

**BEYOND THE EMOTIONAL WORK EVENT
SOCIAL SHARING OF EMOTION IN ORGANIZATIONS**

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IN ORGANIZATIONS**



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PREFACE

This report is a result of a research project carried out at the Center for Management & Organization (A-Sektionen) at the Economic Research Institute at the Stockholm School of Economics.

This volume is submitted as a doctor's thesis at the Stockholm School of Economics. As usual at the Economic Research Institute, the author had been entirely free to conduct and present her research in her own ways as an expression of her own ideas.

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INTRODUCTION

Every day people experience hassles and joys at work. Consequently, research on emotion in organizational settings has tended to focus on these "as they occur" (Weiss & Copranzano, 1996; Bartel & Saavedra, 2000; Pugh, 2001; Fischer, 2002; Grandey et al. 2002; Barsade, 2002) and "as they are managed" (Hochschild, 1983; Sutton & Rafaeli, 1988; Sutton, 1991; Rafaeli & Sutton, 1991; Wharton & Erickson, 1993; Huy, 2002). However, not only do people experience emotional events at work: they may also talk about these events to their colleagues or intimates (Rimé et al., 1998; Sjöstrand et al., 2001). And this verbal sharing of emotion may occur as well in everyday work life as it does in turbulent times or after extraordinary events (Rimé et al., 1998). It can be assumed that this narrating and sharing of emotional work events will have an impact on organizations which, in order to be successful, depend heavily on fluid knowledge-sharing (Hayek, 1945; Kogut & Zander, 1992; Tsoukas, 1996; Tsai, 2002), on the construction of a shared system of meaning for the integration of their members (Weick, 1995; Sjöstrand, 1997; cf. Berger & Luckmann, 1966) and on fruitful interactions among their members for the development of vital social networks (Labianca et al., 1998; Mehra et al., 2001; Sparrowe et al., 2001). To extend the perspective on emotion in organizations as something that occurs and is managed, it can

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thus be rewarding to look at what happens beyond the emotional work event.

Felt emotion does not necessarily disappear immediately after the event that caused it; rather the reminiscence of it may be stored in memory and pondered over, most likely triggering verbal communication about the original emotional event later on (Pennebaker et al., 1987; Rimé et al., 1991; 1998). Discussions at meetings or video conferences can be identified in organizations as arenas for the social sharing of emotional experiences, but so too can "small talk" at coffee breaks, in telephone calls or in e-mails. It is not always feasible to draw a clear distinction between these apparently formal and informal organizational interactions, but the dichotomy is nonetheless frequently used to classify forms of organizational coordination (Tsai, 2002). The narratives picked up from insiders or outsiders of the organization can be shared in the same way, leading in some cases to their diffusion in the organization and their possible retention as organizational narratives (Boje, 1991; Czarniawska, 1996). This type of communication about emotional events has been labeled the *social sharing of emotion* (SSE) (Rimé et al., 1991; 1998). Talking about an emotional event is not then regarded as a purely cognitive activity. Rather, while recalling an emotional event and lending words to it, the storyteller is to a certain extent re-living the emotion that originally accompanied the event. This finds expression in vocal, facial and postural cues, as well as in the words chosen to tell the story. This indicates that the social sharing of emotion or SSE is an emotional event in itself.

A solid theoretical base for analyzing SSE in organizations can be found in Weick's ideas on *sensemaking* (Weick, 1993; 1995). According to Weick, emotion is behind the "ongoing" property of sensemaking. Weick employs here an emotions-as-they-occur perspective by focusing on sensemaking, emotion and the interruption of ongoing projects. He starts by observing that arousal leads to cognitive appraisal and thus, a few seconds later to a desire to make sense of the emotion experienced. In his example, positive or negative emotions are elicited if standard

operating procedures in organizations are interrupted, and employees are prompted to make sense of what is happening (i.e. sensemaking) until the interruption is resolved. Although Weick (1995) does not explicitly mention talk about emotional events, his recipe "How can I know what I think until I see what I say?" can be taken as a pointer in that direction and encourages us to regard SSE as an occasion for sensemaking. Weick's conception of sensemaking, to which he assigns seven properties - identity-constructive, retrospective, enactive, social, ongoing, focused on and by extracted cues, and driven by plausibility rather than accuracy - makes it possible to link the study of SSE to established conceptions of emotion in organizations.

In his theory of sensemaking and emotion Weick refers to *Lebensphilosophie* (Life Philosophy) and existentialism. He also adopts Dilthey's view of the nature of human life as always becoming and never being (Weick, 1995, p. 43). In his psychology Dilthey seeks to recapture the unique quality of every gestalt as the individual experiences it. In terms of sensemaking Dilthey's ideas imply that individual sensemaking should be understood as a state of mind at a specific moment, and that this momentary perception of the ongoing quality of life depends on the individual's assembled experience of sensemaking up to that point. This state of mind is then itself experienced by the individual as an emotion or a will (Hirschberger, 1976, pp. 584-585). From this it is not too great a step to Heidegger's idea of the individual as being cast into the world with all its daily interactions. The human being cannot avoid acting, cannot step back and reflect, cannot predict outcomes of action; there is no objectivity, and language itself is action (Weick, 1995, p. 44). These notions are deeply rooted in Heidegger's existentialist ontology (Hirschberger, 1976). It remains unclear, however, how much further Weick adheres to the conceptualizations of *Lebensphilosophie* and existentialism. Further illumination for our interest in sensemaking and SSE may be acquired from Barbalet (1998), who like Dilthey focuses on emotion as critical in the individual experience of the present. At any moment,

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emotion provides individuals with an anchor in the present by linking it to memory of past emotional experiences, and by representing expectations of what is to come and what is to be felt in the future. In SSE this feeling of the present finds both verbal and non-verbal expression. Individuals use social encounters to make sense of past emotional events, and thus to anticipate the feelings that can be expected in forthcoming interactions. Talking about the past is a way of clarifying the present. This means that all emotion is "now" for a human being, even when it is being talked about in the shape of the social sharing of past emotional events. This view is supported by neurological findings concerning the "feeling" of what happens, which indicate the need of the individual for adequate emotional capabilities, in order to remain adept at starting meaningful personal endeavors and at maintaining a rich social life (Damasio, 1994; 2000). It is also echoed in theory concerned with the way people acquire ever more elaborate emotional knowledge in the course of their lives (Shaver et al., 1987). In this perspective, and in order to emphasize the present focus on emotion, Weick's recipe can be tentatively rephrased for the purpose of this dissertation as "How can I know what I think *and* feel until I see what I say?" It is proposed that remembering, language and the act of speaking constitute a link between cognition and emotion that is accessible for empirical research and theorizing. SSE is regarded as a part of the stream of consciousness of an individual. In the flow of thoughts and feelings, past emotional events may be told at length or just be betokened, used as illustrations, examples or explanations, serve for justifications and so on.

Purpose: This dissertation pays attention to the subsequent consequences of emotion in organizations and here more specifically to the sensemaking that occurs during the social sharing of emotional work events.

Emotion in Organizations

The literature to which I primarily hope to contribute with this dissertation is the ever-growing body of academic writing on emotion in organizations (for an overview, see Ashforth & Humphrey, 1995; Ashkanasy et al., 2002). The dominant theories in this field of academic interest are divided roughly between the emotions-as-they-occur and emotions-as-they-are-managed perspectives. Studies in this field have abandoned the notion of a rational "economic man", adopting instead the ideal type of an "emotional man" (Flam, 1990), an economic actor who is reliant on both cognition *and* emotion in behavior and decision making (Staw & Barsade, 1993; Staw et al., 1994; Elsbach & Barr, 1999). According to this perspective, being emotional is an irrepressible human trait, and emotion is entwined with cognition in all our thoughts and actions. Drawing on the much-debated argument concerning the visceral primacy of emotion over cognition (Darwin, 1999/1874; Zajonc, 1980), some authors may even assign to emotion the main motivating role in workplace behavior (for a critical review see Fineman, 1996). To provide a quick overview of the emotion-in-organizations field, I will briefly present the main concepts used at the various levels of analysis: the managerial, the individual, the group and the organizational levels.

On the managerial level, it has been suggested that emotional traits and the display of emotion by leaders have a major impact on top management team outcomes (Barsade et al., 2000). This links up with the idea that emotions can function as an aid in promoting new ideas when managers are trying to sell strategic issues to their superiors and peers (Dutton and Ashford, 1993). When it comes to the relationship leaders and the members of their own departments, the well established concept of transformative leadership, related in turn to ideas about charisma (Den Hartog & Verbarg, 1997; House et al., 1991) and emotional intelligence (Fineman, 2000; Caruso et al., 2002) also falls in with the ideal type of an emotional man. Similarly, theorists concerned with middle management suggest that managers at this level may

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be required to balance the emotions of their subordinates, for instance when radical changes are under way in an organization. This means championing a change project while simultaneously attending to the emotions of their subordinates, i.e. preventing them from panicking or feeling too secure (Huy, 2002). These theorists posit an emotional dimension to leadership, involving leaders in the recognition, influencing and management of their own and other people's thoughts and emotions.

Weiss and Copranzano (1996) discuss in *Affective Events Theory* the influences of the constant, everyday stream of emotional experiences on individual employees. It is suggested that mood states, resulting from emotional events, can influence dependent variables such as job satisfaction and work motivation. According to this view the "ebb and flow" of emotional experiences depends on daily occurring work events. Also at the individual level, a considerable amount of research has been devoted to *emotional labor*, i.e. the experience or portrayal of specific emotions as part of the work role (Hochschild, 1983; Sutton and Rafaeli, 1988; Sutton, 1991; Rafaeli & Sutton, 1991; Wharton & Erickson, 1993). This approach to the managing of emotion at work includes attempts at the ethnographic mapping of organizational norms concerned with the appropriateness of emotional expression in vocational contexts (Hochschild, 1983; Wouters, 1989), and the effect of corporate culture on emotional expression on the part of employees (Van Maanen & Kunda, 1989).

At the work-group level, emotion is regarded both as influencing and lubricating social interactions within the group and promoting the creation of a group culture. In particular, it is posited that group members are able to "catch" emotions from each other through contagion, thus contributing to the development of a kind of group emotion (Hatfield et al., 1994; Bartel & Saavedra, 2000; Barsade, 2002).

And finally, going beyond the individual and group-level behavior, Albrow (1992) speculates upon a Weberian theory whereby an organization, as an entity, can be said to have

emotions. However, this idea still awaits solid empirical investigation. A first cautious step in this direction may be the study of organizational narratives as shaping the emotional climate of an organization (Van Buskirk & McGrath, 1992).

In sum it can be said that for the managerial, individual, group and organizational levels emotion has been established, alongside cognition, as a critical aspect of organizational behavior research.

What is Emotion?

Studies conducted hitherto on emotion in organizations have shown that the question "What is emotion?" has many answers. Writers have adopted a variety of perspectives, primarily from social psychology (e.g. Izard, 1977; Frijda, 1986; Lazarus, 1991) and micro-sociology (e.g. Hochschild, 1983; Thoits, 1989). This reflects the situation of emotion research in general, which has delivered an inconclusive picture of emotion in a body of literature spread across several disciplines - primarily physiology, neuroscience, philosophy, psychology and sociology. It lies beyond the scope of the present dissertation to find an answer to the question of what emotion exactly is, or to provide answers not already given in the existing body of literature. Thus, the discussion of emotion in this introduction makes no claim to be complete. Rather, revisiting emotion theory in a problem-oriented way indicates how much the various concepts and models of emotion research are interconnected, for instance when it comes to the narrating and sharing of emotional events at the workplace. By referring to the wide-ranging literature relevant to the subject of my dissertation, and building on the notion of emotion as a multi-layered phenomenon demanding a diversified approach, I hope to legitimize a mixed-discourse approach. At the same time, I want to emphasize at this point is that it is possible to talk and write directly about emotion. Otherwise this dissertation would have been an impossible endeavor.

As regards terminology, *affect* is seen as an umbrella term for concepts such as emotion, feeling and mood. *Emotion* is used

to define a fairly brief, intense and focused reaction to a situation. *Feeling* indicates the experience of an emotion. And *mood*, finally, is generally perceived as an affective state of a rather diffuse quality and longer duration than emotion. There are no sharp boundaries between these concepts, which appear to describe overlapping phenomena (Weiss and Copranzano, 1996). In the present dissertation I use the term *emotion* primarily because it fits well with the phenomenon under study, and because has been ubiquitously adopted in organization research.

Due to the bodily sensations accompanying the experience of powerful emotion such as changes in heartbeats, posture, facial expression and voice, sweating or blushing, the concept of emotion is commonly perceived as referring to a physical experience, unlike the "cold" mind-based quality of cognition. Colloquial language depicts emotion as a physical phenomenon in expressions such as "I was scared stiff" or "she cried tears of joy." It was probably also these bodily sensations that generated an assumption among the philosophers of Antiquity, mainly in the Stoa, that emotion was *always* a barrier to rational thought and that the ideal state of mind for intellectual activity was one of contemplative tranquility (Epictetus, 1995). However, adopting the ideal type of an emotional man means that even calmness qualifies as an emotion that influences, and is influenced by, cognition. Further, various emotions such as excitement or surprise, may yield valuable insights - a view that links up with the idea of sensemaking as an ongoing process (Weick, 1995), where emotion leads to a cognitive appraisal and to coping strategies (Frijda, 1986).

Researchers in the social sciences do not necessarily perceive emotion as identical to a physical experience. Rather, they are concerned with the ideas that people share about emotion, including the social construction of emotion by way of human interaction (Harré, 1986). In this view emotion has to be studied in language rather than bodily expressions. It turns the attention to the meaning that people put into notions such as

anger, fear or love, and how this shared meaning affect their actions. (Averill, 1975; Bellelli, 1995)

The debate as to how far emotions should be regarded as universal in their nature or as social constructions is still open (e.g. Ekman & Friesen, 1969; Harré, 1986). This was also echoed in the above reviewed literature on emotion in organizations, which swings between psychological and sociological approaches. The focus in the present dissertation is on the social processes involved in the narrating and sharing of emotional events at the workplace. This means that while acknowledging the physiological quality of emotions, I concentrate on the social causes and consequences of emotion in organizations. I employ methods that aim at capturing the language of the social sharing of emotion. However, the problems of researching and building theory about a phenomenon that is potentially physiological, behavioral and socially constructed all at the same time will accompany us throughout the dissertation, and will be addressed successively. For the perspective adopted here this means offering a cautious welcome to arguments from the natural sciences (Benton, 1991; Gustafsson, 1994). The human body is introduced as a source of experiencing and a means for communicating that allows the individual to make sense out of what is happening (Weick, 1995) and to maintain a viable feeling of the present (Barbalet, 1998).

Research Questions

A workday can be regarded as including a variety of emotional events, which may trigger social sharing of emotion. In the present dissertation the causes and consequences of SSE will be examined and explained with a view to considering the SSE itself as an occasion for sensemaking in organizations. If SSE is both ubiquitous and a powerful need on the part of individuals, as results from social-psychological studies suggest (Rimé et al., 1998), then its occurrence can be expected to affect a variety of organizational phenomena: employees' speaking up, organizational memory, the focus of attention in strategic change,

the selection of information in decision making, or resistance to organizational change - to mention a few. In order to determine the causes and consequences of SSE, it could be useful to examine the way the phenomenon relates to established theories about organizations.

RQ 1: What are the causes and consequences of SSE as an occasion for sensemaking in organizations?

Here, SSE ties up with ideas on the value of gossip and rumor in the information systems of organizations (March and Sevón, 1984; Sjöstrand et al., 2001). Within the general context of sensemaking, organizations can then be seen as interpretation systems (Daft & Weick, 1984) and in certain cases also as systems of heedful interaction (Weick & Roberts, 1993). This way of linking SSE to practices and the diffusion and search for information, and to gossip and rumor invokes the idea of some sort of autonomous organizational coordination (Weick, 1979), thus implying that organizing processes are possible even without the influence of a central governing or planning mind. Such organizing processes also appear in rank-and-file organizations in the form of an adaptation process accompanying the mundane activities of organizational members (March and Sevón, 1984). In early organization theory, organizing processes of this kind were perceived as undesirable. Authors concerned with the conception of bureaucratic organizations (Weber, 1978), scientific management (Taylor, 1967) and the principles of management (Fayol, 1988), sought to overcome such organizing behaviors, which were perceived as unfocused and irrational. Even so, Weber did acknowledge the problematic relationship between bureaucracy and human needs (Albrow, 1992) and Fayol (1988) allowed space for the "soft" side of human interaction in his principle of the "élan du corps." It can be posited that the social sharing of emotion, SSE, may nourish autonomous organizing processes by disseminating what has happened to individual members in their daily practices, by aiding the construction of a

shared systems of meaning, and by helping to build and maintain social networks. The SSE in organizations calls for exploration because it has the potential for improving our understanding of a number of autonomous organizing processes.

RQ 2: What role does SSE play in autonomous organizational coordination?

In this context it would be interesting to determine whether SSE can be suppressed or encouraged, and whether individual people such as managers or informal leaders can exploit it for organizational or personal ends, for instance by spreading emotional accounts of events. Attempts to exert influence through SSE are effective if they focus the attention of subordinates or peers on critical events in a desired way, thus influencing the construction of reality among the organizational members (cf. Berger and Luckmann, 1966; Harré, 1986). In this perspective, SSE ties up with the view of sensemaking as argumentation and manipulation (Weick, 1995)

RQ 3: What is the role of SSE in argumentation and manipulation in organizations?

This introduction provides the reader with an overview of the essays that constitute my dissertation, while also offering a framework for understanding the aim and structure of my work and its overarching concerns. The argument moves from emotion as an individual-level experience to emotion as a social construction. I claim that as an occasion for sensemaking SSE represents a link between the two levels of analysis, and thus affects organizing processes. To this end I first briefly review the theory and prior findings concerning SSE. The discussion then turns to three perspectives on organizations, namely the knowledge-based, the narrative, and the social network theories, and explores how these touch at a common point in SSE in organizations. The discussion closes by looking at the way

emotion can be communicated between organizational members, and how this communication may be governed by social norms. Then I introduce the five constituent papers and indicate their contribution to the overarching concern of the dissertation. I conclude this introduction with a discussion of the possible benefits and drawbacks of the social sharing of emotion in organizations, including certain problematic issues connected with the methodology of researching and writing about emotion.

SOCIAL SHARING OF EMOTION IN ORGANIZATIONS

Reminiscences of emotional events give rise to mental rumination. Emotional disruptions of this kind in our subjective world set off a search for opportunities to talk about the experience with those around us (Pennebaker et al., 1987, Rime et al., 1991). The earliest studies on SSE concerned traumatic situations such as catastrophes, war, torture and so on, or major negative life events like the sudden death of someone close, a serious accident, a sudden illness, or infirmity. The interest in the consequences of these emotional events was driven by the growing awareness of posttraumatic stress disorder. This was first diagnosed in soldiers who suffered "shell shock", while later the diagnosis came to be applied to emergency personnel as well, or to the victims of crime and natural disasters. Debriefing, a kind of guided SSE, has come to be regarded as the most effective first step towards curing these cases.

At the average workplace trauma may be a rare phenomenon, although it is not unheard-of. Disasters and accidents, examples of which have been used as showcases for sensemaking in organizations (Weick, 1990; 1993), can cause traumata at the workplace. Consider for example the case of the devastating fire at the 62-story First Interstate Tower in LA in May 1988. Although the fire caused few deaths, 2500 employees

had to be relocated, and worked under chaotic conditions in the days following the disaster.

"Psychological trauma had taken many forms, depending on how the individual work unit was affected. Clearly, several employees - those in the building during the fire - needed individual counseling to examine and deal with deep personal reactions. However, beyond this obvious group, other employee groups needed trauma counseling with a different emphasis:

1. Employees working outside the downtown area who were not directly affected.
2. Employees in two other downtown First Interstate buildings affected directly by Tower employees newly consolidated into their space.
3. Tower employees who had worked on floors that had burned or been damaged by the fire.
4. Staff support groups responding to the crisis - human resources, communications, public affairs and EOC staff.
5. Senior management responsible for directing the action and making the critical, moment-by-moment decisions.

The fire-related trauma for these groups was magnified if any of the individuals were already experiencing other personal high-impact events, such as divorce or death in their family. Special efforts were made to understand and deal with these complications." (Gorman & McKee, 1990)

It also proved difficult to get employees to work in the building again four months later, after it had been repaired.

The whole process of experiencing an emotional event, ruminating upon it and sharing it with others, calls for the evocation of the emotional event in language and for the presence of addressee. The most common form of SSE is the conversation, and it seems likely that SSE has a variety of implications for both the sharer and the listener (Rimé et al., 1998). Building on their findings regarding traumatic events, Rimé and colleagues (1991) suggested that emotional disruptions of the subjective world probably also applies to mundane emotional experiences, albeit in a less dramatic form. They conclude that everyday emotions and traumatic experiences are not distinct phenomena; rather, they

represent the two extremes on a continuum. Although differing in intensity, the guiding processes are regarded as similar. According to this view emotion is seen not as some kind of disturbance, but as an expression of constant adaptation (Weick, 1995; Rimé et al., 1998). The following example from a novel by Josef Heller (1995) exemplifies a mundane instance of SSE:

"Green, for example, is afraid of Phillip Reeves, a timid, underpaid young employee in Green's own department, and this amuses me greatly because I know that Phillip Reeves, who is Protestant, English, and went to Yale, is afraid of Green; each complains to me about the other. [...]

'I'm absolutely terrified every time I have to go into his office,' Reeves complains to me about Green. 'He'll make some sarcastic remark as soon as I walk in, and I won't be able to think of a single intelligent thing to say in reply. I freeze. It's as though I'm paralyzed and struck dumb. It's all I can do to nod or shake my head or mumble answers to his questions, and I stand there almost speechless with an idiotic smile on my face while he goes on and on making caustic remarks. I can't say that I blame him. Afterwards I hate myself for being so stupid and tongue-tied.'

'I'm absolutely terrified every time I have to speak to him in my office,' Green complains to me about Phillip Reeves. 'It's those good manners of his, I guess, and that vulgar good breeding. I can cope with good manners and I can cope with good breeding, but I can't cope with good manners and good breeding. They throw me off stride, and it's like listening to some total, idiotic stranger running off at the mouth as I hear what I'm saying and realize what I'm doing. I'll make some innocent joke to him when he walks in, just to try to put us at ease, and he'll just draw to a stop and stare back at me with that icy, superior smile frozen on this face. I can't get a response out of him. I become so rattled that I begin making one asinine remark after another in an effort to be friendly, but he just stands there in supercilious contempt and waits for me to finish. He must despise me by now, and I can't say that I blame him. God knows he does nothing to put me at ease, I can tell you that. Afterwards, I hate myself for being so stupid and weak. I wonder why I don't fire him. Because it would be an admission of defeat, that's why, even though his work is lousy.'" (Heller, 1975)

A study using recall procedures found that a large portion of critical emotional events in private settings were socially shared (Pennebaker et al., 1987; Rimé et al., 1991). After allowing for the limitations of selective recall in these studies, Rimé and colleagues (1998) went on to use diary and interval methods to study the social sharing of everyday events, for instance the most important event of a day as recorded in a diary. In line with earlier findings, the diary and interval studies indicated that a large share of daily critical events are shared. After age, gender and cultural background had been tested for, SSE was found to be a stable construct (Rimé et al., 1998). The general pattern was that sharing starts early, the same day or a few days after the event in question. The need to share an event socially diminishes over the days, weeks, months, and years that follow. Findings also indicate that the emotional intensity of the event is positively correlated with sharing behavior. Intense emotions lead to a search for more sharing opportunities, and the event will be recalled and shared for a longer period afterwards.

In the literature on posttraumatic stress it has been suggested that SSE provides mental relief and has a beneficial effect on the sharer's health (Pennebaker et al., 1987). The idea that talking about experienced events can be cathartic goes back to Breuer and Freud's early studies on hysteria (1956/1895), during which both authors experimented with a "talking cure." As regards everyday events in organizational life, too, it has been suggested that employees are "venting" their feelings when indulging in SSE, and are thus releasing negative emotions. For example, a waitress may complain about a difficult customer in the kitchen (backstage), while maintaining her service-oriented behavior toward the customers (frontstage) (Fineman, 1993; cf. Goffman, 1995). However, the findings about SSE were inconclusive in the case of this proposed effect, with regard to both traumatic and everyday events. Talking about a strong emotional event may in some cases even have a re-traumatizing effect. Catharsis seems to be only one of many possible effects of SSE, and there is uncertainty about it. It cannot therefore serve as a major

explanation of people's need to share a substantial part of their emotional experiences (Pennebaker et al., 2001).

The daily flow of emotional work events has also been linked to personal job motivation and job satisfaction (Weiss & Copranzano, 1996). This emotions-as-they-occur perspective assumes an immediate connection between emotional events, mood and these two dependent variables. However, an annoyance like losing a document or the uplift from accomplishing a task on time, as well as stronger emotional events like quarreling with a colleague or workplace accidents may all trigger SSE in organizations even hours, days or weeks after the emotional event itself. This means that although emotions are grounded in the everyday ebb and flow of emotional events they also have long term consequences through SSE (Rimé et al., 1998), for which mood seems an insufficient explanation. The social sharing of these work events is in itself an emotional event, in that mental images, bodily sensations and subjective experience accompany it. Social sharing thus re-elicits memorized emotion in the sharer, and may elicit similar emotion in the listener (Rimé, 1998).

If we now link these observations on SSE with the seven properties of sensemaking (Weick, 1995), we can see SSE as an occasion for sensemaking. In the following seven condensed points I indicate ways in which SSE relates to the properties of sensemaking. For an extensive discussion of the properties themselves the reader is asked to refer to Weick (1995).

- *Grounded in identity construction.* SSE constitutes a controlled, intentional kind of sensemaking that is elicited by emotions that challenge the conception of self. It presents a way of projecting an identity on the environment and of learning from the consequences. It is an attempt to shape, and react to, the environment that confronts it. The focus on emotion in social sharing is concerned with the need for interpreting the self in relation to the environment. Thus, it contributes to the maintenance of a consistent self-conception.

- *Retrospective*. SSE means talking about past emotional events. It has the potential to provide a sense of order, clarity, and rationality, which Weick gives as goals of sensemaking.
- *Enactive of sensible environments*. While accounting for emotional events, SSE creates an environment that is pertinent to the individual in that it contributes to a social construction of reality and the development of emotion knowledge.
- *Social*. SSE requires at least one addressee; at the same time it will have emotional and cognitive consequences for addressee(s). SSE focuses the attention on talk, discourse and conversation as common modes of social contact.
- *Ongoing*. SSE provides the individual with a sense of the present.
- *Focused on and by extracted cues*. SSE focuses on and is focused by the emotional events that are being talked about.
- *Driven by plausibility rather than accuracy*. When people revisit emotional events by sharing them with others, they are generally satisfied with results that are plausible in terms of their own re-assessment and the reactions of the addressees.

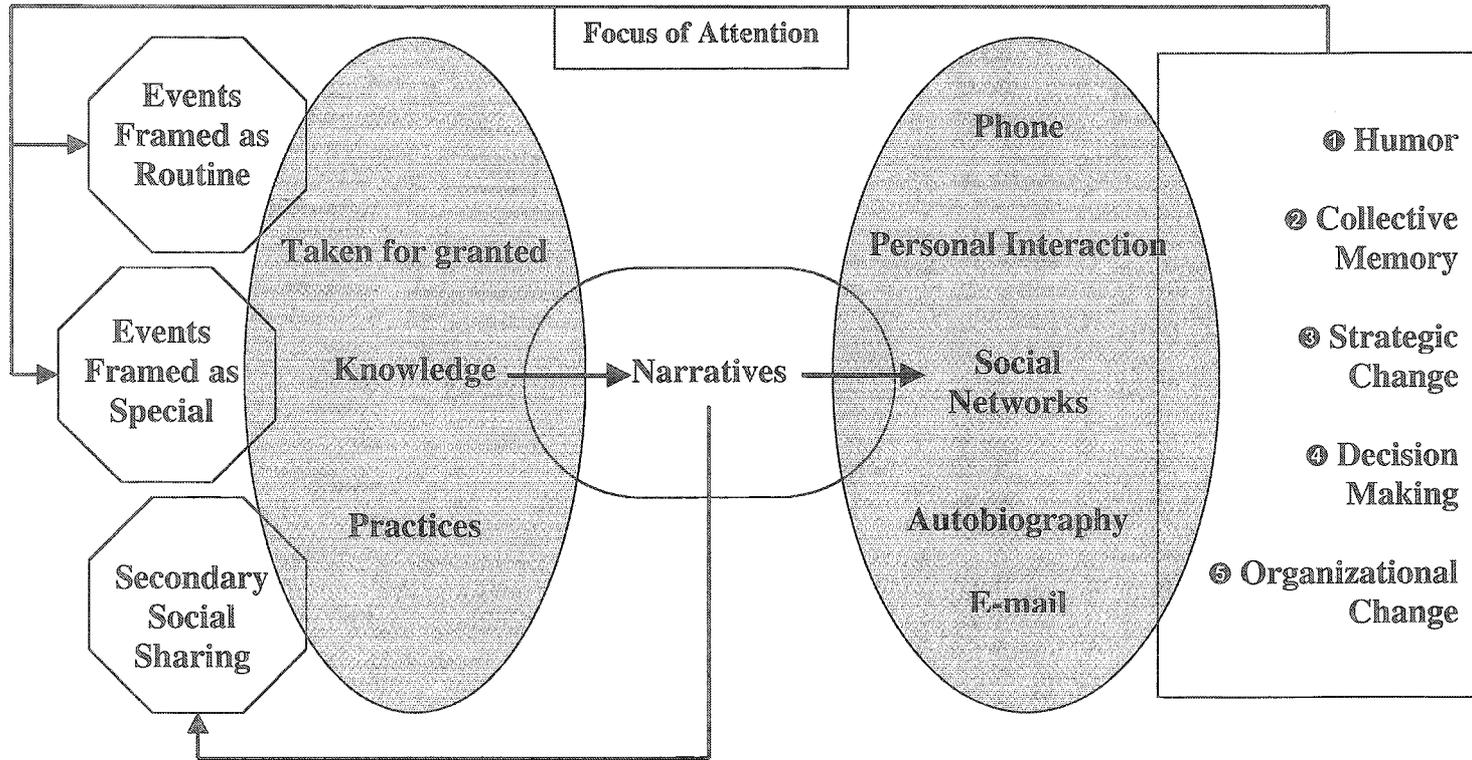
Making sense of things by talking about an emotional event together with colleagues or intimates may help the individual to perceive the personal experience as part of some organization-wide event, development or trend such as strategic change or a corporate crisis, or to see it as concerning personal matters only such as being passed over for a promotion or having to cope with frequent computer breakdowns. Weick (1995, p.46) remarks in relation to sensemaking and emotion: "*It makes evolutionary good sense to construct an organism that reacts significantly when the world is no longer the way it was.*" Polemically it may be added that it also makes good sense when this organism doesn't have to do all its sensemaking at one go, but can return to the event in memory and ponder upon it in a series of emotional evocations. New twists and a different meaning may be discovered in the emotional event. And for a social organism like the human being, such an evocation would very probably involve speaking

repeatedly about the emotional event with various members of its own group, to seek support in making sense of it.

Exploratory research with people in occupations such as psychotherapy, nursing or emergency care has revealed that many emotional work events are shared both with colleagues *and* personal intimates. For example, after being called to deal with a train wreck in which several people had died, fire police officers later engaged in multiple sharing of the experience. Another example showed nurses sharing many parts of their daily work experiences with their colleagues and their partners at home. These observations suggest that two types of need may motivate SSE at the workplace. On the one hand there is a socio-affective need that involves a search for emotional comfort from people we are attached to. On the other, there is a socio-cognitive need that involves a search for information and advice and the reaffirmation of meaning in the occupational role, which may require listeners possessing expertise or credibility with respect to the emotional event (Rimé, 2003, personal communication). However, the boundaries between these needs and the groups likely to meet them may often be blurred. But these exploratory investigations do at least give a first indication of the value of SSE as an occasion for sensemaking in organizations.

The properties of SSE noted so far tie up especially well with three theories of organization, namely the knowledge-based, the narrative and the social network theories. The theory of SSE itself will unfold further as we explore these three perspectives. The following review aims to explore and discuss the theories with a view to explaining SSE as an occasion for sensemaking in organizations. Note that it is not the purpose of this dissertation to unify the three perspectives on organizations. Rather, each one is regarded dialectically as corresponding to a part of the social sharing process and will be discussed in this light. For an overview of the interconnection of the three theories of organizations in SSE see Figure 1.

FIGURE 1
Social Sharing of Emotion in Organizations



Essays:

- ① Nonsense Makes Sense; ② Addressing Collective Memory; ③ Social Sharing of Emotion and Strategic Change;
- ④ Group Polarization Revisited; ⑤ From Theater Theory to Business Practice

This overview shows the process beginning with organizational members perceiving work events as emotional experiences, which are framed preliminary as "special" or as "routine". Special events may include anything from traumatic experiences to everyday hassles and joys. An event is framed as special when it is in dissonance with taken-for-granted acts or common practices. Due to their emotional intensity such special events tend to be socially shared as narratives, which in turn are inserted into the social network of an organizations along a variety of channels: personal interactions, phone calls, e-mails, even autobiographies and so on. All the talk about emotional events thus generates a secondary layer of social sharing, whereby the original listeners pass the story on to third parties. In this way narrative accounts of emotional work events can be diffused through the organization, perhaps even establishing themselves as part of a corpus of organizational narratives. The SSE process as described so far can affect many aspects of organizational life. In the present dissertation, however, I focus explicitly on its impact on speaking up, organizational memory, strategic change, decision making and organizational change - each of which will be the subject of one of the papers making up the dissertation. It can be assumed that these outcomes of SSE will then in turn influence the focus of attention among organizational members, and the framing of future work events as special or routine (George & Brief, 1996).

Knowledge Sharing and SSE

The knowledge-based view of the firm (e.g. Hayek, 1945; Kogut & Zander, 1992) provides a useful point of departure for exploring SSE in organizational contexts. The theory of knowledge and the firm posits that no single organizational member possesses all the knowledge needed by their organization, nor do they know when or how any of this knowledge may be relevant. The firm can thus be regarded as a system of distributed knowledge, which also means that its knowledge is self-contained, inherently indeterminate and

continually reconfiguring and cannot therefore be surveyed in its entirety (Tsoukas, 1996). A further limitation is that language cannot grasp all aspects of knowledge (Polanyi, 1962). However, even scholars who describe the limitations of language admit that it represents a crucial way of sharing knowledge among organizational members and across industries (Appleyard, 1996; Tsai, 2002). It is even assumed that tacit knowledge can be expressed in language, if only to a limited extent and if attention is focused on it (Polanyi, 1962). Here we are touching on the theory of tacit knowledge and its translation into explicit knowledge in learning cycles (Nonaka and Takeuchi, 1995), where this problem is addressed. Central to this perspective is the idea that practice, imbued as it is with tacit knowledge, is a meaningful type of knowledge, indicating what has to be done when a specific event occurs. Hence, practitioners rely in their practices not only on explicit knowledge, but also on factual and organizational knowledge (Tsoukas, 1996). This need for various kinds of knowledge is also reflected in the idea that small talk, gossip and rumors are all part of an unfocused but constant spreading of and searching for information about everyday practices among the members of the organization (March and Sevón, 1984; Sjöstrand et al., 2001).

When asking employees to describe their practices, they may find it difficult to put their actions into words. However, any interrupted practice, i.e. the frustration of an expectation, may trigger a need to find out what lays behind it. The interruption of a practice leads to emotional reactions as well as to cognitive appraisal and a search for sense in what has happened, all of which persist until the interruption is resolved (Weick, 1995). In order to find clarification and assistance on how to integrate or solve a challenge to their practices, employees engage in social sharing of emotion, thus creating a description of their practices and the encountered obstruction. The challenge to their practices provides the necessary attention and background to give expression to tacit knowledge.

An example can perhaps elucidate these ideas. Patriotta (2003, pp. 360-361) visited the FIAT Miafiori Pressing Plant and observes the way technologists encounter problems in their practices. With a detective's mind they investigate the problem, until a solution is found.

"I go back with to the UTE [Elementary Technical Units] box with the technologist. While the solution is still pending, I ask him to reflect on the episode:

'The anomaly was reported yesterday to the chief repairman, who had passed the information to us. The customer had returned five containers of defective parts, 156 in total, because they presented a deformed hole. We took the faulty component from the repairing team, it was about 3-3.30 p.m. Together with the UTE leader of the second shift, I had a look at the anomaly. We consulted the maintenance person who was on duty when the lot was being produced. He said he did not perform any intervention on the machines. Then we had a word with the maintenance leader and with the line conductor of the second shift because they had completed the lot. Basically they had worked for three hours on Monday afternoon - because the problem occurred on Monday afternoon - before exchanging the dies. At 6 p.m. they performed the die change. I wanted to find out whether they had noticed any problem. They mentioned to me that, indeed, they had not noticed any problem nor had they performed any intervention. What they say is confirmed by a line conductor, who had called me for a different problem, around 4 o'clock. Meanwhile we had a look at the component, and the anomaly was not there, it did not exist at four. The die change took place at six. I do not know what happened between four and six, but the problem must have occurred within that lapse of time. Yesterday when I took the part and saw the anomaly, the first thing I wanted to establish was who had caused the fault. I wanted to establish whether it was a problem related to the end of the batch, or if an intervention had been performed, without amending the faulty parts. But I was not able to solve the puzzle. I went home without having solved my problem. This morning I arrived in the office, and I saw a sheet reporting the 156 defective pieces. I asked the UTE leader whether any intervention on the machines had been performed on Monday morning. He replied

no. We decided to investigate the problem further and we did what you have just seen.'

Later on, a phone call informs the technologist that the puzzle is solved, revealing yet another possibility that had not been envisaged. The defective parts returned by the assembly plant do not belong to the lot that had just been completed on Monday, but to the previous lot of the same component, produced a few days earlier. The problem had occurred during the second shift and the die change had been brought forward because there was a broken blueprint on one die. Thus, the operators had detected the defect on the components, but had not performed the check backward on the containers that presented the anomaly."

SSE thus emerges as a constant and autonomous mode of sharing of knowledge, especially knowledge represented in practices, and that in its turn promotes coordination within the organization. Knowledge is thus conceptualized here as embedded in discursive practice and linked to the social construction of reality (Berger and Luckmann, 1966). When the members of an organization communicate with each other, they rely on a shared set of meanings. Emotional expressions are certainly part of what makes communication at the workplace meaningful, and it has been suggested that they also help organizational learning (for an overview see Russ, 2002). In order to build up a shared set of meanings, however, organizational members need to know something more about each others emotions. It is not enough to make an accurate appraisal of one's colleagues' emotions at a specific moment: this would fall in with an emotions-as-they-are-managed perspective. It is in fact equally interesting to learn about others people's usual reactions to all kinds of situations. Not all of this can be covered by rules; it is also necessary to recognize aspects that are taken for granted (Tsoukas, 1996). Thus, it can be posited that what is taken for granted increases successively as a result of the daily social sharing. For new members of the organization this is an important element in their socialization in the practices and social life of their new setting.

A closer look into the theory of SSE reveals all the more clearly its role in the sharing of knowledge about to practices. SSE researchers agree with Weick (1995) that emotions may elicit ambiguous sensations (Rimé et al., 1998). Referring to social comparison theory, Rimé and colleagues (1991) suggest that when people are confronted with ambiguous sensations they start looking for clarifying information in their social environment. The ambiguous and often confusing sensations elicited by emotion can thus often be clarified and resolved, if people share them with other members of the same environment. At the same time, though, emotions are dense and inexact experiences that call for cognitive articulation. With the help of language, and by talking to someone else, the individual may be able to "unfold" the emotional material, label it, and organize it into sequences conforming to the rules of logical thought. In this way people can distance themselves from emotional events - something that is important since emotions can challenge the beliefs that people hold about themselves, about others, and about the world. SSE allows them to work through the emotional experience, making it easier for them to restore their beliefs and to find an acceptable meaning in what has happened.

The critical part of SSE in this process is the way it influences on what is taken for granted in an organization. It is suggested here that SSE processes and completes the emotional memory of events. SSE thus helps in the construction and dissemination of social knowledge about emotion. Memories of emotional events contain a large amount of information about the event in question, about related emotions and about the relevant emotional response. When someone is part of an organization or a group, their emotions can elicit excessive self-focused attention, thus dissociating them from the social environment. Through the social sharing of the event, the social environment can come to acknowledge and understand a state that has been privately experienced, and can propose socially accepted ways of defining the experience and the culturally prescribed forms for the managing and expressing of emotions (Rimé et al., 1998).

On a basis of the theory reviewed above, I assume that emotion and work events are inseparable. Emotions become understandable to the organizational members in relation to the work events that elicited them. For example a person feeling fear without any reason is usually described as suffering from a pathological condition. Some clarifying comments on the structure, causes and consequences of emotional work events are thus necessary at this point in our argument. The chosen perspective is that of individual-level analysis, since the extent to which groups or organizations, as social entities, can possess emotions has not yet been empirically clarified. A basic assumption is that things happen to employees in everyday work settings, and that employees react emotionally to these events. Here, the definition of "event" is very broad. Essentially, an event may be any happening in a certain place during a particular period of time, and in particular a happening that individuals frame as important (Weiss and Copranzano, 1996; Fisher, 2002). Events of high subjective relevance generate a significant emotional reaction. Emotional events may also have prolonged effects by influencing individual people's moods. Further, a distinction is made between emotional events and episodes. An episode can be seen as composed of a number of events, with the linkage consisting of the mood of the individual and the theme of the episode, for instance the prolonged negotiations of a business deal with an important customer. During an episode an employee remains in a state of continuous emotional engagement, that is to say a heightened level of arousal and attention (Frijda, 1993), which means that during an episode their attention remains focused on issues related to the underlying theme. Episodes are seen as the "ebb and flow" of emotional experiences over time, with mood as an underlying emotional tie (Weiss and Copranzano, 1996).

In the organizational context the view of knowledge-sharing and the sharing of emotional events adopted here may recall discussions of the organization as an "interpretation system" (Daft and Weick, 1984) or an "inquiring system" (Churchman, 1971)

that produces knowledge about itself and its environment. There are also links here with empirical work on collective minds in ship-navigation teams (Hutchins, 1993) or flight deck crews (Weick and Roberts, 1993). The knowledge that is necessary for such tasks is distributed throughout the teams in redundant form. The social sharing of work events can be seen as a way of fueling the systems of distributed knowledge, in that it diffuses practice-related information about work events and influences the social construction of reality. SSE may facilitate adaptations to a changing environment. However, too much social sharing may stiffen the organization and keep the employees nervous, while too little social sharing may keep employees unaware of environmental changes.

Proposition 1: Fulfilling the human need for SSE as an occasion for sensemaking enhances, mediates and lubricates the sharing of knowledge that imbues practices in organizations.

Narratives and SSE

When people talk in a vivid way about the work events they have experienced, they usually do so in the form of a narrative account that includes the description of a sequence in time and involves one or more focal actors. Such narratives also have an identifiable narrative voice and an evaluative frame of reference as well as offering other indicators of content and context to guide listeners in their interpretations of what they hear (Pentland, 1999). These other indicators include emotional expressions on the part of the narrator, i.e. the verbal, postural, vocal or facial cues that are indicative of the social sharing of emotion (Rimé, 1998; Pentland, 1999).

While acknowledging the links that have also been posited between narratives in organizations and critical theory (Boyce, 1996) and postmodern theory (Boje, 1995), I will focus in the present discussion on the social-constructionist view of narrative

in order to maintain a coherent picture of SSE as an occasion for sensemaking.

Weick (1995) suggests that organizational reality is based on narratives. Organizational members may then perform their own narratives, which provide legitimacy for past actions (Boje, 1991; Czarniawska, 1996). These performances may refer to what is already taken for granted ("you know the story"), while also adding new narratives to the corporate culture and revising the old ones that link the present to the past and raise expectations regarding the future (Boje, 1991). Narratives are seen as the "sensemaking currency" among the members of an organizations (Boje, 1991, p. 106), and action is described as depending on the human ability to think in narrative terms (Weick, 1995). According to this perspective, narratives may have different origins. They may have developed direct out of recent work events, or they may have existed for some while in the organization and have been re-invoked, changed or passed on from one person to another in the way of myths.

The organization as an entity is conceptualized as a storytelling arena, which can be described as possessing and processing a variety of narratives that capture significant aspects of organizational knowledge (Orr, 1996; Brown and Duguid, 2000). Organizational events imprinted with beliefs and values are told and re-told, gradually coming to constitute part of the organizational identity (Boje, 1991; Czarniavska, 1996). Approaches such as these all assume that information of practical value is embedded and communicated in narratives (Brown and Duguid, 2000; Lounsbury and Glynn, 2001) and that narrating is in itself a mode of organizing (Czarniavska, 1996). This reconnects narratives to SSE as a form of knowledge-sharing, in that the ability to construct accounts of our actions and the actions of others is central to our social relationships, which also means that narratives reflect and shape organizational practices (Orr, 1996). Patriotta (2003) makes this point beautifully in his phenomenological study of a Fiat pressing plant. The "detective stories," told by the employees, reflecting the way a problem

arose in their everyday practices and how they tried to solve it, were at the heart of their knowledge-sharing. He shows how narratives direct attention, how they affect knowledge-sharing and collective remembering, thus also affecting the taken-for-granted elements in the organizational culture.

On the subject of emotion and narrative, it was found in a study of urban legends that the constituent narratives were more likely to be retold if they elicited a strong emotional reaction (Heath et al., 2001). The study supports the proposition that SSE and the search for rumors and gossip and their diffusion in organizations are related (March & Sevón, 1984). In this context narratives are regarded as shaping the "emotional climate" of the organization (Van Buskirk & McGrath, 1992). These observations tie up with the findings that emotion focuses attention, initiating and mediating narratives in the course of being socially shared (Rimé et al., 1998).

Research on listener response to social sharing of emotion has indicated that the addressees in such sharing processes also appear to be subject to socially revealed emotions (Pennebaker et al., 1987). An instance of SSE thus, becomes an emotional event for the listener. If, as proposed, emotional events elicit SSE, it then seems probable that a listener will share the narrative with a third person. This process has been labeled *secondary social sharing*, and research suggests that it is a frequent phenomenon (Christophe and Rimé, 1997).

The apparently frequent occurrence of secondary social sharing raises a socially awkward issue. Sharing often takes place between intimates and, if the shared events are of a sensitive nature, generally under a vow of confidentiality, i.e. the listener is asked not to tell anybody else. However, research on secondary social sharing reveals that a great many of the of emotional events that have been socially shared are later recounted during a secondary round of social sharing with third parties, even if it means breaking a vow of confidentiality. Further, a vow of confidentiality may include a promise that the identity of the original sharer should be kept secret, but SSE researchers have

found that the identity of the original sharer is regularly revealed to a third person. The request for confidentiality - often expressed in phrases like "Don't tell anybody..." - is frequently ignored (Christophe and Rimé, 1997).

Social sharing of emotion offers a micro-level explanation for the development of shared narratives. Organizations, where organizational structure and culture define the field and the content of social sharing, provide a fruitful arena for the study of SSE. Here, secondary social sharing and the frequent disregard of the plea for secrecy, suggest the possibility of a possible diffusion effect, i.e. that narratives may be expected to "travel" through the organization in the way of rumors, impressing themselves on a large and varied group among the organizational members. This supposition is supported by empirical findings on organizational narratives (Boje, 1991; Orr, 1996; Patriotta, 2003) The driving-force behind such diffusion appears in the valence (positive/negative) and the intensity of the emotions elicited by a work event (Rimé et al., 1998). It seems probable that these factors are correlated with the importance of an event in relation to the social environment of the organizational member(s) concerned. In hierarchical and functionally oriented organizations, SSE may acquire a flowing quality, whereby narratives "climb" up through the organizational levels or "cascade" down from managers to their subordinates.

Dutton and Ashford (1993) hypothesize that the emotional indicators of a narrative can help to push new ideas as managers seek to sell strategic issues to superiors and peers. This suggests that the argumentative and manipulative elements in narrative act as a source of sensemaking in organizations (Weick, 1995). By arguing and manipulating, people in organizations can influence the social construction of reality through the narratives they produce. When SSE endows the narratives with a personal note by including personal emotional experiences it represents a particularly subtle way of arguing and manipulating.

Proposition 2: The social sharing of emotion involves narrative production and has positive effects on the diffusion of the narratives thus created through the organization.

SSE in Social Networks

Theory on knowledge sharing and narratives tends to give an optimistic picture of the possibilities open to organizational members to share practical knowledge and recount narratives freely in their organizations. Social network theory, on the other hand, is more cautious. It suggests that organizational members maintain more or less stable networks that include work colleagues and other people outside their organization with whom they interact on a frequent basis, such as family and friends (Tichy, Tushman and Fombrun, 1979; Labianca et al., 1998; Sparrowe et al., 2001). The social networks in the organization may be based on friendship or task-related interactions (Tsai, 2002). Social networks have been considered as a kind of practical knowledge in themselves (Kogut, 2000). However, for the perspective adopted in this dissertation, it is more helpful to look at social networks as channels for the social sharing of emotion.

In a study of a multiunit technology company, Tsai (2002) regarded social networks as something that served intra-organizational knowledge-sharing within the formal hierarchical structure and in informal lateral relations. Tsai found that formal hierarchical structure restricted knowledge-sharing in the technology company, and thus also its intra-organizational coordination. It should be noted here that he understands hierarchical structure as a form of centralization. Informal lateral interactions, on the other hand, provided better opportunities for knowledge-sharing and thus enhanced organizational coordination. Intuitively we would expect SSE to occur less frequently in formal structural settings such as meetings, and more often in informal lateral interactions. In this regard, research on SSE has suggested that the diffusion of narratives doesn't

happen randomly. It is not always the proverbial stranger on the bus to whom people tell their life stories. Individuals usually confide emotional events to people they trust, or people with whom they enjoy stable social relations (Rimé et al., 1998). Further support for this view comes from case studies of organizations involved in some radical change, where recurring interactions among the organizational members acquire a binding emotional quality (Berg, 1979; Huy, 2002). We can thus expect SSE to be more frequent in work relationships containing elements of informality, trust and friendship.

In social network analysis it is the intensity, reciprocity and clarity of expectations that define the nature of the links between organizational members (Tichy, Tushman and Fombrun, 1979). In the case of SSE it is claimed, links are formed when people's beliefs have been challenged, and their basic feeling of security is undermined. It is then that they are likely to turn to their colleagues and friends for social support and assistance in coping. By sharing the emotion with significant members of their social environment they are able to find external support for their reactions, which in turn facilitates and strengthens their attempts to cope. Since SSE appears to reduce the personal distance between sharer and listener, perhaps even having a lasting impact on their social relationship, it has also been suggested social sharing actually strengthens interpersonal relationships and social integration in general (Rimé et al., 1998). Listeners may respond on a later occasion, for instance by sharing some emotional events of their own. Regarded in this light, SSE emerges as a kind of "grooming" process that creates and maintains social networks in organizations. It encourages interlocked behaviors and intertwining interaction patterns, so called double interacts, which in turn may build up a kind of autonomous organizational coordination (Weick, 1979).

Social network theory states that the transactional content of interaction includes four types of exchange: emotion, power, information, and goods and service (Tichy, Tushman and Fombrun, 1979). The fourth of these is not so interesting in our

present discussion of SSE in organizations, but the first three do tie up with our analysis as conducted so far. The exchange of emotion and information ties up with the theory on knowledge-sharing and narrative production. The exchange of power, i.e. the idea of networks as being driven by coordination and competition, touches on the role of SSE in argumentation and manipulation (Tsai, 2002). It has been found, for example, that high and low self-monitors exploit their network positions in different ways. High self-monitors may outperform their peers and become leaders because of their greater skill in social interactions: they are better at pacing conversations, at employing humor, and in the process of getting acquainted they meet the self-disclosures of the other party with personal disclosures of their own (Mehra et al., 2001). High self-monitors may be regarded as special nodes (e.g. opinion leaders) in the social networks. They can be expected to do more social sharing of emotion that is regarded as relevant by their peers than low self-monitors, which establishes them as special nodes for knowledge sharing and the initiation of shared narratives.

Further support for the view that SSE has a vital part in building and maintaining social networks comes from the body of theory concerned with the neurological anchorage of emotions. This is not the occasion for an extensive discussion of the neurology of emotions (for an overview, see LeDoux 1998; Damasio, 1994; 2000; Greenfield, 2001). Nonetheless, some of the findings that have emerged from neurological science might be able to help us to understand the role of emotion in social life. There appears to be widespread agreement that when the brain processes information it engages both its cognitive and its emotional abilities at the same time. It therefore seems likely that emotion affects memory and the cognitive processing of information, and that the converse holds true. Emotion and cognition are regarded as being entwined (LeDoux, 1998), which strengthens the ideal type of emotional man in organizational research. This observation paved the way for the assumption that emotion is a constant influencing factor in human behavior, and

not an extraordinary event as colloquial language suggests. In everyday life it is impossible for an individual *not* to feel. Consistent with this observation Damasio (1994) developed a theory assuming that emotions provide constant guidance in evaluation of social situations. He bases this assumption on the case of a railroad worker, who suffered from a brain lesion after a severe accident. This left him incapable of adequate emotional responses in social encounters, which had negative consequences for his social life. But the lesion appeared to have left his cognitive abilities intact when it came to evaluating his situation. It seems that in order to build and maintain effective social networks people need a good capacity for understanding and expressing their own emotions and for the adequate recognition of emotions in others. These ideas tie up with work on emotional intelligence (Salovey & Meyer, 1990; Fineman, 2000; Caruso et al., 2002), which suggests that dysfunctional behavior leads to socially inadequate evaluation of the information available and to the severance of social ties. It is further proposed that organizations depend on just these social ties and interactions if they are to be able to function as social systems - which implies not only that the individual members of an organization require need to express and talk about their everyday emotional work experiences for their own sake, but event that the organization requires it of them.

In sum, although social network theory adds a valuable perspective for examining the effects of SSE on the construction of reality. In particular, it allows for the exploration of the boundaries of knowledge sharing via narrative production during social sharing of emotion.

Proposition 3: SSE helps to create and maintain the social networks of organizational members, with the result that the social networks function as the main channels for the sharing of emotional work events.

SOCIAL NORMS REGARDING SSE

Revisiting the theory of knowledge-sharing, narratives and social networks in this way has thrown a clearer light on the causes and consequences of SSE in organizations. Although the revisited theory indicates that emotion and sensemaking are constantly in operation in organizations, it remains to be seen whether the same is true of SSE. Up to now I have been implying that people in organizations can engage in SSE in their social networks whenever and in whatever way it pleases them. However, the consequences of SSE go beyond those arising from the dyadic interaction between friends talking over a cup of coffee, for instance. SSE also involves groups and organizations, both of which may have social norms of their own regarding the appropriate expression of emotion (Hochschild, 1983). This brings up the question of social restrictions on SSE that may evolve from the specific context of organizational life. To address this question I revisit theory on social norms of expressing emotions in organizations, which is basically tied to the ways that emotions are communicated. Thus, the model of SSE in organizations as presented in Figure 1 is further positioned in its organizational context.

A groundbreaking study of emotion management among flight attendants (Hochschild, 1983) introduced several new ideas into the sociological discourse of emotion. In the case of organizations, "feeling rules" prescribe the appropriate range and duration of emotional expression in a given context. For example, in their job description flight attendants are requested to show customer friendliness, and they are trained to smile at customers and to stimulate positive emotions. To achieve the appropriate expression, deep or surface acting both allow the individual employees to modulate their own emotional expressions according to the feeling rules. Deep acting means attempting to feel genuinely what is demanded by the job, while surface acting essentially means faking the expression of an emotion, at least to a credible extent. Scholars who deny that rules about what people

actually feel can be enacted resort to the narrower concept of "display rules", whereby only the actual physical expressions is thought to be guided by social norms (cf. Ekman & Friesen, 1969). But even these scholars agree with Hochschild (1983) that when individual employees try to produce the appropriate emotional expression, it is accurate to refer to it as "emotion work". And when a job description demands that an employee should seek to induce an emotion in a customer or a colleague, Hochschild (1983) speaks of "emotional labor". According to this theory, emotions are displayed for instrumental purposes such as productivity, customer satisfaction, or profitability.

Hochschild's ideas have hitherto dominated the sociological discourse of emotion in organizations. However, it has been argued that her theory about feeling rules and the resulting emotional labor may be too inflexible (Wouters, 1989; Martin et al., 1998). According to this critique, it is disputable whether feeling rules should or even can, direct emotional expressions in organizations. Firstly, in light of the theory that sees emotions as part of a constant process of social adaptation (Shaver et al., 1987; Weick, 1995; Rimé et al., 1998), feeling rules would limit this effect by prescribing a fixed set of acceptable emotional expressions. Secondly, feeling rules and emotional labor may lead to a dissonance between actual feelings and the expressions demanded with negative consequences for the well-being of employees (Hochschild, 1983; Van Maanen & Kunda). Thirdly, in everyday life a variety of emotional expressions are usually acceptable as reactions to a certain stimulus. The concept of feeling rules captures this bandwidth insufficiently (Wouters, 1989). And finally, emotions may override feeling rules (e.g. "he lost his nerve"), and most people are aware - and at times tolerant - of the fact that emotions can have this effect (Wouters, 1989). In sum, feeling rules, implemented by management for the sake of economic rationality, are not efficient as a means of control, nor are they necessarily favorable to the purposes of an organization (Martin et al., 1998).

Martin and colleagues (1998) addressed these concerns from a feminist perspective in an ethnographic study of "bounded emotionality" at the Body Shop. In their study they operate with the ideal type of a feminist organization, which has many features in common with collectivist organizations. They contrast it with the ideal types of the traditional bureaucratic (Weber, 1978) and normative (e.g. Schein 1985) organization models. The last two are described as suppressing or limiting their employees' emotional expression at work. With regard to the feminist organization Martin and colleagues (1998) refer to gender research that has found women more apt to self-disclosure, to the expression of a wider range of emotions, and to seeking a work-life balance whereby work concerns do not take precedence over family needs. In the case of the Body Shop, an organization with a predominance of female employees at all organizational levels, Martin and colleagues found a fairly loose connection between social norms regarding emotional expressions and actual everyday emotions and emotional expressions. This bounded emotionality is characterized by an intersubjective rather than a prescribed restriction of emotional expressions, spontaneously emergent work feelings, tolerance and ambiguity, a heterarchy of values, an integrated self-identity and authenticity, as well as a sense of community (Mumby & Putnam, 1992; Putnam & Mumby, 1993; Martin et al., 1998). This all results in a view of emotions and emotional expressions as being bounded rather than strictly governed by social norms.

Martin and colleagues (1998) point out that emotional expressions are not arbitrary nor entirely suppressible; rather, they are dependent on organizational structure, status, gender and cultural background. Further, it is suggested that when an organization allows more space for emotional expressions, these expressions will find a sort of equilibrium in bounded emotionality. As regards the social sharing of emotion, reverting to the theory of rumor and gossip in organizations (March & Sevón, 1984), to the ideas of informal social networks (Tsai, 2002), and to the findings on the ubiquitous nature of SSE among

women and men (Rimé et al., 1998), we can see that SSE is unlikely to be entirely guided or suppressed even in male dominated bureaucratic organizations. Also, SSE is usually not subject to explicit organizational rules. Following this line of argument it can be posited that SSE is in general *bounded* by the social norms regarding emotional expression in organizations.

The picture of SSE as bounded by social norms regarding emotional expression becomes clearer when we consider how emotions are communicated between organizational members. SSE is an emotional event in itself, and its emotion is communicated in verbal descriptions and non-verbal behavioral cues, which evokes an idea of emotion being directly transferred from person A to person B, and that the same emotion can then be socially shared a second time with another person C. However, the listeners may get a different picture of the emotional work event from the one that the sharer intended. They may also feel different about the event. The perceived content will depend on each individual's sensemaking on what just that individual takes for granted (Weick, 1995). The question of whether emotional cues can be transferred with any accuracy can be clarified, albeit not solved, if we also take the physical, behavioral and socially constructed nature of emotion into account.

The verbal cues appear as semantic representations of emotion, as in: "I was *sad* and *angry* about the situation." It is assumed that the way emotions are labeled in the social discourse defines the structure of social schemata. There are innumerable such emotion words which also vary across languages (Averill, 1975). Labeling an emotion makes it possible for the individual to reflect upon it and to communicate it to others. Further, labeling defines the way individual people apply words to their experiences or expectations. Diffuse physical sensations are linked to contextual factors, and an emotion word is sought that describes the event experienced by the teller and makes it communicable in a socially shared language (Belleli, 1995). Labeling also depends on the ongoing nature of emotional events and on the awareness of the individual. Any labeling has thus to

be regarded as preliminary, because emotions do not exhaust themselves during the emotional event itself but persist into further social interactions (Rimé et al., 1998). The labeling of emotion is not arbitrary, however, since the labels are linked to a complex and socially shared language and culture that also embraces knowledge of emotion. Thus, emotional memory is socially constructed by labeling processes, and the use of a given label can be expected to activate the associated knowledge of such emotion words automatically in relation to situations, physical experiences and behavior (Averill, 1975; Shaver et al. 1987; Belleli, 1995).

Conceptions about 'basic emotions' can help to elucidate the interplay between emotional reactions and the labels attached to them. There is a scholarly dispute about whether or not basic emotions do exist as fixed categories. However, even researchers who dismiss the idea of innate emotional reactions do build hierarchies of emotions, ending in a group of emotions that are called basic. These lists vary from one scholar to another, but the emotions most certain to be included are love, anger, fear, sadness, joy, and surprise. The theory of basic emotions suggests that, as people age, these emotions "blend" in various ways to produce emotional responses to new stimuli. This blending is said to create new emotion scripts or prototypes, which help individual people to orient themselves in their daily interactions with others. The emotion prototypes thus created promote the individual's adaptation to cultural conventions or critical life events. Over the course of a life the prototypes become more complex as they form and store appropriate emotional responses, and re-form them whenever new situations are encountered. We can call this the development of a tacit emotion knowledge. The complexity of all these emotional reactions is captured only approximately in the semantic labels that a language provides (Shaver et al., 1987).

The limitations of labeling emotional experiences in a socially shared language have been made apparent in cross-cultural research on emotion (Kitayama and Markus, 1994). It has been noted that individual languages have semantic emotion

concepts not directly translatable into other languages. The labeling of an emotion goes beyond mere categorization, in that it seeks coherence between the individual emotional experience connected with an event and the socially shared knowledge and expectations attaching to the emotion.

It can be presumed that individual people also develop and adapt their own emotional knowledge when they work in an organization, and that the organization consequently tends to socialize specific emotion knowledge in its members, probably by developing social norms for labeling, which find their expression in SSE.

However, a sharer has to rely on the receptivity of those listening, not only to the verbal account but also with the non-verbal emotional cues, i.e. any postural, facial or vocal expressions. In social psychology literature it is held that emotions can be transferred fairly accurately from one person to another, so that two people come to share the emotion concerned. It seems that humans possess an excellent intuitive skill for decoding emotion from the behavior of others. An alert receiver takes, less than a second to get an impression of an emotion that is apparently moving another person (Ekman, 1982). A theoretical concept referring explicitly to this phenomenon, and therefore of relevance to this dissertation, is *emotional contagion*. This means that people in the vicinity of a sharer may pick up and mimic certain postural, vocal and facial expressions (Hatfield et al., 1994), very often in unconscious imitation. It has been said in connection with the idea of emotional contagion that it is possible to "catch" an emotion. Emotional contagion theory suggests that by imitating other people's emotional cues, the same emotion that is present in the human source of the imitation is elicited in the receiver as well. This effect, according to sensory feedback theory, means that the unconscious bodily imitation of an emotion lets people to experience the emotion. According to this view, exchanging a smile and adopting an elated posture, for example, would promote a positive feeling. Work groups have been found to provide fertile ground for emotional contagion among the

organization members (Bartel & Saavedra, 2000; Pugh, 2001; Barsade, 2002). *Empathy* produces a similar effect to that aroused by mimicking an emotional expression. In this case, however, the sharing partner decodes an emotional expression, which prepares the way for an adequate response. A sad stance, for instance, may provoke comforting behavior. Both, emotional contagion and empathy can be suggested to facilitate the social sharing of emotion.

If we reconsider the initial question of the social norms for the sharing of emotion under bounded emotionality (Mumby and Putnam, 1992) in light of the above theories, then it seems likely that SSE is influenced by the semantic labeling of emotions as well as by postural, facial and vocal cues. On a practical level, this is illustrated by the so-called "e-mail dilemma." Short information messages, distributed via e-mail in organizations are frequently misunderstood, because the absence of any emotional priming in the shape of vocal, postural or verbal cues or any semantic representation of emotions, leaves the readers not knowing exactly how to interpret and use the information. Signs of emotion such as urgency, joking or anger often fail to be adequately captured. Subsequent personal interaction at meetings or via telephone calls, which provides the necessary cues and semantic representations, usually resolves this situation (Edenius, 1996). People try to counter this problem in their e-mails by using "smilies" (for example ☺, ☹ or ☹), which represent an emotional expression.

Thus the flexibility attaching to the paradoxical nature of emotion - physical, behavioral and socially constructed - allows individuals to react to new situations and to incorporate them as part of their emotional knowledge. SSE constitutes a process whereby event-related emotions are made explicit in language. Any theorizing about organizing and the social sharing of emotion needs to account for the ongoing nature of emotion in everyday life, for its importance to social interaction and the interpretation of situations, and for its dynamic capacity for adaptation to new situations.

Proposition 4: SSE in organizations is guided by social norms regarding appropriate verbal and non-verbal emotional expressions in the narratives shared.

SUMMARY OF THE ESSAYS

The essays represent incursions into the topic at issue and offer different perspectives on the relation between SSE as an occasion for sensemaking, and autonomous organizational coordination. In order to keep the studies within the boundaries of the practicable, I concentrate on a selection of contexts and a particular range of communication channels. Other contexts and channels could of course have been chosen, but I focused the dissertation on what I assumed to be the contexts and channels most critical to the relation between organizing and SSE as an occasion for sensemaking.

TABLE 1
Contributions and Methods

Article #	Theoretical Background	Research Question	Propositions	Method
1	Humor	1	(P2) Narratives (P4) Social norms	Theoretical analysis
2	Collective memory	3	(P2) Narratives (P3) Social networks	Hermeneutic analysis of published texts
3	Strategic change	1 & 2	(P1) Knowledge sharing (P2) Narratives	Field study content analysis, multiple discriminant analysis
4	Job interviews	1 & 3	(P1) Knowledge sharing (P2) Narratives	Laboratory study
5	Organizational change management	1	(P2) Narratives (P4) Social norms	Field study ethnographic data, content analysis

The empirical studies and the theoretical explorations build on one another in a dialectical way. They address the theoretical model developed above (see Table 1). It could be useful to run through the rationales behind the essays and the individual contributions that the separate essays make to the overall concerns of the dissertation. For a graphical overview of how the essays are connected with one another and with the overall theme of the dissertation see the numbers in Figure 1 above.

Essay 1: Nonsense Makes Sense

The first essay continues the discussion in this introduction by adding a further twist to SSE as an occasion for sensemaking. It also presents an individual-level model, which clarifies the variables that influence the process of SSE at the workplace such as the relationship between initiator and receiver, the emotions involved in the event, and the organizational context.

Emotional expression at the workplace may be subject to social norms. Feeling rules or bounded emotionality may obtain, depending on the type of organization. As a consequence, not every emotional work event may be suitable for social sharing with colleagues. Employees may keep their experiences secret, sharing them only with intimates, or they may frame the relevant work events in a non-offensive way. When this caution concerns matters of organizational importance where secrecy could have damaging effects, it has been labeled organizational silence (Morrison & Milliken, 2000), whereby employees abstain from speaking up with observations, concerns or questions that might critically influence organizational outcomes (Edmundson, 2003). The idea is that speaking up increases knowledge-sharing and learning, which in the perspective adopted the present dissertation connects it to SSE as an occasion for sensemaking.

It is argued in this essay that humor is an ubiquitous way of sharing work events with colleagues by playing down the serious emotional undertones. Humor allows the sharer to retreat from the narrative, saying, "I was just kidding..." Humor thus constitutes a diplomatic way of testing the ground, for recounting a work

experience of one's own or passing on something heard from others. In this perspective humor can be regarded as a way of helping emotional events to find a forum, and it can include bitter forms of humor such as irony, sarcasm or cynicism

This essay thus reviews humor theory in connection with organizational settings and then introduces SSE as an impulse behind humorous narratives in organizations. Starting from primary and secondary social sharing, I describe some factors influencing humorous interaction at work, taking into account characteristics of the initiator and receiver, the emotional event, and relational and contextual factors. Psychological and micro-sociological ideas regarding the occurrence of humor at the workplace are then discussed. Particular attention is paid to sensemaking. It is suggested that the sharing of emotional work events in a humorous way with colleagues helps employees to make sense of past work events by speaking up and breaking the organizational silence.

Humor can be seen as one of many ways of sharing emotion socially. But it seems to be a significant one. In the context of the overarching concern of this dissertation, this essay looks into the way narratives are shared at the workplace and how they are potentially retained as organizational narratives. The humor conveyed in a narrative may promote its retention. Humor appears particularly relevant in organizations where people experience a high level of ambiguity and uncertainty, in that it provides a vehicle for "speaking up" (Hatch & Ehrlich, 1993).

The presence of humor implies that a cautious but active search for work-event-related information is going on among colleagues (March & Sevón, 1984). At the same time, it allows for the organization-wide diffusion of narratives about work events in a non-offensive way. Humor acts as a lubricant for social interaction, and in this role it appears to be important to the maintenance of social networks at work. Thus it facilitates the social sharing of emotion and influences autonomous organizational coordination.

Essay 2: Addressing Collective Memory

In recent years a growing number of top executives have been publishing their autobiographies. Such autobiographies are written for a wide audience including family, top management team members, employees, and probably even society as stakeholders of the organization as well. Given the semantic representations of emotion that appear in these books, the top executive autobiographies can also be explored as a medium for the social sharing of emotion with a view to imposing sense on things by way of argument and manipulation (Weick, 1995). Top executives may seek to exploit their autobiographical accounts to justify their actions and to influence collective memory. In the fixed form of a book, the social sharing of emotion may serve the top executives as a way of impacting autonomous organizational coordination in their company by contributing to the social construction of reality. A further important aspect of these autobiographies lies in their character as dramaturgical presentations of self.

A sample of autobiographies yielded a number of emotion words that could be coded and categorized under six basic types; the emotions in question were identified with respect to critical stages in the lives of the top executives and to stakeholders of their organizations. The findings suggest that through the medium of their autobiographies top executives seek to justify themselves, and seek to influence collective memory. It seems that they address collective memory by the way they present emotional events, probably also hoping to re-define the display rules for top executives in general by describing the work events they have experienced personally.

Each autobiography is seen as narrative of a professional life. Within its narrative form it contains one individual's description of organizational and societal events, which gains weight because it comes allegedly from a high-status figure. Autobiographies allow the top executives to address their own extensive social networks, including their colleagues and

employees as well as their family and friends. It is also a way of addressing their adversaries.

Essay 3: Social Sharing of Emotion and Strategic Change

The aim of this study was to investigate the impact of SSE as an occasion for sensemaking in the area of strategic change. The initiation and diffusion of narratives about work events, and the boundaries within which they operate are investigated. A central notion is that emotional events act as an impulse for knowledge-sharing. It is suggested that this sharing occurs primarily across the social networks in the organization. Nonetheless, private networks, such as family and friends, also play a part as they can provide an alternative to social sharing with colleagues.

The point of departure is an apparent inconsistency inherent in the need to identify such new events, developments or trends (OEDTs) that could be connected with strategic change. It is part of the manager's role to note such things in their organizations and to frame them as strategic issues. To be able to do this, they have to rely on their staff and their fellow-managers to report on any unusual events. At the same time, however, managers are those principally concerned in making sense of events and recognizing their possible importance to the organization. Hence the staff and managers who are making sense of the organization in this way, tend to focus their attention primarily on OEDTs that have already been framed. The question then arises: what brings new OEDTs to the notice of the managers in the first place? The answer, it is claimed, lies in the social sharing of emotion as an occasion for sensemaking.

This essay examines the way narratives springing from emotional work events affect the framing of strategic issues in an organization. A triangulation of qualitative and quantitative data made it possible to identify OEDTs and to trace the social sharing of events among the employees of the organization on a daily basis. I chart the way work events are diffused through the organization, making it possible for managers to notice and frame

them as strategic issues. At the same time managers are involved in the enhancement of certain OEDTs by espousing them as strategic issues. The existence of a bipolar adaptation process driven by emotion and attention-paying emerges and is conceptualized here in a local theory for the case-study organization. The social sharing of emotion appears to function as a fundamental organizing principle underlying the adaptation and "fine-tuning" that is constantly brought to bear on the everyday problems and strategic changes occurring in an organization.

Essay 4: Group Polarization Revisited

Another element in organizing that ties up with the social sharing of emotion as an occasion for sensemaking is group decision making. In job interviews and hiring decisions SSE may help to create a shared assessment of person-job and person-organization fit in panel interviews. The job interviews can be seen as emotional events that encourage discussion among the recruiters, thus opening for arguing and manipulation among panel members. In this study I examine the way recruiters develop a shared stance towards job candidates after job interviews.

In the more controllable environment of a laboratory the opportunity for SSE was manipulated. It is likely that the recruiters' impressions from the interviews emerged during the social sharing in the guise of persuasive arguments and under the influence of social comparisons, which led to a polarization among the group members. The recruiters told each other how they had perceived the job candidate. The findings indicate that groups which had the opportunity to engage in the social sharing of emotion polarized significantly more than the control groups. This demonstrates knowledge-sharing and sensemaking in terms of arguing and manipulation. Further, it appears that perceived person-organization fit is more susceptible to group influences than perceived person-job fit.

Although the study does not explicitly measure emotion in the discussions of the recruiters, its design and results nonetheless indicate positive effects when recruiters are given the chance to

exchange their impressions of an interview event in the social context. This can be regarded as an instance of SSE. On a basis of the findings of the study it can be suggested that SSE has an effect on various situations of group decision making, as individuals share their experiences and their expertise in making sense of the subject matter at hand.

Essay 5: From Theater Theory to Business Practice

The initiators of change management may expect organizational members to engage in SSE after certain events, and they probably count on the positive effects of dialog and discussions. In particular they can rely on the emotion-eliciting effect of organizational change and the methods used to facilitate it.

Against this background I investigate the way change management initiatives can be expected to penetrate everyday practice via the social sharing of emotion. The practice of organization theater is examined here because of the emotional character of the plays and the possible SSE after the play in connection with its contents. Organization theater represents a fairly recent change management practice, whereby theatrical techniques are used to address sensitive issues and to stimulate a readiness for change. I investigate the theories of action of an organization theater company, in terms of the hoped-for effects of the theatrical methods.

Again, the narrative framing of events is the point of departure. Purposive organization theater is expected to stimulate a social sharing of emotion in the days and weeks following the event itself - a sharing that can spark off dialog and discussion to help in the learning of a new practice or the development of social networks following a merger or an acquisition.

CONCLUSIONS

In the present dissertation I explore the causes and consequences of social sharing of emotion as an occasion for sensemaking (RQ 1). I draw on perspectives rooted in knowledge-based, narrative and social network theories of the firm to explain how they relate to my overarching concern. The findings reported in the five articles that constitute my dissertation support the links between SSE and autonomous organizational coordination (RQ 2), and argumentation and manipulation in organizations (RQ 3) that were developed in this introduction. It was possible to identify specific emotional events that initiate SSE in organizations. Emotion appears to function as an impulse for the creation of narratives from work events *and* as a lubricant for subsequent social sharing in organizations. Whether or not a narrative is diffused seems to be determined by a combination of emotion and situation. Here, social sharing facilitates autonomous organizational coordination in that it encourages double interacts, reciprocal behavior, information sharing, in that it informs newcomers about practices, and conveys organizational norms. This means that organizational members re-create the conventions as to what is taken for granted in their narratives about work events. Social norms provide a frame for bounded emotionality guiding SSE at the workplace. At the same time, social sharing of emotion presents also an opportunity for argumentation and manipulation. Leaders may launch stories that fit their needs, push strategic issues with their accounts, or define organizational events, developments or trends.

The present dissertation makes contributions to several fields of academic interest. Taken together, I hope to have enriched the OB literature - especially the discourse on emotions at the workplace - by introducing SSE as a valuable phenomenon for studying the consequences of emotion in organization. As regards the theory on sensemaking, I argue for a stronger focus on emotion as entwined with cognition. Weick (1995) did recognize emotion as influential for the ongoing quality of sensemaking,

however, he does not follow the lead consequently. For the specific interest in social sharing of emotion, the results from my studies suggest to draw a clearer distinction between the realms of work and private life. Work events may initiate a different sharing behavior, with different ends, than private events. Also, researchers of SSE have to take the form of social sharing into account. The focus has so far mainly been on the amount of social sharing and the emotional intensity. The present dissertation introduced humor as a specific mode for SSE at the workplace. In line with Weiss & Copranzano (1996), I have emphasized the need to study emotions in a longitudinal way. As an underlying factor mood might affect the frequency and extent of the social sharing. However, I proposed in addition using diary studies in order to study emotional events and the subsequent instances of social sharing.

Several effects have been suggested in connection with the social sharing of emotion in the present dissertation. However, what is positive about SSE as an occasion for sensemaking in organizations is also a potential danger. SSE may lead not only to positive group polarization, but also to the kind of "group think", which makes group members insensitive to information that contradicts the opinions developed in the group. Further, in psychotic organizations SSE may reinforce the harmful tendencies. It can be asked whether SSE might thus make organizations innovation-averse and whether it creates dysfunctional networks within organizations along strong and weak ties.

Naturally, there are limits to the scope of these articles on SSE in organizations. For instance there is the question of the appropriate environment for social sharing of emotions. Recounting an emotional event in the wrong setting can be embarrassing for the listeners whose response may be uncomfortable.

As regards the diffusion of information via SSE, there is also the risk that false information, as well as lies or fictitious experiences may travel through organizations as rumors or gossip.

There may also be limits to how much emotion is accepted at one time. Employees may feel that there's too much sharing altogether, or that a particular emotional event is being "over-shared." This must have been the feeling of those who started wearing t-shirts after an earthquake, proclaiming: "Thank you for NOT sharing your earthquake story with me" (Rimé et al., 1998).

In physiology and neuro-science emotions have been measured in term of heartbeats, blood pressure or brain activation (e.g. LeDoux, 1998), while psychology and sociology has relied mainly on the observable aspects of emotion such as postural, vocal and facial expressions, and on self-report measures using semantic labeling of emotions (e.g. Barsade, 2002). Given the nature of emotion - physical, behavioral and socially constructed - it is difficult to work towards a consistent epistemology. For instance, if emotion is regarded exclusively as a physical trigger for behavior, it can be too easily forgotten that it is also subject to social construction processes involving status, power, gender and a variety of other contextual factors. Or, if the socially constructed aspects of emotion are emphasized, its physical aspects are all too often neglected.

It seems worth considering a mixed discourse for investigation of the social sharing of emotion. The goal of this dissertation has been to elucidate SSE as an occasion for sensemaking and autonomous organizational coordination, by employing a variety of methods and looking at different levels of analysis. From this a multi-faceted picture emerged. To achieve my aim, I decided to write a dissertation by publication, consisting of five essays. The idea was to allow space for a range of epistemological views from essay to essay, thus reflecting the focal phenomenon from different perspectives. The essays offer a triangulation of separate sub-studies, with multiple non-convergent sources of evidence (Yin, 1994). This means that although the essays all contribute to the overarching concern of the dissertation, their data sets and methods do not converge on conjoint scales. Each essay can be regarded as a slightly aphoristic contribution to the general theme. This kind of research

strategy offers a 'reflective' approach to the phenomenon (Alvenson and Sköldbberg, 2000): the adoption of several epistemological standpoints and methodologies reveals the strengths and weaknesses of each one of them in relation to the subject matter. In terms of the empirical investigation, however, it means that attention has been divided between several investigation methods, so that the data as whole reflects forays into the studied phenomenon, without being exhaustive. Sutton and Staw (1995) have suggested that such an approach may have advantages for the development of new theory.

Every method used to study human behavior has its advantages and disadvantages. It therefore seems appropriate to address some methodological concerns before discussing the essays in detail. In this dissertation I use self-report measures of emotion, which means relying on people's ability to label their experiences in both quantitative and qualitative terms. In addition, I am not only interested in the actual experience of emotion but also in the context that elicited it, which means in turn that I need to rely on individual people's ability to relate their emotions to specific work events. The extent to which people can reveal what they have experienced in self-reports has been queried (Silverman, 1993). The question is primarily one of self-perception or self-presentation. Similar drawbacks apply to the written material that I have analyzed and to my own ethnographic observations. However, it was the self-perceptions and self-presentations that I was interested in from the start, as they are what makes SSE an occasion for sensemaking and may thus guide future behavior. Then again, in two essays I attempt a triangulation of multiple sources of evidence as regards various data sets. There is always the question of how various findings are weighted as regards the overarching research question of an essay (Jick, 1979). The decision lies within the researcher's discretion. However, I have attempted to let various data sources enjoy equal influence in my analyses. Despite these complications the dissertation presents empirical studies that, it is hoped, throw some light on the theoretical analysis discussed above.

Another awkward point that is relevant to this dissertation is that academic work is linguistic in its nature. The labeling of emotions has implications for academic writing about emotions. While writers of fiction use emotional words to induce emotion in their readers and to strike a responsive chord, academic writing is expected ideally to be free of emotion. In writing about emotional words the cultural and lingual context is taken for granted, and readers are asked to bring it with them from their own pre-understanding. Acceptance of the theory of emotion-labeling means that a writer using an emotional word in an academic text - even if they write about emotion - is implicitly playing on the readers' ability to connect such references with the collective emotion knowledge attaching to their own language and culture.

A similar situation arises from the nature of research in the field or research in the laboratory. For example, when a researcher designs a questionnaire asking respondents to recall events and indicate the emotions they usually feel at their workplace, the answers actually represent a social sharing of emotion in which emotion labels are chosen from a taken-for-granted linguistic stock. Such measures are generally regarded as problematic, since they indicate ex-post rationalizations and do not measure emotions as they occur or as they are managed, however, they may be regarded as incidents of SSE. Examples are the explorative studies of communication encounters in corrections organizations (Waldron & Krone, 1991) and the evaluation of academic work by university professors (Brown, 1997). It has generally been proposed that the ecological validity of an emotion theory can be evaluated in terms of its capacity to explain emotional vocabulary (Averill, 1975). Thus, a focus on the social sharing of emotional events does make sense.

One of my aims, as stated at the beginning of this introduction, has been to contribute to the literature concerned with emotion in organizations, which is itself a sub-field pertaining the vast body of research on organizational behavior (OB). Although OB has now become almost synonymous with empirical psychology, it can also contain elements deriving from

sociology, political science and economics. Heath and Sitkin (2001) lament that OB research has generally remained within the narrow definition and that the emergent findings and theory have consequently had a restricted effect on organization studies. In a meta-analysis of the publications in six renowned US journals the authors found that researchers have been emphasizing interesting behavior that *may* be relevant for organizations. They call this the Big-B approach to OB, with the drawback that it leaves the reader to guess what is organizational about the studied behavior. Other researchers have highlighted behavior that *occurs in an organizational context*. Heath and Sitkin call this the Contextualized-B definition of OB, and the drawback is that it may direct the spotlight on peripheral phenomena. The authors describe the limitations of these narrow definitions and contrast them with an approach emphasizing behavior that is central to the task of organizing. Since I have focused on social sharing of emotion as an occasion for sensemaking in relation to autonomous organizational coordination I hope to be consistent with the Big-O perspective that emphasizes centrality of organizing, that eliminates any focus on peripheral behaviors, that calls attention to process and that requires cross-level research.

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NONSENSE MAKES SENSE:

HUMOR IN SOCIAL SHARING OF EMOTION AT THE WORKPLACE

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Abstract

The purpose of this theoretical chapter is to suggest a model of humor in the social sharing of emotion at the workplace. With this in view we first briefly review humor research with special reference to organization science. We then introduce the theory of social sharing of emotion (SSE), i.e. the narrative framing of emotional work events in connection with the production of humor at the workplace. With the help of this theory we develop a model to clarify the process and the relevant antecedents and outcomes of humor in SSE at the workplace. We discuss in some detail the factors in our model in two phases of SSE. We contend that humor is a frequent product of SSE due to the specific social nature of the workplace. We conclude by suggesting future research directions pertaining to our model.

**NONSENSE MAKES SENSE:
HUMOR IN SOCIAL SHARING OF EMOTION
AT THE WORKPLACE**

Emotional events are often molded in a humorous way in the course of frequent retelling after the event. An instructive example, in terms of our concerns in this theoretical chapter, appears in Linstead (1985) with an analysis of a particular case. A worker on a fruit-pie machine was left with a mutilated hand after an accident on the job. His amputated finger could not be found, and 4000 pies were discarded. In the days and weeks that followed, his co-workers re-invoked the emotional event among themselves. Linstead identifies comments, remarks, discussions and jokes in which the emotional event was re-framed in a humorous way. One co-worker recalls "I can't remember 'em all now, but when it happened there were loads of jokes about it. It sounds terrible, dun' it, but tha'd hear a new 'un every break. I wish I could remember 'em." (Linstead, 1985, p. 753). One such joke was: "'They were going to get some 'finger-hunter' stickers made and pack them 4000 pies' (promotion boxes usually bore a sticker marked 'Bargain Hunter')" (Linstead, 1985, p. 754). As Linstead explains that humor was added to the emotional event by the workers in order to maintain their own status, competence and independence, and to

cope with their particular work environment. In the end the event was well recognized and well-established in the sensemaking of the workgroup. What is striking about this example is the molding of a negative emotional event through the injection of humor. In addition to the social effects described by Linstead, humor seems to offer a means whereby the individual can talk about strong emotional events in the social sphere of work.

Repeated storytelling produced well-established narratives, and the development and enactment of such narratives is by no means uncommon in organizational settings (Boje, 1991; Czarniavska, 1997). What emerges are caricatures reflecting the culture and beliefs of an organization, often in the shape of insights arising in organizational life and conveyed in a fairly simple and humorous, albeit profound, manner (Hatch & Ehrlich, 1993; Hatch, 1997). It is the initiation and development of such narratives and the humor they contain, that interest us in this chapter. Research on narratives and the way they develop in the stories has largely neglected the humorous element or has taken it for granted. We are intrigued by the way a humorous view of emotional events - what we could call 'humor' in a broad sense - inserts itself into the everyday interactions of the members of an organization.

In recent years emotion, together with cognition, has become recognized as a persistent factor that can help us to understand organizational behavior in areas such as leadership, job satisfaction, employee well-being and so on (Ashforth & Humphrey, 1995). From this growing interest theories began to emerge about emotional labor, emotional intelligence, emotional events at the workplace and various other related concepts (Ashkanasy, Härtel & Daus, 2002; Weiss & Copranzano; 1996). In this chapter we explore the progression whereby emotional events become humorous narratives as a result of interpersonal and intrapersonal processes during the social sharing of those events.

Before going into detail about the way humor may be created and shared in narratives, we need to define and qualify some of the

terms to be used in this chapter. *Emotion* as we understand it is short-lived, of considerable intensity and directed towards an object, an individual or a collective. It is regarded as a reaction to the experiencing of an event (Frijda, 1993). Mood, on the other hand is seen as less intense, longer-lasting and less focused on a specific target. In this chapter, we adopt the concept of *emotional events* as described by Weiss and Copranzano (1996). *Event* refers to a change in an individuals' present experience, and our emphasis is on the emotional consequences of the event. For our basic framework we draw on social psychological research, but also make occasional forays into ethnographical or sociological terrain, where making sense of what has occurred take precedence over the demonstration of benefits or drawbacks (Weick, 1995).

In the following pages, we first briefly review humor research, paying particular attention to organization science. We then introduce the theory of the social sharing of emotion (SSE), i.e. the narrative framing of emotional work events (Rimé, Finkenauer, Luminet, Zech, & Philippot, 1998; Rimé, Philippot, Boca, & Mesquita, 1992; Rimé, 1995), and its connection with the production of humor at the workplace. With the help of this theory we develop a model to clarify the process of humor production and the relevant antecedents and outcomes of humor in SSE at the workplace. We then discuss in detail the factors in our model in two phases of SSE. We contend that humor is a frequent product of SSE at the workplace. We conclude by suggesting future research directions pertaining to our model.

HUMOR

The study of humor goes back more than 2000 years. Interest in the topic has spread across disciplines such as philosophy, sociology, psychology, psychiatry, communications and

anthropology (Roeckelein, 2002). Despite centuries of widespread interest in the subject, the study of humor remains fragmented. This lack of concentration is particularly noticeable in management and organizational research. In a review of humor studies within the field of management, Duncan et al. (1990) commented that this kind of research was in its infancy compared with its status in other disciplines such as sociology and that its scattered and sporadic nature is also reflected in the definitions that researchers have used in their studies.

The definitions of humor given by Roeckelein (2002) are concerned first and foremost with explaining of bodily fluids, secondly with temperament, and only after that with what we generally think of as 'humor' today. This reflects the origin of humor in the philosophy of Ancient Greece. The Greek physician Hippocrates (460 – 370 BC) believed that an imbalance between the four bodily fluids or 'humors' (blood, phlegm, black bile, and yellow bile) resulted in illness and pain. Galen (130-200 BC), the Greek physician and philosopher, later proposed that four basic 'temperaments' (sanguine, phlegmatic, choleric/bilious, and melancholic) reflect the state of the four bodily humors more accurately. These Greek theories thus make a connection between physiological and psychological conditions. In medieval times humor was frequently considered to be indicative of ignorance and foolishness (Roeckelein, 2002). In modern colloquial language, however, the word 'humor' is described in many different ways, for example as a stimulus, a response, or a disposition. A sense of humor has become a very desirable trait and is regarded as part of a healthy personality. (It should be noted that these observations, especially that concerning the historical status of humor, may be particularly appropriate to Western society (Roeckelein, 2002).)

According to Martin (2000), humor has cognitive, emotional, behavioral, social and psychophysiological aspects. Lefcourt and Martin (1986) classified various theories of humor into three categories: arousal theories (e.g., Freud, 1928); incongruity

theories (e.g., Kant, 1790,1914); and superiority theories (e.g., Hobbes, 1650,1994). The basic idea underlying *arousal theories* is that certain types of mirthful experiences can reduce tension and negative emotional energy that have built up over time. In particular humor helps release energy associated with negative emotions and has been assigned a unique value due to its 'liberating' and 'elevating' effects (Freud, 1928). Freud was writing essentially about the self-deprecating and derisive kind of humor that transforms a negatively affective situation into a laughable one. He also claimed that the fundamental quality of humor consists in the belittling of a painful reality. In other words, humor occurs when a serious situation is viewed with a playful eye, so that it appears less grave. Since Freud's time, almost all theories of humor include the idea that a changed cognition in the experience of humor generates pleasure and laughter. According to *incongruity theories*, people perceive humor in the unexpected juxtaposition of two disparate ideas, concepts, or situations. There has been considerable debate about whether a solution to such incongruity is necessary to the individual's experience of humor (e.g., Nerhardt, 1976; Suls, 1972). Regardless of this debate, incongruity theories clearly indicate the importance of the perspective angle adopted in the humor-appreciation process. Finally, *superiority theories* can be traced back to the days of Plato (428-348 BC) and Aristotle (384-322 BC). But it was Thomas Hobbes (1650, 1994) who introduced this approach into the existing theory, maintaining that laughter was born of a sense of superiority over the inferior quality of others or of oneself in the past. Further, this type of humor usually conveys a sense of aggression and hostility (Hobbes, 1650,1994). However, after reviewing research of the positive effect of humor on well-being (e.g., Levine, 1977; Mishkinsky, 1977), Lefcourt and Martin (1986) contend that even in the form of expressing superiority, humor does not signal an intention to put other people down, so

much as a desire to raise their own self-esteem and personal efficacy.

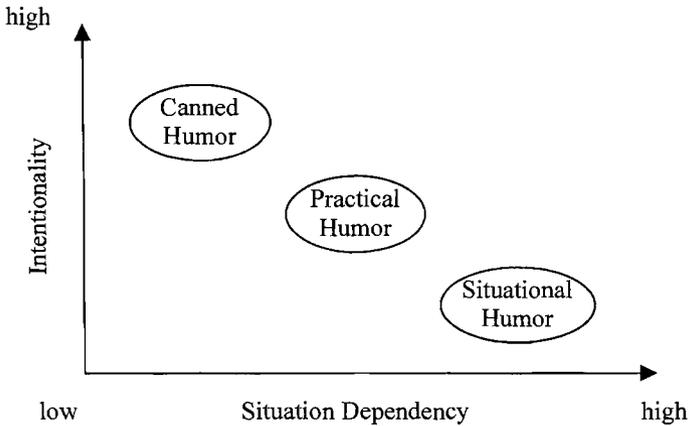
In summary, different theories of humor converge in the common proposition that humor provides individuals with a chance to view a particular situation from a different angle, thus creating a sense of relief and control. Studies have recorded positive physiological effects stemming from humor, such as raising the threshold for physical discomfort (Zillmann & Stocking, 1976). Similar studies have elaborated also on the connections between humor/laughter and human anatomical/cerebral functions and development, and confirmed that humor is related positively to physical and emotional well-being (See Roeckelein, 2002).

With this in mind we have defined humor as the ludicrous or absurdly incongruous that is intended to induce laughter or amusement, often displayed in exaggeration or eccentricity (cf. Roeckelein, 2002). Humor can thus be reflected in objects or the manifestations of humor (e.g. cartoons or toys), as well as in different forms of communication and mental representation (stories, jokes or songs). Our focus, however, is on verbal accounts in face-to-face communication, as this is the most personal and common occasion for the spontaneous production of humor.

When it comes to different kinds of humor, we adapt Fry's (1963) classification that differentiates between 'canned,' 'situational,' and 'practical' jokes. Fry's classification is based on the joke's position within the context in which it is told. In this chapter we do not equate 'humor' with 'joke' since the latter is a form of humor, and is thus a narrower concept. Instead we extend and apply Fry's (1963) framework, in that we distinguish between canned, situational, and practical humor (see Figure 1).

FIGURE 1

An Illustration of the Relationship between Situational, Practical and Canned Humor



If humor is presented with little obvious relationship to any ongoing human interaction, it qualifies as canned humor. For example, people may recall and share a humorous story from a magazine or book in the middle of a conversation, in order to amuse and entertain. Situational humor originates in the ongoing interpersonal process. Situational humor is thus spontaneous and created on the spot, whereas canned jokes are known before they are told, often demonstrating the joke-teller's conscious intention to induce a sense of mirth and laughter in the audience. In contrast, practical humor is both intentional and spontaneous in that the joker intends the humor but its content is not predetermined; rather, it develops as the interaction unfolds (cf. Fry, 1963).

HUMOR AT THE WORKPLACE

Humor at the workplace has not received much attention among organizational scholars (exceptions include Collinson, 1988, 2002; Duncan, 1982; Duncan & Feisal 1989; Duncan, Smeltzer & Leap, 1990; Hatch, 1997; Hatch & Ehrlich, 1993). Because of the mirth that humor arouses and the lighthearted aura it often conveys, researchers tend not to take it very seriously. It is assumed that in organizations humor is a peripheral phenomenon, unrelated or only remotely related to such things as profitability, efficiency, staff turnover, job satisfaction and so on, all of which clearly impinge on organizational effectiveness. Although in certain situations humor can be regarded as 'good' and useful, few areas of organizational life actually call for it. Moreover, humor is an elusive concept that escapes precise definition; its widespread use and imprecise nature make it difficult to tie it down in models and theories. In reality, however, organization members come across humor almost daily in their work life. It can even be pretty pervasive, particularly in various types of organizational communication - live conversations, emails, written material and so on - or attaching itself to certain objects or events.

Interest in humor, joking and laughter at the workplace began to grow in the late 1950s and early 1960s (Duncan et al., 1990). The early researchers tended towards an ethnographic and sociological stance. Roy (1960), for example, reported his personal experience as a participant-observer in a small group of factory machine operatives. In an exploratory analysis he found that informal interactions, including humorous exchanges like 'horseplay', helped to improve job satisfaction. In the few publications that began to call attention to humor at the workplace from the 1980s onwards, humor was often defined in terms of stimulus, i.e. something that can be interpreted as humorous, and response, i.e. usually laughter. Malone (1980, p. 357), for example, adopted Chapman & Foot's (1976) description of humor as "a

process initiated by a humorous stimulus, such as a joke or cartoon, and terminating with some response indicative of experienced pleasure, such as laughter.” The study of humor at the workplace has focused primarily on joking behavior in a group context (e.g., Duncan, 1982; Duncan et al., 1990). Here, humor has also been closely linked with communication in a group context and used interchangeably with 'joke' (Duncan, 1982; Duncan & Feisal, 1989; Duncan et al., 1990). In addition, humor has been investigated as an artifact within the culture of an organization (Dandridge, Mitroff, & Joyce, 1980; Vinton, 1989).

Researchers generally seek to suggest ways in which management can foster humor with a view to improving the effectiveness of their organizations, although the feasibility of such an enterprise has not gone unchallenged (Collinson, 2002).

Although sociological, psychological and ethnographic perspectives on humor have been adopted in previous management research, only rarely, have the more theory-based psychological mechanisms been explored. Specifically, we believe that humorous accounts are created as individuals share emotional events with other members of their organizations. These events may then be spread further as one member passes them on to another, who in turn does the same and so on. The humor contained in the original account is thus relayed, and probably modified by all these others as the sharing proceeds. Some of the humorous stories eventually become part of the organization's narrative corpus, its lore, reflecting certain characteristics of the organizational culture and introducing these to newcomers, as well as reverberating among the veteran members of the organization in a process of repetitive sharing. The emotional event thus provides the content and background for the production of humor. Hence, in this chapter we focus on the role of emotion in the creation and development of humorous narrated accounts.

SOCIAL SHARING OF EMOTION (SSE)

The SSE Process

The social sharing of emotion (SSE) is conceptualized as an interpersonal process that occurs following the experience of some life event of emotional significance to an individual (Rimé et al., 1998). This line of research emerged from an interest in traumatic events, such as serious accidents, the sudden death of a spouse, etc. (Rimé et al., 1992). People often have an urge to share their feelings and thoughts with others after the occurrence of some major negative life event. Rimé et al. (1992, 1998) argue that this phenomenon is not exclusive to major emotional events, but that it applies to daily emotional experiences as well. They identified five arguments for their own conjectures as to why social sharing occurs. Briefly, these are: 1) People share their experiences and emotional reactions in order to resolve ambiguous sensations arising from their emotions. 2) By putting an experience into words, people are able to organize the matter cognitively. 3) People seek to restore such beliefs regarding themselves as were challenged by the emotional occurrence. 4) Through sharing, people receive social support from important others, thus counteracting their own sense of insecurity. 5) Social sharing is a means whereby the collective can absorb and integrate individual affective experiences as well as developing and prescribing culturally acceptable interpretations (Rimé et al., 1998). SSE thus shows the properties that Weick (1995) noted to be essential for sensemaking in organizations.

Early studies of SSE used a procedure involving the recall of critical incidents (Rimé, Mesquita, Phillipot, & Boca, 1991). Experimental studies involving the viewing of film excerpts were also conducted to address the question of memory bias and to corroborate the connection identified between emotional intensity and SSE in correlation studies (Luminet, Bouts, Delie, Manstead, & Rimé, 2000). Other studies were conducted for different age

groups and across cultures and in relation to personality (See Rimé et al., 1998). The general conclusion was that SSE is a universal phenomenon that can be observed in both men and women, young and old, and across cultures. Most people share their experiences with someone else, if possible almost immediately after their occurrence, and they may continue sharing them with several receivers on more than one occasion (Rimé et al., 1991). A general positive relationship was also found between the intensity of the emotion and the frequency of social sharing (Luminet et al., 2000).

SSE at the Individual and Collective Level

To understand how SSE connects the individual and the collective levels it is important to make a distinction between two steps in social sharing. Primary social sharing of emotion (PSSE) is conceptualized as the basic form of sharing in which individuals repeatedly share their own experience with different receivers (Rimé et al., 1991). Secondary social sharing of emotion (SSSE) arises from the fact that hearing about an emotional event is itself an emotional event for those with whom the events have been shared. The receivers in PSSE may then share the heard story with other people, in much the same way they pass on rumors or gossip (Christophe, & Rimé, 1997). We use 'initiator' and 'receiver' to refer to the two parties involved in sharing. The initiator is the one who shares the emotional event, and the receiver is the one with whom the experience is shared. In PSSE, the initiator is the one who experienced the emotional event and produces the humor. In SSSE, the initiator is the one who presents or reproduces the humorous slant they received in an earlier sharing. PSSE refers to 'repeated reproduction' on the part of the individual who actually experienced the emotional event, while SSSE is 'serial reproduction' of vicarious experience that comes with the relaying of information from A to B to C, and so on. PSSE focuses on the behavior of a single person who tells the same story repeatedly to one or more recipients. SSSE, on the other hand, focuses on a

chain of individuals connected by the sharing of the same emotional event. Narratives, rumors and gossip are common examples of the kind of thing reproduced in the SSSE.

One of the theoretical assumptions in explaining why SSE occurs is that people have a need to organize their emotional experiences cognitively (Rimé et al., 1998). Hence, sharing serves to process and complete emotional memory. Studies of shared and kept-secret memories (Finkenauer & Rimé, 1998) found that memories of unshared emotional events were associated with a more extensive search for meaning and a greater effort to get some order in one's mind about what had happened. In essence this is what Weick (1995) called sensemaking. The underlying idea of sensemaking is that reality is an ongoing accomplishment that emerges from efforts to create order and make retrospective sense of what occurs. One source and stimulant for sensemaking consists of the emotions that are elicited by significant interruptions of the everyday life of individuals (Weick, 1995, p.46). In PSSE, individual sensemaking appears in the initiator as an explicit effort to tell a coherent story about an emotional event to the recipient and, implicitly, to themselves. The listener makes sense of the story as well, and the sensemaking activity persists throughout the process of SSSE (Rimé et al., 1998).

Consequently, the iterative process attributed to PSSE and SSSE leads to collective sensemaking, i.e. the social construction of what is taken for granted as part of a shared reality (Berger and Luckmann, 1966; Weick, 1995). Collective sensemaking is inherent in social sharing, namely in the "construction and dissemination of social knowledge on emotion" (Rimé et al., 1998). This is built largely on the receivers' processing of information and the subsequent SSSE. Receivers retain information about the shared event in light of their own emotion schemata (Shaver, Schwartz, Kirson, & O'Connor, 1987). These schemata contain simplified and easily accessible prior knowledge about particular emotions and related situations (cf. Rimé, 1995;

Rimé, Philippot, & Cisamolo, 1990). The receiver highlights salient information in reference to their own schemata and organize it in ways that are compatible with their existing knowledge and expectations (Bartlett, 1932). In SSSE receivers retrieve from memory certain patterns from prior sensemaking, add details from the shared emotional event that fit their own knowledge, and pass it on to new receivers. During this recurring process of selecting, filtering, storing and retrieving, pieces of emotional memories are added to the collective's reservoir of emotion knowledge (Shaver et al., 1987). And during this construction and reconstruction of the emotional event, diverse social schemata maintained by the various individuals involved and linked to the emotions in focus, become aligned with one or a limited number of stereotypical conclusions. These are frequently expressed in a humorous story. For example, at Siemens AG there is a story about Werner von Siemens, the founder of the company and an immensely rich man, visiting the production plant one day. His contemporaries knew von Siemens as a brilliant engineer, but he was also feared as obsessed by accuracy and intolerant to ineffectiveness. He picked up a small piece of metal from the otherwise clean floor and showed it to an engineer. 'Do you know what this is?', he asked. 'A piece of metal', replied the intimidated engineer. 'No', replied von Siemens, 'this is MY money' (Feldenkirchen, 1996). Werner von Siemens died in 1892, but the story is still told today. No one knows who started telling this story or how it has been transformed since it was first told, but somehow it became established as a humorous narrative in the Siemens culture implying that waste should always be avoided. The event, probably in a form very different from its originally one, remains as representing the collective's way of making sense of the relevant circumstances and emotions.

HUMOR IN SSE AT THE WORKPLACE

A large part of a people's lives revolve around their work, the organizations they work for, and the people they work with. We can thus expect that a good deal of SSE is connected with events occurring in working life. Further, since colleagues at work know about the work processes involved and are implicitly interested in work events in the organization, they are also frequently the initiators and receivers of social sharing. As such SSE proves to be a common phenomenon in organizations (Meisiek, 2002; Rimé, personal communication, March 2, 2003).

Earlier field studies on humor at the workplace confirmed that humor is a frequent mode for communication at all functional levels of the organization (Collinson, 1988; Hatch & Ehrlich, 1993; Hatch, 1997; Linstead, 1985; Roy, 1960), which leads us to believe that it is presumably also an important ingredient in the process of SSE at the workplace and that it contributes to general sensemaking in organizations. This ties up with another observation namely that humor creates in those involved a sense of relief and of being in control.

The workplace has often been described as a place where the expression of strong emotion is widely regarded as inappropriate; unless it is officially sanctioned as part of the work role (Hochschild, 1983). Organizations do not expect their workforce to give way to emotion, either positive or negative, for fear that they might do something to harm the organization's policies or its culture (Ashforth & Humphrey, 1995). Consequently, organizations develop and maintain *display rules* as part of their culture, indicating the appropriate range, intensity, duration, and even the target of emotional expressions in certain given situations (Ekman and Friesen, 1969; Hochschild, 1983). It has been suggested, too, that this could lead to the repression of emotional displays that are regarded as inappropriate (Hochschild, 1983). However, as SSE theory tells us, emotion does demand articulation

for sensemaking purposes (Rimé et al., 1998). Humor - which is generally regarded as an appropriate and beneficial ingredient in organizations (Collinson, 2002) - can thus be regarded as a useful mode for invoking emotional events in the complex social setting of the workplace. SSE also allows the person who shares the emotional event a chance to back away from the story, for example by adding "I was just kidding...". Moreover, humor offers a way of describing an emotional event that doesn't demand any direct empathy on the part of a receiver, which is particularly important when confiding in receivers that are not intimates. And apart from all this, emotional events that have been transformed into humorous stories are pleasant for people to hear and are more likely to be well received.

As regards the basic SSE process an important observation is that people tend to share emotional experiences with close others: such as parents, family members, spouses, or close friends (Rimé et al., 1998). In an organizational setting, however, intimates may not be very numerous, such as their co-workers, which means that employees have to resort to sharing emotional experiences with people with whom they are unlikely to have such a close relationship. Sharing may then occur because of some common experience or mutual understanding of the background to the work events, or because employees are connected through some aspect of organizational life like their department or their functional area. A work setting thus provides both opportunities and constraints when it comes to the sharing of emotional experiences - which ones to share, how to share them, and where. The actual emotional events shared at work may of course be private as well as work-related, but the latter can be expected to have more impact on subsequent organizational processes.

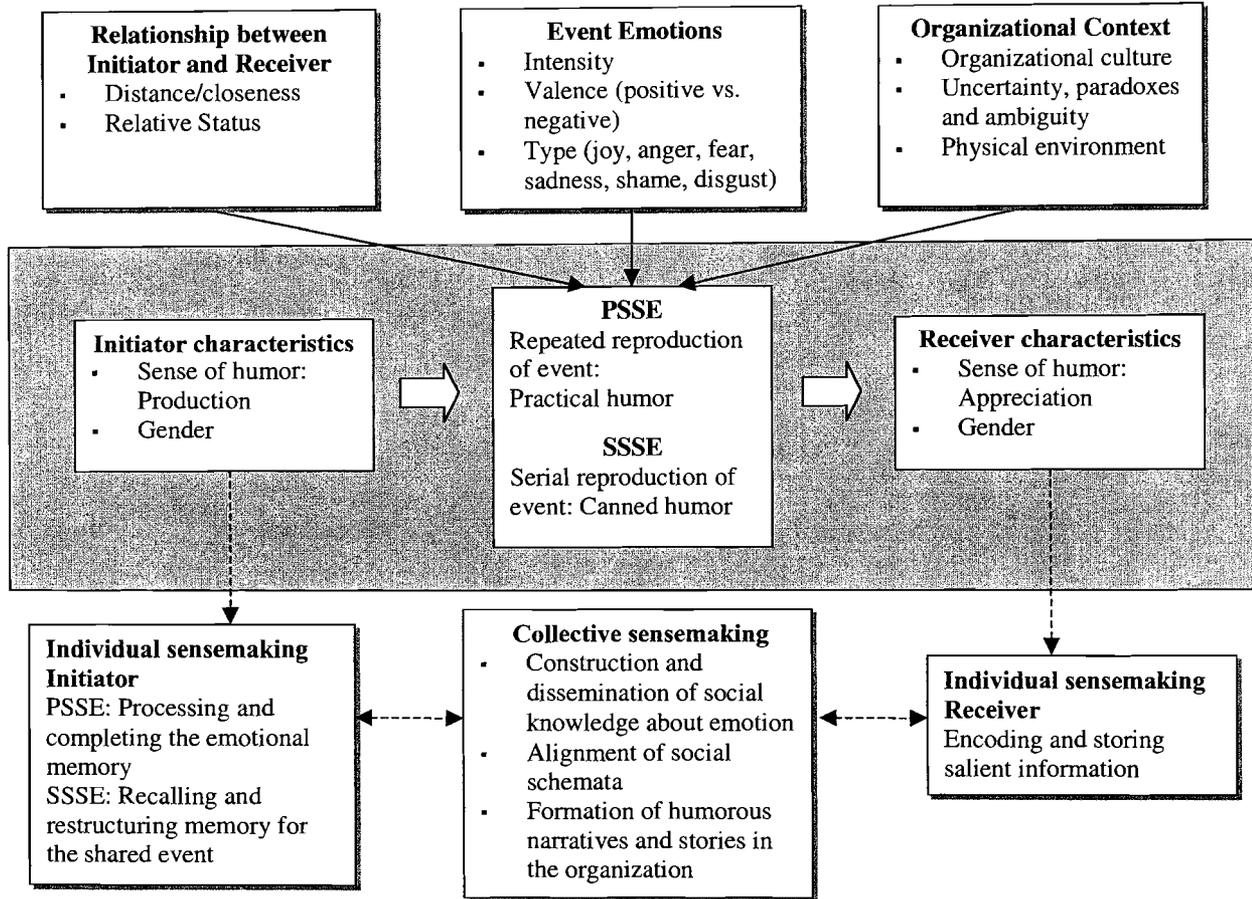
We propose below that emotional events can be transformed into practical humor and then into canned humor by way of PSSE and SSSE. Eventually they may crystallize into narratives that reflect the culture, history and characteristics of the organization in

question and of its employees. This proposition will be addressed in this chapter by exploring the critical factors of the relationship between initiator and receiver, the emotions associated with an event, the organizational context and the individual characteristics that encourage initiators to adopt a humorous approach in presenting a story to their receivers. Drawing on research into SSE and humor in organizations, Figure 1 demonstrates the PSSE and SSSE process.

The process begins with the need felt by individuals to share an event that carries emotional significance for themselves. In the course of PSSE the initiator continues to process the emotional event cognitively and in doing so generates meaning. When an initiator launches the sharing with a view to presenting the emotional event in a humorous way, it may become possible to generate practical humor as the sharing evolves. In the course of this sharing the initiator and the receiver both have an opportunity to make sense of the emotional event. The initiator also gets a chance to go through the process over and over again and to revisit the meanings he or she has constructed and perhaps reconstructed over time. The receiver, on the other hand, may proceed to share the emotional event with other individuals within the organizations. The receiver retains the memory not only of what had happened to the initiator, but also the humor created during the PSSE. If the original humor is successfully conveyed, it is very likely to be retained in the organizational system, as repeated SSSE occurs and evolves as a humorous aspect of the narrative. However, although the emotional event may eventually become an example of canned humor, the original story is likely to change in the process of the secondary sharing. As in the primary sharing process, the initiator and receiver both make sense of the emotional event in the course of sharing it, while also extending their understanding of the organization, the individuals concerned and the particular situation involved. These memories are retained,

FIGURE 2

Humor Production during Primary and Secondary Social Sharing of Emotion (PSSE & SSSE).



and they help the people who are exposed to them to make sense of their environment in the present and the future. It is also probable that several receivers may be able to share the same emotional events and their accompanying humor on several occasions. This labyrinth of mutual exchanges reinforces, and possibly alters or corrects, the way people remember and make sense of the emotional event, which in turn facilitates collective sensemaking in the organization. It is also likely that people are sharing is not a single emotional event but a whole emotional episode consisting of a series of emotional events around a common theme (Weiss & Cropanzano, 1996). Collective sensemaking can thus also be based on a chain of related events.

We will now look at PSSE and SSSE separately, in order to discuss the specific circumstances under which humor relating to a shared emotional event may be produced. In other words we look at the antecedents of practical humor creation in PSSE and of canned humor production in SSSE.

HUMOR IN PSSE

Relationship between Initiator and Receiver

Although most of us find at least some co-workers with whom we feel reasonably comfortable to 'be ourselves' and whom we trust with our emotional experiences, we are rather more alert to the needs of self-presentation at the workplace than we are elsewhere (Bolina, 1999). Our motives for impression management may vary, depending on our goals and values. For example, if someone wants to rise quickly in the organizational hierarchy, they will seek to present themselves as competent and conscientious workers (Wayne & Ferris, 1990). They will then engage in various behaviors that convey such an image. Although it is usually assumed that humor helps to build up a desirable impression, since

it is commonly interpreted as a favorable quality, it can backfire if used inappropriately. Thus an initiator has to consider the listener: who is this person with whom they are sharing an experience, and does the relationship really allow for the expression of humor? Two attributes of the relation may be significant here: the distance/closeness between initiator and receiver, and their relative status in the organization.

Distance/closeness is regarded as a fundamental dimension of interpersonal behavior (e.g., Brown & Levinson, 1978/1987; Spencer-Oatey, 1997). It is related to friendliness and affect or the degree of association. Hays' (1984) conceptualization of close and casual friendships can be used to tap this dimension (Spencer-Oatey, 1997). There are four behavioral contents that distinguish between close and distant relations: companionship, consideration, self-disclosure, and affection. Self-disclosure is related most closely to SSE. It pertains to disclosing or discussing information about oneself, to the exchange of ideas, facts, opinions or confidences on any topic. This aspect of a close relationship corresponds to the SSE findings that emotional experiences are more frequently disclosed to intimate others rather than to strangers or to people of less importance to the focal individual at that particular stage in his or her life - an observation also suggesting that there is more freedom for self-disclosure in close relationships. However, since close relationships at work are rare, and since humor signals informality and reduces social distance (Graham, 1995, Sykes, 1966), closeness may be enhanced in primary sharing at the workplace by the introduction of humor into the exchange.

Proposition 1: Due to their relative distance between co-workers, people are more likely to produce humor when they share an emotional event at the workplace than when sharing events with their personal intimates.

The *relative status* of the initiator and the receiver is another important aspect. Studies have shown that low-status individuals tend not to joke very much with those of higher status (e.g., Vinton, 1989). Hence, a big difference in status hampers the production of humor, and thus perhaps of SSE as well. In a study of humor in workgroups Duncan and Feisal (1989) reported that 'solid citizens', that is to say members of a group who possessed no formal authority and who were socially close to the group's rank-and-file members, were well received by the others in the group when it came to joking behavior. They could joke about the others and were among the favorite targets for other people's jokes, which suggests that they were liked and enjoyed special joking privileges. Lundberg (1969) found that people of similar status enjoyed themselves more when spending time exclusively with one another.

Proposition 2: People are more likely to produce humor when sharing an emotional event with someone of equal or lower organizational status than when sharing with someone of higher status.

Event Emotions

Whether or not humor can be made out of an event, and the type of humor thus created may be affected by the intensity, the valence and the type of the emotions associated with the event in question.

As noted above SSE increases with the intensity of the emotional event. This observation has been corroborated by the results of studies of emotional secrecy in which Finkenauer and Rimé (1998) found that *intensity and valence* were not necessarily precursors of emotional secrecy. To the present authors' knowledge, no research has been done on the relationship between the intensity or valence of an emotion and the content, format or quality of its sharing. However, it is reasonable to assume that the

more intensive an emotion the more of its original perspective and framework will be retained in its social sharing compared with the case of less intensive emotions. At the workplace, however, the expression of intense emotions may be hampered by the organizational display rules mentioned above (Hochschild, 1983). Thus, intense emotional events may be quickly converted into humorous narratives, to adapt them to the organizational context. This relationship between the intensity of emotion and the production of humor is also addressed in arousal theory (See Lefcourt & Martin, 1986). The basic idea underlying arousal theories is that, in the course of time, laughter can reduce tension and the built-up of energy (Freud, 1928). Thus a very intensive emotional experience at the workplace may be shared sooner rather than later and with lots of humorous comments. Further, the really intense emotions that may normally require a good deal of time and several iterations before they can be viewed in a different light (Rimé et al, 1998), will reappear sooner as an event in the production of practical humor in PSSE at the workplace. The valence of the emotions concerned may also influence the timing of the humor production - in that positive emotions delay the onset of this production for longer than negative emotions do (Linstead, 1985).

Proposition 3a: People are more likely to produce humor in PSSE at the workplace if they are sharing events of higher emotional intensity than when they are sharing less intensive emotions.

Proposition 3b: People are more likely to produce humor in PSSE at the workplace when they are sharing events of negative valence when they are sharing events of positive value.

Finkenauer and Rimé (1998) also found that emotional secrecy is correlated positively with events eliciting negative social emotions such as shame and guilt. An immediate implication of this in relation to for the production of humor is that such emotions are probably less likely to become a subject of humor to begin with. And even if they were, the humor may be unintended, due to an underlying desire to avoid revealing socially inappropriate behaviors or thoughts.

Proposition 4: People are less likely to produce humor in PSSE at the workplace in relation to events that elicit negative social emotions such as shame and guilt.

Organizational Context

Context also affects the behavior of organizational members. Here we consider three types of contextual factors: uncertainty and ambiguity, organizational culture and the physical environment.

Any *uncertain, paradoxical and/or ambiguous* elements in an organization also have an impact on humor in PSSE at the workplace. Uncertainty often develops in the course of radical changes such as mergers and acquisitions, and it arouses strong emotions (Huy, 1999). The prevalence of emotional events in periods of organizational change encourages the primary sharing, thus also promoting the production of humor as a coping and sensemaking strategy. Hatch and Ehrlich (1993) also contend that when an organization is infused with paradoxes and ambiguity is particularly marked, humorous comments will flourish. Hatch (1997) identifies irony in particular as a sign that employees are confronting contradictions. Observations like these suggest that an uncertain and ambiguous organizational environment provides a fertile ground for the production of humor in PSSE.

Proposition 6: People are more likely to produce humor in PSSE at the workplace if the organizational environment is uncertain, paradoxical and/or ambiguous.

Culture and language serve as a sense-giving backdrop for humor at the workplace. A joke, even one made with the best intentions, may not always be appreciated, due to differences in cultural values regarding the target or the style of the humor. In much the same way ethnicity or language may have a significant impact on humorous behavior at work. Duncan (1982) asks "have you ever sat through a comedy in a foreign country and discovered that 'everybody is laughing but me'? Or, even worse, 'no one is laughing but me'?" In our model we consider organizational cultures favorable to humor. A strong humor culture encourages humor at the workplace. Some entrepreneurs such as the founder of Southwest Airlines recognize and promote a pro-humor culture (Quick, 1992). In this context, it has been proposed that humor can help to maintain an organizational culture (Linsted, 1985), and that humor can be an artifact or manifestation of a culture (Dandridge, 1986). In a culture of humor, organizational members believe that humor offers a desirable approach to daily activities. People are more conscious of humor and will act on this belief by creating humor in PSSE as they interact with others in the organization. In an organizational culture of humor, however, joking behavior may also be used as a cover for strong emotions. Burawoy (1979) discovered that racial prejudice between Black and Caucasian workers was articulated in jokes on the shop-floor. Since the production process demanded a degree of co-operation between workers, overt racial hostility had to be kept to a minimum and was therefore diluted by humor.

Proposition 5: People are more likely to produce humor in PSSE when the culture of their organization encourages humor at the workplace.

To our knowledge, researchers have not yet examined the relationship between the physical environment and humor at the workplace. But the physical environment may in fact contribute to the production of humor in PSSE, thus also enhancing a culture of humor. Davis (1984) identified three key elements in the physical environment: physical structure, physical stimuli, and symbolic artifacts. All three of these can affect people's perception of their environment and the way they interact with each other, which in turn will either encourage or discourage the production of humor.

People are more likely to interact with others who are physically close. Thus, workplaces whose physical structure leaves employees isolated or with little formal or informal contact with one another will restrict SSE and the chances it offers for producing humor. If on the other hand people are given more opportunities for meeting, they will have more time to develop relationships providing opportunities for humorous interaction (Davis, 1984). Within the physical structure behavior is also affected by physical stimuli: the color scheme in the office (visual), the sound of the phone bell (audio), or the smell of the coffee brewer (olfactory). Most of the literature on physical stimuli focuses on the way the stimuli are manipulated in order to reduce distractions and to induce desired behaviors (Davis, 1984). Finally, symbolic artifacts are aspects of the physical environment that can direct interpretations of the social setting in a certain way. Office signs, carpeting, or type and style of furnishing, for example, can convey information about the organization and the people who work there (Davis, 1984). A workplace that is designed to be informal and enjoyable sends an implicit message to its occupants that a playful attitude is encouraged there, so that people feel more comfortable about making humorous comments, telling funny

stories and laughing together with their colleagues. We believe that certain physical stimuli and symbolic artifacts may facilitate the production of humor.

Proposition 7: People are more likely to produce humor in PSSE if the physical environment at their workplace is favorable to interaction among the employees, providing pleasant stimuli and symbolic artifacts that encourage humor.

Individual Characteristics

Although the initiator may be inspired or stimulated by the receiver or by some factors of the situation, to imbue the narrative with a humorous quality, certain innate personal qualities help to also determine the possible importance of external conditions (Ross & Nisbett, 1991). In our model we consider two individual characteristics: sense of humor and gender.

A *sense of humor* is a distinct characteristic attributable to the individual. It makes a person more prone to convert emotional events into humorous stories, as well as making it easier for them to do so. The sense of humor can be regarded as a personality trait. The assumption is that there are stable differences between individual people as regards the extent to which they perceive, enjoy and create humor (Lefcourt & Martin, 1986). However, the sense of humor is a multi-dimensional construct to which various meanings have been attracted (Eysenck, 1972; Moody, 1978). Eysenck (1972), for example, suggested three subdivisions for the sense of humor concept, namely the conformist, the quantitative and the productive types. The first two refer to the extent to which an individual agrees with most other people about what is humorous, and to the frequency and immediacy of their laughter and smiles. Only the third type refers to the probability of a particular person perceiving a situation as humorous and amusing, and thus deriving humor from it (cf. Lefcourt & Martin, 1986, p.

22). Most sense of humor studies have started from individual differences in the appreciation of humor, such as a preference for particular types of humor (e.g., Eysenck, 1942, 1943; O'Connell, 1960; Redlich, Levine, & Sohler, 1951). We concentrate on the third meaning to emphasize the productive aspect of the sense of humor. In the course of PSSE, a strong sense of humor will predispose the initiator to convert an emotional event into a humorous story together with the receiver.

Proposition 8: An individual with a strong sense of humor is more likely than other people to produce humor when they share emotional events with others at work.

Studies have found *gender* differences in the appreciation and production of different types of humor (Collinson, 2002; Duncan et al., 1990; Lefcourt, 2001). Women in Western society seem to display a stronger tendency to appreciate and produce self-deprecating humor, while men prefer wit and jokes characterized by competition and aggression and often directed at others (Crawford & Gressley, 1991; Levine, 1976; Zillman & Stocking, 1976). In the workplace it can be expected that women may produce self-deprecating humor as a defense mechanism against stressful and disturbing events (Lefcourt & Martin, 1986). Self-deprecating humor allows people to laugh at themselves and to take things less seriously (Freud, 1928). Males at the workplace on the other hand, tend to produce aggressive and competitive humor in connection with workplace events in which some a co-worker has behaved or responded in a foolish way (Collinson, 1988).

Proposition 9a: Females tend to produce self-deprecating humor in PSSE when sharing stressful work events.

Proposition 9b: Males tend to produce aggressive and competitive humor in PSSE when sharing work events that involve a colleague's behavior.

HUMOR IN SSSE

SSSE is similar to PSSE in its processes and many of its elements. Much of what has been discussed above is thus also valid for SSSE (See Figure 1). However, because the initiator of SSSE has not experienced the shared emotional event personally, we can expect some differences in the nature of this kind of humor-sharing. SSSE illustrates the way humorous descriptions of emotional events are developed to become well-established organizational narratives.

Sense of humor is again important to the initiator's reproduction of the humorous account (Lefcourt & Martin, 1986). However, since the initiator in SSSE has been a receiver in an earlier round of primary or secondary social sharing, the appreciation of humor is more likely to be relevant here than its production. Only when a receiver has proved able to appreciate the humor they shared earlier as a receiver, will they be able to share the humor that accompanies the description with a third party.

Proposition 10: People with a greater sense of humor are more likely to appreciate and to reproduce humor in SSSE at the workplace.

Similarly, *gender* differences in the appreciation of humor directly affect the retention of the humor first produced in the PSSE. A female receiver may not appreciate competitive and aggressive humor, so it is not very likely that she will now share it with someone else in a humorous form, which means that the

practical humor generated in PSSE will not be preserved. On this part, a male receiver may not appreciate self-deprecating humor, which will thus be lost when the male receiver goes on to share the emotional event with someone else. The relation between the gender of the initiator, the type of humor and the gender of the receiver may affect the choice of humorous mode: a male employee may avoid sharing aggressive humor with a female co-worker and a female employee may avoid sharing self-deprecating humor with her male colleagues (Zillman & Stocking, 1976).

Proposition 11a: Women are more likely than men to appreciate and subsequently reproduce self-deprecating humor in SSSE at the workplace

Proposition 11b: Men are more likely than women to appreciate and subsequently reproduce aggressive and other-directed humor in SSSE at the workplace.

It can be posited that the relative impact of relationship and context may be different in SSSE. Relationships may be less important since the initiator is not the one who actually experienced the original emotional event. Over time the weight shifts towards contextual cues such as uncertainty and ambiguity, organizational culture and the physical environment that are more likely to trigger the humorous elements in SSSE at the workplace. People may also engage in SSSE because they enjoy the humor, and simply want to reproduce it.

Proposition 12: The influence of relational factors on the production of humor in SSSE is less than it is in PSSE, while the influence of contextual factors becomes greater.

In sum, the production of humor in PSSE may be a direct outcome of experienced emotional events, while the reproduction of humor in SSSE may be a direct outcome of an earlier sharing of experiences and of perceived features in the emotional events. The two stages of SSE occur in a work setting as follows. Employees experience emotional events at the workplace and share these with their co-workers, because the emotions associated with the events demand articulation for sensemaking purposes. As the employees proceed to share the experience, there are various factors - their work-based relationship with the receiver, the emotions associated with the experience, the organizational context or their individual characteristics - that incline them to give a humorous spin to the narrative. Those receivers who appreciate the humor may then share the story socially with someone else in the organization. The receivers may also change the original story a little or give it a different humorous spin in order to adapt it to another conversational context. In this way some stories will withstand the trials of time and become well-known features of the organizational culture. They convey important aspects of organizational life in a light-hearted way that people can easily remember.

CONCLUSION

The purpose of this chapter has been to suggest a model of humor in the social sharing of emotion at the workplace. Building on prior humor research and the theory of SSE, and taking into account the specific social situation of the workplace, we have discussed the part played by humor in SSE in organizations on the one hand and, on the other, the part played by SSE in the development of humorous narratives in the organization. Our

model unfolds in three steps: SSE is characterized as a theory for explaining why people share their emotional experiences in PSSE and SSSE at the workplace; PSSE is characterized as relying to a certain extent on the production of humor in organizations; stories from PSSE are transformed into organizational narratives through an iterative process of SSSE.

In organizational behavior research, humor has been widely regarded as an antecedent of emotion. It has been suggested that humor arouses emotions: joy, for example, in case the humor has been appreciated, or anger if it has been resented. Humor, thus, has been conceptualized as beneficial for the well-being and job satisfaction of the employees. This perspective seems to ignore the "ongoing" aspect of the presence of emotion in organizations. Consequently, our model aims to embed humor in the ebb and flow of emotional experiences at work, which means humor may be an outcome as well as an antecedent of emotions in organizations. Given the individual's need to articulate emotional events for sensemaking purposes and the collective's need for narratives as a "sensemaking currency" (Boje, 1991), as well as the specific social conditions at the workplace that imply relatively distant personal relationships, humor emerges as a powerful ingredient in communication at the workplace.

Sharing can occur via a telephone call, an e-mail or a written note, but we assume that it's main medium is face-to-face communication (Rimé et al., 1998). Further, although we have not directly addressed the many forms of sharing that occur - comic strips on the wall of a cubicle, ironic comments posted on a bulletin board or art work displayed in an office for instance - all these and many more can be regarded as possible means of conveying affective reactions to certain events. Such things also serve to help individual people to comprehend the culture of their own organization, to learn about its norms and other people's attitude towards it. Situational humor as expressed in 'horseplay' has not considered been in this chapter, as it has been identified

primarily as a way of counteracting monotony or boredom and is irrelevant to our discussion on the impact of humor in organizations.

An entire emotional event can be presented as a joke, but under certain conditions it is only possible to take up certain aspects of a story, which cannot then be regarded as a complete story with a beginning and an end or as located in its own particular setting. The emotional event on which the account is based may have happened long ago, or just before it was told the first time. Or an experience may be hinted at, discussed, reshaped as a joke and so on, without any attempt to present it as a complete story. It is not altogether clear how far such behavior can be regarded as an instance of SSE, but in the light of the theory presented above, it seems reasonable to regard it as covered by the model.

The intricacies of producing and retelling instances of practical humor make it unlikely that humor produced in the course of SSE will survive for long. Few such stories are likely to enter the corpus of organizational narratives, reflecting common grounds for the sensemaking of an event and its emotional outcomes. But when they do, they may be used to socialize and educate new employees, or as a way of strengthening bonds among the veteran employees through the frequent reiteration of emotional events. Humorous accounts of this kind can also venture beyond the borders of the organization, allowing outsiders a glimpse of various aspects of it. Humor can increase the cohesive nature of a group, or offer individual people a way of being able to talk about emotional events at work. The same time, of course, humor serves to entertain, to strike a responsive cord in others or to attract attention.

It seems to us that the social sharing of emotion, on which we base our ideas about the production of humor at the workplace, has not yet received much scholarly attention in organizations. We could perhaps say that it has been addressed indirectly in theories

on informal communication. Certain findings from social psychology, however, encourage its use in seeking to explain organizational phenomena.

The model described in this chapter is based largely on research findings and theories developed in Western societies. Although SSE has been tested in both individualistic and collectivist cultures, theories of humor and related speculations have their roots in the individualistic world. Readers of this chapter should be cautioned about applying the same model in a collectivist context. Although we believe that the basic elements of humor - production, retention, and transformation - are likely to hold across cultures, the relation between the antecedents and production of humor may be affected by the presence of other social norms, values or concepts of self. Social norms may dictate the amount of humor that can appropriately be shared, for example, or the kind of humor most suitable for sharing. We thus suggest that parallel studies should be conducted in both, the individualistic and the collectivist type of culture, an undertaking that would contribute at the same time to cross-cultural humor research.

Although we have presented separate sets of antecedents for the production of humor in SSE, we do not deny that there may be interactive effects between them. Hence, certain factors in one category may interact with some factors in another, in this way affecting the production and reproduction of humor. At this stage of theory development we have concentrated on identifying certain factors and speculating about their possible general relationship with the phenomenon under study. Further refinement of the theory would necessarily have to build on empirical findings. A research program based on the present model could start by surveying and examining the correlation between all the antecedent factors proposed here and the creation of humor. Specific factors could then be focused and their relationship with the creation of humor tested. For example, the relation between the gender of the initiator, sense of humor, type of emotion, and the type of humor

most likely to be created could be investigated by using a diary. It would be interesting to examine the survival of humorous stories produced in relation to an emotional event in relation to various characteristics of the initiator and receiver.

In brief, the intention of this chapter has been to introduce a general framework for addressing humor in SSE at the workplace and to propose some directions for research. Despite the limitations of the present approach, we suggest that humor and emotion research in organizational behavior seem to be more closely related than has been assumed in previous research. Further exploration of this relationship promises to extend the sensemaking paradigm and to contribute to social psychological research on emotions in organizations.

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ADDRESSING COLLECTIVE MEMORY:

CHIEF EXECUTIVE AUTOBIOGRAPHIES, EMOTION AND THE PRESENTATION OF SELF

Abstract

In recent years a growing number of chief executive autobiographies have appeared on the book market. A hermeneutic analysis of a sample of chief executive autobiographies sheds some light on the way top managers call upon collective memory in their own organizations and the public at large by linking emotion words to the life events described. The findings indicate that the autobiographies constitute a dramaturgical presentation of self that is embedded in the social sharing of emotional life events. Identified display rules show how the chief executives deal with the expectations evoked by their role. The study illustrates how semantic representations of basic emotions are employed, how critical life episodes are viewed and how the chief executives relate to stakeholders. From this there emerges a picture of the way chief executives use emotion.

**ADDRESSING COLLECTIVE MEMORY:
CHIEF EXECUTIVE AUTOBIOGRAPHIES, EMOTION AND
THE PRESENTATION OF SELF**

In recent years, the number of chief executives who published their autobiographies has been growing steadily. Various ways in which these autobiographies can make a potential contribution to organizational science have been identified, for instance by calling attention to the basic assumptions of leaders prevailing among managerial elites (Sjoberg and Kuhn, 1989). Autobiographies, together with interviews and other archival data have been used to create psychobiographical profiles of chief executives (Kets de Vries, 1990), or to describe leader traits (Gardner and Laskin, 1998). It has been assumed that an inherent dialectical relation exists between leading organizational actors and their organizations (Meindl and Ehrlich, 1987). And with the increasing celebrity of CEOs (Hayward and Westphal, 2002), the dialectical relation appears to be extending to include society as a stakeholder as well. The chief executives of major corporations seem to have acquired the status of public figures, which in turn may explain the growing number of autobiographies that they are producing. They are both creating and addressing a demand.

A great many studies have focused on these managerial elites (for a review, see Pettigrew, 1992), and special attention is often paid to the way top management team members influence their organizations (Hambrick and Mason, 1984; Hayward and Hambrick, 1997). Paradoxically, this research portrays top managers as being context-dependent, while also possessing institutional and societal power (Sjöstrand, 1997). The present study sheds some light on these questions by focusing on critical events and relationships with stakeholders as described in chief executive autobiographies, and examining the way these are intended to create and mold an image among stakeholders and the general public. Autobiographies are presumably written to show how top managers remember and make sense of past events, and how they wish to be seen by the stakeholders of their organizations and by the general public.

It is recognized that chief executives often use co-authors or ghostwriters to put their memories into words. Publishing an autobiography is thus not necessarily about telling the truth, but about providing a sensemaking picture of the "author's" personality and past experience of events, in the cause of that author's interests. The present study focuses on the way the autobiographies are written and directed at potential readers, "as if" they had stemmed directly from a chief executive's pen. The interest lies in the way the literary genre and medium of autobiography is used to appeal to the public memory of the alleged authors and their deeds (Lejeune, 1989). The question as to whether if the autobiography is written by the chief executive alone, by the chief executive with the help of a co-author, or completely by a ghostwriter can be disregarded. Any mention in the following pages about chief executives as "authors" of their autobiographies automatically includes the influence of possible co-authors and ghostwriters.

Of particular interest here is the way the authors employ semantic representations of emotion in their autobiographies. A recent tendency in leadership studies has identified emotion as a critical influential factor in leadership. Display of emotion (Kristi,

2000; Barsade et al, 2000), charisma (Den Hartog and Verburg, 1997; House et al., 1991), transformative leadership (Ashforth and Humphrey, 1995) and the emotional intelligence of leaders (Fineman, 2000; Caruso et al., 2002) are examples of topics that concern emotion in leadership studies. These studies suggest that there is an emotional dimension to leadership, namely leaders recognize and manage their own emotions and those of other people in order to attain influence. This implies that emotional expression on the part of managers has a potential impact on the operations and culture of the organizations under their leadership (Sjöstrand, 1997).

The purpose of the present study is to acquire further insight into leaders' use of emotional expression, namely by focusing on the semantic representation of emotion in autobiographies of chief executives. It will be argued that emotion words in autobiographies are used to steer attention, to refer to desirable inner emotional states in the managers, and to strike a responsive chord with the reader as a presentation of self. This is done in order to address the collective memory regarding the managers and their deeds in a favorable way.

COLLECTIVE MEMORY

When chief executives write their autobiographies it can be assumed that they are aware of their own celebrity status and are calling upon a collective memory of events surrounding their lives, their organizations, their products and various related events. The term *collective memory* (Halbwachs, 1992 [1950]) describes how social groups retain, alter or re-appropriate the social memory of events, episodes, persons or eras. Once established, collective memory is far from stable. It has been found that it changes over time and from generations to generation, such that successive generations may remember different events particularly well

(Schuman and Scott, 1989 ; Schwartz, 1991), or it may be consciously re-evoked and adapted to a new context (Schwartz, 1996). Collective memory is thus portrayed as a continuously changing entity that is subject to time and to social change, power and culture (Swindler and Ardit, 1994). Thus, it is part of the ongoing sensemaking (Weick, 1995) and social construction of reality (Berger & Luckman, 1966;) It has been claimed that collective memory is a property of not only societies but also of organizations (Walsh and Ungson, 1991).

When it comes to the conscious influencing of collective memory, the media are thought to play an important role. For example, journalists call upon collective memory when they commemorate events, draw historical analogies, or describe historical contexts (Edy, 1999). It has been argued that technological changes in the media have influenced the way events are collectively retained. The invention of the printing press in particular revolutionized the methods of collective remembering. Knowledge and narratives about events were no longer confined to slow copying by hand or the spoken word, but were now more easily "fixed" and reproduced in written form (Eisenstein, 1979).

Accordingly autobiographies can be understood as "fixed" and reproducible narratives, accessible to large numbers of people and consequently available for interpretation and discussion. Collective memories concerning chief executives and their organizations develop from events that attracted attention in their day in the internal and external environment of the organizations concerned. It can be assumed that chief executives occupy a special position in constructing a collective memory of such events. They probably operate as the principal "human broadcasters" (Rime and Christophe, 1997) for the top-management-based "insider" view of certain events. They can meet the need for information to complete a collective memory, and their key role gives them an opportunity to attempt to influence collective memory in their own favor. One way of invoking collective memory is to publish an autobiography.

EMOTION IN AUTOBIOGRAPHIES

Emotion appears in autobiographies in the shape of a narrated event that contains some word denoting an emotion such as "love", "fear" or "surprise", or in colloquial expressions with an emotional content such as "I was smoldering" or "it left a bitter taste". These are seen as labels or semantic representations of emotion in a language (Averill, 1975; Shaver et al., 1987; Bellelli, 1995). Essentially, an emotional event can be any described as happening in a certain place or during a particular period of time that the authors identify as important and mark with words referring to emotional states. In this form the information in autobiographies is emotionally primed by words denoting emotion. These words personalize the narrative and make it more engaging as well as guiding the reader's interpretation of the portrayed events (Bjorklund, 1995).

It can be assumed that the chief executives who publish autobiographies regard the emotional events that are described there as appropriate for sharing with a wider audience. In the fixed form of an autobiography the emotions described thus reveal an adherence to display rules (Ekman and Friesen, 1969; Hochschild, 1979). These rules account for *what* can be emotionally expressed, *how* it can be expressed and in *what* situations. A normative emotion code defines when a person has the right to express happiness, jealousy, anger and so on. It can be assumed that by invoking collective memory in their autobiographies, chief executives are recreating and influencing the display rules for leaders accepted by the stakeholders of their organizations and the general public. Within these limits, display rules refer to beliefs about the appropriate range, intensity, duration and target of emotions expressed in given situations (Thoits, 1989). The published form and the adherence to display rules suggest that autobiographies contribute broadly to the social construction of reality in organizations and society (cf. Berger and Luckmann, 1966). Their

contribution consists in the thoughts and emotions that chief executives allegedly experience and express (Harré, 1986).

In addressing collective memory and trying to understand the function of displayed emotion in this context, it can be helpful to look at the process whereby collective memory develops. Rimé and Christophe (1997), for example, describe the case of the kidnapping of a former Belgium prime minister. The crime received huge media attention. A few days after his release in return for a ransom, the former prime minister told the story of his kidnapping in great detail at a press conference. The emotions he displayed and his thoughts on the whole event became widely known in Belgium through the media and, as people told and re-told his story, it entered the collective memory. He was repeatedly quoted in the press, his emotional words entered popular songs, and people borrowed phrases from his story for their mundane communications to illustrate and exemplify their own stories. It has been suggested that the diffusion of knowledge about an event and the retention of a story in collective memory depends on the emotions displayed in the relevant account (Rimé & Christophe, 1997). This view is supported by findings on the diffusion of urban legends, which are also more widely shared if they elicit strong emotions (Heath, Bell and Sternberg, 2001).

In the Belgian example two components become apparent: the media coverage of the original event and the story told by the person who was most affected. To develop or change collective memory, a personal story that is emotionally engaging and comes from somebody who was closely involved in the event seems to be required. It provides the illusion of immediacy. Such stories have also been described as an initial social sharing of emotion, because it is assumed that the event-related emotion portrayed will stimulate and guide other peoples' subsequent communication of the event and, thus, the development of collective memory (Rimé et al., 1991). Such storytelling promotes sensemaking, in that it re-invokes the story and lets people reflect upon it (Weick, 1995). It has been

thought that people evoke and consolidate their own memory of events by continued sharing (Rimé et al., 1995; 1998). The emotion portrayed in a story, so runs the basic assumption, elicits an outward-directed "working through" process in the listeners, with a view to restoring beliefs or finding meaning in the events described. This need for sensemaking in the development of collective memory, also implies the existence of a public demand for immediate first-hand stories about events. Autobiographies can meet this demand for a story and thus feed into collective memory.

Thus, to recapitulate, it is suggested that stories containing semantic representations of emotions can promote the development of collective memory and steer its direction. Consequently, an autobiography can be regarded as a story and an initial instance of social sharing of emotion, aimed at anchoring the events portrayed in the mind of the readers by employing words that denote emotions (Bjorklund, 1995; Ruth and Vilkkö, 1996). Due to the lack of other direct sources, the reader is fairly likely to see the relevant events through that particular lens, especially when the autobiography is well crafted. However, the idea of an autobiography as a story and an initial social sharing of emotion, contains the possibility of exaggeration or deception. The words denoting emotions in autobiographies do not necessarily relate to any "real" emotions experienced. They probably seldom do so. Their function is to address collective memory, and co-authors and ghostwriters can help the chief executive to achieve the desired effect.

A DRAMATURGICAL PRESENTATION OF SELF

It can be expected that the events narrated in autobiographies are based on real-life events and any major deviation from this might be noticed in public scrutiny that follows publication.

Exaggerating one's positions, or engaging in attempts at self-justification that will not withstand long-term scrutiny, can threaten the credibility of such autobiographical accounts (Sjoberg and Kuhn 1989). However, it appears that the chief executive authors are also seeking to present their own legacy, and to justify various of their own acts, beliefs and values to stakeholders and the general public in a way that makes acceptable sense (Hansen, 1996; Weick, 1995). The autobiographies of chief executives could be described as dramaturgical presentations of self. By this expression, Goffman (1959) meant the way actors on the social stage present themselves to others. In his framework Goffman borrows from theatrical terminology. In the cause of social harmony the presentation of self is designed to provide information to the social environment and to fulfill its expectations about the occupant of a role. In the case of autobiographies the self portrayed is a public image that does not necessarily correspond to the subject's private view of themselves. The authors offer a picture based on their individual interpretation of their own history, their own chief executive role, complete with the accompanying display rules of emotion.

As well as meeting the expectations attaching to the role, the role-occupants also have the opportunity to try to change certain aspects of the role concerned. This ties up with the idea of sensemaking as a manipulation of the organizational environment, whereby chief executives impact the flow of environmental demands and resources (Weick, 1995). The authors of the autobiographies we are discussing here can be seen as high-power individuals attempting to exert social impact on the way they, as belonging to a managerial elite, are perceived by their organizations and by a wider public. This is reflected in the dialectical relation that has been posited between senior managerial actors, their organizations and the wider public in the polarity between context dependency and the possession of institutional and societal power (Crozier and Friedberg, 1977). In the organizations to which the authors belong the autobiographical narrative may become part of the internal

facilities for the retention of culture and organizational memory (Walsh and Ungson, 1991)

An analysis of a sample of autobiographies by political figures, military leaders, scientists and artists suggests that the concepts of self and self-development as portrayed there have changed in such autobiographies over the last 200 years or so, reflecting changes in social life, technology and the behavioral sciences (Bjorklund, 1989). A similar development can be noticed in the way their autobiographers explain the emotions. The "self" portrayed in the autobiographies emerges as a category created by culturally conventionalized interpretation (Bjorklund, 1995). As a category, this self is both idealized and paradoxical, in that it blends the past with the future on a basis of the images by which it wants to be remembered, thus creating a "postself" and seeking immortality (Schmitt and Leonard II, 1986).

In a study of the self-images entertained by American chief executives, Hansen (1996) surveyed a number of autobiographies to discover the self-attributed leadership traits of their authors. He found that chief executives attributed to themselves the ability to make quick decisions, intuition and strong leadership. He concluded that these traits are rarely sufficient to explain the success of these authors in business life, and he identifies them as part of their presentation of self. He claims that the three traits serve to legitimize the special position held by the autobiographers in their organizations and in society at large.

METHODS

A hermeneutic line of research was chosen here, in order to identify semantic representations of emotion in autobiographies. The research design follows a multiple-case logic, whereby the search

for replications confirms or disconfirms emerging categories (Yin, 1984).

Sampling

Five criteria were adopted in choosing autobiographies that lent themselves to analysis according to the questions and frameworks developed above. The *first criterion* is that the autobiographies should bear the name of the relevant chief executive as its main author, so that the readers will spontaneously attribute everything written in the book to that person. The *second criterion* for inclusion in the sample is that the book should be about the chief executive's life, and not - as is often the case - an account of their management philosophy. *Third*, autobiographies in the sample should be written by chief executives whose native language is English, since the understanding of emotional concepts varies from one language to another (cf. Russel et al., 1995). The *fourth criterion* is that the books be connected with a specific period in business history, because popular concepts of the self change over time (Bjorklund, 1989; 1995). Thus the time frame for the sample in the present study was restricted to the autobiographies of people attaining top management positions in the second half of the 20th Century. *Fifth*, to obtain a reasonably homogenous sample, autobiographies were limited to those working for the producers and retailers of consumer goods, since the familiarity of the public with their products would open the way for a potentially wide circle of readers in the context of collective memory. After the existing literature had been reviewed in the light of these criteria, nine autobiographies were selected for the study (see Table 1).

TABLE 1
Coded Autobiographies

<i>Author</i>	<i>Title of Autobiography</i>	<i>Company</i>	<i>First Published</i>
Jack Welch	Straight from the Gut	General Electric	2001
Richard Branson	Loosing my Virginity: How I've survived, had fun, and made a fortune doing business my way	Virgin	1998
James Dyson	Against the Odds: An Autobiography	Dyson	1997
Howard Schultz	Pour your Heart into it: How Starbucks built a Company one Cup at a Time	Starbucks Coffee	1997
Sam Walton	Made in America: My Story	Wal-Mart	1992
Thomas Watson Jr.	Father, Son and Co.: My life at IBM and beyond	IBM	1990
Roger Enrico	The Other Guy blinked: How Pepsi won the Cola Wars	Pepsi Cola	1986
Lee Iacocca	Iacocca: An Autobiography	Ford & Chrysler	1984
Ray Kroc	Grinding it out: The Making of McDonald's	McDonald's	1977

Data Coding

The method used here for coding emotion in autobiographies is derived from content analysis (Insch, Moore and Murphy, 1997). Words denoting emotional states were identified and collated. However, in contrast to conventional content analysis, which puts an emphasis on word counts and statistics, the present study followed a

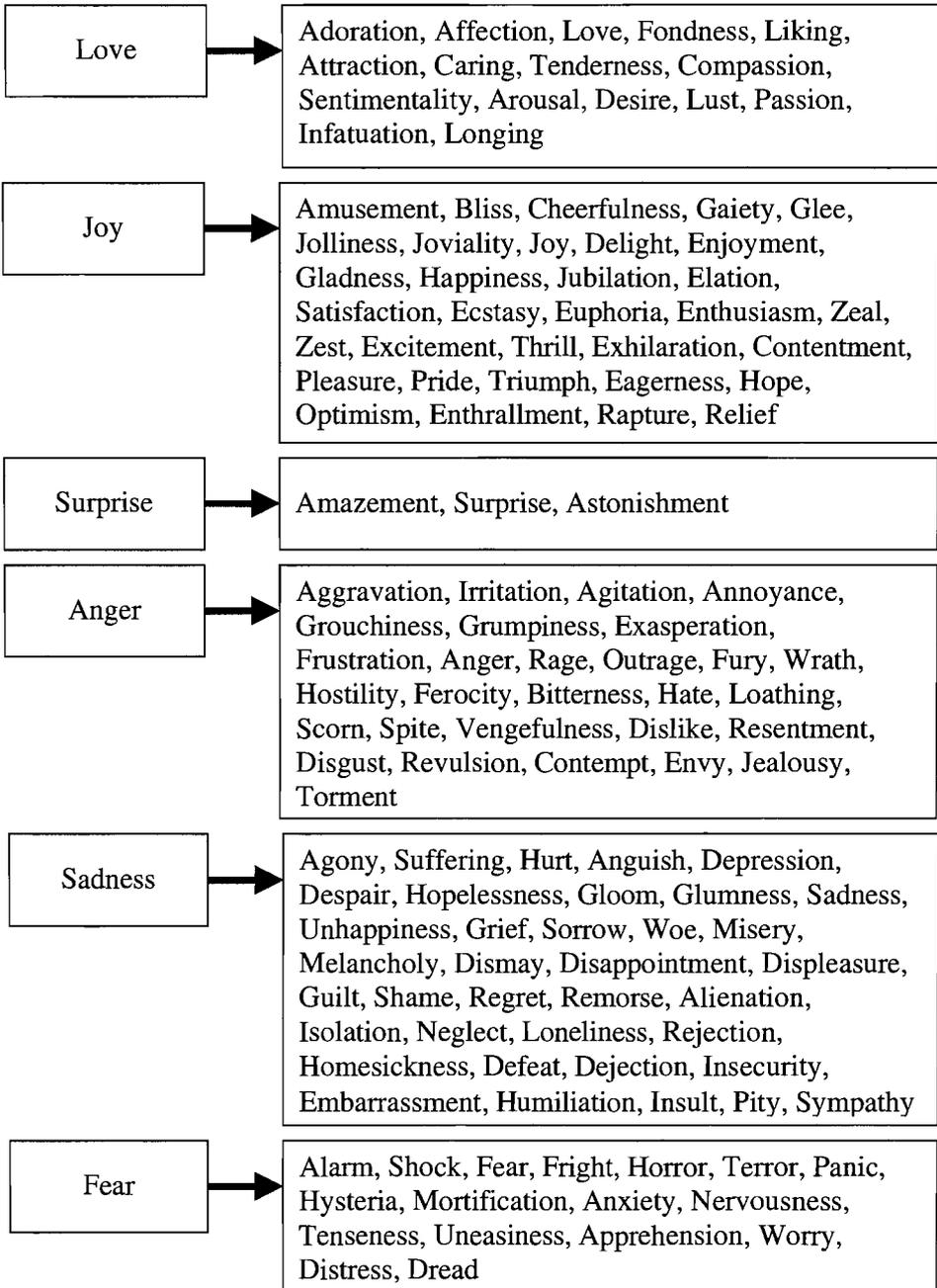
hermeneutic line in the data analysis. In line with the theory revisited above the number of times the word "anger" appeared, for example, is not as relevant as the subjects or objects to which the word "anger" is related. In other words, even if a word appears often, this may not say much about its significance in the context of the autobiographies. Its relation to the content is what reveals its value to the interpretation. In this I align myself with the criticism regularly raised against conventional forms of content analysis (cf. Rosengren, 1981).

Guidelines for a coding system that considers the expression of emotion in these books can be found in Shaver and colleagues (1987), which take up the idea of basic emotions for developing distinct hierarchies in the semantic representation of emotion. The authors of this study show how ca 200 emotion words can be traced back to their origins in six basic emotions: love, joy, anger, sadness, fear and surprise (see Table 2). It is possible to reduce semantic representations to such basic categories because they represent "fuzzy sets". They don't define a sensation with sharp boundaries, but provide a vague idea of the physical experience they represent (Bellelli, 1995).

In autobiographical narratives the emotion words used to describe events can be seen as an exemplification of display rules. In the present case coded words from the emotion hierarchy were categorized according to their attribution: to the chief executive, or to others. In a display-rules perspective, two categories emerge. (1) Emotions that the chief executives describe themselves as having experienced (but maybe should not have done), and emotions that they describe themselves as not having felt (but maybe should have done). (2) Emotions that the chief executives describe others as having had (but maybe should not have done), and emotions that they describe others as not having had (but maybe should have done). This categorization indicates the normative character of the emotions described in the autobiographies. However, the way other people felt or didn't feel is not directly linked to the display rules

FIGURE 1

Semantic Emotion Hierarchy (adapted from Shaver et al., 1986)



applying to top managers. For the present analysis of chief executives and their invocation of collective memory, only events connected with their own emotions have been taken into account.

FINDINGS

First, the semantic representations of the basic emotions of love, joy, surprise, anger, fear and sadness in the autobiographies were identified as representing categorical display rules as relationship-shaping entities. The use of these words provide the first clues about the way the authors of the autobiographies position their presentation of self. Next, the way these basic emotions are related over time to the organizational context portrayed is traced in two steps. Step one looks at critical life events as occasions for collective memory, while step two considers stakeholder groups as the immediate addressees of the accounts. For an overview on how basic emotions are displayed see Figure 1. In the following quotations from the autobiographies the coded emotion words are italicized.

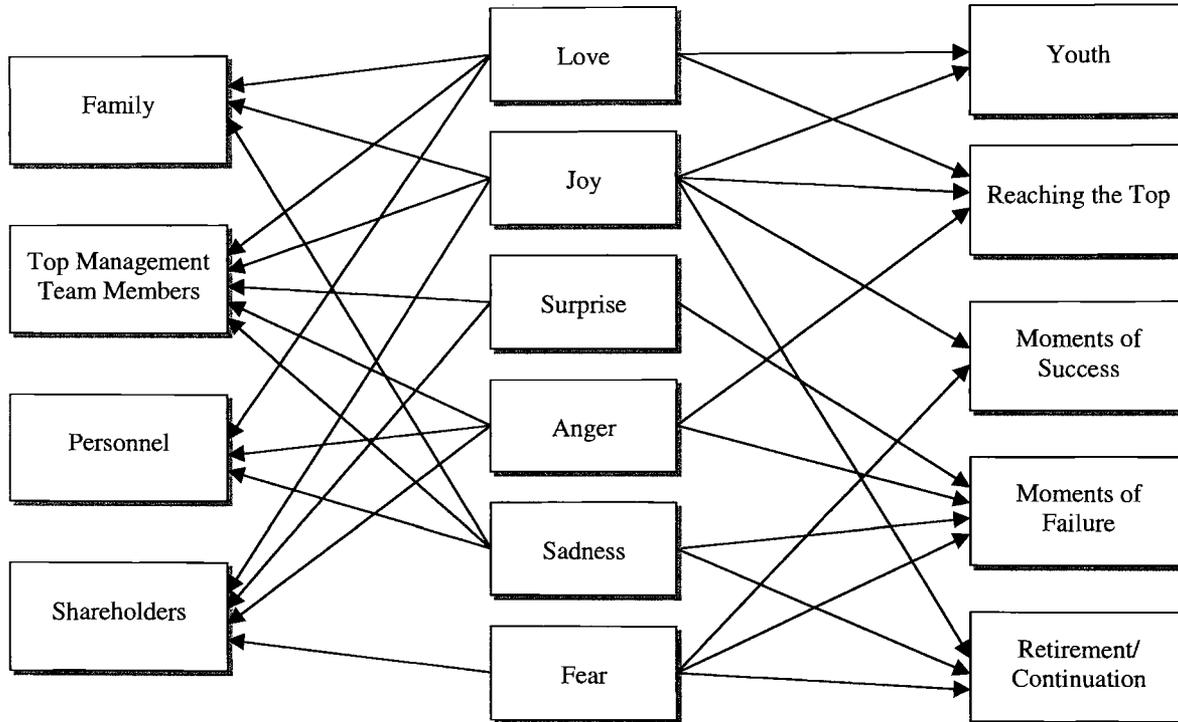
Basic Emotions

As might be expected, the authors use the words *love* and affection in connection with members of their family and close friends.

"But that night when I sat holding Joan's scribbled note in the houseboat and thought about our unborn baby, I realized that I really *loved* her." (Branson, p. 141).

But in connection with their working life, the word "love" is more frequently used to describe the chief executives' emotion about business deals and their work in the organization. In their own view,

FIGURE 2
Emotion Displayed in Respect to Critical Life Events and Stakeholder Groups



chief executives have to be in love with their company, their employees and their business ventures. This indicates that the presentation of self is reflected in the author's work life rather than in private events.

"I *loved* the car business and I *loved* the Ford Motor Company."
(Iacocca, p. 93)

For these chief executives this is a way of demonstrating their support for the company and their faith in the business deals they have initiated and for which they are responsible. In such contexts, love is an expression of commitment. In respect to mundane activities, chief executives express love for the daily processes of their work such as decision making, or engaging in projects at various levels in the organization.

"I began to *love* the decision-making process - the feeling of responsibility and the opportunity to see later whether a decision was right or wrong. It was *thrilling* to be in the middle of the technology business as it picked up speed in the postwar world." (Watson, p. 138)

Joy is seen as directly linked to the excitement of doing the job of a chief executive. In connection with love, joy is displayed as the outcome of the work events that these people experience, particularly when critical events occur.

"My years as general manager of the Ford division where the *happiest* period of my life. For my colleagues and me, this was fire-in-the-belly time. We were high from smoking our own brand - a combination of hard work and big dreams." (Iacocca, p. 65)

In identifying themselves with the performance of their organizations, joy for the executive is linked to the feeling of overcoming resistance, gaining control and seeing their organization grow. Joy is displayed as a counter-reaction to the fear and surprise that is also connected with the role of the top manager.

"I was terribly *proud* of the start I'd made. I didn't like it when people compared me to my father, but I felt that if I could keep my record going for perhaps another ten years, I'd be able to count myself into the same league as Dad." (Watson, p. 298)

Surprise is expressed by chief executives when people in their immediate environment do not act in the way they had expected, or when confronted by negative events. In such cases, the source of the surprise is usually identified as another person, be it someone outside or inside the executive's own organization.

"To my great *surprise*, this was echoed by one man at headquarters who kept prodding me to act: Kirk's old crony Birkenstock. Talking him out of quitting after Kirk died was one of the best moves I ever made, (...)" (Watson, p. 196)

It becomes apparent from the autobiographies that top managers use *anger* as a means for achieving their goals in the organization. The chief executives in our sample reveal that they don't repress their own anger in the way they might expect their subordinates to do. Rather they claim that they reinforce and express their emotion to promote action that suits their own interests.

"Dad had taught me that a good businessman has to be an actor. You have to make a show of getting *angry* a lot more often than you really lose your temper; you have to look more *worried* than you really are when trying to stimulate someone to tackle a problem. Dad was a master in hammering it up in this way, and I patterned my actions after him whenever I got the chance." (Watson, p. 300)

The chief executives understand that anger does not always lead to the desired results, but it is expressed as the most immediate way of overcoming resistance. Anger evidently serves the chief executive as a way of maintaining control over other organizational members and organizational events.

"I *hate* being out of control, and I had no idea what to do." (Branson, p. 66)

In contrast to the aforementioned emotions, *sadness* is seen as related to the inability to do the right thing. It is born of restrictions on action. On the interpersonal level, sadness may originate in negative social relationships with the top management team. Or, it may come from the inability to overcome criticism from outsiders.

"It is *lonely* on top. I never felt this so keenly as when Harry Sonnenborn and I had our final confrontation, and he resigned." (Kroc, p. 152).

Sadness can also come from environmental factors beyond the influence of the top managers, factors that leave them without an adequate response.

"The entire episode with the warrants left a bad taste in my mouth. But what really made the Chrysler victory a mixed blessing for me is that it coincided with the greatest personal *sadness* of my life." (Iacocca, p. 300)

Fear is connected primarily with work life events relating to high-risk operations and, is less frequently connected with people.

"I was *scared* stiff over this one, and I gave it a lot of pushback. Toho was a bankrupt company, and the scale and the scope of the acquisition *overwhelmed* me. This was unfamiliar territory." (Welch, p. 246)

Especially the fear-related emotion word "worry" in particular is portrayed as an emotional response towards the daily events that concern the companies. Top managers speak of their constant worry about their organizations, thus displaying seriousness and concern. As the autobiographies show, chief executives see their worries as a necessary part of their work life.

"But I keep *worrying*. I find it impossible to stop my brain from churning through all the ideas and possibilities facing me at any given moment, [...]" (Branson, p. 92)

Here, fear is seen as a motivator and a means for keeping attention focused on critical matters concerning the organization, as something that drives the leaders to perform at the highest level. Fear of loss of control is close to the fear of doing a bad job.

"*Fear* of failure became the most powerful force in my life. I think anybody who gets a job like mine, unless he's stupid, must be a little bit *afraid*. There is such a long way to fall." (Watson, p. 284)

Critical Life Events

Display rules describe the appropriate emotional response to a given situation. An examination of the semantic representations of emotion in a chief executive autobiography can thus direct the readers' attention to critical events in the authors' lives, while also

throwing some light on the reactions that the writers consider appropriate at the time when they are actually writing. The type of critical events that are likely to be relevant in this context are youth, reaching the top, moments of success, moments of failure, retirement (see Figure 2).

In the chief executive autobiographies, *youth* is idealized as an opportunity for learning about leadership, and other relevant and valuable qualities. Chief executives link their childhood experiences to the experiences and successes of their later business lives. An apparently important emotion that enters descriptions of youth is the development of joy in competition, whereby sport is commonly seen as a significant influence.

"It's always been a part of my personality to develop an unbridled *passion* about things that interest me. My first *passion* was for baseball." (Schultz, p. 14)

Top managers see themselves as strategic actors and they emphasize this by pointing out that they love card games for their strategic elements.

"But my long illness changed all that. I gave up sports and started to playing chess, bridge, and especially poker. I still *love* poker, and I usually win. It's a great game for learning when to exploit an advantage, when to back off, and when to bluff. (It sure came in handy years later during tough labor negotiations!)" (Iacocca, p. 17)

Another area where the joy of competitiveness is often learned is in debating teams at school. Chief executives are aware of themselves as public figures. Consequently, an activity that helps them overcome the fear of public speaking is seen as an important preparation for their later careers.

"The only thing I really *enjoyed* about school was debating. Here was an activity I could get my teeth into - figuratively, of course - but I would not have hesitated to bite a debate opponent if it would have advanced my argument. I *loved* being in the center of attention, persuading the audience that my side was right." (Kroc, p. 18)

As regards *reaching the top*, four of the autobiographies in the study are by men who were selected for the chief executive positions

by their companies. The other five others founded their own companies, thus also acquiring top management positions. The "selected" chief executives report hating the procedures of the "rat race", e.g. the competition for positions.

"The competition to succeed Reg (the former CEO) has been brutal, complicated by heavy politics and big egos, my own included. It was *disgusting*." (Welch, p. xiii)

However, it is the joy at winning the top position that prevails. The autobiographers see themselves as deserving their new positions as the result of hard work. And as soon as they have won it, they report how much they love holding on to exercising the power.

"Like most chief executives, I *felt the desire* to be totally dominant in the company I was running" (Watson, p. 255)

Ultimately, the position is seen as enjoyable and taken-for-granted. It is regarded as the personal property of the top manager.

"I was also greedy. I *enjoyed* being president. I liked having the president's perks, the special parking place, the private bathroom, the white-coated waiters. I was getting soft, seduced by the good life." (Iacocca, p. 127)

On the other hand there are the top managers who founded a company and gained a chief executive positions as a result. Unlike their selected colleagues, these chief executives report the joy and excitement they felt as they established their own base.

"I was *elated* when I finally got that store open and it began to show profit." (Kroc, p. 79)

While the self is conceived and presented as a creative and active individual, the joy in success comes to be seen as something of wider social consequence.

"I felt enormous *pride* whenever I saw people carrying Virgin paper bags along Oxford Street." (Branson, p. 61)

For *moments of success* public recognition is regarded as important. The immediate reaction is joy at the success of the deal or the events, but this is accompanied by relief.

"Much later I was talking to someone when a wave of exhaustion hit me. I realized that we had won. All the stress cleared out of my

shoulders, and I smiled with a *happy* content smile, toppled sideways, and fell deeply asleep." (Branson, p. 340)

However, a certain fear arises with success: fear of having to repeat it.

"If I was *scared* when I first became president I was *doubly scared* now. IBM had already reached a size at which I felt it might be prudent to slow to a more sedate growth that I was sure we could finance and manage." (Watson, p. 253)

At the same time, this fear spurs the chief executives to look forward to new ventures, as every success is seen as linked to a high-risk game. They describe regaining their joy in their everyday work.

The immediate reactions to *moments of failure* are surprise and anger.

"Next morning Dire Straits called us up and told us that they were going to sign with PolyGram. No reasons were given. Simon and I were *horrified*. We couldn't believe it." (Branson, p. 112)

Sadness (shame and guilt) for the situation are then frequently expressed. The chief executives see themselves as directly responsible for the failure. They describe how they identified with the organization.

"That Sunday evening, I called 14 of GE's business leaders to deliver the bad news and apologize to each of them for what had happened. I felt terrible, because this *surprise* would hit the stock and hurt every GE employee. I blamed myself for the disaster." (Welch, p. 225)

However, the emotions displayed at failure are seen as a call to action. By the time of writing, chief executives are probably finding it easier to interpret the failure as an event that led to further action.

"But I was so *enraged* by what had happened that it's a good thing I found myself a new job right away. Otherwise, I might have burned out, just stewing in my own *anger*." (Iacocca, p. 143)

As regards *retirement and continuation*, chief executives give different reasons for writing at that particular time. Of the nine autobiographies four were written by chief executives leaving the corporate scene due to retirement. The other five were written by

chief executives who were continuing their involvement in the corporation at top level. Among those retiring, age and the longing to do something else are given as reasons for stepping down and looking for other occupations.

"I also wanted time to *enjoy* myself with my wife and my children. My *zest* for business was evaporating fast." (Watson, p. 390)

For those retiring, the transfer of control to others is presented as a life event connected with the fear of having nothing to do any more. However, the chief executives who have founded their own organizations are more likely to stay involved in it after their official retirement from the top position. Fear and sadness at the idea of letting go are also reported.

"Nobody believed it at the time, but although I was *unhappy* with some of the things going on under Ron's chairmanship, real *unhappy* with a few, I tried as hard as I could to convince him to stay and be part of our growth even though he couldn't be chairman and CEO." (Walton, p. 194)

In contrast, autobiographers who intend to remain in their top positions after publishing their autobiographies, close their accounts with a list of things they want to do in the future. They describe issues that fill them with joy. They expect more of the same.

"The way we do all the best at Pepsi USA, as I *hope* these pages have shown, is first and foremost by *surprising* ourselves - by coming into the office, morning after morning, with the sense that anything we want to do is possible. And it's *amazing* how original you can be - and how much *fun* you can have - when you got that mind-set working for you." (Enrico, p. 273)

Stakeholder Groups

The emotions displayed in the autobiographies are also related to specific people or groups, who can also be identified as possible addressees for the autobiographies. The relationship patterns represent display rules that are important for maintaining social ties. The most prominent stakeholder groups mentioned in the autobiographies are family, members of top management, personnel

and shareholders. For an overview of the links with the basic emotions see Figure 2.

The chief executives express themselves in different ways when it comes to their feelings about their *families*. However, the basic theme is the love they feel for their wives and children. Reference to the private love relationship regularly includes mention of references to the support required of their spouses and children in connection with their own time-consuming work as chief executive.

"But I wanted somebody who would give me sweetness, *love*, and support - and somebody who wasn't going to feel upstaged if I actually managed to accomplish something in my life." (Watson, p. 82)

This is said in connection with displaying sadness at not having enough time for family matters. However, when they do reach the top or experience great success in their operations, the chief executives see it as a reward enjoyed by the entire family.

"The moment Henry [Ford] walked out the door. I called my wife. Then I called my father in Allentown to tell him the good news. During his long and active life my father had a lot of *happy* moments, but I am sure my phone call that day ranked near the top." (Iacocca, p. 98)

Possible loneliness at the top is compensated by the feeling of joy shared with other *members of top management*, who are frequently referred to as friends and competitors. In this context, joy can also be seen as an appropriate reaction, if a difficult personal relationship at work is solved by one party leaving the company.

"At the time Nik and I were both *happy*. Nik was happy to have left a company that looked as if it was heading into trouble, and I was *happy* to have virtually full control of my destiny even if I knew Virgin was on knife-edge." (Branson, p. 148)

When relationships have broken down after a power crisis, sadness is reported about the way matters have been handled.

"I felt nothing but *shame and frustration* at the way I'd treated him. There were so many other ways to have managed things" (Watson, p. 360)

While chief executives search for people in their environment who share their own feeling of love for the organization, they are nevertheless always eager to present themselves as different from other members of the top management team, thus defining certain spheres of influence. They refer to emotional differences, using emotional terms with reference to themselves and the other top management members.

"On the other hand, his cool, *dispassionate* manner didn't inspire much spirit and enthusiasm. I like to get people fired up, fill them with *zeal* for McDonald's, and watch the results in their work." (Kroc, p. 98)

Chief executives sometimes refer to their *personnel* in a loving way, as though they belonged to their family. Laying off employees is generally presented as a sad event.

"Firings are *never pleasant*, so you have to handle them with as much compassion as you can muster. You have to put yourself in the other guy's shoes and recognize that no matter how you dress it up, it's a pretty bad day in anyone's life. It's especially hard when the person feels it's not really his fault, that he's the victim of bad management, or that the top people never really cared about him" (Iacocca, p. 200)

When cuts in the workforce are spoken of as something negative, anger at being unable to do anything else is also expressed.

"Giving people their notice is always heart-wrenching, and I *hate* doing it. I *hate* confrontation and I *hate disappointing* people, I always try to give people another chance." (Branson, p. 206)

On the other hand the chief executives defend themselves by referring to their dislike of letting the company decline due to high labor costs, thus legitimizing the layoffs. This reveals signs of rationalization and justification.

"[...] Newsweek magazine was the first publication to pick up the moniker "Neutron Jack," the guy who removed the people but left the buildings standing. I *hated* it, and it hurt. But I *hated* bureaucracy and waste even more. The data-obsessed headquarters and the low margins in turbines were equally offensive to me." (Welch, p. 125)

In general *shareholders* are banks or families. The actions of these powerful stakeholders can sometimes surprise the top management team. Dealing with the banks is presented as an awkward affair. Anger-inducing disagreement with banks is not uncommon.

"I *resented* the rebuff, and you can be sure that I did my banking elsewhere from then on." (Kroc, p. 107)

On the other hand banks are very necessary to operations and are seen as important shareholders. Bringing wealth to the shareholders is presented as a positive undertaking and when the goal is reached it is displayed as a source of joy. When the goal is not achieved, it is a fearsome experience for the chief executive. Here the shareholders are being taken as an external point of reference for the success of the chief executive and his evaluation of his own feelings.

"I walked into the annual meeting that year filled with *dread*. Any minute I expected a stockholder to say, 'I have a question for the younger Mr. Watson. Is this the kind of performance that we can expect from you as a president?' Luckily nobody asked, but I felt shaken." (Watson, p. 249)

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

The sample autobiographies indicate that chief executives use emotion words in connection with the events described from their own lives, in order to signal what they regard as the appropriate emotional reactions in given contexts. The appearance of similar patterns of display in the autobiographies is interesting, since on the whole there are considerable personal differences among the authors themselves. The likeness might indicate that chief executives have become socialized into the organizational and public expectations surrounding their role. Or, it may be the influence of co-authors or

ghostwriters, who possess knowledge of the ways that an autobiographical account is supposed to be composed. The display rules regarding emotion and the dramaturgical presentation of self have been introduced here as an analytical frame. In this light, autobiographies can be said to be invoking collective memories in organizations and society.

In these reviews of their lives the chief executives appear to be making sense of their work experiences before an audience of company stakeholders and the public in general, and they seek to draw a coherent picture of their own actions and emotions. This sensemaking may be aimed at the re-defining of display rules. The authors display before the readers whatever it was that they allegedly loved, enjoyed, were surprised about, got angry about, were sad about, or feared. In this way they attempt to guide their readers' evaluations and interpretations. However, as the theory of dramaturgical presentation of self has suggested, the aim may also be to make the autobiography more engaging, to win the sympathy of the reader perhaps by striking a responsive chord, or to excuse or justify questionable behavior.

The analysis of the autobiographies enabled the development of an explorative framework for emotions displayed in relation to critical life events and stakeholder groups. The emotions serve as explanatory factors for the collectively remembered events, whereby the chief executives also introduce their own self-image in a culturally conventionalized interpretation. The results of the analysis thus allowed for a further picture of the chief executives' use of emotion. By singling out six basic emotions and showing how they are displayed in respect to the critical life events and the stakeholder groups, Figure 2 offers an overview of the display patterns as they emerged in the sample of autobiographies. In particular, the findings suggest love as an emotion that shows the commitment of the chief executives to their families, their organizations and its constituent members. Joy reveals itself as the basic emotion that appears in most categories. Joy was not much in evidence in connection with

personnel, however, which might indicate a certain distance between the chief executives and the workforce. Surprise was displayed in fewer categories than the other emotions. It was frequently displayed in connection with top management team members and shareholders, which might suggest that chief executives present themselves as people who can only be surprised by other powerful actors. The findings indicate that chief executives display anger in order to overcome resistance and to motivate other organizational members. The reasons for displaying sadness vary, suggesting that it is a less specifically defined emotion. That fear is displayed only towards shareholders suggests the importance of shareholder opinion to the chief executive's position.

According to the individual authors' presentation of self, collective memory is invoked in patterns of display rules. The findings indicate three ways in which these rules are applied in the chief executive autobiographies. (1) Many of the display rules identified are of an apparently trivial nature, e.g. love for one's own family or joy at success. The findings suggest that in their autobiographies the chief executives subscribe to display rules commonly shared in society, thus defining themselves as people that others can relate to. (2) However, beyond those commonplace display rules, there are others that relate to the leaders' specific position as chief executives and the work this entails. In general they are fulfilling the expectations they believe to be held by other people regarding the chief executive role. These display rules help them to define their profession, to explain their situation and to justify their past actions. (3) And finally, some display rules can be identified that individual chief executives describe as crucial and unique to their own personal disposition (cf. Hansen, 1996). These are regarded as an essential part of the personality of an individual who is capable of becoming a chief executive. These display rules correspond to ideas about specific leadership traits that cannot be learned.

There remains the question as to how far chief executives use the autobiographies as a strategic means. For those executives who continue to pursue their professional career after writing their autobiographies, the molding of collective memory can be seen as a way of reinforcing their position in their organizations and society, and justifying the past and future actions. It can also be expected that those who leave the organizations they have themselves founded are writing also for the strategic benefit of those organizations. Autobiographers who were selected for the top position that they have now left, can be expected to invoke collective memory solely as a way of creating a "postself."

This study has introduced the autobiographies of a number of business leaders as a way of addressing collective memory. It has looked particularly at the authors' semantic representations of emotion and their presentation of self. The focus has thus been on the way the chief executives as individuals, or the organizations they led were described in such a way as to give them a place in collective memory.

Limitations of the study

The purpose of this study was to draw the reader's attention to the way chief executive autobiographies have used words denoting emotion to address invoke collective memory. In this context it was possible to discover patterns in the autobiographies. However, the study does not include data on how the autobiographies have actually influenced the collective memory. A weak indicator of their influence is that the autobiographies analyzed here have sold all over the world as bestsellers. Future studies could focus on more specific events and could triangulate the accounts in the autobiographies with biographies, newspaper articles or other sources of information.

Further, it can be argued that autobiographies may not have influence on the organizations of the authors. For instance insiders may have their own versions of the events described and of the

personality of the chief executive. Perhaps it could be argued instead that it is outsiders who are more likely to believe that they are getting a glimpse of the "inside" and they often all represent the mass market at which the autobiographies are aimed. On the other hand, the organizations headed by people like Iacocca or Welch can count over a hundred thousand employees in various parts of the world. They may not all have inside views about what went on, and there may be a demand among them for information. Moreover, the autobiographies also target future employees of the companies, who might want to find out something about former leaders.

I raised the question of representational status at the beginning of this study, but the, difficult remains that co-authors and ghostwriters are paid to dramatize and reconstruct the executive's thoughts in a way that will appeal to a wide audience in order to please the publisher. An executive autobiography is not an intimate communication between the executives concerned and the specific audiences they consider to be relevant. Co-authors and ghostwriters probe about and collaborate with the executives to construct a story with all features they think will sell a book - emotional expressions being essential here to the point of pathos. The problem of the autobiography as a literary genre is thus that several interests are involved in its production, and this may dilute the chief executive's attempts at self-presentation.

The picture of how autobiographies are used to invoke collective memory could be enriched by investigating the way business leaders outside the Anglo-American countries present themselves, or by including leaders in other professions such as brokers, journalists, or advertising executives to broaden the scope of the research as a whole. Autobiographies and self-portraits of chief executives also change over time. It could therefore be interesting to replicate the study on changing concepts of self and self-development in American autobiographies in general (Bjorklund, 1989; 1995) and to relate her findings to business leader autobiographies.

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SOCIAL SHARING OF EMOTION AND STRATEGIC CHANGE IN A SMALL BUSINESS VENTURE

Abstract

The purpose of this study is to explore the way stories of emotional events in organizations are related to strategic change. Two propositions introduce the apparently paradoxical situation whereby it is presumed that managers take notice of organizational events, developments or trends (OEDTs) in the stories told by other organizational members and that they frame these as strategic issues, while at the same time their own articulated sensemaking directs the attention of their staff and fellow-managers towards OEDTs already noticed, thus giving special prominence to just these issues for storytelling. Weick (1995) calls this enactment, i.e. managers themselves produce part of the environment that faces them. In the light of this, the social sharing of emotion, i.e. the recounting of emotional work events, is introduced as a theoretical concept for studying strategic change in organizations. A triangulation of qualitative and quantitative data collected in a small business venture enabled the matching of interviews, diaries and experience sampling with the special requirements of a study of social sharing at the workplace. The results indicated that various discrete emotions helped to determine the work events that were socially shared and the people with whom they were shared, both inside and outside the organization. This sharing behavior proved to have an effect on managers when it came to noting certain OEDTs. The results allowed for the refining and adjusting of the original propositions to create a local theory indicating a bipolar process of strategic change.

**SOCIAL SHARING OF EMOTION
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In the course of strategic change, managers may notice some organizational event, development or trend (OEDT), which they subsequently frame as part of strategic issues (Ansoff, 1980). The process of noticing an OEDT, i.e. extracting cues from the environment by way of filtering, classifying and comparing, can be described as initiation of a sensemaking process (Starbuck & Milliken, 1988; Weick, 1995). A defined OEDT is a social construction based on extracted cues and the result of sensemaking on the part of managers (Weick, 1995; cf. Berger & Luckmann, 1966). Once noticed OEDTs become part of strategic issues in that they define the state of affairs; while the strategic issues themselves also imply what should be done about this state. Then, to enroll the support of other organizational members, the managers set about "selling" the issues concerned (Dutton & Ashford, 1993), thus initiating a process of strategic change.

However, it has been questioned, whether the manager, as a source and mediator of strategic change, is altogether self-sufficient (Sjöstrand, 1997). Managers are not omnipresent, observing everything everywhere in their organizations: they are bound to rely on communications from their staff and fellow managers (March & Sevón, 1984). Such communications are

likely to appear in the form of stories about work events, since stories are the "sensemaking currency" in organizations (Boje, 1991) and the organizational reality is based on stories (Weick, 1995). The organization has been conceptualized as a storytelling arena in which innumerable stories capturing significant aspects of organizational knowledge and sensemaking processes are maintained and processed. Organizational stories, evolving from events and imprinted with beliefs and values, become elements in the organization's culture and identity (Boje, 1991; Czarniawska, B. 1997; Weick, 1995; Weick & Browning, 1986). It is assumed that strategic information is embedded and communicated in stories on an everyday basis (Brown & Duguid, 1991; 2001; Dutton, Ashfort, O'Neill & Laurence, 2001; Lounsbury & Glynn, 2001). Stories may thus catch the attention of managers, who notice them as indicative of OEDTs and frame them as part of various strategic issues. However, since the stories emerge from the organizational context, it is important to identify the factors in them that draw attention to particular work events and affect the subsequent storytelling that surrounds them at all organizational levels.

Emotion appears to play an important part in determining which stories are told in an organization. A study of urban legends revealed that stories which elicited an intense emotional reaction were more likely to be passed on (Heath, Bell & Sternberg, 2001). Similarly, it has been suggested that emotion focuses attention by initiating and mediating stories in organizations (Rimé et al., 1998). Stories, in turn, are seen in a double light as shaping and being shaped by the "emotional climate" of the organization (Van Buskirk & McGrath, 1992). Stories about work events contain a great deal of information about the events themselves and the emotions they involve - knowledge that contributes to sensemaking and subsequently reappears among employees in the form of social schemata (Rime et al. 1998). This suggests that when stories about work events have become emotionally primed, individuals will find them more valuable in their own sensemaking (Weick, 1995). This means in

turn that the intensity of the emotions involved in stories together with their logical-analytical comprehensibility will indicate how the narrator or listener can make sense of it (Damasio, 1994; Rimé et al., 1998). The emotions in a story, and their intensity, are communicated in postural, facial or vocal expressions on the part of the teller (Hatfield et al., 1994) and in the verbal representations of emotions used (Averill, 1975; Rimé et al., 1998). The importance of the emotional priming of stories is illustrated by the "e-mail dilemma": short informative messages distributed in organizations via e-mail are frequently misunderstood because the absence of emotional priming by vocal, postural or verbal cues, or the semantic representation of emotions, gives the readers no clue as to how exactly they should interpret and use the information. Emotional elements such as urgency, joking or anger often fail to be adequately captured. After some personal interaction, which provides the necessary cues and semantic representations, the situation is usually solved (e.g. Edenius, 1996). In an implicit reference to the emotional priming of information, Dutton and colleagues (1993) suggest that emotion and passion help to push through new ideas successfully. The emotion and novelty attached to work events once they are framed in stories, will reveal the environmental cues more clearly, making them easier to encode and retrieve, and enabling managers to frame them as OEDTs.

Strategic change initiated in this specific way seems likely to be especially prominent and evident in small business ventures. Organizations in the start-up stage are characterized by small size and a limited supply of financial and human capital. These organizations are dependent on their ability for rapid adaptation to information inputs from their internal and external environments in a series of small steps (Rajagopalan and Spreitzer, 1997). The period of business creation has been described as a time when opportunistic adaptation (Bhidé, 2000) and strategic experimentation (Nicholls-Nixon, Cooper, and Woo, 2000) are dominant in the organizations that turn out to be successful. In small business ventures the kind of strategic change required is

irregular and immediate, to keep the adaptation process moving at high velocity. At the cognitive level of managers and staff, the adaptation process calls for quick sensemaking, if the organizations are to remain competitive (Nicholls-Nixon, Cooper, & Woo, 2000; cf. Weick, 1995). This reflects a trial-and-error learning process (Van de Ven and Polley, 1992), involving the powerful emotions that are usual in cases of radical change (Huy, 1999; 2002).

Emotions focus attention on important individual and organizational issues (Weick, 1995; George & Brief, 1996), which suggests that telling stories about work events and noticing OEDTs is an emotional as well as a cognitive process. Managers may notice OEDTs in emotional work events experienced by members of the organization in their everyday work life and diffused in stories that capture and frame the events in question. Consequently, an OEDT may itself be framed as a story (Boje, 1991; Van Buskirk & McGrath, 1992) and be 'sold' as part of a strategic issue among managers and staff (Dutton & Ashford, 1993). In small business ventures in particular managers can be expected to be alert to the stories they hear from the staff and from other managers, since the stories may indicate adaptations that are going to be called for in the trial-and-error phase of the organization's development.

The purpose of this study is to investigate stories connected with emotional work events and their role as possible initiators and lubricators of strategic change in small business ventures. The case study design allows for a detailed investigation of the way emotional work events elicit a *social sharing of emotion* (Rimé et al., 1998), i.e. managers or staff recount work events to others, a process which can give added prominence to these events as clues for OEDTs. In this way the narrative framing of emotional work events is related to strategic issues and strategic change.

Due to the research approach adopted here, which connects qualitative and quantitative data in a process of triangulation (Jick, 1979), the architecture of this paper may appear somewhat unusual. While qualitative data allows for the development and

exploration of propositions, quantitative data calls for the testing of hypotheses. To combine these two traditions, the paper explores two propositions in several steps in order to develop the theoretical assumptions with the help of the empirical data. The idea of the study is not to demonstrate the supremacy of one proposition over the other or to create testable hypotheses, but to describe the findings in terms of patterns and to test the explanations against plausibility as well as against a priori theories expressed in the propositions (Weick, 1995, p. 173). Such a research process leads to the development of a *local theory*, which in its parameters is fixed to the empirical context of small business ventures, but whose developed terminology allows application to and redefinition in further cases (Lyotard, 1984). The multiple-method design of the paper allows for the convergence of multiple sources of evidence, whereby every step refines and adjusts the theoretical pre-understandings by the inclusion of new observations (Alvesson & Sköldbberg, 2000). In practical terms I first develop two propositions based on a structural analysis of theoretical texts and previous empirical findings. The propositions are then clarified and explored with the help of hypotheses derived from the relevant theory on social sharing of emotion. Finally, a triangulation of the qualitative and quantitative data in three steps allows for the critical exploration of the propositions. In the subsequent discussion the parameters of the propositions are refined and the conclusion provides a speculation on further implications of the previously established local theory.

PROPOSITIONS

Managers have precedence when it comes to defining organizational matters (Sjöstrand, 1997). By openly defining certain issues as important they are simultaneously guiding the attention of employees at various organizational levels, and these

individuals can then report their own observations accordingly. In view of the power relationship and the social nature of sensemaking, this can be labeled as a process that develops top-down. OEDTs that have already been defined by managers may attract the attention of staff and other managers to individual work events, helping to diffuse these as stories through the broader organizational context, and setting off a process of retention. According to this view, OEDTs tend to direct attention towards specific work experiences, thus fostering stories about these events at various levels in the organization. The managers are creating an "echo" of their own perceptions, in the fashion of a self-fulfilling prophecy (Weick, 1995). With their attention guided in a particular direction, staff and other managers will react with more intense emotion to work events relating to defined OEDTs. The process is reinforced by the managers' interest in selling strategic issues (Dutton et al, 1993).

Proposition 1: Emotional work events that relate to OEDTs defined by managers tend to attract attention among staff and other managers and to trigger stories that are passed round among members of the organization, thus confirming the managers' definitions of OEDTs.

Unprecedented events, however, have by definition not yet been made sense of in terms of their importance to the organization, which makes it difficult for staff or other managers to know where to direct their attention. Employees have to decide what may be interesting to communicate from among the potentially large numbers of events in a workday. This means, that each employee makes sense of new work events and may communicate them accordingly. The stories generated by work events are emotionally primed and subsequently told and re-told among employees in everyday work life. Thus they attract the managers' attention, are made sense of, and are probably framed

as OEDTs. This can be described as a process that develops bottom-up.

A basic assumption is that things constantly happen to employees in work settings, and that employees react emotionally to these events. Essentially an event can be any happening in a certain place during a particular period of time, and especially a happening that individuals regard as important (Weiss & Copranzano, 1996). When various events have a common theme, they are bound together as an episode. During an episode the employee remains in a state of continuous emotional engagement, that is to say a heightened level of arousal and attention (Frijda, 1993). This means that during an episode an employee's attention remains focused on issues related to the underlying theme. Episodes are seen as the "ebb and flow" of emotional experiences over time (Weiss & Copranzano, 1996). However, it is probably rare for work events and episodes involving single individuals only, to be regarded by managers as sufficient evidence of an OEDT. Thus, beyond the individual level, where many employees may experience work events independently and in diverse settings, a common theme and the storytelling that attaches to it can then tie the individual work events together into episodes within the organizational context. If an episode has not originally involved all employees, then the related stories may be diffused, informing and engaging an increasing number of them (Boje, 1991). Such a diffusion process recalls the properties of organizational gossip (Sevón & March, 1984) and would make managers more prone to notice episodes as OEDTs. Thus, work events experienced by organizational members at various hierarchical levels, enacted in stories and bound into episodes, may become the source of new strategic issues and an aid to strategic change. In this perspective stories are conceptualized as a communicative link between staff and managers.

Proposition 2: Thematically related emotional work events that engender stories among several members of an organization, thus signaling the presence of OEDTs, tend to attract the attention of managers and to be framed as strategic issues.

The paradoxical situation expressed in the two propositions indicates a dialectic tension, i.e. an opposition between two interacting forces, that seems to exist between managers and their staffs (Dutton, Ashford, O'Neill & Laurence, 1997; Hambrick and Mason, 1984). It may be described as the balancing of attention between the agreed-upon and the new. At the theoretical level these questions are related to ideas regarding strategic change (Eisenhardt, 1989), but the underlying forces involved call for some clarification.

SOCIAL SHARING OF EMOTION

Every day in their work organizational members experience hassles and joys that may be related to new OEDTs. In a series of recall and diary studies Rimé and colleagues (1991) found that such emotional disruptions in the subjective world generate an eager search for opportunities to talk about the relevant work events with others in the relevant social environment. This involves the verbal evocation of the emotional event together with one or more addressees. Testing for age, gender or culture the authors found the social sharing of emotion - i.e. the experiencing of an emotional event, the mental rumination upon it and, finally, telling others about it - to be a stable construct. In the everyday context the sharing usually occurs within a few days of the emotional event in question. The need to share an event socially grows weaker over the days, weeks, months, and years that follow (Rimé et al, 1991; Christophe & Rimé, 1997). The concept of social sharing of emotion is consistent with the seven properties

that Weick (1995) names for sensemaking in organizations. It is (1) grounded in identity construction, (2) retrospective, (3) enactive of sensible environments, (4) social, (5) ongoing, (6) focused on and by extracted cues, and (7) driven by plausibility rather than accuracy. Social sharing of emotion, however, brings emotions as a driving force behind storytelling and sensemaking into focus and introduces a time perspective (Rimé et al., 1998). This view provides a link between emotional work events and storytelling. The social sharing of emotion implies a narrative framing and diffusion of information about a work event, and can, thus, help to draw the attention of managers to certain extracted cues and to allow them to frame these cues as OEDTs.

Rimé and colleagues (1998) are distinctive in that they see emotion not as some kind of disturbance, but as a means for constant adaptation. Emotion and cognition are regarded as intertwined. The ambiguous and often confusing sensations elicited by emotion tend to be clarified and resolved if people search for related information among members of their own social environment. Further, emotions are dense and inexact experiences calling for cognitive articulation. By using language and by talking to someone else, people may "unfold" the emotional material, label it, and organize it into sequences conforming to the rules of logical thought. In this way, people are able to distance themselves from the emotional event. This in turn is important because emotions can challenge people's beliefs about themselves, about other people and about the world. Social sharing allows people to work through this emotional experiences, helping them to restore their beliefs and to find an acceptable meaning for the event. This serves to process and round off the emotional memory of events. When beliefs are challenged, people's basic sense of security is undermined and they are likely to search for social support and assistance in coping with this situation. By sharing the emotion with significant members of their social environment, they can enroll external support for their efforts to cope. All of which serves to enhance interpersonal relationships and to reinforce social integration.

Rimé and colleagues (1998) conclude that social sharing reduces interpersonal distance, and may have lasting consequences for the social relationship between a sharer and a listener. Emotions can give rise to an excessive focus on the self, thus tending to dissociate individuals from their social environment. As a result of the sharing of the emotion the social environment may come to acknowledge and understand a state that has been privately experienced, and may offer socially acceptable ways of defining the experience and certain culturally prescribed ways of managing and expressing emotions.

It is suggested here that the impact of the social sharing of work-related emotional events with other organizational members is particularly likely to have implications for managers when it comes to their noticing of OEDTs. Important aspects of this line of argument include the initiation and diffusion of the social sharing of emotion and the boundaries within which it operates, which in turn can perhaps help to clarify the apparently paradoxical relation between propositions 1 and 2.

Initiation

Proceeding from the basic assumptions of the social sharing of emotion it has to be established whether work events generate sharing to much the same extent as private events. Extensive social sharing in an organization would indicate an initiation of stories as adumbrated in our propositions. The social sharing of emotion is not limited to informal communication. It is usually difficult to distinguish between formal and informal communication (March and Simon, 1958), and OEDTs can be betokened by either of them. The work events taking place during a particular period constitute the base for the social sharing of emotion between organizational members. In this context, Rimé and colleagues (1998) propose that social sharing of an event is affected by the emotions involved and by their intensity. Also, in accordance with our propositions, work events are more likely to be shared if they are linked to an episode in the organization.

Hypothesis 1: The more intense the specific emotions involved in a work event, and the more the work event seems to be connected with an episode, the more likely it is that the event will be socially shared.

Diffusion

In order to signal the existence of an OEDT to managers, information about a work event and its accompanying emotions has to be diffused beyond the original sharer. Thus, the listener response to socially shared work events is also of interest when it comes to clarifying the effect of the social sharing of emotion on the likelihood of managers noticing OEDTs. Prior research findings suggest that socially shared emotions are also elicited in the addressee of the original sharing (Rime et al., 1998). Proceeding from the basic argument that emotion elicits the social sharing of an event, it can also be assumed that the recipient of a story will probably share it with a third person. This process has been dubbed *secondary social sharing*, and various findings suggest that it occurs with some frequency (Christophe and Rimé, 1997). When it comes to storytelling, secondary social sharing implies the possibility of a diffusing effect rather like that applying to gossip (Sevón & March, 1984) or urban legends (Heath et al., 2003). This means that the socially shared work events may be able to "travel" around in an organization in the form of a story. In the case of secondary social sharing it is proposed that stories are more likely to be shared if they belong to an episode in the organization.

Hypothesis 2: The more intense the specific emotions involved in a story and the more the story seems to be connected with an episode, the more likely it is that an event will be subject to secondary social sharing.

Boundaries

Analyses concerning the boundaries of the organization and social networks (e.g. Tichy, Tushman & Fombrun, 1979) imply

that the identity of the receiving party is also important when it comes to clarifying the connection between the social sharing of emotion and OEDTs. Rimé and colleagues (1998) point out that sharing generally occurs between personal intimates, such as friends, family or partners. In light of these findings it can be interesting to see whether stories about work events find different listeners. The occupational context of an event or a story would favor sharing it with colleagues who are familiar with work processes resembling those that originally produced the emotional event. Colleagues may include equals, superiors or subordinates. Specific emotions and their intensity, as well as the connection between a work event or story and an episode, are regarded as crucial to the selection of listeners. Rimé and colleagues (1991) found that shame, for example, is an emotional experience shared almost exclusively in the private sphere and very rarely in professional life.

Hypothesis 3a: The specific emotions that are involved in a work event, their intensity and presumptive connection with an episode, affect the selection of work events and stories to be shared with colleagues.

Hypothesis 3b: The specific emotions that are involved in a work event, their intensity and presumptive connection with an episode, affect the selection of work events and stories to be shared with intimates.

METHODS

A Case Study Approach

In addressing the aims of this study the case study method of empirical inquiry (Yin, 1994) has been used. The nature of the subject matter makes it necessary to "get inside" the organization in order to trace the social sharing of emotion and its relation to

strategic change. Exploratory fieldwork assumes particular importance in areas of research that lack a prior body of theory and data, since it enables ideas to be developed for further study. Moreover, a single-case study becomes a necessity when the organizational processes involved, such as the interplay between the social sharing of emotion and strategic change here, do not lend themselves easily to a multiple-case design.

Case Study Company

Since it has been suggested that strategic change is a particularly prominent feature of small business ventures, the choice of a suitable case for the present study fell on an Internet start-up called A-Travel (a pseudonym). At the time of the study A-Travel had fifteen employees at its main office and eight abroad. The company specializes on selling discount airfares online, and on developing travel market software, which it licenses to other travel agencies. Two managers who had previously worked for a fairly large travel agency founded A-Travel two years before the present study was made.

Data Collection

For the study of strategic change and the social sharing of emotion both qualitative and quantitative data on A-Travel were collected, which enabled a triangulation of the two research methods (Jick, 1979).

Five semi-structured interviews were conducted with the managers of the organization. Respondents included the CEO, the vice-CEO, the software development manager, the travel operations manager, and the manager for organizational development. The interviews helped to clarify A travel's organizational structure, which until then had not been formally defined. The purpose of the interviews was to gather data on the OEDTs which in the view of the managers, A-Travel was facing at the time of the study. Because of the relative youth of the organization, there was not yet any archival data yet that could have been used for the analysis.

The chosen method of quantitative data collection derived from of the experience sampling method developed by Csikszentmihalyi and Larson (1987) for the study of flow experiences. For the special requirements of exploring the social sharing of emotion the traditional experience-sampling method had to be adjusted. Because several days may pass before an emotional experience is shared, an appropriate solution is simply to record one work event and story in a diary each day (Rimé et al., 1998). And to measure the attention focus, the most relevant approach seems to be to ask for the work event or story of the day that has been particularly noticeable to the organization member concerned (Flanigan, 1954).

Questionnaire diaries were distributed to the employees in the main office of A-Travel. The questionnaires were identical each day and it took participants approximately 5-10 minutes to complete them. Respondents were asked to fill in the questionnaire without discussing their answers with their colleagues. The questionnaires about daily work events were completed for 12 consecutive workdays. Each questionnaire comprised two parts about everyday emotional events. The first asked about work events that the individual concerned had experienced personally on the day in question. The second asked about work events that had been recounted as stories to the individual participants the same day. In both parts the participants described the work event which provided further qualitative data. They then rated their emotional involvement in terms of eight different emotions on a 1 to 5-point scale for intensity. In line with previous research on the social sharing of emotion the eight chosen covered the basic emotions of Sadness, Anger, Joy, Fear and Surprise; the 'social' emotions of Disgust and Shame; and finally an emotion of special relevance to the sharing situation, namely interest (Rime et al., 1998). It was open to the participants to rate more than one emotion for each event, since the names of the emotions are semantic representations of complex sensations.

After the first two days both parts of the questionnaire, i.e. the daily questions for work events and stories, were

complemented by further questions relating to social sharing itself. These additional questions were linked to the answers rendered two days earlier, and to refresh their memories participants were given the opportunity to look at their old entries again. They were asked to remember the past work events and stories and to say whether they had shared them often, several times, once, or never. They were also asked whether they had shared the events with intimates in private life and/or with colleagues. And finally they were asked to indicate whether they had shared the event in personal interaction (for example during meetings or coffee breaks), via the phone (office phone or cellular phone), and/or via e-mail. These questions thus added to the data collected on the social sharing of emotion in the section on work events and to the data collected on the secondary social sharing of emotion in the section on stories.

Data Analysis

The organization with its daily emotional work events constituting a basis for sharing, has been the chosen level of analysis of the social sharing of emotion in the present study. Faced with multiple sources of evidence I undertook a triangulation of qualitative and quantitative data in three steps to enhance the internal validity and reliability of the case study material (Jick, 1979; Yin, 1994), allowing for the refinement and adjustment of the theoretical pre-understandings of the propositions. In the first step the OEDTs presently engaging the case organization are compared to the current episodes as revealed in the questionnaire diary. The second step links the OEDTs and episodes to the social sharing of emotion. The final step then identifies differences in the sharing behavior of the managers and their staffs.

The qualitative data gathered from the interviews has been analyzed according to standard practices (Miles and Huberman, 1994). Interviews were transcribed, collated and summarized. The search for emerging categories as regards strategic issues then generated inductive ideas. A strategic issue was deemed to have

become established if it recurred in four out of five interviews. A content analysis was used in coding the diary entries referring to episodes. Episodes were defined by a series of key words that linked two or more individual events. The key words emerged as the diary entries were collated and compared. Reported work events and stories were coded as belonging to an episode, if reference was made to a particular event in the qualitative descriptions of more than one organization member. Finally, a discriminant analysis was conducted on the data collected, using the adapted experience-sampling method. The discriminant analysis tested whether emotions, and the intensity they revealed in connection with OEDTs and episodes, explained whether or not work events or stories were shared and, if they were shared, who they were shared with.

RESULTS

Comparing OEDTs with Episodes

The first indications regarding the propositions can be expected from the qualitative data. From the interviews with managers at A-Travel it was possible to identify five OEDTs presently engaging the organization as follows. (1) Problems regarding the travel software were a rising concern. The software did not always function as it was meant to, and new applications created problems with the existing software design. (2) As a new company the focus was on winning new customers and assuring loyalty by providing satisfactory service. The software department was increasingly courting licensees and the travel department sought individual travelers. (3) There was a recognized shortage of personnel for the work that had to be done and an active search was under way for suitable staff for the software and travel departments. (4) The lack of structured meetings was lamented, and improvement were more and more called for - particularly because information via e-mails was

sometimes interpreted incorrect, so that various concerns had to be cleared up at spontaneous meetings, often during coffee or lunch breaks. (5) The organization's expansion in terms of personnel had led to an acute lack of office space. Both the CEO and the Vice-CEO were looking for new premises.

These OEDTs can be compared to the data from the questionnaire diary. This was aimed exclusively at the employees of A-Travel working in the main office. 73% of employees succeeded in completing the questionnaire for all the twelve consecutive workdays. The questionnaire diary yielded 198 work events and stories. From the qualitative parts of the questionnaires eleven different episodes were identified and coded (See Table 1).

Forty-six work events and stories unconnected with any Episode were coded as *single event*. These were defined as individually distinctive work events or stories associated with one employee only, and never with any others. These events may have had relevance for the individual concerned and may even have been socially shared, but they do not recur thematically in the work events and stories reported by their colleagues, thus indicating that they did not get wide attention.

A comparison between the work events and stories from the diaries and the OEDTs emerging from the interview material showed that episodes 1,2, 3, 5, and 10 are related to the OEDTs that managers defined in the organization at that time. In contrast, 4, 6, 7, 8, 9 and 11 seem to be episodes of the week or month. These episodes do not - or do not yet - reflect defined OEDTs, but in the short term they were apparently important enough to cause concern to several employees. A further look revealed three patterns in the way work events and stories form episodes. The first pattern contains episodes - namely 1, 2, 3, 5, 6, 7 and 10 - that touched upon most organizational functions. The second pattern consists of episodes that appeared in two organizational functions, thus signifying a connection between those two: 4 (travel and accounting), 8 (travel and CEO), and 11 (software and accounting). The third pattern refers to an episode that appeared in one organizational function only: 9 (travel).

TABLE 1
Coded Organizational Episodes

#	Events	Episodes	Coding Example from Content Analysis
1	36	Software development*	"We managed to make a <u>flight ticket booking</u> - almost. It worked with only one passenger, when two or more persons travel it doesn't work."
2	29	Customer relations*	"I received a mail from a customer who praised our <u>customer service</u> ."
3	22	Personnel turnover*	" <u>New co-worker</u> - time to show her what she will be working on."
4	13	Workload	" <u>Difficult workloads</u> for the body, stress, pain in the shoulders and a headache. The same work all day."
5	10	Meetings*	" <u>Meeting</u> with the CEO and a raise was mentioned (about time, I would say)"
6	10	Organizational development	"Peter was here and we talked about <u>organizational development</u> . Carl, Frank, he and I. Very nice, spontaneous but still cool."
7	10	New office furniture	"We got <u>new furniture</u> from IKEA. WRONG desk. A desk with two left feet."
8	9	Competitors	"One newspaper had an article that made me very happy: 'A-Travel is suing <u>Mr.Flight</u> for copyright violation.' Cool that it became official."
9	7	Interpersonal conflict	"Greg, our new marketing assistant <u>complained</u> about a girl again. According to him women apparently can't do anything, which I told him. He answered: 'God made many mistakes, before and after me.'"
10	4	New office space*	"John is moving into our room. I'm working with Carl on the need for <u>new office space</u> ."
11	2	CD burner disappearance	"The <u>CD burner</u> has disappeared. It seems odd that things disappear without anybody knowing where."

Note: *OEDTs

The findings indicate a link between OEDTs and episodes at A-Travel. The comparison shows that the greater the number of work events and stories attaching to an episode and the greater the number of organizational functions concerned, the more likely it was that the episode concerned was also a defined OEDT. In the case of A-Travel this may indicate that the managers have noticed the dominant episodes and already framed them as OEDTs and probably also as strategic issues, or that the employees were "echoing" the defined OEDTs in the attention they paid to work events and to their colleagues' stories. However, the fairly wide spread "workload" episode had slipped the managers attention. This was maybe because in the start up phase of a small business venture a high workload is seen as taken for granted. Such episodes that gain wider attention, however, may be framed as OEDTs in the future. Also interesting is that the small "new office space" episode was defined by the managers as an OEDT. It is probably that managers may notice OEDTs that are not really part of staff's everyday episodes. As things stand, the findings illuminate the relation between OEDTs and episodes on the one hand and between managers and staff on the other hand as suggested in the propositions.

Linking Episodes to Social Sharing of Emotion

For hypothesis testing, the data on the social sharing of emotion can be expressed as a dependent variable containing the two parameter values *sharing* and *secrecy* (see Table 2 for descriptive statistics).

For triangulation purposes the work events and stories were re-coded, which made it possible to include the findings on episodes as an independent variable. For this purpose each work event and story was weighted with the total number of events connected with its episode. For example, events that were coded as New Office Furniture were re-coded as 10, because the episode contained ten individual work events and stories (cf. Table 1). All single events were re-coded as 1. This produced a metric variable ($Mean = 16.26$; $SD = 12.47$), which represents the influence of

TABLE 2
Descriptive Statistics for Social Sharing of Emotion Variable
(percent)

	Work Events	
	Sharing	Secrecy
Work events	75.2	24.8
Stories	60	40
Episodes	65.1	34.9
Single Events	54.3	45.7
Intimates	54.8* (25.8 intimates only)	-
Colleagues	72.6* (44.4 colleagues only)	-
Personal Interaction	91.1*	-
Telephone	23.4*	-
E-mail	7.3*	-
Total	68.9	31.1

Note. *These fields don't add up to 100%, because sharing took place with multiple listeners.

episodes postulated in the hypotheses. Multiple Discriminant Analysis was used to test whether the collected data on emotions, their intensity and the related episodes, can explain the sharing and secrecy of work events and stories. It is important for the analysis that the work events and stories be analyzed separately, because they have been found to differ from the outset, one representing social sharing of emotion (H1) and the other secondary social sharing (H2) (Rimé et al., 1998). For the correlation between the independent variables of emotions and episodes for work events and stories, see Table 3.

Prior research on the social sharing of emotion has indicated that the observed group sizes reflect the actual population proportions (cf. Rimé et al., 1998). Thus, prior probabilities were

TABLE 3
Means, Standard Deviations, and Correlations

Variable	Mean	S.D.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
Experienced Events										
1. Interest	3.05	1.41								
2. Sadness	1.33	.95	.17							
3. Anger	1.79	1.39	-.18*	.15*						
4. Fear	1.40	1.04	-.18*	.16*	.21*					
5. Surprise	1.84	1.32	.14*	.03	.07	.12				
6. Disgust	1.33	1.08	-.02	.25*	.60*	.33*	.15*			
7. Shame	1.21	.62	-.03	.17*	.20*	.25*	.29	.28*		
8. Joy	1.94	1.45	.11	-.21*	-.35*	-.16*	.05	-.24*	-.05	
9. Episodes	16.72	13.00	.20	.09	.06	-.05	.13	.02	.08	.14
Narrated Events										
1. Interest	3.55	1.04								
2. Sadness	1.19	.64	-.09							
3. Anger	1.53	1.25	-.12*	.31*						
4. Fear	1.33	.96	-.08*	.39*	.12*					
5. Surprise	2.11	1.49	.27	-.05	-.04	-.07				
6. Disgust	1.41	1.11	.03	.09*	.81*	-.00*	.09*			
7. Shame	1.08	.48	-.14	.69*	.13*	.43*	-.07	.01		
8. Joy	1.50	1.10	.03	-.12*	-.14*	-.16*	.11	-.11	-.09	
9. Episodes	16.88	13.49	-.12	-.21	-.01	-.03	-.18	.00	-.20	-.10

* $p < .05$

computed from group size. The first discriminant analysis assessed the predictive power of the independent variables with respect to the work events. The same variables were then used regarding the stories. The results are shown in Table 4.

In the case of work events an independent sample t-test showed significant results for the emotion variables Fear ($F(1, 115) = 11.88, p < .01$), Surprise ($F(1, 115) = 9.86, p < .01$), Shame ($F(1, 115) = 4.96, p < .05$), and Joy ($F(1, 115) = 21.78, p < .01$). Similarly, in the case of stories an independent sample t-test showed significant results for the emotion variables Anger ($F(2, 80) = 26.21, p < .01$), Surprise ($F(2, 80) = 12.75, p < .01$), Disgust ($F(2, 80) = 4.00, p < .05$) and Joy ($F(2, 80) = 5.67, p < .05$). To assess the model fit of the discriminant analysis,

particularities were sought in the work events and stories that were incorrectly classified. It appears that the incorrect classification was usually connected with single events or with the customer-relations episode. Single events may consist of work events or stories that have significance for a single individual and are socially shared, but do not attract attention at the organizational level. The impact of customer relations may derive from the difference in the nature of these relations in the software department, which deals with corporate customers, and in the travel department, which deals with private individuals. Nonetheless, the classification scores were high and the findings support hypotheses 1 and 2.

TABLE 4
Classification Table of Discriminant Analysis

Independent variables: Emotions and Episodes	Wrong Classification				Percentage Correctly Classified	N	
	Right classification	Secrecy	Sharing	Secrecy			Sharing
Events		13	78	19	5	.79*	115
	Stories	21	38	11	10	.75**	80
Events		Others	Intimates	Others	Intimates		
	Stories	17	36	16	10	.67	79
		Others	Intimates	Others	Intimates		
	Stories	16	18	7	4	.76**	45
Events		Others	Colleagues	Others	Colleagues		
	Stories	5	54	18	2	.75	79
		Others	Colleagues	Others	Colleagues		
	Stories	6	34	5	0	.89**	45

* $p < .01$

** $p < .05$

For the second discriminant analysis the dependent variables *intimates/others* and *colleagues/others* were tested with regard to work events and stories. Two sets of dependent variables were necessary, since in some cases the sharing of a single work event

or story occurred with both intimates and colleagues. The results are shown in Table 4.

Further insight can be acquired by identifying the independent variables that led employees to share work events and stories with intimates or with colleagues. Significant results from an independent sample t-test indicate that work events and stories that eliciting Sadness ($F(1, 126) = 3.86, p < .05$), Anger ($F(1, 126) = 21.71, p < .01$), Fear ($F(1, 124) = 7.81, p < .01$), Surprise ($F(1, 126) = 7.54, p < .01$) or Disgust ($F(1, 126) = 7.48, p < .01$) tended to result in a sharing with intimates, while work events and stories that elicited Interest ($F(1, 126) = 4.97, p < .05$) and were related to episodes ($F(1, 124) = 17.27, p < .01$) tended to result in a sharing with colleagues. The results indicate that work events and stories that were important to the employees of A-Travel were socially shared within the organization. Interest can reinforce episodes, while work events and stories connected to episodes are more likely to re-invoke defined OEDTs. In contrast, work events and stories that elicited other emotions tended to result in a sharing with intimates, which means that at A-Travel such work events and stories go unobserved at A-Travel.

An assessment of the model fit for the discriminant analysis as regards listener identity, again suggests single events as a major factor in the case of incorrect classification. The findings nevertheless support hypotheses 3a and 3b.

The results show that the initiation and diffusion of the social sharing of emotion, and the boundaries within which it is contained depend on a combination of the independent variables for emotions and episodes that explain whether and with whom, a work event is shared. The descriptive statistics identify the social sharing of emotion as a type of behavior that frequently occurs involving insiders and outsiders of the organization. On the one hand, the observation that the emotions concerned and their level of intensity, help to explain the initiation, diffusion and boundaries of the social sharing of emotional work events, appears to favor proposition 2. On the other hand, the obvious influence of episodes on the initiation, diffusion and boundaries

of the social sharing of emotional work events, favors proposition 1. Only a combination of the two, however, adequately explains whether and with whom work events and stories are shared. These findings indicate that the processes described in the propositions are dependent on each other. As part of the social sharing of emotions in A-Travel, managers and staff probably take notice of stories about work events that seem to form part of episodes as well as initiating and diffusing them. In the case of all employees, the initiation and diffusion of a story and the boundaries that apply, all seem to depend on the emotions - and the intensity of the emotions - elicited by the work event or story in question, as well as on its connection with an episode. However, the interpretive power of the managers in defining certain episodes as OEDTs, seems to create episodes that are widely diffused.

Identifying Differences in the Social Sharing of Emotion among Managers and Staff

An examination of the differences in sharing behavior between managers and staff can further refine and adjust the theoretical assumptions expressed in the propositions. The apparently mutual dependence between managers noticing an OEDT as a result of storytelling by staff and other managers on the one hand, and managers reinforcing episodes by defining them as OEDTs on the other, can be clarified by analyzing tendencies among managers and staff as regards the social sharing of emotion. An independent sample t-test as regards managerial sharing and secrecy revealed significant results in that Anger ($F(2, 68) = 10.49, p < .01$) together with a work event or story being part of an OEDT ($F(2, 68) = 5.99, p < .05$) tends to result in sharing. On the other hand, work events or stories involving Joy ($F(2, 68) = 7.82, p < .01$) tend to result in secrecy. In the case of staff, an independent sample t-test showed that work events and stories involving Anger ($F(1, 127) = 7.27, p < .01$), Fear ($F(1, 127) = 5.47, p < .05$), or Shame ($F(1, 127) = 3.93, p < .05$) tend to result in sharing, whereas those work events or stories

involving Joy ($F(1, 127) = 26.97, p < .01$) tend to result in secrecy.

These results reveal managers as active definers and diffusers of OEDTs. Apart from this defining power, however, Anger emerged as a strong driving-force behind for social sharing among both staff and managers at A-Travel. Staff also reacted to Fear and Shame as powerful triggers of social sharing of emotion. A cautious speculation, is that work events and stories primed with Anger, Fear or Shame are diffused by employees, allowing managers to notice new OEDTs. Thus, in general, various emotions appear to predict whether or not a work event and its attendant story enter the social sharing of emotion in an organization, thus helping to promote strategic change.

DISCUSSION

The purpose of this study has been to explore the relationship between the social sharing of emotion and strategic change in a small business venture. It has been proposed that stories derived from work events are emotionally primed, which causes their diffusion in the organization and, in consequence, leads to sensemaking and the framing of the events as OEDTs by the relevant managers. Further, it has been proposed that OEDTs defined by managers are likely to direct the attention of employees towards specific work events and stories. The qualitative and quantitative data addressed this paradoxical situation by focusing on the emotions that provoked and diffused stories at A-Travels. The data also gives some idea of the role that episodes played in diffusing of work events and stories in the organization at the time of the study. The findings thus allow for a certain refinement and adjustment of the theoretical pre-understandings as expressed in the propositions. The diary study at A-Travel revealed a dynamic picture of the organization and the observations verify the importance of the emotional priming

of stories, and lead to the assumption that the two processes as outlined in the propositions are dependent on each other. Consequently the theoretical pre-understandings can be regarded as coming together in a bipolar process of initiation and retention. As a result of the specific emotions that work events elicit, stories about these are diffused through the organization and are likely to be noticed by managers as OEDTs, while at the same time managers show a tendency to diffuse stories about defined OEDTs, thus enhancing the stories about specific work events among both staff and other managers.

This new proposition can be discussed in relation to the results of the study. The qualitative data collected enabled the identification of the OEDTs and episodes. The predominant episodes may be an "echo" in the attention-paying of other employees regarding the defined OEDTs. Managers probably create the echo involuntarily by searching for more evidence of the OEDTs or by strategic issue selling. The defined OEDTs are likely to obstruct the view of any new widely diffused episodes. It can be suggested however, that lesser and more limited episodes may also become strategic issues later, depending on whether they involve strong emotions, are shared more widely and can therefore be picked up by management. Whether or not these episodes are noticed depends on the social sharing behavior of the employees. The descriptive statistics illustrate the sharing behavior at A-Travel and confirm prior findings on the social sharing of emotion. Almost 80% of all work events engendered social sharing, and 60% of all stories were subject to secondary social sharing. Secondary social sharing was probably less frequent than social sharing, due to the mediated character of the story. That sharing occurred predominantly among colleagues seems understandable, in light of the fact that the reported work events and stories all concerned work-related issues. However, it is interesting that about half the work events and stories were nonetheless shared with intimates as well. And of all the shared work events and stories a quarter were shared exclusively with intimates. In these cases the potentially valuable information

contained in the work events was not retained in the organization, and is thus not active as a way of attracting the attention of managers to these episodes. Finally, although information technology was a predominant feature in this internet startup, by far the largest amount of social sharing occurred in personal interaction. Phone conversations and emails were less frequently used for the social sharing of emotion. This result suggests a preference for personal encounters to ensure a satisfactory sharing of events. This in turn may be connected with the idea that personal encounters allow a broader spectrum of communicative means for sharing a work event. Postural, vocal, and facial cues can be employed more efficiently. The paramount use of personal encounters for sharing also indicated the importance of secrecy and relations with friends when it comes to the diffusion of information connected with work events or contained in stories.

The specific emotions that will influence sharing behavior, and the way they do this, may depend on the culture and emotional climate of the organization. In the local theory regarding A-Travel, Anger is a powerful trigger when it comes to managers and staff creating stories from work events. Anger indicates a challenge to held beliefs and is likely to indicate problems that could become strategic issues, or that are already established as such. In the case of staff, Fear and Surprise had the same effect as Anger, possibly because of the subordinate position of these employees. The negative impact of Joy on social sharing, on the other hand, may indicate that because Joy does not necessarily challenge any held beliefs, it does not generate a strong need for sharing either. This ties up with the view that stories eliciting negative emotion are more readily diffused than stories eliciting positive emotion. It would also suggest that Joy does not promote strategic change, because it doesn't indicate any problem in the company.

Work events or stories that elicited interest and were connected with OEDTs were more likely to be shared with colleagues. Such events have news value for colleagues and evoke the attention of these listeners. This could perhaps be

explained by the fact that defined OEDTs bind attention to the individual's own work processes. If work events and stories elicit intense Sadness, Anger, Fear, Surprise, or Disgust they are more likely to be socially shared with intimates. This supports an earlier finding that certain emotions are of a more private nature and their sharing is more likely to be kept out of professional settings. A moderating factor is that sharing was possible with both intimates and colleagues for the same work events or stories. In sum the local theory illustrates the value of emotional priming to the adequate transfer and use of relevant information. And in so doing, it indicates the dialectic tension that exists between managers and staff. Such a perspective is also consistent with the theory on strategic experimentation and opportunistic adaptation, which described small business ventures as especially active in strategic change.

CONCLUSION

The triangulation of qualitative and quantitative data contributed to the exploration, refinement and adjustment of the theoretical pre-understandings. Emotional climates can change over time and different companies may have different sharing patterns. The emotions that actually initiate and diffuse stories, and whether there are predominant OEDTs, may depend on the situation of the specific organization. However, the terminology used here can be proposed as a useful tool for studying the phenomenon of strategic change by way of the social sharing of emotion in other organizations as well, and it can be suggested that the processes may well be similar there. The social sharing of emotion in particular seems to be an ubiquitous human behavior that has biological grounds.

The present case study organization had a low level of complexity. When the level of analysis is shifted towards different industries or larger organizations, social network

features become more important, and the social ties that probably exist between different members of the organization are then of greater interest. Bureaucracies, family businesses or non-profit organizations might reveal their own distinct patterns in the social sharing of emotion. Further, in larger organizations, stories may be replaced by written communications, numbers, memoranda and so on. This last brings to mind the email dilemma referred to above.

The 12-day study period represents a snapshot only of an organization in the process of developing. The study does not indicate explicitly how managers sought to implement strategic issues. Rather, it focused on a comparison between the strategic issues espoused by managers and the social sharing element that involved all the employees in the organization. Sharing occurs mainly in personal interaction, which underlines the importance of facial, postural and vocal expressions. It is also interesting to consider the form of the sharing: events can be recounted in a joking manner, with cynicism, sarcasm or exaggeration. However, the effects of such variation in the transfer of information and emotion are not clear.

As regards strategic change, the insights touched on here into the effects of the social sharing of emotion in the workplace allow the speculation that such sharing helps small business ventures to adapt to a rapidly changing environment. It is as if it were the "fine tuning" of the organization to the daily occurrence and recurrence of problems and specific work events. The initiation and diffusion of information about work events suggests a cascading effect within the hierarchy. Stories about work events may not be socially shared within one organizational level of the hierarchy only, but they may cascade from management down, or flow from the employees up. In this way, various individuals in the organization can become the source and mediator of strategic change. Here the boundaries of the sharing are interesting, since they do not appear to coincide with the borders of the organization itself. A substantial proportion of the work events are channeled into the private sphere, where employees can get

assistance in coping from their intimates. Hence stories about work events do not necessarily remain within the organization where they can enrich its knowledge base. The nature of stories also raises the question as to whether the stream of stories can be encouraged or controlled with the help of an incentive system.

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**GROUP POLARIZATION REVISITED:
EFFECTS OF DISCUSSION AMONG RECRUITERS
ON PERCEIVED PERSON-JOB AND PERSON-
ORGANIZATION FIT**

Abstract

Previous research on job interviews tended to regard the job candidate as the only source of information in assessing person-job (P-J) and person-organization (P-O) fit. Revisiting group polarization theory, this study explores the effects on perceived P-J and P-O fit of discussions among recruiters, i.e. when the cooperating recruiters share socially the impressions they have acquired from panel interviews. Fellow-recruiters thus become a source not only of information in assessing a job candidate, but also of social comparisons and persuasive arguments. Findings from a laboratory experiment in which experienced managers ($n=60$) conducted fictitious panel interviews with job candidates indicate that, in accordance with group polarization theory, convergence of perceived P-J and P-O fit depends on the possibility of socially sharing decision-related interview experiences. Perceptions of P-O fit showed a stronger tendency to converge than perceptions of P-J fit. This suggests that perceptions of P-O fit are more subject to discussion in the recruiter group than perceptions of P-J fit.

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Theories on recruitment reflect the dichotomous nature of hiring decisions, namely the necessity of assessing person-job fit (P-J) and person-organization fit (P-O) (Judge & Ferris, 1992; Kristof-Brown, 2000; Rynes & Gerhart, 1990). On the one hand, the application material and the interviews themselves are scrutinized for information on capabilities as regards knowledge, skills, and abilities (KSAs), all of which concern potential P-J fit (Caldewell & O'Reilly, 1990; Kristof-Brown, 2000). On the other hand, job candidates are assessed with regard to their interpersonal relationships, work motivation and social situation by collecting such information on values and personality as is relevant for assessing the P-O fit (Adkins, Russel & Werbel, 1994; Cable & Judge, 1997; Kristof-Brown, 2000).

In a narrative review of recent research on how recruiters assess job candidate fit from interviews, Posthuma, Morgenson and Campion (2002) have ordered the field and identified various interrelated areas of research activity: social factors, cognitive factors, individual difference factors, measures and outcomes. It is noticeable that the focus of attention lies on the relationship between job candidates and recruiters. The job candidate is conceptualized as the only source of information for assessing P-J and P-O fit. This, however, disregards the widespread use of

panel interviews, also called board interviews, where the risk of hiring a new organizational member is frequently shared by more than one recruiter in order to minimize the risk of poor decisions (Roth & Campion, 1992). Here, when it comes to the efficiency of recruitment decisions, the potentially influential relationship between various recruiters working together on a single hiring decision may be included as an element in the selection process. For example, in a study on the assessment of Naval Officers, four recruiters sat together evaluating the candidates. This may improve the likelihood of finding a good candidate, as the different organizational members involved in the recruiting process may have different foci and preferences (Herriot, Chalmers & Wingrove, 1985, p. 310).

The simultaneous process of assessing P-J and P-O fit is diluted, as job interviews are open to personal assessment errors, such as halo-effects or logical errors. There seems to be a gap between the subjective feeling of accuracy and the quality of the assessment. The gap is the more prominent, the more the assessment has to rely on subjective information. People seek information that strengthens their own previous ideas (Forbes & Jackson 1980; Kahneman, Slovic & Tversky, 1982; Valenci & Andrews. 1973). By involving several organizational members in a hiring process any subsequent conflict surrounding the choice may be avoided, and the integration of the new organizational member will be easier. The aim of panel interviews is to find a candidate who, ideally, fulfills the requirements and expectations of all the recruiters involved.

In this study I attempted to replicate and extend the findings of Kristof-Brown (2000) on P-J and P-O fit. The rationale for the extension is two-fold. First, the present study introduces discussion among recruiters as a further factor exerting influence on perceptions of P-J and P-O fit. In the case of job interviews this means that several organizational members involved in the recruiting process may interview a job candidate at the same time, thus constituting a panel. After the interview, during which little discussion among recruiters *about* the candidate is usually

possible, the recruiters can talk to each other and share socially the impressions and evaluations of the candidate they acquired during the interview. The second rationale is based on the idea that in group discussions information regarding perceptions of P-J and P-O fit may have different impacts. Perceptions of either P-J or P-O fit may change more due to group discussion of recruiters. Thus, the present study revisits group polarization theory and explores in a laboratory experiment the specific context of group job interviews, elucidating the effects of post-interview discussion among recruiters regarding perceptions of P-J and P-O fit. Group polarization theory is relevant to group hiring decisions in that it indicates a process for reaching a pooled decision outcome.

GROUP POLARIZATION AND PERCEPTIONS OF P-J AND P-O FIT

Group decision theory, which describes output-oriented aspects of group behavior, is particularly pertinent to those with an interest in group job interviews (Hackman, 1990; Schultz-Hardt, Jochims & Frey, 2002; Shaw, 1981). The dynamics that shape group decisions and thus differentiate them from individual decisions are central to this field. Group decision making is characterized by the social interplay between group members. For example, social loafing and the diffusion of responsibility may occur in groups working towards a pooled output, which means that some group members may reduce their individual efforts (Weldon & Gargano, 1988). However, when group members perceive that their own performance will be evaluated, they engage in feedback and seek to adjust themselves to the expectations of the group (Karau & Williams, 1993). These tendencies in groups derive from the uneven distribution of information and conflict within the group (Hollenbeck, Ilgen, LePine, Colquitt & Hedlund, 1998). These behaviors are affected by the attitudes of group members towards decision-related

matters. Attitudes can be described as a psychological tendency expressed in the evaluation of a particular item with some degree of favor or disfavor (Eagly & Chaiken, 1993). Attitude change is measurable in change in the evaluative tendency. It has been proposed that attitude changes are subject to persuasion strategies (Eadly & Chaiken, 1993), impression management (Schlenker & Weigold, 1992), involvement (Johnson & Eagly, 1989), and cognitive responses (Eadly & Chaiken, 1993) among group members.

Relevant to the question of attitude changes in group decision making is the theory on group polarization (Burnstein & Vinokur, 1977; Isenberg, 1986; Stoner, 1968). Group polarization describes two tendencies. On the one hand, under certain circumstances, group members tend to align their attitudes and assessments of given situations, thus showing groupthink (Janis, 1982). Group members find a common stance on an issue and may shut out opposing opinions and attitudes. On the other hand, the group polarization may lead to the enhancement and exaggeration of initial tendencies in the thinking of group members through discussion (Myers & Lamm, 1976). In this case, group members move away from each other in their opinions and attitudes.

Polarization is seen as a direct function of verbal and non-verbal interaction and an inverse function of the differentiation among group members (Galam & Moscovici, 1991). From this perspective polarization emerges not so much from silent agreement or official orders as from face-to-face communication and successive adjustments. It seems that at a very early stage in their discussion, group members can guess what the group preference is. Subsequently members provide information relating to the group preference and pay more attention to arguments that favor it (Eisele, 1999).

As regards the mechanisms of attitude change in group polarization, Isenberg (1986) identifies social comparison theory (e.g. Brown, 1974) and persuasive argument theory (e.g. Burnstein & Vinokur, 1977; Eagly & Chaiken, 1993) as the most

influential. Social comparison theory holds that the removal of pluralistic ignorance or bandwagon-effects is responsible for group polarization. Individuals attempt to find a middle course between their own ideal and the main tendency of the group. Prior to group discussion, group members regularly underestimate the group norm and are far from their own ideal. After being exposed to the group norm in the discussion, the individual group members move closer to their ideal and the group norm. In contrast, persuasive argument theory implies that individual attitudes regarding an issue are dependent on the number and persuasiveness of pro and contra arguments that they recall from memory when they formulate their own position. Group discussion causes the individual to shift in a given direction, to the extent that the discussion confronts him or her with persuasive arguments favoring that direction. In the case of panel interviews with multiple recruiters, it can be suggested that discussion plays a vital part in eventual group polarization and decision for or against a candidate. Integrating ideas regarding perceived P-J and P-O fit with the theory of group polarization, it can be hypothesized that the attitude changes in recruiter groups and the subsequent polarization there, is a function of group discussion.

Hypothesis 1: Discussion among recruiters following a group job interview will increase polarization of the recruiters' attitudes in their perceived P-J and P-O fit.

Job interviews have been described as ambiguous decision-making situations. Interviewers in group interviews may be aware of their limited capability to make accurate assessments, and this uncertainty leads them to seek feedback from the group (Hollenbeck et al., 1998). During the interview itself there is little chance for the individual interviewers to step back and discuss their rational evaluations or emotional reactions with their co-interviewers. It can be proposed that the discussion among recruiters surrounding group hiring decisions after group job

interviews are based on attitudes that the group members have formed during the interviews and that reflects their previous professional experience and expertise. For the group decision process this implies that the feeling of ambiguity, the inadequacy of information and the lack of precedence surrounding a group decision elicits discussion. Rimé, Mesquita, Philippot and Boca (1991) identify telling others about a personal experience as a means for checking listeners' responses to one's own verbal description of an event and to complete and consolidate one's own memory and interpretation of that event. This effect is similar to what has been observed regarding attitude change and group polarization. Because of specific information exchanges and foci of attention, it can be assumed that discussion among recruiters will be subject to influences of varying strength on perceived P-J and P-O fit in groups. In light of group polarization theory this effect seems likely to apply mainly to the evaluation of social components expressed in the concept of P-O fit (Burnstein & Vinokur, 1977). The theory regarding post-event discussion suggests a stronger influence on values and personality in the case of perceptions of P-O fit (Rimé, Finkenauer, Luminet, Zech & Philippot, 1998). This theory holds that after events such as job interviews, discussion about social factors surrounding the event is more prominent.

Hypothesis 2: Given the possibility of discussion, recruiters will polarize more in respect to their perceptions of P-O fit than in respect to their perceptions of P-J fit.

METHODS

Sample

The participants consisted of 43 male and 17 female managers with an average of 10 years ($SD = 4.2$) full-time work experience behind them. Participation was voluntary. All the

managers had experience of hiring decisions, and all were working at an executive level in medium-sized or large enterprises. Their average age was 35 ($SD = 4.6$). All the managers were enrolled in a part-time Executive MBA (EMBA) program at a European business school. They worked for different international corporations, although most of them were nationals of the country where the business school is located. An equal number of managers were randomly assigned to the experimental conditions (with the reservation that the same male–female ratio should apply) in task groups of three persons.

Study Design

The purpose of the laboratory study was to explore the effects of discussion on perceptions of P-J and P-O fit after panel interviews. The study employed a randomized two-factor design (Kristof-Brown, 2000). The managers' opportunities for discussion were experimentally manipulated. Half the managers (discussion group condition) were given the opportunity to communicate while performing their hiring task, the other half (control group condition) were restrained from communicating anything about their interviews while carrying out their hiring task. All the managers were asked to undertake fictive job interviews. They were then presented with stimulus material and three fictive job candidates to be interviewed and evaluated in relation to a fictive job profile.

Procedure

To get as close as possible to a "real" job interview, a general task description and several CVs were prepared to introduce the task groups to the job requirements and the job candidates. Further, a number of individuals were trained to function as job candidates. They were postgraduate students from the business school. All had prior work experience and were therefore used to job interviews. The CVs were the job

candidates' true CVs in order to make it possible for them to answer all questions as truthfully as possible.

The managers were told that they were to participate in an experiment designed to study the influence of rational and intuitive assessments on their choice of job candidates. From the task description they all knew they had been chosen to look for a new co-worker for their company. They were reminded that it was important to find someone who would fit their organization well. Their company, they were told, was a multinational enterprise which had specialized on the production of consumer goods and services. After a fairly long period of intensive growth the company was facing a restructuring to fit itself to the new requirements of the market. Part of this restructuring process was the organization of new project teams. The new employee that they were to choose was intended for the position of project manager in one of the new teams. It would thus be his or her task to function in a coordinating role between the different positions involved in the production of goods or services. At the same time the successful candidate would also assume responsibility for the products vis-à-vis the top management. Since the chosen candidate would start by undergoing a period of training the company was looking for someone who was still fairly young and flexible, and who would be able and willing to adapt to the culture of the company. The managers were told that the work of a project manager in their company required good personal skills. The new employee should be particularly good at handling people in difficult situations and should be capable of working well in a team.

Three CVs and the first assessment questionnaire were then distributed. The CVs provided information on each job candidate in accordance with the different requirements of the task description, giving his or her name, age, education, extracurricular activities, former employment, and hobbies. The CVs were quite distinctive, each one matching one particular job candidate. The assessment questionnaire was intended to focus the interviewer-attention on the P-J and P-O decision criteria. The

job candidates were familiar with the CVs that the interviewers had received about them and they were asked to answer questions as truthfully as possible, the only pretense being that they actually wanted the employment.

The managers were then asked to interview three job candidates one after the other. The fictive job interviews took place in an interview room at the business school. The room is especially fitted for the needs of conducting interviews. It has a V-shaped table with three chairs on one wing and one on the other. The spatial arrangement was such that all the interviewers would have a good view of the candidate but not such a good view of each other, which meant, they would be more focused on the behavioral cues of the candidate and less on those of their fellow interviewers. Food and refreshments were available with a view to making the interview atmosphere more informal and helping the managers and candidates to relax. After the three interviews had been completed, the second assessment questionnaire was handed out to the managers.

The groups under the discussion condition were allowed five minutes for free discussion after each interview. They were asked to pay particular attention to the items in the assessment questionnaire. The experimenter and the job candidate left the room during these discussion sessions, lest their presence lead to social desirability. The control group interviewed all the candidates without any pauses for talking to each other. However, to guarantee similarity in the time for considering qualifications, the control groups had five more minutes interviewing time per candidate. The idea of this was to control for that the polarization effect would not occur because of extra time for individuals' to study their impressions or any information either independently or collectively as a group.

Measures

An identical assessment questionnaire was distributed to the managers after the CVs had been received and after the interviews. The questionnaire was designed to probe managers' attitudes toward the respective job candidates. In accordance with

the P-J and P-O evaluation criteria used by Kristof-Brown (2000, pp. 655-656), the managers were asked for a sample of KSAs (knowledge, skills and abilities) to rate the perceived P-J fit of the job candidates on a 7-point scale (1 = low, 7 = high). The perceived P-J fit embraced the six KSA items: *general work skills/experience*, *communication skills*, *age fit*, *leadership skills/experience*, *team skills/experience*, and *realistic/knowledgeable view of the industry*. The reliability coefficient (Cronbach's alpha) for the P-J scale was .75. The managers were then asked to rate the perceived P-O fit of the candidates on a 7-point scale (1 = negative, 7 = positive). The six items for perceived P-O fit included: *realistic view of self*, *emotional competence*, *likable/friendly/personable/warm*, *confident/can sell him or herself*, *interested in extra effort/good work ethic*, and *focused/goal oriented*. The reliability coefficient (Cronbach's alpha) for the P-O scale was .80.

RESULTS

Hypothesis 1 proposed that recruiter groups which are given the chance for discussion after a job interview will polarize in their perceptions of P-J and P-O fit more than recruiter groups which don't have that opportunity. Hypothesis 2 predicted that perceptions of P-O fit will polarize more when discussion occurs. To test these hypotheses it is necessary to compute the distance of the different manager scores to their group mean. Taking the positive square root of the squared difference between the task group means and the individual scores calculated the scores for the different measures. This yielded a positive distance score for each manager with respect to his or her task group mean. Further, the distance scores for the individual managers regarding the three interviews were added together, providing one distance score per manager. However, this does not tell us whether the distance between respondents and group means increased or

decreased. The final scores as regards perceptions of P-J and P-O fit were calculated by subtracting the pre-interview from the post-interview scores, thus giving us the net change in distance from the task group mean for each individual manager. The means, standard deviation, and polarization scores as regards perceptions of P-J and P-O fit measures for the discussion groups and the control groups are shown in Table 1. Negative scores indicate that after the interviews the managers were less far from to the group mean than before the interviews.

An independent sample t-test revealed significant changes in perception of P-J fit as regards four variables, namely general work skills/experience ($F(2, 58) = 4.39, p < .05$), team skills/experience ($F(2, 58) = 7.85, p < .01$), team skills/experience ($F(2, 58) = 12.4, p < .01$), and realistic/knowledgeable view of industry ($F(2, 58) = 4.16, p < .05$). In perceptions of P-O fit significant changes appeared in two variables, namely realistic view of self ($F(2, 58) = 4.24, p < .05$), and confident/can sell him or herself ($F(2, 58) = 4.14, p < .05$). In each of these cases the discussion group shifted closer to the group mean than the control group. For illustrative means it can be observed that perceptions of P-J and P-O fit as measured under the condition of discussion converged by -115.6 points, while the perceived P-J and P-O fit as measured in the control condition remained almost unchanged at a convergence of by -0.04 points (see Table 1). These results support Hypothesis 1.

In a further step, it was investigated whether there was more group polarization regarding perceptions of P-J or P-O fit. The twelve variables measuring perceptions of P-J and P-O fit were z-standardized. Then the six variables indicating P-J fit

TABLE 1
Means, Standard Deviations and Distance for Perceived P-J and P-O fit

	Discussion Group Condition			Control Group Condition		
	M	SD	Σ	M	SD	Σ
Perceived P-J Fit (n=30)						
General work skills/experience	-0.67	1.28	-19,98	-0.55	1.03	-16,38
Communication skills	-0.18	0.87	-5,36	0.36	0.8	10,68
Age fit	-0.51	1.26	-15,2	-0.08	1.1	-2,42
Leadership skills/experience	-0.00	1.08	0,02	-0.04	1.9	-1,32
Team skills/experience	0.09	1.56	2,68	0.76	1.01	22,68
Realistic/knowledgeable view of industry	-0.58	1.83	-17,36	-0.44	1.37	-13,34
Perceived P-O fit (n=30)						
Realistic view of self	-0.5	1.3	-14,86	-0.42	1.09	-12,64
Emotional competence	0.04	0.94	1,14	0.67	1.09	20
Likable/friendly/personable/warm	-0.53	0.91	-16	0.09	1.14	2,66
Confident/can sell him or herself	-0.84	0.86	-25,32	-0.24	1.22	-7,3
Interested in extra effort/good work ethic	-0.27	0.86	-8	0.31	1.18	9,36
Focused/goal oriented	-0.18	1.3	-5,36	-0.09	1.32	-2,66

Note. The Σ column shows the sum of the distance scores for each variable and condition. The higher the score, the greater the polarization within a group. Negative scores indicate polarization towards the group mean.

were added together ($M = 0$, $SD = 3.03$) and the six variables indicating P-O fit were added together ($M = -2.28$, $SD = 3.71$). This provided two variables for group polarization for the discussion condition ($n = 30$). The reliability coefficient (Cronbach's alpha) for the z-standardized scales was .88. A paired-sample t-test revealed a significant difference ($p < .01$) in the discussion condition regarding perceptions of P-J fit and P-O fit. The results indicate that in the discussion group condition perceptions of P-O fit changed more than perceptions of P-J fit. The findings support Hypothesis 2.

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

The purpose of the study has been to examine the effects of discussion among recruiters in panel interviews on the polarization of perceptions of P-J and P-O fit. The findings of the laboratory study indicate that the opportunity for discussion following the interview task does have a polarizing effect on perceptions of P-J and P-O fit. In both cases the discussion group exhibited a significantly greater degree of polarization than the control group. These findings verify the effects found in earlier studies of attitude changes and group polarization. The data also supports previous indications that recruiters distinguish between P-J and P-O fit. Thus the present results add to previous findings regarding job interviews the notion that it is valuable to include discussion among the recruiters in assessing the effectiveness of job interviews. It appears that feedback on job candidates from fellow-recruiters affects perceptions of the fit of a candidate. The results indicate that discussion among fellow-recruiters can be added to the catalogue of influential factors surrounding job interviews. Fellow-recruiters serve as a source of information, thus opening the way in hiring decisions for social influences beyond the job candidates themselves. Thus, fellow-recruiters not only pass on the information they acquired from their own

interviews with the job candidate, but they also enrich this with input from their individual experience and expertise in recruiting.

Discussion among recruiters affected perceptions of P-O fit more than perceptions of P-J fit. This suggests that the post-discussion assessments of P-J and P-O fit differ from one another due to information exchange, attention focus and attitude change. Recruiters paid more attention to whether or not their fellow-recruiters thought the candidate would fit the organization, but trusted their own judgement more when it came to P-J fit. Recruiters rely on their colleagues' opinion for assessing a candidate's P-O fit. These findings confirm the proposition that when an assessment relies on subjective information, or when one's own performance is to be evaluated, people are more prone to seek feedback from the group. The group setting allows for checking the way one's fellow-recruiters reacted to the candidate in terms of personality and values. Meanwhile individual recruiters rely a good deal on their personal assessment of P-J fit, whereas in assessing P-O fit they seem to give more credence to the impression made by the candidate on several organizational members, who can then communicate their reactions about the encounter to one another. The findings thus suggest that these discussions make it possible to decide on a job candidate while maintaining harmony in the interviewer panel.

The comparison of the means for the discussion condition and the control condition thus showed more significant changes among the P-J fit variables, while after z-standardization and summing up the new P-O fit variable showed a bigger change than the new P-J fit variable for the discussion group condition. This suggests that P-O fit is more nebulous and more elusive to the recruiters than P-J fit. Attitude changes may occur in a more general level, than the relatively well-defined and testable KSAs. After only a few minutes of discussion among recruiters in a newly composed task group, polarization occurs. One explanation of this immediate development could be that when individuals are introduced to a new task in a new group constellation, they embark on an active search for cues that can help them solve the

task at hand in a way that fulfills the requirements of the group. And perhaps the fact that the groups are at an early stage in their group process makes them less prone to group conflict and more aware of the need for discussion. This may in turn make the groups more open to the mechanisms of group polarization as described in social comparison theory and persuasive argument theory.

Limitations of the Present Study

This study has sought to add to our existing knowledge of job interviews by including discussion among recruiters in the approach, and by revisiting group polarization. Further research would be appropriate, however, to address the limitations of the present study. Laboratory methodology generally raises concern about external validity. This concern was addressed here by using experienced managers as participants, as was suggested by Gordon, Slade and Smith (1986).

Video recording was not possible in this study, as the managers did not want to be filmed during the experiment. Thus, no data was collected regarding what happened during the discussions. The group members' attempts at persuasion, as well as the postural, facial and vocal cues and various other social factors all have to be investigated, if we are to understand how discussion among recruiters affects the group polarization.

The findings indicate that the panel interviews create group polarization and, thus, agreement upon one candidate. However, where there is conflict in the group the assessments can diverge. It can be assumed that since the managers in the present study had no very profound interest in the outcome of the recruiting - i.e. they weren't really going to have to work with that person in the future - conflict regarding the choice of candidate was limited. Moreover, the question of group leadership - which would be relevant if one recruiter has the last word in a hiring decision - was not addressed. It can be assumed that in a situation of group conflict, discussion among recruiters would enhance the

polarization of individual positions away from the group consensus.

Notwithstanding the limitations of the present research, the data suggests that fellow-recruiters serve as a source of information on the P-J and P-O fit of a job candidate. Each recruiter enriches the information acquired from the job candidate with their experience and expertise, thus changing the information and contributing to the discussions in the recruiter panel.

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FROM THEATER THEORY TO BUSINESS PRACTICE:

THEORIES OF ACTION OF AN ORGANIZATION THEATER COMPANY

Abstract

This paper on organization theater - theatrical performances in organizational contexts - looks at those who provide theater of this kind. Particular attention is paid to the theories of action and the practices of organization theater companies (OTCs), with a view to exploring the functions of organization theater in greater depth. As an analytical frame for theories of action the concepts of espoused theories and theories-in-use are introduced. Possible dilemmas regarding consistency, congruence, effectiveness, value and testability stemming from the theories of action are briefly discussed. Organization theater is then presented in terms of a typology and various identified effects. Against this background a case study of an OTC is offered in order to throw more light on the theories of action and the practices concerned. Results indicate a divergence between the espoused theories and the theories-in-use. While the espoused theories imply a strong focus on human self-development and liberation, the theories-in-use point more towards direct influence on the part of the management of the customer organizations.

**FROM THEATER THEORY TO BUSINESS PRACTICE:
THEORIES OF ACTION OF AN
ORGANIZATION THEATRE COMPANY**

"Theater functions as a mirror of a society or an organization; it is intended to make an audience reflect, compelling them to action. The precise nature of the field at which organization theater is aimed, and the precise definition of its boundaries, makes for the magnification of situations. The great advantage of organization theater is its knowledge of the target. [...] It focuses attention. It acts as a magnifying mirror." (Aragou-Dournon & Détrie, 1998, p. 36; translation by the present author)

Several books have appeared in which the providers of organization theater have written about their backgrounds, their methods, their experiences and their goals (Leplâtre 1996; Aragou-Dournon & Détrie 1998; Schreyögg and Dabitz 1999). These texts give the reader a vivid image of how organization theater companies (OTCs) present their theories and practices. A recurring theme is the idea of theater as mirror. The OTCs survey the organizational life of a customer organization and then use the techniques of theater to incorporate their observations into plays. It is intended that the audience should recognize the events portrayed in the plays as mirror images of their own reality.

The language, techniques and metaphors of theater have inspired an increasing amount of organizational research (for an overview, see Clark & Mangham 2004). However, research on

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the connection between theater and organizations has focused mainly on the language of theater as an analytical instrument (Burke 1945), or has treated social and organizational life *as if* it were theater in a metaphorical sense (Goffman 1959). In addition, the literature on art and media management has viewed theater companies as organizational entities dealing with a specific type of internal and external environment, and thus requiring a specific way of being managed and organized (e.g. Towse 2001). At the crossroads between theatrical language as metaphor or ontology and the performing organizations, a practice has been established over the past decade that uses theater as a technique in organizations. This practice, known as *organization theater*, offers a further perspective on the connection between theater and organizations. The term organization theater describes theatrical techniques used to promote and support change in organizations. The diverse techniques are generally employed to create an awareness of problems, to stimulate discussion and foster a readiness for change that can then be drawn upon in various subsequent initiatives (cf. Leplâtre 1996; Schreyögg & Dabitz 1999). Problem-specific plays are staged for organizational audiences. Sometimes a play is written specifically for the organization that has commissioned it. In such cases an observer spends a certain period of time in the organization to study various aspects of its organizational culture. These aspects are then woven into the play with a view to making it more credible to the audience. Another technique is to involve members of the audience actively in the play, either by using them as the actors of a play in a theater workshop beforehand, or by asking them to intervene spontaneously in the play whenever they want to change the plot in favor of their own ideas. Unlike the earlier use of theatrical techniques in organizations, the aim of organization theater is not entertainment for special occasions such as Christmas parties. Rather, management commissions the play as a means of exerting influence. Management determines the topics and the dramatic form. Thus, employee attendance at the play or

their participation in it is not voluntary. The audience is there during working hours (Schreyögg 1999a).

While organization theater was introduced to organizations as a technique, it was also a type of drama that offered actors, directors and scriptwriters a new and challenging field of activity embracing the language, theories, problems and functions of organizations. This challenge has triggered the development of a growing number of companies specializing on the provision of organization theater. Previous studies in the field have focused mainly on single theatrical events and the responses to these on the part of managers and employees (e.g. Teichmann 1999; Clark & Mangham 2004). This approach leaves the companies that actually provide organization theater out of the picture. Yet it can be argued that a key to analyzing and understanding the phenomenon of theatrical performances in organizations lies in the theater companies themselves. Despite the differences in the techniques, the plots or the actors employed, plays originating from a single theater company will be based on similar theories of action (Argyris & Schön, 1974) and the same sort of practical background in order to reach, impress and move the corporate audience.

The question remains of how organization theatre companies manage their field of activity. It seems that they have to strike a balance between, or combine, theater theory and organization theory. Although some members of OTCs may have experience in consulting, most professional actors, directors and scriptwriters who discover organization theater as a field of activity come from a background in theater theory or psychodrama. Theater has traditionally been perceived as a free art form. In the history of theater in western society, theatrical performances that portrayed organizational life usually did so not to demonstrate its benefits, but to highlight its negative or questionable impact on human beings (cf. Fischer-Lichte, 2001). The concern of the present paper is to look at the way OTCs move from theory to practice when plays are created for organizational purposes rather than for general audiences. A case

study of an OTC can throw more light on the theories of action of these companies. Here, it can be assumed, lies the key to the adaptation of theater theory to become an instrument of organizational change management. Thus, as regards the metaphor in the introductory quotation, this paper deals with the theories of action of the "magnifying mirror" that is presented to the employees on the stage.

ORGANIZATION THEATER

Organization theater is a fairly recent topic and not much literature on the subject is available in English. It therefore seems appropriate to make a brief presentation of the body of literature and the theories to which this paper makes a contribution. Further, this theoretical background contributes to the classification and analysis of the case study. The use of theatrical techniques in organizational settings has historical roots. Since the early 1960s role-playing has been used in organizations to allow employees to explore and train in their work roles (Petzold 1972). It has also long been a common practice to provide small theatrical happenings for entertainment purposes at corporate celebrations (Rosen 1988). However, it was probably as a result of the increasing focus on developing human resources that the techniques of theater found new applications in organizations (Leplâtre 1996).

The techniques can be defined in terms of certain key elements in these performances, namely the organization-specific content, the role of the employees-as-audience, and the role of management as purchaser and content-definer. Schreyögg (1999a) has developed a typology for the German situation that describes the techniques used in organization theater in pursuit of organizational goals. The typology can also be used to classify different types of organization theater in a wider context, however, since the difference between countries is often marginal

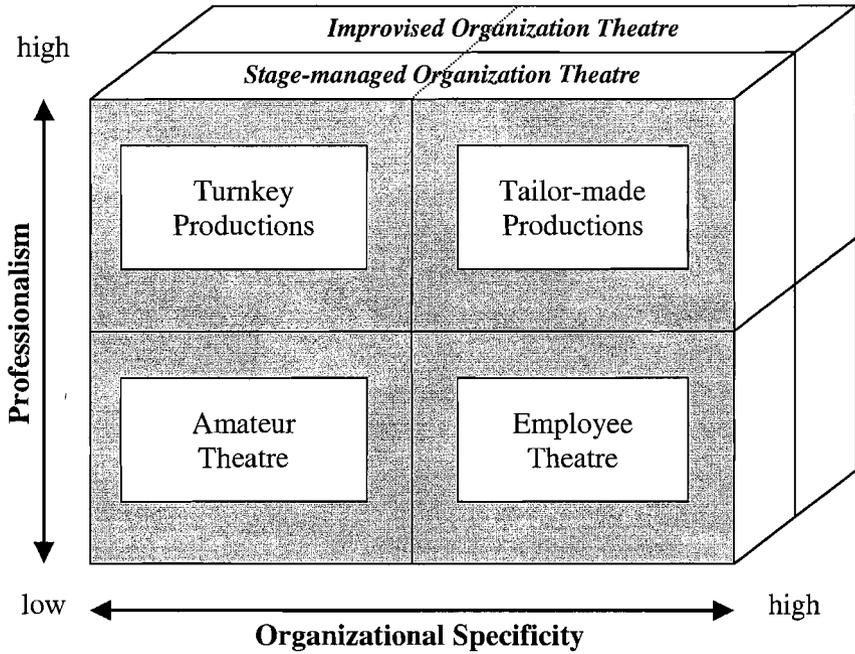
when it comes to the existing theatrical techniques and to the organizational problems addressed. For the present discussion of the theories and practices of organization theatre companies, the German typology provides an idea of what organization theater represents. Schreyögg develops his typology along the dimensions of organizational specificity and professionalism. Organizational specificity refers to the extent to which the play concerns issues specific to the target organization. The focus may then be on particular conflicts within a group or a department, or on wider issues such as employee recruitment or customer orientation. Professionalism, on the other hand, concerns the extent to which the stage is occupied by professional actors or by amateurs. The two dimensions contain stage-managed theater whose chief aim is to convey a pre-defined message, and improvised theater which plays on the spontaneous development of problematic issues. Thus, in the 2x2 matrix we find stage-managed types such as turnkey productions, tailor-made productions, amateur theater, and employee theater, and each of these types can also be used in the form of improvised theater (see Figure 1).

Various attempts have been made to identify and clarify the effects of organization theater and other attempts to build theoretical frameworks for understanding the use of theatrical techniques in organizational contexts. Four of these that are relevant to the present study are second-order observation, enforcing values, catharsis and stimulating dialogue.

Second-order observation: One effect that can develop during the drama is associated with the idea that theater represents a duplication of reality. The audience witnesses the observations of others, namely of those engaged in the production of the script and in the play itself. The audience, confronted with their own daily routines and problems on the

FIGURE 1

Typology of Organization Theatre (adapted from Schreyögg 1999a)



stage, can then watch the plot develop before their eyes without their own active participation. In systems theory terms this is known as second-order observation (Luhmann 1997), i.e. an observation of an observation. It is thought that confrontation with the observation of a second party will encourage critical thinking and an awareness of the problems which, through the participation of a multitude of employees translates into the organizational context (Schreyögg 1999b).

Enforcing values, creating togetherness: Another effect is thought to come from the idea of organization theater as a spectacle directly connected with organizational situations and events. By calling it "corporate" theater, it has been suggested, large-scale shows can reinforce values and create a sense of togetherness among employees as a result of their participation in

or witnessing of the theatrical event. Through the theatrically presented story an imaginative truth - a desirable situation - is established, which is expected to motivate the audience (Clark & Mangham, 2004).

Catharsis: Catharsis is frequently mentioned as an effect of dramatic performances is catharsis. In the literature relevant to our present topic, three catharsis-related concepts are used to help explain the effects of organization theater (Meisiek & Dabitz 1999): (1) *The cleansing of negative affects* whereby the eliciting of emotions is seen as a means of purifying particular bad memories. According to this view, organization theater is supposed to arouse feelings connected with recognized problems by presenting these on the stage, thus allowing the audience to relive them passively and, because of their non-real presentation as drama, also to resolve them. In psychological terms the spectators become emotionally involved in the play, thus seeking regulation of the emotions connected with their prior experiences. Regulating emotion involves engagement in a process of sense-making, thus integrating the “felt” with prior cognitive concepts (Schoenmakers 1996). (2) *Developing creativity:* The idea of a creativity-generating catharsis was developed in connection with the active participation of the audience in the play (Moreno 1979) and with actors’ training (Stanislavskij 1936). By drawing on negative work experiences and actively reliving them on the stage, the audience can free themselves from these experiences and develop the creativity to find new solutions. (3) *Action motivation:* Boal (1995) has developed a notion of catharsis for his *forum theater*. He assumes that when an audience actively engages itself in the play by proposing solutions after an introductory scene has been performed, this serves as a test-run for the problems that are encountered in real life. Thus, the test in the play provides the employees with the necessary action motivation to overcome the problems.

Dialogue: Another approach that is important to the present case study means viewing organization theater as an invitation to dialogue between the theatrical presentation and the organization,

as well as to subsequent dialogue in the organization about the play itself (Meisiek, 2002). Of the various views on dialogue and work life in the literature the arguments of Isaacs (1993) and Gustavsson (1992) seem particularly fruitful (cf. Berglund & Tillberg, 1999). Isaacs sees dialogue as the art of thinking together, a means for collective reflection whereby the individual taps into the capacity of the group as a whole. He further suggests that dialogue does not simply happen, but needs to be initiated and guided in order to be successful. Gustavsen on the other hand bases his view of dialogue on Habermas (1987), and sees ways of changing a bad practice as the most crucial issue. From a background in action research he advocates seeking to solve problems through group discussions rather than introducing an external solution into the social structure. For both Isaacs and Gustavsson the aim of dialogue is the improvement of work behavior.

As regards dialogue subsequent to the theatrical event, it has been suggested that the collective experience sparks a dialogue in the audience, and thus also a search for a shared stance (Meisiek, 2002). After an emotional event people usually start telling each other about it. This kind of behavior after emotion-eliciting events has been described as the *social sharing of emotion* (Rimé et al., 1991; 1998). It has been proposed that the social sharing of emotion helps to construct and consolidate the memory of significant events. (Rimé et al., 1998). After the emotional situation of experiencing - or hearing about - such an event a process of repetition is initiated, during which emotions are shared and information is sought. For an organization, this process of repetition generates a collective memory that can serve as a basis for further discussions and actions. The social recital of the event reinforces people's memory of it and creates a social narrative (Halbwachs, 1992).

OTCs are continually aware of the emotional impact of theater, and this awareness seems to be related to their ideas on dialogue. Emotion has been described as social in both its origin and its consequences. According to this view emotions are created

and modulated by everyday social experiences. Consequently, the emotions are labeled, assessed and managed in the course of interaction. Structural and cultural factors affect the feeling and interpretation of various emotions in that they constrain possibilities and frame situations (Harré 1986; Thoits 1989). "Emotion roles" are shaped in the course of interactions depending on the way individuals define the situation concerned, and on the role-taking, self-concepts and self-presentations it produces. (Hochschild 1983). "Role-taking emotions" acquire importance in everyday life in connection with individual functional roles. Empathy for the feelings of others is a mechanism that ensures the maintenance of social order and social control (Heiss 1981). It has been suggested along similar lines that emotions are scripted by structural and interactional contexts (Denzin 1984). Dialogue about emotion roles with the help of the techniques of theater is thought to encourage reflection upon and experimentation with these roles. These somewhat disparate ideas on dialogue and emotion will contribute to the case study analysis as regards the theories and practices of the OTC.

OTCs' THEORIES IN ACTION

Like all practitioners OTCs seek to integrate theoretical thinking with action. Their theoretical background is certainly informed by theories of change management but is likely to be grounded also in theater theory, since this is the source of their inspiration and the basis for developing their theatrical techniques.

Argyris and Schön (1974) developed a framework for theories of action that can serve as a point of departure for understanding how OTCs integrate, or don't integrate, theater theory with the practices they offer to organizations. These authors' adopted an approach designed to explain and encourage

organizational learning (Argyris and Schön, 1978; Argyris, 1985), which was also imbued with the epistemological view of the "conduct of inquiry" as presented by Kaplan (1964). According to this approach a reconstructed and presented logic is an idealization of a practice rather than a description of it. Theories, according to this perspective, can emerge from different sources. They may be practical common sense theories, or scientific ones. It should be noted that theories are not necessarily accepted, good, or true; they are rather a set of interconnected propositions referring to the same referent. Deliberate human behavior is seen accordingly as the consequence of theories of action held by humans. Further, Argyris and Schön (1974) see theories of action as directly or indirectly related to practice. A practice is defined as a sequence of actions undertaken by an individual to meet the demands of clients. In relation to practices, theories of action are "maps" detailing the actions that will yield the intended outcomes in a specific situation. Argyris and Schön hold that practices usually contain theories of intervention aimed at enhancing effectiveness. These theories of action are collectively held maps of organizations that serve to adopt practices to improve the fit between environment and organization. In the case of OTCs, practices contain the theories of action that guide the preparations, the presentation of the OTC to customers, the script development, and the theatrical techniques employed in putting on the plays. It can be expected that the theories of action, for example, reflect the effects of suggested organization theater.

Argyris and Schön(1974) suggest that theories of action are of essentially two kinds. On the one hand there are *espoused theories*, which are what individual people say about the way they would behave under certain circumstances. These are theories of action as espoused for specific situations. On the other hand there are *theories-in-use*, i.e. theories that actually control action.

Espoused theories and theories-in-use may be mutually *inconsistent*, and the espouser may or may not be aware of this. When evaluating theories of action it is necessary to determine the internal consistency, defined as the absence of self-

contradiction; espoused theory and theory-in-use may possess internal consistency of this kind, or they may not. It is also important is to discover whether the espoused theory and the theory-in-use are *congruent* with one another. Argyris and Schön also identify various dilemmas that can develop from the assumed structure of espoused theories and theories-in-use, including such things as *effectiveness*, *value* and *testability*, which refer to the impact of the practices. The possible inconsistency between espoused theories and theories-in-use, and even more so the characteristics of such inconsistency, are interesting in the context of the present paper, because OTCs have to bring together the traditionally different approaches of theater theory and organizational change. This distinction will be useful in our attempt to analyze and understand how OTCs sell their theatrical techniques to companies and how they meet the organizational need for problem-specific and goal-oriented plays staged before a corporate audience.

Argyris and Schön are concerned with theories of action that are held collectively, and with their consequences for organizations. Following this approach, the present study of an OTC focus on theories of action collectively held by the members of the OTC concerned. The collective level can be established by conceptualizing theories of action as a part of organizational culture. Organizational researchers have defined culture in a variety of ways, although most empirical work takes the view that it is an enduring, autonomous phenomenon that can be isolated for analysis. Definitions as a whole see culture as consisting of some combination of artifacts, values and beliefs, and also of certain common assumptions regarding appropriate behavior. It seems generally acknowledged that these shared conceptions have a normative role in guiding behavior, which has let to culture being dubbed the "social glue" of organizations (Smircich 1983). Organizational culture is regarded as holistic, historically determined and socially constructed, involving beliefs and practices, existing at various levels, and manifesting itself in

numerous aspects of organizational life (Hofstede, Neuijen, Ohayv, & Sanders 1990).

Theories of action are normative (Argyris and Schön 1974) and the espoused theories of OTCs can be regarded as linked to the basic assumptions held by their members regarding the theatrical techniques used, the underlying pedagogical concepts, the customer organizations, and work life in general. Theories-in-use on the other hand can be said to be more visible in practices, i.e. the way an OTC uses theatrical devices in its work with customer organizations, and in the content of the plays staged. To understand the way theories guide practices in this field it is important to identify the espoused theories and then, by examining the practices, to identify the theories-in-use, including the nature of possible inconsistencies between the two.

METHODS

Argyris and Schön (1974) suggest that case studies provide the most effective way of discovering and analyzing espoused theories and theories-in-use. The present paper offers a case study that has been analyzed according to the standard procedures of case study research (Yin 1994; Stake 1995). A single-case design was chosen as it allows a close-up, detailed study of the OTC, which Argyris and Schön (1974) regard as the most advantageous for decoding espoused theories and theories-in-use from collected data.

Case Study Organization

The case study company is the oldest and largest professional provider of organization theater in any Scandinavian country. The OTC fulfills the criteria required for organization theater as defined by Schreyögg (1999a), i.e. it provides a play, an

organization-specific content, employees-as-audience, and an organization as the content-defining client.

Life Theater (pseudonym) was founded in the late 1980s. Presently the company has 10 members and their programme consists of 13 turnkey plays. All their plays are based on the same theatrical and pedagogical techniques, which are organized in seminars. Every year Life Theater organizes approximately 100 such seminars. About three-quarters of these are half-day seminars, while about a quarter last a whole day or sometimes even two days. Some of the turnkey plays have been developed by Life Theater on its own initiative, others have been developed in cooperation with various customers. There is a continual effort to develop new plays. The actors performing the plays and the discussion leaders work for Life Theater on a permanent basis.

Life Theater counts government organizations, non-government organizations (NGOs), and business organizations among its customers. On a regular basis, it also sets up plays for MBA courses on coaching at a top European business school. Most of the seminars are held in Sweden, although the company has also received several international assignments.

Data Collection

The case study data was gathered over a half-year period of contact with the OTC. Documents were collected in the form of self-descriptions of the company, advertising brochures and internal documentation of theater techniques and plays. Further documentation was collected in the shape of books written by the CEO of Life Theater on the subject of theater and work life. These books are sold to customers direct from the company. Semi-structured interviews were also conducted with the CEO and three other people in the organization. The interviews concentrated on their personal views of their own organization and their customer organizations, and of their role in the evolution of new plays and in the staging of the existing turnkey productions. A first draft report on the espoused theories was completed and presented to all the members of Life Theater, who

then held an internal meeting and provided feedback to the present author regarding the accuracy of the analysis, that is to say how far they identified with it. Finally, three plays were observed during rehearsal, before being shown to corporate audiences. This provided data on Life Theater's performance on stage.

Data Analysis

In an approach based on direct interpretation, the goal is to understand the phenomenon at hand- here the OTCs - rather than to search for categorical aggregations (Stake 1995). This research approach appears to be especially appropriate to a single-case study. In our study the various data sources were triangulated to identify possible dilemmas of inconsistency, incongruity, effectiveness, value or testability. It is difficult to learn about theories-in-use from documentation or interviews, but they can be reconstructed from observations and be regarded as hypotheses (Argyris and Schön 1974). In view of the variety the data sources in our case, the analysis proceeded in two steps. In the *first step*, the collected data was collated and summarized. The documentation, the interviews and the feedback to the first draft report were scrutinized for emerging patterns of espoused theories, a procedure that also made it possible to check the espoused theories for inconsistencies. In the *second step*, an examination of the theatrical techniques and their theoretical background made it possible to summarize the practices. With the help of this information about the practices, the theater plays observed were analyzed as regards theories-in-use. A comparative logic was employed. Three theater plays are compared with regard to their theatrical history, background, plot and essence. Similarities were identified as possible theories-in-use of Life Theater, which then also made it possible to check for inconsistencies in the theories-in-use. Finally, the espoused theories and theories-in-use identified were compared as regards their congruity, effectiveness, value, and testability.

RESULTS

During the analysis it became apparent that there were inconsistencies between the espoused theories and the theories in use. The following presentation of the results takes account of this observation. The gap in the theories of action becomes manifest in the practices of the OTC.

Espoused Theories

Life Theater aims to focus on general problems and situations in work life, rather than describing a specific organization or workplace, although the members of the audience are expected to relate to the story and the characters as these develop on stage. The point of this non-specific approach to the characters and company portrayed is to avoid the risk of offending the audience. Life Theater wants to give the audience a chance to team up with the actors on stage and to solve the problems presented there in a dialogue together with them.

The collected documentation provides the necessary background material. The books on workplace psychology written by the CEO and founder of Life Theater are intended to help laymen towards a better understanding of workplace dynamics in their own organizations. The books represent Life Theater's view of organizational life, and thus also the background to their theatrical techniques and performances. Members of the case study company expressed very similar views in the interviews, suggesting that they subscribed broadly to the theories described in the books, which express Life Theater's beliefs regarding customer organizations. The first book, written in a popular style and illustrated with autobiographical accounts from the author's own experiences, is concerned with general workplace psychology, while the second presents and discusses a case. It is also the blueprint of a play that Life Theater offers to its clients. In these books the CEO draws on humanistic psychology with its basic belief in human development throughout the course of a life. Role-thinking occupies a central part in the theory presented.

It functions as a key to the behaviors targeted for change. Employee roles such as "the clown", "the workaholic" or "the messenger" are sketched in, while different leadership roles such as "the tyrant", "the laissez-faire leader" or "the uninterested leader" are also identified. Communication is seen as the social glue that binds the roles together and that creates or solves the problems. Theories derived from family therapy are used to help in understanding the problems of communication in the workplace. Here the emotional intelligence of the employees in the workplace is seen as an important factor. Emotions and emotional intelligence are part of the communication that takes place at work and as such should be taken seriously if social interactions are to be improved. It is suggested that change will be encouraged by addressing emotions and allowing them to enter the dialogue.

According to one recurring espoused theory, every human being is a voluntaristic leader of his or her own life. All employees have their own broad ideas and knowledge about the problems and situations at their workplace, in which the solutions to the problems of everyday work life already lie. The task is simply to enable the employees to take an active part in shaping the environment for a functioning work life. Life Theater seeks to operate as a facilitator, combining emotional and experience-based methods of change with the ideas and knowledge possessed by the employees. Here dialogue is perceived as a way of changing work routines as well as allowing employees to cope better with their work environment.

Life Theater proposes that by using an interactive theater form, situations can be re-framed in an emotional mode. For this purpose it creates situations on stage which endow themes such as equal rights, diversity, team work, substance abuse, workplace ethics, workplace quality, priorities in health care or workplace democracy, with a practical content. Life Theater attempts to stage its plays in a non-judgmental way. There are no seminars with fixed solutions or given answers. Rather, there is a desire to

adopt a variety of perspectives, to ask central questions and to encourage reflection.

The theatrical method that Life Theater employs is much inspired by the work of Augusto Boal. The work of this director and actor from Brazil, himself both practitioner and theorist of theater, aims at changing everyday life and his beliefs and practices are accessible in his written works (see Boal 1979; 1995). Other sources of inspiration cited for the theatrical techniques used by Life Theater include Moreno's psychodrama (e.g. 1959) and Brecht's theater (e.g. 1960). Since Boal is given as the main source of inspiration, and he himself draws on Moreno and Brecht, the discussion here will focus on his work. Boal and his *theater of the oppressed* draw heavily on the *pedagogy of the oppressed* by Paulo Freire (2000), and has its roots in emancipatory and revolutionary movements in Brazil. For Western society the idea is to free individuals from "socially internalized limitations," constraints and negative situations by giving them a chance to explore in a playful way the institutional settings of such restrictions. The playful character of this exploration, enables the individual to test ideas, knowledge and possibilities, thus developing motivation to use the experiences acquired in real life. From this process a more active and self-confident individual should emerge. Boal sees theater with its duplication of reality on the stage, as the arena for this playful experimentation and has developed a wide array of theatrical techniques to allow the audience to take part in it. Life Theater uses some of these techniques under the label of *interactive theater*.

It appears that the espoused theories are grounded deeply in theater theory and humanistic psychology. These points of departure provide the espoused maps of ways to reach and move the audiences. The professional backgrounds represented by members of Life Theater are informative when it comes to the espoused theories. They have all received training as actors. Some have worked with minor public theaters before joining Life Theater, and many have had some psychological or pedagogical

training, particularly in the field of psychodrama methods and therapy. These professional backgrounds explain the strong focus on psychological aspects and on the theatrical techniques that inform the espoused theories.

Practices

Before each seminar Life Theater prepares its plays and discussion themes in contact with the organization for which the play will be staged. They hold interviews, make site visits, and arrange improvisations. Starting from their abilities and collected experiences the members of Life Theater rehearse or create the play that later forms the basis of the seminar. The play is first rehearsed by the whole group of actors in order to find out more about the problems as a whole and the relevant situation regardless of the role they may be playing later. This is supposed to help them subsequently in guiding the discussions with the audience after the performance. Life Theater's goal is to address societal, organizational, interpersonal and individual levels all at the same time. So far it still follows the espoused theories.

In their seminars Life Theater uses interactive theater, practical exercises and lectures. Dialogue is developed both with the actors in their roles, and in group exercises and discussion related to the audience's own work situation. However, it is a strict policy that members of the audience are never brought on stage to interact directly with the actors.

The seminars start by showing an ordinary play followed by an interactive play. The first presents a problematic situation in a workplace. The audience learns about the history of the different characters and gets the background necessary to understand the unfolding of the plot and the problems and conflicts that have created the present difficulties. The characters should be drawn in recognizable detail, so that it is possible to identify with them. Human peculiarities and weaknesses are then added to the characters to enhance the plot in dramaturgical terms. When the plot reaches its climax the play is interrupted and the audience becomes involved. This is where the seminar becomes interactive.

The actors now ask the audience to select the character who they would personally like to see taking a new initiative in the plot in order to solve the problem at hand. As the CEO of Life Theater says, audiences often want to help all the characters at once. However, for pedagogical and methodological reasons they are asked to choose one role at a time to take a new turn. The character chosen by the audience appears and asks the audience what they want to discuss. The audience remains in their seats, although they are all free to offer ideas or angles and thus try to influence the plot by entering into dialogue with the characters. During this interactive play the actors stick to their roles, which also means that they react to any change proposed by the audience in a way that is appropriate to their present character. They can also address the audience, sharing their thoughts and ideas with them and asking for their views and advice. The audience can offer spontaneous instructions to the characters as to how they should react in different situations. When one character has responded to the requests of the audience and the new initiative has been acted out on stage, the audience is then free to choose another character to try another move. All the characters generally reappear in initiative-taking roles in the interactive play. Life Theater assumes that the actors' knowledge of the overall situation in the client organization helps them to react positively to the audience, so that the plot develops along pedagogical lines.

After the interactive part and a subsequent break, the seminar continues with discussion under the guidance of the actors. Now, however, the actors have abandoned their roles and have become facilitators and discussion leaders. The general shape of this part will vary, depending on the subject of the play and the nature of the organizational audience. One central factor, however, will concern the way the audience has experienced the play and what reflections it has aroused in them.

The actors all describe what it felt like to assume their particular characters. Life Theater regards this as an important way of gaining insight into different people's behavior. It can also be instructive because members of the audience identify

themselves - one of their colleagues - with one of the characters. During the reworking of the play time is allowed for lectures, discussion of theoretical models, and group training. The discussions at the end of a seminar are also regarded by Life Theater as a means of quality control. Finally, about a month after a seminar, Life Theater contacts the customer for a joint evaluation and of the seminar day, and to find out how the organization has subsequently handled the material.

Most of Life Theater's plays call for three or four actors. The size of the audience varies, but the ideal is usually considered to be between 40 and 60. The basic ordinary play takes roughly 30-40 minutes, and the interactive play about an hour altogether. Because the development of the plot depends on the audience's ideas and suggestions, this part can end in different ways. A general aim, however, is that the situation should have improved relative to the original play.

Theories-in-Use

This survey of the practices now allows for a closer look at the relevant theories-in-use. In seeking to identify the theories-in-use of Life Theater, interest focuses on the content of the plays and the identifiable rationales behind them. The theories-in-use are thus grounded in the practices described above. The reactions of the audiences, on the other hand, will not be analyzed in this context, as they are likely to shift from customer to customer. In their latest brochure Life Theater has included the following titles: Team, Leadership and Change; Health Care Environment; Equality; Diversity; Alcohol and Drug Abuse; Role of Politicians and Civil Servants; Quality and Competence; and Teamwork. Three plays - those on teamwork, diversity and equality - were watched during the case study, and these are presented here in some detail in order to examine Life Theater's theories-in-use in relation to the nature of the mundane problems that they hope to address with their interactive theater method. A collation of the descriptions of the three plays can serve to highlight the theories-in-use that they reveal. The three plays are described in Table 1,

together with their theatrical history, background, plot and essence.

The *theatrical history* suggests that Life Theater regards its seminars and its theatrical techniques as universally applicable to all possible customer organizations. With minor adaptations the seminars can be held for government organizations, NGOs or business organizations. Their *backgrounds* indicate the presence of normative ideas as regards the "best" way for a corporate audience to think about the problematic situations presented on stage. Teamwork, diversity and equal rights are pre-defined as being good and desirable for the organization, and employees are expected to adapt to them. A comparison of the *plots* reveals a shift in focus away from psychological employee aspects and towards structural and functional aspects of the organization; away from individual psychological problems and towards ways of coping with the organizational demands on the employees. Consideration of the *essence* discernible in the previous points shows that Life Theater doesn't question the organizations as such. In other words it is not intended that new strategies, existing power relationships or organizational structures and processes should be challenged or changed as a result of participation in the theatrical presentation. Boal (1979; 1995) defined his theatrical methods as providing an opportunity for the audience to experiment with the social and societal boundaries of their lives. In the theories-in-use of Life Theater the organizational boundaries are taken as given.

TABLE 1
Description of three Seminars from Life Theatre

Title	Teamwork - on personal responsibility and common goals	Diversity - on cultural diversity in the workplace	Equality - on equal rights at the workplace
Theatrical history	The play has been put on for government organizations, NGOs (non-government organizations) and a bank.	This play has been put on for government organizations, unions and business organizations.	This play has been put on for government organizations, hospitals and large business organizations.
Background	The seminar is based on a formal contract between unions and employers to increase the influence of teamwork between employees and employers in decision-making processes. The goal of the seminar is to highlight the exact content of the contract and to offer encouragement in practical terms, and to inspire better communication in the workplace. The seminar was developed on the initiative of a non-government organization in 1999.	As the internationalization of organizations proceeds, normative and legislative pressure in Scandinavia is growing to incorporate employees from different cultures in the workplace. The primary concern of this seminar is to explore the prejudices and values that can hamper constructive interactions when people from different cultures meet. This seminar was developed in 1998 on the initiative and with the help of a government organization.	The basic concern of the seminar is to explore whether it is possible to strike a balance between family and work life and if this is interesting to both men and women. The incentive behind the play was the increasing amount of equal opportunity plans in organizations. The seminar is about men and women, fairness and unfairness, and sexual harassment in the workplace. The seminar was developed on Life Theatre's own initiative in 1999, because they had become interested in ways to working with workplace equality in practice.
Plot	<p>The interactive play opens with a unit manager (A) who has to implement a teamwork contract so that it shows concrete results in his unit. She meets strong resistance. In particular the employees refuse to take responsibility and engage themselves in their work situation. They want the manager to decide as much as possible even if that means less influence for themselves.</p> <p>In the unit there is a male administrator (B) who is very jealous of his own prestige and thinks that he is the best at whatever he does. At the same time there are weaknesses in his computer competence,</p>	<p>The interactive play presents two cases of the recruitment of personnel with foreign backgrounds to the workplace. The first case is about whether or not a Kenyan man should be invited to an interview for a job as personnel administrator. A second case concerns a man of Iranian background who is already working as a cleaner in another company. He holds a French and a Swedish Bachelor's degree, and when a job in his field opens in the company he becomes interested. Administrators, managers and cleaners represent the employees, already working in the company. Among them are many different attitudes towards what is new, foreign and different. These thoughts, ideas, prejudices and expectations are disclosed by the characters during the first play and in the interaction with the audience in the</p>	<p>The interactive play involves a woman who works as a saleswoman in a company. She is industrious and very keen, and has her mother take care of her child when its father can't. One day she receives a prestigious order from a customer. However, the customer harasses her sexually and hints that he will cancel the order if she isn't more open to his requests.</p> <p>The plot then turns to a man in the same company, also a keen salesman. Until now his wife has taken care of his household, but since she started studying, more responsibility falls on him. He has a hard time combining his own needs, the family needs, and the demands</p>

	<p>which he conceals from the group. A female administrator (C) has been a colleague of (A) in a previous work setting and is now using this earlier relationship to avoid long decision-making processes. (A) lets herself be used by others because she wants to avoid conflicts. The administrators interact with is a young, energetic unit assistant (D) who is creative and competent, but the administrators who use him as a personal assistant abuse his ambitious attitude.</p> <p>Both (B) & (C) see the teamwork meetings as unnecessary and a waste of time. The administrators work with similar tasks, although neither of them wants the other to have access to what they do. (B) is afraid that his lack of computer competence will be discovered, and (C) is an individualist who doesn't want to share her power and influence. (A) simply wants the work situation to be conflict-free, which leads (B) to believe that (A) is weak and incompetent.</p>	<p>interactive play.</p> <p>A cleaner of Finnish origin, for example, believes that one should be happy and grateful for what one gets and not ask for too much. An administrator in the personnel department is struggling with personal anxiety and stress at the thought of meeting new co-workers from other cultures. She asks herself what their views on women may be, whether they can handle Scandinavian traditions, and if their education can be compared to the Scandinavian equivalent. Another administrator, on the contrary, thinks that her present co-workers are narrow-minded. At the same time her attitude includes class thinking and she looks down on cleaners.</p> <p>The managers in the play have different problems. One is to even envisage a cleaner with a Bachelor's degree. One manager wants to formulate the job description in a way that makes advanced knowledge in Swedish compulsory for it. Another manager is positive to the idea of hiring a foreigner. At the same time he is worried about not being able to cope with the new demands that a foreign employee might make on him. To avoid cultural problems and confrontation between the employees, he states that the job is not yet sufficiently developed to be taken by a foreign employee.</p>	<p>his manager makes on him as a successful working man. The manager himself has chosen work before family life, and finds it difficult to empathize with his co-workers' life situations. Equal opportunity plans don't interest him and he leaves them to the equal opportunities advisor in the hope that they will solve themselves. However, the equal opportunities advisor takes his work seriously and works with great personal involvement.</p>
<p>Essence</p>	<p>This seminar is seen as an example of how resistance to change can have negative consequences when employees are afraid of having their shortcomings discovered and they are not accustomed to asking for help. Instead of teaming up and improving their workplace, a constructive dialog is avoided. The seminar is supposed to allow employees to reflect on these conflicts and to experiment with solutions.</p>	<p>The main issue in the seminar concerns responsibility for cultural diversity in the workplace. The attitudes to integration often focus on the immigrant as a source of problems. This play tries to change that perspective and to stimulate interest among non-immigrants to take active steps towards promoting workplace diversity.</p>	<p>By showing how different people unconsciously fall into behavioral patterns which oppose equal opportunities, the seminar is aimed at arousing the audience's awareness. The discussion and exploration of male and female roles in the workplace are its foremost goals.</p>

DISCUSSION

In Schreyögg's typology of organization theater techniques (1999a; see Figure 1), Life Theater occupies a position as a provider of turnkey productions and tailor-made productions. It offers a series of well-rehearsed turnkey plays, but it also offers to develop new plays for specific customers, but does not engage in amateur theater or employee theater. Further, with its interactive method, Life Theater aims at achieving the effects proposed in previous research on organization theater. By presenting employees with a play about everyday work life, Life Theater is subscribing to the belief that theatrical performances in organizations provide employees with an opportunity for second-order observation of their own work life. The interactive method also reveals similarities with Boal's ideas on catharsis. Action motivation is an explicit objective.

The members of the OTC believe strongly in the potential for willed and purposeful action on the part of the employees in the customer organizations. Organization theater is intended to enable individual employees to use their freedom to reshape social situations within the boundaries of their jobs as officially defined. The OTC seeks to address difficult situations and the role expectations connected with these, and invites the employees-as-audience to experiment with their own roles in the situation. A key to the effect of organization theater can be seen in dialogue. In plays like the three examples addressing teamwork, diversity, and equality (Figure 1), Life Theaters' goal emerges as the reshaping of the emotional role-taking that obtains in a workplace. For example, if diversity at the workplace seems to be frightening to some of the employees, then the goal is to portray it as a social experience connected with positive feelings. If teamwork is regarded as bothersome and disruptive, then the goal is to make it seem like as an opportunity associated with hopes for improvement. In order to address the everyday emotions of the employees, Life Theater puts on an emotion-eliciting play. The idea of the subsequent discussions is then to frame the elicited

emotions in a new way by making them explicit in a socially shared language. In a sense, the emotional work roles are being renegotiated in the subsequent dialogue. Something that is also emphasized by the role-oriented thinking that is so prominent in the books by the Life Theater CEO. The leverage effect of this emotional role-taking appears first in the two plays - the basic opening play and then in the interactive one- and finally in the post-performance social sharing of emotion to which the dialogue-enhancing effect of organization theater contributes. Language is thus seen as a means for negotiating work roles.

The case study described here allowed for the investigation of the espoused theories, the theories-in-use and, in relation to these, the practices of an OTC. Argyris and Schön noted several dilemmas that can arise in connection with such theories of action. The espoused theories or the theories-in-use showed no evident inconsistency. The espoused theories are founded upon psychological theory in combination with a body of theater theory. The theories-in-use are directed primarily towards the needs of the customer organizations, as required by management as purchaser and content-definer. This dual orientation, however, indicates an incongruity between the espoused theories and the theories-in-use. The juxtaposition of the two reveals that the espoused theories diverge from the espoused beliefs as expressed in the practices of the OTCs. Audiences are supposed to change as a result of free dialogue and the emotional reinterpretation of their roles. However, as management initiates and defines the content of the plays, the focus of the dialogues and reinterpretations has been pre-set. Management is the content-defining party, and their goal is to improve efficacy in their company by hiring an OTC to help them to do so. Changes in organizational structure or power relationships are not demanded. This contradicts the espoused theory that the people already know the best solution and need only a chance for self-development to realize it. The theory-in-use, however, seems to be that the employees should achieve a new solution that fits the intentions of management. The employees who make up the corporate

audience can choose the solution that they know or prefer only within the frame set by management. This contradicts the basic conceptions of Boal's theatrical methods and Freire's pedagogy of the oppressed, which have influenced the espoused theories of Life Theater. Both these thinkers see the challenging and changing of social structures as one of the primary foci of their work. The incongruity found in the present study reveals further dilemmas of value, effectiveness and testability of the data collected. This proved to be difficult, since the aims of the OTC are often formulated in a holistic way that makes it hard to see whether the theatrical technique has achieved them. Life Theater's feedback strategy is to contact a customer organization a few weeks after the play to find out how they view the outcome. Effectiveness, value and testability are important also another context: OTCs rely heavily on word-of-mouth recommendations to get new customers. The feedback is sometimes ambivalent and can easily be interpreted as confirming the espoused theories and meeting the customer demands one and at the same time, thus also failing to reveal the aforementioned incongruity.

The finding that espoused theories and theories-in-use are inconsistent is not really surprising. What is counterintuitive about it is that the relationship between the espoused theories and the theories-in-use is the opposite of what might have been expected. In view of the theatrical and psychological background of the OTC, it could be expected that such companies would adhere to the vocabulary of organizations in their espoused theories, while applying theater theory in their theories-in-use. However, the findings indicate that the espoused theories are imbued with the theatrical idea of change represented in particular by Boal and Freire, while the theories-in-use embrace practices geared functionally to the needs of customer organizations. Probably, in order to survive in the field between organizations and theater the OTC had to adopt its theories-in-use so to make them acceptable to their customer organizations. This may be the result of trial-and-error processes in seeking a better fit between OTC and environment. Additionally, in order to present

themselves as "artistic" to the customer in character, while also maintaining a self-image acceptable in the theater world, they keep the espoused theories in their present form.

CONCLUSION

This article has had three main objectives. The first was to draw attention to OTCs as a phenomenon disregarded in previous research on organization theater. Second, it has explored the espoused theories and practices of the OTCs relative to their theories-in-use. And third, it has sought to enrich our general theoretical understanding of organization theater by examining the way OTCs bring together two theoretical backgrounds, namely theater theory and organizational change management.

The findings of the case study suggest that the encountered dilemmas in the theories of action of the OTC are ubiquitous. It can be hypothesized that OTCs in general encounter similar problems in integrating theater theory, psychological theory and the demands of organizational change management. The results of the present study suggest that organization theater researchers may choose to take the history and nature of the OTCs into account in their analysis of theater intended for corporate audiences.

In the quotation that opens of this paper an OTC practitioner describes organization theater as a magnifying mirror help up before the employees of a customer organization. The following case study then demonstrated that, in using this mirror, OTCs are not only seeking to produce a pure mirror image; the image revealed is loaded with interpretations of the organizational problem. On the one hand are the ideas nursed by the members of OTCs, imbued with both theater theory and psychological training. On the other hand there is the influence of management as the purchaser of organization theater and as content-definer. This leads to a certain discrepancy between the espoused theories

and the theories-in-use that in the long run might pose a difficult choice on the OTCs regarding their theories of action: should they develop these towards a more function-oriented kind of change management, or stick to the holistic notion of theater as portrayed in much of theater and psychodrama theory? While the first would probably attract more customers, the second would attract more professional actors, scriptwriters, directors etc. into organization theater, which in turn would make its stage performances more professional.

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