This article reports a case study of change-related communication in the business services department of a large local-government organization in New Zealand. The authors argue that popular contemporary management discourse celebrates change and creates assumptions that guide managerial practice and the interpretation of managerial actions. Thus, the work experience of most people is inundated with communication about and promoting change. The authors explore the change communication from the three perspectives suggested by Trujillo, what he terms the “functional,” the “romantic,” and the “critical.” Each of these perspectives has a different logic, suggests different metaphors, and implicates different standards for evaluation. In terms of communication, each perspective highlights different change-related communication practices and/or alternative dimensions of the same practice.

NUTS ABOUT CHANGE
Multiple Perspectives on Change-Oriented Communication in a Public Sector Organization

Theodore E. Zorn
Deborah J. Page
University of Waikato, Hamilton, New Zealand

George Cheney
University of Montana-Missoula
and University of Waikato

Executives and managers today assume they must encourage ongoing incremental change through frameworks such as continuous improvement or benchmarking. At the same time, many assume they must be alert to the need to radically change their organizations or work units through reengineering, restructuring, or downsizing, or perhaps through introducing a contemporary

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A key issue for managers in leading such changes is how to communicate the changes and get commitment from staff. Put more concretely, from a managerial or administrative standpoint, how do you get employees to “buy into” changes once they have been decided on at the top and are now to be implemented? On one hand, this question strikes to the heart of an enormous practical challenge facing policy makers and midlevel managers. On broader ethical and humanistic grounds, the question has great implications for how we conceive of employees and the management of human resources.

Two of the most popular ways of creating and communicating change are to emulate the “best practices” of “excellent” organizations and to be guided by the popular writings of management gurus. This article describes a case in which these two strategies, along with other techniques, are combined. In our analysis, we examine such managerial strategies as well as responses from staff who are the targets of change-related communication (or what we simply call “change communication”). Throughout the analysis and especially in the concluding section of this article, we encourage reflection not only about specific organizational changes but also the very ways we think and talk about them.

THE NATURE OF CHANGE
AND CHANGE COMMUNICATION

The basic argument regarding the need for change today is this: The environment that organizations operate within is changing rapidly and unpredictably because of market globalization, increasing competition, technological developments, and customer demands. Taxpayers and funding sources are insisting that both government and not-for-profit organizations do more with less. The recommended response to these pressures is to organize for continuous change, to become a flexible organization that can adapt quickly to
environmental changes. For example, local governments in many developed countries—including the one in our case study—often employ organizational development experts so that they can deal with change on an ongoing basis. Change thus becomes a regular part of organizational functioning, as standard operating procedures are (ironically) developed to handle it.

We argue that the assumptions underlying the argument to organize for continuous change are part of a pervasive “managerialist” discourse representing “knowledge” or “received wisdom” (Alvesson & Willmott, 1996) about what constitutes effective management. Numerous authors (e.g., Ezzamel, Lilley, & Willmott, 1993; Lawler, 1996) have noted that the prevailing wisdom about what constitutes effective management has undergone substantial revision in the past two decades, variously labeled “new wave” (Ezzamel et al., 1993) or “new logic” (Lawler, 1996) management. This new managerialist discourse embodies a powerful bias toward change now operating in boardrooms and on shop floors, a bias that is seldom questioned (Zorn et al., 1999). So prevalent have assumptions about constant change become that a manager can often win an argument for a particular proposal simply by placing it under the rubric of “change that needs to happen.” Like the organizational mantras of efficiency, quality, and customer service, change has now come to the forefront of popular and managerial thought as a slogan that prevents debate and its own examination. In this environment that attacks the very notion of stability, it is hardly surprising that some corporations, like New Zealand’s wood products giant Fletcher Challenge Forests, engage in virtually annual restructuring.

In Deetz’s (1992) terms, there has come to be a kind of “discursive closure” around the very idea of change in organizations, such that its opponents or mere questioners are quickly labeled “out of touch,” “old paradigm,” “resistors,” or even “terrorists” (e.g., Galloway, 1998). Discursive closure thus represents a more specific and concrete way of revealing the operation of ideology in language use. Relatedly, Foucault (1984) tells us that power works most effectively when it masks its own mechanisms. Discursive closure is the process by which alternatives to a dominant opinion
or even the initial framing of an issue are kept out of view or closed from consideration (cf. Lukes, 1974).

On a more concrete level, many of the actual changes experienced across organizations bear notable similarities—at least at the level at which new programs are framed. “Change” becomes the overarching value under which are placed more specific programs that have gained substantial attention in the past two decades—particularly programs focused on customer service, organizational excellence/quality, and teamwork. This terminological or value cluster structures a loosely coherent discourse seen in popular management books and articles written by consultants such as Peters and Drucker (for discussion and critiques of the “gurus,” see Clark & Salaman, 1996; Huczynski, 1993; Mickelthwait & Wooldridge, 1996). These writings provide anecdotes of organizations that have achieved “greatness” through promoting such practices. Thus, within a larger managerialist discourse, there are layers of subsidiary discourses, including those of customer service, organizational quality/excellence, and teamwork. Together, these create a set of assumptions that guide management actions and the interpretation of those actions. Even when these discourses do not shape new organizational programs, they are used as points of reference to justify a wide array of managerial actions. In many popular management books, these terms appear closely interlinked, often within the same paragraph. For example, the author of one such book (Lawler, 1996) claimed the following:

A team-based design can lead to dramatic performance improvements in cost, speed, and quality. For example... one life insurance company reduced the time to issue a new policy from six weeks to one day... the customer got a much faster response (p. 147, emphasis added).

Popular management books, articles, and videos exist in a symbiotic relationship with management discourse and practice. That is, they both reflect and influence management practice. Without delving deeply into the question of the diffusion of managerial knowledge, we argue (a) that certain key themes and prescriptions do eventually get picked up by lots of organizations (see Abrahamson, 1996),
that organizations in all sectors today mimic one another in an effort to be “cutting edge” (see DeCock, 1998), but also (c) that there is great divergence as well as convergence in the actual activities being conducted under the “master symbols” of change, quality/excellence, customer service, and teamwork (Benders, van den Berg, & van Bijsterveld, 1998; Zbaracki, 1998). Once a particular discourse has become established or fashionable, it helps to shape managers’ and workers’ assumptions about what constitutes effective practice, thereby providing an impetus for initiating changes and a ready-made logic for interpreting them (Abrahamson, 1996; Benders et al., 1998). Simultaneously, managerialist discourse serves as a powerful rhetorical resource for managers in communicating the changes they initiate. Policy makers’ and managers’ calls for change gain legitimacy and authority through their apparent consistency with the gurus’ writings, as well as by appeals to specific examples of competitors or admired organizations in other sectors who have seemingly “made it” by being at the forefront of a trend. Sometimes, of course, the invocation of a trendy program (like Kaizen) functions as a kind of retrospective justification for what the policy-making manager wanted to do all along (see Weick, 1979).

Consider the example of “quality.” As Wilkinson and Willmott (1995) suggest, “Arguably, its vague, but nonetheless positive associations make the appeal of ‘quality’ immediate and extensive” (p. 2). The pursuit of quality thus becomes one of the self-confirming practices of the organization: “From the quality ‘expert’ perspective, any good or service can legitimately receive the seductive sobriquet of ‘quality’ so long as it consistently meets the standards—however ‘inferior’ these may be—that beat the competition within its market niche.” Finally, these same authors suggest the following on how the idea of quality is applied to work processes themselves:

“Quality” does not necessarily mean the attainment of exceptional high standards. . . . Instead, it means the development of “uniform and dependable” work practices that are congruent with delivering products and services at a low cost with a quality suited to the market.
Similarly, Steingard and Fitzgibbons (1993) explain how quality is at once a broad-ranging term and a strictly defined imperative in the case of specific applications. “Quality management” models (such as the ones celebrated by the Malcolm Baldridge Awards in the United States or the European Foundation for Quality Management [EFQM]) become important reference points for organizations when they can announce that their programs, regardless of specific content, place them in the same league with well-known achievers in the area (DeCock, 1998; Zbaracki, 1998). The quality seal of approval becomes the object of desire and the mark of legitimacy. Widespread acceptance of the quality discourse may influence employees to accept quality reforms; employees’ immersion in this discourse makes managers’ arguments for implementing quality systems more palatable: “They [employees] are meant to ensure ‘quality’ which everyone ought to be for. If one opposes the changes then one opposes ‘quality’!” (Moreland & Clark, 1998).

LEADERSHIP THROUGH CHANGE

The use of the pro-change discourse as a rhetorical resource is very apparent in recent scholarly and popular literature on leadership. Underlying transformational, visionary, and charismatic leadership forms is the notion that leaders enlist followers in a noble cause, particularly in the service of others. For example, a fundamental assumption of Burns’s (1978) view of transforming leadership is that the act of transforming leaders and especially followers raises each to a higher level of morality. Bass (1985) built on Burns’s ideas in suggesting that transformational leaders enlist others in the pursuit of a noble cause. Similarly, Kouzes and Posner (1987) argue that transformational leaders “enlist others in an inspiring vision.” And, Conger (1989) suggests that charismatic leaders must “present their ideas in a truly visionary way” to “make the organization’s work meaningful for employees.” Thus, each of these models suggests that the leader must find ways to frame goals or changes as rising above the mundane routine of producing a product or service (Fairhurst & Sarr, 1996); instead, the leader must achieve a transformation of the individuals and the organization.
In the 1990s, leadership has become more tightly bound to the idea of change—and not just little changes but big ones. The effective leader is by definition a “change master” (Kanter, 1983). And the changes that are brought about are expected to be consistent with the spirit of the times, especially service, quality/excellence, and teamwork.

THE SEDUCTIVENESS OF SERVICE, QUALITY/EXCELLENCE, AND TEAMWORK

Today’s noble cause of leadership has been frequently cast in terms of service to the customer and the pursuit of organizational quality or excellence. Service is a particularly compelling rhetoric, because it converges with the cultural value of service to others. The identity of servant to humankind and the associated practice of toiling selflessly for one’s fellow human are associated with great moral historical figures from Jesus Christ to Nelson Mandela. Service to customers is a particularly appealing management strategy because it also serves managerial interests quite well. When workers are compelled by the notion of service to others (customers), their selfless toil translates into profits.

Equally compelling is the treatment of customer service as the ultimate and perhaps most efficient form of democracy. That is, consumerism is seen from many quarters as the principal engine of capitalism today, and it is framed positively by many observers as the centerpiece of democratic capitalism. From this viewpoint, what could be more democratic or more direct than (seemingly) giving people what they want (Cheney, 1998)? Even in political discourses, the citizen has become the consumer, suggesting the breadth of the symbol of “customer service.”

Finally, customer service has become a slogan of the 1990s also because of how it appears to unite employees at all levels of the organization under “consumer consciousness” (Cheney, 1999). As part of the internal marketing concept, even employees are reframed, alternately, as customers and suppliers (Halal, 1996). Employees are therefore expected to see each other as customers who are demanding and needing to be served, with this chain of
associations and relationships all pointing toward the ultimate “fulfillment” of the customer outside the organization—and a derivative sense of self-fulfillment for the employee (Oakland, 1989). Moreover, public and third sector organizations have also jumped on to the customer service bandwagon, reframing citizens, students, and patients as customers (Cheney & Zorn, 1999; McMillan & Cheney, 1996). Even religious institutions have begun to talk about their faithful and potential adherents as “customers” (Cheney & Zorn, 1999; McMillan & Cheney, 1996).

The rhetoric of quality and excellence is equally attractive, because it creates the opportunity for organization members to identify with the ideal of being the best, “world class,” or an industry leader. The symbols of quality and excellence are also intended to inspire employees to put forth “extraordinary effort” to achieve organizational goals (Bass, 1985).

Finally, teamwork represents a subsidiary but important managerial discourse because of its positive associations (e.g., with cooperation and mutual support) and its vagueness. We see the symbol of teamwork in a secondary position vis-à-vis other symbols simply because teamwork is frequently framed as a means to a larger end. Teamwork is an ambiguous but appealing concept that is expressed in varying ways across organizations, sectors, and countries. In Japan, for example, teamwork is usually associated with loyalty to the company as a whole, whereas in Sweden the concept denotes substantial autonomy at the level of the group (Berggren, 1992). In New Zealand, as in the United States, teamwork typically evokes images, values, and myths associated with culturally revered team sports such as rugby and cricket in New Zealand and football, baseball, and basketball in the United States. In our organizational experience, we find that many organizations that wish to pursue team-based restructuring of work processes often have only a hazy notion of their goals, yet they are sure that teamwork is a good thing. In that way, teamwork sometimes does become an end in itself.

In fact, recent studies of managerial trends show that “there’s a lot going on” under the big symbolic umbrellas of abstract value terms such as quality, excellence, efficiency, and customer service.
These terms are frequently used as guides for managers in their drive to reshape practices, even when it is not clear exactly what the terms mean. Specifically, the symbolic “play” under a banner like “quality management” allows for such things as (a) the unintended as well as the deliberate manipulation of ambiguity to control employees (e.g., Boje & Winsor, 1993; Markham, 1996), (b) the retrospective rationalization using the popular banner of what the manager wanted to do all along (Ezzamel, Lilley, & Willmott, 1993; Zbaracki, 1998), (c) the implementation of programs that look not at all like their supposed original inspiration (Benders et al., 1998; Case, 1999), and (d) the rather arbitrary rise and fall of management fashions and slogans (Xu, 1999). In these various ways, managerial mantras, like political slogans, allow for both broad interpretive diversity and a kind of presumed or working cultural unity. Such terms are thus simultaneously packed with and devoid of meaning (see J. B. White, 1984).

Thus, because of its interpretive diversity and positive associations, contemporary managerialist discourse is compelling for managers or policy makers and simultaneously a powerful rhetorical resource in communicating change to workers. On one hand, it seems to promote a cooperative, empowering system in which workers can serve noble ends and gain prestige and self-esteem by association with and contribution to organizational accomplishments. However, authors are divided as to whether these changes make the workplace exciting and empowering (e.g., Peters, 1987) or, instead, lure workers into more embracing systems of control and oppression, leading them to toil longer and harder for reduced rewards and increased insecurity (Boje & Winsor, 1993; Clegg, 1989; Sennett, 1998; V. Smith, 1997). In addition, the meanings and the efficacy of customer service, quality/excellence, and teamwork programs are ambiguous. In practice, quality and excellence do not so much mean the attainment of ever-higher standards as they signify the standardization of work processes in accord with currently popular models. Annual “quality management” prizes, such as the Malcolm Baldridge Award and the EFQM Award, are determined according to a long list of specified procedures to which many organizations then appeal for modeling their own pur-
suit of excellence. Ironically, organizations prove they are “the best” by being just like the rest. In the process, local knowledge and internal creativity and freedom are often sacrificed in the face of regularization and control over work processes (Tuckman, 1995). Similarly, the research literature on teamwork offers a decidedly mixed assessment, with claims of both liberating and oppressive experience for workers (e.g., P. Adler, 1992; Parker, 1993).

SUMMARY AND RESEARCH QUESTION

These various trends and associated discourses are making their way into boardrooms, staff meetings, and shop floors in many areas of the world. However, the trends are not unitary and neither are their effects. The joint venture New United Motors Manufacturing, Inc. (NUMMI), of California, has been simultaneously celebrated as a dynamic example of “humane Taylorism” and condemned as a new and more insidious form of workplace control (see P. S. Adler & Cole, 1993; Berggren, 1992, 1994; Parker, 1993; Wilms, 1996). The NUMMI case is especially interesting because it is so well researched and because its managerial ethos embodies concerns for customer consciousness at all levels of the organization, an elaborate quality-management approach, and teamwork at the level of the shop floor. The NUMMI case underscores the need to be sensitive to multiple aspects of an organizational change program and to allow for multiple possible interpretations of the same data.

Organizational change is, not surprisingly, an emerging topic of investigation within organizational communication research (Lewis & Seibold, 1998). Transcending the traditional concerns of innovation research, change-oriented investigations consider how an entire organization can be embraced by a top-down-implemented change and how the very discourse of change can envelop or infuse organizational interactions and messages. In recent years, organizational communication scholarship has considered, under the broad heading of change, such topics as team-based restructuring (e.g., Barker, 1993, 1999), tensions within perspectives on change (e.g., Howard & Geist, 1995), downsizing survivors’ interpretations of change communication (e.g., Economo & Zorn, 1999), analyses of the role of discourse in
change management (e.g., Barrett, Thomas, & Hocevar, 1995; DeCock, 1998), framing devices used in change (Fairhurst, 1993; Fairhurst & Sarr, 1996), and narratives of change programs (e.g., Barry, 1997; Boje, Rosile, Dennehy, & Summers, 1997). We situate our study within this growing body of work analyzing communicative dimensions of organizational change.

Benders et al. (1998) argue that “the application of fashionable management concepts is a neglected area of study. . . . Both theoretically and empirically, little work has been conducted on later stages, when fashions actually succeed in getting adopted” (p. 211). Our case analysis focuses precisely on these later stages. Broadly speaking, our research question is, How is organizational change communication enacted and interpreted within the context of a local government organization?

METHOD

CASE PARTICIPANTS

The case focuses on the Business Services Department of a large, locally based, public sector organization in New Zealand that has been undergoing substantial change since 1996. As a whole, this local-government complex employs nearly 600 people. The Business Services Department provides support functions for the larger organization, such as processing license applications; it also provides some services directly to the public. For example, the Business Services Department is often the first point of contact for a member of the public who has a query or complaint about the larger organization’s services. The department includes a male manager, whom we call “Ken,” and eight women who vary in age from early 20s to mid-50s.

PROCEDURES

Data gathering. The second author was a participant observer in the Business Services Department from November 1997 to January 1999, resulting in more than 170 hours of contact and approxi-
mately 200 single-spaced, typed pages of field notes. She regularly attended the weekly team briefings, typically staying after meetings to observe the daily activities of the department and also to join some of the women on their morning breaks for informal conversation. She was invited to the social activities organized by the department over the 14 months of her fieldwork, as well as to training sessions and a site visit to another organization that had been recognized for outstanding customer service. In addition to participant observation and informal conversation, she conducted formal interviews with the top managers in the larger organization, with Ken (twice), and with four members of the Business Services staff. Field notes were collected by writing notes during each weekly team briefing. Quotes were written in full. The staff was fully aware they were being studied. At the first team briefing, the participant observer was introduced by Ken and given time to explain the study. Thus, this case analysis benefits from multiple types of data gathered at multiple levels of the organization.

Interpretive framework. The interpretative framework for this study was not selected in an a priori fashion, nor did it simply “emerge” from the data. Rather, it emerged from the coauthors’ interaction with one another in relation to the data. In the early days of the study, we exchanged stories about and reactions to the case. The tone of these stories and our reactions varied greatly, from admiring the energy and passion of the participants to critically evaluating what seemed to be questionable control tactics on the part of the manager. At some point, we began to notice and value the different perspectives represented both in the participants’ accounts and in our own explanations of what was happening in the case. We concluded, as DeCock (1998) stated, that “the differences between the story lines are at least as informative and useful as the formulation of an overarching account” (p. 19). Because it preserved such differences and resonated with our evolving understanding of the participants’ views, we settled on Trujillo’s (1992) multiple perspectives approach as a means for analyzing the case. According to Eisenberg and Goodall (1997), analysis of multiple perspectives
can disclose tension and conflict when interpretations of the same situation are constructed through different lenses.

Following Trujillo’s (1992) framework, we show how the change communication practices in our case may be seen from three different perspectives: functional, romantic, and critical. Trujillo suggests these interpretive lenses as a way to fulfill “the true promise of interpretive research in organizations . . . to explicate the multiple senses of reality . . . and to reveal the multiple . . . voices which assign meaning to these senses of reality” (p. 365). We note that these three categories apply to both lay understandings of organizational change and to scholarly assessments of them. That is, we see each perspective present within lay conceptions of current managerially driven programs of organizational change, just as we can identify each of them in the research literature. We can encapsulate each perspective as follows: (a) functional, referring to means of securing employees’ compliance with changes deemed necessary for organizational effectiveness; (b) romantic, centering on the metaphors of heroic achievement and family intimacy as sources of inspiration; and (c) critical, seeing the seduction and exploitation of workers operating in both overt and subtle ways. Each of these perspectives we find well represented within our data.

RESULTS AND INTERPRETATIONS

Before we can address our research question, we provide a case history to contextualize our discussion of change discourse and practices. Our narrative is punctuated with key moments in the department’s experience of change over the 14-month observation period. Much of the narrative focuses on the figure of Ken, the manager, because he was the chief interpreter of downward-directed change within the larger government organization and the initiator of significant changes within his own department. Also, Ken regularly communicated with his staff about organizational change as well as specific programs during the entire time the second author observed the business services department.
CASE HISTORY

A major planned change, including substantial restructuring, downsizing, and outsourcing of jobs, had begun a year earlier in the larger organization and was followed by other significant changes. Different departments in the larger organization were affected, albeit in sometimes sharply varying ways. For example, operational reviews were carried out in most departments. In one department, much of the work was outsourced to outside contractors, and more than 100 people lost their jobs. Two departments were eliminated, resulting in a loss of staff, and other departments merged. Some management positions were eliminated. Business Services was restructured: Some staff were transferred to other departments or left the organization, and two women were newly appointed. One of the most tangible organization-wide initiatives following the restructuring was an organization development program they called FIT (Focus on the customer; Invest in the process; Teamwork). In addition, an organization-wide computer system was implemented that substantially changed some of their work processes.

During our observation period, the entire department was shifted to a different work area designed especially for them and located near the main doors of the building. This shift brought greater public exposure for the women themselves and put a spotlight on their work activities. As a result of the move, the employees were in view of every person who entered the building—staff and customers alike—so Ken became very particular about the way the women presented themselves. He subsidized a corporate uniform for each department member, including a matching jacket and trousers for himself, and told the women that their corporate uniform “conjured up a picture of an airhostess.” That picture, for him, was the epitome of style and was the standard he was trying to achieve, as he told the women at the weekly team briefing (field notes, August 21, 1998).

Ken saw the shift to a new location as an opportunity to enlarge the role that his department played in the organization. He felt that the counter staff could coordinate with other departments in the
building and act as reception staff for them. He told the women of his department, “Now that we have moved, everyone is a customer and we need to know who they are and keep tabs on them” (team briefing, September 11, 1998). At times, it appeared to the observer that the women were in the midst of chaos but were expected to handle these changes in what Ken called a “professional manner.” There were building contractors still working around the women, putting on finishing touches. There was a lot of dust around, so Ken said that he would subsidize the women’s dry cleaning of their uniforms by 50%. Signage and lighting had still not been put into place. Ken was keen for his employees to maintain their high standard of service and appealed to them by saying, “You need to [provide me with your] feedback. . . . Come and tell me. If I am not there, write a note and leave it on my desk” (team briefing, September 4, 1998).

Because of the many changes and new initiatives, Ken expected that the women would work overtime when asked. Most of the time the women were paid for overtime and also were rewarded in other ways. For example, when the women were all asked to work on a Saturday to complete a mail-out to 8,000 customers, they were paid overtime and provided with lunch and morning and afternoon tea.

In addition to (and in many cases driving) these changes, Ken was a strong advocate of change, especially change toward excellence in customer service and teamwork. He regularly exhorted the staff to “be the best” and to hold themselves accountable to the highest standards. This is evident in the fact that he applied for and won a national-level quality award for the department; the application process and preparation for it were important means of encouraging changes in work processes. The same quality and excellence orientation is also evident in constant references to “being the best.” For example, in a team briefing, Ken said to the staff,

There’s no need to feel frightened. All this is aimed at being the very best. For example, our target is one hundred percent accuracy for typing. You’ve probably heard enough about this; I’ve slaughtered it enough. Our future is very secure if we move with these issues. (team briefing, September 11, 1998)
Ken’s enthusiasm for changes came through in comments such as his imploring the women to “grasp a new challenge with both hands.” Similarly, during the introduction of a new organization-wide computer system, he told the women they should be “scared, frightened, and excited of the changes that are about to happen. These would be the usual range of behaviors to experience when there is so much change going on” (team briefing, January 23, 1998).

One of the most prominent means Ken used for communicating and encouraging change was the use of a popular management book titled *NUTS!* (Freiberg & Freiberg, 1996) that is based on stories of excellence in customer service at Southwest Airlines, based in Dallas, Texas. Southwest Airlines has become famous for the charismatic and quirky leadership of its chief executive officer, Herb Kelleher, as well as for its casual dress, employee parties, and joking with customers. For several years running, in the mid-1990s, Southwest received national-level commendations for its quick turnaround of planes at U.S. airports.

Ken strongly advocated the philosophy and methods conveyed in *NUTS!* He bought each staff member a copy and had the copies placed at their seats when they returned from a break during a Saturday training day. Furthermore, he not only encouraged his staff to read the book but also asked them to make regular presentations based on the book’s lessons. Each week at the departmental team briefing, one of the eight women in his department was asked to present a short extract from *NUTS!* that she “personally found meaningful.”

Ken also used a variety of other means to initiate, encourage, and communicate change. He used slogans, such as putting “positively outrageous service”—a phrase borrowed from Southwest Airlines—on all department business cards and name badges. He employed symbols that communicated core values (e.g., regular use of the term *outrageous*) to support ideas and practices consistent with his philosophy. He displayed the awards the department had won on the main customer counter; training certificates were framed and hung in prominent positions on the walls; and “smiley face” and
“big tick” cards were used to recognize or thank workers who had demonstrated good work. Ken issued staff gold-colored name badges when the rest of the organization had white plastic ones. Susan said that “It’s because we’re special” (field notes, July 10, 1998). Ken also provided each woman with a ring binder that displayed the organization’s code of conduct on the front cover. Inside, the women placed the handouts that were given to them at team briefings, such as photocopied newspaper clippings that Ken had found interesting, poems, or his “thought for the day.” They also included the handouts the women themselves generated from their presentations from NUTS!

Ken endorsed and used the larger organization’s FIT program to legitimize and support some of the things he wanted to introduce to the women. FIT borrowed heavily from the Malcolm Baldridge Award (U.S.) criteria. Ken and Angela, the team leader, attended a seminar presented by an examiner from the Baldridge organization. At the seminar, they reviewed the first page of the Baldridge customer-focus criteria. Angela read some of these aloud at the team briefing. Ken then told the women,

We are not doing it; we don’t do it [up to the standards set in the Baldridge criteria]. We’re still scratching the surface and we need to make huge leaps. Yes, be proud; you are a great bunch of people and you are doing well, but in answering these questions, we don’t come close. I think we are head and shoulders above most, but we have still got a long way to go. (team briefing, August 7, 1998)

FIT and the principles on which it was based provided another resource to draw on in advocating change (and exemplified the interrelated discourses of customer service, quality/excellence, and teamwork).

Ken scheduled several weekend activities focused on improving teamwork and learning best practices for customer service. Among these were “experience days,” or benchmarking visits to other organizations with reputations for excellent customer service. After one such visit to the Auckland International Airport, Ken debriefed the women by concluding that “a flood of good ideas has
come from the experience day. Part of my commitment is to have
time-out sessions not more than six months apart. We need the
opportunity to talk about them. Communication is important”
(team briefing, September 25, 1998). From that particular experi-
ence, Ken arranged for one of his staff to spend three days in the
other organization on a “staff exchange” with a staff member from
the other organization. He asked the women,

How do we feel about that? Is that a good pattern? We could focus
on culture and what makes our people and their people special. We
could share FIT [with them]. I said to Susan that it would be nice to
sit with someone who is sitting with their customer.

Susan replied, “I think it is totally outrageous!” clearly signaling
that she believed wholeheartedly in the concept of excellence in
customer service and that she wanted to pass on to the staff in the
other organization the things she felt they were doing so well (team
briefing, September 25, 1998).

One day, Ken and four of the women visited a parallel organiza-
tion in another city. On their return, he told the rest of the women
that he had not been impressed with the staff they had met and that
his own team was “head and shoulders above in terms of service”
(team briefing, July 24, 1998). It was after this visit that Ken
decided he would not look at similar public sector organizations but
would examine “commercial businesses to benchmark ourselves
on.” In addition, Ken used his department’s quality award as a
means of encouraging changes in work processes. Ken tried
unusual tactics, including bringing in a customer who complained
to meet with and be interviewed by his staff. He also organized
day-long training sessions focused on building effective teamwork.
He told the women that although the organization was cutting the
training budget, “We will not skimp on dollars for tools to do the
job. We need to be frugal . . . but if we can look after the little things,
then the big things will look after themselves. . . . We will maximize
training” (team briefing, October 23, 1998).

There were also more mundane interactions that provided occa-
sion for Ken to recognize, reward, and highlight the values of
change, customer service, quality/excellence, and teamwork. For
example, Diana spent an hour with a customer assisting him to complete a form because the customer was almost unable to read or write. Ken told the women he had noticed Diana assisting the customer and was “impressed by her patience.” Ken then gave her two movie tickets to show his appreciation.

We could summarize Ken’s change communication in Business Services in three main points. First, he enthusiastically used the practice of articulating vision and values in rhetoric aligned with the compelling symbols of customer service, organizational quality/excellence, and teamwork. Second, Ken’s rhetoric was supported by the use of exemplars of service excellence and teamwork in the forms of benchmarking and site visits (e.g., to an oil company with service stations renowned for customer service), visits from representatives of “customer-responsive organizations” (e.g., the Auckland International Airport), and reading and video presentations (e.g., about Southwest Airlines). Third, the rhetorical force of the change-directed set of strategies was enhanced through the use of active participation strategies of persuasion, in which staff participated in benchmarking visits and were asked to make presentations on NUTS! and other aspects of customer service.

MULTIPLE PERSPECTIVES ON COMMUNICATION PRACTICES IN THE BUSINESS SERVICES DEPARTMENT

Our research question asks, How is organizational change communication enacted and interpreted within the context of a local government organization? In response to this broad question, at least three perspectives may be fruitfully considered in analyzing organizational culture: the functional, the romantic, and the critical. We not only treat multiple perspectives in an organization’s culture but also acknowledge the coexistence of multiple cultures in almost any organization we can imagine. Organizational cultures are seldom, if ever, monolithic, despite mighty attempts by those who speak from the top and for the organization to assert such unity in culture, identity, or purpose (Young, 1989). Thus, we should be attuned not only to individual differences in attitudes with respect to organizational change, but also to how those views might cluster...
well in practice to constitute something we might identify as multiple, competing, counter- or subcultures.

Applied to the practices in the Business Services Department, the three perspectives can illuminate the tensions and paradoxes implicit in, and often experienced by, participants and observers of this culture (see Endnote 5). Some participants are more likely to view their experience of this culture primarily from one perspective or the other. Thus, there is truth in saying that all three perspectives coexist in the interactions and messages of Business Services. The researchers, as two outside observers and a participant observer, also feel somewhat torn among these perspectives, sometimes seeing the organization from one perspective, other times from another.

As applied to this case, each perspective (a) suggests different metaphors for the organization and its practices, (b) highlights different practices or different dimensions of the same practice, (c) implicates different motives for the enactment of those practices, and (d) offers different standards for evaluating those practices and, therefore, different assessments of the outcomes or the degree to which the change practices were “effective.” Thus, our focus is on the communicative aspects of the change process, although we readily acknowledge its material aspects (such as the physical structuring of work activities).

THE FUNCTIONAL PERSPECTIVE: CHANGE COMMUNICATION AS EFFICIENT ADMINISTRATION

Motive: Organizational improvement. From a functional or instrumental perspective, the enactment of change communication is a practical necessity in today’s competitive business and government environment. It enables management to achieve the organizational mission of providing good service to taxpayers efficiently and effectively. This perspective is common in managerial handbooks and guidelines, just as it provides the foundation for many training seminars. Getting workers to put in extra hours and performance beyond the call of duty is justified because workers are paid a reasonable wage in exchange for their efforts, and their work...
is underwritten by citizens who are demanding more for their money. The importation of the market metaphor into government agencies has intensified the demand for efficient customer service. The motive for change and change communication from this perspective is organizational improvement: We should change to improve the effectiveness of the organization in serving its constituents. There is a strategic quality to this perspective on organizational change in that it argues that the organization choose the best means to meet the demands of competition and clients. From this standpoint, an organization’s employees are told they should not rest on past laurels or pause in their commitment to the process of quality improvement, however marginal the advance may be at any particular point along the way.

There is no question that many of today’s management trends are calling for a higher level of performance by today’s employees. More and better work is being requested in many sectors of many countries. With this move often comes greater responsibility and some genuine opportunities for creative expression. However, performance also represents something to be documented and monitored closely by the organization. Perhaps what unifies many of today’s methods, insofar as they call for increases in productivity at lower costs, is “the continuous search for marginal improvements in costs by constantly stressing and readjusting the production system and, above all, the labor process” (Moody, 1997).10

Standards of evaluation. From the functional perspective, change communication is evaluated in terms of its effectiveness in furthering the organization’s interests. At the department level, the relevant questions are the following: Does such communication motivate workers to embrace and implement the changes? Does it inspire them to work to full capacity? Does it enjoin them to provide outstanding customer service? And, ultimately, are there tangible improvements in productivity or performance that suggest the changes are paying off?

For the most part, the Business Services Department would be evaluated positively from the functional perspective. The women’s presentations of NUTS!, the weekend training sessions, and the
benchmarking visits are not evidence of manipulation but testimony to a manager doing his job well, motivating and developing workers by involving them in improvement efforts and creating learning opportunities for them. Certainly, winning the New Zealand quality award is also testament to the success of the department from a functional perspective.

Metaphors: Learning organization and team. From the functional perspective, the NUTS! presentations are a concrete practice of a “learning organization,” a popular metaphor building on the metaphor of organization as system and used to frame organizations as effective and progressive (e.g., Leavitt & March, 1988; Senge, 1990). Senge (1990) suggests that a learning organization is characterized, among other things, by: a shared vision, reflection on and willingness to change mental models of work, and team learning through dialogue. Rhodes (1997), in his postmodern critique of organizational learning, notes that although the term change carries with it neutral connotations...learning implies that the current situation is an improvement on the past. The change processes at Business Services are intended to promote organizational improvement through continuous learning, with changes framed positively as opportunities for learning and being the best. Whereas the term learning organization was not explicitly used by the participants, they (especially Ken) made numerous references to the idea that they, as a group, should learn from their experiences, from other organizations, and from training. Ken preached the principles of the learning organization concept without directly referring to it (e.g., “Continue to push the boundaries, accept nothing, question everything” [field notes, May 29, 1998]).

Even though Business Services was attempting to emulate Southwest Airlines’ practices, to some extent their learning process was open-ended, allowing for creative adaptations. Thus, in this case, the operationalization of organizational change was part corporate imitation, part locally emergent strategy.

The discourses of customer service, excellence, and teamwork are construed from this perspective as helpful sets of principles and
lessons to be used to improve organizational effectiveness. Thus, the group’s exploration of the lessons from NUTS! through presentations and discussion is simply a way to learn from a model organization (Southwest Airlines) how to be an excellent team that provides outstanding customer service. The benchmarking visits function similarly.

The use of the word *team* is itself an important metaphor, as organizations such as Business Services talk about themselves in terms fit for athletic teams. Teamwork is seen as a means toward effective and dynamic organizational functioning. The assumption behind this view is that if the staff view themselves as a team with common goals and values, and support each other in attaining those goals, they will do the work of the organization effectively without the need for constant supervision. The common goals and values become decisional premises that guide members’ actions as well as their interpretations of other members’ actions. In this way, horizontal, or peer-based forms of influence substitute what would be more strictly downward influence in a traditional bureaucratic organization. This is the essence of concertive control (Barker, 1993; Bullis, 1993; Tompkins & Cheney, 1985), which, from a functional point of view, is an effective and perhaps even inspiring means of accomplishing organizational goals—and not unduly constraining. All organizational activities reflect values, in one way or another, and Business Services is being explicit and direct about its concerns. Concertive control is framed from this perspective as “empowerment,” something to be both accomplished in practice and felt (Chiles & Zorn, 1995). Control of this type represents a means to minimize the need for supervision, to speed up organizational responses to customer demands, and to resolve problems with a high degree of coordination and without regard for traditional areas of work specialization or functional lines of division.

Both Ken and the women working in Business Services regard themselves as being a team. They label their weekly meetings “team briefings” and they talk about participating in “team-building” exercises, such as a training session in which they used the popular Myers-Briggs Type Indicator (Myers & Myers, 1995)
to learn to understand and work together more effectively. Angela, the team leader, told us that “we’ve developed into a really good team. . . . We’re in the best position that we could be in” (interview, June 5, 1998). Similarly, Susan said of a new staff member, “I hope she will fit into the team” (field notes, May 11, 1998). Ken regularly monitored and discussed team dynamics. He confided that one woman was “having difficulty adjusting to being part of a team” (field notes, February 20, 1998). He seemed keen for the women to support one another and for each to feel like an integral part of the team. For example, at one point there was a separate customer counter away from the Business Services Department’s main office, and the women took turns staffing the counter. Ken asked on several occasions at the team briefings, “Is it time to rotate someone else to the front counter?” He told the woman who was working there, “I don’t want you to become insular and left out.”

Key practices: Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs) and Opportunity for Improvement Forms (OFIs). A tool that is highlighted from a functional perspective in creating and communicating change is the combination of SOPs and OFIs. Ken considered SOPs important to the department’s effective functioning; he wanted them to be followed closely and to be continuously improved, in part, through the use of OFIs. This is apparent in the following excerpt from a memo:

As the ground floor alterations come to their conclusion and the finishing touches are put into place, I anticipate more things coming our way. With that in mind, I want to keep a lid on reality and be sure that we are comfortable with the basics, e.g., are we following our SOPs? (September 2, 1998)

Ken had earlier discussed the SOPs at a team briefing (August 14, 1998). He said he was

...going to spend one hour a day going through the SOPs and updating them. The SOPs are in a disgusting mess. They’re terrible; they really are. We need to look at the SOPs and do a flowchart. Often as a result of an OFI, a new SOP is required.
Ken was telling all of the employees (including himself) that they were to blame for not keeping up with the SOPs and suggested that SOPs get added to the list of things to do.

Occasionally, an OFI was raised at the weekly team briefing meeting if one of the women or Ken could see that a task might be improved by doing something differently. An OFI could also be raised as a result of customer comment cards that were freely available to customers, both internal and external, who interacted with each department. These were discussed at the weekly team briefing, and the members of Business Services decided, as a group, how they wanted to proceed. They seemed to have an implicit norm that the OFIs were decided on by consensus when they were raised. Occasionally, Ken allowed the women to make a decision without his input advising them that “it’s your call.”

On one occasion, Susan raised an OFI to be circulated to the larger division (rather than just her department) that a coffeepot be purchased and coffee supplied to clients who were waiting at the counter to see a group member. Echoing the Southwest Airlines slogan, Ken suggested that this “would be an outrageous level of service” (team briefing, May 1, 1998). Christine also told the participant observer later that if she was not satisfied with something in the course of her work, she “can always raise an OFI. I might be stepping on someone’s toes, but that’s the way it goes. Things get to be improved and that’s good.” Christine said that she has made “lots of suggestions” and that Ken supports her fully (field notes, December 5, 1997). The use of OFIs in this way encouraged the “empowered” mindset—that is, conveying the message that they were expected to solve at least some problems on their own.

Outcomes. The fact that the workers work longer hours and occasionally unpaid time on weekends is not seen as evidence of exploitation from the functional perspective but in fact as evidence of a committed workforce and an organization that can adapt to pressing needs. These indicators suggest that the change communication is working, that workers are highly motivated and therefore willing to put in the time it takes to achieve outstanding results.
Both Ken and some of the women at times see the department, the changes they are going through, and their various change communication processes, functionally or instrumentally. That is, they point to the effectiveness of the change processes and the fact that Business Services performs its organizational responsibilities well. In a memo (September 2, 1998), Ken simultaneously argued for the need for continuing change and suggested that previous efforts were paying off in the department’s contributions:

We need to reflect on the things that the customers are bringing to us, and how we are reacting to the more difficult and awkward situations that have not been previously encountered. There is no doubt in my mind that we are having a very favorable impact on the organization.

From Ken’s functional perspective, both the need for continuing change and the payoff from past change efforts are grounded in their functionality. In his rhetorical appeal, the department needs to change because customers are demanding new responses and because the larger organization is benefiting. Business Services, and local government in general, is now embraced by a market orientation that keeps everyone alert to possible ways to improve work processes and customer service.

From a functional perspective, change communication consists of acts and messages designed to encourage the creation of a learning organization. It is justified in that continuous improvement is necessary for the organization to serve the public well, use tax dollars efficiently, and become more effective and efficient in accomplishing organizational goals. Key means to necessary improvements include empowering staff to solve problems on their own or to suggest improvements through OFIs.

THE ROMANTIC PERSPECTIVE: CHANGE COMMUNICATION AS HEROIC CHALLENGE AND FAMILY MAINTENANCE

A romantic perspective glorifies the changes that the organization is undergoing and appeals to transcendent ideals. In these ways, the romantic perspective is evident in much of the popular
discourse that accompanies the introduction of a new managerial program (just as the same occurs with the advent of a new technology). The romantic perspective celebrates, elevates, and transcends—in these ways, it manifests an ethos sharply different from the effectiveness and efficiency standards of the functional viewpoint on organizational change.

Metaphors: Family and heroes. There are at least two prominent, but quite different, ways that the situation in Business Services may be seen from a romantic perspective. First, it presents the organization’s mission and the changes deemed necessary to accomplish it as a heroic challenge, a noble mission that requires all staff to do their absolute best to be successful. Second, it presents the work group sentimentally as an intimate family and encourages family members to support and take care of each other during difficult times.

The heroic challenge is suggested rather directly in the popular management literature and the discourse it has spawned. This literature often refers to speeches and actions of inspiring historical leaders such as Gandhi, Churchill, and Martin Luther King, Jr., to demonstrate charismatic leadership characteristics (e.g., Conger, 1989; Kouzes & Posner, 1987). The prescription from such works is to reframe otherwise mundane work as a noble mission to be undertaken by inspired heroes. Although, at first, such a reframing may seem preposterous, the attention given to excellence, customer service, and teamwork make the rhetorical task feasible.

In fact, since the mid-1970s, there has been a broad trend for organizations in all sectors to speak about core values, missions, visions, and ethics. In some ways, many business organizations are behaving more like religious institutions, at least in terms of some of the prominent themes of their internal and external persuasive campaigns (Cheney & Christensen, in press). The zeal with which quality, for example, has been pushed in the 1990s can be viewed within this wider arena.

Ken has immersed himself in the bestsellers of contemporary management literature and has drawn heavily on their central rhetorical appeals. He conveys the values of excellence and quality in
telling the women that they are “the best unit in the organization” and “you are the best in New Zealand at what you do.” The enthusiasm with which Ken offers this praise is reminiscent of pep rallies for sports teams. Ken’s hyperbole suggests an appealing identity for the employees as winners, champions, or heroes, as is consistently offered in the popular management literature (e.g., Kouzes & Posner, 1987; Peters, 1987). But Ken also impresses on the women the challenge that being the best will not be maintained unless they “go the extra mile” and “put in some extra effort.” He justifies setting difficult goals because he “wants to get the work done at the highest standard.”

Ken’s excellence posture was strengthened when the department won the national quality award. The department, and especially Ken, received substantial recognition for this prestigious award. The women, in response, felt they were part of a winning team and had a strong desire to be winners. About being recognized in this way, Susan said that she “just adores working here.” She told the participant observer that she is fully committed to the department and wants to focus on her work and on becoming multiskilled. She said that she “loves getting out of bed and coming to work” (field notes, November 17, 1997).

The use of the family metaphor has been documented extensively in organizational studies (e.g., Boje, 1995; Eisenberg & Goodall, 1997). This metaphor is used explicitly by some workers in Business Services and by Ken. He often tells the women to “care for one another” or to “look out for one another.” This metaphor, of course, converges well with the emphasis on teamwork, even though Ken does not specify the kind of family the department is or should be—indeed, part of the appeal of the family metaphor is its vagueness. Ken seems to be trying to foster a climate of collaboration and trust among the women. For example, at one team briefing, he explained that Sarah had come to talk to him because she heard a rumor that others had said she was “slacking.” Ken told the other women that the rumor had

made her feel like shit. . . . You can see how easy it is and I thought we were a cut above that. Let’s pick up and move on. There are important philosophical issues guiding our team spirit. Be open and come
to me; that’s good. All these things become opportunities to move on. If people want to talk about it then it epitomizes that we care and brings out strong traits in people. (team briefing, August 28, 1998)

He also went on to defend Sarah, explaining she had been “a bit down,” which could happen to anyone. In this example, he reprimands the women but does so by suggesting that they are “above that” and by suggesting they support each other by appealing to their teamwork ethic. And he encourages open communication rather than behind-the-scenes gossip as a way of managing conflict.

Another indication of the employees embracing the family metaphor was in their discussions regarding one staff member’s pregnancy. Natalie was young and single when she became pregnant, and the other women continually referred to her unborn child as “our baby.” Ken added to this sense of the “family” caring for Natalie, even suggesting quite seriously after Natalie had been diagnosed with high blood pressure that “we must all keep an eye on Natalie’s ankles” (field notes, January 23, 1998) because they had been told that swollen ankles is a symptom of high blood pressure reaching a dangerous level.

Key practices: NUTS! Presentations. In terms of heroic challenge, the NUTS! presentations are inspirational opportunities to reaffirm the correctness of the noble quest and learn from the example of a pioneer (Southwest Airlines) that has traveled the path of excellence in customer service. There is in these sessions a quality similar to a religious experience; the group studies and explicates passages from NUTS! much like a prayer group might study the Bible. In addition, the exploration is very much about finding inspiration on how to live one’s life, albeit more professionally than personally.

From the family metaphor, these meetings are ritualistic occasions for sharing and bonding. Team briefings are held at the same time each week and are held away from their office so they are able to be in a different environment away from ringing phones and customers requiring attention at the counter. These occasions seemed to engender a sense of community and belonging to the department
and to one another. Often biscuits (cookies), cake, or muffins were provided during the meeting. At the first team briefing that the participant observer attended, she wrote in her field notes,

Ken was quick to congratulate the women on a job well done—a mental pat on the back, I thought. . . . Ken summed up the meeting by saying the word “commitment” and asking for a response from all the women in turn. Had they then broken into the departmental prayer at this stage I would not have been surprised and would have joined in with “Amen!” (field notes, November 7, 1997)

The family metaphor is an especially powerful one when applied to organizational life. It not only draws an analogy between work and home, it also means that the boundaries between personal and professional can be crossed in various ways. In some workplaces, this means explicitly that managers can yell at subordinates “just like we do at home.” In other organizations, it means that one’s deep emotional commitment can and should be expected.

Motives and standards of evaluation: Feeling good, feeling inspired. Appeals to the family metaphor at Business Services elevate things like overtime and off-site meetings as occasions where special things happen between and among people who care deeply for one another. The invocation of the family image, along with the exhortations to heroism, make the organization’s and Ken’s call to sacrifice all the more potent. From the romantic perspective, the central standard for evaluating change communication practices is the degree to which they successfully engender intense, positive feelings. Feelings of inspiration and success from the heroic challenge view, and feelings of caring and belonging from the family view, are what are important. Thus, the motive behind the change-related rhetoric and practices is to inspire and to create a sense of bonding. One could argue, of course, that attempts to engender these feelings are—at least in part—in the service of other, functional goals, such as achieving organizational objectives. However, from a romantic perspective, creating the feelings of energy, passion, and warmth are ends in themselves.
Outcomes. Based on the romantic perspective’s standards of evaluation, the change efforts in Business Services would be judged partially successful. Many staff clearly felt a sense of bonding with and caring for each other and, at times, inspiration. These feelings came through in Christine’s NUTS! presentation, titled “Keeping the Spirit Alive: Dare to Dream,” in which she advocated the following passage: “In organizations where relationships are based on covenants, people are bound by a deep sense of loyalty to each other; instead of simply trading a fair day’s work for a fair day’s pay, they share a common set of values, norms, and guiding philosophy” (team briefing, August 21, 1998). On the other hand, not everyone felt inspired or a sense of belonging. Elsie, the oldest departmental member, complained, “As you’ve probably noticed, other staff don’t come and help me out. No matter how busy or heavy my workload is.” When asked how she felt about that, Elsie replied, “Well, a little bit resentful at times because all the others back each other up, and they do get that communal back up” (interview, May 8, 1998).

THE CRITICAL PERSPECTIVE: CHANGE COMMUNICATION AS MANIPULATION AND OPPRESSION OF WORKERS

Motives and metaphors: Control and seduction. From a critical perspective, the communication practices in Business Services may be seen as management using a variety of means to dominate and control workers, with workers themselves reinforcing and reproducing the system of control (e.g., Burawoy, 1979). That is, the motive for change communication is to exploit and control workers and maintain the current, management-dominated system of power relations. In Ken’s department, employees were influenced to work harder and work longer hours. They were asked to sacrifice personal and family time by working unpaid weekend days. Many workers in the larger organization lost their jobs as a result of the changes. Especially prominent from this perspective are the processes of concertive control, hegemony, and patriarchy.

Key metaphors that stand out are those of seduction, patriarchal family, and scolding. The managerialist discourse, saturated as it is
with romantic appeals to heroism and family, is a powerful means of seducing workers to support the very practices that control them. Also, Ken, as the “patriarch” of the “family,” used his position and his “fatherly” relationship with the mostly young women to alternately hug them physically and “scold the children” into “behaving properly”—that is, according to the family’s (i.e., his) rules. For example, when another department manager was attending a team briefing, Ken was upset that the women had not been prompt to the meeting. In his fatherly way, he scolded them, in front of the other manager:

When we have guests coming to team briefing, we should be here and ready to start at 8 a.m. You need to sign in, get your coffee or whatever and be in this room. It is very bad manners to keep people waiting. (field notes, December 4, 1998)

His use of the terms guests and bad manners suggests a father scolding his daughters to behave “like good girls.” There were numerous examples of Ken scolding his staff gently but firmly on their actions and appearance. His scolding is not that of a command-and-control manager. Rather, it is that of a father whose “daughters” should “know better.” This is particularly important given that the practices highlighted by the critical perspective encourage self-control or concertive control.

Key practices: Concertive control, hegemony, and patriarchal practices. The critical perspective is largely concerned with what is not noticed, that is, the hidden means by which control and power relations are created and maintained. Thus, whereas there are certainly concrete practices implicated in this perspective, what we want to point to here are practices that are more abstract and subtle than making presentations or encouraging the use of OFIs (i.e., those highlighted from the other two perspectives). The particular practices highlighted from this perspective are concertive control, hegemony, and patriarchal relations.

Concertive control is a means of controlling, or achieving organizational goals through influencing workers, in which “explicit written rules and regulations [i.e., bureaucratic control] are largely
replaced by the common understanding of values, objectives, and means of achievement, along with a deep appreciation for the organization’s ‘mission’” (Tompkins & Cheney, 1985). Concertive organizations typically display flexibility and allow employees substantial autonomy, relying on highly motivating core values to guide workers’ decisions. Employees in such an organization may have strong feelings of belonging and identification and, thus, are often allowed a degree of decision-making freedom in their work to make day-to-day decisions for themselves. Identification with the organization means seeing the organization’s or group’s interests as aligned with one’s own. Therefore, workers within a system of concertive control identify with the organization and, as a result, accept decision premises assumed to be in the best interest of the organization and, by extension, themselves. Control is achieved largely, but by no means entirely, in a horizontal manner, as employees are urged to motivate, monitor, reward, and punish one another. Concertive control is especially powerful in organizations that are strongly mission-based, as typically found in today’s team-based, high-tech firms (Barker, 1993) or in social-movement organizations (Papa, Auwal, & Singhal, 1995, 1997).

We feel the need to make a distinction between largely horizontal or peer-based enforcement of norms and a “coming together” around the core mission, values, and attendant requirements for work. A culture of concertive control may have one of several different origins; it may also follow one of several different courses of development. Concertive control may be imposed from the top and then promulgated throughout the organization, with some degree of internalization by employees (this is what most organizations desire). It may arise at the level of the work (the shop floor, office, or network of interactions), or it may be part of the very “constitution” of the organization (as is the case in many explicitly values-based organizations, such as religious groups, social movements, cooperatives, and feminist organizations). Concertive control by definition involves a high degree of coordination and a fairly intensive amount of group interaction (even if “virtually” achieved through computer-mediated communication), but its genesis and enforcement may well come from above. In fact, one of the greatest
The ironies of today’s work organizations is that top-down control (through both direction and monitoring) often becomes combined with group-centered, semi-autonomous activity (Alder & Tompkins, 1997; Barker, 1993, 1999; Sewell, 1998). In this way, “culture” becomes a key point of reference for policymaking and a point of contention and negotiation within the organization (Knights & Willmott, 1987; Kunda, 1992).

In Business Services, the women identify strongly with the larger organization and even more so with their own department. For example, one of the women titled her NUTS! presentation at a team briefing “Learning Through Metaphor,” in which she told the story of a flock of geese migrating, and explained why they fly in a flock. She suggested that “there is strength and power (safety, too) in numbers when traveling in the same direction as others with whom we share a common goal.” In the discussion of her presentation afterward, her coworkers agreed that they do share a common goal and should stick together to help each other with “active support and praise” (team briefing, January 16, 1998). This is one of many examples in which their discourse actively embraces the idea that they are a team with a common goal of providing outstanding service to both their external and internal “customers”; in this example, we see the seductive power of the romantically tinged discourse of teamwork and service.

In Business Services, values such as outstanding customer service and organizational excellence are relied on to guide employees’ behavior. Both Ken’s rhetoric and that from the larger organization rely on the discourses of customer service, organizational excellence, and teamwork to seduce staff to buy into these core values and thus discipline themselves to behave accordingly. Concertive control is unobtrusive; that is, workers may not see that they are controlled at all. As some scholars have found, organizational structures such as teams are framed as empowering yet are, in practice, often more controlling and oppressive than more traditional, obtrusive forms of control (e.g., Barker, 1993; Boje & Winsor, 1993; Clegg, 1989; V. Smith, 1997). In some cases, concertive control paradoxically coexists with a high degree of over-the-shoulder and electronic monitoring of work; thus, employees
receive the contradictory message of “be independent, but you are being watched” (Alder & Tompkins, 1997; Sewell, 1998). The critic points to this feature of concertive control—that it is not obvious or apparent as control, yet is in fact highly controlling—as its most compelling yet disturbing quality. However, concertive control is often combined with other more direct means, and in practice its implementation may involve relatively little autonomy (Cheney, 1999). In a revealing comment, Ken told the women that “SOPs are put into place for self-monitoring” (field notes, March 27, 1998).

Although there is substantial research on concertive control, the literature is not very specific about the microlevel processes by which concertive control systems are established. A recent exception is research by DiSanza and Bullis (1999). As these authors suggest, “In part, inculcating premises involves simply communicating facts and values to individuals through organizational channels, so that the premises are available as the most natural choices at particular moments” (p. 349). From their research, DiSanza and Bullis concluded that organizations attempt to induce identification through newsletters and that employees reading these in some cases accepted or elaborated on the identification attempt—and thus their decision premises—but in other cases dismissed or rejected identification attempts and decision premises. The key seemed to be the compatibility of the content with readers’ personal experience.

We agree with DiSanza and Bullis (1999) about the importance of personal experience with the organization and believe that it is the day-to-day communicative experiences in the organization—those that create identification and acceptance of the organization’s decision premises—that need to be explored and explicated. Furthermore, our group-level data are important in illustrating the specific dynamics of concertive control at work. One additional and important way concertive control was established at Business Services was through active participation processes of persuasion, including pro- or counterattitudinal action and pro- or counterattitudinal advocacy (M. J. Smith, 1982). As with the forest rangers in Kaufman’s (1960) classic study, the women at Business Services were asked to commit themselves publicly to the organization with
personalized presentations. Public advocacy can have the effect of greatly intensifying one’s commitment to the organization and of dispelling doubts about the extraordinary things one is being asked to do at work.

Persuasion theory has long suggested that acting or advocating consistent with a position may in some cases influence the actor/advocator to change or strengthen his or her attitude in alignment with that position. Stiff (1994) concludes from his review that “the studies reviewed . . . provide strong evidence that behavior change can produce attitude change. Although there is some debate about the best theoretical explanation for this effect, the relationship between behaviors and subsequent attitudes is clear” (p. 85). Conditions that tend to promote attitude change following enacting the behaviors include (a) actor’s perceptions of relatively free choice in performing the action, (b) no strong external justification for performing the action, and (c) the actor’s relatively weak or ambiguous attitude regarding the act. The latter condition is probably most important in changing, rather than strengthening, an attitude.

In using such active participation strategies to create concertive control, managers may articulate core values, then subtly influence workers into acting in a way consistent with those values. When the organization’s work is framed as consistent with cherished cultural values such as teamwork, service to others, and doing one’s best, the persuasive task is quite manageable; that is, the appeal is very seductive.

In Business Services, there are multiple occasions in which the staff engage in acts consistent with the organization’s core values and goals. Each week one woman “volunteers” to make a presentation at the team briefing meeting on some aspect of NUTS!. In inviting volunteers to make a presentation, Ken would tell them that the group had not heard from them yet and it was their turn next week. He told Sally, a departmental newcomer, “Now you can be on the same wavelength as the rest of us as to what we’re doing and why we’re doing it” (team briefing, March 27, 1998). Most of the women would say nothing and accept their fate. However, when Ken asked Diana, “Would you like to do a NUTS! presentation next
week?” Diana was silent for a moment or two, and then she said, “No.” She quickly said, “I would like to finish the book first.” Ken said, “So what about in a fortnight?” Diana hesitated and then said she would do it (team briefing, August 7, 1998).

Similarly, the employees “chose” to spend unpaid weekend days on experience days or training days. One trip Ken had arranged in another city happened to coincide with a sports event in which his sons were competing in the same city. Barbara was obviously upset that Ken assumed that everyone would attend and he scolded them for resisting. She said, “He puts pressure on people to attend things on a weekend and gets annoyed when they refuse.” Barbara went on, “Ken does not seem to realize that we have our own families” (field notes, March 6, 1998). At another time, Elsie asked Ken about giving up time on a Saturday for experience days. She told him, “Things at home don’t get done. You are not a woman and probably don’t do the same things on your days off as we women do.” Ken countered that he did indeed help his wife “do things around the house on the weekend and spend time with the boys” (team briefing, August 21, 1998). The observer noted that on this occasion the topic of conversation was changed rather quickly.

Ken has legitimate power over the women in Business Services, but this power is rarely exerted in the form of orders or decrees. Ken’s pressure here is a bit more subtle, allowing staff to perceive they have free choice to make the presentation, or attend the Saturday outings, yet conveying that he expects them to do so and conveying irritation if they resist. Although the women are not forced to make a presentation from the book, nor indeed are they told that they have to believe and support Ken’s ideology of “positively outrageous service,” they do so almost always, typically without question.

The women generally acted in accord with Ken’s position, but they also engaged in persuading themselves of the correctness of this position. The employees’ comments about these activities are mixed, sometimes reflecting the critic’s stance that they are acting against their own self-interests and at other times suggesting that they have accepted management’s position. Two or three of the less
outgoing women told the participant observer that even though they feel uncomfortable or self-conscious making a presentation from *NUTS!*, they believed it was the right thing to do. Christine told the observer that she thought Ken used the book to emphasize the beliefs of the unit because she “felt that the book was closely aligned to what the women in the unit believed in.” She said that she thought “their department might be at an advantage to those departments who did not read *NUTS!*” (field notes, March 27, 1998).

Similarly, the change communication process in business services may be seen as the creation and maintenance of hegemonic relations. Mumby (1997, following Gramsci, 1971) defines hegemony as “noncoercive relations of domination in which subordinated groups actively consent to and support belief systems and structures of power relations that do not necessarily serve—indeed, may work against—those groups’ interests” (p. 344). Although hegemony and concertive control often go hand in hand, they are conceptually distinct. Concertive control may sometimes involve relations of domination. For example, a group of equal partners may agree on a set of values and be guided by them—a situation that would manifest concertive control but not necessarily hegemony. Of course, even in this case, a group may be overcome by a particular ideology or world view and cease to examine real alternatives.

In the case of Business Services, hegemonic relations are established through essentially the same processes by which we have described in the creation of a system of concertive control. By identifying with the organization and accepting management’s decision premises, the employees actively consent to and support the belief systems and power structures that work, at least in some cases, against their interests. Thus, a dominant discourse—one consistent with the prevailing managerialist discourse—becomes normalized, or seen as natural, effectively denying alternative possibilities. Because of the unequal power of the participants and the degree to which Ken frames the entire experience, the situation may be seen not only as concertive control but also as hegemony. He frames goals and methods in romantic terms, which makes them appealing, and in functional terms, which makes them seem necessary.
In addition, from a critical perspective, the Business Services Department may be seen as exhibiting an oppressive patriarchy, or male-dominated system. Conrad and Poole (1998) summarize the underlying propositions of critical feminist perspectives on organizational communication: Labor is divided into different categories by gender; men dominate organization so their perspectives dominate and their meanings are privileged; and when women enter organizations, they are “pressured into adapting their meaning systems to ‘fit’ the dominant (male) system.” From what we have already said about Business Services, each of these propositions is operative. As is often the case in organizations, a man is the manager and women are the underlings. Ken’s and the (largely male) upper management’s constructions of reality (i.e., their ideas on change, customer service, and organizational excellence) dominate the discursive landscape, a landscape to which the women must adapt. As an obvious example, the discourse of teams draws heavily from the traditionally male domain of sport, a domain that is infused metaphorically and literally throughout organizational life (Murphy & Zorn, 1995). Similarly, Ken’s urging the new employee to read NUTS! so she “would be on the same wavelength” is an explicit directive to adapt to the dominant meanings that he has introduced to the group.

There are other, subtle but nevertheless clear, ways that Ken exercises influence in methods consistent with a patriarchal view. Ken’s decision for all staff to wear uniforms and his obsession with the way the women present themselves is a good example. He is paternalistic toward the women in keeping a “fatherly eye” on some of the younger women. One day he was sitting at the front customer counter next to Sarah while she worked at her computer. Ken happened to notice that the top couple of buttons on Sarah’s blouse were undone. He nudged her and indicated to the buttons. “Oh thank goodness it was only you who noticed!” she told him. On another occasion at the weekly team briefing, Sarah, who was sitting next to Ken, was fidgeting. He ordered her to “sit still!” and finally asked her, “What’s the matter?” She replied, “I have just discovered a big coffee stain on the bottom of my blouse!” She showed
it to him. “Do you feel guilty?” he asked her. “Yes, I do,” she replied. “Good! I would tuck it in if I were you,” he replied. Notice again the fatherly “you should know better” tone of his scolding.

As Mumby (1997) claims, “The exercise of power often prevents people from thinking in certain ways, thus shaping their needs and wants” (p. 359). The women in the department seem to have assimilated the ideology that they work hard and long to provide “positively outrageous” service. After each NUTS! presentation, Ken always asked the rest of the women what they thought about the choice of material. Most of the time the women nodded agreement or said little, but at times they added their own thoughts. Consistently, their comments indicated they had accepted the dominant meaning structures (i.e., outstanding customer service, organizational excellence, and teamwork) as ends in themselves.

Standards of evaluation and outcomes. From the critical perspective, the change communication practices are evaluated in terms of their openness, transparency, and emancipating qualities. That is, does the change communication allow a free and open exchange of views among equal participants? For Business Services, the answer would have to be that it does not. The employees certainly participated actively, but it was a severely limited form of participation. That the employees accepted Ken’s managerialist discourse and goals and did not engage in an open exchange is indicated by the fact that their discussion never centered around what Habermas (1979) would call deeply “practical” questions (e.g., “To what degree are we willing to sacrifice personal and family time to achieve these goals?”). Rather, they emphasized purely “technical questions,” or questions about how to achieve the goals they had accepted. For example, Natalie’s presentation outlined how Southwest Airlines encouraged employees to be creative in their interactions with customers by telling jokes. All agreed that it was a good idea to consider that approach but Barbara pointed out that “you would need to ascertain whether the customer was one with a sense of humor who [sic] you were able to share a joke with” (team briefing, February 20, 1998). Although it is always difficult to establish the counterfactual (that things might be different, if only domina-
tion were not present), one could argue from a critical perspective that the women’s interests are being suppressed (see Gaventa, 1980; Lukes, 1974).

From a critical perspective, Business Services may be seen to be an example of many problems prevalent in today’s workplace. It is a constraining environment in which Ken uses appeals to cherished values and employs participatory strategies to persuade workers to identify with the organization and work unit and accept decision premises that support the organization’s interests but not necessarily their own. In essence, employees discipline themselves and each other to work harder and longer for fewer rewards, less security, and under conditions of greater observation (see Barker & Cheney, 1994; Foucault, 1984; Papa et al., 1997).

**IMPLICATIONS AND CONCLUSION**

We have examined the discourse practices in the Business Services Department from three perspectives: functional, romantic, and critical. Each perspective suggests different metaphors for its practices, highlights different practices or dimensions of the same practice, and points to different motives for the enactment of those practices. We end with some implications of our analysis for theory and practice.

Certainly, one implication of this analysis is that managerial discourse is pervasive and persuasive. From teaching MBAs and executive education programs, we know all too well how today’s managers can recite the buzzwords, slogans, and lessons from Peters (1987), Drucker (1999), Senge (1990), and others. Managerial fads and trends are enacted as managers see them as “the thing to do.” The kinds of changes enacted at the Business Services Department are interesting not because they are unique but because of how familiar they are. Ken is not unusual in his fervor for change, customer service, quality/excellence, and teamwork. He is typical of many managers who see these ideas as the best of contemporary management “knowledge,” attempt to implement at least some of them, and further promote such practices.
In this way, we see in the daily practices of Ken and the team the diffusion, translation, and adaptation of popular managerial discourses. As Zbaracki (1998) demonstrated in his study of TQM programs, a cycle is created in which managers feel compelled to adopt currently popular initiatives, and even though what they actually implement may be limited or somewhat idiosyncratic, they brandish their (apparent) successes, thus perpetuating the myth of the initiative’s power. Whereas the ambiguity of certain value-related terms and management slogans (such as quality) is important for their popularity and wide applicability (Eisenberg, 1984; Markham, 1996), it is also the case that slogans come to be closely associated with patterns of practice, especially when organizations are given the imprimatur of quality or excellence awards with their technical criteria (Cheney, 1999).

Such positively elevated discourses, however, are persuasive not only for managers or policy makers. As we see in the case of Business Services, managers draw on dominant managerial discourses to develop a repertoire of rhetorical appeals that can be used to persuade employees. Ken was very convincing in the need for Business Services to change. His enthusiasm for the initiatives was infectious for some employees. And, his immersion in the popular rhetoric enabled him to draw on examples (such as Southwest Airlines) and symbols (such as words and phrases like “team,” “family,” “service,” and “being the best”) that have almost mythic appeal. At the same time, in practice these slogans are often applied in a rather authoritarian, top-down manner that is inimical to the notions of empowerment, participation, and entrepreneurship also being preached. There is then a concealed kind of “discursive closure” (Deetz, 1992), in which the mechanisms of power may not be fully understood by participants, despite their own enthusiastic involvement.

Another implication is that concertive control is powerfully effected by the microlevel interactions of organizational members, and “active participation” processes in particular are potent means of enhancing and sustaining such control. Having staff members “voluntarily” research and discuss the positive aspects, or the specific applications, of a change initiative has potential as an effective
means of influence. From a managerial standpoint, this is a poten-
tially effective way not only to build understanding but also com-
mitment to a change program or set of values. However, there are
obvious ethical questions to be considered in any persuasive
process. We would encourage those promoting and engaging in
active persuasion processes to discuss such tactics as persuasive
rather than concealing them as simply “necessary” or “informa-
tional”; that is, they should be mindful and open about the persua-
sive intentions and/or effects of such processes and raise questions
about the ethical issues involved.

Theoretically, this study, combined with prior research, is begin-
ning to delineate a more complete understanding of the microlevel
means by which concertive forms of control are established. It is
clear that among the ways managers can encourage the adoption of
values that serve as decision premises include (a) communicating
goals and values through written channels, such as employee news-
letters and annual reports (Cheney, 1983; Cheney & Frenette, 1993;
DiSanza & Bullis, 1999); (b) communicating goals and values
through oral persuasion, as Ken did in our study and as is often
advocated (although not explicitly in terms of concertive control) in
popular leadership prescriptions for framing (Fairhurst & Sarr,
1996), articulating vision (e.g., Kouzes & Posner, 1987), and man-
agement by wandering around (e.g., Kouzes & Posner, 1987); and
(c) active participation strategies, as we have demonstrated in this
study, and as is apparent in Kaufman’s (1960) classic work. When
these persuasive mechanisms are combined with surveillance
mechanisms such as peer monitoring in teams (Barker, 1993, 1999)
and electronic surveillance (Alder & Tompkins, 1997; Sewell,
1998), a powerful system of control may be established.

Of course, this is hardly to say that employees are necessarily
better off in more traditional systems of control. As we have shown,
employees may find ways to resist such means of control, through
circumventing the system, going through the motions of require-
ments, or even sabotage. In addition, because organizations by their
very nature must have some means of control, concertive control
systems have the potential to be humane, especially if there is an
ongoing discussion of values and objectives as well as their specific
applications (see Rothschild-Whitt, 1979; Satow, 1975). Indeed, as we demonstrated, many of our participants in this study were generally positive in their attitudes toward the ways the department operated. The danger in concertive control is that it is often presented as just the opposite: not a form of control at all but a system in which employees are empowered and given substantial freedom. Also, control is masked by high-flying talk about mission, values, and ethics. And, this is precisely the kind of case in which control is most subtle, that is, where it masks its own mechanisms and diverts the gaze of participants from the recognition of power. Thus, it is the camouflaging—whether intentional or not—of control as non-control that gives us pause.

We are nevertheless aware that the changes and change communication practices can be seen from multiple vantage points, each with its own biases. Trujillo’s (1992) multiple perspectives model provides a set of lenses through which we can consider these alternatives. As outside observers and researchers, we are tempted to take a primarily critical point of view, seeing the pitfalls in the unquestioned embrace of contemporary managerialist rhetoric and how it is used to create systems of control in which ordinary workers may be disadvantaged (Alvesson & Willmott, 1996; Clegg, 1989; Sennett, 1998; V. Smith, 1997). Yet, as taxpayers ourselves, we appreciate the practical motivation to improve the efficiency and effectiveness of the organization and its services, just as we look to improve such things in our own organizations. Finally, we find some sympathy with the romantic view, too. Most of the employees seem energized by, and sincerely committed to, at least some of the changes and the means of enacting them. At times we admire their enthusiasm, and respect their desire to see their work as more than something mundane—indeed, as a heroic challenge that provides them with positive identities as winners and heroes.

Considering multiple perspectives enables a richer view of organizational processes and encourages learning and empathy. We hope that our analysis, rather than caricaturing any of the perspectives presented, demonstrates how each can be, at times, a quite reasonable way to see what is occurring in an organization. Regardless of which perspective or hybrid of perspectives the reader may
adopt, we hope we have demonstrated how all three perspectives have a “lay resonance” in the experiences of the employees of Business Services, as well as being voiced in both the scholarly and popular literatures on organizational change today. We can learn from considering alternative views of the same phenomena and, from this learning, empathize with those who hold to a different view. This learning and empathy may in turn enable the kind of open dialogue necessary for organizational members to reach an informed consensus—or perhaps at least tolerant disagreement—about how to manage change and the pressures for change.

NOTES

1. Although the term *discourse* is employed in a variety of different and often conflicting ways (Fairclough, 1992), we use it here in the sense of “a historically contingent body of regularized practices of language that are condoned by a particular community . . . that construct and legitimate the way we see things and talk about them” (DeCock, 1998, pg. 2).

2. Certainly other trends, less central to this article, are changes to promote the use of new technology and to cut costs or increase overall efficiency.

3. Whereas the notion that leadership involves leaders enlisting followers in a noble cause was a prominent theme in the organizational leadership literature in the 1980s and 1990s, representing a significant departure from models of organizational leadership of previous decades, the idea of leaders inspiring followers to pursue a noble cause was, of course, not new in itself (see Bass, 1985).

4. We discuss these terms together because we see the discourse of quality essentially encompassing and supplanting that of excellence. Yet, they reflect the same cluster of concerns and values.

5. In speaking of managerial or “managerialist” discourse, however, it is important to distinguish between and among these four domains or levels: (a) managers’ rhetorical strategies with respect to the implementation of specific programs (e.g., total quality management [TQM] and *Kaizen*); (b) managers’ rhetorical handling of the value and imperative of change in general; (c) the discourse emanating from popular (and some academic) management literature, videos, and seminars; and (d) the rhetorical dimensions of the broader romance with change in our society. Although this article is most clearly situated in the first arena, we necessarily deal a bit with each of the other three areas. After all, one of the conclusions that emerges from this case analysis is that the currents of influences from society to business and business to society are multiple and are not easily separated.

6. Names and some facts have been changed to protect the identity of the organization.

7. We should say a bit more here about our three categories for analysis: functional, romantic, and critical. First, despite their resemblance to the typical epistemological categories of empirical, interpretive, and critical, we are not employing the terms in that manner and would discourage that sort of comparison by the reader, except in a very loose sense. In par-
ticular, we would say that the romantic perspective is imperfectly parallel to an interpretive perspective, and there is a strong sense in which we are using all of our categories to highlight the actual interpretations of organizational members.

Also, our approach may seem to parallel that of Papa, Auwal, and Singhal (1995), who also argued for the value of bringing multiple frames or perspectives to bear on organizational communication issues. These authors claimed to take three separate epistemological and methodological positions in their analysis and attempted from their analysis a “transperspectival” interpretation. However, we would argue that such a transperspectival analysis is achievable only in a tentative or qualified manner, because any analysis is ultimately grounded in a perspective, complete with ontological and epistemological assumptions. Our alternative for the present study was to take a single epistemological stance—an interpretive one that explicitly values multiple perspectives—and examine our data from three different angles, while remaining grounded in the commitments of the interpretive approach. (Of course, one could employ either the empiricist or the critical perspective in a similarly overarching manner [see Cheney, in press]. However, the interpretive perspective is most often open to and associated with the idea of multiple perspectives.)

Second, although we employ the term functional, we deliberately wish to avoid the kind of perspective bashing of recent years in which the term functionalism has been employed as a slogan to dismiss whole bodies of work without much in-depth discussion. We mean functional in this case to refer to an operating perspective in an organization that features managerial or administrative concerns, highlights organizational effectiveness, and strives toward efficiency.

Third, although each of the three perspectives we employ is supported by lay discourses and understandings, we have chosen three labels that do not appear explicitly in those discourses. Thus, although we see all three perspectives as existing in the experiences and understandings of organizational members, we did not find that the perspectives were summarized, encapsulated, or labeled by the members themselves. Thus, when our research is evaluated in terms of a broad interpretive standard, we do take the risk of creating methodological artifacts in arguing for three coherent perspectives being manifest in the work lives of the organization and its members.

Finally, we recognize the ambiguity and undecidability of our chosen categories. For example, the functionality of organizations imitating one another may be either affirmed or questioned from a neo-rationalist standpoint. Also, a critical perspective may point to the ironies and contradictions without necessarily invoking notions of unnecessary dominance. And a romantic perspective may itself be reframed as functional, even necessary, for organizational success. So, if we were not constrained by space limitations, we could certainly point to combinations of these three perspectives.

8. There are a number of typologies that we could have employed to present multiple and somewhat competing interpretations of the same set of organizational experiences. However, for the reasons we have already explained, we found Trujillo’s (1992) to be particularly apt and useful in this case, especially given its attention to organizational cultures. Still, we would be remiss not to address, at least briefly, a few broader issues of typologies for assessing bodies of discourse and making coherent certain portions of experience. Typologies such as the one we employ here—using the terms functional, romantic, and critical—not only represent epistemological frames of references but also embody attitudes or sentiments toward what is under investigation. This idea is best captured in Burke’s (1937/1984) landmark work, *Attitudes Toward History*, in which he brought together a sensitivity toward discursive form and power with our very understanding of history as a chronicle of human events. Among other things, Burke shows how the very telling of a story is intricately bound up with
what we see as true and how we feel about it. In that same work, Burke revisits traditional poetic categories, including tragedy, comedy, irony, and the burlesque, to show their rhetorical and pragmatic power as tools for shaping that which we call history. In this way, *Attitudes* presaged the development of a full-blown theory of rhetoric and society, for Burke also inspired writers in a variety of disciplines, including Hayden White (e.g., 1975, 1987), whose own analysis of history has a pronounced concern for patterns in discourse. Burke, White, and others (such as Frye, 1957) simultaneously explore the depths of certain archetypes, like tragedy and comedy, and consider the emergence of certain hybrid forms or attitudes. Thus, Burke allows for a “tragi-comic” perspective, probably best illustrated in his critique of what he calls “the bureaucratization of the imaginative.” Particularly relevant to our analysis, this phrase captures the absurdities and pain associated with human attempts to execute big ideas and to engineer solutions to complex human problems. In the process of pursuing programs like TQM, for instance, we often find ourselves in situations that seem to undermine the very spirit of the original enterprise. Organizational and societal claims to “progress” are in this way suspect, and deserving of careful scrutiny. In most cases, we are likely to find reasons to both cry and laugh as we observe the greater human project.

9. By “tick” New Zealanders mean what Americans would call a check mark. That is, it connotes a sign of approval.

10. Some portions of the analysis in the article, especially about contemporary market and work trends, are adapted from Cheney (1999).

11. Many of Ken’s tactics may have proven equally influential with males; however, some tactics (e.g., pointing out the unbuttoned blouse) seem only to fit a male manager-female subordinate relationship.

REFERENCES


Theodore E. Zorn is a professor and chair of the Department of Management Communication at the University of Waikato, Hamilton, New Zealand. His primary research interests are organizational influence processes such as leadership, facilitation, and change-oriented communication.

Deborah J. Page is a doctoral student at the University of Waikato in Hamilton, New Zealand. She received her bachelor’s and master’s degrees from Waikato. Her research focuses on organizational communication, particularly communicative aspects of organizational change, leadership, and organizational learning.

George Cheney is a professor and codirector of graduate studies in the Department of Communication Studies at the University of Montana-Missoula. Also, he is an adjunct professor in the Department of Management Communication at the University of Waikato, Hamilton, New Zealand. His research and teaching interests center on issues of identity and power in organizations, workplace democracy, business ethics, and trends in public relations and marketing.