ETHICS AND COMMUNICATION IN ORGANISATIONS: MANAGEMENT'S RESPONISIBILITY TO EMPLOYEES

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ABSTRACT

This article deals with the question of managers' ethical responsibilities in their communication with employees. The idea of a social contract for business is used as a starting point for the development of an ethical standard for communication. Focusing on the concept of corporate culture, the author looks at the role of power, rhetoric and ideology in exerting symbolic control in the organisation. He argues that although some believe that the presence of rhetoric and of power differences precludes the possibility of ethical communication, this is not necessarily true. Finally, Sonja Sackmann's view of corporate culture as a dynamic construct is introduced as an approach that seems to promote ethical communication with respect to employees.

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INTRODUCTION

Recently the field of business ethics has experienced a revival for a number of reasons, including the need of philosophers to revitalise their field (Machan & Den Uyl, 1987:107). But there is also a feeling in the business sector that in the press to compete and maximise profits ethical principles have been neglected for too long (Drake & Drake, 1988; Frederick, 1988). In this paper I wish to examine ethics as it relates to business organisations. More specifically: What are managers' ethical responsibilities with regard to their communication with employees in business organisations? In looking at this question, I will place my emphasis on the issue of corporate culture.

Schein (in Drake & Drake 1988:107) defines corporate culture as follows:

A pattern of basic assumptions - invented, discovered, or developed by a given group as it learns to cope with its problems of external adaptation and internal integration - that has worked well enough to be considered valid and, therefore, to be taught to new members as the correct way to perceive, think, and feel in relation to those problems.

Although corporate culture is approached from a variety of perspectives, it involves the entire symbolic field of the organisation, and is conveyed through the expression of sentiments, beliefs and attitudes. It is for this reason that I have decided to place emphasis on culture - it encompasses aspects of communication that go far beyond specific messages, and constitutes a powerful form of symbolic control.

Because of this, corporate culture has come under attack as being one more form of exploitation. In this paper I will explore this view, and examine whether it is possible to adopt an ethical approach to corporate culture.

DO ETHICS PLAY A ROLE IN ORGANISATIONS?

According to Machan & Den Uyl (1987:108), ethics is the branch of value theory concerned with the "nature of human goodness, including the question of personal responsibility vis-a-vis the human good."

The question asked here has to do with whether this branch of value theory has any business concerning itself with productive organisations or not. Before I begin discussing ethical standards for management's communication with employees, there is a problem that must be dealt with.

This is the argument that it is not useful to discuss ethical problems at all, as business is morally neutral, or at least not subject to the requirements of normal morality. This point has been made by many, such as Friedman (1989:437-438) and Ladd (1983).

Objections to views such as Friedman's (1989), that profit is business's only legitimate concern, are well-known: for example, the point that this does not take account of situations where a business gains profit from activities that cause harm to individuals or society.

Ladd (1983) takes a different perspective, saying that the only standard that ought to be used when evaluating an organisation is whether or not it is achieving its objectives. Ladd's argument is that an organisation forms a unique language game, constituted and regulated by rules internal to the organisation. Just as it is irrelevant to judge the morality of a game such as chess, so it is irrelevant to ask whether the organisation's own rules are moral. There are also many objections that can be made to this argument, such as the confusion of playing the game with winning, and the uncertainty as to whether the organisation is a game in itself, or a player in the game of business.

I do not, however, wish to go into these matters in detail. Rather I would point out that arguments like those of Friedman (1989) and Ladd (1983), that efficiency is the ultimate virtue as it promotes the pursuit of profit, enable the business organisation to be characterised as an institution, in MacIntyre's (1984:194) sense:

Institutions are characteristically and necessarily concerned with what I have called external goods. They are

involved in acquiring money and other material goods; they are structured in terms of power and status, and they distribute money, power and status as rewards. (MacIntyre, 1984:194)

In an institution, the virtues such as justice, courage and honesty that go along with an orientation towards internal goals must be subordinated in favour of external goals (MacIntyre, 1984:194). Ethical matters are shunted aside as not worthy of attention because they are seen as being in a competitive relationship to effectiveness (Deetz, 1990).

I believe that such arguments are erroneous, for the following reasons. Profit is regarded in this view as the business organisation's end, and the all-importance of this end is used as a justification for the making of moral demands on the employees, while denying that the organisation has any similar obligations in return. This position can only hold, however, when the context is obscured. As MacIntyre (1984:194) points out, although institutions have corrupting power, they are situated within communities which, like practices, are oriented towards the exercise of certain virtues.

In reality profit is the end of the business organisation only insofar as the attainment of profit is a MEANS to something else: social welfare. Although this could be seen as limited to social prosperity, it is often seen in a broader sense. For example, Friedman focuses on the primacy of profit because that is what keeps capitalism working, BECAUSE capitalism is an "'indispensable' means of achieving political freedom." (Pribble, (1990:257)

The point I wish to make here is that proponents of free enterprise are caught in a contradiction if they deny that business organisations have ethical obligations.

Arguments denying ethical obligations of organisations usually follow the line that ethical concerns will interfere with the business of making a profit, which must be allowed to proceed if society is to be free and prosper. However, by justifying unlimited demands on employees these people are opening the way to exploitation of the very employees who make up a significant, if not the largest, proportion of the society whose freedom is being so vociferously defended.

To explain this more fully, I would like to look at Donaldson's (1989) theory of a social contract for business. Donaldson asks: why should productive organisations exist? In answering this, he turns to a situation akin to those used by Rawls and Locke, seeking to ascertain what people would choose in a state of nature. In this instance, a "state of individual production" (1989:453) where no productive organisations exist.

Donaldson (1989) argues that people in this state would be likely to adopt productive organisations if "the benefits outweigh the detriments of doing so." (1989:452) Furthermore, as the choosers in the original condition are ordinary people, they would most likely be consumers and/or employees. Consumers and employees are likely then to agree to the existence of productive organisations only if they will allow certain benefits.

For consumers, these benefits include improved efficiency, stabilised output levels and distribution and increased resources with which organisations can meet liabilities. For employees the benefits include the potential for increased income, diffused personal li-

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ability, and adjustment of allocation of personal income.

However, these benefits do not come without drawbacks (increased pollution, for example). Also, there is a tension between the interests of consumers and of employees - so that a benefit for one group often means a drawback for the other. For example, improved efficiency benefits consumers, but leads to production processes which cause alienation, loss of control over working conditions, and demoralisation of employees.

The point is that while the pursuit of profit may be an important goal, limits must be placed on this. The benefits of social prosperity must not be outweighed by the drawbacks that the achievement of prosperity brings with it. It is in this space between benefits and drawbacks that discussion of ethics has its place.

WHAT WOULD ETHICAL ORGANISATIONAL COMMUNICATION ENTAIL?

The view that the organisation's orientation towards profit should be tempered by other considerations has interesting links to Gregory Bateson's Ethics of Optima, as discussed by Berman (1984:255). This involves a holistic perspective of society, where all its elements are linked in a cybernetic system. The system is homeostatic (that is, it seeks to optimise rather than maximise certain variables in order to maintain stabilty).

The idea then, in the organisational context, is not to maximize profits at all cost, but to achieve the optimal level of profit which will keep the system in balance, and allow other important elements to be optimised too (For example, the creation of a humane, meaningful working environment for employees). In focusing on management's commu-

nication with employees, the pursuit of external rewards should not influence communication in such a way that the employees are treated as means to these ends. Rather, employees should be treated as ends in themselves.

Another way of expressing this would be to adopt a Rawlsian scheme, with principles lexicologically ordered. (In other words, the principles are arranged in such a way that preceding principles have to be satisfied before following principles can be adopted.) Since employees are one of the groups that should benefit from productive organisations' activities, these activities should not threaten employees - or else they would not agree to a social contract that permitted the existence of such organisations.

Thus, the first requirement is Kant's Categorical Imperative - that all involved should be treated as ends in themselves, rather than means. Once this is satisfied, benefits such as increased social prosperity are to be welcomed.

Sackmann (1990:139) would seem to be in line with this sentiment when she calls for the appropriate inclusion of one of the organisation's major resources - people:

By 'appropriate inclusion' I mean a recognition of the peculiarities and special faculties of human beings, such as learning, thinking, awareness, and self-consciousness; the capacity to reflect in time, space, and history; the ability to produce, absorb, and interpret symbols; and the capacity to choose and enact different kinds of roles.

If ethical communication is communication which treats people as ends - or as Fisher (1985b:355) puts it, which honours the participants' dignity and

worth, the question arises: What does such communication look like?

Since the organisation is working for external rewards, communication is ultimately there to get people to do things - so will mainly involve coercion and persuasion. Coercion obviously does not meet ethical requirements; persuasion is a little more problematic. Is persuasion itself unethical, or are certain means of persuasion legitimate?

It might clarify matters to look at persuasion as a kind of trade. A seeks something from B: a certain behaviour, or a certain state of mind. In return, A must provide B with something: a good reason, freely acknowledged as such. The use of trickery, which makes a bad reason appear good; or coercion, which compels B to accept a reason although he does not grant its validity, would be an unfair trade, and A would be treating B as a means to his own ends. However, a fair trade means B is treated as an end: it is more important for A to treat B humanely than to gain his will, regardless.

A number of scholars have developed theories which can be used to look at ethical communication.

One of these is Habermas's theory of communicative rationality, according to which decisions are reached by a consensus of uncoerced subjects who consider the validity of utterances according to the claims of propositional truth, normative rightness and subjective truthfulness (Habermas, 1985).

In the ideal speech situation, where communication is free of ideological distortions, there must be equal, uncoerced participation. In this regard, Habermas spoke of three cognitive interests which were involved in communication: the technical interest, which occurs in the labour world; the practical interest, which occurs in the world of social interaction and refers to the generation of mutual understanding between individuals; and the emancipatory interest, which occurs in the realm of power and allows the individual to gain autonomy and responsibility (Deetz & Mumby, 1990).

However, it is here that a problem arises. According to Deetz & Mumby (1990:35) distortion takes place in the organisation in a number of ways. Because the technical interest is privileged at the expense of the others (which are also present in modern organisations), employees are prevented from being able to understand and articulate their own self-interest, and the various interests do not have equal impact on decision-making. Communication is used by management to perpetuate an imbalance of power, and is thus ideological (Thompson, 1984:4).

Arguing that no interests should be dominant over others, Deetz & Mumby (1990) maintain that democracy in the workplace is desirable. Undistorted (ethical) communication is not possible when power is uneven. It is useless then to talk about managers communicating ethically with employees - as long as managers have more power than employees, this is not possible. Habermas's ideal of communication free of ideology can only be realised under egalitarian conditions.

But is egalitarianism justified in productive organisations?

According to Conrad (1983:192), egalitarianism is problematic in the organisation which wishes to be economically successful:

As the organisation increases in size and complexity, actions that result in dividing tasks, responsibilities and

power become necessary for its continued functioning. Egalitarianism may make these efficiency-maintaining changes impossible and the economic realities faced by the organisation, in turn, may make reliance on egalitarianism foolish.

This is not to say that the efficiency results because those with more power have any special abilities. Indeed, MacIntyre (1984:77) has argued that managers' claim to a privileged position is based on the erroneous belief that social science (which provides managers with their knowledge of administration) provides reliable law-like generalisations about human behaviour.

Rather, as McMahon (1989) argues, managerial authority has legitimacy as result of the prisoner's dilemma situation in which organisational members find themselves. In this case, the organisation will be more effective with any hierarchical structure than with none at all. Employees thus have an interest in the existence of an appropriate hierarchy, as they themselves benefit from the existence of effective organisations (Donaldson, 1989.)

If managers are needed and this role could be filled by people other than those at present considered competent, why not introduce democracy and let employees vote for their managers - then ultimate authority would reside in the employees themselves. This is not possible under a capitalist system, as McMahon (1989) points out. In a system of private ownership of corporations, the owners are surely entitled to appoint the managers of their choice.

So, according to this argument even though managers may not be as competent as they claim nor have the legitimacy of authority which would be conferred by democracy, managerial

authority (and the accompanying hierarchy) is legitimate, as managers achieve better results than would be achieved under conditions of anarchy.

I believe, then, that a valid argument can be made for the necessity of hierarchy in the workplace. However, there surely must be ethical requirements placed on this hierarchy, lest its existence become so tyrannous as to outweigh any benefits produced by the social prosperity the organisation ideally promotes.

Indeed, Fisher (1984:9), whose theory of the narrative paradigm is also useful in examining ethical communication, acknowledges the inevitability and legitimacy of hierarchy while condemning

the sort that is marked by the will to power, the kind of system in which elites struggle to dominate and to use the people for their own ends or that makes the people blind subjects of technology.

Rather the people must be in a position to "judge the stories that are told for and about them" (Fisher, 1984:9). This position corresponds to MacIntyre's (1984:24) belief that the treatment of someone as an end involves leaving it up to them to evaluate the reasons given in an argument.

So, while hierarchy and discrepancies in power do exist in the organisation, this does not automatically exclude the possibility of ethical communication with employees. It is the right use of power and the right kind of hierarchy that must be adopted. Fisher (1985b:353) thus agrees in general with Habermas over the 'ideal speech situation' under which agreement (consent) can be said to be valid (equal opportunity to participate, and the absence of coercion), while disagreeing that ordinary discourse is in-

herently distorted.

I will now turn to the question of power in the organisation - first looking at unethical situations, then examining ethically preferable alternatives

POWER AND ORGANISATIONAL CULTURE

The view of the power struggle in the workplace has undergone some alterations since Marx described the conflict between the owners of the means of production and the workers. As a number of scholars have indicated (Deetz & Mumby, 1990; Ray, 1986; Frost, 1987; McMillan, 1990), the power struggle in the modern organisation involves more than merely dispute over economic issues, and largely takes place through symbolic means, in the struggle over meaning.

In this regard, it is useful to focus on the relatively recent concept of corporate culture, which has acquired a prominent place in organisation theory. Although there are a variety of perspectives from which the concept is viewed (Sackmann, 1990; Smircich & Calas, 1987), management often sees culture as a variable of the organisation to be manipulated. The object is to obtain a system of shared values and norms which are internalised by employees. The employees do not realise that these norms and values are alien to their own interests, and the corporate culture thus plays the ideological role of maintaining an imbalance in power while preventing the employees from realising this.

Ray (1986:288) points out that in this way corporate culture has come to form the latest in a series of control mechanisms. The first of these control mechanisms was the early form of bureaucratic control, where increased productivity was obtained through manipulation of rewards. Then came humanistic control, which sought to produce a satisfying work life for employees and thus increase productivity. The third and latest form of control, corporate culture, is but a new way of manipulating employees.

Through the manipulation of symbolic elements such as language, myths, metaphors, stories and ritual, the corporate culture orientation seeks to produce a love of the company and its objectives in themselves, bypassing the issue of whether the company and its objectives are worthy of this love. This, according to Thompson (1984:31) is part of the new ideology which has come to dominate in Western societies:

> The modern organization appears as a perfectly rational structure which functions by itself, independently of the desires and decisions of human beings, who are themselves transformed into 'organization men'.

Frost (1987) points out that this manipulation of the organisation's symbolic field creates a deep structure of power which is not easily detected, as it forms the very meaning environment in which employees function. This makes it impossible for certain groups - including employees - to realise that their interests are not being met. Through systematic distortion of the symbolic, of communication, the corporate culture planners cause employees to identify with the technical interest, while preventing them from realising that their practical interest in achieving mutual understanding, and their emancipatory interest in achieving autonomy and responsibility are not being catered to (Deetz & Mumby, 1990).

This is what Deetz (1990:234) refers to as "blocked discourse", where one view

of reality is promoted over others, to someone's advantage. The interests that are privileged in this case, are those of the managers. In the modern corporation managers have effectively become administrators, with vested interest in the maintenance of a stable organisation, rather than productivity (Deetz & Mumby, 1990). Their continued control is important for the continuation of lucrative careers - thus the corporation is an end in itself, in contrast to the requirements of a social contract for business. Management interests thus come to dominate not only those of other employees, but also of owners, whose first interest is in profit.

Some of the discursive techniques used to control the way that the employee is situated in the organisatioon can be seen in Deetz's (1990, 236-239) list of common communication distortion techniques. These techniques prevent ethical communication because they are elements of symbolic violence: "that form of domination which is exercised through the communication in which it is concealed" (Thompson, 1984:58):

DISQUALIFICATION: Certain individuals are excluded from discourse by definitions of expertise, which define those qualified to participate. These could include requirements such as professional degrees. The notion of managerial expertise, which has been criticised by MacIntyre (1984) as a fiction based on an erroneous belief in the validity of the social sciences, would act as one such mechanism, using false criteria to exclude other employees from having access to certain types of discourse.

NATURALISATION: Here one perspective of the subject matter is made into the only view, as it is said to represent 'the way it is'. "The 'is' can preclude the concern of 'ought' and more importantly 'how' - that is, in what manner is it observed and produced." (Deetz, 1990:237) Views such as those discussed earlier, that profit IS the aim of the business organisation and thus its only ethical obligation, would be guilty here. Questioning of whether profit OUGHT to be the corporation's aim is excluded, as are questions to do with HOW that profit is made.

NEUTRALISATION: Here value positions are hidden, and what appear value-free are actually value-laden activities. Mumby (1987), for example, uses an anecdote about the chairman of IBM to show how stories perform a political function in organisations. In Mumby's example, rules are made to seem neutral, applicable to all members, no matter their position. This hides the fact that rules are made by the bosses, to serve their own interests.[1]

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Mumby's (1987:121) anecdote concerns an incident in which the chairman of IBM is challenged by an employee. The young girl refuses to allow the chairman through security because he did not have the correct ID, even though she recognised him. The chairman's encourage were horrified, but the chairman merely held up his hand for silence and had someone fetch the correct badge for him. Although it seems that there is equality here: 'the rules apply to all,' Mumby argues otherwise: "What the story obscures, however, is the fact that the formal system of rules is created BY the corporate elite...to protect their own interests. IBM is a profit-making organization, one goal of which is to maintain as large a share of its market as possible. Part of this involves employment of strict security to protect corporate secrets. Staying ahead of its competition in the area of technology ensures the competitiveness of IBM products. The corporate rules that the story deals with, then, are in place for the benefit of people like [the IBM chairman] and not for people like [the security guard]."

TOPICAL AVOIDANCE: Here discussion of certain topics, feelings and events is disallowed. One example of this is the exclusion of the ethical as a valid topic of discussion in the business world. Another is Deetz's (1990:237) point that organisation members are often forbidden to mention problems they are experiencing at home - thus preventing managers from having to think about the effect of their decisions on employees' private lives.

SUBJECTIFICATION OF EXPERIENCE: Saying things such as 'It's all relative', leaves the matter in the field of each one's opinion. According to Deetz (1990:238) this stops discussion at the point it should begin. When it seems no decision can be made though rational means, then power politics enters the picture. An employee would not have any reasonable grounds for questioning of normal routines - it is just her opinion against the opinion of superiors.

MEANING DENIAL: This, according to Deetz (1990:238) "Happens when one possible interpretation of a statement is both present in the interaction and denied as meant." The listener is then made responsible for interpreting, and the speaker can control without appearing to do so, thus avoiding responsibility. A manager who says, for example, "I want that building completed by next month, no matter what," can deny that she was coercing her subordinate into taking short-cuts. The subordinate, who followed instructions for fear of losing her job, must then take the rap when irregularities are discovered.

While these points are extremely useful in identifying unethical communication in the organisation, it needs to be asked whether Deetz & Mumby (1990) are entirely accurate in saying, firstly

that employees who are subject to the meaning environment in the organisation are unable to recognise their true interests, and secondly that discursive power is concentrated in the hands of the managers.

On the first point, as Haslett points out,

the whole issue of interest representation may be moot. Interests can never be fully known and thus we have no standard of judgment for whether they have been expressed or given equal consideration in organizational discussions (1990:54).

Deetz & Mumby (1990) are operating from a 'third' perspective, so to speak - that of the outsider. It is from this vantage point that they are able to see the ideological influences in communication in the organisation, and to determine which interests are not being served. To be sure, participants in the corporate discourse may not be fully aware of the distorting effects of their communication environment. But employees are themselves not wholly unable to judge for themselves where their interests lie. While from the outside it may appear that employees are being manipulated, employees may, according to their own criteria, have judged the management's communication to be valid. These criteria, while not comprehensible to outsiders, may be derived from the broader community in which employees find themselves

Open ended though it may be, the story of my life is always embedded in the story of those communities from which I derive my identity - whether family or city, tribe or nation, party or cause. (Sandel, 1984:6)

And surely one of the communities from which I derive my identity is the

organisation in which I spend a significant part of my life. And surely this organisation's story is also embedded in the story of my community as a whole. Thus the symbolic environment in the corporate institution is not a world unto itself, but is formed in interaction with the community in which it is situated, and in terms of which it justifies its existence.

Further, if my identity is in large (or most) part derived from the communities in which I find myself (MacIntyre, 1984:221), so are my interests. My interests are thus not entirely formed outside the organisation, and either favoured or suppressed within it - but nor are they totally formed within the organisation, so that I take on the interests of a worker, or a manager. I have a multiplicity of interests, and if at one time some of them are not being met, some are. Whether I accept the current situation or not often depends on a story larger than the one involving my immediate context, rather than on the ingenuity of the deceptions worked on me.

So, for example, my interests as a labourer may not be met, but I may also see myself as a character in a larger story (as a citizen in a capitalist state, for example, in which I accept the need to be productive and I accept the culture of my organisation because it fits with my own world-view as influenced by my family, my religion, and so on) whose interests ARE being met: the need to feel a valued part of a system that works, perhaps.

The argument above corresponds with Fisher's (1984, 1985, 1985b), theory of narrative rationality. People are 'storytelling animals,' and narrative is a valid form of discourse which is judged according to the criteria of narrative rationality, following the "logic of good

reasons" (Fisher, 1984:16). The narrative fidelity and narrative probability of a story are judged by comparison with "prior, accepted stories." (Fisher, 1985b:364) Thus I may accept stories told to me in the organisation because they make sense to me when compared with the more important stories that I already accept - such as those involving my political or spiritual communities. Whether these stories are valid or not only I can decide, and if others wish to persuade me otherwise they can do so only through giving me a better story, not by insisting that I accept their judgement criteria.

For example, if managers wish their workers to be motivated by the meaning in and of their working lives (Rossouw, 1991), the stories told to workers must make sense to them according to their own criteria of what meaningfulness entails. And if workers DO become more productive, it does not necessarily follow that they are being exploited - it may be that they are motivated by the fit between management's stories and the larger stories of their lives.

With regard to the second point - whether or not managers do monopolize discursive power in the organisation - a number of theorists have pointed out that power is more elusive than Deetz and Mumby (1990) allow. Rather, as Foucault has indicated, power as pervasive in social life - and organisations are no exception (Haslett, 1990; McMillan, 1990). The point here is that even if management does largely influence the organisation's symbolic environment, employees are not necessarily being unethically manipulated, as they may have enough counter-power as to make the situation one of fair exchange.

Some of the ways in which employees can exercise power are in the forma-

tion of alliances and coalitions, the selective interpretation of rules, and the esta-blishment of own meanings in the context of subcultures. McMillan (1990:209) argues that the very rise to prominence of rhetoric in the organisation has begun a shifting of the balance of power, which was previously held solely by elite groups. Because management of corporate culture is essentially a rhetorical process, this process requires closer scrutiny.

RHETORIC IN THE ORGANISATION

Rhetoric is inextricably tied up with power (McMillan, 1990; Lucaites & Condit, 1985) and insofar as rhetoric has to do with the obtaining of uncoerced obedience and commitment through obtaining identification with the speaker's position, rhetorical processes can be seen to be central in an organisation's culture (Pribble, 1990:256).

Tompkins (1987), in fact, maintains that the whole of the theory of organising is derived from classical rhetorical theory. Quoting Burke's definition of rhetoric as "'the use of language as a symbolic means of inducing cooperation in beings that by nature respond to symbols,'" for example, Tompkins (1987:78) points out that co-operation is closely tied up with organisation. He also compares Weber's investigation into the nature of uncoerced obedience within bureaucracies with Aristotle's concern with how obedience is secured through artistic persuasion[2].

While rhetoric works to create consent, and Deetz & Mumby (1990) maintain that the modern worker's relationship to the production process involves consent rather than coercion, it is not necessarily true that this consent is created through unethical, ideological manipulation of the symbolic field. To be sure, this is possible, as Deetz's (1990) identification of manipulative techniques illustrates. However, the presence of rhetoric means that some kind of symmetry in power relations is present, although this symmetry is not absolute. While the speaker has power in her use of the symbolic, the audience also has the power to assess the message.

As McMillan (1990) points out, where there is a total imbalance of power, subordinates would merely be told what to do; there would be no need to generate consent. And while Thompson (1984:11) has pointed out that ideology often takes a narrative form, Fisher's (1984, 1985, 1985b) theory would indicate that elements identified as constitutive of culture, such as myths and stories, are legitimate forms of persuasion, as the audience is capable of judging such elements according to the requirements of narrative probability (the degree to which stories cohere, are consistent) and narrative fidelity (the logic of good reasons) - or, as Brown (1990:170) puts it, the degree to which stories 'ring true.' This view corresponds closely with MacIntyre's view of narrative selfhood: "I am not only account-

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Tompkins (1987:79) draws a direct parallel between Aristotle's three categories of rhetorical proofs and Weber's three categories of legitimate authority: "Aristotle's first form of proof, ethos,... or source credibility... is of course comparable to Weber's charismatic or personal authority... Aristotle's second type, pathos,... is similar to Weber's traditional authority, particularly when one concedes that commitments to the old ways and routines are more dependent on emotions or a quasi-religious frame of mind than on reason and argument. Aristotle's third type of proof, logos, 'his power of proving a truth, or an apparent truth, by means of persuasive arguments,' is comparable to Weber's rational-legal authority."

able, I am one who can always ask others for an account, who can put others to the ques-tion." (1984:218)

Tompkins (1987:80,81) refers to another way in which both speakers and liste-ners participate in the construction of persuasive arguments. According to Aristotle, if a deductive argument is to be effective as proof (provide the au-dience with good reasons for accepting it), the premise must already be part of the audience's opinions. While the speaker spells out the form of the ar-gument, it is the listeners who have contributed the premises on which the argument is based. Thus, both speaker and audience "participate in the con-struction of the proof." (Tompkins, 1987:80

When the organisation members be-come participants in message-making, co-operating with management in the creation and recreation of organisational plots, rather than the mere playing out of scripts, then communication can also perhaps draw closer to the ethical ide-als of a social contract for business. This is attained when the employee is not subject to orders and commands issued by 'remote control' in a mystify-ing, impersonal structure, (Schumacher, in Tompkins, 1987:89) but is part of a hierarchy which acknowledges his dis-cursive power, and which seeks to construct a culture, a story that makes sense to him, rather than compelling him to see the sense of the pre-con-structed corporate narrative.

AN ETHICAL APPROACH TO ORGA-NISATIONAL COMMUNICATION

Sonja Sackmann (1990) advocates an approach to organisational culture that synthesises two approaches to corpo-rate culture: the culture-as-variable ap-proach, and the culture-as-metaphor approach. While the former is the ma-

nipulative approach often taken by management, and the latter is oriented towards merely understanding organi-sations AS cultures. Her view, of organi-sational culture as a dynamic contruct, sees culture as developing over time in an organisation. While proponents of this view want to use a cultural per-spective to better understand organi-sations, they also wish consciously to develop organisational culture.

However, rather than being instrumen-tally manipulative, such an approach allows for management that is culturally aware (1990:133). There are indications that such management promotes ethi-cal treatment of employees. For ex-ample, the relationships between people in the organisation are seen to form a probabilistic network, rather than a machine-like chain of deterministic events. Symbolic management can merely increase the probability of de-sired behaviour occuring, rather than attempting to guarantee it though the use of ideologically-laden communica-tion.

This view also calls for a metaper-spective in which the organisation's culture undergoes critical examination through comparison with the cultures of other organisations, in which actions are evaluated according to existing meaning systems, and in which man-agement examines its own cultural bi-ases.

Although Sackmann (1990) acknow-ledges that the concept needs more work and that empirical evidence on the functioning of such a mode of management hardly exists, the idea sounds promising:

Organizations are seen as evolving, dynamic, complex cultural systems with inconsistencies and paradoxes, and several cultural groupings or

meaning systems. Within this perspective, the management of culture can only take the form of a culture-aware management that tries to create, interpret, negotiate, and communicate meanings in conscious efforts... Every organizational member is a potential source of cultural variation, adding to the dynamic and pluralistic nature of culture. (1990:138)

Such an orientation would seem to comply with the requirements that managerial communication treat employees as ends in themselves and not merely means to the achievement of organisational objectives. In MacIntyre's (1984) terms it seems to create conditions under which management can provide reasons to employees, while leaving it up to the employees to decide how good those reasons are.

CONCLUSION

In business organisations the treatment of employees as ends in themselves involves the use of ethical persuasion. This is persuasion which provides reasons for why employees should accept managerial authority, but which leaves it up to employees to evaluate those reasons according to their own criteria.

Contrary to a number of arguments, the use of rhetoric as a persuasive tool designed to justify the existence of hierarchical relations of power and to elicit uncoerced obedience is not in itself unethical. The use of rhetoric is ethical as long as there is a genuine attempt to provide reasons that employees can freely accept.

This broad principle remains to be worked out in detail in the South African context. For example, what kinds of reasons are regarded as good? What are the basic requirements for an organisational environment in which employees in South African companies would be empowered in the rhetorical process? Answers to questions like these may stimulate a discussion which would bring benefits to many in our society.

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