiate it from Frank's are, first, the stronger impression it makes on the reader, and, second, its apparent order and clarity.

Perelman's term for strength of impression is "presence": He accords presence overriding importance in argumentation. Because by definition no argument can be fully conclusive, a given argument succeeds only to the degree that it is able to crowd other interpretations out of the audience's consciousness (Perelman & Olbrechts-Tyteca, 1969, pp. 116-122; Perelman, 1979, pp. 111-116). Several elements in Anna's version contribute to its presence. In the first place, the purpose is strongly stated at the outset. Next, the data are organized according to the purpose. This produces the impression that only data pertinent to the issue have been presented. As Perelman and Olbrechts-Tyteca (1969, p. 116) say, "By the very fact of selecting certain elements and presenting them to the audience, their importance and pertinency to the discussion are implied." Another factor is the amount of repetition in Anna's report, generated by the top-down, general-to-particular structure dear to texts on technical writing. As Perelman (1982, p. 144) does not forget to point out, repetition of a given point has the effect of reinforcing its presence. Anna's three key points are given twice, and her central message—Starcom's technical weakness—appears in the first paragraph and is echoed in the "technical difficulties" and "technical restrictions" headings, as well as in the specific kinds of problems mentioned in the body of the report. Furthermore, the structure is hierarchical; this arrangement influences the reader's impression of the relative importance of the different elements. As Perelman and Olbrechts-Tyteca (1969, p. 356) put it, "Language plays an essential role in argumentation by example. When two phenomena are subsumed under a single concept, their assimilation appears to derive from the very nature of things, while their differentiation appears to require justification." For example, "Peggy," who figures so prominently in Frank's report, is relegated to the third level of importance in Anna's. Again, it is important to note that Anna's approach differs from Frank's chiefly in its structure rather than in an actual difference in the information presented: Her version in fact includes almost all the material in the original report. And of course Frank's data are no less selected than Anna's: His two pages represent a very small sample from his experiences on the trip. The issue is the *level* on which the selection— and consequent interpretation—takes place (Perelman & Olbrechts-Tyteca, 1969, p. 121). Was the trip an incidental collection of impressions of which organizational custom required an accounting, or was it a source of information that was strategically significant for the organization's future?

The fact that Anna's interpretation is more striking than Frank's contributes to the impression her version made on the other members of the group. Perelman and Olbrechts-Tyteca (1969, pp. 121-122) remark that a striking or arresting interpretation of the data tends to overshadow alternative interpretations, even when the latter are not incompatible with the former. He also argues that arguments that are new and "specific to the case," like Anna's, are more effective than routine arguments like Frank's routine trip report. Perelman and Olbrechts-Tyteca (1969, pp. 468-469) suggest a way of distinguishing the two types of arguments that practicing writers could profit by: "It is characteristic of an argument particular to the matter at issue that it generally contributes something either to our stock of information or to our habits of thought." Anna's report does both. It contributes the new information gleaned from the trip and it offers its audience a means of gauging its significance; it actually redirects the readers' thinking about Frank's trip.

Perelman (1982, p. 134) also discusses the importance of what the arguer chooses *not* to present to the audience. Because Anna does not give reasons for her assessment of Starcom's problems as serious, the validity of her conclusion is taken for granted. In summary, Anna's explicit statement of purpose, her repetitions, and her assumption of self-evidence all contribute to the "presence" of the report.

Clarity, the other major distinctive quality of Anna's report, is more directly related to audience than presence. A function of the interaction of several rhetorical characteristics, clarity is more precisely an appearance or impression that the audience receives of sharing a perspective with the rhetor than it is an objective quality of the discourse. Scott (1981, p. 117) argues: "As we know, nothing is clear in itself. Anything that is clear is clear to someone: clear-to-me or clear-to-you. Furthermore, we notice consistently that the experience of finding something clear, especially if that something has been hidden in a hitherto puzzling way, seems to stimulate a desire to share, to enlighten others. 'Make it clear' is a demand we hear constantly, from ourselves and from others. Thus, problems of clarity are apt to lead to social interchange in such circumstances that the influencing of one person by another is potential (and intended influence is always mutual)." (See also Perelman & Olbrechts-Tyteca, 1969, pp. 131-138.)

On the way the impression of clarity tends to influence the audience, Perelman and Olbrechts-Tyteca (1969, p. 135) say: "Every time a traditionally confused notion is put forward as an element of a carefully structured system, the reader may get the impression that one is after

expressing what he has always thought, or he did not have himself a sufficiently precise context which would provide the notion with certain of its determinations." This is exactly what happened in the seminar. All the participants had been grappling with the indeterminacy of Frank's report when they were confronted with a version that subsumed all of the odd bits of data into an immediately comprehensible, significant message. Small wonder that Anna's version was so readily accepted—it satisfied a basic psychological need for coherence and for context.

The comprehensibility of Anna's message is an important component of its clarity. On the sentence level, Frank's version is clearly written, but the relationship of the various elements and the meaning of the whole are not at all apparent. Anna's version, in contrast, gives the essential message at the outset and structures the data so that their relationship is immediately evident, not only intellectually, but also visually. Moreover, the complex interrelationships among the data, established through a highly patterned presentation, give Anna's version an air of logic and an internal demonstrative force that strengthen its influence on the audience, particularly on this technically oriented audience.

Most of the qualities in Anna's report that Perelman has identified as likely to make an argument effective have also been shown to be effective through psychological studies. Everything that gives Anna's version greater presence than Frank's likewise makes it more concrete: As we noted earlier, social psychologists have shown how influential concrete representations are even with a sophisticated audience. Likewise, most of the rhetorical qualities that contribute to the clarity of her version correlate with measures of comprehensibility established by the work of cognitive psychologists. Huckin (1983, pp. 90-104) provides a brief summary of their findings. One psychologically important element, however, that Perelman does not deal with: the importance of participating in a human drama. Perelman (1982, p. 5) stresses again and again that to be effective an argument must produce more than intellectual conviction in the audience; it must call forth a strong emotional response. What better way is there to engage the emotions and invite identification than to tell a dramatic human story? And in this respect, the difference between the two versions is striking. Although the original is more frankly narrative, more pregnant with dramatic potential, it lacks a compelling point of view. It asks the reader to identify with someone wandering unfocusedly into a confused environment and coming away with odd bits of organizational gossip, whereas Anna's version offers the image of an alert, purposeful person on a mission that could almost be

described as detective. What reader would not prefer to identify with the persona in Anna's version?

The Rhetorical Context

The issue of the audience's response can be fruitfully examined from a rhetorical perspective complementary to Perelman's. Historians and philosophers of science have had much to say lately about how scientific communities accept or reject theories. And because business organizations are communities—"rational enterprises" according to Toulmin's definition—business documents too can be examined from this perspective. As communities, business organizations have rules—often tacit or even confused, and imperfectly disseminated, but rules nonetheless—for the admission and analysis of evidence. Kuhn's analysis (extending Popper and Polanyi and extended by Toulmin) of the way dominant theories and methodologies control activity within scientific disciplines is of great theoretical importance for the study of dominant patterns in management communication theory. For our immediate purposes, however, Polanyi's and Toulmin's frameworks are more fruitful.

Polanyi's explanations of what influences scientific communities to accept some theories and reject others has interesting practical possibilities for application to communication in business organizations. Polanyi (1962) lists three criteria by which theories are evaluated in the sciences: accuracy, intrinsic interest, and relevance to the system. In this case, the question of accuracy does not arise; the available information was clearly demarcated and uncontested. The intrinsic interest of Anna's version is clearly high, both from the perspective of practical significance for the organization and from that of personal drama. The issue of systematic relevance is more complex, because business is not a coherent discipline and because each organization and each group within an organization has its own set of problems and methodologies currently considered relevant. Anna's version has greater relevance to her immediate organizational system than Frank's, because her version presents the data as significant information that the organization ought to respond to, whereas the significance of Frank's is not demonstrated.

With respect to Polanyi's criteria, then, Anna's version is superior to Frank's not because her perspective on the problem is more up-to-date than his, but because it is more immediately and fundamentally relevant to Computyme's organizational system. In fact, her use of

the information from the trip to discover a problem and to argue for an organizational response is really the most fundamental difference between her report and Frank's. Instead of setting forth information for readers to deal with as they choose, she identifies a constellation of problems and calls for a specific action. Rhetorically and practically, a communication that invites a response has greater value than one that leaves the audience uncertain not only about what to do, but whether the communication is worth attending to at all.

One aspect of systematic relevance is not directly evident in the differences between Frank's and Anna's versions of the trip report, but we see it as both significant and too little considered. As in science, there are undoubtedly general patterns within our culture governing the kinds of problems that business organizations see themselves as having at a given time in history, along with the kinds of solutions that they would admit as relevant to these problems. In accordance with Toulmin's theories for the sciences, these patterns of thought in business do not merely undergo chance variations, but evolve as the cultural environment evolves. One example of this would be a situation in which productivity is low, absenteeism is high, and complaints are frequent. A generation ago, this would have been diagnosed as "low morale" and treated with suggestion boxes, pep talks, incentive pay, and baseball leagues. In the context of previous generations' deference for authority such tactics might even have worked, more or less. In the contemporary scene, however, with its premium on the autonomy of the individual and its suspicion of unquestioning obedience, the paternalistic approach just outlined would be more likely to create resentment and hostility than coopera- tion. Communication theory has changed accordingly. Today, filled with a conviction of the importance of intrinsic rather than extrinsic motivators, managers would see the same situation as a problem in communication or job satisfaction, and treat it with interviews, quality circles, and greater individual autonomy. In its broad outlines, then, the process of "paradigm change" in business follows the pattern of the sciences. The field of organizational communication would do well to be more explicitly aware of these paradigms and their changes, and of their influence on the prevailing rhetoric of the business community.

Finally, Toulmin's (1972, pp. 159-160) discussion of what "enculturation" into a scientific community means also has relevance to the prototypical case of Anna, Frank, and Computyme. If we substitute "the organization" for "the science" in the following explanation of what the apprentice in a discipline must learn, we can

see that what Anna did was to demonstrate her superior mastery of a collective organizational *transmit,* an agreed upon way of explaining events:

> This process involves an apprenticeship. . . . In that apprenticeship, the core of the transmit—the primary thing to be learned, tested, put to work, criticized, and changed—is the repertory of intellectual tech-niques, procedures, skills, and methods of representation, which are employed in "giving explanations" of events and phenomena within the scope of the science concerned. . . . Described in these terms, the proof that an apprentice scientist has grasped some concept of the science is evidently tangible and "public." For he demonstrates his ability to apply the concept in a relevant manner, *by solving problems or explaining phenomena using procedures whose "validity" is a communal matter.* This demonstration yields not so much circumstan-tial evidence from which we draw conclusions about the apprentice's "private" mental grasp indirectly, by speculating inferentially about an hypothetical "inner life" on which his publicly demonstrated skills depend. More crucially, *his explanatory achievements provide the most immediate and direct confirmation possible that he has grasped the significance of the concept, i.e. its current role in the relevant discipline.* [italics added]

Two immediate corollaries follow from this: (1) that where there is "enculturation," there is a governing "culture"—the domain, disci-pline, or "rational enterprise" that orders the rational behavior of its members, and (2) that successful rhetorical acts define, validate, and maintain the norms of this culture or discipline. The preference of Anna's peers for her interpretation of Frank's data showed that her "explanatory achievement" validated not just her own grasp but also the group's sense of the relevant issues and of the appropriate criteria for making inferences about Starcom's technical and corporate status. Their ready assent to her version of the facts—a dramatic gesture of consensus in the wake of considerable confusion, dissatisfaction, and dissension over Frank's original message—confirmed the existence of an underlying organizational ideology relevant to the questions at hand. Anna had tapped into that communal ideology and given it an immediate application. Her authority, then, derived not merely from a superior logical or communicative facility, which were advantageous but not sufficient factors in her successful performance, but also from her appropriate response to the demands of the immediate rhetorical situation. This situation obliged her to sift through that "repertory of intellectual techniques, procedures, skills, and methods of represen-

tation . . . employed in 'giving explanations' of events . . . within the scope of [the rational enterprise] concerned"—that is, the largely tacit but shared knowledge of Computyme's managers about organizational practice in general and Computyme's culture in particular— and to use it to pin down the organizational significance of Frank's facts. This she did.

Lest our editorializing on Toulmin's words appear to distort their intended scope, we would add that it was Toulmin (1972, p. 371) who argued for recognizing the fundamental similarity among superficially distinct rational enterprises, deliberately linking the domain of pure science with the domain of practical affairs: "If we can only bring ourselves to accept David Hume's invitation to leave the philosophical study for the outside world of practical life," he writes, "we shall find more similarity between the rationality of science and the rationality of law, technology, and other practical affairs, than are dreamt of in academic philosophy. These rational parallels cut deep."

CONCLUSION

We no longer need, nor can we afford, to see communication in organizations in the traditional way. The importance, for all of us, of the decisions being made in public life—in corporations, in government, and in other organizations—obliges us to understand rhetorical behavior in organizations as part of a complex social process by which groups in a representative "rational enterprise" define their domain, do work, and adapt to change. Central to this process, as we have indicated, is the effort to achieve consensus, a rhetorical goal given inadequate attention in the theoretical and pedagogical literature that treats organizational communication as essentially manipulative or mechanical or formulaic. Management texts are dangerously blind, many of them, to how consensus is really achieved in everyday business life. They fail to acknowledge the complexity of rhetorical acts, shaped as they are by cognitive, ethical, and social constraints; they tend not to deal with questions of how "the truth" is established, with the very real gap between our perceptions and anything that could be called objective reality; and until recently they have treated decision making as a reductively linear process. The traditional communication texts rely on social psychology to the neglect of cognitive psychology, and they emphasize matters of style and format over considerations of audience, context, purpose (particularly when there are multiple or tacit objectives for a given document), and the

organizational "rules" for the admission and analysis of evidence. The traditional view of organizational communication has situated the rhetor solidly outside his audience, which is to be influenced, manipulated, or informed according to design.

The treatments of management behavior and organizational communication that avoid these pitfalls (e.g., Fisher, 1981; Filley, 1977; Parkinson, 1977; d'Aprix, 1977; Janis, 1977) also approach rhetoric as an "architectonic productive art," focusing on the practical uses of communication to achieve connection and consensus in the shifting sands of public life. Moreover, they recognize the importance of a longitudinal view of organizational culture, which evolves as the culture at large evolves and therefore calls for adaptive paradigms of rhetorical behavior. We would suggest that the new rhetoric offers not only a more productive and more realistic perspective on organizational communication, but also a more humanistic one. In a world marked by divergent values, galloping change, and the need for ethical approaches to problem solving, a rhetoric that both acknowledges the human complexity of decision making and suggests a practical rationale for producing consensus is needed. Approaches such as those by Johnstone (1970), McKeon (1971), and Booth (1974) are decidedly more realistic, more fruitful, and less cynical than the narrow traditional view of organizational communication.

One difficulty with applying theories developed for the sciences to organizational communication is that the process so stretches the theories that the result might be considered mere commonplace truisms. We would like to suggest, in closing, that rather than being superficial generalities, such restatements of Polanyi, Toulmin, Perelman, and others as offered above constitute basic starting points from which the analysis of the rhetorical processes of organizations needs to develop. Their hallmark is an interest in understanding how the rhetor and the rhetorical community interact, consciously and unconsciously, to produce discourse.

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