

**REMEMBRANCE OF THINGS
PAST? CHANGE, DEVELOPMENT,
AND PATERNALISM**

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Abstract

As part of a retrospective study of effects of organizational change on interpersonal relations, this paper discusses change talk among Australian employees of an American multinational manufacturing enterprise. Interviewees tended to feel pushed into change, discussing its effects in terms of the difficulties of adolescence and earlier experiences of sudden independence. Over time, what had been a simple and firm us and them division in intergroup relations between management and unions/workers had become more fluid and subtle, and perhaps more mature. Interview data are interpreted and then re-interpreted in terms of theories of team development, nostalgia, and paternalism. It is argued that each interpretation makes differing, but complementary, assumptions about the nature of time. If developmental, progressive assumptions of organizational change are relaxed, further attention can be given to theorizing and researching subtleties in talk of the past.

REMEMBRANCE OF THINGS PAST? CHANGE, DEVELOPMENT, AND PATERNALISM

Our descriptions of social realities...cannot be separated from the objects, persons or circumstances that they describe or the languages that we use to describe them.

(Miller, 1997, p. 25)

INTRODUCTION

Since Lewin's (1951) discussion of driving and restraining forces, organizational change is often presented as progressive (McKendall, 1993, cf. Jeffcutt, 1994) and in dualistic, oppositional terms (see Knights and Vurdubakis, 1994; Linstead, 1993; Linstead and Grafton-Small, 1992). Accordingly, distinctions are made between change and stability, between organizational transformation and organization development (Dunphy and Stace, 1988, 1993), and between Confucian and Western approaches to change and its management (Marshak, 1993a; Weick and Quinn, 1999). Associated with such distinctions is a constricted understanding of relations between the past and the future. As Linstead (1993) explains, when language is structured in terms of oppositions of terms (in this case, the past-the future), one of the terms tends to be valued more positively, "effectively banishing" the other terms from which it is differentiated (Linstead, 1993, p. 110, with reference to the work of Derrida; see also Chia, 1997). Successful planned change, for example, is often held to involve a sequence of *n*-steps (Collins, 1998) or phases of transition from the past to the future (see, for example, Bridges, 1986; Isabella, 1990; Olson and Terpstra, 1992), and while the particular nature of those phases is held to vary, the developmental assumption that the past is something we should learn to let go, and that change moves us on, or forward, is not⁽¹⁾.

However, this assumption has been complicated by attention to non-linear and cyclical representations of time (e.g., Burrell, 1992; Clark, 1990; Hassard, 1996). For example, Wolfram Cox (1997, pp. 634-5) described employees' talk of loss in terms of four different relations between past, present and future: loss as regret for what has been in the past, loss of what might have been in other futures, loss as relief to move on to what can be better futures, and loss as release from constraints of the past. She found that each of these relations was present in accounts of organizational change within a single organization, and suggested that differences among them represent not only different evaluations of the present in terms of the past, but also differences in figure-ground relations between past, present and future. For example, talk of regret represented a negative evaluation of the present in terms of the past and could be compared with various other responses where the past is figural, such as melancholia (Wolfram Cox, 1997, p. 647; see also Gabriel, 1993, p. 120).

This paper also presents views of the present in terms of the past, although the discussion focuses on intergroup conflict and on the language of family rather than on the language of loss. Within mainstream organizational studies, most writings on the subject of intergroup conflict derive from a functionalist perspective (Burrell and Morgan, 1979) and suggest that a level of conflict that is too high or, conversely, too low is likely to have negative effects of organizational performance (see, for example, Brown, 1995; Robbins, Millett, Cacioppe, and Waters-Marsh, 1997; cf. Coser, 1956; Smith and Berg, 1988). In contrast, from an interpretive perspective (Burrell and Morgan, 1979; Gioia and Pitre, 1990; Gioia, Thomas, Clark and Chittipeddi, 1994) the emphasis is not on the processes and outcomes of conflict but on how the actors involved make sense of their day to day interactions, with "the interpretations and experiences of the informants in the foreground" (Gioia et al., 1994, p. 367, cf. Alvesson, 1999). There has been recent attention to an interpretive view of organizational change processes (see, for example, Isabella, 1990, 1993; Wilson, 1992), and this paper extends that work to the subject of intergroup conflict during organizational change.

Overview

Following Isabella (1990), who suggested that retrospective studies are particularly well suited to interpretive approaches to organizational change, this was a retrospective study of changing boundaries; of the effects of organizational change events on interpersonal relations. The data include 33 in-depth

interviews of Australian employees of an American multinational manufacturing enterprise. Change was talked about in terms of pressure, of pushes and of pulls. Participants tended to feel pushed into change, often likening their experiences to earlier experiences of sudden independence in childhood and discussing the effects of these pressures in terms of the difficulties of adolescent dependence and independence in relation to a previously autocratic parent. Participants described their workplace as an organization that had, in the past, been a paternalistic employer that had encouraged the dependence of its workforce. More recently, this dependence (and the extreme counterdependence of the past employee relations) had altered, with a shift in the nature and apparent strength of conflict within the organization, and the effects of change were discussed in terms of the movement of conflict and blame across the organization (cf. Jehn, 1997; Smith, 1989). In particular, descriptions of identifications and emotions associated with team membership contrasted dramatically with the extreme positive/negative emotional split of the past.

First, a developmental reading suggests an interpretation of change as progressive and of an organization that is maturing, if not mature. What had been a simple and firm us and them division between management and unions/workers had become more fluid and subtle. While there were still strong intergroup separations, boundaries had shifted, were less strongly drawn and were perhaps more permeable than in the past. This permeability is interpreted in terms of Alderfer's discussion of underbounded systems and theory of embedded intergroup relations (Alderfer, 1976, 1980; 1987; Alderfer and Smith, 1982; Lichtenstein, Alexander, Jinnett and Ullman, 1997).

It is then argued that while the developmental reading privileges the future at the expense of the past, a nostalgic interpretation privileges, instead, the past, and that both imply an oppositional logic between past and future. A variant of the concept of remedial personalization (Padavic and Earnest, 1994) is suggested in order to allow movement between these earlier positions while romanticizing neither the future nor the past. Remedial personalization refers to "a sense on the part of the worker of being regarded, and in some ways treated, with concern, interest, and respect by management ...[i]n much the same way as family members, friends, or acquaintances are treated differently from strangers" (Padavic and Earnest, 1994, p. 392). This second, critical reading suggests that the very language of development and maturity, and the past-present-future distinctions that this language suggests, masks a parent-child dynamic within the focal organization, implying that the maturing process is bounded and limited in its possibilities. It is argued that talk of paternalism as a form of remedial personalization serves to buffer the present without romanticizing the past or implying that the future should or can be progressive, and that the play of the different readings offers particular insight into the local reality of the organization that was studied.

METHOD

Case Summary

One day, an Australian subsidiary of the United States-based manufacturer, named here as "CANCO", called a meeting of its 1000 employees and announced changes including product-based teams, a 24-hour three shift operation, and employee redundancy packages. This announcement occurred in the context of talk of the threatened closure of the plant. Eighteen months after this "Refocusing Day", the teams were dissolved. The general aim of the research was to understand impacts of organizational change on interpersonal relationships, both at work and beyond. The focus was on interpersonal dynamics following extreme organizational change events and the study took the form of a single-case design (Yin, 1994).

Procedure and Sample

After a series of meetings with the human resources director and industrial relations manager and a tour of the factory, I held a series of five meetings to discuss my research interests with union and shift representatives. These meetings started 14 months after the changes were announced and served a mix of purposes; they enabled contact, established my legitimacy as a researcher prepared to visit the plant at different times (as distinct from another in what had been a series of paid consultants usually only present during the day), and provided initial data on the nature and range of the changes and responses to those changes that assisted in development of an interview protocol.

A combination of semi-structured interview and self-report questionnaire methods was used. In essence, the interview provided a reconstruction of the process of the change events, while the questionnaire supplemented that picture with before/after comparisons. A mixed sampling technique resulted in 33 semi-structured interviews and a subset of 25 follow-up quantitative self-report questionnaires. Of the 33 interviewees, eight were non-production staff and the others worked on the factory floor: nine on the morning, eight on the afternoon, and eight on the night shift. I spoke with a total of 19 males and 14 females, whose length of service ranged from two to 37 years. All but one of the interviews were taped and transcribed onto disk. Interviews varied in length and averaged one and a quarter hours for factory workers.

The Interviews

This paper focuses on data collected from the interview study. The interviews combined the critical incident/ behavioral event (Flanagan, 1954; Boyatzis, 1982, 1994) and personal application assignment (Kolb, Osland and Rubin, 1995) approaches. The critical incident interview technique adapts a journalistic method to obtain a story of or picture of the sequence and actors in an event. The personal application assignment is based on Kolb's adult learning cycle (Kolb, 1984) and includes a series of steps in which someone thinks back on a significant incident or experience. Participants were invited to discuss their own interpretations of particular change events - and how they came to form those interpretations. A mix of nomothetic and ideographic methods (Burrell and Morgan, 1979) was used in the sense that the interview format allowed for the inclusion of issues and comments deemed important by participants and for flexibility in the sequence and emphasis of questions.

The interview data were analyzed by inductive content analysis (Gephart, 1993) based on open coding or fracturing (Strauss and Corbin, 1990) of themes and sub-themes across the interviews and emergence of recurring links (Cresswell, 1994, p. 155) between talk of intergroup conflict and of family dynamics. It should be noted that neither of these topics was included within the semi-structured interview protocol; they were topics generated by the interviewees. The analysis presented below is the result of constant comparison and editing techniques, in which a reduced summary is the result of a cyclical process of comparison between themes and original textual data (Miller and Crabtree, 1992; King, 1994). But first, a word of caution on the assumptions of this process.

INTERPRETING TALK

The importance of talk and of the discursive turn in psychology, ethnography, and in organizational studies (see Grant, Keenoy and Oswick, 1998; Harré, 1992; Linstead, 1993) has had a major impact on theory, research, and management in the area of organizational change. This recognition is evident both in attention to metaphor in understanding and guiding organizational change (Cleary and Packard, 1992; Grant and Oswick, 1996; Illes and Ritchie, 1999; Marshak, 1993a, 1993b; Morgan, 1997; Oswick and Grant, 1996; Palmer and Dunford, 1996a, 1996b; Sackmann, 1989; Srivastva and Barrett, 1988; Weick and Quinn, 1999 cf. McCourt, 1997), and in the recent emphasis on change as conversation (Ford, 1998; Ford and Ford, 1995; Roth, 1999).

However, much of this latter work does not recognize that "what the theorist sees is not the model as a representation of the organization but the organization as a representation of the model" (Cooper, 1989, p. 494-5, drawing on the work of Degot, 1982), and fails to be reflexive in the sense of possessing "the ability to be critical or suspicious of our own intellectual assumptions" (Hassard, 1993, p. 12, with reference to Lawson, 1985). For example, Srivastva and Barrett proposed that "[l]ooking at a group's metaphors allows one to see the nascent stages of the group's social construction of reality" (1988, p. 38), and that a group's creation of metaphors is generative, facilitates contact between group members, and "supports the growth and development of the group" (Srivastva and Barrett, 1988, p. 32). Similarly, both Ford (1998), and Roth (1999) assume change and development to be progressive.

Despite the recent surge in attention to reflexivity in organization theory (see, for example Chia, 1995, 1996, 1997; Hassard, 1993, 1994; Hardy and Clegg, 1997; Holland, 1999; Jacques, 1992; Linstead, 1993, p. 108;

Weick, 1999), such attention has not, for the most part, affected the analysis of organizational change (some exceptions include Boje, 1995; Collins, 1998; Knights and McCabe, 1998a, 1998b; Palmer and Dunford, 1996a). Accordingly, research on conversation may highlight only some of "a diversity and multiplicity of voices" (Boje, 1995, p. 1030), showing little recognition that:

In the "management of writing and the writing of management", the construction and choice of the happy story over competing voices is less a search for truth than a naïve political and economic complicity that marginalizes alternative stories" (Boje, 1995, p. 998^[2]).

Recognizing that there can be no unmediated truth and that "[n]o privileged position exists from which analysis might arbitrate" (Hardy and Clegg, 1997, p. S5), this paper presents, instead, contrasting readings of the same case study. It is suggested that this analytical approach is a "textual strategy" (Linstead, 1993, p. 100) to give life both to presentations of the talk of organizational change and to the re-presentation of the theorizing of that talk. Indeed, the theoretical reading, re-reading and writing of the "data" involves the construction of particular versions "of how things hang together" (Alvesson, 1999, p. 17, with reference to Potter, 1996) in attempting to make sense of the positions taken by the speakers or "subjects" of the study.

And those positions may, in turn, be many. For example, Alvesson (1999) suggested that in any presentation of interview data, interview statements are limited in their efforts to reflect either an objective reality or an experienced subjectivity. Instead, affected by context and by "the available cultural scripts about how one should normally express oneself on particular topics" (Alvesson, 1999, p. 4), the research interview should be carefully interpreted "considering a wide set of meanings and complications" (1999, p. 23). In an elaboration of some of the more general representational concerns raised above, Alvesson identified various ways of understanding interview accounts: as local accomplishments of conversation work; as establishing and perpetuating an expected story line; as identity work on and by the interviewee; as the application of available cultural scripts; as impression management; as political action; as reality construction work; and as a play of the powers of discourses that constitute fluctuating subjectivities.

The data below may well reflect several of these issues, and are presented in the spirit of the call for "ongoing reflection and critical interpretation" of interview accounts (Alvesson, 1999, p. 23). In the context of this preface, let us now move to the accounts themselves.

US AND THEM: THE MOVEMENT OF INTERGROUP CONFLICT

Probably since the late seventies this company had gone through a very, very checkered time period....We certainly had some very, very nasty, prolonged, strikes and pickets and so forth. But I think there was just so much ingrained in the way the company operated, in terms of its management, and employees within the organization, that it was nearly seen as a...venue for open industrial dispute. (32^[3])

This manager's description of CANCO's history of industrial disputation is typical of accounts of the background events leading to the initiation of its organizational change program in the 1990s (and to the talk of the threatened closure of the plant). Indeed, many participants, including both managerial and factory floor staff, reflected on the extent to which reduction of union power was a stated or unstated management objective for organizational change at CANCO as the changes had resulted in a combination of reduced permanent staff numbers and a reduction in the number of unions represented on site (cf. Wolfram Cox, 1997). Further, while CANCO management had initially aimed to impose compulsory redundancies across all levels of the factory, union resistance culminated in an agreement to allow a series voluntary redundancies at shop floor level.

Thus, CANCO's "colorful" (2) history of labor relations was marked with conflict, and with a strong factory floor/management division and a "blaming culture" (17) in which an employee identified with one group in terms of being in conflict with another (cf. Kramer, 1991). One indication of a shift in identity relations at CANCO was the corresponding shift in conflict and in identification from status groups to product teams, and particularly to shifts. In this section, I give examples of this movement in interviewees' talk of

boundaries with those with whom they disagree; or, in identity terms, with those who are defined as other. While I do not attempt to measure or quantify the relative levels of conflict over time, discussions of these shifts depict the ebb and flow of some of the most strongly felt (and graphically described) identifications at CANCO.

In particular, the past separation of management and workers at CANCO was initially very distinct and was often described in us/them terms (1, 3, 4, 9, 12, 20):

It was just bred into us. There was no talking, there was no decent human relationships, it was all baseball bat stuff, stand off tactics....People just stood in their corners and just came out fighting, it was disgusting, from the most trivial issues to some serious ones. (28)

Literally, the Managing Director had a body guard, he had bullet proof glass. You can still see it up the front in his office, it has been there for years. \$50,000 worth of bullet proof glass, and that is not because he is paranoid, it is because the issues were real....I know a woman that we knew who spoke out at a union meeting and had shit smeared all over her clothes in the change room, so those things I look back on, not with any bizarre fascination with them, but now ...we will all talk about the issues as civilized human beings. We have disagreements but we manage them pretty well. (33)

It has narrowed a lot. It used to be "them and us", there's management and the workforce. Um, we sit down now, and discuss things....Um, we sit and go through it, and we come to an agreement. Er, which is good, management have stuck to their word. And I think er, most of the unions on site have stuck to theirs. (3)

However:

Even to this day we're sort of separate, segregated from management.

....And I get on quite well with all the managers and they always say to me "Yeah, we're going to come down, we're going to do this in the factory". But they're never seen. It's all just talk. And we're still thrown on to do all the work. (12)

More generally, the strongest conflicts seemed to shift from within CANCO's Australian operations to the "political struggle" and even "war" between manufacturers across its world-wide operations, where the cast of characters included a "smiling assassin", an "axeman" and a "head kicking John Wayne", among other "autocrats". In place of the "mercenary" approach to change management (2) which had caused Australian management to be viewed with distrust and suspicion, it was now world-wide management who became the "enemy", and whose use of figures for benchmarking of production efficiency and for setting Australian production targets could not be trusted. In between these periods, when workers' identifications were in transition from functional departments to product based teams, as well as from two to three shifts, new difficulties arose. Conflicts between shifts were the subject of many discussions^[4]:

We got the 3 shifts, and we have shift meetings and all that, and you go to a meeting, and you got your back shift [night shift] coordinators and [morning] shift, and afternoon shift, and they're all backstabbing each other, and, like I went to a meeting last night, and if one shift's got an idea, the other one goes, "Oh, you think that's going to work?". They don't think they're good enough, so they're sort of backstabbing each other. (11)

Well, one shift's always criticizing the other shift, and people come in looking for faults from the shift that's ready to finish. (16)

One shift argues with another shift, you know: "You never clean the line properly. We had to come in and re-clean it", and all that sort of thing. It's more aggro between the shifts now than what there was before.... it's a bit of aggro, it's not rivalry any more, and that's about it.

I: What's the difference between aggro and rivalry?

Rivalry can be friendly. Aggro's being aggro. (21)

Aside from such general antagonisms, there was also a tendency to locate blame in a particular individual or shift. However, in the context of such problems between the shifts, there were many thoughtful discussions of dynamics between and within teams. Here the rivalries were less bitter and were balanced by feelings of pride:

Within the first week, there were all these ____ guys down in the [lower] floor that hadn't been there before. And I thought this is great, our team...this is our team, these are our guys.

I: There was that feeling there?

Yeah, Yeah. But it did also create a bit of competition....and we could sort of look at the others - maybe not intentionally - but we could look at the other teams and think "Oh, we are gonna leave them behind, 'cause our guys are already swapping around, and look at them, they're not. They are gonna be, in six months time, still doing that and we're gonna be able to do everything, we are gonna be really good at this". (5)

At the time, inadvertently, I suppose we got a lot of rivalry up between each team: "Oh, we can do better than you" and that sort of thing.

I: Tell me about that.

Oh, there's nothing, no malice or anything, like. We usually try and beat the other mob and they would try and beat us. Just things like that, you know. It's friendly. There's no hassles or anything....It improved morale. (21)

Overall, life within the teams was not without its problems, but those problems were "little stupid things" (10), and were further reduced with a subsequent change from product-based to functional teams:

Well, I think it's a lot better again, since we went to departmental again, because it doesn't matter which department you are, we sort of talk, there's no teams. Um, so if I'm having lunch outside, if somebody comes out from the kitchen, we sort of talk, and we, you haven't got that team business thing. Like, I don't know, it's just strange, because before, "Oh, you're in [another] team", or "You're in [another] team". You know: "I'm not going to talk to you" type of thing. Or you made a mistake, or if there was a major problem or something: "Oh, you ____ yesterday", you know, so they were sort of picking on you in certain things, but now, I mean, we sort of work all together, and if there's a mistake, we try and talk about it, or we discuss things, and it's a lot more relaxed. (11)

READING ONE: CHANGE AS DEVELOPMENT IN INTERGROUP RELATIONS

One reading of these data is that the effects of change represent the movement of conflict and blame across the organization; from what had been conflict between management and unions/workers to conflict across international relations, between shifts and with particular individuals (cf. Smith, 1989). This reading suggests that the identifications and emotions associated with product team membership were more complex and more subtle than the extreme positive/negative emotional split of the past. It is in this sense that what had been a simple and firm "us and them" division between management and unions/workers had become more fluid and subtle, and perhaps more "mature". In boundary terms, while there were still strong intergroup separations, boundaries between conflicting groups had shifted, were less strongly drawn and were perhaps more permeable than in the past.

This permeability can be interpreted in terms of Alderfer's discussion of underbounded systems and theory of embedded intergroup relations (Alderfer, 1976, 1980; 1987; Alderfer and Smith, 1982; Lichtenstein et al., 1997). Alderfer (1980) used an open system conception of organization, suggesting that there is an optimal degree of psychological and physical boundary permeability between each system-environment relationship. He suggested that underbounded systems show more boundary permeability than is optimal, and that the "primary threat" to such systems is that "they will become totally caught up in their environmental turbulence and lose a consistent sense of their own identity and coherence" (1980, p. 269). Within organizations, each person may be a member of a large number of groups, and "[r]arely are individuals "just people" when they act in organizations" (Alderfer, 1987, p. 204; Alderfer and Smith, 1982, p. 39). Dynamics between outside groups with whom members of a focal group (or, in this case, team or shift)

identify, affect intergroup dynamics as system and subsystem dynamics are embedded within and affected by suprasystem events, and vice versa (Alderfer and Smith, 1982; Miller, 1978).

In this way, interactions among members of the same team also have the potential to be intergroup events (Alderfer and Smith, 1982; Lichtenstein et al., 1997). It is important to pay attention to the external dynamics of work groups (Alderfer, 1998), for members of work groups or teams that are underbounded or poorly integrated may exhibit competitiveness, conflict, and hostility toward one another, particularly where those teams are composed of members with diverse social identities (Lichtenstein et al., 1997; Tajfel, 1982; Tajfel and Turner, 1979; cf. Lau and Murnighan, 1998; Hope Pelled, Eisenhardt and Xin, 1999). For example, Lichtenstein et al. suggest that "[i]f the boundary is too permeable, team members will identify more strongly with outside groups and less strongly with the team" (1997, p. 416-7). They went on to examine the effects of different degrees of member diversity (e.g., in occupation, tenure, age, gender, team size) on perceived team integration in underbounded teams that lacked formal responsibility within a hospital's authority structure. Team integration was measured by a questionnaire comprising three dimensions: role clarity of the team, participation on the team, and perception of overall team functioning.

While the nature of the present study was quite different, I propose that embedded systems theory can also be used to interpret the interview data presented above, and that the shifts in discussion of extreme and impermeable management/union conflict, to strong between-shift conflict, to inter-team conflict, and on to more minor within-team disputes represent a growing sense of integration and development within the work teams. Under this view, the decreasing strength and increasingly internal focus of talk about organizational conflict is associated with increasing team boundedness, reduced dependence on the surrounding system, and growing team integration and maturity.

This proposition could be assessed in longitudinal case research on conflict talk over time (cf. Jehn, 1997), but in the present context my interest was more in retrospective depictions and interpretations of change than in any assessment of the objective veracity of the strength or sequence of the conflicts to which people referred, or even an assumption that the pasts remembered had ever actually occurred. Further, the optimistic, progressive, and structuralist nature of this first reading can be compared with a second, and more critical, reading of what appears to be development of independence among CANCO's work teams.

PROBLEMS IN THE FAMILY: DEPENDENCY DYNAMICS

Interviewees often discussed the introduction of changes at CANCO by comparing those changes with shifts between the adolescent-parent dependency dynamics. These discussions differed in emphasis from those above in that they did not only focus on current (or recent) inter- or intragroup conflicts, but also on individuals making sense of the present in terms of difficulties in their own pasts.

The discomfort of CANCO's present struggles was compared in various ways with the comfort and familial nature of the past (18, 19, 22, 23). In the past, CANCO was the sort of place where "everyone knows everyone" (15) and, indeed, where members of the same family had worked side by side (25):

You know, and it was always family. And, you could feel comfortable here. But now you don't. I don't feel comfortable here any more. I like working here, but I'm not as comfortable as what I...was. (9)

10 to 20 years ago the family, I mean the company, had the feeling of being one big happy family. It was like a family. We had a number of things, it was common to play table tennis at morning tea. You'd play volley ball or cricket or football at lunchtime. The comraderie that existed between factory and other workers was phenomenal. (27)

I have grown up here, it is just like family really. (29)

However, organizations have been likened to families in differing ways (Boje, 1995; Casey, 1999; Czarniawska-Joerges, 1992; Knights and McCabe, 1998a; Morgan, 1997; Palmer and Dunford, 1996b;

Popper, 1997). Indeed, rather than "nurturing" change, CANCO's current approach to parenting was seen as much more impatient, both within Australia and in relation to its international parent headquarters:

You've got to nurture [change], you've got to teach it, you've got to have the patience with it. And you have to wait for it to develop. But if...I feel the company thinks that if it doesn't develop quick enough, it's out the door. (9)

We were told actually that [CANCO] would be closed down if we didn't pick up our performance, because we had meetings with [the managing director]. He, you know, more or less said, "Well, you know, if we don't pick up, the American company, mother company, would end up closing us here". (18)

From my perspective, we had convinced our parent company that all our problems were union based, people based and after 10 years of convincing a parent company that was our problem, they believed us. But that is not the case: we had some people problems but we had management problems, we had administration problems, we had lots of problems it wasn't just union based problems. But I think they saw it as a waste [of] time spending any effort or any money in this country with these people in this company. That is how I saw it. (28)

There were also mixed feelings about CANCO's past paternalism, and about the effects of the change process in terms of dependency dynamics and parent-child analogies in the workplace:

Well CANCO is a very good paternalistic company. CANCO is not known for paying the best, but not the worst. I believe that, paternalistic is the best way to say it takes good care of its workers, most of the people have been here for a long time. In that sense it might breed complacency but it gives people, most people have a very strong sense of loyalty to the company and perhaps there is a bit of a civil service mentality. I have been here [several] years now, I am not one of the old guys either.

I: So when you say civil service mentality what do you mean there ?

I think we do things that way and that is the way we do it right, we don't do it any other way, it is pretty easy. The jobs here were pretty easy, there was not a lot asked for. You have a system already you just follow it. Christ - a monkey can handle most of the jobs. There are good things and bad things in that. (30)

"You are not here to think" - people will tell you that they were told things like that in years gone by...In the early 1950's the Government decided that manufacturing industries would be a good idea, and encouraged companies to set up factories on this side of the highway... and on the other side of the road they put a migrant ghetto and they called it [names the suburb]....It was an industrial ghetto from day one. So the people were factory fodder, they felt like factory fodder, they behaved like factory fodder, and that was the way that it was...they felt like victims, they were out of control. They were relatively powerless. (33)

This was often accompanied by references to employees not knowing "how to wipe their bums" (33), being like "kindergarten kids" (30), being treated "like children" (19) by a consultant group facilitator, and to discuss similarities between the introduction of teams and the events of childhood:

When it actually happened, we um, everybody came to work in the day, we didn't actually work, we got taken into groups of what team you were going to be in. All given a hat of the color of the team. Like kids. (13)

You can't just go from having too many bosses, to having none. Doesn't work. To me, I used to say to people that it was like a school: "OK kids, there's no more teachers. Go for it!" (15)

I: Have you ever experienced a similar change before?

No. Not even school. Not even high school, I mean, you know, like when you first go from state [elementary] school to high school. That's probably the only thing like it.

I: Really?

Mmm. But nowhere near as bad, this was worse. [Laughs]

I: Now why is it like that? Why is it like that?

I don't know, that's never, I've never thought of it like that until now^[5]. I think it's just because of the new environment and everything again. It's just all...[indistinct] anxieties and everything. Yeah, they're all thrown at you again.... Just sort of wondering how, you know, how you're going to get on with this one, or that one, never going to grow up to do this or that. Yeah, yeah, that's what it's like. But a little bit more of an adult approach (laughs), a little bit! (15)

You were working now with a whole group of new people. People that had come from other shifts as well, and you didn't even know 'em, some of them. 'Cause they'd chosen to go on that shift. Some people we didn't even know. So that was a big adjustment, even getting to know people.... you're virtually introducing yourselves. It was really reminding me of, like, first day of high school.... We actually sat on chairs, outside, in the sun, sat in a circle, and one of the big bosses, I can't remember the name of the guy we had, said "Now, sit down here". And we were actually working out a roster, to start work that night. Here was this guy that didn't know any of us, "Now, what job do you do?" And it was like that in high school, and even we were there laughing about it. Like people sit here, we are working for a company and we look like we're at high school. I mean, here was this man, sitting in the middle of us, saying "What job do you do?" It was... it was nearly laughable. (25)

The change events were also likened to family dynamics by interviewees comparing events at CANCO with other life changes, including getting divorced (16) having a child (17), becoming a grandmother (18). In summary, an overview of the introduction of teamwork at CANCO gives a sense of an overly-controlling parent suddenly thrusting an unprepared child into the water and saying "Swim! And make sure that you help out the others at the same time!". As the quotations above show, the changes at CANCO were likened to abrupt changes in adolescence, and the responses to CANCO were a mixture of understanding, amusement, bewilderment, anger, and pain. The arresting nature of these quotations helps to bring the experiences of the interviewees to life, giving an immediacy to the descriptions of the identity and emotion consequences of change at CANCO.

READING TWO: CHANGE AS PATERNALISM

References to the comfort of an organization's past are not unusual in accounts of organizational change. For example, Gabriel has argued that organizational nostalgia is a dominant phenomenon manifested as attachment to and yearning for a lost past. Nostalgia often arises in relation to a past from which one has been separated through "radical discontinuity" (Gabriel, 1993, p. 121), and can perhaps be expected as a result of radical organizational change programs where people need to come to terms with the present through demonization of the present and unconscious phantasies of the past (Gabriel, 1992, p. 132). Even hard and disagreeable times may emerge as objects for nostalgia, for "nostalgia is a state arising out of present conditions as much as out of the past itself" (Gabriel, 1993, p. 121^[6]).

In the context of this study, it noteworthy that Gabriel discusses frequent nostalgic references to the organization as a family in transcriptions of field interviews in five other organizations, and suggests that "[t]he image of the organization as a family seemed to be at the heart of nostalgic feeling" (1993, p. 124). Thus, references to nostalgia may be associated with references to the family, for both can romanticize the past and invoke positive feelings for what was or for what might have been. However, many of the quotations above in reference to CANCO do not merely compare the present with the past but describe the present in terms of the past, and in terms that are far from the rosiness of happy families.

Perhaps this means that loss of the past has not been "psychologically conquered" (Gabriel, 1993, p. 133) and that nostalgia is not yet possible except for a few. In contrast, such a romantic view of the past is complicated by a closer analysis of CANCO's particular family dynamics in the references mentioned above.

The contradictory assessments of this particular family, replete with references to dependent children, conjure up images not only of nostalgia but also of paternalism, which is "a system of management under which the employer creates a workforce dependent for more than just the wages exchanged for work" (Wray, 1996, p. 702⁽⁷⁾).

Padavic and Earnest (1994) suggest, counter to Weber, that paternalism is one of many forms of managerial control. They differentiate two forms of paternalism:

- (1) an exploitative power asymmetry, suffused at the social-psychological level with deference and loyalty grounded in a familial sentiment; [and] (2) the institutional forms within which this asymmetry is exercised, such as company-subsidized community projects or housing.

In a similar but more extensive classification, Wray (1996) discusses traditional paternalism, "which transferred family or domestic 'authority' into the workplace as a basis for industrial organization" and is "authoritarianism tempered with generosity" (Martin and Fryer, 1973); welfare paternalism, in the form of routinized benefits such as long-term employment contracts, pension schemes, company-owned housing, and provision of medical benefits, education, parks and sports; and sophisticated paternalism, where "[t]he personal indulgency patterns established by traditional paternalist employers are maintained through the institutionalisation of largesse through profit share systems and social and welfare benefits financed by the organisation" (Wray, 1996, p. 703).

Remedial Personalization

Padavic and Earnest (1994) then describe the dynamic of remedial personalization, which refers to "a sense on the part of the worker of being regarded, and in some ways treated, with concern, interest, and respect by management[i]n much the same way as family members, friends, or acquaintances are treated differently from strangers" (Padavic and Earnest, 1994, p. 392). Under this principle, if an owner treats the employee as "more than an instrument", the owner is, in turn, treated as "more than an exploiter" (Padavic and Earnest, 1994, p. 397), and, particularly relevant to the shifting nature of intergroup conflict at CANCO discussed above, the lateralization of conflict among employee groups may overshadow vertical employer-employee conflict (Padavic and Earnest, 1994, p. 399).

However, counter to the personalization of paternalism where "experiences of work that might inform antagonism towards management are blunted, refocused and edited out" (Padavic and Earnest, 1994, p. 392), or even to the argument that "[p]aternalism is a regulatory discourse that dampens and contains dissonant experiences, not an absolute one that prevents them from being registered as experience at all" (1994, p. 398; see also Casey, 1999; Jackman, 1994; Kerfoot and Knights, 1993), many of the quotations above describe CANCO's change processes in very raw terms. Importantly, much of the talk above refers not only to a yearning for a past of patronage and its "climate of ease" (Wray, 1996, p. 711), but a likening of the unpleasantness of the present with past parent and teacher patronization. The descriptions are personalized in the sense of containing references to childhood and school relationships, and are remedial in that they provide a means for making sense of the difficulties of the present through comparison with past difficulties that, at the very least, had been survived by the adult speakers. However, those difficulties had not been forgotten, and I propose that their "remembrance" had been invoked to highlight similarities rather than to make contrasts between the dynamics of the present and the past.

I therefore suggest that this talk may be a variant of remedial personalization, serving to buffer the present without either buffering the past (as in Padavic and Earnest's initial conceptualization), romanticizing the past (as in the case of nostalgia) or romanticizing the future (as in the case of the first, developmental and structuralist reading of intergroup conflict above). Thus, in contrast to the first reading in terms of team development and growing team independence from the surrounding system, this second, and more critical, reading does not assume either that dependence should be/can be overcome or that the dependent are mystified, silenced or made impotent (cf. Morgan, 1997). While both readings concern changing boundaries, the second reading suggests that the language of development and maturity masks an ongoing parent-child dynamic within the focal organization and implies that the maturing process may well be limited in its possibilities.

The second reading may also reflect a shift in CANCO's organizational discourse rather than a representation of any "underlying" or essential organizational reality. From this perspective, remedial personalization is an illustration of change in talk rather than talk of change, and is one that is of particular interest because it is a variant of (rather than a disruption to) the more dominant paternalism talk of the past. Further variants of paternalism and nostalgia discourses may be worthy of study for those interested in theorizing and researching subtleties in talk of the past, or who wish to compare this discussion with other organizational case studies where discursive shifts are more dramatic, or more gradual (see, for example, Barrett, Thomas, and Hocevar, 1995).

CONCLUSION

In terms of identifying criteria by which reflexive theorizing might be assessed, Hardy and Clegg suggest that theoretical positions can be judged according to three criteria: (a) the differentiation of research and practice and the suspicion of prescriptive, normative research agendas; (b) the broad reference imaging of theory that "ranges across territories of intellectual life" to fix its identity through the recognition of theories outside and not just within the same tradition or "discursive community"; and (c) the existence of theoretical communities that are pluralistic and whose members engage in debate (Hardy and Clegg, 1997, pp. S13-14). In this paper, the discussion of the developmental, progressive organizational change literature and the use of different theoretical readings of "the data" attempt to meet the first criterion, and the choice of theories, drawing on both the social psychology of intergroup relations and the sociology of paternalism and worker control, is an effort to meet the second. The third criterion is assessable only in the broader context of the variety of papers accepted and the nature of discussion at venues such as the Academy of Management's Organization Development and Change Division, and in the pages of journals such as the Journal of Organizational Change Management and Journal of Applied Behavioral Science.

In this paper, theorizing was used as a "textual strategy" (Linstead, 1993, p. 100) to show that both readings (and probably several others not considered here) can "make sense" despite their very different assumptions about past-future relations. In presenting these different analyses, I deliberately chose theories based on very different assumptions. My interest was not in whether different theories allow some convergence or triangulation of apparently disparate data (Denzin, 1978), or the "seeing" of different parts of a complex organizational reality (cf. Morgan, 1997), or even the bridging of different paradigms (Schultz and Hatch, 1995), but in suggesting that if developmental, progressive assumptions of organizational change are relaxed, further attention can be given to theorizing and researching subtleties in talk of the past, whether or not that past ever occurred or was even remembered as occurring.

Does the past lead "up" to a better future? Does the present allow us to gaze "back" fondly at the past? Perhaps both are true, or, in the case of CANCO, perhaps both are only partly true, each informing the other as the reader moves between them in the analysis of what can be both lateral and vertical intergroup conflict. The use of different theories to interpret the voices presented here is a deliberate disturbance device not only to make this point, but also to show how a close analysis of the interplay between theory and data (if not fact) can give life both to theorizing a case study of organizational change and to changing the theorizing of research data. With respect to the latter, this paper is a call for further non-representationalist organizational studies. The disentangling, un-bracketing and metaphorization of supposedly oppositional relations into continual movement between the past and the future is but one exemplar of such endeavor (cf. Cooper, 1989; Chia, 1996; Linstead, 1993).

NOTES

^[1] Note, for example, that pictorial representations of Lewin's (1951) force field model usually depict the driving forces as moving to the right or upward (see, for example, French & Bell, 1999: 176; Robbins, Millett, Cacioppe, & Waters-Marsh, 1998: 684). Such an assumption is also evident in managerialist accounts of how to deal with resistance/restraining forces (Armenakis, Harris, and Mossholder, 1993; Dunphy and Stace, 1988; Kotter and Schlesinger, 1979; cf. Collinson, 1994; Merron, 1993; Srivastva, Fry, and Associates, 1992).

^[2] In milder language, and in reference to conflicting use of particular metaphors rather than stories in organizational change, Palmer and Dunford (1996a, p. 696) suggest that one concern of the reflexive change analyst concerns enunciation; that is, whether change metaphors emerge "because of their creativeness or because they represent dominant organizational interests". Other concerns include representation, which is the use of single or multiple metaphors to describe or understand a change situation; separation, which concerns the relationship between literal and metaphorical language in analyzing change, and routinization, which concerns rules governing consistency in use of change metaphors (Palmer and Dunford, 1996a, pp. 696-7). For example, with respect to separation and of particular relevance to the developmental reading presented here, Palmer and Dunford (1996a, p. 709) consider different uses of the word phase, and suggest that this word produces assumptions of both linearity and teleology in change:

the word phase can be treated as a literal term when linked with change (change phase) compared to a term that structures how thinking occurs around a variety of issues associated with change. That is, the word phase may both filter in and filter out a variety of issues associated with change.

^[3] The interviewee number is included in rounded brackets in order to indicate where materials are drawn from common interviews.

^[4] In my preliminary meetings, several suggestions were made that I should focus attention on the shift from two to three work shifts in the factory on the basis that the associated work time changes had caused difficulties for people (particularly women) trying to manage childcare and other domestic responsibilities (cf. Moss Kanter, 1995). Although shift changes were mentioned by many interviewees, it is noteworthy that this issue of external responsibilities was never raised in the interviews. Instead, the focus was on intergroup conflict between shifts.

^[5] Note that this appears to be an instance of the interviewee constructing reality rather than representing any existing objective or subjective circumstance (see Alvesson, 1999).

^[6] See also Gouldner's (1954) description of the Rebecca Myth that was invoked when workers longed for restoration of indulgencies in what was seen to be a better past.

^[7] Citing Burawoy (1985), Wray comments that paternalism obscures the commodity status of labor. Padavic and Earnest also argue that paternalism abridges workers' instrumentalization as sellers of labor power (1994, p. 392), suggesting that unionization is an alternative abridgment of worker instrumentalization, for "[i]n union-management negotiations to contractually constrain management's control of wages and working conditions, management is compelled to recognize workers as contracting subjects" (1994, p. 392). It is noteworthy that traditional paternalism has been distinguished from and seen as incompatible with trade unionism (Boje, 1995; Wray, 1996; Padavic and Earnest, 1994). However, CANCO's past represents a combination of both "civil service" welfare paternalism and unionization (see also Thompson and McHugh, 1995, p. 207-8 for further examples).

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