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UMI
THE RHETORIC OF CORPORATE COMMUNICATION: A CASE STUDY OF AN EMPLOYEE COMMUNICATION PROGRAM

DISSERTATION

Presented in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for The Degree Doctor of Philosophy in the Graduate School of The Ohio State University

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The Ohio State University 2002

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ABSTRACT

This dissertation explores the workings of corporate communication, focusing on an employee communication program at AFC Canada, a subsidiary of a multinational travel and financial services organization. This case study focuses on how two key genres of employee communication, employee newsmagazines and all-employee meetings or town halls, function as management tools.

Rhetorical analysis of documents and events was used together with observation and interviews conducted over eleven months during 1998. Interviews revealed that the corporate communication group attempted to pursue an "open and honest" communication policy, delivering both good and bad news to employees in a timely manner. However, the group was often constrained in its communicative practices by more powerful managers in other divisions. For example, the group had difficulty convincing certain managers that employees needed to know that the company had lost several important contracts. Thus, while the group members in some senses saw themselves as advocates for employees, they were not always able to act in this capacity.

Results of the rhetorical analysis reveal that the genres of employee communication serve as epideictic rhetoric, attempting to inculcate particular values—and ultimately behaviors—among employees. Negative messages and
positive emphasis were both found to be used strategically. Negative messages were used to preempt unofficial versions of events (such as the employee grapevine) and “counterspin” external media reports. They were also presented in a way that averted the company’s responsibility for decisions that negatively impacted employees such as lay-offs. In addition, both the newsletter and the town hall meetings used identification strategies such as employee testimonials and storytelling to engender employee loyalty.

The analysis of the town hall meeting found that they served a ritual function in the organization’s culture, functioning as epideictic rhetoric by reinforcing key organizational goals and values among members. The meetings used entertainment features including a theatrical setting and the showcasing of employee “performers” to achieve greater adherence to organizational values as well as to the American parent company. Most notably, the meetings used both forms and language of democracy, yet permitted little genuine employee participation.
For Ian

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ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

My first thanks goes to my friend "Justin" (who introduced me to AFC) and the other participants in this study who gave generously their time, insights, and labor to make this project possible.

I thank my committee who, although they were at great physical distance from me, remained close in spirit. My co-directors, Kitty O. Locker and Andrea A. Lunsford, gave unstinting encouragement and showed unwavering faith in this project and in me. Louie Ulman consistently provided timely, insightful and challenging comments and questions.

In addition to my committee members, I wish to thank Brenda Brueggemann whose comments on very preliminary drafts helped me with the initial methodological and ethical dimensions of my research. Nan Johnson gave me the confidence to pursue a more theoretical direction in my work, which has informed this study, and for which I'm grateful. I also wish to thank Judy Segal of the University of British Columbia who introduced me to the realm of rhetoric.

Financial support from an OSU Summer Fellowship, an Edward P.J. Corbett Memorial Fund Award, and Locker fund fellowships were essential to the completion of this project.

On a more personal note, I am grateful to my parents, Betty Williams and John Williams for their emphasis on education, which has spurred me on. I also
wish to thank Paula Chambers who set an excellent example and whose pithy advice and sense of humor helped me through the dissertation writing process.

Last but not least, heart-felt thanks are due to my husband, Ian Gordon, who gave me the intellectual, emotional, and practical support I needed from start to finish, including caring for our three young daughters, Olivia, Sophie, and Emma.
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PREFACE

This dissertation presents a case study of an employee communication program concerning a corporate communication group at the Canadian subsidiary of a multinational financial and travel services organization. To ensure the confidentiality of the organization and its members, I have used pseudonyms throughout this dissertation. All products, services, document names, company and personal names in this report are pseudonyms. The corporation has asked to review my final draft to ensure that it contains no information that could identify it to outsiders. A copy of my nondisclosure agreement appears in Appendix A.
CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

While the study of rhetoric was once almost exclusively concerned with the discourse of the senate, the courtroom, and the pulpit, corporate or organizational rhetoric has begun to attract the attention of scholars. As corporations or organizations have come to rival if not surpass in scope and influence traditional forums for public discourse, Mary Beth Debs argues that corporate or organizational rhetoric is an increasingly important area of study:

Although we may want to be cautious in recognizing it as such, the corporation, certainly the organization, has become the major arena for public life for the individual in modern Western civilization. One's concerns are often those of the economically prescribed marketplace; one's participation is shaped by the collective dialogues of the sponsoring organization; one's rhetoric is often of necessity (or at least of a salary) a product of institutionalized corporate activities. (161)

Yet despite the power and influence of corporate rhetoric, many scholars, including those in English studies, have ignored the study of business language and culture. As Thomas Frank argues in his history of the advertising industry in the 1960s, *The Conquest of Cool*, while popular culture has become a fashionable area of study, the process of cultural production has been overlooked:

Today corporate ideologues routinely declare that business has supplanted the state, the church, and all independent culture in our national life. Curiously enough, at the same time many scholars have decided it is folly to study business. For all of cultural studies' subtle
readings and forceful advocacy, its practitioners tend to limit their inquiries so rigorously to the consumption of culture-products that the equally important process of cultural production is virtually ignored. (18)

That corporate rhetoric has been until recently overlooked can be accounted for in part by the preoccupation of scholars in the humanities with individually authored texts. I address the issue of collaboration vs. individually authored texts later in this dissertation. However, as William N. Elwood argues, “Rhetors, or creators of rhetoric, include human and corporate citizens” (7 emphasis original). The study of corporate rhetoric complicates and enriches what Bitzer termed “the rhetorical situation,” composed of “a natural context of persons, events, objects, relations, and an exigence which strongly invites utterances” (5).

One of the preeminent scholars of organizational rhetoric, George Cheney, highlights the importance of the terms “organization” and “corporation” in understanding the complications—and implications—of organizational or corporate rhetoric. The term “organization,” originally derived from the individual body (organ), reminds us that rhetors have traditionally been understood as individual speakers or writers. In a different manner, the term “corporate” embodies a tension: on the one hand it refers to any group or collectivity, and on the other hand it refers to a specific legal category that accords certain rights and responsibilities like those accorded to individuals (Rhetoric in an Organizational Society 4). Cheney warns of the potentially obscuring effects of corporately authored texts, which can take on a relatively placeless, nameless, omniscient quality, even when a corporate identity is assumed and declared. And this mystery which surrounds corporate rhetoric often obscures its workings, its effects. In the language of contemporary philosophy, corporate messages tend

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to "de-center" the self, the individual, the acting subject. (*Rhetoric in an Organizational Society*)

This de-centering effect of corporate rhetoric is in no small part attributable to how the corporate veil obscures the acting subjects who compose corporate messages and craft organizational identities. These subjects and their rhetorical practices are worthy of our attention.

This case study of an employee communication program at AFC, a Canadian subsidiary of a multinational financial services corporation, analyzes the organization's employee newsmagazine and all-employee meetings as well as the communication group responsible for these documents and events. I examine how the communication group's position as official organizational spokespeople informs their rhetorical choices. Drawing on research in rhetoric and composition and business communication, I will explore the ideological functions of these employee communication "vehicles" in terms of how they function as epideictic genres and how they attempt to achieve employee identification with the organization. In examining genres of employee communication in context, my study contributes to research and pedagogy in Rhetoric and Composition and Business Communication but also Corporate Communication practice.

Because this dissertation is highly interdisciplinary, drawing not only from business communication and rhetoric and composition but also from organizational, management communication, corporate communication, and cultural studies, fields that are themselves contested, an exhaustive review of the literature would be impossible. Instead I highlight the themes, issues, and
analytical methods of particular relevance to my study. However, before doing so it is important to provide a brief overview of the shifting terrain where I locate my research.

Wherever it is housed physically, business communication research comprises a wide variety of objects of study, theoretical orientations, methodological approaches, and interpretive strategies. In a 1993 editorial for a special edition of The Journal of Business Communication on “Business Communication as a Discipline,” Kathryn Rentz argues that a productive disciplinary conversation is more important than a firm definition, for without successful talk we have no discipline. According to Rentz, efforts at making knowledge in the field have been hindered by the lack of a shared paradigm—that is, consensus concerning methodology, goals, and values. Yet despite the absence of a shared paradigm, Rentz asserts that scholars “can find enough common ground on which to stand so that we can at least speak to each other” (236). To address what she sees essentially as a “rhetorical failure,” researchers need to become better translators of their work by learning about other disciplines outside our own, making our assumptions explicit, avoiding (or at least defining) jargon, identifying the authorities whose work we are citing, anticipating objects, and answering them (237). While Rentz’s recommendations

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1 In “Business Communication: The Orphaned Discipline,” John Hagge traces the nomadic history of the field and its struggle to achieve academic legitimacy and respectability. Because so many business communication scholars are situated in business schools, Ronald E. Dulek examines the two different models followed by business colleges and schools—the vertical and the horizontal—and their implications for research and teaching. The vertical model favors functional specialization and quantitative research, emphasizing an instrumental approach to the discipline. In contrast, the horizontal model stresses breadth rather than depth, using qualitative methods to examine “softer” management issues such as leadership, communication and strategy.
could easily apply to research outside of business communication, her focus on improving the disciplinary conversation is particularly relevant to this dissertation, which spans several different fields.

Like Rentz, in “Remapping Curricular Geography: Professional Writing in/and English,” Patricia A. Sullivan and James E. Porter argue that the very indeterminacy of the field they call “professional writing” is a strength. Rather than attempt to define professional writing as a discipline or profession, Sullivan and Porter undertake to locate it within industry and the academy. In particular they examine the status of professional writing within departments of English and its relation to literature, rhetoric and composition, and business and technical writing. Countering the charge that professional writing inevitably “serves to instill and maintain the ideological interests of a dominant self-interested capitalistic and/or technocratic system,” the authors argue that pedagogical outcomes depend on local practices, not on disciplinary orientations (414). Promoting an ethical or “humanities” perspective toward professional writing, they see the role of professional writing as the study of the “career writer” (that is, the professional writer, not the professional who writes). They see the role of the career writer “not to better represent the company to the public but, rather, to help the company better understand the needs and interests of the public” (414). Sullivan and Porter’s concern with ethics has a direct bearing on my study of the communication group at AFC, which explores how the employee communication program not only represents the company, but constructs the employee audience.
Organizational, Management, and Corporate Communication

While organizational rhetoric comprises the discursive practices of all employees, those who formally represent the organization to various audiences—corporate communicators—make a compelling object of study. For as Roland Marchand shows, Public Relations (the original term for Corporate Communication) has become a powerful cultural force and one that has not necessarily been counter-balanced by individuals and groups outside the organizations:

the giant corporation, arising after the mid-nineteenth century, demolished all balance in size and power between the framers of the new corporate images and their audiences. Over time a cadre of those most talented in devising verbal and visual imagery came to dominate such discourse on behalf of the largest, richest organizations. Although individuals, and occasionally those united in voluntary groups, did not lack all capacity to counter or even undercut the flood of imagery from the corporations, the encounters became increasingly disproportionate as the twentieth century wore on. (232)

Most studies of corporate communication—the name given to documents, events, images and other symbols—have focussed on external or “public” communication, although the term “corporate communication” (which is used interchangeably with Public Relations and Public Affairs) encompasses three principal audiences or “constituents”: employees, investors, and customers. Paul A. Argenti, who teaches management and corporate communication at the Tuck School of Business at Dartmouth and is one of the leading scholar-practitioners in the field, describes the key subfunctions of the field: image and idea, corporate advertising, media relations, financial communication, employee relations, corporate philanthropy, government relations, and crisis communication (“Corporate Communication” 77). He argues that of all the subfunctions of
corporate communication, employee communication offers the greatest opportunity for sought-after research ("Corporate Communication" 94).

In addition to scholars like Argenti in corporate communication, speech communication scholars have both recently begun to examine Public Relations or PR as a form of rhetoric. Because PR concerns documents that are by nature available to the public at large (largely through the mass media), it has been a more accessible subject of study than internal communication such as employee communication. Two volumes in particular, *Rhetorical and Critical Approaches to Public Relations* and *Public Relations Inquiry as Rhetorical Criticism: Case Studies of Corporate Discourses and Social Influences*, provide rhetorical analyses of public relations cases, primarily focusing on "crisis communication," cases of organizations attempting to shape public opinion in the face of events that threaten their favorable image or identity. One of the few studies of internal corporate communication is Mitchell S. McKinney's "The Rhetoric of Indoctrination," that analyzes a new employee orientation video. Mitchell makes the point that "a critical examination of such texts can provide evidence of the organization's value system and corresponding power and knowledge structures," similar to the approach I follow in this study (178).

Scholars Majia Holmer Nadesan, Mark Zachry, and Jo Ann Yates draw on rhetorical theory to analyze narrative in management communication texts. In "The Discourses of Corporate Spiritualism and Evangelical Capitalism," Majia Holmer Nadesan explores the "vocabularies and techniques currently used to motivate employees and foster organizational commitment" in popular periodicals (5). Drawing on Foucault's notion of discourse, Nadesan examines
how three discourses she identifies—New Age corporate spiritualism, evangelical capitalism, and populist—articulate and constrain the ways that individuals understand themselves and new economic arrangements” (6).

Nadesan argues that the former two discourses promote individualistic, entrepreneurial subjectivities that work against the populist (and critical) discourse required for confronting corporate control. I will argue that the AFC employee communication program functions in a similar manner, promoting an individualized subjectivity for employees. Nadesan’s analysis of the discourse of New Age corporate spiritualism, which presents “employees’ commitment to organizational goals […] as the route for self-actualization” is particularly relevant for my analysis of AFC’s employee communication program (14). While Nadesan argues that both New Age corporate spiritualism and evangelical capitalism are not devoid of value, they suppress alternative, critical discourses of organizational life (33) and present normative subjectivities; “Both approaches articulate idealized visions of correct subjectivities to which individuals should aspire” (34).

In “Management Discourse and Popular Narratives: The Myriad Plots of Total Quality Management” Zachry examines “the interplay between management discourse and professional communication by focusing on the discourse associated with total quality programs” (109). My study demonstrates how the highly influential Total Quality narratives and tenets derived from these narratives (such as “survival of the fittest”) Zachry identifies inform the AFC employee communication texts, inscribing particular organizational values and subject positions for employees.
Whereas Nadesan’s and Zachry’s articles focus on relatively recent (since the 1980s) management discourses, Jo Ann Yates’ Control Through Communication provides a historical examination of management discourse. Yates traces the rise of the systematic management movement through a variety of business communication genres, including newsletters and meetings, arguing that management has moved from more overt methods of control to more subtle methods of coercion, including the use of employee publications. I have drawn on Yates’ work to help situate my study of AFC’s employee publication and all-employee meetings historically.

**Employee Communication**

In his introduction to a special edition of Human Resource Management, Argenti calls employee communication the single most important component of corporate communication yet “an area generally neglected in both the academic and practitioner literature” (Argenti, “Introduction” 197). In another article on the subject, he outlines two distinct evolutions of employee communication: one in the business context and the other in the academic (“Corporate Communication Discipline” 74). In the United States, the academic field developed in communication, journalism, and business schools. The practitioners originated in PR firms, working for organizations on an ad hoc basis. Only later would corporate communicators be hired directly by organizations as the “corporate communication function” took hold within most large organizations during the 1970s (Argenti Corporate Communication, 49).
The vast majority of the literature on employee communication is descriptive and prescriptive, by and for corporate communication practitioners and found in one journal: Communication World, published by the International Association for Business Communication (unrelated to the Association for Business Communication, which publishes the more scholarly Journal of Business Communication, and pedagogically-oriented Business Communication Quarterly). The articles on employee communication in Communication World address three recurring themes: asserting the importance of employee communication, identifying trends in employee communication practice, and articulating guidelines for what constitutes good employee communication. In addition to Communication World, journals in the fields of human resources, management, marketing, and public relations as well as "newsstand" business publications, such as Inc. and Fortune, regularly feature articles on the subject of employee communication. These articles for the most part focus on the theme of boosting productivity through improved employee communication, defined broadly as the dissemination of information and the boosting of morale.

The extremely small body of scholarship on employee communication, like the practitioner literature, articulates the role of employee communication in terms of information delivery and morale building: "Companies today must explain complicated health and benefit packages, changes in laws that affect employees, and changes in the marketplace that might affect the company in the future. Increasingly, they must boost the morale of employees after downsizing and reengineering" (197). Argenti also argues that today's employees expect to be better informed about companies than their parents were, a belief shared by...
the communication group at AFC: "managers find that a new generation of employees, most of whom are better educated, have higher expectations than their parents did, and want to work more with their heads than their hands, are more likely to want more information about the company for whom they work" (Argenti, "Strategic Employee Communications" 199). Yet although Argenti asserts the importance of addressing employees' needs, he privileges the interests of management. On the one hand, he makes a case for employee involvement in decision-making: "Part of the problem at many companies is that senior managers fail to involve other employees in the decision-making process. This makes these employees feel alienated and less willing to accept changes that managers then impose upon them (Argenti, "Strategic Employee Communications" 199). On the other hand, he posits employee communication as a panacea for virtually any organizational problem, including massive lay-offs ("Introduction") and stops short of arguing for the systemic change that Cheney calls for in his study of Mondragón. In addition to informing and motivating employees, a key concern for Argenti is the relation between employee communication and "strategy," a popular business buzzword usually referring to major decisions such as whether or not employees should be laid off. I will show that Argenti's beliefs concerning the role of employee communication, particularly its relation to corporate strategy, resonate with those held by members of the communication group at AFC.
Employee Publications: "House Organs," Newsletters, or Newsmagazines

Employee communication employs a variety of "vehicles" such as new employee orientations, training workshops, videos, intranets, publications like newsletters and quarterly reports, and a variety of face-to-face meetings. In most large organizations, the employee newsletter or newsmagazine (in the United States and Canada, sometimes known as the "house organ") is widely considered one of the key means of communicating with employees. Just as the vast majority of articles on employee communication are by and for practitioners, so are those on employee publications. These articles are largely focussed on justifying the role of employee publications and describing their evolving role within organizations. Michael Brandon, for example, argues that employee communication has gone "from nice to necessity" ("Nice") and traces the evolution of employee publications, from a preoccupation with "birthdays, babies and ball scores" to "today's focus on challenge, change, and commitment" in order to assert the importance of employee communication in communicating business "strategy" to employees ("Three B's" 21). Sosnin describes a threefold purpose of newsmagazines: informing, motivating, and unifying employees from diverse locations, which, as I will show, are all concerns for the writers and editors of AFC's employee magazine (106). Barry House's article, "Cop an Attitude for Effective Employee Communication," presents five "attitudes" that ensure successful employee communication: Respect, Honesty, Openness, Timeliness, and Receptiveness, terms that figured prominently in my interviews with the communication group, although not always in the publication itself. Overall the practitioner literature is concerned with improving the effectiveness
(defined in terms of productivity or efficiency) of employee publications rather
than any reflection about the political or ethical dimensions of these publications,
perhaps not surprisingly given the position of employee communication within
corporate structures.

The scholarly work on employee publications to date is almost exclusively
exploratory in nature. In the aptly titled “Exploratory Research on Employee
Publications,” Clampitt, Crevcoure, and Hartel make a case for the importance of
attending to this overlooked genre based on compelling statistical evidence: a
1980 IABC survey showed a 228 million circulation in the United States and
Canada for employee publications (5). In their 1986 study they analyzed
questionnaires and employee publications from 53 United States organizations
(one issue from each) drawn from a random sample and used content analysis to
analyze data from both the surveys and the publications themselves. The authors
devised a profile of the “Typical Publication” and examined the purpose,
content, and effectiveness of the employee publications they examined. The
most relevant of their findings for the purposes of my study are that (1) the major
purpose or focus of employee publications was employee recognition; (2) many
editors leaned towards the “trivialization” strategy (focusing on the three B’s of
bowling or ball scores, babies, and birthdays); and (3) evidence of the
collaborative approach such as stories about the organization’s goals and plans,
question and answer columns, or comments from the CEO was conspicuously
absent (16-17). My analysis will show that employee recognition figures
prominently in AFC's employee publication and that its editors deliberately (and successfully, in the sense that the issues I examined showed little evidence of the 3 B's) avoid the "trivialization" strategy. I will also demonstrate that while AFC Press includes certain features of the "collaborative" approach such as stories about the organization's goals and plans and comments from the CEO, such features cannot be accepted uncritically as evidence that the newsletter takes a collaborative approach. For, in chapter 3, I will show that the newsletter's review cycle—that gives managers final say as to what the editors may include—precludes a truly collaborative approach.

Like the study undertaken by Clampitt, Crevcoure, and Hartel, Nancy Roundy Blyler's "Rhetorical Theory and Newsletter Writing" is admittedly exploratory and intended to balance the almost exclusively pragmatic approach to newsletters with a more theoretical one. But whereas Clampitt, Crevcoure, and Hartel draw on theories of organizational communication to understand the roles newsletters can play within organizations, Blyler focuses on issues central to rhetorical theory: "we do not have a body of theory about newsletter writing, of particular interest to those of us, trained in rhetoric and composition, who teach professional writing" (140). Moreover, while there is a great deal of practical advice on the writing of newsletters, it does not address vital rhetorical concerns, namely, "how newsletter writing, in response to rhetorical constraints such as audience, purpose, and context, achieves its effects" (140). Blyler examines the newsletters of two political-advocacy organizations involved in the

---

2 Although the IABC has not done an updated study, other sources show no evidence of a decline in the number of company newsletters (Anonymous, Management Today). In fact, the time adults
Midwestern farm crisis, applying rhetorical frameworks in her analysis: schema theory, social construction, and theories about audience.

Blyler’s use of schema theory is particularly relevant to my study of the AFC newsletter. She argues that the newsletters she studied use visual rhetoric (such as newsprint and headlines) and journalistic conventions (such as providing datelines with articles and including the five W’s, who, what when, where, and why, in first or “lead” paragraphs), to draw an analogy to newspapers and thereby influence readers’ expectations (143). I will show how AFC Press similarly uses both visual rhetoric and journalistic conventions in an attempt to achieve greater credibility with its readership.

Paula Foster’s ethnographic case study of knowledge workers at a software company examines responses to employee publications. Foster’s study of workers’ reading strategies and responses to management communication focuses on their “literate practices” and resistance to employee communication vehicles. Whereas most of the research on employee publication takes an instrumental approach (such as DiSanza and Bullis’ study discussed later in this chapter that focuses on the effectiveness identification inducements), Foster’s “pro-worker” perspective draws on theories of critical literacy to address the broader political dimensions of employee communication. In studying responses—and resistance—to employee communication documents, Foster builds on and complicates the scholarship on employee communication. Although my study does not address employee response to AFC’s communication program, my critical-rhetorical approach foregrounds, like spend with business-focussed trade publications and newsletters is up dramatically (Consoli 9).
Foster's, the political and ethical dimensions of the employee communication genres I examine.

All-Employee Meetings

In addition to an employee publication, *AFC Press*, this dissertation examines all-employee meetings or “town halls,” an increasingly common and important communication event for many large organizations. While employee publications have attracted the attention of a handful of scholars, all-employee meetings have been virtually ignored in the scholarly literature. Although there is a body of scholarship on meetings, it does not address all-employee or town meetings.

Francesca Bargiela-Chiappini’s and Sandra J. Harris’s, *Managing Language: The Discourse of Corporate Meetings*, uses a linguistic approach to examine managerial discourse in meetings at two multinationals in the telecommunications sector: one in Britain and the other in Italy. Their data comprise questionnaires, interviews, observation and audio recording, which they use both qualitative and quantitative methods to analyze. The first systematic analysis of meetings, the study yields many rich example of the central role of language during meetings in defining organizational roles. Shifts in pronomial forms between “we” and “I,” for example, mark shifts from individual to corporate identity as well as shifts in collective identity (such as “we” the task group, “we” the function or department, or the corporate “we”). These choices mark the conflicting interests and divided loyalties of group members. While Bargiela-Chiappini and Harris’s analysis of the tactical and
strategic use of language contributes to our understanding of both corporate meetings and intercultural communication, the meetings they examine occupy a very different organizational role and bear little resemblance to the meetings examined in my study. The corporate town meetings this dissertation analyzes borrow more from political rather than business meetings in style and structure, if not in substance.

In recent years televised and virtual town meetings have mushroomed, often undertaken as an almost reflexive response to major political events and news stories. Michael Schudson's *The Good Citizen: A History of American Civic Life* traces the genealogy of the town hall meeting. Schudson debunks the mythology of the 18th-century New England town-hall meetings, which he argues were far from models of democracy and political freedom. Instead, they were exclusive, elitist, and intended to showcase harmony and consensus rather than provide a forum for free opinions. As I will demonstrate in my analysis of AFC's town halls in chapter 5, corporate town halls and their 18th-century New England counterparts share some surprising similarities.

Although corporate town hall meetings have not been studied by scholars, certain elements of town meetings have been addressed. Priscilla S. Rogers, for example, studied CEO presentations in conjunction with earnings announcements, which are presented to analysts and constitute a key genre of voluntary reporting ("CEO Presentations" 427). Rogers studied eight CEO presentations from the perspective of the audience (or rather, five MBA students she selected to represent the audience) to extend genre analysis beyond analysis of text to context and audience response (429). She analyzed her data using: (1)
"the competing values framework," which she describes as "an empirical model that links communicative purpose with valued characteristics" and (2) categories based on user information needs (440). Rogers found that the presentations were "informational" rather than "promotional" or "transformational":

the composite profile of the CEO presentation in conjunction with earnings announcements depicts an elaborated statement of factual information and considerable emphasis on highly interpretive categories. From this, it can be posited that such presentations need not explicitly promote a company or deliberately seek to motivate those in the audience to invest, as would be expected of promotional communications one associates with unveilings of new product lines or services. (465)

Rogers' terminology (she studies the "user" rather than "audience") reflects an instrumental approach to the presentations she studied; nonetheless, she extends the small body of work on presentations, an important element of the town meetings I examine in chapter 5.

Whereas there is no existing scholarship on corporate town meetings, in the popular business press town meetings are usually addressed in the context of "turnaround" stories about organizations like General Electric and Continental Airlines that have used these meetings to transform the organization. General Electric's "Work-Outs" are described as highly participatory, problem-solving town meetings credited with increasing production, "empowering" workers, and "horizontalizing" the organization (D'Ol'Brian). In a less dramatic fashion, Continental's town hall meetings are described as part of a communications initiative (together with CEO voice mail and daily news summaries of the airlines industry) that keeps employees better informed and has contributed to
the company's turnaround from filing Chapter 11 to making healthy profits ("Continental's People" 55). These articles are helpful in providing an understanding of how the communication group at AFC sees the role of the town hall meetings they manage. However, my analysis of these meetings counter-balances their uncritical acceptance as inherently good for employees and organizations and explores how they both reflect and influence AFC's corporate culture.

**Canadian Business Communication and Intercultural Communication**

In a special issue, "International Perspectives on Business Communication," of *The Journal for Business Communication*, Rebecca Sutcliffe provides an overview of business communication research in Canada. A good deal of scholarship on workplace writing has been undertaken by Canadian researchers who have contributed particularly to our understanding of writing in the professions, including writing in accounting (Northey), architecture (Medway), economics (MacKinnon and Smart), medicine (Segal), and social work (Paré). These researchers have all studied writing within Canadian organizations. While Sutcliffe allows that Canadian researchers studying Canadian sites have achieved a considerable presence in the field, she asserts that researchers have yet to investigate "what makes business communication in Canada uniquely Canadian" (113). Jane Ledwell-Brown's study of writing in a pharmaceutical company, which she describes in "Organizational Cultures as Contexts for Learning to Write," is situated in a Canadian subsidiary of a multinational.
However, her article does not address the national or international dimension of her study's context.

The sole study to address cultural differences between Canadian and American audiences is Roger Graves' "'Dear Friend' (?) Culture and Genre in American and Canadian Direct Marketing Letters." Through a comparison of sales letters in the financial services industry written for American and English-speaking Canadians, Graves explores how cultural differences inform genre. Graves examined over 60 letters advertising similar products and services: 50 sent to American addresses and 12 to Canadian addresses. He also compared two requests from federal political election candidates for funds, one from the Canadian Conservative Party and the other from the American Democratic Party. Drawing from the literature on Canadian and American cultural differences, Rogers found "significant differences in the ways some of the letters approached evidence and credibility" (237). Based on his findings, Graves emphasizes the importance of understanding genres of business as "cultural objects" because the same genre may operate differently in different cultures (251). Consequently, he argues that "in order for business communicators to write successfully for Canadian audiences they need to conceptualize Canadians as different from Americans" (237). Graves lays the groundwork for my analysis of how AFC's Canadian subsidiary adopts the American genre of the town meeting while failing to adapt it to the Canadian audience, particularly with respect to the form of the town hall meetings and the ethos of the speakers, especially the kind of humor they use.
Organizational and Corporate Culture

While my study addresses issues of intercultural communication, it also looks at the role of organizational or corporate cultures in understanding rhetorical practices. Terrence Deal and Allan Kennedy popularized the concept of organizational culture in their widely cited 1992 book, Corporate Cultures: The Rites and Rituals of Corporate Life. Deal and Kennedy identify the key elements of an organization's culture as business environment, values, heroes [sic], rites and rituals, and cultural network (13-15). Organizational theorist Edward H. Schein defines organizational culture as the symbolic and discursive aspects of an organization.

In “The Writing Consultant and the Corporate Industry/Culture” Cezar M. Omatowski explores how organizational culture affects members’ communication practices. He argues for the importance of outside consultants and researchers to assess organizational culture through its symbolism that takes three forms: verbal (myths, stories, names and terms, legends, slogans, jokes, anecdotes, and rumors) material (logos, products, wall décor, awards, pins, flyers, status symbols and other visual devices), and behavioral (rites and rituals, meals, breaks, and meetings) (447). Of particular relevance to my study is Omatowski’s discussion of stories, speeches, and the appearance of key executives, which he argues constitute an important component of an organization’s self-representation (448). In a similar manner, Charlotte Thralls’ “Rites and Rituals: Analyzing Corporate Videos” examines the role of rituals in organizational culture and identity. According to Thralls, corporate documents
and events do more than relay information to employees: rituals build culture. I draw on her work in chapter 5 to discuss AFC’s town meetings.

Collaboration and Document Review

Like culture, collaboration (sometimes referred to in business communication as “group writing”) is widely addressed in both business communication literature and rhetoric and composition. Ede and Lunsford’s landmark *Singular Texts/Plural Authors* provides a wide-reaching study that draws on surveys and interviews to collect data about collaboration both in the classroom and workplace. Ede and Lunsford provide a comprehensive examination of key theoretical constructs relating to collaboration, particularly the notion of authorship. Most relevant to this study is their exploration of two kinds of collaborative relationships: hierarchical and dialogic. In chapter 3 I show how the location of the communication group at AFC within the organizational hierarchy to a great extent determines the kind of collaboration that is possible not only within the group but also between it and other members.

Barbara Couture and Jone Rymer’s “Situational Exigence: Composing Processes in the Job by Writer’s Role and Task Value” examines how the constraints of collaborative workplace writing affect composing processes. Their study combines “the strategies of rhetorical and empirical research and offers a new approach to explore the influence of social context on professional writing” (4). Drawing from surveys, they analyze “situational exigence,” namely, the writer’s functional role within the organization. They distinguish between “professional writers,” whose principal task involves solving technical or
managerial problems, and "career writers" whose principal task involves solving communication problems (9). They found differences in the composing strategies of these two groups: whereas professional writers were heavy planners for nonroutine writing tasks, but not heavy revisers, career writers tended to balance their heavy planning with revision, even for routine tasks. Couture and Rymer attribute this difference to career writers' greater commitment to style but also to their different function. The career writer must constantly accommodate the needs and expectations of others and must revise her writing accordingly: "The instrumental function of the career writer as a mediator dictates an active investment in every aspect of the communication process that achieves [...] accommodation" (19). My study of the communication group at AFC furthers our understanding of the constraints faced by career writers that Couture and Rymer identify. Moreover, like Couture and Rymer's work, this dissertation helps to bridge the gap between empirical research and rhetorical theory.

In "The Complexity of Workplace Review" Susan D. Kleimann offers a model of workplace review (what she terms a "complexity chart") that builds on Paradis, Dobrin, and Miller's model of document cycling and the review process. The complexity chart Kleimann devises acknowledges the often frequent cycling and multiple internal and external readers of workplace writing. Kleimann sees the functions of workplace review as (1) the transmission of corporate values and culture and (2) the articulation and transformation of cultural norms, both of which are relevant to my study. My study builds on Kleimann's discussion of workplace review by showing how particular texts and genres such as the
employee publication and executive speeches are enabled and constrained by
the review process.

In “Exploring the Value of Face-to-Face Collaborative Writing,” Rogers and
Horton argue that face-to-face collaboration is better than electronic collaboration
(which they studied in another article) because it produces more “talk about
talk,” which (as they note Bruffee says) is necessary to grow as a writer. In
particular, Rogers and Horton found that face-to-face discussions increase
awareness of ethical issues (130).

In “Substantive Conflict in a Cooperative Context: A Way to Improve the
Collaborative Planning of Workplace Documents,” Rebecca Burnett builds on
this finding, proving quantitatively that groups that have substantive
disagreements produce better documents. Burnett uses excerpts from a
conversation of collaborators to illustrate the characteristics of successful
communication. Burnett summarizes the research on conflict and context,
categorizing conflict according to affective, procedural, and substantive. She
argues that only substantive conflict is productive. According to Burnett,
collaborators too often see their goal as minimizing conflict and reaching
consensus without considering the kind of conflict (534). However, premature
consensus can “short-circuit effective decision-making” and result in
“groupthink.” Therefore writing groups need to allow substantive conflict but in
a cooperative atmosphere, one that is characterized by “supportiveness,
commitment, and interdependence” (535). “Collaborative planning,” according
to Burnett, enables writers to (1) defer consensus and (2) stimulate substantive
conflict in a cooperative context.
In Freed and Broadhead's "Discourse Communities, Sacred Texts, and Institutional Norms," the authors demonstrate how different organizational cultures affect the ways writers approach documents (sometimes in ways that seemed counterproductive). Freed and Broadhead looked at two consulting firms, one within an accounting company, which was much more "reserved" and conservative; the other focused more on sales and reader benefits. Their article was the first in business communication to explore the effect of corporate culture on language and to demonstrate that different discourse communities existed within the same industry.

Mary Beth Debs makes an important theoretical contribution to our understanding of workplace collaboration in "Corporate Authority: Sponsoring Rhetorical Practice," where she explores some of the implications of corporate authorship. Drawing on organizational and rhetorical theory, she complicates the rhetorical triangle of writer, audience, and text with a fourth element: "the sponsoring organization" (164). Theorizing the role of the "organizational spokesperson," she examines the "agency relationship" that exists between rhetor (or writer) and organization, a relationship that she argues is essential to our understanding of workplace writing. My study builds on Debs' work by exploring the role of the organizational spokespeople at AFC, the members of the corporate communication group who represent the organization to employees at large through the newsmagazine and town meetings.

Geoffrey A. Cross's ethnographic case study is one of the first to address unsuccessful collaboration. Cross' 1994 volume, Collaboration and Conflict: A Contextual Exploration of Group Writing and Positive Emphasis reports an
ethnography conducted at an insurance company. Cross studied an unsuccessful writing group that took 77 days to write an executive letter. Drawing on Bakhtin’s notion of centripetal and centrifugal forces of language, Cross examined how the writing process underwent a period of stability during which members of the team suppressed their dissent, followed by a period of instability during which there was a conflict concerning both the audience and purpose of the letter. Cross’s study has two key points of resonance with my own: first, he demonstrates how the hierarchical distribution of power within the group prematurely eliminated divergent viewpoints and secondly, he shows how the overly positive emphasis in the text that resulted from the collaborative process resulted in a document with ethical problems. As I will show in chapters 3 and 4, the collaboration of the communication group at AFC similarly suppresses divergent viewpoints. Whereas the overuse of positive emphasis caused ethical concerns in Cross’s study, my findings suggest that the use of negative messages can also pose ethical problems.

Whereas Cross studied one group in-depth, in “What Makes a Collaborative Writing Team Successful? A Case Study of Lawyers and Social Service Workers in a State Agency” Kitty O. Locker compares two writing groups assigned the same task. Locker’s study suggests the importance of writers’ having a good understanding of organizational culture and discourse community in workplace writing. Because of “serendipitous” circumstances, Locker had the opportunity to study two different collaborative writing groups at a state agency working on the same document, a class-action suit. Whereas the first group was unsuccessful (it was unable to produce an acceptable document)
in 13 months, the second group successfully accomplished the task within 9 months. According to Locker, a constellation of four factors contributed to the second teams' success: (1) improved group writing process, (2) better understanding of the organization's discourse community, (3) improved socialization of group members, and (4) an improved organizational environment. Lockers' findings concerning the importance of writers' understanding the organization's discourse community and being socialized for the organization have particular relevance for my study. As I will show, these issues proved to be key for a member who was new both to the group and the organization.

Like Cross, Jennie Dautermann demonstrates the constraints faced by collaborative writers both within and outside of the group in Writing at Good Hope: A Study of Negotiated Composition in a Community of Nurses. Dautermann's ethnography examined a group of nurses working collaboratively to revise the regulations governing their own work and make those regulations more accessible to their colleagues. Dautermann found that "composing community discourse in this setting required constant negotiation among the various specialty interests of the nursing community, as well as mediation among members of the writing group" (99). While Dautermann shows that "an intricate social balance is at work in the production of community discourse," my own study shows that this balance can be upset when the discourse produced is not the result so much of community as of a hierarchical directive (110).
Positive Emphasis, You-Attitude, and Negative Messages

In their article, "Positive Emphasis and You-Attitude: An Empirical Study," Annette N. Shelby and N. Lamar Reinsch note that whereas a number of generally accepted "principles" inform business communication, scholars have amassed a relatively thin base of empirical findings (304). Positive emphasis is viewed by contemporary writers as an issue of focus, accentuating the positive rather than the negative aspects of a situation and you-attitude is a concept that "extends the classical rhetorical focus on audience into business communication theory" (304). Analyzing the responses of business practitioners to 99 negative message (or bad news) memorandums written by MBA students, Shelby and Reinsch found that positive emphasis and you-attitude had significant effects on readers' responses. Their study therefore provides some of the first empirical support for the concepts of positive emphasis and you-attitude. My study complements Shelby and Reinsch's by providing empirical data on writers' use of (rather than readers' responses to) these ubiquitous business communication strategies and precepts.

Locker's 1999 article, "Factors in Reader Responses to Negative Letters," provides a summary of the scholarly discussion about negative messages and reports the results of two pretests and two experiments she conducted using negative messages. Locker found that buffers did not significantly affect college students' responses to the negative messages that simulated refusals of credit and admission to graduate school. Based on the scholarship to date and these experiments, Locker recommends that negative messages begin with the reason for the refusal and if an alternative or compromise exists then the writer should
suggest it. In addition, she discourages the use of buffers. My findings concerning the professional writers I studied support those of Locker's, as I will show in chapter 4 where I discuss the company newsletter in detail.

One of the most recent studies on negative messages, Winifred Crombie and Helen Samujh's "Negative Messages as Strategic Communications: A Case Study of a New Zealand Company's Annual Executive Letter," addresses the absence of positive emphasis in a letter to shareholders, arguing that in some contexts being negative makes strategic sense. Crombie and Samujh studied the annual executive letter of a small New Zealand business, doing both a detailed textual analysis as well as a contextual study of relevant documents such as financial statements, auditors' reports, and agenda. They found that negative messages (including a number of problems) were used in the letter to deflect more serious issues, to undermine the credibility of potential challengers, and to present the directors positively as problem-solvers (229). Writers' use negative messages to present themselves—or, in the case of my study, the organization they represent—positively as problem solvers is one of the recurring strategies I identify in the newsmagazine. As I will show, the communication group is usually not presenting new information to employees; rather, it is shaping events in a way that paints managers (and the organization) in a favorable light. However, while Crombie and Samujh restrict their examination of the use of negative messages for strategic purposes to practical considerations (asking, "how effective is such a strategy?") my study explores the ethical implications of these and other rhetorical strategies.

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Terministic Screens, Plastic Words, and Metaphors

The influential philosopher of language Kenneth Burke argues that language inescapably shapes our reality: “Even if any terminology is a reflection of reality, by its very nature as a terminology, it must be a selection of reality; and to this extent it must function also as a deflection of reality” (Language as Symbolic Action 45 emphasis original). Since we cannot see without terministic screens, we need to become aware that we are perpetually making choices about how we view the world around us through our language use:

We must use terministic screens, since we can’t say anything without the use of terms; whatever terms we use, they necessarily constitute a corresponding kind of screen; and any such screen necessarily directs the attention to one field rather than another. Within that field there can be different screens, each with its ways of directing the attention and shaping the range of observations implicit in the given terminology. (50)

In other words, Burke is concerned with how language both directs and deflects our attention. Burke articulates that, through language, ideology acts upon us, inhabiting and even animating us in particular ways:

Do we simply use words, or do they not also use us? An “ideology” is like a god coming down to earth, where it will inhabit a place pervaded by its presence. An “ideology” is like a spirit taking up its abode in a body: it makes that body hop around in certain ways; that same body would have hopped around in different ways had a different ideology happened to inhabit it. (Language as Symbolic Action 6)

Different ideologies or “terministic screens” therefore move us differently. If we cannot free ourselves from terministic screens, then at least we can strive to be aware of them. In this study I examine the terminology of the employee communication program at AFC with a view to understanding some of its—and the organization’s—ideological underpinnings.

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Burke’s notion of terministic screens asks that we examine how the use of terms directs attention to particular fields, and away from others. In a similar manner, linguist Uwe Poerksen in his 1995 volume, *Plastic Words: The Tyranny of Modern Language*, explores how words from one field or milieu “can overwhelm, cover up, and ‘colonize’ those of another milieu” (76). He is particularly concerned with how “plastic words,” terms taken from science and technology, economics, and administration and applied in particular ways to social life (such as “information,” “communication,” and “strategy”), reshape daily life and have a dehumanizing effect (77). Poerksen’s exploration of how terms from the scientific and technical realm can disfigure the human sphere is particularly relevant to my discussion of the newsletter, which I will show draws on scientific and technical terminology to achieve particular ends.

Like Burke’s terministic screens that render our understanding of reality selective rather than reflective, Lakoff and Johnson’s study of metaphors shows how metaphors offer highly selective versions of reality, emphasizing certain aspects, and downplaying others: “In allowing us to focus on one aspect of a concept [...] a metaphorical concept can keep us from focusing on other aspects of the concept that are inconsistent with that metaphor (10). They argue that we cannot separate our values from the dominant metaphors: “our values are not independent but must form a coherent system with the metaphorical concepts we live by” (*Metaphors We Live By* 22). Economist Deirdre McCloskey warns of the dangers of economic metaphors such as “the invisible hand” that elide effects on human beings.
Metaphors evoke attitudes that are best kept in the open and under the control of reasoning. This is plain in the ideological metaphors popular with [political] parties: the invisible hand is so very discreet, so soothing, that we might be inclined to accept its touch without protest; the contradictions of capitalism are so very portentous, so scientifically precise, that we might be inclined to accept their existence without inquiry. (47)

Burke, Poerksen, Lakoff and Johnson, and McCloskey all argue that language, including but not restricted to metaphorical language, shapes our reality, a key assumption of this study.

Form and Genre

Burke's theory of language is helpful not only in analyzing the workings and effects of particular terminology, but more broadly, of form and genre. In an oft-quoted sentence, Burke asserts that "Form in literature is an arousing and fulfillment of desires" (Counter-Statement 124). For Burke, form is persuasive, involving a kind of "conquest" over the reader: "We must also consider the value of formal appeal in inducing acquiescence. For to guide the reader's expectations is already to have some conquest over him" (Counter-Statement 178). Burke provides an important theoretical lens to help us understand the workings and effects of both AFC's newsletters and town meetings. As I will show, the form of AFC Press guides readers to expect an objectivity that is antithetical to the organizational context of the newsmagazine. In a similar manner, I will explore some of the effects of the entertainment form of the town hall meetings. As Neil Postman argues in Amusing Ourselves to Death, as entertainment becomes the dominant mode of discourse people become less willing to listen to reasoned debate (23).
In "'An Arousing and Fulfillment of Desires': The Rhetoric of Genre in the Process Era—and Beyond" rhetorician Richard M. Coe builds on Burke's notion of form to theorize genre. Understanding genres as both structures and social processes (183), Coe argues for a theory of genre that goes beyond strictly formalist analyses to explore not merely how genres are shaped but what they do:

Although usually initially identified as structural/textual regularities, genres are social processes that correspond to (and also construct) recurring situations. Genres also invoke (and thus tend to construct) particular types of auditors/readers. Genres are motivated symbolic actions that should be understood in terms of what they do, not how they are shaped. Genres are, moreover, important factors in the social construction of orientations, paradigms, ideologies, worldviews and cultural perspectives. (184)

In examining the effects of the employee publication—such as the ideologies, world view, and employee audience they construct—my study builds on Coe's theory of genre. Coe's work is also of particular relevance to this dissertation since he argues that we must consider, as I do, "how generic structures influence (i.e., persuade) both writers and readers" (182). Finally, in emphasizing the importance of studying a genre's "contexts of situation," which enable "the logical flow that should take us from consideration of strategies to consideration of the ends those strategies serve—and hence from rhetoric to ethics," Coe's theory of genre helps distinguish my approach from those who take a more instrumental approach to the study of genre (184).
Identification

For Burke, for persuasion to occur, the rhetor must overcome the division that separates her from her audience and achieve consubstantiality. She does this through identification, building on the common ground she already shares with her audience: “some of [the audience’s] opinions are needed to support the fulcrum by which the [rhetor] would move other opinions” (A Rhetoric of Motives 56). But how exactly does this process of identification occur?

George Cheney, a rhetorician from speech communication, brings to bear Burke’s theory of identification in his numerous studies of organizational communication. In a 1983 study that examined 10 “magazine-type corporate house organs” representing 10 different companies and industries, Cheney asserts the importance of the genre: “House organs [. . .] represent just one of many persuasive means that today’s large corporation uses in its communication with employees. And these publications, like other organizational messages, should be examined with all the care with which they are produced—if for no other reason than because of their prevalence” (“The Rhetoric of Identification” 156). Cheney draws from Kenneth Burke’s theory of identification to devise a taxonomy of identification appeals deriving three common strategies used by the organizations: (1) identification through common ground (when the rhetor links herself to the audience through shared values, shared goals or offering an organizational “identity”), (2) identification by antithesis (rallying against a common outside enemy such as a competitor), and (3) the assumed or transcendent “we.” While Cheney’s study offers an important theoretical contribution to the study of employee publications, it is very general in nature.

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Moreover, he did not examine the newsletters in context, providing no data about either the writers or the organizations they represented.

Cheney's 1991 volume, *Rhetoric in an Organizational Society: Managing Multiple Identities*, draws extensively from the theories of Burke and Foucault. In this book, Cheney explores organizational rhetoric as the management of multiple and often conflicting identities through an in-depth analysis of the development of the United States Catholic bishops' pastoral letter on nuclear arms, *The Challenge of Peace*. Most relevant to my study is Cheney's finding that "The management of multiple identities necessarily involves the use of power: in any situation particular identities may be celebrated, incorporated, co-opted, suppressed, or rejected" (179 emphasis original). As I will show, much of the work of the communication group at AFC is focussed on constructing and managing the organization's identity for the employee audience. While the members of the group responsible for employee communication attempt to present an organizational identity that values rank-and-file employees and celebrates diversity, both the employee newsmagazine and town hall meetings ultimately privilege the role of senior management and contain dissent.

Extending Cheney's work on newsletters, DiSanza and Bullis used focus interviews to examine 51 employee responses to "identification inducements," strategies (and their subunits, tactics) employed to effect employee identification with the organization. In addition to Cheney's identification strategy of establishing common ground with employees, they identified four tactics: global recognition of individual contributions, recognition of individuals' contributions outside the organization, invitation, and bragging (385). They classified
employee responses as follows: (1) nonidentification (no identification), (2) identification (readers link themselves to the organization), (3) contextual identification (readers remember past organizational participation), and (4) disidentification (readers feel separate from the organization). Their findings, including how the employee publication fosters a sense of identification with the organization for those outside headquarters, resonate with strategies used by the AFC communication group.

**Epideictic Rhetoric**

Aristotle's notion of epideictic rhetoric as "the ceremonial oratory of display" is a classification on which contemporary rhetorical theorists continue to build (32). Although Aristotle limits the epideictic genre to rhetoric that praises or blames, he nonetheless connects epideictic and social action when he asserts that "to praise a man is in one respect akin to urging a course of action" (61). In a similar manner, Perelman and Olbrechts-Tyteca argue in *The New Rhetoric* that just because epideictic rhetoric does not call for immediate action, it is nevertheless a powerful persuasive force that "strengthens the disposition toward action by increasing adherence to the values it lauds" (50).

In *The Realm of Rhetoric* Perelman asserts that epideictic rhetoric is about more than merely gaining glory for the speaker, which is helpful to understanding the function and purpose of AFC's employee communication program in general, but in particular the all-employee meetings or town halls. Drawing on Perelman's notion of epideictic rhetoric, I will show that AFC's town
halls are not merely exercises in puffery or boosterism but occasions where values are reinforced and ideological work is performed.

The epideictic discourse normally belongs to the edifying genre because it seeks to create a feeling or disposition to act at the appropriate moment, rather than to act immediately. We would fail to understand the nature or importance of that genre if we were to ascribe to it merely the purpose of gaining glory for the speaker. That can result from the discourse, but we should not confuse the consequence of a discourse with its goal. The goal is always to strengthen a consensus around certain values which one wants to see prevail and which should orient action in the future. It is in this way that all practical philosophy arises from the epideictic genre. (20)

Notably, Perelman and Olbrechts-Tyteca associate epideictic rhetoric with "those who, in a society, defend the traditional and accepted values, those which are the object of education, not the new and revolutionary values which stir up controversy and polemic" (48). If we transpose this view of epideictic rhetoric from society to organization, then we will see how AFC town halls uphold the organizational hierarchy and the traditional and accepted (in this case capitalist) values rather than engendering controversy or dissensus. Dale L. Sullivan's notion of epideictic as "the rhetoric of orthodoxies" similarly emphasizes the conservative function of the epideictic genre (232). As I will show, the generic functions that he derives from epideictic can all be fruitfully applied to the employee communication program at AFC.

Elisabeth M. Alford's article, "The Text and the Trade Association: A Story of Documents at Work" offers one of the few studies of business communication that explores epideictic rhetoric. Drawing on Perelman and Ttyeca's theories, Alford argues that "epideictic rhetoric is one of the main vehicles through which corporate culture is expressed and maintained" (146). As
I will demonstrate in my analysis of the town meetings, the epideictic plays an important role in unifying employees.

Narrative Theory

Narrative constitutes one of the primary strategies employed by the communication group to reinforce values. As Roland Marchand argues in his history of public relations, the storytelling function of corporate communication departments is not a recent phenomenon. Early PR guru Bruce Barton argued that "In modern society people needed to be given ways to relate to biggness that were more stable than mere identification with an individual" and that narrative was a particularly effective means of achieving this identification (Marchand 144).

Wayne Booth emphasizes the ethical dimension of narrative: "Stories that listeners really listen to are powerful self-creators: they can create or reinforce bad ethos or good. They can transform us in self-destructive directions or they can turn us into would-be heroes" ("The Ethics of Teaching Literature" 272). Booth’s remarks on the power of narrative speak to the power of the employee communication program in shaping organizational culture through narrative, particularly notions of the good employee and the good organization.

Mumby’s notion of “narrative-as-ideology” helps us to understand organizational stories as a means of reinforcing behavior:

the articulation of prescribed and proscribed organizational practices, and the interpellation of members such that they develop an organizational consciousness that “fits” with the existing power relations within the organization. These power relations are reproduced discursively insofar as narrative strives for closure by portraying events as essentially moral dramas—dramas in which a
particular set of values are given legitimacy and authority. Stories, in this sense, embody the *ideal* of the political reality they portray. (114 emphasis original)

**Research Questions**

In this study, I explore three sets of questions:

- **What is the nature of the collaborative process of the communication group at AFC?** How do they negotiate among the often competing and conflicting demands made on them by management, their role as career writers, and the principles of good—defined not merely as effective but *ethical*—communication? What kind of constraints do they face in pursuing their self-professed "open and honest" communications policy?

- **What role does the employee communication program, in particular the newsletter and the town hall meetings, play in the organization?** Whose interests do these genres serve?

- **What does rhetorical analysis of the employee newsletter and town meetings reveal?** What rhetorical strategies are at work and what are some of their effects, both positive and negative? What do these genres ask of employees and what subject positions do they inscribe for them?

**Significance**

This study contributes to our knowledge in several key ways. First, my study offers perhaps the first in-depth analysis of an employee communication program. Although far from comprehensive or exhaustive (a case study rather
than an ethnography), in providing a contextual study of one organization’s newsletter over time, this study differs from other more exploratory studies of employee publications. In addition, my study makes a contribution to the conversation about positive emphasis and the strategic use of negative messages in business communication.

Secondly, in examining a corporate communication group, my study contributes to our understanding of the role of “career writers.” In particular, I add to our understanding of the role of the “organizational spokesperson” within organizations and the constraints they face. My analysis of how the group uses stories, speeches, and rituals contributes to our understanding of how corporate culture is shaped. My study of the collaborative practices of the communication group also contributes to our understanding of workplace collaboration, especially collaboration that is hierarchical in nature.

Third, I offer what may be the first study from a rhetorical and literary perspective of town hall meetings. In bringing together rhetorical theory and cultural studies, I help theorize corporate town hall meetings, a widely popular but hitherto ignored genre of employee communication. In particular, I show how the town hall meetings are informed both by popular Hollywood entertainment and management discourses such as TQM. Moreover, my analysis of AFC’s town hall meetings shows how transporting cultural forms can have unintended effects. By drawing on genre theory to study the employee newsmagazine and town hall meetings, I contribute our understanding of not only the formal properties but the effects of these genres.
Fourth, in exploring the use of identification strategies and the epideictic genre I not only help theorize largely overlooked genres of business communication and also revise and expand our knowledge of how identification strategies and epideictic genres work in an organizational context, particularly in reinforcing particular organizational goals and values. In so doing, I extend our understanding of epideictic rhetoric, which has been largely overlooked in Rhetoric and Composition.

Fifth, through a metaphoric analysis, using Burke's concept of "terministic screens" I examine both the ideological function and the ethical implications of AFC's employee communication program. The broader analysis I provide helps balance the overwhelmingly practical emphasis of the practitioner literature on formal organizational communication. In addition, I contribute to Rhetoric and Composition pedagogy, which has all but ignored organizational rhetoric.

Finally, in combining rhetorical analysis with a case study, I offer an unusual methodological approach that uses theory to enrich empirical data.
CHAPTER 2

SETTING AND METHODS

This study grows not only out of the scholarship outlined in the previous chapter, but also a very particular organizational context and historical moment. In the first part of this chapter, I will describe the setting, including the organization and its corporate structure and culture, which inform the focus of this project: the employee communications program at AFC. In the second half of this chapter, I will describe my research design and how it was influenced by my access to the organization, including documents, interviews conducted, and events attended. I will also discuss my data collection and analysis, both of which were informed by my role as researcher.

The Setting: AFC Canada

American Financial Company (AFC), a pseudonym, like all of the participants' names, is a large, multinational financial and travel services company headquartered in New York where it is traded on the New York Stock Exchange. The organization sells a wide range of products (including credit cards, travelers checks, travel insurance and travel agencies) and services (including travel agencies). In 1998, during the time of this study, it was among
the *Fortune* 500. AFC is known to consumers as an upscale service brand that caters primarily to business people. The organization has long been associated with highbrow philanthropic causes. Focussing on cultural events, it has an international reputation as a supporter of art exhibits, jazz festivals, opera, theatre, and the restoration of historical monuments.

This study concerns AFC Canada, the Canadian subsidiary, created in 1958 by the American parent company. All data were collected at the headquarters of the Canadian company where 3,000 employees worked. In 1998 AFC Canada was enjoying record profits and a healthy gain in market share. The context for the company was also marked by several key features: (1) a booming Canadian (and global) economy, (2) a widespread sense of job insecurity among Canadians, and (3) upheaval in the Canadian financial sector. Despite record low unemployment, many Canadians did not feel their jobs were secure. This widespread insecurity was at least in part the result of restructuring and downsizing in the late eighties and early nineties, which had shown people how tenuous their jobs were. If organizations could not ensure job security, what loyalty were employees obligated to show in return? This paradox of a booming economy coupled with a widespread sense of job insecurity makes employee communication a particularly compelling subject of study. Consequently, organizations such as AFC have come to seek inexpensive ways to attract and retain employees and employee communication was seen as one way of doing so.
The Physical Setting: The Bytown Building

The original Canadian headquarters of AFC was located in downtown BigCity and only later moved to Bytown, a former bedroom community now filled with business parks. The first phase of the imposing modern three-level glass and concrete structure was opened in the mid-eighties and the second phase several years later. A large sign with the company logo marks the entrance to the parking lot that dominates the landscape behind the building.

AFC’s physical space reflects both its blue-chip identity and its fairly progressive corporate culture. The gray exterior is matched by an interior foyer of gray-blue tile, pale gray walls, and chrome and steel fixtures. At the center, between two sets of glass doors on either side leading to the offices, is a blue reception desk and a security counter. Across from these are navy leather chairs for visitors. On the other side of the glass doors the interior hallways are gray and brown with geometrically patterned carpets and pale gray walls. During my first visit to AFC, I was struck by posters of AFC’s signature products, along with photographs of employees that are prominently displayed in the foyer. Name plates listing AFC “winners,” members of the “Grand Achievers Club,” and other titles are accompanied by 8” X 10” color photos of the recipients. Internally, this is a company that advertises its people as much as its products, an issue I examine in chapters 4 and 5.

Security at AFC is tight, whether for pragmatic or symbolic reasons. I am told that tight security is increasingly common, while not universal, at large corporations in the 1990s and beyond. At the center of the front foyer is a reception desk, behind which one to three people (usually women) are seated.
answering the phones, signing in visitors, and providing visitors with numbered badges. Beside the central reception desk sits a male security guard. Employees require photo pass cards to gain entrance to the offices. During my initial visits, employees showed their IDs to gain entrance; later the IDs were changed to electronic passes which employees slid through a magnetic card reader. Guests (like me) must be signed in by an employee and provided with a numbered tag that says “Visitor Escort,” indicating that we must be accompanied by an employee at all times, although during later visits I was sometimes permitted to circulate throughout the building unescorted. In order to gain access, I had to ask the receptionist to call the office of the person I was meeting with and wait for him or her to come to the lobby to sign me in. (The security measures must have made quite an impression on me as during my fieldwork I once dreamt that I stole an employee tag to gain entrance and was later trapped within the building, unable to leave.)

The security measures serve to emphasize AFC’s status as a private organization rather than a public institution, an important distinction as I will show in my analysis of the town hall meetings. For whereas government offices have recently had to adopt more stringent security measures, such measures are solely about preventing violence rather than controlling access and excluding non-members.

The building includes several amenities for employees, the central one being the cafeteria. Because the building is located in an industrial park with no restaurants or cafes within walking distance, a cafeteria is essential. But the facilities like the cafeteria are also in keeping with AFC’s emphasis on employee

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satisfaction, which is measured regularly through surveys and informal means. An enormous, light, atrium-style room filled with plants that opens onto a spacious patio, the cafeteria serves as both the physical and social center of the building. Giant signs naming AFC products are mounted on the walls. Here employees—from the President to call center operators—come together simply to eat or to celebrate events like product launches. On the half dozen or so occasions I visited the cafeteria (I conducted several interviews there), I observed employees grouped together around tables, eating lunch or taking coffee breaks. The cafeteria sells excellent food (employees can choose from among salad and pasta bars, a grill and deli counter, and fresh baked goods) at reasonable prices, an important feature since there are few dining options nearby. In addition to the cafeteria, the building has a general store and a room with vending machines and microwave ovens. There is also a resource center and a health club on the lowest (basement) level with machines and weights, and a personal trainer on site.

The main floor is divided between the Operations division (including a call center where employees answer phone calls from customers about credit or travel-related matters) on one side, and executive and administrative offices on the other side. The Operations division of the company includes the front-line customer service employees of the organization who work for the company’s credit card and travel divisions. The majority of Operations employees are shift workers (and therefore paid for overtime work) while the non-Operations employees are salaried workers (exempt from overtime pay). The customer service employees who work in Operations occupy several enormous rooms,
giving them little privacy. They wear head phones and work at computers, divided from one another by cubicles, which they share with others who work different shifts.

In contrast, the administrative offices are filled primarily by salaried, white-collar employees who work in divisions such as marketing and finance. Like the Operations employees, the administrative staff are divided from one another by cubicles. However, rather than working in enormous rooms like the Operations employees, they are divided by unit or function into considerably smaller rooms. For example, the communication group had a room to themselves (with Michael’s office upstairs in the executive suites with the other vice presidents and the President). These rooms, at least one for each division, are in turn divided by cubicles and each employee has her own. Because the year of my fieldwork, 1998, was a time of tremendous growth for AFC, office space was at a premium. Meeting rooms were usually full and cubicles afforded little privacy, so I often conducted interviews in the cafeteria at the suggestion of my participants.

The physical division between the Operations division (or “Ops” as it is called by employees and the rest of the business) where the call center was located speaks to the huge cultural gulf within the organization (which I explore in detail in the following section), one that posed a challenge for both the communication group and the organization as a whole. The two groups of employees are distinguished not only by the opposing sides of the building they occupy but also by differences in educational background, employment experience, and mobility. My participants reported, for example, that it was
difficult for rank-and-file Operations employees to move to management positions in divisions outside of Operations as Sandra, an AFC Press writer, had done.

The video monitor in the central hallway announces the parent company's stock price on the New York Stock Exchange, a reminder of AFC Canada's subsidiary status. At the same time it announces local news such as where AFC products are now being distributed near the Canadian offices.

The executive offices were on the second floor of the Bytown Building. In addition to the President, Donald, there were seven senior vice-presidents, three of whom were women. "Public Affairs and Corporate Communications" rated a senior vice-president position at AFC (occupied by Michael), underlining its importance within the organization, for in many corporations the "communications function" is often subsumed under that of Human Resources. Although Michael's office was considerably larger than the cubicles and adjoining conference room occupied by the members of the communication group who worked under him, it was by no means lavishly furnished. According to my participants, the difference between the executive offices and the rest of the offices was much less pronounced at AFC than in other similar companies. Moreover, although Michael occupied an office on the floor above in the executive suites, according to the group, there was daily contact with him, both face-to-face and through e-mail.
AFC's Divided Corporate Culture(s)

As a large global financial and travel services company, AFC Canada faces the challenge of not only communicating across great geographical distances but also across a wide range of different businesses internally. Although AFC Canada has its own President and executive team in addition to 3,000 employees, it is a wholly owned subsidiary of the AFC parent company. AFC Canada's status as a subsidiary is important in situating its communication practices: the survival of the Canadian organization is determined by the American parent company. The Canadian company's lack of power in relation to the American parent company has been a key issue for the organization since the early 1990s when AFC Canada went through a period of losing money. As rumors swirled that New York was going to close the Canadian company, employee morale plummeted. To help turn the Canadian company around, there was a major change in the organization's structure.

When I asked a senior manager in marketing to explain the current corporate structure, he described it as "complex" (Justin, 16 August 1999). Prior to the early 1990s, most business lines and staff functions (such as marketing, human resources, and corporate communication) at each subsidiary reported to the "head" of each geographic market. At AFC Canada, this meant that most functions reported to Donald, the President of the Canadian company. This reporting structure was guided by the theory that a strong head in each geographic market could direct and prioritize all the business activity in his or her specific backyard. However, the reporting structure was changed in the early 1990s from a geographic to a "functional" one, meaning that functions within the organization...
Canadian company would no longer report to the Canadian President, Donald, but rather to the international heads (based in Europe and the United States). For example, the head of the marketing division now reports to the international marketing head who is based in Rome, Italy rather than to Donald in Canada. As a result of this change in corporate structure, the Canadian president has few people who report to him directly and the autonomy of the Canadian company has been undermined. Donald in turn reports to the vice presidents of the parent company responsible for the "international" (that is, those outside the United States) businesses. The underlying rationale for the change in structure was that the business could be better run by consolidating each function, regardless of geography. But according to Justin, the effectiveness of this change remained to be seen: "the jury is still out on this one, with many people whispering that too much power has been taken away from the chief honcho in each [geographical] market" (Justin, 16 August 1999). With few people directly reporting to him, Donald's role was reduced to primarily that of a figurehead leader for the Canadian organization, a nonetheless significant role, particularly in terms of employee communication. However, during the mid-1990s AFC Canada began a turnaround: with profits up by 500% from 1993 to 1998, the Canadian company became a model within AFC Worldwide. While the turnaround of the Canadian organization may have been hastened by the new employee communication program, it is more likely that the broader national economic recovery was responsible for the dramatic change in the company's status. Model or not, the Canadian organization had much less autonomy in 1998 than it had had in the early 1990s before the change in corporate structure.
In addition to the tension between the Canadian subsidiary and its American parent, internally, AFC Canada was seen by many as composed of two distinct worlds or cultures. Organizational members (both within Operations and outside of it) often referred to the difficulty of communicating across the various “silos” that divided employees from one another and prevented them from understanding how their own particular work served the broader goals and values of the organization at large. The physical division between the Operations division where the call center was located and the rest of the business spoke to the huge cultural gulf between the two areas. This gulf posed a challenge for both the communication group and the organization as a whole. According to the communications managers in Operations, employees in Operations feel that they are treated like second-class citizens within the organization. Many of them are temporary or contract workers and therefore do not have benefits. In addition, Ops workers have only recently been included in events like the annual Christmas party and “all-employee” or “town hall” meetings, which were previously reserved for the white-collar employees.

The culture of AFC Canada (hereafter referred to simply as AFC) is marked by a gulf between the youthful, campus-like culture of the white-collar business functions such as marketing, new product development, and human resources, on the one hand, and the blue-collar Operations division that encompasses the call center, on the other.

AFC has several key features that contribute to its youthful, campus-like culture, particularly its “corporate casual” dress code. The casual dress code—whereby employees may wear casual pants or skirts and shirts rather than
the traditional business uniform of the suit—was introduced incrementally: initially only on the last Friday of the month, then every Friday, then every day in the summer, then every day throughout the year, with the full casual code introduced in 1995. But corporate casual dress does not entail elimination of a dress code. For example, during one visit to AFC I observed a notice on the electronic monitor a message concerning casual dress telling employees that casual dress did not mean "sloppy" and that sleeveless shirts were not permitted.

The casual dress policy at AFC provides a nondiscursive example of how the organization uses symbolic means to shape its culture and motivate employees. Although the casual dress code in place at AFC and many other organizations is presumably intended to make the workplace more democratic (Arkin 2), it in some ways masks class and gender inequalities. During my visits I found it easy to distinguish between Operations and other employees by their dress: the Operations employees tended to take the casual dress code to an extreme, wearing in some cases tee-shirts and mini-skirts. In contrast, management employees wore more tailored and more expensive-looking shirts and blouses. This difference became particularly obvious to me after attending a meeting with only Operations employees. In addition to this class difference, I was struck by the fact that the dress code was enacted differently by women than by men. Many more men than women actually dressed casually in "Docker" or chino pants and button-down shirts whereas many of the women, including but not restricted to members of the executive team, wore suits. Although I have no firm data to account for this difference, I suspect that the women's more formal
business attire was part of an effort to establish their authority, for at AFC as in most settings, clothing is an important means of building ethos. Notably, one of the female members of the communication group I interviewed who was in her late twenties explained that she “dressed up” to increase her authority and in order “not to look like a kid.” Deborah Tannen argues in Talking 9 to 5 that women are marked by dress whatever choice they make. Whereas men may opt for a neutral style, every style available to women is marked, that is, carries meaning (109). Tannen argues that dress reflects and reinforces gender hierarchies that are also evident in naming and language practices: “A man can choose a style that will not attract attention or subject him to any particular interpretation, but a woman can’t. Whatever she wears, whatever she calls herself, however she talks, will be fodder for interpretation about her character and competence” (112).

In introducing a casual dress code, AFC is not alone. By the late 1990s, casual dress codes were very common in American and Canadian companies although what was deemedacceptable as “casual” differed from company to company and by rank within any one company. A 1995 survey conducted by Levi Strauss & Co. of San Francisco found that 9 out of 10 companies in the United States allowed casual dress on either an occasional or a part-time basis. The change in policy from formal business attire to corporate casual, like employee communications programs, was motivated by management’s desire to increase productivity: “HR managers surveyed indicated that business casual is an effective management tool: It increases morale and is viewed as a perk; it saves employees money, attracts new employees, and increases productivity”
Casual dress is touted in the business press as an employee benefit that costs the company nothing: “What could cost less—and offer more flexibility—than a casual dress code?” (Caggiano 108).

“Corporate casual” at AFC is about more than simply how employees choose to represent themselves; rather, it speaks to an organizational identity that values informality and accessibility to senior management, albeit within an established corporate hierarchy. Donald, the President, and other members of the executive team attempt to make themselves visible, if not available, to employees. Donald attends all town hall meetings along with the rest of the executive team. Furthermore, he regularly attends company-sponsored charity events and provides opportunities to rank-and-file employees to meet with him at monthly breakfasts, which I did not attend. As I will show, the visibility (if not the accessibility) of the organization’s leadership was part of a strategy designed to encourage employee identification with the corporation.

While all my participants referred to their co-workers, including their superiors and the company president, by first name, AFC executives were nonetheless afforded certain markings of privilege such as designated parking spots, an issue that was raised by an employee at one of the town meetings I attended. Within the communication group that is the focus of this study, members emphasized that the AFC executive team was not only visible but more accessible than leaders of other large organizations, although my data do not indicate that rank-and-file employees perceived the executive team as accessible. Peter, the manager of the employee communications program, for example, was struck by the fact that when writing speeches for the President or other senior
executives he was able to contact them directly rather than being obliged to go through their assistants, as he had at the insurance company where he worked before coming to AFC. After working for an extremely rigid, hierarchical organization, Peter was struck by the approachability of the executive team.

The observations of Sandra, one of the writers of the employee newsmagazine, suggest the paradox of AFC's organizational culture. On the one hand, the company has consistently enacted progressive policies; on the other it has done so within a paternalistic framework whereby management "gives" benefits to employees:

AFC is very aware that there's more to life than just the nine to five of [sic] these four walls. It's a good company to work for; they're very much into giving whatever they can to their employees in terms of benefits and compensation, competitive wages. There are moments where it's very fast-paced so it's expected then that you'll do whatever it takes to get the project done and then if it's not so busy the next week you'll leave early. So it's give and take. (26 January 1998)

While Sandra speaks very positively about the company, she (perhaps unwittingly) articulates an "us" vs. "them" mentality that separates employees from senior management. I will show that this mentality informs the employee communication program.

Both the Canadian subsidiary and the American parent company have a history of pursuing progressive employee policies. The Canadian company has been an industry leader in advocating a diverse work environment (an initiative led by the American parent company) through the implementation of equality-based programs such as benefits for same-sex partners and paternity leave. It has had its "Valuing Diversity" policy since 1993 and currently has many networks such as the gay and lesbian network and ones based on different cultural
backgrounds that advocate within the organization. In addition, the organization has consistently been included in lists of top organizations for promoting women. No doubt its willingness to offer employees flexible work hours helps attract and retain women employees. For example, the communication group I studied accommodated a member with family commitments by permitting her to work three days a week rather than five.

In short, while AFC Canada is a fairly hierarchical organization, its culture is in many respects progressive, reflected not only in visible features (such as dress code and the number of women senior vice presidents,) but also in the less obvious but equally important flexible work hours. The dependence of the Canadian subsidiary on the American parent company has in the past caused morale problems, problems that have been alleviated by the financial health of the Canadian business. While the company leaders enjoy perks such as large executive offices and personal parking spaces, they also attempt to maintain high visibility within the organization.

Snapshot of the Communication Group

The “Public Affairs and Communication” group at AFC is responsible for the organization’s external and internal communication. The communication group is a fairly small unit within the organization, averaging (during the course of my study some employees left and other were hired) four full-time members not including the senior vice president, Michael Jones, who heads the group. (In addition to heading the communication group, Michael had a second portfolio overseeing the “Quality” group.) Michael in turn reports not to the Canadian
President but to the head of Communications for the parent company who works out of the United States. The following figure shows the group’s reporting structure:
Figure 1: The Communication Group’s Reporting Structure
The group's external audiences include the media (and indirectly consumers) and other stakeholders such as government (whom it lobbies for legislation that is favorable to the organization's interests) and community but not shareholders and members of the investment community such as analysts. As a wholly owned subsidiary, AFC Canada's results are folded into the results of the parent company. Thus it is the responsibility of the parent company—and not AFC Canada—to communicate with shareholders and the investment community. External communication at AFC Canada consists primarily of writing press releases and planning events such as media launches for new products. In addition to the members of the communication group responsible for external communication, AFC is supported by external PR agencies the organization hires on a project basis. Internally, the group oversees the employee communication program, which includes the writing of publications aimed at employees such as the newsmagazine (AFC Press), quarterly briefings and reports (updates on the company and industry strictly for managers) and the organization of events like the all-employee town meetings.

At the time of my initial contact with AFC in early 1998, the communication group consisted of four employees—Peter, Sandra, Parin, and Judith—in addition to the vice president, Michael. While most of the group members under Michael had essentially the same title, "Manager, Public Affairs and Communication," they nonetheless occupied distinct organizational roles, although with some overlap. In fact, one participant remarked that she had been trying for some time to get Michael to give them more specialized titles so that
outsiders would have a better understanding of the correct person to contact for
the various functions.

While the employee communication group in theory serves the needs of
all employees, all members of the communication group admitted that it had not
always been successful in meeting the communication needs of Operations
employees. Because of the frustrations expressed by Operations employees who
felt they overlooked by the communication group, the vice president of
Operations, Nancy, hired a communications manager and an assistant manager
to do communications for Operations.$^3$

Methods

My research design was multi-modal, drawing on several different
methods of data collection and analysis. I collected examples of all the various
employee communication documents available (as demonstrated in figure 3) and
observed the meetings for which the communication group was responsible. In
addition, I interviewed members of the communication group at AFC. My
research can by no means be classified as an ethnographic case study, which
would have presupposed different research questions and required far more
time in the field than I was permitted. Rather, my primary means of data analysis
involved rhetorical analysis of the documents I collected and meetings I
observed, drawing on key concepts of rhetorical theory such as genre and
Burke's concept of identification to make sense of the data. My study can best be
described therefore as a contextualized rhetorical analysis. I situate the texts (in
the broadest sense of the term, including meetings, since these were scripted) that are the focus of this study not only in relation to the practitioner literature but also within AFC.

*How I Gained Access to and My Research Agreement with AFC*

"The practice of field research is the art of the possible" (Buchanan, Boddy, and McCalman 55).

Buchanan, Boddy, and McCalman discuss the increasing challenge of gaining access to organizations: "as the economic climate has become harsher, in the private and public sectors, managers increasingly feel that they and their staffs have little time to devote to non-productive academic research activities" (55). Consequently, gaining access to do organizational research can be a difficult and time-consuming endeavor. A forum on conducting qualitative research in a 1993 issue of *The Bulletin* published by the Association for Business Communication discusses the various ways that researchers gain access to organizations. With the exception of Cross, all of the researchers included in the forum gained access through a personal contact.

After several fruitless (and frustrating) attempts to gain access to study corporate communication in various organizations, my friend Justin suggested that the company where he had worked for almost ten years, AFC Canada, would be an ideal site for me to study. Because communication was something the company really valued, Justin thought AFC was more likely to agree to be

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3 While the tension between the Operations division and the communication group is a subject for research, it is one that I will leave for another time.
open about its communication practices than the other organizations I had contacted. Justin had been a manager at AFC Canada in the marketing division but shortly before I began my study he accepted a position in the company’s UK office. Justin offered to put me in touch with the vice president of Public Affairs and Communications, Michael. Instead of asking to conduct research at the company for a specified period of time (I was advised by a friend of Justin who had formerly worked in the communications division of AFC that such a request would likely be turned down), I left it open: I hoped to remain in contact with the organization as long as I needed to collect adequate data and as long as they would have me. In retrospect this seems a risky proposition, but it was one I was prepared to take since after several months of trying I had been unsuccessful in gaining access to other organizations.

After Justin explained my general proposal to study corporate communication to Michael, I called Michael’s office and was immediately put through to him by his secretary—a far cry from the countless voicemail messages I had had to leave at organizations before I was actually connected with a person. I gave a brief outline of my proposal to Michael over the phone, telling him that I was a Ph.D. student and writing instructor in an English department and interested in learning more about business writing. I then asked him for access to documents and permission to interview employees and attend meetings at AFC. Because the two most common reservations that can block research access are time and confidentiality, I offered to conduct interviews during participants’ lunch hours (which turned out to be unnecessary since all of my participants were flexible about interview times) and assured Michael that my findings
would remain confidential to outsiders through the use of pseudonyms and by disguising other potentially identifying information. He was enthusiastic and offered to send me a selection of newsletters and set up some interviews for me with the members of the communication group. He also promised to let me know about any meeting that he thought would interest me. After waiting a couple of weeks for the documents to arrive, I called Michael to find out what was going on. He said he had not sent me the documents because the legal department wanted me to sign a confidentiality agreement first. I returned the signed agreement (found in Appendix A) to AFC and the documents arrived several days later.

As part of the nondisclosure agreement, I agreed to share a copy of my dissertation with Michael, who (along with the legal department) screened it for any "confidential" information about the company's products or services it would not wish competitors to know. While this gave Michael and the organization at large censorship rights over my findings, Michael made it clear that the organization's main concern would be with information about the company's products and services, which lay outside the purview of this study. Michael reviewed this document and asked me to make minor changes to prevent the company from being identified. Moreover, while the legal agreement I signed with AFC caused me some concern (for example, what if they asked me to delete portions of the study I thought essential?) a greater source of ongoing anxiety has concerned the ethical implications of my study. While I have attempted as much as possible not to self-censor, it has been a challenge not to do since I criticize some of the documents for which my participants are (at least in 64
part) responsible and my study of the employee communications program at AFC is in some ways not a flattering one. At the same time, my intent from the start has not been to blame individual writers for the effects of their documents, but to show how these documents perform particular ideological functions within the broader context of the organization.

The names of people, companies, and products are fictitious, according to standard ethnographic practice, to preserve the privacy and confidentiality of the participants. I made sure that my participants knew that Michael would be receiving a copy of my findings (and that they were also welcome to a copy). Given the small size of the unit I studied and the background material included about members, I could not promise participants that they would be unrecognizable to other organizational members, even using pseudonyms. Both their lack of anonymity (to AFC colleagues) and the knowledge that Michael would be reading the study inevitably shaped the outcome of the interviews of the communication group members although to what degree I cannot say. My participants in some cases perhaps self-censored, slanting the interview portion of my findings. However, I found group members willing to share both some of the pleasure and the frustrations they experienced as a result of their work. In addition, participant interviews are only one part of this study; I triangulate my interview data both with interviews of other members of the group as well as with those outside of the group such as Justin and Heather who had worked in marketing, as well as the communication managers from Operations, Leanne and Anna, who do not report to Michael, and who are therefore less likely to censor
their interview responses. Comparing data from interviews with data from the
texts themselves offers an additional means of triangulation.

In attempting to enact the principle of research reciprocity, I offered to
provide my participants with feedback on the employee communication
program. Shortly after completing my data collection over the course of almost a
year, I gave Michael a two-page summary (according to his specifications) of my
findings after which he asked me to make a presentation to the group.
Understandably, the group members were particularly interested in feedback
that would help them do their jobs more effectively and efficiently. But
providing this kind of feedback put me more in the role of a consultant than a
researcher, requiring a very different kind of analysis than I offer in this
dissertation. I agonized about what I could present to them in the allotted 30
minutes that they could find of use. A friend of mine who worked as a
management consultant suggested that I use a popular business framework: a
SWOT analysis (often used by management consultants) that outlines strengths,
weaknesses, opportunities for improvement, and threats. Moreover, I learned
beforehand that the meeting Michael had invited me to would include not only
members of the communication group but Michael's boss, the head of
communications for the American parent company. To avoid inflicting harm on
my participants, I tried not to be overtly critical of either Michael or the rest of
the communication group in this context, while offering them what I hoped

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*I had initially intended to offer free writing instruction (as researchers such as Cross have done)
or proofreading but I was told by a friend of Justin who had previously worked in at AFC that
they might be offended at such an offer. For, unlike the "professional writers" whom Cross
studied for whom writing was only a part of what they did, the communication group at AFC
would be helpful feedback. In short, my formal research agreement with AFC and my less formal but equally important relationship with my participants required that I write up two versions of my study: one concerning practical aspects of the employee communication program (asking, "in what ways is the program effective and in what ways is it not effective and how can we improve it?"), the other exploring broader interpretive and ethical issues such as "how does the program work and what are its strengths and weaknesses?"). After completing the presentation, I felt freer to explore my findings from a rhetorical (and therefore more theoretical) perspective since I had met what I saw as my primary obligation to AFC. While the research agreement did not stipulate any limitations or deadlines, my data collection was, however, bounded by Michael's request for me to present my findings in November 1998 (I had begun collecting data in December 1997). Although he did not explicitly tell me that I could not collect further data after that time, we both understood that the part of my research that required me to be at AFC was complete.

In addition to offering participants a copy of my findings, I offered those who worked in employee communications my services as copy editor or general gopher if they chose to take me up on my request to observe or (in their words) "shadow" them. While I made it clear that participation was elective (both orally and through the "informed consent" document shown in Appendix B), I was concerned that group members would see participation in the study as mandatory since Michael, their boss, was authorizing my study. Consequently, I comprised "career writers," for whom their writing was the product (rather than merely a byproduct) of their labor.

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attempted to be highly attuned to any signs—verbal or otherwise—that people
did not wish to participate. For example, after an initially enthusiastic response,
one participant repeatedly cancelled interviews and rescinded invitations to have
me observe her on-site. Although I was disappointed, I respected her decision
not to participate further and eventually stopped contacting her.

My Data Collection: Enacting “the Art of the Possible”

The open-ended nature of my access to the organization both enabled and
constrained my data collection. On the positive side, my field of study was wide
open—I could pursue whatever leads struck me as most interesting and fruitful
since nothing was officially off-limits. However, the downside of my open-ended
agreement was that I was not guaranteed access to anything or anyone in
particular. Rather, my access and therefore my data collection was entirely at
Michael’s discretion. In describing the fraught terrain of case study fieldwork in
organizations, Buchanan, Boddy, and McCalman appropriately dub it “the art of
the possible”:

Fieldwork is permeated with the conflict between what is theoretically
desirable on one hand and what is practically possible on the other. It
is desirable to ensure representativeness in the sample, uniformity of
interview procedures, adequate data collection across the range of
topics to be explored, and so on. But the members of organizations
block access to information, constrain the time allowed for interviews,
lose your questionnaires, go on holiday, and join other organizations
in the middle of your unfinished study. In the conflict between the
desirable and the possible, the possible always wins. (53-54)

My data collection, including the documents I obtained, meetings and other
events I attended, and the participants I interviewed were of necessity

“opportunistic.” While such an approach leaves much to chance, provoking all

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kinds of anxieties for the researcher (I repeatedly asked myself, “Will I be able to get enough quality data for my study?”), an opportunistic approach is often unavoidable when conducting organizational research, particularly when “studying up” the hierarchy. AFC had nothing to lose in refusing me access and, with the exception of a short report and presentation, not necessarily much to gain, either.

In addition to collecting documents and conducting interviews, I had initially hoped to spend extensive time on-site in AFC’s offices in order to examine the rhetorical practices of the communication group, including their composing processes. Michael agreed that I could “shadow” (to use his term to describe participant-observation) one or more of the group, at least in principle. However, in reality, this “shadowing” or observation never occurred. While members of the group were willing to give their time to do interviews, they were understandably less accommodating when it came to being observed, although they never outright refused my request. While no one ever refused to give me any documents I requested (in part because I was most interested in documents available to all employees) my observation was restricted. I was never given my own pass to the organization that would have enabled me to come and go as I pleased. As an outsider not only to the communication group but also to the organization, I was not privy to informal communication such as impromptu meetings, collaborative processes, arguments, and conversations. Rather I was granted access to the organization’s formal internal discourse. I relied on scheduled interviews and invitations from participants to attend meetings.

During an interview one of my participants referred to an upcoming “off-site”
meeting that the communication group would be making so I subsequently asked for permission to attend it, which he refused (I suspect because financial issues such as the group’s budget were to be discussed). In this respect, my open-ended research agreement worked against my gaining access to a wider range of events, not just those staged by the group. Observation of less formal organizational events would have given me a better understanding of the organizational context for AFC’s employee communication program.

My data collection included documents, interviews, and some observation. I began with the AFC documents I was sent by Michael, who acted as my primary “link” person through whom I collected documents, made arrangements to meet interviewees, and attended events such as all-employee meetings, product launches, and press conferences. The first batch of documents that Michael sent me included a sample of recent newsletters, quarterly reports, the text of a presentation given by the president at a team meeting (a meeting for managers from a particular division), and a statement of the company’s values. After analyzing these, I drew up a series of interview questions for Michael as well as for those listed as writers and editors on the documents, whom I hoped to interview. I also noted any upcoming meetings (such as the all-employee meetings or town halls) that were mentioned in the documents in order to ask Michael for permission to attend these when we had our first meeting.

I soon realized that to study intensively both the company’s internal and external communication would prove too broad a scope for a lone researcher. Consequently, while I collected data concerning external communication (studying electronic press releases and videos, interviewing participants whose

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work focused on media relations, and attending media launches) to give me a broader understanding of the communication group, I chose to make internal communication—the employee communications program in particular—the focus of this study. My choice was guided by two reasons: (1) the dearth of research in internal communication and (2) AFC’s emphasis on its employee communications program. First, as I demonstrated in chapter 1, while much research has been done on Public Relations, likely because such documents are easily available to researchers, few scholars have examined employee communication programs. Secondly, my initial interviews with my friend Justin, who had worked at AFC Canada in marketing, and members of the communication group suggested that employee communication was an area to which the organization devoted a great deal of resources.

Focusing on employee communication, I collected as many samples of the main “employee communication vehicles” I could get my hands on: AFC Press, the employee newsletter, management team briefings (news briefs for managers and above), and quarterly team briefings (also restricted to managers). In Michael’s office, his secretary dug out back issues from a filing cabinet of the employee publication (in its various incarnations as “newsletter” and “newsmagazine”) going back to 1992. I also asked Peter, the manager of the employee communication program and his predecessor, Parin, for any and all documents as they could find that would be relevant to my study. In some cases, they provided me only with the finished products. In other cases, usually with recent issues, they gave me stacks of draft materials including “Michael’s edits.” Table 1 shows the range of documents I was given.
### Documents Collected and Analyzed

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Title and Type of Document</th>
<th>Distributed to</th>
<th>Date(s)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>AFC Core Values</strong></td>
<td>AFC Worldwide employees</td>
<td>unknown</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“Celebrating Excellence” brochure on employee reward and recognition program</td>
<td>AFC Canada employees</td>
<td>December 1998</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“Canada Management Team Briefing” presentation and slides</td>
<td>AFC Canada Managers and Above</td>
<td>15 April 1997</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Quarterly Team Briefing Financial Update</strong></td>
<td>AFC Canada Managers and Above</td>
<td>15 April 1997</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Quarterly Report Expanded Financial Update</strong></td>
<td>Managers and Above</td>
<td>May 1997</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Consumer Pulse Check Shopping Survey</strong></td>
<td>AFC Suppliers &amp; Partners</td>
<td>December 1997</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Change Management Manual</strong></td>
<td>Operations Managers</td>
<td>February 1998</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Video, AFC: A Quality Company</strong></td>
<td>AFC Employees</td>
<td>May 1998</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 1. AFC Documents Examined
In addition to these documents, I interviewed at least once all members of the communication group (with the exception of the student intern who started shortly before I gave my "exit" presentation to Michael and his group). I interviewed those employees currently working or who had previously worked in the employee communications program (Michael, Parin, Peter, and Sandra) at least twice. I audiotaped all the interviews, except for those conducted by telephone (these are marked with an asterisk). The interviews ranged in duration from 45 minutes to over 2 hours and averaged one hour and a half.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participant</th>
<th>1st Interview</th>
<th>2nd Interview</th>
<th>3rd Interview</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Sandra</td>
<td>26 January 1998</td>
<td>21 May 1998</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Judith</td>
<td>16 September 1998</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Leanne</td>
<td>28 January 1998</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Heather</td>
<td>2 January 1998</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 2. Schedule of Participant Interviews
I began the first interview with each participant with a set of demographic questions and questions about his or her professional background and education. I then moved to open, non-directive (what Spradley terms “grand-tour” questions such as “Tell me about the work that you do here”) (86-87). From these general questions I moved to questions I had devised based on the analytic categories I had derived both from my review of the literature and the initial documents I had been given. Through supplementary questions, I attempted to cultivate data on key terms, categories and relationships that emerged during the course of each interview. For example, I asked about the group’s collaborative practices (“Describe how you work with others on various documents.”)

I transcribed all of the interview tapes myself, which was necessary for me to comply with the nondisclosure agreement I had signed with AFC. I provide the name of the speaker or interviewee, date, and page number of the typed transcript. Although this proved to be an exceedingly time-consuming endeavor (and one I hope not to repeat), it offered three main benefits. First, transcribing the tapes myself provided me with more accurate transcripts than would have been possible with an outside transcriber. Capturing the many acronyms and company jargon used by participants would have posed a challenge for an outside transcriber. The sound quality of interviews taped in the cafeteria was sometimes poor due to background noise but I was always able to understand almost every word. While I aware of this difficulty after the first interview conducted in the cafeteria, it was a necessary constraint in order to give my interviewees (who in most cases chose to be interviewed in the cafeteria rather than their cubicles) the privacy they preferred. Secondly, in transcribing the tapes
myself I was able to “clean up” or “sanitize” the interviews using a consistent standard. In addition, while I have included what I have determined to be meaningful pauses and false starts to facilitate as rich data analysis as possible, I made minor alterations throughout. I have used dashes to indicate pauses, ellipses to indicate elision, and italics to suggest vocal emphasis. I use pseudonyms throughout and disguise details about products and services to protect AFC’s confidentiality. Thirdly, transcribing the tapes myself—and doing so while I was still collecting data—helped me identify key words, themes, concepts and patterns, which I could in turn pursue while still in the field.

Based on the data I obtained from each interview, I would request additional documents and access to additional participants. In most cases participants appeared happy to put me in touch with additional organizational members whom they believed could contribute to my project, a process Patton calls “snowball sampling” (276). As it turned out they referred me to other members of the communication group, except for two managers who did employee communication in Operations. My interviews in turn led to the opportunity to observe events such as product launches, but primarily all-employee meetings or “town halls.” During all of the events I attended I sat in the audience with other employees (or in the case of the “media launch,” with members of the media and business community). While this study does not examine the reception of the employee communication program, it was helpful to observe the reactions of other audience members throughout the meetings.

I took copious field notes in spiral notebooks during the meetings (since I was reluctant to ask to audio tape these), which I later transcribed adding
comments and additional impressions where relevant. I also asked for and was provided with scripts for the presentations given at these meetings. Table 3 below shows the events I observed at AFC.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Event</th>
<th>Audience</th>
<th>Date</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Product Launch</td>
<td>All employees</td>
<td>15 January 1998</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Change Management</td>
<td>Operations management</td>
<td>11 February 1998</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Meeting</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Operations Town Hall</td>
<td>All Operations employees</td>
<td>24 February 1998</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Town Hall</td>
<td>All employees</td>
<td>25 March 1998</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Town Hall</td>
<td>All employees</td>
<td>3 June 1998</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Town Hall</td>
<td>All employees</td>
<td>6 July 1998</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Media Launch</td>
<td>Members of the media, business</td>
<td>29 July 1998</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>partners and suppliers</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Town Hall</td>
<td>All Employees</td>
<td>23 October 1998</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Group Meeting</td>
<td>communication group</td>
<td>5 November 1998</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 3. Events Observed

While I had initially hoped to for more extensive observation to get a richer sense of AFC's organizational culture and the subculture of the communication group (for example, I wished to observe a full cycle of the employee publication, from storyboarding to production) it became clear to me after several months of contact with organizational members that this was not going to happen. A more

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participatory role would have afforded me a better understanding of how the participants understood the documents and events of the employee communication program. Instead, the focus of my study became the rhetorical analysis of the texts I had collected (both documents and texts from events), enriched by my interviews and observations.

Positioning Myself as Research Instrument

As a thirty-year-old white, English-speaking Canadian woman, I was confident that at least in terms of age, race, nationality, and gender, I would not stand out at AFC, except for being noticeably pregnant. (I was six months pregnant with my first child when I began conducting interviews in January 1998.) Before beginning my fieldwork at AFC, I attended an Association of Business Communication Conference in November 1997 where I presented my research design at a roundtable. Some of the respondents expressed concern about my undertaking fieldwork while visibly pregnant: they thought participants might have an adverse reaction to me. So I asked my friend Justin's wife Heather, who had also worked at AFC Canada, her thoughts on the matter. She reassured me that I would not stand out at AFC where so many employees were pregnant: “Don’t worry about being pregnant at AFC—everyone there’s pregnant, truly—we think there’s something in the water in Bytown” (17 November 1997). As it turned out, one of the women members of the communication group had two young children and another announced her pregnancy while I was conducting my fieldwork. While I had no objective measure of my participants’ reaction to my pregnancy, my sense is that it
probably made me less threatening (even though I never attempted to present myself as an authority but instead as a learner). As it turned out, my pregnancy also provided a popular neutral topic for small talk. My sense of ease as a visibly pregnant researcher at AFC perhaps also attests to the organization’s favorable culture for women, which is substantiated by its inclusion in lists on the best companies for women employees. Nonetheless, in order to make myself as unobtrusive as possible before my first meeting with Michael, I asked Heather’s advice about dress. She said, “Oh, well they’re corporate casual so you can just wear a nice shirt and dress-pants or a skirt” (17 November 1997). Like many of the women in the organization, I was probably closer to corporate than to casual in my suit jacket which I wore over my maternity clothes.

I presented myself to my participants (starting with Michael) as a graduate student and college writing instructor, rather than as a management consultant (which I was clearly not). While Michael told several participants who I was and what I was doing by way of easing my introduction to them, I introduced myself to participants as “Justin’s friend,” since some of them knew him from when he had recently worked at AFC Canada in marketing. I described my background to participants, including my areas of scholarly and teaching interests. Drawing from Buchanan, Boddy, and McCalman’s article on fieldwork in organizations, I tried to avoid the use of potentially “threatening and dull” words such as “research.” Instead I described my project in terms of learning about the practices of corporate communication with a view to informing—and improving—writing instruction (57). While I was as open as possible about my research agenda, my project was, like all research, “secret in some ways and to
some degree [for] we never tell the subjects everything” (Scott, “Domination” 280). As Scott explains, this omission may occur not because of any deliberate withholding or deception on the part of the researcher, but because the researcher herself may be unaware in advance of where her findings will lead (280). This was certainly true in my case since I had begun this study with the broad intent of studying the rhetorical practices of corporate communicators.

My age at the time (approximately the same as those of most of my participants except for Michael who was a decade older than I) likely enhanced my rapport with participants and made me a less threatening interviewer. Although they may have been intimidated by the fact that I was more formally educated than they, by framing my project in terms of learning from them I tried to put them at ease. Moreover, my interest in writing and my background in the humanities rather than business was an orientation my participants and I shared.

While the process of finding an organization willing to grant me access had been draining (being repeatedly told “no” is not easy for anyone), I found meeting and interviewing participants exhilarating. Unlike many academics (including some writing teachers) who are more comfortable expressing themselves in writing than orally, I am equally comfortable with both. So while conducting interviews was initially nerve-wracking, I soon felt at ease, especially as I got better at listening (and not interrupting my interviewees) and became more comfortable with veering from scripted interview questions when I felt intuitively that doing so would be fruitful. I established a good rapport with all of my participants; they seemed eager to help me and flattered by my interest in their work. I became most friendly with Peter, likely because as manager of the
employee communication program his role was most central to my study. Peter seemed to let his guard down with me more than some of the other employees. As the only male member of the group (except of course for Michael) and the newest employee, he was the most comfortable questioning the way things were done at AFC.⁵

In addition to the visible features of my subject position such as age, race, and gender (amplified in a certain respect by my pregnancy) I brought to this study less obvious but equally influential identifications. I had completed several extremely formative years of graduate study in a department of English where I acquired a strong grounding in both literary—particularly feminist and poststructuralist—and rhetorical theory. These years formed a stark contrast to the practical focus of the corporate environments (primarily in the non-profit sector and in small organizations) where I had previously worked. Consequently, before beginning this study I felt like I had one foot in the (corporate) workplace and one foot in academia; I envisioned this project as a building-bridge between two worlds I had inhabited at different times. However, during the course of this study I learned that my identifications with academia were stronger than those I had with the corporate workplace: the questions and issues that most interested me could be broadly classified as scholarly rather than strictly practical.

What I saw and heard at AFC was informed by my education in the humanities. Like all terministic screens, mine yielded both blind spots and

⁵ At least one member of the communication group commented that it was “funny” to be the one being interviewed when she was normally the one in the role of interviewer.
insights. More comfortable with words than numbers (notably, like many members of the communication group I studied), I was not particularly adept at reading or analyzing financial data. For example, my husband, who had worked as a management consultant and was at the time of this study completing an MBA, asked me how much AFC spent on the communication program, a question I had not even considered asking initially and one that Michael ultimately refused to answer. In addition, my emphasis on qualitative rather than quantitative methods of data collection and analysis speaks to a bias attributable to my disciplinary training in English studies. However, because of the nature of employee communication itself, which tends to address financial data only in very general terms, I do not believe that my ignorance of finance seriously compromised my findings. On the positive side, my “outsider” status with respect to the corporate world gave me heightened powers of observation on occasion. Such was the case with the town hall meetings which have become so commonplace as to go practically unnoticed by most business people.

My Data Analysis

Researchers of whatever sort and relation to institutional power follow essentially the same data-gathering methods. Field-workers observe activity, take notes, collect artifacts, interview informants, and do so with care and rigor whatever their purposes and position on our continuum. What varies much more widely is their methodology, the theoretical frameworks that guide data analysis and justify research, and the textual practices through which researchers report their work. (Herndl and Nahrwold 284)
My research design deliberately played to my strengths, particularly my understanding of rhetorical, poststructuralist, and feminist theory. My training as a rhetorician has given me an expanded notion of “text,” enabling me to bring a wealth of reading strategies to the documents, interviews, and events that composed my data. As a rhetorician, I am particularly attuned to issues of intention, audience, and occasion, as well as to the ethical dimensions of communication. Burke’s theories of language inform much of this study, particularly his notion of terministic screens and identification as the primary means of persuasion. In addition, I analyzed the AFC texts in terms of epideictic genre, defined not merely in terms of the formal properties of the text, but in terms of action: what these texts do. For example, what kind of employee does the newsmagazine hail? In addition to rhetorical theory, my understanding of literary theory has focused my attention on the role of narratives. Drawing on the poststructuralist interrogation of authorial intention I have examined how the texts I study exceed and sometimes subvert their authors’ intentions (given in interviews). Finally, my knowledge of feminist theory has prompted me to explore the role of language in constructing and reflecting power relations, a particularly relevant approach to organizations as I will show. In short, in analyzing documents, events, and interview transcripts my interpretive methods have drawn on rhetorical, literary (in particular poststructuralist), and feminist theories.

I analyzed my data inductively. Except for my prepared interview questions, no pre-specified categories or models were used to guide my research. I tried as much as possible to transcribe interview tapes and notes from

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documents, observations, and informal conversations as I went along. The literature review presented in the previous chapter served as the initial basis for my data analysis, helping me make observations about my data, noting emergent themes and key words. Using myself (informed by my understanding of literary and rhetorical theory) as instrument, I then began noting associations evoked by the data. In order to avoid premature closure, I attempted to postpone generalities for the later stage of my analysis. My analysis was based on themes, patterns (of both consistency and contradiction), and commonalities that emerged from my data.

Miles and Huberman argue that the use of the theme rather than the word, sentence or paragraph is appropriate when the purpose of the research is to identify meanings (54). This research examined thematic units rather than physical, syntactical, referential, or propositional units. According to Keith Grant-Davie, coding—like all reading strategies—is an interpretive act: “Coding systems [. . .] are never derived entirely from the data but originate in the researcher’s prior knowledge and are selected and developed in the context of the data” (284). Because coding involves interpretation it is necessarily subjective. “Researchers should argue the validity and reliability of a coding system by demonstrating it directly to readers through numerous examples” (285). Consequently, I have used examples from the texts and events I analyze throughout to support my analysis.

I will show in the chapters that follow how the texts and events that comprise AFC’s employee communication program serve to promote particular
organizational goals, values, and norms that together create an organizational culture.
In the previous chapter I outlined the broader organizational context in which the communication group at AFC works. This chapter focuses on the communication group itself. I first discuss the various roles and responsibilities of the individual members and their professional backgrounds. I then explore the group's role as official "organizational spokesperson" and tease out some of the complications and implications of this position. I show how the group is charged with the task of communicating with employees, while at the same time constrained by managers in other divisions on whom they rely for information and from whom they must secure approval on their drafts. In addition, I examine how the authoritative discourse their role requires informs their collaborative practices, resulting in conformity within the group. Finally, I demonstrate that members of the communication group at AFC are margin dwellers within the organization: while they work closely with other departments, they have limited power within the organization in part because they are divorced from "strategy," decision-making power. This position informs their communicative practices.
Members' Roles, Responsibilities, and Professional Backgrounds

The group uses a variety of what members call communications "vehicles," such as all-employee meetings (or town halls), team briefings (documents for managers and above), and the newsletter, based on the belief held by group members—one that is also subscribed to by the corporate communication practitioner literature—that "multichannel systems" are most effective (Jackson qtd. in Argenti "Practitioner Interviews" 315). The mechanical metaphors used by and associated with the communication group, such as "multi-channel systems," "communication vehicles," and "information," suggest a conduit view of both language and genre whereby neutral information is poured into discrete containers, implying that the job of the communications practitioner is merely to transmit predetermined and neutral information. On the one hand, the conduit model of language at AFC reflects the group's limited role in "strategy" or decision-making within the organization. On the other hand, such a notion of language fails to acknowledge the group's crucial role in using language as a management tool to build employee morale and foster employee identification with the organization through the newsletter and all-employee meetings and more broadly, in shaping the organization's culture.

When I asked Justin, a manager in marketing, whether the communication group at AFC was perceived as powerful or ancillary by other divisions, he raised the issue of the group's relation to strategy. Justin claimed that the group played an important role in managing the organization's image both externally and internally:
I think the question here is if they are effective or not. I doubt the communication group in any company is ever really powerful, if defined as being the group that sets strategies, leads the rest of the organization etc. But I think they can be very effective in what they do, and my impression is the group [at AFC] is effective, especially compared to the people in place before Michael came in. **Externally,** they're very good at ensuring the relevant employees are well briefed and trained before speaking to media, they have good relationships with the media, which helps in getting good coverage (not necessarily biased, but at least fair, and gives AFC opportunities to get their case out), they can generate stories by coming up with good studies or angles for reporters, they use sponsorship opportunities intelligently. **Internally,** again from my perspective in more the management side, I always thought they did a really good job of communicating frequently, honestly and in some considerable degree of detail with employees, certainly more than I've seen [where I work now], and more than in my early days at AFC. I guess the group could be considered powerful if they're able to improve and strengthen the image of AFC, and in general, they've been able to do that. (16 August 1999)

Although the communication group at AFC is not powerful in terms of setting strategy (an issue I examine towards the end of this chapter), Justin nonetheless sees it as exercising a different kind of power than other functions: the group acts as corporate image maker. What, then, accounts for the effectiveness of the group? I will show that they are considered effective at AFC because they have been able to sustain the tension between maintaining open and honest reporting to the employees and representing management’s interests.

In early 1998, four employees, Peter, Sandra, Parin, and Judith (all Canadian) in addition to the vice president, Michael (who is British), were members of the communication group. Most of the group members (except for Michael) had the same title, “Manager, Public Affairs and Communication,” although they in fact occupied distinct organizational roles. In addition to these members, during the course of my data collection, Mary, a student intern, began...
helping the group. Table 4 below shows the members of the “Public Affairs and Communication group,” as it was formally called:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Michael</th>
<th>Peter</th>
<th>Sandra</th>
<th>Parin</th>
<th>Judith</th>
<th>Mary</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Position</td>
<td>Vice president</td>
<td>Manager, Employee Communication</td>
<td>Head Writer, AFC Press</td>
<td>Manager</td>
<td>Manager</td>
<td>Student Intern</td>
</tr>
<tr>
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<td>Employees</td>
<td>Employees</td>
<td>Media</td>
<td>Media</td>
<td>Internal &amp; External</td>
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<tr>
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<td>VP of U.S. Parent</td>
<td>Michael</td>
<td>Michael</td>
<td>Michael</td>
<td>Michael</td>
<td>Sandra and Peter</td>
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<tr>
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<td>30</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

Table 4. Members of the Communications and Public Affairs Group

As manager of employee communication, Peter was responsible for documents such as (1) the “monthly” (ten issues in 1998) employee newsmagazine, AFC Press; (2) the quarterly all-employee meetings or town halls; (3) the quarterly report (an expanded letter from the president providing an...
update on the progress of the business); and (4) management team briefings (expanded oral versions of the quarterly report directed at managers). Sandra worked in employee communication with Peter, writing for AFC Press and overseeing the employee recognition program. Parin and Judith were responsible for external communication. During my eleven-month period of contact with the group, an employee whom I met only once and never interviewed (and therefore does not appear in Table 4) left the organization for family reasons, and Sandra took over her role. In order to give Sandra more time to fulfill her new role managing the foundation, Mary, an intern and graduate from a Public Relations (PR) program, began writing for AFC Press in the spring of 1998, after I had completed my first round of interviews with the group.

Michael was originally from the UK where he was educated (he earned a business degree) and worked as a journalist before joining AFC. In 1993 he accepted the position as vice president of Public Affairs and Communication at AFC Canada.

Peter, who has a BA in Political Science and became interested in Public Relations while still in college, had only just joined AFC as employee communication manager when I met him. Because only one university in Canada (located across the country) offered a certificate in PR, Peter attended Riverside, a community college with a one-year program in PR. At Riverside, Peter attended eight months of classes (which he did not find particularly useful) and then did a two-month internship at a financial institution where he worked in event management. After graduating, he had several contracts with both government
and private sector employers before accepting a position at an insurance company where he worked until joining AFC.

At the insurance company, Peter edited the employee newsmagazine but also provided "communication support" for Human Resources, explaining compensation and benefits to employees. Peter enjoyed this position because it gave him an opportunity not only to "write strategy but to implement strategy," including an employee stock purchasing program and a new e-mail system (19 May 1998 5). Peter enjoyed communications work because of the variety it afforded him: "I like to really be involved in a whole bunch of different things. [. . .] It puts me in a bit of a different capacity and enables me to do the things I like to do without too narrow a focus" (19 May 1998 5).

Sandra, the most junior of the group in terms of title, had been with AFC for two years. When she and I first met, her two main areas of responsibility were the employee recognition program and AFC Press where she was initially listed as "head writer," because for the past year she had been writing "about 95%" of the articles in AFC Press (10 February 1998 1). By the summer she had begun overseeing the foundation after Beverly's departure although she still wrote articles for AFC Press. Sandra described the group as very fluid and without many layers, which she felt enhanced their collaborative process, and contrasted with more hierarchical and bureaucratic structures common in large organizations like AFC:

Our department is so small that very often if I have a question I'll go right to Michael. I won't go to Peter. I mean if Peter can answer my question, fine, but it's very unstructured in that way which is good. [. . .] In a lot of organizations you have to go through the proper channels and you talk to your manager and if your manager can't give you the
answer you go to blah, blah, blah. It's not like that here. If you have a question you can just pick up the phone. There's a very open door policy (10 February 1998 3-4).

After completing a BA in history, Sandra worked for two AFC competitors, including a stint as a call center operator. The experience gave particular insight into the challenges of communicating with Operations employees whom she described as working in "a whole other world" compared to the rest of the organization. Like her colleague Peter, Sandra went into PR because she loves to write: "I got some information on what Public Relations deals with and [found] it involved a heck of a lot of writing. Whereas that's a deterrent for a lot of people when they find out that Public Relations isn't all planning parties, it's actually writing a lot—that was the reason I got into it" (10 February 1998 6).

Like Peter (and several other members of the group), Sandra had a certificate in PR from Riverside College: "we all have the same background actually, except Parin. Everyone in our department went to university and [then] went to Riverside and got a Public Relations certificate" (10 February 1998 6). In stark contrast to Peter who found that the program taught him little about writing, Sandra spoke very favorably of the Riverside program, particularly its writing component: "You can't graduate from Riverside without strong writing skills. You have some sense going in that you have to be able to write. It's a pretty rigorous course" (10 February 1998 6).

When I met Parin in January of 1998 she had only begun looking after "public affairs" or external communications for two of the major divisions within the organization two months prior to our meeting. Parin had been with AFC since mid 1996 and for her first year and a half with the organization she looked
after employee communication, the role that Peter took over on his arrival. In her new role, Parin composed press releases (both paper and electronic), and managed events such as product launches. Prior to joining AFC, Parin worked for a competitor in a position that involved a wide array of communications, including marketing, PR, client, supplier, and employee communication, a scope she found too broad (23 June 1998 3). With a college diploma in marketing, Parin did not start out in corporate communication but, like Peter and Sandra, writing has always "been a strong point" for her (23 June 1998 3).

Like Parin, Judith’s communication is aimed at the media rather than employees or customers, working in a capacity similar to Parin’s but for a different division within the organization. Judith worked exclusively in external communications for a nonprofit healthcare organization before joining AFC. Like almost all her colleagues in the group, she attended Riverside College after obtaining a BA in the humanities and then working for several years. Aside from sharing offices with Peter and Sandra, Judith’s work did not concern the employee communication program. Rather, she spent much of her time talking on the phone to journalists in an attempt to generate favorable media coverage for the company and its products and services.

Mary, the Intern, began at AFC as I was finishing my data collection. While I did not officially interview her, we did talk at length about her impressions of AFC and the communication group the day I presented my initial findings to the group at one of their status meetings. Just as her colleague Sandra did, Mary was starting out by writing shorter pieces for AFC Press. Like most of the group
members, she had an undergraduate degree in the social sciences after which she graduated from the Riverside College PR program.

In short, most of the group members were drawn to corporate communication by a strong interest in or experience in writing. While writing is only a small part of the work of “Public Relations” (much of it concerns cultivating “relationships” with members of the media), writing is central to the work of those responsible for employee communication.

**Collaboration and Constraints:**

**The Fraught Role of the Organizational Spokesperson**

The roles related to a given genre are defined within certain parameters, such as responsibilities, levels of relative power and influence, division of labour, channels of and access to information, and the obligation and freedom to report. (Paré and Smart 149)

Writing the employee newsmagazine and speeches for the all-employee meetings is a highly collaborative endeavor: the writers and editors of AFC Press rely on “clients” from various business units (such as marketing) for information concerning the business. They work with but also on behalf of these managers in other functions and divisions. At the same time, members of the communication group strive to represent the interests of employees-at-large.

A growing body of work addresses collaboration and conflict in the workplace (Ede and Lunsford, Cross, Kleimann, Locker). But the role of the organizational spokesperson, that is, the rhetor (or writer) who represents one institution or organization to another broader community, remains largely untheorized. Mary Beth Debs calls for a theory of rhetoric that accommodates the
relationship between rhetor and sponsoring organization, what she terms the “agency relationship”:

The basic triad of elements (writer, audience, text) that we have distilled from classical theory is not sufficient to explain or to model the practice of rhetoric in today’s economic world. What needs to be added is a fourth element, that of (for lack of better words) the sponsoring organization, and what needs to be stressed is not audience or writer or sponsor, but the relationships among these. It is from examining the variation of these relationships that we will understand how a particular kind of authorship is fashioned in the marketplace and how the individual writer participates. (164)

This “agency relationship” is crucial to understanding the rhetorical practices of the communication group members. Those responsible for the employee communication program must represent the organization to all of its employees. To do so they must get approval from other more powerful employees who determine their access to information and what they are permitted to share with employees-at-large.

Holland and Potter address the dilemma corporate communicators face in balancing the needs of “customers” vs. “audience”: “In organizational communication, there is a distinct difference between your audience and your internal customer” (15). The gap between what communicators perceive their primary audience needs or wants to know and what clients or customers such as the company president or other executives think employees need to know and understand in order for the organization to be successful sometimes puts communicators in a difficult position. Therefore, according to Holland and Potter, organizational communicators like the group at AFC must struggle to “find a magical middle ground that satisfies both constituencies” (16).
Members of the communication group credited AFC’s “open and honest” approach not only to Michael but to the president of the Canadian company. Recognizing that drastic action was called for to raise flagging employee morale, the President made it clear to Michael when he was first hired that internal communication was a priority:

What I was asked to do [by the President] was to focus on employee communication: Let’s get the employee communication right—make sure that they know where the business is going and why we’re going there, and what we’re doing. [. . .] Let’s make sure we get our own house in order before we worry about promoting ourselves externally. (15 January 1998)

Notably, the employee communication program for the Canadian company is well funded compared to other countries. After an international meeting of AFC communication professionals, the group told me that in some countries there is no employee communication program, only Public Relations.

By his own account as well as those of others, Michael’s arrival marked a major turning point in the overall approach to communications at AFC—a general move from a less than forthright approach to communications to what he and the other members of the group call “a more open and honest” communication policy. When Michael started with AFC in 1993, by all accounts there was not a strong communications program in place. News magazine articles from earlier editions prior to Michael’s arrival soft-pedaled the Canadian organization’s financial difficulties even while rumors abounded that the

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* Notably, Argenti argues that it is the responsibility of organizational leaders to ensure that an open and honest policy is followed: “The most senior communication official and the CEO should also take an interest in the development of [employee] publications to ensure that employees are getting the real story about what is happening to the company and the industry in the most interesting presentation possible” (“Strategic Employee Communication” 203).
Canadian company was at risk of being closed. Communication audits (surveys conducted by consultants from outside the organization) revealed that employees were unhappy with being told how well the company was doing in the face of major lay-offs or “downsizing.”

Michael describes the organizational code that recognizes the crucial role employees play in the organization’s success:

We have a company philosophy that says we have three key constituents and one can’t be satisfied without the other and the key constituents are the employees, the customers, and the shareholders. You can’t take the employee out of that axis; it’s the employees that provide the service, the employees that provide the quality and provide the products. And it’s very difficult for employees to work at the optimum level if they’re asked to do so in the dark. If they see things happening in the business, if they see decisions being made that may affect them or that may affect the customers or the shareholder and they don’t understand why it’s happening, when it’s happening, or who it’s happening to, it can be very demoralizing and demotivating [sic]. What we try to achieve through our employee communication program is to make sure that our employees are well informed, understand what’s going on, understand why things are happening, and understand what their role is as a consequence within the organization and feel that they’re recognized as well. (11 February 1998 3)

Such an approach is a deliberate attempt on Michael’s part to avoid the company newsmagazines that sidestep difficult issues. He observes, “You often hear feedback from organizations doing employee communication surveys where people told them, ‘Well, you’re telling us stuff but you’re not telling us the whole story’” (15 January 1998 4). Because of his position on the executive team, Michael is privy to information before the rest of the group. When I asked him if information was ever withheld from employees he denied that anything pertinent to employees is deliberately excluded: “It’s more a question of timing,” he insisted (11 February 1998 4).
AFC Press plays a particularly vital role for non-management employees who do not have the same access to information that managers enjoy through other formal and informal means such as higher-level meetings. For example, some meetings such as “team briefings” include employees only from the managerial cadres and above. Thus for non-management employees, AFC Press is a crucial source of information about the organization. The group’s information sharing is particularly important for the largely female call-center operators who have less access to communications technologies and other informal channels of communication than do management employees.

In describing the approach he takes, Michael emphasizes high journalistic standards: “We want to [provide] to-the-point, punchy, good quality writing. Just because it’s an employee communication, an employee magazine, doesn’t mean you should have low journalistic standards” (15 January 1998 8). The “high standards” Michael emphasizes refer not only to information sharing (group members talk of “asking the hard questions,” and being “open and honest” but also taking “a third-party perspective,” including covering issues and events beyond the organization (15 January 1998 4).

Sandra sees her role as changing to accommodate employees’ shift in reading habits away from reading a daily newspaper. Consequently, she attempts to provide background and context for news events where possible:

More and more I’m trying to look to the Internet for feature articles to get some context because [...] people don’t always have time to read the paper. Like the merger story I’ve been working on will give people enough information to make their way. [...] I’ve put in the article what the merger is going to mean in terms of money, the people involved, so potentially they could read the article and know enough about the merger to get by. (21 May 1998 12)

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If employees are in fact increasingly reliant on employers for explanations of complex political and economic events and issues such as the rash of bank mergers in the United States in the late 1990s and the 1998 “Asian Flu,” then company newsmagazines are assuming a role traditionally occupied by newsstand publications, a shift that does not necessarily serve employees well.

For however much Michael and the rest of the group wish to represent the interests of employees, they are constrained by the very role they occupy at AFC as organizational spokespeople. As Michael wryly observes, the newsmagazine is “not an underground, subversive publication. [laughs] It’s not meant to be that but it’s meant to be asking the difficult questions and giving answers in an honest and open and credible way” (15 January 1998 5). Moreover, employees are only one of the “three constituencies” of the organization, besides shareholders and customers, whose interests the group must also consider. The relationship between the writers and their subjects at AFC Press is markedly different from that between newspaper journalists and their subjects, despite the publication’s superficial similarities to newsstand publications, an issue I explore in the following chapter. Speaking of the difference between independent publications and organizational newsmagazines Michael observes, “We don’t take the attitude, ‘publish and be damned’”( 15 January 1998 11). As I will show in the following chapter, this difference informs how stories are told as well as silences or absences. After all, company newsmagazines are a management tool, so that even “an open and honest communication policy” is enacted to achieve very particular ends.
At AFC, the employee communication manager must cultivate good relations with managers in other divisions to acquire vital sources of information. As Parin said, "the employee communication manager needs to have a really good understanding and feel for what's going on in the business. [He or she needs] to have a broad network of contacts throughout the company that [he or she] can call on to get updates on what's going on—to find out about issues" (15 January 6 1998). Moreover, before an article is published in the employee newsmagazine, it must be approved by the manager from the department that the article concerns. Parin describes the review process: "once a final version has been put together it goes back to Michael for final editing. And it goes to the senior manager who is directly responsible for the area that we're talking about or the issue that we're talking about to check for accuracy on facts and things like that" (15 January 1998 7). While this step in the article's cycle is supposed to concern strictly factual matters, managers will often try to make substantive changes. Thus approval by managers from other divisions can prove tricky, particularly when it comes to relaying bad news or, in the vocabulary of business communication "negative messages." The communication group therefore faces the challenge of trying to maintain the integrity of the publication without alienating its subjects or "clients," as the communication group calls them. Michael recalls moments of tension with other managers over the degree of openness:

We've had a couple of occasions where we've had run-ins, if you like, with senior managers. We're taking an independent editorial perspective, to some degree, but you have to be realistic about how far you can go. We might ask a difficult question and they'll sometimes say, "I don't want that to be in there!" Well, just saying that you don't
want that to be in there doesn’t mean employees aren’t thinking it and asking the questions, so why don’t we address it? I think you gain credibility and you gain the respect of the readership that way” (15 January 1998 4).

Like Michael, Parin sees the role of the editor of AFC Press as convincing clients to be up front about bad news (or “negative messages”): “The challenge that the editor of AFC Press faces is going to the client and saying, ‘It’s great that we’re talking about all these wins, but employees know that there are down times, down turns in a company, so let’s talk about it’” (16 September 1998 1). Parin describes convincing clients to share bad news as a “difficult sell,” one that usually requires sitting down with them face-to-face and directly addressing their concerns:

A lot of times you’ll find that when you send off a draft to the clients for factual verification, they’ll make comments like, “Can we leave this out?” and they’ll cross out entire paragraphs. But you just have to ignore that. What I would do is once again sit down with whomever it was and say, “These are facts. Are you crossing it out because it’s inaccurate or are you saying—what is the reason you’re asking me to delete it?” [I’m] just trying to say, “Is it not true that this happened?” and you just have to sort of play with them a little bit and make them understand your point of view. (16 September 1998 2-3)

Thus in her struggle to convince managers in other divisions, Parin relies on appeals to facts. Like Parin, Sandra recalls frequent challenges from managers in other divisions when she is trying to communicate bad news: “When we are trying to give employees honest and accurate information we sometimes run into problems internally with other departments saying, ‘No. We don’t want that. Take it out of there.’ They’re very sensitive because they’re afraid they might look bad even if it’s not their fault” (26 January 1998 5).
An article in the June 1997 AFC Press entitled “Wins Outweigh Losses for Growth in Corporate Services” illustrates some of the complexities of the role of employee communicators. For this article, Sandra and Parin insisted on including the “bad news”—the loss of major accounts—but were careful to explain the reasons for the losses, a strategy congruent with Locker’s recommendations concerning negative messages (“Factors in Reader Responses to Negative Letters”). For example, the article points out that in one case AFC lost the contract not because it did anything wrong, but because the business partner’s American parent company decided to go with an AFC competitor and the Canadian subsidiary had to follow suit.

Sandra and Parin strive to address both the needs of their clients to save face and the needs—and arguably the rights—of employees-at-large to learn the whole story. Although the article in question emphasizes the overall growth in the particular business unit, it does not bury or buffer the bad news of the lost contracts, clearly “vital” losses for the organization. Recalling the conflict in writing “Wins Outweigh Losses,” Sandra describes why she resisted the client’s request to avoid mentioning the lost contracts:

in the case of this article, we wanted to explain that we had lost a couple of big accounts, even if it wasn’t our fault. But [the business unit representatives] told us, “We don’t want to talk about that.” But employees have a right to know and so we put it out there. That was a tough article to write because we had to go back and forth for a while. They were saying, “No, we don’t want you to write about this,” but then we finally convinced them that we needed to write about it or the rumors were going to be worse than the reality. (26 January 1998)

In attempting to convince the client to tell the full story, Parin emphasizes the need for employees to understand:
The first thing that you always get is, “We don’t want to talk about it. Oh my God, the fact that we lost this account is painful to talk about—the fact that we lost, a say multimillion dollar account. Let’s not dwell on it.” You really have to help them see the point of view that we’re not trying to dwell on it but we're trying to get an overall picture of what is going on here and the impact on our business so that the employees can understand. They know we lost [Pseudonym account] and let’s tell them why. Let’s give the reason so that they can understand the impact it’s having on our business and on them. Usually they’ll come around when you put it into that perspective. (16 September 1998 2)

Given the metaphors of war—one either wins or loses—it is understandable that business units are reluctant to share bad news, for no one wants to be portrayed as a loser. Resistance to a more open communications policy is not necessarily a plot on the part of management to keep employees in the dark, but sometimes about saving face. To secure approval or “sign-off” on the “Wins Outweigh Losses” article, the writers and editor first had to convince their clients in the division the article concerns that employees must be given a complete picture of the unit’s performance, both the good and the bad. This approval requires considerable rhetorical alertness on the part of the group. For, as Susan Kleimann shows in “The Complexity of Workplace Review,” the process serves the transmission of corporate values and culture, which often covers fraught terrain. Moreover, the resistance the group sometimes encounters suggests that the “open and honest” policy it pursues is not necessarily an organizational norm.

Conflicts between the communication group and managers in other divisions occur not only about negative messages but also about good news, such as new products that the company is introducing. Parin expresses
frustration that employees are sometimes the last to know about new products and services the company is offering:

We’ve had many arguments with our legal department and our marketing department on what we can talk about [. . .] from an employee communication perspective, we want employees to know about what’s happening in the company before anybody else does, and they should. [But] there have been a lot of cases where advertisements have started running on a product and employees have not been told [. . .]. So my point of view is no matter what, employees should always know first what’s happening. (15 January 1998 7-8)

Members of the group explained that other divisions sometimes hold back information from the communication group out of fear that “sensitive” information will reach competitors: “Our main audience is the employee-base, obviously, [but] with an understanding that sometimes it does go external. Sometimes we run into problems—people not wanting to put in certain information because there’s always the potential that [the newsmagazine] could go external” (26 January 1998 7). For example, before Michael could send me a copy of AFC Press, the legal department required that I signed a confidentiality agreement. In this way, unnamed competitors function as a silent, but powerful part of the rhetorical situation as what Brown calls a “watchdog” audience. According to Brown, while a “watchdog” audience does not have the authority to stop the message and will not act directly on it, it has political, social, or economic power.

To allay clients’ fears the group often draws on strategies such as using percentages rather than numbers to represent sales trends, for example:

We’re writing an article about a contract we just won and we’re very conscious not to put a whole bunch of numbers in there because [our competitors] are just dying to know what we’re charging, how many
cards are going to be in force, the nitty gritty of the target. [...] A lot of
times we try and stay away from numbers and instead put percentages in so rather than saying we have ten cards, we'll say we have 10% of the market share or something. We try and cloak it so it's not quite as conclusive. (26 January 1998 8)

However, this strategy does not always give employees a clear picture of how the Canadian organization is doing. While they can certainly read information about the publicly traded parent company through annual reports and other publicly available information, figures for the Canadian subsidiary are not available to them since they are folded into the aggregate of the figure for all of “international” businesses (that is, those outside the United States).

The secrecy that the communication group must accept as a necessary constraint has been a source of frustration for some, particularly for those who deal with external audiences who tend to be far less accepting of vagueness than are employees. Parin expresses frustration with the organization's worldwide nondisclosure policy that prohibits the release of information such as the number of products in force and instead permits percentage figures only. The policy makes it difficult for her to satisfy external audiences whom she characterizes as more exacting than internal ones when it comes to numbers: “when you’re writing something externally people are a lot more critical and tend to question things a lot more so you need to make sure that you’re presenting a lot of facts, details, and figures. When writing internally you can get away with saying, ‘We had a tremendous year last year; we increased our profits’” (11 February 1998 7).

While Parin may see the employee audience as complacent in comparison to the media, it is questionable that all employees are accepting of the lack of supporting evidence to back up claims about the organization in employee
communication, particularly in light of the recent accounting scandals at organizations such as Enron.

Moreover, although the communication group prevailed in the instance of the lost contracts, in its negotiations with other departments it must sometimes yield control. For example, Sandra expressed frustration concerning the column in *AFC Press* devoted to Human Resources issues which was cautiously vetted by the Human Resources department.

within communications we’re all aware of what we need to put out there and we try and put as many facts in *AFC Press* as possible, so it’s not just fluff [. . .]. It’s always a struggle between the person whom the article is about—the person or organization or project or the subject matter—always, is a lot of times, very concerned. Every month it is a struggle because it involves employees or we’re talking about initiatives which involve employees and the communication around that has got to be incredibly well worded or there will be some sort of public outcry. When I’m writing about new benefits I’m dealing with something that is directly impacting employees. So that is always—every month—scrutinized by our HR department. (26 January 1998 13)

Significantly, in writing about issues such as compensation and other benefits that directly affect employees, Sandra has the least authority over the text. Human Resources has authority over the final draft, which it scrutinizes for legal reasons. Unlike the majority of the articles Sandra writes, with this column she felt little sense of authorship:

To be honest, when it comes to [the articles on HR issues], what I write and what comes out are two totally different things. [. . .] It basically ends up with them just writing it because they want their words chosen very precisely so that nothing can be misconstrued and no employee can get upset about it. So a lot of time it can be very filled with jargon. Sometimes I read it and it doesn’t make a whole lot of sense to me. (26 January 1998 13)
The conflicts that occur between the group and other divisions help contribute to more responsible communication practices at AFC, that is, communication practices that better serve rank-and-file employees rather than simply making managers look good. However, the communication group members all too often lack authority over the texts they write and edit; instead they are constrained by other divisions such as Human Resources. Nonetheless, as the example of the lost contracts illustrates, they are occasionally successful in their attempts to act as advocates for a more open communications policy.

Assuming the AFC Voice:

Acquiring Authoritative Discourse Within an Organization

Both Sandra and Peter were drawn to communications careers by their enjoyment of writing and both considered themselves strong writers upon their arrival at AFC. Yet no matter what kind of language skills they brought with them, they found that to be good writers at AFC they had to acquire an understanding of the organization’s corporate culture. As Sandra recalls, the early feedback she received on her writing primarily addressed her lack of understanding of the company’s culture:

in the beginning much of the editing I received was, “This isn’t our corporate culture; this isn’t how we write here.” So that was a learning process. AFC, and I’m sure a lot of companies are like this, is the kind of company that gets in your blood. I can spot [the company logo] from 100 paces! [Laughs] I talk to other people and they’re the same way. I’m sure a lot of companies are like that so I mean, now, I can write about anything. (10 February 1998 23)

Sandra believed that one of the toughest issues for writers in corporate communication—especially those who are new to an organization (and maybe...
even an industry)—is writing as an authority while still relatively unfamiliar with the organization’s culture. She describes her own learning process as gradually coming to know the organization and its language:

It’s good that I learned to write with really small articles of 100 words and successively built up so I didn’t jump in right away. But that’s the hardest thing: you have to have a really good sense of what’s going on in the business to write. I mean, we don’t use jargon but there are ways of saying—we talk about “growing the business” which I think is used in the business world a lot but it’s just one of these catch phrases that we write a lot about. Our terminology, like getting the AFC lingo down, is the toughest part about corporate writing—getting familiar enough with the company that you can write about it as though you’re a part of it. And coming in when you’re new and you have to learn what we do is so confusing in and of itself and then to write about it as though you’re an authority on it is tough. So that’s the hardest part: you’ve got to get a certain comfort level within the business before you can start writing about the business. (10 February 1998 22)

To be an effective spokesperson, she had to learn how to assume the “AFC” voice and style. Sandra saw her recently arrived colleague, Peter, as possessing a set of transferable skills, yet she anticipated that his biggest challenge would be to learn about the business and culture of AFC: “Peter right now has tons of skills in terms of what he did [where he worked before]. […] Now he’s just got to get his head around the kind of business we do here” (10 February 1998 22). Sandra’s remarks speak to the challenge communications professionals face: as representatives or spokespeople of their organizations, they must assume an authoritative voice even before they have familiarized themselves with the new discourse community. Like the students Bartholomae describes in “Inventing the University” and the novice workplace writers Dias, Freedman, Medway, and Paré describe in Worlds Apart, members of the communication group at AFC had to learn how to write according to the expectations of the organization.
Sandra’s and Peter’s experiences learning to write on behalf of organizations was at times a painful process. For career writers, receiving criticism on their writing can feel like an attack on professional identity since writing is not only the process but the product of their labor—the primary means of making their mark, so to speak, within the organization. Whereas the architects whom Dias, Freedman, Medway, and Paré studied welcomed criticism on their writing because they did not see the activity of writing as part of their professional identity (223), Sandra initially found criticism about her writing very difficult:

when I started, Parin was my manager and I would take many of her comments very personally and the day I got comments back on my articles I was in a stew [...] and she always knew that and she’d just leave me alone. That wasn’t professional but I was still pretty new—I’d only been working for two years. She just chalked it up to exuberance and youth and immaturity. But I’m getting much better. (10 February 199811)

Despite Sandra’s initial reaction to such ego bruising, she acknowledged that learning to accept negative feedback on her writing was necessary. In a similar manner, Peter recounted experiencing a strong emotional response to criticism of his writing:

When I was co-editing the newsmagazine with the lady [where I used to work] we had two totally different styles. Mine was a little more relaxed; hers was very rigid. Well, she hated my stuff and I hated hers and we couldn’t find any common ground. I remember one day her sitting down and telling me the way she thought the article should flow and I probably should have been mature and everything but I found myself becoming very unsettled, and I [said to myself], “Just take a breath, Peter. Calm down!” We just had two totally different styles. (30 January 1998 30)

Even though Peter saw his former colleague’s feedback as idiosyncratic, he recognized that such feedback was essential. The responses of Peter and Sandra

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to feedback on their writing suggest that resistance to feedback is not limited to novice writers. However, while Peter and Sandra occasionally resist (and resent) negative feedback, they also see it as an important learning opportunity. In stark contrast, Dias, Freedman, Medway, and Paré found that novice writers entering the workplace allowed their resistance to negative feedback to impede their learning rather than recognizing such occasions “as opportunities for learning (and further collaborative performance)” (196).

After her painful initiation to learning to write at AFC, Sandra characterized not only the communication group’s writing but its very thinking as highly uniform: “We all pretty much think very similarly; we have a similar writing style. Parin and I have a similar writing style—she’s a great writer and so is Michael. So it helps that we have some continuity. If I were a different type of writer, who knows what could happen? Everything could be a rewrite” (10 February 1998 22). Notably, Sandra sees the group’s homogeneity as beneficial because it makes for a more efficient writing process, particularly given the fairly tight production schedule of the employee newsmagazine, AFC Press:

at the end of each month we plan what we’ll write about, what is going on in the business. For a March publication, the writers would sit down the last week in January to get a sense of what is going on in the business, writing during the first two weeks of February, and third week production and layout, and by the fourth week, the beginning of March final copy. There’s probably about a five-week turnaround time from the brainstorming process to [publication] [. . .] but many times we can do the whole thing in three weeks, if push comes to shove [. . .]. The first thing is to come up with things to write about and then interview people, do the background research [. . .]. And so you do the interviews, write the article, then it goes to the person I interviewed for factual sign-off but they always give you creative input. But you’re [just] looking for factual input, to make sure the numbers are in place. And then Michael takes a look at it and depending on how he’s feeling

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that day he might say, “Lots of changes” or “No changes.” (26 January 1998:1-2)

Although the group’s homogeneity reduces the need for revision, it raises questions about the degree to which dissent within the group is discouraged. In her business communication textbook Locker warns against what Irving Janis calls “groupthink,” which she defines as “the tendency for groups to put such a high premium on agreement that they directly or indirectly punish dissent” (336). While my data do not provide evidence that dissent was punished, the tight deadlines around AFC Press and the other employee communication genres certainly encouraged conformity since additional revisions risked production delays.

Sandra may have seen the group’s writing (which she described in terms of “style” and “terminology”) as very homogenous, but as a newcomer Peter was struggling to find the “AFC voice.” After only having been with the company a couple of months, he wrote an article about the closure or “outsourcing” of the mailroom (it was being taken over by another company as a result of “reengineering”), which Michael subsequently revised. Peter described to me his version of the article:

we were talking about the employees that are in the mailroom now and how they would be—they could apply for jobs with the company [...] that it’s being outsourced to [another organization], and Michael was like, “That’s all you really need to say: that they can apply for jobs. You don’t need to get into the touchy-feely stuff. But I was being really conscious of the fact that people could lose their jobs—you’ve got to kind of, you know—so that was the approach I was taking [...]”. (19 May 1998:33)

Peter wished to take a more narrative (and lengthier) approach that addressed employees’ sense of the company’s obligation to them:
[My approach] was kind of like, “you know, if you don’t get a job there you can look for another job in the company and if you don’t get that then you’re going to be compensated very well,” And Michael was like, “you don’t need it,” Well, that’s fine, that’s a cultural thing and if that goes over here OK, fine. But [where I worked before] it probably wouldn’t have, because people would want, you know, you’re an insurance company and you’re taking care of your employees and they want to know, “If I do this and I don’t get this job, then what are you going to do for me?” (19 May 1998 33)

While Peter’s version went into considerable detail about the various options for employees, focussing on employees’ expectation that the company had a responsibility to do something for them, Michael’s version—the one that prevailed—is much more concise: “Distribution employees can apply for a position with [the outsourcing company] or seek out other career opportunities within the company. ‘We’re doing our best to support them through this time,’ says Helen. ‘Wherever possible, we will retain and, where necessary, retrain’” (AFC Press February 1998 7). Despite his belief that his own version was better, Peter claimed that Michael’s understanding of AFC’s culture made him a better judge of what would be acceptable to the employee audience. While corporate culture may in part account for the difference between Peter’s and Michael’s approaches, it is also likely that Michael’s position on the executive team influenced his approach to the article. Whereas Peter’s version tries to address employees’ needs to have all of the options laid out in detail, Michael’s is more impersonal, distancing the organization from the employees who will lose their jobs when the mail room closes.

Shortly after his arrival, Peter described the challenges of writing about a business with which he was still unfamiliar: “right now I’m in a bit of a pinch because I don’t know enough about the business” (30 January 1998 8). As part of
his effort to learn about AFC's business and culture, Peter planned to “orient” himself by getting out and meeting as many employees as possible. While he appreciated having access to the executive team as part of this “orientation” process, he believed that he would have to look beyond company leaders to learn all he could:

Michael helped me out at the beginning by setting me up an appointment with pretty well everyone on the executive team so it was my chance to get to know them, spend fifteen minutes with them, maybe half an hour if I was lucky. But it can’t stop there. It has to filter down because these people are far too busy and really don’t always know the inner workings so right now at this point I’m relying heavily on Sandra and Parin, but it’s really me going out there and meeting people and finding out what’s going on. (30 January 1998)

Notably, Peter’s introduction to the organization was top-down. While he was grateful for access to the executives, he knew he could not rely exclusively on top-down communication from Michael. Like Peter, Sandra realized that she had to rely on contacts throughout the organization as well as research to understand the business even though Sandra was not a newcomer to AFC. She often needed to do background research prior to conducting interviews: “as much as I know the company there are still areas that before you can go in and do the interview, I have to acclimate myself to what’s going on so I don’t look like a complete air head” (26 January 1998).

Members of the communication group who are responsible for employee communication write not only articles for the newsmagazine but also speeches for executives that are delivered at all-employee meetings. Peter draws an important distinction between his work as writer and editor of AFC Press and his work as speechwriter. With the newsmagazine, he must develop relationships in
order to keep on top of what is going on in the organization, whereas in writing speeches he is acting as an invisible spokesperson:

The nature of this job is that you're behind the scenes most of the time, writing speeches for other people [. . .]. I'm quite pleased to do that. The last thing I want to do is to go up on that stage and give a speech. I always think that I'm more comfortable behind the scenes. You have to kind of develop different personalities: for the newsmagazine you have to be in people's faces and get out and get to know people, whereas for events and things you are writing speeches for other people and dealing [. . .] with the logistical side of it. (30 January 1998 25)

As speechwriter and event manager, the texts he writes and events he stages are visible to employees but “authored” by or “attributed” to the President and other executives or, in the case of the town hall meetings, the organization at large. While Peter initially saw face-to-face contact with other members as his primary means of learning about the organization, when I interviewed him six months later he described his experience more along the lines of writing-to-learn. Referring to an upcoming meeting he was preparing for, he described how he was learning about the business through the act of speechwriting: “There are about three people I need to interview. Initially I was going to get them to write [their speeches] but [. . .] I try to get out and meet these people because it teaches me about the business. And as hard as the Team Briefing [a document for managers and above] was, I learned more about doing it than I have since I've been here” (21 May 1998 13).

While political speech writers are often influential in determining policy (as Kathleen Hall Jamieson describes in Eloquence in an Electronic Age) corporate speech writers such as Peter are divorced from any real power in part because of their limited access to information and in part because they do not have the
financial background to challenge the information they are given. Peter describes
some of the challenges of speechwriting at his former job at an insurance
cOMPANY where he was forced to write in a vacuum, without knowing either his
“sponsors” or how his writing was received by them. Where Peter previously
worked, “a silent ride in the elevator” was the closest he ever came to the
President, for whom he regularly wrote speeches (30 January 1998 18). In
contrast, he was impressed by the accessibility of the senior executives for whom
he writes at AFC, usually meeting in person:

   when [a member of the executive team] calls me when I’m writing a
speech for her, it’s wild because I would write speeches [at the
insurance company] and nobody would tell me whether or not that’s
what they wanted. When Michael interviewed me for this job he asked
me, “Are you comfortable writing speeches?” and I have written them
but to be honest in the last few years I’ve written briefing notes and
sent them to the twenty-fifth floor and I don’t know if they’re right or
not. (30 January 1998 25)

While receiving feedback was sometimes difficult, no feedback at all was even
worse, according to Peter. Whether ghostwriting speeches for company
presidents whom he has never met or trying to “make sense of the financials”
with little quantitative education or training (he is admittedly more adept with
words than numbers), Peter, and writers like Sandra, must heavily rely on
colleagues in other divisions and functions for help.

**Positioning Employee Communication**

The communication group’s lack of autonomy at AFC is not unique. Both
the practitioner and scholarly literature make it clear that in most organizations,
employee communication is marginal. Unlike other divisions that generate
revenues for organizations, staff functions such as communications and human resources cost organizations money and are therefore less powerful. In Communication World, the publication of the International Association for Business Communication (IABC), for example, Michael Brandon emphasizes the need for corporate communicators to prove their value to management: “A focus on plans and progress automatically creates a golden opportunity for employee communicators to demonstrate their value to management” (3). Brandon’s Darwinian take on the role of corporate communicators, typical of the practitioner literature, suggests that adaptation to business trends and norms is essential for the survival of employee communication professionals: “The question is not whether the employee communication function can adapt successfully but if it will do so. Those who do will create for themselves a new and important niche in the organizational ecosystem” (3). For Brandon and others, the way for today’s employee communication professionals to secure a place within organizations is to tie their work as closely as possible to “strategy.”

A key business term of the 1990s, “strategy” usually refers to the organization’s major decision making. Like many of the metaphors of business language, “strategy” is a term borrowed from the military with the attendant values of war (Harragan 75). Scholar-practitioners Paul Argenti and Janis Forman claim that corporate communication is less powerful not only because it is often constrained financially but because its work is not closely aligned to the organization’s strategy: “Often, the departments dedicated to communications or public relations are understaffed, and more crucially, distanced from the development and implementation of the organization’s strategy” (3).
To forge an important role for itself within organizations, corporate communication as a field has tried to play up its role in developing and implementing strategy. Consequently, corporate communication has distanced itself from its traditional purview, the "softer" aspects of organizations. Michael Brandon claims that in-house publications have evolved from "birthdays, babies and ball scores" to today's focus on "challenge, change, and commitment" (3).

Given the emphasis on and status attributed to strategy in the business world, it is not surprising that the communication group at AFC prides itself on the strategic focus of their work, rather than on "trivia" such as the birth of babies or employees' hobbies, an issue I examine in the following chapter. Parin describes her former role as manager of the employee communication program in terms of "talking more strategically, thinking about communications issues and themes and things like that we can talk about and trying to integrate those into whatever else is going on in the company [. . .]." (15 January 1998 2). The practitioner literature suggests that senior managers now expect corporate communicators not only to "write the news release [. . .] but think strategically—look at the goals and missions of the organizations and help [. . .] deliver an honest, open communications program or develop a system that will reach our employees and help them understand the business of doing business" (Neubauer 2). However, the strategy the group reports in the newsmagazine is not strategy that its members have had a hand in deciding or implementing. This distinction is important for understanding the role of the communication group, whose job is to communicate strategy in the form of organizational goals that have been established by colleagues in other divisions.
Argenti and Forman (who both teach in business schools) claim that the limited role of communications professionals in "strategy" or decision making is in part attributable to their "outsider" status: "the communication function in most organizations is staffed by what we refer to as "outsiders"—former journalists or public relations professionals rather than executives with graduate business degrees. As a result, this group can be of little help when the organization needs to communicate strategy to key constituencies" (Argenti and Forman 3). Linda M. Dulye, a communications executive interviewed in Argenti’s 1998 study, describes one of the biggest challenges she faces as "finding talented communicators" (312). Dulye considers writing and editing divorced from (and subordinate to) "business strategy" and doubts that professional communicators can think like business people:

I’m not necessarily convinced that communications folks are business people first—really thinking like a business person and not like someone who just edits a publication or is concerned with putting together speeches or brochures. Getting them to think first like a business person and then as a communications professional is a challenge. I mean really strategically oriented communicators. ("Practitioner Interviewees" 312, emphasis in original)

Argenti’s interviewee thus not only sees “communications” and “business” people as occupying two different camps, but the activities of writing and editing as subordinate to strategy. Notably, Argenti and Forman along with practitioners like Dulye, see the background of corporate communicators in journalism as a deficit to the organization. Nowhere do they mention the benefits of a broader education, nor the value of organizational members who do not "think first like a business person."
One of the group's key challenges is to make organizational strategy a compelling subject for employees. As Holland and Potter assert, the challenge of professional communicators today in balancing the needs of customers or clients such as the President and other executives with those of employees at large entails "telling interesting, compelling stories" that also deliver "clear strategic messages" (17). For without employee acceptance or "buy-in," corporate strategy has little chance of success. In other words, the communication group members' inability or unwillingness to think "like business people first" (at least in part attributable to their broader education) enables them to connect with their diverse employee audience, an essential part of their role. Therefore one of the key strengths of the communication group at AFC is its ability to address the broader implications of "strategy"—particularly its impact on all employees, including those without business degrees. Peter's attempt to address employees' concerns about the closure of the mailroom is an example of the strength in not thinking like a business person first. Thus the communication group influences organizational practices in a way that Argenti's exclusive focus on strategy ignores.

Conclusion

In summary, the members of the communication group responsible for employee communication attempt to take an "open and honest" approach. However, their very position within the organization as official spokespeople limits the extent to which they can follow such an approach. The group works according to a highly collaborative model, but it is a hierarchical one rather than 118
a dialogic one (to use Ede and Lunsford’s terms), since they are often constrained by other more powerful divisions. Within the group itself, there is a strong drive to consensus: to write in the “AFC Voice,” using not only the organization’s particular terminologies but also its values. Nonetheless, as the article on the lost contracts shows, the group plays an important role in encouraging the organization into being more open and honest with employees. In the following chapters I provide further evidence of the constraints the group faces, particularly how the writers and editors are pushed by senior management (especially Michael) to remind employees of the organization’s “strategy” (or goals) and values—goals and values which they have had no role in shaping. In this way, I show that the group acts as purveyors of AFC’s corporate goals and strategies, a role that constrains, but does not entirely prevent, their acting as employee representatives or advocates.
CHAPTER 4

INFORMING AND MOTIVATING:
THE EMPLOYEE NEWSMAGAZINE AS A MANAGEMENT TOOL

In chapter 3, I situated the communication group at AFC and explored how members' writing practices are informed and constrained by factors such as managers in other divisions, their familiarity with the organization's culture, and the hierarchical collaborative model of the group that gives Michael, the Vice President, final say. In this chapter I give a brief history of the newsmagazine as a genre and locate AFC's newsmagazine in relation to both the practitioner and scholarly literature. I then examine the "cornerstone" of the employee communications program at AFC: AFC Press. While chapter 3 gave the writers' and editors' perspective on AFC Press, in this chapter I provide a rhetorical analysis of the newsmagazine, showing that it functions as a management tool, informing and motivating employees. I look at both the formal and generic features of the newsmagazine, analyzing its surface characteristics as well as its rhetorical effects. In addition, I explore to what extent the "open and honest" approach to communication the group professes is evident in AFC Press through a close reading of several articles, particularly one on "reengineering" the organization.
According to its cover, AFC Press, “the newsmagazine for Employees of American Financial Company in Canada,” is one of the few documents distributed to all employees of the Canadian company. (Another publication is distributed out of headquarters for employees around the world.) As an internal document or “in-house” publication, AFC Press represents the organization to its own members, as opposed to documents intended for external audiences such as annual reports aimed at shareholders, press releases designed for the media, or advertisements pitched to consumers. According to the communication group, the employee publication’s function is to inform and motivate employees about the organization’s corporate strategy and key developments in the business. Parin, former editor of AFC Press, emphasizes the publication’s importance in terms of its availability to all employees: “Because we have such a large employee base and because it is so diverse and we’ve got everybody from operations staff to senior VPs that we need to capture with [the newsmagazine], that’s one of the challenges—to make it relevant and readable for everybody, and understandable as well” (15 January 1998 6).

Michael observes that there is more to communicating with employees than simply publishing AFC Press: “We can send this thing to them and they can look at it and toss it in the bin and we can say, ‘We’re communicating with them!’ because we’ve sent this thing out” (15 January 1998 5). Rather, he sees constant feedback from the readership as essential. The organization therefore solicits ongoing feedback from readers through surveys and other means:

like any magazine, you’ve got to kind of keep an eye on it: are you in tune with your readership? Are you giving them—or are you sort of unconsciously drifting away from your editorial premise? We do that
by having employee communications audits and reader surveys and that kind of thing, from time to time. We don’t overdo them, but just enough to make sure we’re on track. And we also try to get anecdotal feedback from people as well. (15 January 1998 7)

Such ongoing assessment fits in with the organization’s culture: AFC boasts a very strong marketing division and conducts regular employee surveys on a wide variety of topics, according considerable space and emphasis to communications. Although a close examination of the readership of AFC Press is beyond the scope of this study, recent surveys conducted by the organization’s marketing division suggest a high readership as well as high satisfaction with the company newsmagazine among employees. (For an examination of how employees respond to and resist employee communications, see studies by Foster and Murphy.)

The Origins and Evolution of the Newsmagazine

Although this study focuses on formal and official organization discourse, the writing of the newsmagazine is informed by awareness of unofficial discourse, in the form of “the grapevine” or “rumor mill.” An article in the practitioner journal, HR Magazine, asserts the pivotal role of the newsmagazine in controlling and regulating organizational discourse, focussing on its status as a written rather than oral genre:

The newsmagazine serves as the most “public” internal record, available to all employees. Unlike messages communicated through meetings, those published in newsmagazines are controlled and cannot be altered. Therefore, they allow management to disseminate accurate, timely information that dispels rumors and instills confidence in employees. (Sosnin 106)
Sosnin thus sees the role of the newsmagazine as quashing less formalized and more dialogic discourse, whether in the form of meetings (where talk cannot be entirely scripted) or through the grapevine. In this way, newsmagazines play a conservative function, helping to maintain organizational hierarchies in contrast to potentially disruptive oral genres, an issue also addressed in my discussion of the town hall meetings in the following chapter.

Despite the pervasiveness of newsmagazines, little attention has been paid to the genre by rhetoricians and scholars of professional communication, with the exception of articles by Yates, Cheney, DiSanza and Bullis, and Blyler. Instead, most of the work published on newsmagazines is by practitioners and is primarily anecdotal and prescriptive. Although practitioners offer valuable insights concerning the newsmagazines they and their colleagues write and edit, a rhetorical perspective affords a more in-depth understanding this genre.

Scholars of management communication trace the origin of employee publications to labor unrest in the early twentieth century, which prompted employers to attempt to repersonalize the workplace: “influenced by the corporate welfare movement and by their own labor problems, many companies started shop or company publications designed to reinject a personal element into the workplace” (Yates 74-75). According to Yates, official company documents such as employee newsletters or newsmagazines (the two terms are used interchangeably) grew out of the systematic management movement, which “contributed to the decline of the ad hoc, word-of-mouth management and to the rise of formal internal communication” (10). Yates’ historical study of business communication genres shows that early employee publications focussed on the
personal. For example, she quotes one editor of an in-house magazine who recommends including articles on employees' home lives and personal interests in addition to articles on their role within the company (75-76).

In one of the few scholarly articles on contemporary newsmagazines, George Cheney explains their importance within organizations:

Corporations invest significant amounts of time, money and creative energy in the production of internal publications, most of which reach only employees and their families. While we probably cannot know that such messages significantly affect employee attitudes, another conclusion is clear: business believes that they do (or at least that a cost-benefit analysis deems such efforts acceptable). ("The Rhetoric of Identification" 156)

In other words, whatever their effect on employees (and my study does not address their reception), employee publications are ascribed value within organizations, if only by management.

The practitioner, Brandon, situates employee communications in general, and company newsmagazines in particular, in terms of three major historical stages of development. According to Brandon, the focus of the first stage (the 1920s to the 1950s) was boosting employee morale, which included recognizing employees' lives both within and outside of the organization:

In an effort to improve employee morale, companies started newsmagazines to create another means of employee recognition. Thus it is not surprising that the pages of many early company communication were filled with announcements of births and birthdays, reports on company-sponsored sports teams, employee profiles and the occasional goodwill letter from the company president. (1)

While the "first stage" of newsmagazines emphasized employees' personal lives, the "second stage" (the 1960s to the 1980s) was informed by journalistic values...
and practices and therefore emphasized company “news.” With the move to the second stage, the tone of employee publications shifted from an informal to a more “objective” one: “Employing the styles and techniques taught in schools of journalism, this new generation of employee communicators shifted the focus to reporting company events, activities and announcements” (1). This shift towards an emphasis on journalistic values brought with it a rejection of anything “personal.” Ironically, the company newsmagazine—one of the very genres invented to humanize the workplace—has moved away from including stories about people's lives outside the organization in which they work. Brandon describes the shift away from the personal and towards a greater focus on the organization itself: “The new communicators disdained the old goal of improving morale. They referred to such coverage contemptuously as the three B’s—birthdays, babies and ball scores. They saw their calling as a higher one: to provide employees with information about their organizations” (1).

Brandon sees not only the second-wave of company publications as attempting to mimic superficial textual features of newspapers and magazines, but also the “objectivity” of the news:

The folksy informalty of the industrial relations expert was quickly replaced by the objectivity and distance of the journalist. A look at the internal information programs of most organizations today would reveal a series of communications patterned after “the news.” Many newsmagazines have been upgraded to newspapers and news magazines; video programs usually mimic the six o’clock news; the company web site follows the lead of its online journalistic peers. (1)

Kominkiewicz also sees a trend toward company newsmagazines’ modeling themselves (at least superficially) on mass-market media:
One of the challenges communicators continually face is the manner in which their audiences benchmark organizational products against the high-priced mass commercial media. Corporate videos need to have music as good as any sitcom intro or beer commercial. The sets have to be at least as good as those found on daytime soap operas. And your publications have to look and feel as good as the ones your readers pay their hard-earned money for—regardless of the fact that the information in the organizational publication could (and should) have an immediate effect on their lives.

The third stage of employee communication, from the 1990s to the present, has seen a further rejection of the personal in favor of business “strategy” (with its military associations). Events associated with rank-and-file employees’ lives outside of work, such as births, are deemed irrelevant to the organization and therefore unworthy of readers’ attention. While this rejection of the personal mirrors the devaluation of “the personal” in the academy, it forms a stark contrast to the current obsession with the personal in popular culture, such as television and radio talk shows and the self-help movement. Notably, while rank-and-file employees are excluded from employee publications, company leaders are accorded a great deal of attention, both at AFC and in the media at large. Moreover, where employees are depicted in AFC Press, they are presented as types, rather than as individuals, embodiments of organizational norms rather than fully-fleshed characters as I will show in the following chapter.

7 Jack Welch, the former CEO of General Electric, for example, has achieved heroic stature in the popular press.

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The Form(at) of AFC Press: The Affordances and Constraints of Genre

Form […] is an arousing and fulfillment of desires. (Kenneth Burke, Counter-Statement 124)

We try to give it the look and feel of a newsstand publication. (Michael, 15 January 1998 4)

AFC Press shares certain key formatting conventions with newspapers and magazines such as headlines, feature articles, regular columns and a masthead. Based on data gathered from interviews, Michael and the group model AFC Press on newsstand publications. Michael, a former journalist, has made a concerted effort to dissociate AFC Press from Brandon's first stage by giving the newsmagazine “the look and feel” of a newsstand publication (15 January 1998 7). Prior to Michael’s arrival in 1994, AFC Press existed in stark contrast to the slick, attractive document that it is today. The “old” AFC Press from the early 1990s was photocopied on plain white paper and featured poorly reproduced black and white photographs. It followed an irregular publication schedule, reflecting the loosely structured and erratic employee communications program that existed during the organization’s period of crisis in the early nineties.

The current AFC Press is a 9" X 12" folio-style full-color glossy issued monthly, ranging from eight to twelve pages in length. The cover features a large photographic image relating to the cover story. AFC Press usually has two “feature” articles (approximately 750 words each) plus a series of shorter ones (approximately 200 words each) and sidebars. Images are used copiously.

While most of the examples of AFC Press I studied were issued monthly, the publication did not always adhere to a rigid monthly schedule. According to Peter, such flexibility was important for both budgetary and other reasons. Committing to ten rather than twelve issues per year would
throughout to support the text: each page has at least one photograph and/or graphic. Two regular columns appear on the second from last page: an international news section that presents bulleted news about "AFC's business around the world" and, just below, "H.R. [Human Resources] Notebook" (which replaced a column on health and safety in the workplace), devoted to Human Resources issues such as pay and benefits. The masthead names Michael Jones VP of Communications as managing editor, and Peter Page (both names are pseudonyms) as "editor and production coordinator."

*AFC Press* is distributed to all Canadian employees in their offices. At the Bytown office it is available in newsstands stationed in high traffic areas by elevators, at the entrance to the cafeteria, and by the doors to the executive and administrative offices. Unlike some company newsmagazines, *AFC Press* is not mailed to employees' homes. Sending newsmagazines to employees' homes rather than distributing them in the workplace suggests an attempt to blur the home/work boundary, helping "to make the company part of the family" (Argenti, "Strategic Employee Communications" 203-4). The decision to distribute *AFC Press* at the office is likely based on fears about information leaking to the competition (a concern that was raised repeatedly by group members) and concerns that the business focus of the publication would make it uninteresting to employees' families. Cost also may be a factor although I did not ask my participants about this.

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enable him to put more resources into fewer issues and thereby enhance the quality of the publication.
Corporate communicators must justify the cost of employee publications to both management and employees. DiSanza and Bullis’ study of the United States Forestry Service newsmagazine found that some employees dismissed it as a waste of resources (382). Similarly, Foster’s study of employee resistance to managerial communication found that several participants expressed resentment about the incongruity they perceived between “the tight-spending regimen that the company was supposedly on and the generous spending on glossy promotions—promotions that simply repeated the same content over and over” (153).

Michael has used his belief in the symbolic as well as practical function of the employee publication to defend it against criticism that it is too expensive (15 January 1998 7). When he arrived at AFC in the early nineties cut-backs made it difficult to justify the expense of seeming “extras” such as the employee publication:

our company was going through the same problems as others. We were reorganizing, downsizing, and other such corporate words, and people were saying, “Why are you spending all this? This must cost a fortune: it’s glossy, it’s colourful!” [...] But it’s not overly expensive when you look at the quality of the thing. But I was conscious of the fact that although it’s an internal publication, it has to be of a quality, that is consistent with the image of AFC, from a design perspective, that enabled it to compete with magazines on the newsstand. (15 January 1998 7)

Making the employee publication appealing in every way—including visually—is a deliberate strategy on Michael’s part to convey to employees that they are valued as much as the organization’s other constituencies: “having AFC Press the quality of a newsmagazine says to employees, ‘You are as important as our customers. You deserve the same treatment [. . .].’ If you have a glossy
external publications and some raggy rag for internal, what does that say? It's not respectful to employees" (31 July 1998 2). Michael's concerns about the visual aspects of AFC Press echo Yates' historical analysis of the attention paid to form of employee newsmagazines: "Their form, as well as their content, indicated that these papers were viewed as serving an important purpose. They improved morale and cooperation, thus indirectly reinforcing control" (77).

All members of the group attempted to address the needs of their audience, but Michael alone articulated concerns about the demands made on employees outside of the workplace and the challenge of communicating with an audience that is bombarded with information:9 "We can't take the view that we have a captive audience, that what we have to say is about where you work and therefore you should be interested. Just because it's about where people work doesn't mean they're going to take an interest. We're competing with TV, radio, and newsstands for our employees' time and attention [. . .]" (31 July 1998 2). Like Brandon and Kominkiewicz, Michael sees outside media as competition for the employee magazine.

Although Michael's modeling the form of AFC Press after that of newsstand publications may be part of an attempt to make AFC's internal image consistent with its external one, such a strategy has additional, although perhaps unintended, implications. In her article on newsmagazines, Nancy Blyler argues

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9 The issue of "information overload" is a serious one. In 1997, American adults spent 11.8 hours consuming media each day, compared to 10.4 hours in 1995-96% of their waking hours. Although people can and do consume more than one media source at the same time, "the sheer volume of media products consumed by the average American adult is staggering and growing" (Consoli).
that format conventions influence reader expectations. According to Blyler, even skeptical readers are more likely to believe what they read when a company publication resembles a newsstand publication, for “expectations about the truth-value of newspapers potentially transfer, via analogic reasoning, to newsmagazines” (145).

Richard M. Coe argues that in analyzing any genre we must attend not only to its surface features (as Blyler does) but also to its “rhetorical situations and contexts of situation” (184). Coe’s belief that generic structures influence a rhetor’s creative process, at once “stimulating and constraining discursive practices” helps make sense of Michael’s and the rest of the group’s attempt to mimic newsstand publications, despite the significant organizational constraints I outlined in chapter 3 (183). Yet the differences between AFC Press and the newsstand publications on which it is explicitly modeled are as striking as their similarities. Despite the invitation to readers to contact the editor with comments (a key convention of both newspapers and magazines), there is a notable absence of dialogue between writers and readers. In AFC Press, for example, a conspicuous absence in the issues I read were any letters to the editor, which speaks to a different kind of relationship with readers than a publication that regularly includes reader feedback. This relationship forms a key element of AFC Press’s rhetorical situation.

Throughout the practitioner literature and at AFC, corporate communication professionals stress the role of employee publications in motivating as well as educating employees. This latter function has become particularly important as other forms of communication such as email and the
Internet have made it possible to relay information far faster than the traditional printed newsmagazine. In fact, many now see the role of the newsmagazine to "frame" issues rather than to disseminate "late-breaking" news (Jackson, qtd. in Argenti, "Practitioner Interviews" 317; Anonymous "Paperless Companies?" 11), a view supported by my findings.

The content of AFC Press today contrasts sharply with Brandon's "first stage" of employee publications that focussed on buoying employee spirits with reports of fun but innocuous events like company picnics. However, an analysis of several articles will show that the morale-building goal of employee communication has not been abandoned at AFC. While Brandon is concerned with the goals of employee communication, I am concerned also with its effects, namely, with what these texts do.

The Strategic Use of Negative Messages:

Pursuing an "Open and Honest" Communications Policy

The stories found in house organs are often notoriously positive, portraying companies in the most favorable light possible. As a result, such publications are sometimes dismissed by the practitioners who write them as mere puffery or boosterism:

the stuff we're forced to publish is so laundered. We bleach all the life out of stories [ . . . ]. They're meant to offend no one who is not directly concerned with the subject of the story and boost the egos of those who are. Those people are made to feel proud. The rest just yawn, read the first three paragraphs and flip the page. (Draper 1)

DiSanza and Bullis found resentment among some employees who dismissed the overly positive view of the Forest Service portrayed in its newsmagazine, a

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criticism which led these employees to dismiss the publication as “propaganda” (382). Members of the communication group repeatedly distinguished AFC Press from the employee publications of AFC competitors:

In my experience most companies just tend to put out only good news stories all the time and sort of mask anything else that’s going on in the company—issues—and try to keep things secret a lot. That’s one thing I found really amazing about AFC when I came aboard is how open and honest communications are with employees. (Parin 15 January 4-5)

Parin recalls the evolution towards greater openness under Michael’s leadership, sparked by negative feedback from employees:

We did some [...] internal communications audits [...] and that’s one of the things we got in our feedback, was that we were not being honest enough with employees. Because employees know that there are issues going on, and if you don’t talk about it they’re going to say, “Why aren’t you talking about it? Why aren’t you telling us?” From then we started taking a different approach and saying, “OK. We’ll give you what you want,” and it seems to be working. When we did the last audit in [19]96 when I came on board I did one, we found that the scores really rose in terms of the credibility of the communications and the integrity of what we’re trying to say and the fact that employees feel that they’re being kept informed and understand the issues and initiatives that are going on in the business right now. (15 January 1998 5)

Thus the members of the group try to avoid candy-coating bad news as their predecessors had done. While the communication group may see being “open and honest” with employees as unique or cutting edge, not surprisingly such an approach is widely touted in the business press: “We are straight and frank, telling the negative as well as the positive findings. And people are saying, ‘Yes, that’s right.’ They feel informed and involved.” (“Paperless Companies?” 11).

Although there are clearly strong ethical reasons for keeping employees informed, increasing productivity has been the driving force behind employee
communication. Much of the practitioner literature emphasizes openness and honesty in building organizational trust usually with the goal of increasing productivity ("IABC Research" 8). Yates shows that even efforts to repersonalize or humanize certain aspects of the workplace through internal communication were undertaken to increase worker efficiency:

The welfare movement and other attempts to elicit cooperation by humanizing organizational life adopted new modes of internal communication as tools. Although these forms of communication were designed to promote a more humane and cooperative atmosphere, they also served indirectly to reinforce control in the interests of efficiency. (15-16)

Moreover, Yates points out that the goal of many in-house magazines has historically been to "educate" employees, albeit without their awareness: "The educational function could not be too prominent if [the magazines] were to succeed in humanizing the workplace, raising morale, and getting management's point of view across [...]. A successful in-house magazine had to 'sugar coat' its attempts to instruct" (76).

Argenti associates honesty with progressive management: "Enlightened managers know that the more information they provide to employees, the more likely these employees are to be highly motivated to do a better job, to advance in their positions, and to further the goals of the organization itself" ("Strategic Employee Communications" 200). The link between employee communication and productivity is also given much attention in the business communication scholarship such as the often cited Clampitt and Downs 1993 article, which studied employee perceptions of the relationship between communication and productivity. Although Clampitt and Downs' found the relationship between
communication and productivity a complex one, they also that communication had an “above average” impact on productivity compared to other factors.

Argenti is blunt about the connection between information sharing and the bottom line: “More than anything else, communication is the key to getting workers to become more productive” (“Strategic Employee Communications” 200). For Argenti honesty is a means of boosting employee morale by making employees feel as if they are “insiders” within the organization:

[Employee] publications should, above all, be as honest as possible about what is likely to affect employees. Nothing is going to hurt morale more than having employees find out about a major corporate event from a source other than the corporation. Use publications to communicate important ideas to employees and release the information to them at the same time that it goes to the national and local media. Again, the goal is to make employees feel that they are insiders, a part of the team, and on the cutting edge of what is happening within the firm and the industry. (“Strategic Employee Communications” 204)

A participant in Argenti’s 1998 study of communications executives argues that the role of employee communications is not to merely disseminate information, but to shape employee behavior:

Most people in this field are still talking about information transfer, and if there is anything that we have learned in the last five or ten years it is that people are drowning in information; the last thing they need is more information.

What they need is to understand what is really happening so that management and others can motivate their behavior. Obviously there is information that you need to do your job. This need-to-know information, however, is mostly localized information. The real challenge is to find a way to take all of our organization’s information and behavioral transmissions and to put them into a message that will localize them. (Jackson, qtd. in Argenti, “Practitioner Interviews” 314)

For this practitioner, employee understanding is simply a means to an end.
Peter and Sandra see an important part of their role as connecting employees' daily work to the organization's broader goals, which they attempt to do through the newsmagazine. Peter describes an instance where he and Sandra tried to help employees connect their work to the organization's goals and values that are articulated in a document from the American headquarters called the "Strategic Steps":

What Sandy and I are trying to do—and it's a conscious effort we've made in a recent issue—is to tie in the Strategic Steps whenever we possibly can. It may get a bit annoying and you may not want to see it in every article, but you've got to kind of pound them into people's heads. If you want people to think this way, then you've got to make the link for them because otherwise they may not link quality and innovation and launching three new products. (21 May 1998)

Although members of the communication group at AFC acknowledged that there are strong ethical reasons for pursuing an "open and honest" communications policy, in their discussion members focused mainly on pragmatic ones. According to Michael, "informed employees are motivated employees" (11 February 1998). In a similar manner, Parin, one-time employee communications manager at AFC, links better understanding on the part of employees to enhanced job performance: "if [employees] understand the issues and they understand their role, and their impact on those issues, we hope that that will incent [sic] them to do more with their jobs or change their jobs differently or change the way they look at their responsibilities and how it affects the overall business (15 January 1998 6). For Parin, giving employees an account of both the good and the bad news sends employees a clear message about the harsh reality of a fiercely competitive industry: "[It] makes employees understand, 'Listen, if we slack off, we lose. There are people out there who are
willing to step in in a matter of seconds to take our business.' This all impacts our jobs: everything that we do and the quality of work that we provide" (16 September 1998 4). In urging employees to "'unite' against a common enemy"
Parin uses a tactic that Cheney identifies in his 1983 study of employee
newsmagazines, identification by antithesis (153). According to Robert Solomon,
in many organizations it is not only profits but winning that is at stake:
winning—beating the competition—takes precedence over and above
employees' needs: "the interests of individual employees come into play only in
the context of motivation—how to get them to perform [...]. The bottom
line—not only profits [...] but ordinal winning [...] is everything" (146). While
such a strategy may prove effective in raising productivity, it raises ethical
concerns. On the one hand, disclosing bad news acknowledges employees' right
to know what is going on within the organization and the fact that they may take
losses personally, which can be interpreted as commensurate with a feminist
"ethic of care." However, on the other hand, being open about bad news can also
play on employees' fears of job loss. Parin uses disclosure strategically to
motivate employees to work harder while at the same time addressing the
emotional as well as economic attachment employees have to the organization:

It doesn't do anybody any good not to talk about [a contract that was
lost] because sometimes employees might feel bad—they might take it
to heart.10 This is a business that we pour our hearts and souls into and
all of a sudden we've lost it. Is it something that we did? Is there
something that we could have done better? That's all stuff that we
need to make employees understand. It comes back to the role of the
employee and how they fit into the picture. (16 September 1998 2)

10 It is interesting to note how Parin here uses the language of relationships whereby employees
take loss "to heart." Conversely, the language of economics/finance has colonized that of human
relations. For example, we can "invest" in a relationship or decide to "cut our losses."
The *AFC Press* article on the lost contracts that I analyzed earlier, demonstrates how Parin and the rest of the group attempt to present a balanced view of events, delivering the "straight goods" employees have demanded, while ensuring that the business unit that lost the contracts saved face. The strategic use of negative messages by the writers and editors of *AFC Press* is also illustrated by an article entitled "Customer Advocacy: Finding Solutions to Mend Business Processes" that appears in the October 1998 issue. The article is noteworthy for the way it presents a major problem and (equally important) its solution, as well as for how it frames the problem in terms of meeting employees' (rather than solely customers') needs. The bad news in the "Customer Advocacy" article concerns a major mistake that resulted in thousands of customers not receiving Personal Identification Numbers (PINS). The piece begins by asking a series of direct questions about a recently discovered major systems error:

How do embarrassing customer service situations go unnoticed? That's just one of the questions Nancy Landon asked herself last year when thousands of customers did not receive PIN numbers for months and nobody realized there was a major systematic problem. And this led to other questions like who was ultimately responsible for PINs, why didn't we catch this and why was no one looking out for malfunctioning systems? (6)

Notably, the questions attempt to locate responsibility for the error even before the article describes if or how the mistake was corrected. However, the direct questions are not answered, likely because to do so would require laying blame on particular individuals. In the second paragraph, the actions that have been taken to correct the problem are presented. While highlighting the corrective
measures, the article resists presenting quick-fixes. Progress is uneven at best: "we have seven teams—some making giant leaps and some making baby steps—collectively making some real progress" (6). After identifying a glitch in the computer program, a manager claims, "We accomplished more in three hours than we had in six months" (8). However, the following paragraph makes it clear that not all issues are so easily solved: "Our largest hurdle is still technology. There are opportunities in policies and practices which are changing to meet customers' needs [. . .]. But systems are a little more difficult and will take time and capital investment" (8). Thus the negative message about the missing PINS serves to highlight the division's solution to a difficult problem, presenting a flattering portrayal of the unit. This strategic use of a negative message to make their clients (and by extension the organization) look better corroborates Thomas' finding that writers use negative messages strategically to present themselves as problem solvers and take credit for their successes (qtd. in Crombie and Samujh 230). In a similar manner, Crombie and Samujh's study of the annual executive letter of a small New Zealand business found that negative messages (including a number of problems) were used to deflect more serious issues, to undermine the credibility of potential challengers, and to present the directors positively as problem-solvers (229).

In addition to the strategic use of a negative message, the AFC Press article on fixing the systems error is notable for its use of another tenet of business communication: you-attitude, which in rhetorical terms refers to a focus on the concerns of the audience. In emphasizing that the error adversely affected not
only customers but employees, the article uses you-attitude to appeal to the employee audience:

Then came the results of the Employee Survey. The level of employee frustration with quality ricochets—the broken business processes impacting the quality of service to customers—disturbed [the President]. Customer Service employees were finding it difficult to do their jobs. They couldn’t focus on servicing the customer because they were too busy putting out fires. [The President] wanted to find a way to put us back on course, fix what was broken and lessen people’s frustration so we could get on with expanding the business. (6)

The President is depicted as deeply concerned not only about customer satisfaction, but also employee satisfaction. In a similar manner, the Director of the President’s office emphasizes that the mistake affected all three organizational constituencies (customers, shareholders, and employees): “we selected the seven processes that were impacting the customer and shareholders as well as frustrating our employees the most” (6). Nancy, the vice president of Operations, the division in which the error occurred, echoes the claim that all three constituencies are valued: “The beauty of what we’re doing is simple,’ says Nancy. ‘We’re fixing customer and employee satisfaction and decreasing cost. Customer advocacy benefits all three of our constituencies. The outstanding efforts shown by our employees to fix broken processes is [sic] admirable and I encourage everyone to persevere as we continue this quest” (8).

The article uses the occasion of the systems error to try to convince employees of the importance of understanding the business beyond their own narrow job and making connections with employees outside their own particular business unit. The solution to the missing PINs is presented—without any
supporting evidence—as a result of unifying employees in two different divisions within the organization:

Customer advocacy shows how people in different departments can pull together to solve problems collectively. It is important to have a greater understanding of other parts of the business. We can't operate in silos because both divisions own the promise to the customer. There is now a sharing of accountability on both sides of the table. (8)

Thus positive emphasis and you-attitude are used to present a negative message, emphasizing that the organization has overcome a major challenge, a triumph ascribed to employee education and unity. However, the example is a weak one since no details are provided about how exactly people in departments worked together.

A third article similarly illustrates AFC's strategic approach to negative messages. “News Accounts Charge AFC With Selling Consumer Information” concerns negative media reports that accused AFC of selling personal information about its customers. The article opens with a description of the allegation by a national newspaper and other news organizations that AFC was planning “to sell detailed purchasing information about customers [...]” (June 1998 3). The article also outlines consumers' negative reaction to the news.

The organization addresses the issue in an effort to present its side of the story, with the knowledge that most employees have already heard the negative media reports through outside channel: “Frontline customer service representatives have been fully briefed on the situation and have been responding to inquiries regarding the issue” (6). Like the articles on the lost contracts and the missing PIN numbers, in addressing the bad news directly, the article uses the negative message to represent itself as an upholder of customer 141
privacy. It dismisses the "spin" of the media reports about AFC as "misleading" and briefly outlines the deal AFC has reached with a database marketing firm. It then provides context for the public's growing concern about privacy issues, positioning AFC as an advocate for consumer privacy: "AFC has [...] being [sic] working with government agencies and consumer advocacy groups to confirm our commitment to protecting customer privacy" (6). Ending on a positive note, the article uses the occasion of the negative media reports to elaborate AFC's "rigorous and comprehensive" customer privacy code (a list of nine bulleted points) (6).

Notably, most of the negative messages in AFC Press do not contain information that is new to employees (for example, the employees directly affected by the closure of the mailroom would have been told first by their supervisors). Since employees already know much of the bad news before they ever read AFC Press, these messages serve a different function. Rather than breaking the bad news to employees, these articles instead "spin" the events, framing them in terms of a larger organizational story wherein the organization is always right.

While negative messages pose a challenge for the group, perhaps surprisingly, so can positive ones. Recounting a recent conversation he had with the President, Michael describes the dilemma he and the communication group face: "We've reached our target for the year early so we are now wondering, 'What do we do next?' We're always talking about this success or that success and people hear this over and over through different vehicles, so the message risks becoming diluted. You need something new" (31 July 1998 4). With so

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much positive happening in the company, Michael expressed concern that employees might become complacent.

At the same time, for Michael, establishing credibility with his audience involved not only a commitment to communicating negative messages but also to avoiding falsely positive ones:

> You’ve [ . . . ] got to be conscious about not over-hyping things or over-promising. If you get it blown up too soon and go making claims and predictions and sharing plans. Again, the good things can change and events in the marketplace can overtake you. So we’re conscious—I think perhaps AFC and other companies in the eighties were guilty of hyping things a little too much: making grand claims and grand predictions and then having to live with them. We’ve tried to become a bit more even-handed. (15 January 1998 6 )

Overdoing or exaggerating the positive can pose as many ethical issues as does presenting negative messages. This is one of the communications challenges unique to successful organizations in times of economic boom: a seeming excess of positive news. Michael’s concerns seem prescient in light of the economic downturn that occurred after our interview as well as the Enron scandal of 2002 where senior management lied to employees and shareholders right up until its implosion.

These AFC Press articles show that rather than simply reflecting a policy of being “open and honest” about bad news, negative messages perform a variety of strategic functions such as making specific organizational members and divisions look good (by emphasizing their problem-solving capabilities), presenting senior management as concerned equally about employees and customers, and “counterspinning” negative media reports about the organization, and scaring employees into working harder.
Representing “Reengineering” at AFC:

Locating Agency and Responsibility

The three AFC Press articles I have so far discussed, “Wins Outweigh Losses,” “Finding Solutions to Business Processes,” and “AFC Charged With Selling Consumer Information,” demonstrate some of the ways that the newsletter uses negative messages strategically. AFC Press reader surveys indicate that the shift in communications policy has been successful with employees; however, it is important to note that a direct approach to negative messages is not a panacea for organizational problems. Extolling the benefits of a direct approach to negative messages, some practitioners believe that virtually any outcome—including lay-offs—can be made acceptable to employees:

If communications is ingrained as part of the culture, and an organization is candid and direct with its constituents, employees can deal with all facets of change. They can deal with their livelihoods being threatened; they can deal with their co-workers being let go; they can deal with health benefits changing. They can deal with all of those things if an organization brings them along in the process. (Gonring qtd. in Argenti, “Practitioner Interviews,” 306-07)

An article in AFC Press, “Reengineering at AFC,” suggests some of the limitations of strategic uses of negative messages as well as some of the constraints of the newsmagazine as a genre. As I outlined earlier in this chapter, Coe’s approach to genre asks crucial questions about power relations among texts, readers, and writers:

What sort of communication does the genre encourage, what sorts does it constrain against? Does it empower some while silencing others? Are its effects dysfunctional beyond their immediate context (for example, bureaucratese)? What are the political and ethical implications of the rhetorical situation constructed, persona embodied, audience invoked and context of situation assumed by a
particular genre? What does the genre signify (about its discourse community)? (186).

My analysis of “Reengineering at AFC” tries to answer at least some of these questions in terms of the newsmagazine as an organizational genre.

“Reengineering at AFC” addresses the ongoing organizational restructuring in the Canadian company since its financial difficulties in the early 1990s: “In Canada, reengineering was introduced much earlier in 1990 with an emphasis on organizational structure. Eight years later, reengineering has saved the company an estimated $200 million and has become a significant part of our profitability goal outlined in the ‘1998 Winning Strategic Steps’” (6). Analysis of the article shows how the group’s rhetorical practices are circumscribed by corporate goals and strategy disseminated in another document, the “Strategic Steps” composed by the executive team. Sandra describes how the Strategic Steps informed her writing of the article on reengineering:

Whenever possible we try to build the Strategic Steps into an article. In fact, in February’s issue we talk about reengineering, which is something we’re starting up. And part of reengineering is that it’s going to mean huge things for our bottom line, for profitability. Profitability is one of our Strategic Steps. In fact, I sent it out to Michael and it came back, “Good article, but try to build in profitability into it.” So I had to put in—there’s a constant push to keep it top of mind with employees. So whenever there could be a link we try and draw a link between them. (26 January 1998 17)

Sandra’s emphasis on the organization’s goals (or “strategic steps”) in her writing illustrates how employee communicators act as purveyors of corporate strategy. The Strategic Steps in this way exert a centripetal force on the

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11 While reengineering is presented as the reason for AFC Canada’s financial turnaround in the mid-nineties, the recovery of the Canadian economy after the recession of the early nineties could also account for the dramatic improvement.

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employees, unifying their different activities under the umbrella of the organization’s goals and values.

The article uses positive emphasis—framing reengineering in terms of the company’s goal of profitability—and thereby downplays the negative impact of reengineering: the closure of the mailroom. The article credits reengineering for the company’s turnaround: “At the heart of this turn-around is reengineering [...].” (February 1998 6). Attributing the organization’s financial turnaround to reengineering silences dissent; if reengineering is responsible for the company’s turnaround, then to argue against its result is to argue against success. Yet to credit reengineering for the company’s success divorces the goal of profitability (one of the key “Strategic Steps”) from the human costs and consequences. Such an argument relies heavily on what Bourdieu calls a neoliberal world view, one that imposes as self-evident a whole set of presuppositions, including the separation of the social and the economic:

it is taken for granted that maximum growth, and therefore productivity and competitiveness, are the ultimate and sole goal of human actions; or that economic forces cannot be resisted. Or again—a presupposition which is the basis for all presuppositions of economics—a radical separation is made between the economic and the social [...]. (Acts of Resistance 30-31)

The article on reengineering subscribes to this neoliberal view not only because of what it endorses, namely, the goals of growth, productivity and competitiveness, but also because of what it fails to mention, namely, the social implications of reengineering.

“Reengineering” is the central metaphor of the article, a euphemistic term eschewed by practitioners such as Kominkiewicz as a “red flag of propaganda”
Management guru Michael Hammer popularized the term “reengineering” with his 1993 *Reengineering the Corporation* and the follow-up work, *Beyond Reengineering*. In these volumes, Hammer espouses a new regime of “customer ascendancy” whereby “The company does not close plants or lay off workers—customers do by their actions or inactions” (157 emphasis added). In other words, corporations are not responsible for lay-offs; nameless (and blameless) consumers are. Under Hammer’s “customer-as-king,” (note the gendered metaphor) regime, humane values are made untenable not by senior managers or shareholders, but by fickle consumers:

> Like it or not, security, stability, and continuity are out because there simply isn’t anyone on the scene who can provide them. The company can’t because the customer won’t. Companies are not cold or cruel or heartless. They are merely running as fast as they can to keep up with demanding and unforgiving customers. The people who work in them will have to do the same. It’s not that no one cares about you; it’s just that there is nothing anyone can do about it. (*Beyond Reengineering* 119)

Hammer’s model places corporations at the mercy of “demanding and unforgiving customers” and therefore without either agency or responsibility.

The term “reengineering” is used to lend scientific authority to organizational restructuring, which almost always involves lay-offs or other hardships such as wage freezes or roll-backs for rank-and-file employees. Linguist Uwe Poerksen warns of the potentially distorting effects of words and phrases like reengineering that are transferred from their original scientific or technical domain to the human one:

> The transmission of words and images from one milieu into another casts things in a different light. It can unlock meaning and promote recognition, it can alter perspective, and it can organize and illuminate the new milieu. The linguist Charles Bally spoke about “effets par évocation d’un milieu.” But at the same time this effect is
not without problems. The transmission can also disfigure the sphere of application. And not only can an individual metaphor be off-kilter and distort its object; an entire frame of reference can also be carried into a new domain and have the effect of simplifying, reducing, and alienating it. The forms of expression of one milieu can overwhelm, cover up, and "colonize" those of another milieu. There seem to be three particularly effective spheres of origin, three big image donors, which export their vocabulary and shed a strange new light on everyday existence: the languages of science (and technology), of economics, and of administration. These three "colonizers" intermingle and conquer society; they share a specialized form of expression. (76)

"Reengineering" presents the change in terms of a problem-solution model favored by engineers and other applied scientists and in so doing simplifies and reduces the impact of the change. 12

In a similar manner, Kenneth Burke argues that language not only shapes but creates our reality; his notion of terministic screens posits that our understanding of reality is necessarily selective rather than reflective. Terms like "reengineering," with their scientistic associations, elide the messier (and all too human) implications of organizational change that displaces workers. Associated with impersonal systems and processes rather than with people, terms such as "reengineering" that have been widely adopted depersonalize organizations and their members.

Yet strikingly, "reengineering," an unequivocally mechanistic metaphor, is used in the AFC article in concert with organic metaphors from agriculture and nature, suggesting conflicting notions of organizational identity and transformation. The article claims, for example, that reengineering is a humane strategy to "get the company back on its feet," a personification of the
organization. It uses such “softer” metaphors to reassure employees that reengineering is not synonymous with job loss. The figure who relays this message is Nancy, the female VP of Reengineering, whose speech (or rather the speech that is attributed to her, for a member of the communication group wrote the article) is rife with organic metaphors. Nancy refers to “growing the business” which, like reengineering, is a pervasive cliché and explains the challenge of reengineering in agricultural terms: “We have picked all of the low-hanging fruit so the task becomes more difficult” (6). The accompanying illustration, featuring a pastoral scene of people hand-picking apples from an orchard drawn in pastel hues, underscores the text’s organic rather than mechanistic metaphors.

Furthermore, while technological initiatives are part of the process, the case for reengineering is not made in technological terms alone. Rather, employees are reminded that organizational change requires social reengineering as well: “Reengineering often involves a cultural shift. [ . . . ] An initiative must be aggressive and sometimes a little radical to be a true reengineering” (6).

Although the goal of profitability is emphasized throughout the article, a goal that mainly benefits shareholders, “you-attitude” is also in evidence. For example, technological advances are presented as an important means of saving money, but not at the expense of either customers or current employees. The article repeatedly mentions cost-cutting: “[we are] introducing initiatives which reduce manual effort and the need to hire additional employees and incur additional costs.” However, the piece claims that management’s decision was not

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12 For a discussion of how the problem-solution model informs technical writing, see Michael Jordan’s work.
made strictly to save money. Rather, it is to serve customers better: "for an initiative to be viable, it must not only save money, but first and foremost it must be good for our customers. Saving money at the expense of customer satisfaction is simply not an option" (7).

As for employees, a voice response system is offered as an example of an "automation initiative" that does not "displace" (rather than "cut" or "axe") jobs but instead prevents the need to hire new employees. Nancy also makes the qualified claim that mechanization will not necessarily result in job loss but that any job loss that does occur will not be random: "Reengineering is not about arbitrarily cutting jobs. [...] It's about putting new processes in place that will allow us to be profitable and service our customers better. In many cases that means keeping our employee numbers exactly the same" (7). While such reassurances may have been well received by some employees, they must have rung hollow to others. For just below the article is a brief (200 words) announcement that the mailroom will be "outsourced" (shut down) but that its employees are welcome to apply for other jobs within the organization and/or with the company who will be taking over the mailroom. The decision is blamed on AFC's parent company: "This decision is part of a worldwide review of support services" (7). (It is important to note that in this case the newsmagazine is not the vehicle delivering the bad news to the mailroom employees who were told in person well in advance of the article about the closure of their unit.) Nonetheless, it is notable that while the article on the missing PINs gave credit solving the problem, the article on reengineering shows how writers use language to distance the organization from problems that cannot be easily
solved. This supports Thomas' findings cited in Crombie and Samujh's article on negative messages that found writers distance themselves from problems by attributing them to external, often non-human agents. My findings suggest that such a strategy is not limited to the genre of the annual executive letter.

Ironically, while the parent company is blamed for the shut-down, reengineering is justified on the grounds of achieving autonomy for the Canadian company: "the ultimate objective of reengineering is to create a self-funding environment where the money saved is reinvested into the Company to grow the Canadian business." Once again, the business is organic, with growth—specifically, growth of the Canadian company—as the ultimate objective.

Although it is important to subject this article to cultural critique, it is equally important to situate it in relation to the practitioner literature since the latter likely wields a greater influence on its writers. Although I did not study their reading practices in detail, the terminology used by the communication group echoes that of the practitioner literature. The article's almost exclusive focus is on reengineering on impersonal organizational "strategy" (rather than on individuals) reflects Brandon's "third-stage" employee communications that depicts corporate communicators as implementers of management's strategies. According to Brandon, this third stage requires a new way of thinking for many communicators. Whereas the (first-stage) communicator with an industrial relations orientation sees events in personal terms, asking, "Who will be affected and how?" the former journalist (second stage) is likely to report events "and
then forget them to go on to the next story” (2). In contrast, the third stage communicator sees company events in the context of corporate strategy:

Moving to the third stage doesn’t mean ignoring the company’s employees or ceasing to report on major events. But, if communicators want to be effective in the new environment they must shift the primary focus to the goals of the organization. They must see themselves not as distant observers but as fully engaged participants, helping the organization’s management implement its strategies. (2)

But as the article on reengineering demonstrates, despite Brandon’s claims, an exclusive focus on strategy risks ignoring employees. Just as the AFC Press article presents reengineering as an inevitable course of action, Brandon claims that employee communication should be nothing but a management tool narrowly focussed on strategy:

The new role of employee communication is no longer to lift employee morale, nor merely to report current events within the organization. Today’s environment necessitates that employee communication evolve into an extension of the management process, helping an organization’s executive leadership implement strategy more effectively. (2)

The exigencies of “today’s environment” (market forces, perhaps) are used to justify the shifting role of employee communications.

In “Sexual Dynamics of the Profession: Articulating the Ecriture Masculine of Science and Technology” Beverly Sauer argues for a “re-visioning” of the language of the body in technical communication. For Sauer, this revisioning demands a change in attitude as well as language: scholars and engineers alike need to take responsibility for their own language practices and resist sexist and other exclusionary discourses. Moreover, she shows the dehumanizing effects of procedures and operating manuals that reduce human behavior to the passive voice and obfuscate responsibility (319). Sauer’s work is helpful not only in
elucidating the gendered codes underlying technical discourse but also the issue of human agency or, in other words, responsibility. The AFC article on reengineering shows that the questions of agency and responsibility that Sauer raise are equally crucial in business communication.

In summary, by framing reengineering in terms of AFC's goal of profitability (a use of positive emphasis), the article downplays the closure of the mailroom, which can hardly be considered an open and honest approach to communications. The central metaphor of reengineering and the recurrent strategy of positive emphasis (a strategy that is ubiquitous in business communication practice and pedagogy and often uncritically accepted as a convention) in the form an exclusive focus on the favorable aspects of reengineering elides the human consequences of organizational change for employees. Moreover, despite the attempts to emphasize the human face of reengineering and to present it as an issue of Canadian autonomy, the loss of jobs is framed as an inevitable course of action and responsibility for the decision is averted or at least shifted to the parent company. Thus the article illustrates the limits of the group's stated aim to report bad news in as direct as possible way to employees, an aim that is perhaps better realized in other articles the group has written.

Conclusion

AFC Press is understood by all to function as official organizational discourse, a management tool supporting the organization's business strategy. AFC Press competes with commercial mass media not only for the time and
attention of the employee audience, but in some cases (such as the report of AFC selling consumer information) with the media's version of events. Since management cannot control all the information to which employees have access, it uses AFC Press to present its version, which it tries to present as "reality," discounting the rumor mill and negative media reports as "spin." In short, while AFC Press has adopted some of the form, format, and ethos of mass media in order to gain attention and credibility, it cannot serve the larger cultural function of a "free" press. Because all texts are shaped and mediated, taking a so-called "objective" stance is impossible. Moreover, recent consolidations of media ownership in both the United States and Canada mean that large corporations such as Time-Warner have taken control of many smaller, independently owned newspapers and radio stations. Yet despite this consolidation, the media continue to play a crucial role in drawing attention to government and corporate abuses of power, such as the Enron scandal. In contrast, in-house publications such as AFC Press almost exclusively represent the narrow interests of the cadre of elite senior management.

Because newsmagazines are so pervasive, writing teachers (and not only those who teach business communication) must help provide students with critical reading strategies that look beyond surface features and instead probe the power relations of texts. Such strategies will help students be more astute readers not only of organizational texts, but the cultures they inscribe.
CHAPTER 5

FOSTERING EMPLOYEE IDENTIFICATION:
THE NEWSMAGAZINE AND THE TOWN HALL MEETINGS AS EPIDEICTIC RHETORIC

Identification measures the extent to which we hold common goals, norms, values and beliefs associated with our organization’s culture. This dimension indicates how connected we feel to management and to coworkers. (IABC Research Foundation 8)

In the previous chapter I focussed on how the newsmagazine is used as a management tool to inform and motivate employees in order to increase productivity, focusing on the strategic use of negative messages, “you-attitude,” and positive emphasis and their effects. In this chapter I examine how not only the newsmagazine but also all-employee or town hall meetings are used to foster employee identification with the organization. I argue that both the newsmagazine and the town halls belong to the epideictic genre. Drawing on the work of rhetorical theorists George Cheney, Chaim Perelman, Lucy Olbrechts-Tyteca, and Dale Sullivan, I look at the ceremonial rather than deliberative how they act exert a normative force within the organization. My findings suggest a renewed importance of epideictic rhetoric, particularly given the current broader cultural dominance of entertainment over discussion and debate.
Cheney examines the role of newsmagazines ("house organs") in encouraging employees to see their interests as aligned with those of the organization:

house organs may be seen as one element of a matrix of persuasive messages by which the formal organization presents its interests as the interests of the employee member. To a certain extent, this stance is inevitable: any organization must, at least part of the time, subordinate individual needs to those of the collectivity if it is to "act" as an organization. ("The Rhetoric of Identification," 156 emphasis original)

I explore how AFC's two key "communications vehicles," its newsmagazine and town hall meetings, function as part of the identification process, instantiating specific organizational values and goals and interpellating employees.

The Theory and Practice of Identification With(in) Organizations

As Roland Marchand demonstrates, the attempt to get employees to identify with the organization they work for and its goals and values is as old as public relations itself (144). Cheney argues that identification has become even more important within organizations as a result of the shift from direct to indirect means of management:

In the past [managers] relied on more direct, even forceful, means of influence (e.g., close supervision, purely monetary rewards, and assembly-line "determinism"). And, of course, such methods are still quite evident. But today we often find managers and administrators less obtrusively encouraging individual involvement, support and loyalty. In short, fostering identification is the "intent" of many corporate policies, for with it comes greater assurance that employees will decide with organizational interests uppermost in mind. ("The Rhetoric of Identification" 158)

Ashforth and Mael identify a similar shift from external control, including hierarchical, technical, and bureaucratic forms, to internal control, including
normative and cultural control (92). While external control requires compliance on the part of employees, internal control regulates through thought and feeling, inducing members to "remake themselves in the image of the desired member" (92-93). According to Ashforth and Mael, internal control draws on the practices of symbolic management: the stories, rituals, and physical setting that I explore in this chapter.

Some argue that particularly during economic booms such as that of the late 1990s when unemployment is low, monetary considerations are only part of employees' concerns: "Pay is not one of the first questions anymore. It has a lot more to do with the ambiance of the place. 'What kind of place is this to work? What kind of boss are you? What kind of relationships do you have with people?' Relationships have become extraordinarily important for people" (Neubauer 3). Consequently many communications practitioners recognize (and attempt to exploit) employees' need to belong and to win:

"It's not just growing stock price that drive growth, and it's not simply a paycheck that delivers satisfaction. We are social creatures. We want to be winners. We want to be part of something we can be proud of. We want to feel that our efforts create something of value. To do that we need to know stuff" (Suss 3). Kevin Thomson argues that "genuine" (that is, successful) employee communication involves gaining employee adherence to organizational goals rather than the mere transfer or dissemination of information:

Often companies restructuring the way they work believe that they are "communicating" their new management strategy to their employees. But evidence suggests that they confuse information with communication. After all, providing staff with information is one thing. Gaining commitment is quite another. (1)

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Scholar Mark Zachry argues that identification is a distinctive feature of the Total Quality Management (TQM) literature that has dominated Western management practices since the 1980s. According to Zachry, the TQM literature uses metaphors to connect its narratives to large-scale social institutions such as science, the military, and education “with which it is easy to identify” (116).

Because gaining employee commitment to organizational goals is a key concern of contemporary organizations, Cheney sees organizational identification as an important area of research for the Burkean scholar in particular: “The fact that contemporary organizations are so concerned about identification—both with respect to specific interests and with regard to their own status as potential targets of employee dedication—demands the attention of the Burkean critic. Organizations are in the business of ‘congregation’” (“The Rhetoric of Identification” 158). According to Burke, organizations’ expectations of employees exploit a natural tendency, at least within the American cultural context: “In America, it is natural for a man to identify himself with the business corporation he serves” (Attitudes Toward History 264). As both men and women work increasingly longer hours not only in the United States but in Canada (the context for this study), employee identification is particularly worthy of our attention.

But how exactly does identification work in the context of organizations? Burke understands identification as a social process that is initiated by the rhetor (in this case the organization and its representatives) but that also requires
participation of the individual members. Cheney explains how this works within organizations:

an individual who is inclined to identify with an organization (or an organizational sub-unit) will be open to persuasive efforts from various sources within that unit. The organization “initiates” this inducement process by communicating its values, goals, and information (i.e., the organization’s own stated “identifications”) in the form of guidelines for individual and collective action; the member may then “complete” the process by adopting or adapting the organization’s interests, doing “what’s best” for the organization, and perhaps even developing a salient identification as a target. (“The Rhetoric of Identification” 146-47)

In the case of organizations like AFC, the communication group plays a crucial role in initiating the inducement process through its employee communication program, particularly the newsmagazine, town hall meetings, and the Reward and Recognition program. Although none of the communication group members use the term “identification” to describe what they do, much of their work can best be understood in terms of inducing identification among employees with the organization.

The AFC Ambassadors: Enlisting Employees As Spokespeople

There are two types of information that are useful in an organization. One of them is what I need to know to do my job today. The second is what I need to know to be a good citizen of this organization—to be an ambassador, to be able to interrelate with other people inside the organization and know what is happening in marketing and strategy and finance, etc., so that I am a good citizen of my organizational world. (Jackson qtd. in Argenti “Practitioner Interviews” 316)

The so-called “I” is merely a unique combination of partially conflicting “corporate we’s” [...] (Burke Attitudes Toward History 264.)

The employee communication literature suggests a widespread belief (at least on the part of managers) that employees have a duty to represent their
organizations, even outside of working hours, as unpaid spokespeople.

According to Cheney, "Today's top-level managers count on identification with the organization being the rule rather than the exception ("The Rhetoric of Identification" 157). Some practitioners argue that the responsibilities of modern employees extend well beyond the paid workday:

Doing your job alone during working hours is not enough: Employees want to be empowered; we all want to be accountable, then there are some things we are responsible for. One of them is keeping ourselves informed; the second one is this business of being an ambassador for our organizations. You don't just go to work in the modern world and count beads all day and then go home; that won't cut it anymore. (Jackson qtd. in Argenti "Practitioner Interviews" 316)

For Argenti, being an ambassador for one's company is constitutive of the "empowered" employee, and who would argue against empowerment? He outlines a trajectory of employee development whereby the employee's identification with the organization increases over time:

Initially, the interest of the employee is relatively selfish and focused simply on the job s/he is hired to do. As the employee becomes more comfortable with the job, however, and more a part of the department or group in which s/he works, the focus will be more externally oriented toward those around the employee. Eventually, the locus of interest ultimately focuses on the company itself and what the organization is trying to accomplish within the industry. At each stage of the employee's development, the company has an opportunity to create loyalty and to get more of the employee's discretionary time—that time that the employee does not have to devote to the job but chooses to nonetheless. ("Strategic Employee Communication" 200 emphasis added)

Strikingly, Argenti presents the employee's growing commitment to the company not only as an inevitable course of action but as one that is freely undertaken.
The second AFC all-employee meeting I attended had for its theme “the 3,000 ambassadors of AFC,” a campaign essentially aimed at fostering employee identification. The speech delivered by the President at this town hall asks employees not only to use AFC products and services but also to become corporate spokespeople or “ambassadors” for the global brand:

You can be ambassadors or advocates if you will, for our products. Let me use an analogy to illustrate what I mean. If you work for Coke, you drink Coke and not Pepsi. If you work for General Motors, you drive a GM product not a Ford [...]. Whenever you are out shopping, or just talking with your friends and family, we want you to tell them about AFC. (3 June 1998)

Peter, who organizes the AFC town halls, describes the ambassador campaign as a means of increasing employee involvement: “The theme for the employee meeting is really about active employee involvement, about saying, ‘this is how we involve you in the organization and this is what we need you to do: almost become an ambassador, become an advocate of AFC’” (21 May 1998).

Describing the speech he wrote for the President, Peter emphasizes its motivational rather than informational importance:

With Donald’s stuff, all the material is existing; what I need to do is make it motivational. So that’s the approach I’m going to have to take so when I’m writing the speech, just to kind of rah, rah, about our success, about the programs that we have in place and really—enlist them as ambassadors to get out there and if you work for AFC and somebody at a party makes a stupid comment about [a product] you can tell them that they’re wrong. Right now, I think people try to do that but they don’t necessarily have the information they need. (21 May 1998)

In addition to the “3,000 ambassadors” campaign launched in the town hall meeting and extended in the newsmagazine, Peter attempted to devise a set of “talk points” to remedy what he saw as employees’ lack of knowledge about the
organization. The "talk points" were to have provided a "cheat sheet" for what employees should say when someone in a social situation asks a question or makes an incorrect statement about AFC or one of its products. However, the script was never developed because no one could agree as to what exactly it should say. Yet the idea itself is noteworthy because it assumes employees' willingness and obligation to represent AFC in the best possible way. Burke argues that such attempts to enlist members to represent their organization(s) favorably exploit our inherent vanity as we seek to boost our stature through our associations: "[The individual] identifies himself with some corporate unit (church, guild, company, lodge, party, team, college, city, nation, etc.)—and by profuse praise of this unit he praises himself. For he 'owns shares' in the corporate unit—and by 'rigging the market' for the value of the stock as a whole, he runs up the value of his personal belonging" (Attitudes Toward History 267). In this way, the AFC "Ambassador" program plays on readers' desire or need to associate themselves with a winning brand and organization. Although certainly not all employees are willing to advocate for the organization, the goal itself is striking.

While the expectation that employees will become ambassadors for the organizations for whom they work is widespread, it nonetheless raises ethical concerns. The concept of employee spokespeople or "ambassadors" assumes that identifications are freely undertaken, even though employees may not see them as such. Scripting employees' speech about the company during non-working hours may be an effective means of gaining free advertising for the organization, but it also extends managerial control beyond the paid work day and entails
discursive appropriation. Asking employees to be unpaid spokespeople not only encroaches on leisure time, but also risks pre-empting other identifications. As Ashforth and Mael point out, "many organizations are inherently 'greedy institutions' in that their demands on the person are 'omnivorous': They take as much behavioral and psychological involvement as they can, even if members cannot afford it" (92). Such demands for organizational loyalty are a particularly pressing issue at a time when people are working longer hours and therefore less able to join outside organizations.

In the widely cited article, "Bowling Alone," political scientist Robert Putnam examines the recent erosion of social capital in the United States and the attendant decline in civic engagement. Putnam argues that in lieu of the traditional forms of civic organizations such as church-related groups, school-service groups, and sports groups, Americans are joining new "mass-membership" organizations that tie their members to "common symbols, common leaders, and perhaps common ideals, but not to one another." The trend Putnam identifies raises two important questions about organizational identification: what exactly is the nature of the identification promoted at AFC and other corporations and what are its implications for civic engagement?

The identification promoted in the employee communication literature, like that at AFC, serves primarily to make employees more effective organizational spokespeople. It is not participatory but instead encourages a passive and uncritical stance towards the organization. Argenti's notion of employee spokespeople goes beyond employees' promoting their company's products and services. Like Argenti, at least one of the practitioners he interviewed for his 1998
study asserts that if loyalty and trust can be established at the "lower levels" of the organization, then "employees as volunteers can move out and do the community relations. They can do the public affairs. Nobody can have an impact on lobbying a position or on dealing with regulators like the people in the company—moving out into the community and getting opinion leaders out there to take up the cudgel" (Jackson, qtd, in Argenti "Practitioner Interviews" 314-315). In effect, this move incorporates all employees into the company's corporate communication program. Moreover, by naturalizing employee loyalty to and identification with the organization Argenti and other communication practitioners sidestep any critique of organizations' expectations of employees—expectations that seem particularly questionable given their one-sided nature.

Burke argues that reciprocity between individuals and corporations is by nature impossible: "loyalty to the financial corporation is necessarily impaired because the obligations are mainly of a one-way sort. Complete corporate identity must be of a two-way sort. The overlord requires fealty of the underling and in exchange he guarantees certain protection to the underling" (2:142). However, employee loyalty is inevitably curtailed in the age of downsizing and reengineering. According to Ashforth and Mael, the strength of the organizational self—including employee loyalty—is weakened by the widespread lack of job security:

regarding the organizational self in particular, the much-publicized erosion of job security and the growing contingency workforce have severely affected the willingness of individuals to trust in organizational orthodoxies. As loyalty gives way to cynicism and detachment, the popular press proclaims the death of the
“organization man” and urges individuals to protect themselves by maintaining their options and managing their own careers. (106)

At AFC, for example, although Peter sees the ambassador campaign launched at the meeting and later reinforced in the company newsmagazine as involving reciprocity (“it works both ways”) the company’s responsibility to employees is not mentioned in either the town hall speeches or the newsmagazine. Moreover, like other corporations, AFC is in no position to offer protection to its employees, as it makes clear through repeated references to “market forces,” except insofar as it provides them with a regular paycheck. If it cannot offer job security then organizations like AFC must offer other benefits in order to encourage employee identification.

Parin describes how AFC employees are rewarded financially for their work at AFC:

when the company makes a profit for the year, all the employees, as part of their annual bonuses, will get a share of the profit that’s linked both to the bottom line performance of the company as well as individual performance. So that’s how we relate everything back. So if something’s happening in the company, it doesn’t matter which area of the company it is, and it’s going to affect our bottom line and our performance, then ultimately it’s going to affect you. (15 January 1998)

The Performance Incentive Award is described in the newsmagazine as “an important part of rewarding employees for your contribution and giving you a greater personal stake in the success of the company [...].” (AFC Press October 1997). But although money is an important means of encouraging employee identification with the organization, symbolic means are taken equally seriously at AFC. Burke sees an inverse relation between the practical and symbolic orders,
arguing that the symbolic takes on greater importance as practical enjoyment diminishes:

In an ideal social structure, the maximum amount of contentment is provided by the practical order. And whatever discontent is left over and above this, is stilled with the aid of symbolism. But to-day, when so little contentment is provided by the practical order, symbolism is called upon to perform a much more drastic function. It cannot be merely the completion of a social structure: it must seek to make one. (Attitudes Toward History 305 emphasis original)

At AFC, as in most organizations, the practical and the symbolic work together. However, the focus of the communication group is on the latter, particularly at the town hall meetings, which provide recognition ceremonies for outstanding individual employee “performers” as well as the organization as a whole.

Joining the AFC Family:

Caring, Community, and Corporate Philanthropy

Drawing on the work of Canadian-born economist, John Kenneth Galbraith, Cheney argues that the emphasis on organizational identification as a sign that corporations have gone awry. According to Cheney, the individual has come to conflate her own interests with those of the corporation, which has led to her assuming a passive, uncritical stance toward the organization. Moreover, identification has come to replace material compensation as a motivating force: “[Galbraith] sees this trend as one reason for the decline in power of unions; as workers become more accepting of organizational interests, the opposing stance of organized labor becomes less tenable and less practical [. . .]” (“The Rhetoric of Identification” 157-58). Although I have no hard data to support this, it seems likely that part of the purpose of AFC’s employee
communication program is to prevent a union drive, particularly among the Operations employees.

During the late nineteenth and early twentieth century many organizations sought to improve their public images by acquiring a "corporate soul" and later, during the 1920s and 1930s, institutional advertising campaigns aimed to bolster the social and moral legitimacy of corporations (Marchand 4). Sandra describes AFC's Foundation (its philanthropic function) as a means not only of crafting a favorable image for the organization externally but also fostering employee identification:

we are trying to build a bridge between the foundation and some way of letting employees know what we're doing and getting them involved [...]. There's an opportunity to get employees involved and let them know what we're doing and also give them a better sense of what AFC is all about including giving back to the community. Like the Winnipeg Flood Relief is one thing we gave money to through the Red Cross and the Ice Storm. We should really be hyping this up among employees if for no other reason than that they can go into society or the public and talk about their company as a company that cares. (21 May 1998 2-3)

Representing AFC as a caring corporation is, as I will show, one of the main roles of the employee communication program and one that is attempted through several key rhetorical strategies.

In his study of identification in employee newsmagazines, Cheney identifies several tactics that figure prominently in the issues of AFC Press that I studied, including employee testimonials; the espousal of shared values equating family, organization, and nation; and the expression of concern for the individual member (150-153). A February 1998 article, "Surviving the Ice Storm," chronicles how individual employees came through for each other in the face of natural
disaster. The piece is the only feature story in the *AFC Press* issues I studied that could be classified as "human interest," although it emphasizes the role the protagonists played in the drama as AFC members. Whereas human interest "dead fish and live babies" stories are disparaged by the communication group as I showed in chapter 3, this article links the recognition of employees to the organization and its mission rather recognizing employees as individual members.

In the issue the article appears in, a photograph of enormous mangled electrical wires occupies three-quarters of the cover and is underscored by the headline "Surviving the Ice Storm." The text begins with a series of pointed questions that brings the disaster home for all AFC employees:

What if you were forced to abandon your home? Imagine living out of a suitcase or not knowing when your next hot shower or bath would be? What about waking up every two hours or so to keep the wood stove going to ensure everyone's warmth? Well, that's how Michel Gaston, Sales Consultant, and his family coped with the ice storm that ravaged the area a few weeks ago. (1)

The second paragraph provides a testimonial of how another AFC employee united his family during the storm, emphasizing the role of family members in helping one another: "As Kieran was fortunate enough to have power, his one bedroom apartment became a safe haven for her sister and her family. Says Kieran: 'Although it was a bit cramped, we made do.'"(8). The role of family and the AFC family in particular is again emphasized with the following optimistic interpretation of the events provided by one of the storm's heroes:

Looking back I have to count my blessings. My family was a lot better off than the people who stayed in the shelters," says Michel. "The ice storm has had a real effect on me because I now realize just how
vulnerable we really are. I will never forget the acts of human kindness shown by my fellow AFC employees. It was those individuals who opened their homes and gave their colleagues much needed financial and emotional support that got us through the storm. (9)

What the employee hero will remember most is not the storm itself, but the kindness of his fellow AFC employees. Employees are portrayed as looking after one another with an announcement of the dollar figure that AFC Canada employees have raised for the United Way. The employees function in synecdochal relation to the company so that AFC's good employees prove that AFC itself is a good corporate citizen.

The story makes AFC's role in the crisis central by presenting the article as a response to employees' questions and concerns about their fellow members: “Many are wondering how colleagues survived the crisis and what AFC did to lend a helping hand in what's been called the worst natural disaster in Canadian history” (8). After focusing on individual employee testimonials, in the third paragraph the article shifts to the role the organization as a whole played, representing AFC as a company that cares about not only its members but also the community (in this case the province) at large:

In support of the relief effort, the AFC Foundation has made a [dollar amount] donation to the Red Cross. Human Resources [...] and other departments did what they could to deal with the business issues and ease personal suffering. Also, employees across the country opened up their hearts and wallets to lend a helping hand.

“The AFC Foundation has a long history of responding to crisis situations,” says Michael Jones, Vice President, Quality Services and Public Affairs & Communications. “When it became apparent what a devastating effect the ice storm would have on the people of Quebec, the Foundation wanted to provide some assistance.” (8-9)
The article is careful to show that the organization gave money, but individual employees also donated household necessities:

In addition to the Foundation donation, AFC employees answered the call to action. When Brigitta Meyer, a Consultant in Bytown, saw the reports on television, she wanted to do something. So she put up posters requesting donations and the items just poured in. "People were so generous," says Brigitta. "My storage room was filled with everything from diapers, baby food and formula to toothpaste and soap." (9) In emphasizing AFC as one big extended family and a leading member of the community, the Ice Storm article offers a more co-operative and relational view of the corporation, "as community, a group of people working together for (more or less) shared goals and with [a] [...] shared culture" (Solomon 151). However, Nadesan sees managerial discourse that emphasizes community as posing a potential hazard when it functions instead of rather than in addition to community. Identifying what she terms the discourse of "New Age corporate Spiritualism," she warns that organizations risk becoming substitutes for community and family: "Rather than addressing the erosion of community and family time the discourse of New Age corporate spiritualism offers the corporation as a stand-in for community and family" (19). Burke imputes cynical motives to corporations' philanthropic activities, which he argues are motivated by a "psychology of service" (Attitudes Toward History 163). According to Burke, businesses' social services are simply about "paying something to society. It is the discharging of a debt. [...] liberal apologetics finally gets back to "social service" as the "justification" of business enterprise" (Toward History, 163-64). But we must be careful not to throw out the baby with the bath water so to speak. AFC's involvement in the community has made a difference, as the Ice Storm illustrates, 170
particularly given cutbacks to government services in the 1990s and beyond. In Canada, the federal and provincial governments have been systematically "offloaded" many social services to the local governments who have been unable to meet the demands for these services.

Although the effects of this article on its readers are beyond the scope of this study, DiSanza and Bullis show that when recognition is related to the organization and its mission, it is valued: "people depicted in these stories served as personifications for abstract organizational premises, such as volunteering, working one's way up through the ranks, caring about the organization's image, or devotion to the organization (372). Notably, the Ice Storm article ties recognition of individuals and the organization as a whole to key AFC values. Conversely, any major dissonance between the official corporate line and the reality of employees' working lives (such as the reengineering article) risks engendering resistance. Rather than having the desired effect of identification, such dissonance can result in what DiSanza and Bullis term "disidentification" responses: "Whereas identification is associated with feelings of commitment, membership, similarity, and loyalty, disidentification is associated with feelings of disconnection, separateness, and exclusion from the organization" (380). Not surprisingly, DiSanza and Bullis found that "when employees see contradictions between the premises expressed in the newsmagazine and their own experiences, they are less likely to identify with the organization" (381).

Epideictic rhetoric is helpful for elucidating some of the strategies at work in the "Travel Counsellors" and other AFC Press articles. Elisabeth M. Alford 171
argues that the field of composition has not fully appreciated “the critical function of epideictic rhetoric” in business and technical communication (146-47), a task that I take up here. Aristotle’s understanding of epideictic is particularly helpful for understanding how the airline strike article uses praise to reinforce loyalty to the organization, loyalty that is demonstrated through the company values of hard work and dedication to clients and customers:

Praise and deliberations are part of a common species [eidos] in that what one might propose in deliberation becomes encomia when the form of expression is changed. When, therefore, we know what should be done and what sort of person someone should be, [to use this in deliberative oratory] we should change the form of expression and convert these points into propositions [. . .]. Thus, when you want to praise, see what would be the underlying proposition; and when you want to set out proposals in deliberation, see what you would praise. (Book 1 Ch. 9 35-36)

Thus praise is used to forward specific propositions and conversely, specific propositions are used to praise. In other words, Aristotle posits a fluid boundary between epideictic and deliberative rhetoric: epideictic rhetoric functions also as deliberative rhetoric, for by praising past actions the rhetor encourages the audience to act in a like manner in the future. Like Aristotle, Perelman and Olbrechts-Tyteca argue that although epideictic rhetoric does not call for immediate action, it is nevertheless a powerful persuasive force that “strengthens the disposition toward action by increasing adherence to the values it lauds” (50).

The article’s dramatic opening paragraph sets the scene for the crisis:

“When Air Canada pilots went on strike September 1st, AFC braced itself for the financial impact resulting from the grounding of Air Canada. And AFC Travel Staff prepared themselves for long days, lunch at their desks, constant

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pressure—and they weren’t far from wrong” (October 1998 1). The article advances the proposition that in the event of another crisis, employees should work equally hard in order to meet the company’s goals. Although the article does not explicitly prescribe employee dedication and hard work, the encomium of the employees in the travel division encourages all employees to behave accordingly in the event of future crisis: “Our front line staff go above and beyond (what’s required) every day, but during the strike they really came through with flying colors” (October 1998 8). By cataloguing the effect of the extra demands made on employees both during and after the strike (whether in the form of “long hours, missed lunches, or long-distance calls made from home”) the article not only reinforces the values of hard work but inscribes exceptional service as a company norm.

Tellingly, it is assumed that employees will off-set potential losses by working longer hours. The VP of Travel is determined to achieve corporate objectives even in the face of the crisis: “this will in no way detract [sic] us from our course. We will exceed all of our goals again in 1998 and are well positioned to expand our market leadership position again in 1999” (1). Alternatives such as hiring temporary staff to ease the workload or paying employees overtime are conspicuously absent from the article. Instead, employees’ compensation is gratitude from customers and business partners: “’Accolades from customers and suppliers have been pouring in describing the professionalism and commitment to service by AFC staff,’ says Kim” (8).
The relationship between customer service employee and client echoes a courtship model in which the customer (in this case male) expresses gratitude to the employee through gifts of flowers:

floral arrangements and notes of appreciation were delivered throughout the strike from grateful customers. A particularly impressive bouquet was delivered to Jennifer [. . .]. She smoothly rearranged the flights of an 88-year-old professor scheduled to lecture in Switzerland in early September. Jennifer’s highly valued personalized service included several calls to the professor in Europe, even from her home due to the time difference. Jennifer also found protected seats for a Canadian family attending a reunion in France—all twelve of them [. . .]. (1)

This example presents AFC as valuing customers (who are generally professionals) and prepared to go to great lengths to solicit their gratitude. But whereas relationships among employees and with competitors are described in sports or military terms (clients are alternately “won” and “lost,” and competition is “fierce”), the agent-customer relationship is cast in therapeutic language: “counsellors [. . .] go above and beyond” to help clients.

The values of teamwork or collaboration and self-sacrifice are emphasized throughout the article: employees are troops—from the “front line” customer service employees to senior management—that must be marshaled when the occasion demands it: “‘The counsellors were really stretched,’ reports Tammy, ‘But everyone pitched in to help. We were helping the counsellors while they were hand-holding the customers. Everyone pitched in to deliver lunches and snacks to the counsellors, and to batch tickets’” (8). The work of the front-line

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13 Betty Lehan Harragan explains the origins of such gendered language: “While proper literary English became the predominant speech of the isolated female tribes, the jargon of business as a cultural vernacular descended from the all-male military-sports tribes” (69). The corporation itself is a highly gendered construct, as Robert Solomon argues, one that is “often structured as a

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customer service employees such as Jennifer is praised, but it is presented as possible only with the help of the organization as a whole, especially management. In fact “effective communication,” namely, information disseminated downward from senior managers, is presented as key not only to handling but capitalizing on the crisis:

Throughout the strike a program of highly effective communications from head office not only helped everyone weather the storm but actually created value from the strike experience. “We got great support from Supplier Relations,” says Karen. “Hilary sent us a steady stream of e-mail with information on changes and updates, which we then faxed to customers. We received many calls of thanks for this helpful information.” (8)

Moreover, AFC’s astute management is credited with ensuring that employees and customers fared better than their competitors during the strike: “Despite their frantic workdays, employees realized that pressures at other travel agencies were worse. Thanks to a proactive strategy implemented by AFC, the impact of the walkout was reduced for our clients” (8). Unlike the Ice Storm article that presents a more relational view of the corporation, in emphasizing the role that downward communication played in maintaining AFC’s status as an industry leader, the airline strike article subscribes to what Robert Solomon identifies as the more traditional military metaphor of the corporation “as a (predominantly male) hierarchical chain of command whose primary purpose is to beat the competition” (151).

This strategy of idealizing and dramatizing employees' achievements echoes campaigns of the late 1920s when organizations like the Pennsylvania
Railway Company used letters from grateful customers to instill in employees the service ideal (Marchand 126). But while such campaigns were aimed exclusively at employee audiences, the AFC article on the airline strike suggests the presence of a watchdog audience: the airline industry. (For an elaborated discussion of a watchdog audience, see Brown). Although one of the key strategies employed is the praising of employees, the article does more than merely affirm company values of employee industriousness. Rather, it justifies the organization’s very role in the travel industry. The article criticizes the airlines’ undermining of the travel agents’ economic power in recent years, and ends by reaffirming the vital role of these employees: “In light of recent questioning by airlines over [travel counsellors’] role and effectiveness, and despite two rounds of commission caps, our travel agents truly proved their worth to customers and the public” (8). Although ostensibly aimed at the employee audience, in refuting attacks by external stakeholders such as the airlines, the article’s audience potentially includes key industry players such as the airlines.

To summarize, the AFC Press article on the airline strike functions as epideictic rhetoric: in praising employees, it articulates a vision of the good employee and thereby advances the specific proposition, that, in the event of another crisis employees should work equally hard to meet the company’s goals. While the article does not explicitly prescribe employee dedication and hard

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14 The Pennsylvania Railway Company’s campaign of the 1920s offers a prime example of how a disjunction between an organization’s communication strategies and actions renders potentially powerful rhetoric mere verbiage. The Pennsylvania Railway company’s campaign of praise for its
work in the future, all employees are implicitly encouraged to behave accordingly. By interpellating employees in this way, the article is true to the origins of employee newsmagazines, which according to Yates, began “as a form of downward communication, ultimately aimed at improving cooperation, control, and efficiency” but indirectly rather than directly (17).

**Ritual, Recognition, and Celebration:**

**AFC's Town Hall Meetings as Corporate Theater**

Few perks are cheaper, easier, or more effective than recognition.” (Caggiano 107).

In “Rethinking Genre in School and Society” David Russell calls for a broader unit of analysis than strictly oral and written utterances, arguing that “The ongoing social practices in which speaking and writing operate also use a host of nonlinguistic tools: buildings, machines, demarcated physical space, financial resources, data strings, and so on” (507). The organization of space of AFC’s town hall meetings provides insight regarding their role within the organization: they are rituals of a particular kind, entertainment events that are more theatrical than blue-chip in style. Held in a darkened area of the cafeteria, the meeting space is separated from the rest of the atrium-style room by heavy, black theatrical curtains. The focal point of the room is a lectern (illuminated and equipped with microphones) stationed on a podium at the front and center of the room where the presenters speak and two large screens which flank the lectern workers was followed by massive lay-offs and pension cutting, undermining the campaign’s success with rank-and-file employees.
and are framed by navy velvet curtains. At least one of these large screens is visible from any position in the room, suggesting the key role of visual elements. Up-tempo music blares from large speakers both before and during the meeting at crucial junctures. The professional lighting and sound systems add to the impression of being at the movies rather than in a business meeting. The employee audience sits in relative darkness in folding chairs facing the lectern, arranged in rows; the lights above the audience are turned on only at the end of the meeting during the Q-and-A period when questions are permitted.

Like the organization of space, both the talk during and the metadiscourse about the meetings construct the town halls as performances. Speaking of an upcoming town hall, Peter, the manager responsible for its planning, referred to the “exciting line-up” and anticipated “standing room only” (3 June 1998). Another employee meeting I attended focused on the prestigious industry award for which AFC was competing. Delivering a presentation on the subject of AFC’s bid for the award, Michael likened the award to a “Canadian quality version of an Oscar” and jokingly referred to the examiners’ on-site visit at AFC as “like an Oprah Winfrey forum—not a Jerry Springer one” (23 October 1998). At a town hall later in the year, the President announced that AFC Canada had won the award, describing the previous evening’s ceremony as “like being at the Oscars” (23 October 1998 2). When AFC won the “Oscar” of the industry, a congratulatory message delivered by the Canadian Prime Minister via videotape was presented and the trophy was passed around for all employees to hold while the President joked that the award was like winning the “World Cup.”
What are the implications of constructing the town hall meetings as entertainment events? On one level, the entertainment form and references can be read as effective marketing that builds a consistent brand image. Such internal "branding" connects AFC's internal organizational identity with its external one as patron of the arts and entertainment industry. However, making these meetings into theatrical performances also serves additional purposes. Cultural critic and educator Neil Postman cautions in *Amusing Ourselves to Death: Public Discourse in the Age of Show Business* that when television, whose primary mode is entertainment (due to its visual nature), becomes the dominant cultural medium, discussion and debate are usurped by entertainment:

> how television stages the world becomes the model for how the world is to be staged. It is not merely that on the television screen entertainment is the metaphor for all discourse. It is that off the screen the same metaphor prevails. As typography once dictated the style of conducting politics, religion, business, law and other important social matters, television now takes command. In courtrooms, classrooms, operating rooms, churches and even airplanes, Americans no longer talk to each other, they entertain each other. They do not exchange ideas, they exchange images. They do not argue with propositions; they argue with good looks, celebrities and commercials. (92-93).

As I showed in chapter 3, entertainment is seen by communications practitioners as the form best suited for capturing the limited attention of today's employee audiences who are bombarded with information. But like Postman who asserts that entertainment media like television supplant reasoned discussion, Michael worries that the entertainment format of the town halls may be getting in the way of communicating the substance of the meetings (such as the organization's quarterly results and corporate goals and initiative) to employees (31 July 1998 3). Using Hollywood-style entertainment (such as the
references to AFC as an “Oscar-winning” company) is not only an attempt to capture the audience’s limited attention but it also serves an additional purpose: it ties the organization to a American-based culture industry, by implication anchoring the Canadian organization to its American parent. Constructing the town halls as entertainment events therefore subsumes national boundaries and differences under the rubric of a “global,” but what is really an American, brand and corporate identity.15

Just as the employee newsmagazine functions as epideictic rhetoric, so do AFC’s town hall meetings. Dale L. Sullivan’s notion of epideictic as “the rhetoric of orthodoxies” is also helpful for understanding the town halls (232). The five generic functions of epideictic rhetoric that he derives can all be applied to the town halls: (1) Education which teaches “a way of seeing” by inculcating key values such as putting customer satisfaction first; (2) legitimation (authorizing organizational leaders as representatives of the organization), (3) demonstration (the meeting itself “performed ritualistically before an audience of witnesses or observers”); (4) celebration (the employee awards and prizes and industry awards) and (5) criticism (the Q-and-A portion of the meeting).

Televised and virtual town hall meetings, usually in the form of political events, have mushroomed in recent years. According to historian Michael Schudson, “As recently as the 1992 election, Americans borrowed the notion of the town meeting to speak of electronic town meetings and electronic town halls.

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15 Bourdieu argues that where financial markets are concerned, “globalization is not homogenization; on the contrary, it is the extension of the hold of a small number of dominant nations [the United States in particular] over the whole set of national financial markets” (Acts of Resistance 38).
to justify the experiment of presidential candidates appearing to listen to the public on televised talk shows” (16). “Town meetings” or “town halls” (the terms are used interchangeably) have also become commonplace in a variety of organizational contexts to describe large meetings, particularly those that are open to all employees. Although scholars such as Bargiela-Chiappini and Harris have examined managerial meetings, all-employee meetings or “town halls” have been virtually ignored in the scholarly literature despite being an important communication event for many large organizations like AFC.

In Language Is Sermonic, rhetorical theorist Richard Weaver argues for the critical nature of naming: “it cannot be denied that single names set up expectancies of propositional embodiment” (87). Just as the name of AFC’s newsmagazine and its attendant generic features that mimic a newsstand publication set up particular audience expectancies such as an independent view, so the term “town-hall meeting” suggests, among other things, that these meetings are public, or at the very least, democratic events. They are public in the sense that they are open to all employees of the organization, rather than restricted to particular levels of management or divisions. But despite the town hall’s associations with the public sphere, those at AFC and at other corporations are private events, conducted in private spaces, as the many security measures to enter corporate headquarters indicate. Calling all-employee meetings “town halls,” an increasingly common practice within large organizations including universities as well as corporations casts—however unintentionally—a public and democratic veneer on an event that is neither.
The term “town hall” evokes a distinctively American rather than Canadian political tradition and the town hall itself all has become a potent symbol of American-style democracy. While “electronic town halls” are now popular events in Canada, the town hall meeting is an American political and cultural transplant, outside the Canadian tradition of parliamentary democracy, an adaptation of the United Kingdom's.

According to Michael Schudson, author of The Good Citizen: A History of American Civil Life, the current popularity of the term “town hall” is inspired by a nostalgic notion of the 18th-century New England town meeting that Americans have come to revere as the ideal democratic forum (16). However, as Schudson argues, these town-hall meetings were far from models of pure democracy since the agenda was usually set by a land-owning elite and attendance was frequently poor (16). Above all, he objects to the reification of New England town meetings because it ignores the drive to consensus and conformity that characterized them:

The most telling point against the picture of the New England town meeting as the model democratic institution is not the limited participation in decision-making but the normative presumption that open discussion of differences was to be avoided at all costs. The object of the meeting was order, not representation. There was nothing in the town meeting to show special respect to the individual or to honor and respect differences of opinion. The New England town fathers praised “harmony, conformity, and consensus.” Real freedom (though they would not have formulated it precisely this way) was possible only within a community of like-minded men. (18)

Schudson’s analysis of New England town meetings raises important questions about those of AFC, particularly how they act as a normative force within the organization.
Aristotle's notion of epideictic rhetoric as the mode of rhetoric concerned with "the ceremonial oratory of display" is helpful for understanding the use of praise to forward specific propositions not only in AFC Press, but also at the town hall meetings (32). Like Charlotte Thralls, I understand corporate documents and events as rituals that do far more than relay information to employees: rituals build culture. AFC's town hall meetings function as what Thralls terms "rites of integration" and "rites of enhancement," the former bringing people together across distance (and in this case also rank and division) and the latter building culture (381). The town halls provide the sole occasion where all employees who work at headquarters come together and share a common physical place, despite differences in rank or division. Their regularity and repetitive structure and the fact that their content is almost identical to that found in other communications vehicles like the company newsmagazine suggests that these meetings attempt to do more than merely present information such as quarterly earnings and targets to employees. The town halls at AFC are ritual events that emphasize the role of both rank-and-file employees and organizational leaders. These meetings are ceremonial occasions where organizational values are reinforced and part of the process of employee acculturation that fosters identification.

Argenti criticizes large meetings because of the alienation they potentially engender between management and employees and recommends of smaller lunch hour meetings in more informal settings: "Some companies, such as Anheuser-Busch, stage elaborate multimedia events, which employees and spouses are invited to attend in the evening. These annual meetings, which usually feature the most senior executives, may only increase the separation
between management and employees” (203). However, my participants believe that AFC’s meetings are particularly well executed and effective. And whereas many organizations hold all-employee meetings only on an ad hoc or reactive basis (for example, in response to a crisis such as massive lay-offs), AFC’s town halls are quarterly events, following the organization’s corporate calendar.

The importance of these events, at least from the perspective of senior management, is evident in the substantial resources devoted to these meetings. They are elaborate multimedia events that pose a considerable logistical challenge for those who organize them: they entail writing speeches and coordinating audiovisuals as well as bringing together roughly a thousand employees at each “performance,” (the remaining 2,000 attend the additional town halls scheduled throughout the week) including the Canadian President and members of the executive team. Although AFC’s town halls in theory have been open to all employees since the inaugural meeting in 1994, the inclusion of all employees has been a struggle. Many of the blue-collar employees who work in the call center serving customers over the phone have only recently been able to attend because they are not permitted to leave their desks during their shifts. To accommodate the shift workers’ schedules, the same town hall is now repeated several times during the week. The executive team also travels across Canada on a “road show” to deliver presentations at many of the offices.

As part of the ritual of each meeting, both monetary rewards and symbolic recognition are accorded to employee “winners” whose names are posted on the
jumbo screens and called aloud by the President as they proceed to the podium to receive their awards. These AFC leaders function as members of the priesthood and the employees as the congregation. Through the recognition program, the leaders bestow beatification on employees, if not a big salary or year-end bonus and power. The President and at least one member of the executive team not only attend but speak at each meeting, suggesting the importance that he and the other company leaders ascribe to these events. Although speeches are written by the communication group, they are in effect authorized by the executives who deliver or perform them.

While senior management "speak" (both in the newsletter and in town hall speeches) in the first-person, lower-ranking female employees are spoken about. Although Cheney identifies employee testimonials as a strategy used in newsletters, he does not address the significance of testimonials and how they are used differently from stories, particularly the issue of who gets to speak and who is spoken about: The carefully scripted speeches (each speech goes through several drafts before the meeting) that comprise the town halls follow a strikingly familiar pattern: heroic employees, usually but not always frontline customer service representatives, rescue AFC customers. At one meeting, the President recounts a story about a stranded international business customer bereft of everything but the clothes on his back and his status as a customer. The customer is rescued by Elena, a dedicated and resourceful AFC employee:

16 Not surprisingly, those members of the communication group who were most aware of the exclusivity of many of the employee events were those who had both formerly worked in the call center.
We have Great Performers like Elena Edwards, a travel consultant. Elena received a panicked call from a Platinum Customer who was in flight on Singapore Airlines from London to Singapore. His flight had originated in BigCity on Air Canada but his one piece of luggage had not gotten onto the connecting flight. And, to top it all off, he had a presentation to give the next morning—and he was wearing jeans!

Elena spent a good part of the day at the office in contact with Air Canada and Air Singapore trying to track down the luggage. She even took the file home to continue the search. Racking her brain for a contingency plan, Elena contacted the concierge at the hotel [where] the Customer was scheduled to stay to see if it would be possible to have a suit waiting for him. She contacted the Customer for his measurements and any accessories he required. When he arrived at the hotel, a new suit and accessories [were] waiting for him. By the way, Elena later found out that the client also got his lucrative contract. (President’s speech March 1998)

Elena’s ingenuity is credited with saving both the client and the organization whom the business traveler was representing. Rewarding (cash prizes are given out in varying amounts) and praising in as visible a fashion as possible employees who conform to the AFC service ideal inscribes “exceptional” behavior as an organizational norm. In recounting the deeds of these employee heroines (for most of them are women) who do whatever it takes to serve their customers, these narratives idealize the work of employees, in effect, selling the service ideal. According to DiSanza and Bullis, if employee recognition is to unite employees, including those who are geographically dispersed such as is the case of AFC, then it must be tied to its “mission,” that is, its key goals and values: “if people are going to read and identify with people recognized in the newsmagazine, recognition should be for something related to the organization’s mission. Empty recognition or gag citations, although fun for

17 While capitals are often used in the town hall speech scripts to indicate to the reader which words to emphasize, it is interesting to note that “customer” is often capitalized. This
the people directly involved [...] may not be read by those in more distant quarters" (394).

A presidential speech at another town hall meeting presents customers as travelers who require the intervention of dedicated AFC employees. The President commends the award-winning employees, "great performers" who work around the clock to help clients deal with language barriers and border crossings:

Great Performers like Sheila Maloney of Travel Services helped a French-speaking customer whose car had been towed from a lot at JFK Airport in New York. Since the Canadian Embassy refused to help, Sheila worked with Traveler's Aid in New York and local authorities to have the customer's car released. Or someone like Tina Lee of [a division] in Bytown who helped a frantic customer whose purse had been stolen in Denver and was due to board a plane in a few hours. Tina immediately contacted Customs and Immigration, the airline and local authorities to make arrangements. The very grateful customer returned home without further incident. (25 March 1998 6)

All of the examples of outstanding service depict customers who are traveling outside Canada, and AFC is able to intervene on their behalf when not even the Canadian Embassy can help. Thus, these stories emphasize AFC's role as particularly valuable in where commercial ties are stronger than national ones.

In addition to these recognition ceremonies, all four town halls I observed shared a similar structure: they were built around a theme such as "Quality" or "Employee Involvement" and featured presentations by the President and at least one other member of the executive team and sometimes by a visitor (in one case from the American headquarters). The presentations were followed by a question-and-answer period (the "Q & A" as it is called at AFC) at the end of the

capitalization also fits in with the AFC service ideal of the customer as King.

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meeting. The town halls, like the newsmagazine, focus on the progress the organization has made towards its goals during the past quarter, as well as upcoming targets, all of which are determined by the American executives with input from the Canadian team. Peter, as manager of employee communication, works closely with the senior executives to select the theme for each meeting, write the speeches, and co-ordinate the accompanying visuals, but the executives retain final say as to what is included.

The themes of the AFC meetings are variations on the management discourse of TQM, which Barley and Kunda argue has been highly influential during the past twenty years or so in shaping organizational language and values: “From 1980 until the present, managerial discourse has been oriented toward continuous quality improvement, forming a normative ideology for contemporary organizational cultures” (qtd. in Zachry 108). Zachry identifies three tenets associated with TQM, two of which figure prominently in AFC’s town hall meetings: (1) “Economic performance in turbulent environments requires the commitment of employees who make no distinction between their own welfare and the welfare of the firm” and (2) shared values and emotional commitment area essential to “foster financial gain” (110).

After the company won an industry award, for example, the President’s speech emphasized values drawn from the discourse of TQM such as “quality” and “teamwork”:

The award’s criteria and our corporate values have a lot in common. They share a commitment to placing the interests of clients and
customers first; a continuous quest for quality and improvement in our business processes; a dedication to Human Resources development and treating our employees with respect; and a sense of teamwork and common purpose throughout our organization. (23 October 1998 3)

The President’s speech presents what Zachry identifies as a “stock theme” of TQM: “Survival of the Fittest.” The speech announces that the organization has won the industry award and praises employees for their hard work: “Because our employees contribute to our success, we want you to share in it” (23 October 1998 1). However, celebration is curtailed in order to focus on future challenges the organization faces:

While this is an achievement that we should certainly take some time out to celebrate, its real value will be in how we can use it to generate even more momentum to improve our business and our results. Rest assured that we won’t rest on our laurels after this win. We can use the feedback from [the award] to point us in the direction of how we can continue to improve the way we run our business. (23 October 1998 4)

Rather than using positive emphasis (by highlighting the company’s success in winning the award) the speech abruptly turns from celebration to warning. It cautions that in such a competitive marketplace, survival requires growth; therefore to “rest on one’s laurels” is to risk extinction. In urging employees not to dwell on the organization’s recent success because of the threat from unnamed competitors and other market forces, the speech subscribes to the TQM “Survival of The Fittest” tenet:

Getting recognition within the company, and externally with things like our award is great. But we need to remain practical and keep our feet on the ground. The business is getting tougher. More players are coming into this market, and we are seeing the merger of some of the banks who are already big and tough competitors, and will only get bigger and tougher. And with the current wave of uncertainty in the economy, the level of success we have seen recently is going to be hard to sustain. I can only tell you that we...
are working through how we can keep this momentum going, no matter how hard it gets, and I can tell you that we will have to try to have some fun along the way. (23 October 1998 16-17)

Like the article on reengineering I analyzed in the previous chapter, business is presented as a game where the biggest and toughest win. Given this strong emphasis, the promise that they will "try to have some fun along the way" seems rather disingenuous, a mere afterthought that contradicts the overt warning of the speech. At the same time, in view of the subsequent downturn in the economy, this cautious strategy seems justified.

**Inscribing Goals and Values and Interpellating Employees through Storytelling: AFC Press as Epideictic**

Rhetoricians, from political speakers to public relations practitioners, must cast their appeals in terms of stories if they expect to be heard and understood. Complex social and political issues are cast into the forms of half-hour sitcoms. Political speakers embody ideals of civic virtue in particular heroes and heroines and then tell stories about them. Public relations has become the practice of telling and managing stories that are told about people, institutions, and groups. (Brummett 22)

The practitioner literature represents storytelling as an important means of "selling" decisions to employees. Beverly Sosnin's "Time-Tested Story Ideas," for example, presents a series of topoi for employee newsmagazines (110). Another article aimed at practitioners, "Story Telling: A Powerful Form of Communication," presents storytelling as a virtual panacea for organizational communication woes:

If you're worried about losing your audience to fact fog, data smog and information overkill try story telling. If you want your audience to have an emotional response to your communication—not just an 190
give story telling a try. And if you want a better way
to sell products, services and ideas; build corporate culture; and polish
your executives’ leadership image [ . . . ] storytelling may well be the
answer. (Wylie 1)

Wylie also quotes a CEO who proclaims that “Storytelling is the ultimate sales
technique” (International Association of Business Communication). A
communication manager at the conference of the International Association of
Business Communication (IABC), the practitioner organization, calls leaders in
the field “executive rhetoricians” (1). Stories are considered effective because
they function as pathetic appeals, targeting employees’ emotions rather than
intellects, thereby bypassing their critical faculties.

Scholar Dennis Mumby also argues that narrative is authoritative discourse
that can bypass readers’ critical faculties:

Stories are an exceptionally powerful means of constructing and
maintaining an organization’s underlying mode of rationality,
providing a vision of the organization which is relatively complete,
stable, and removed from scrutiny. In this sense, narrative has a level
of authority that excludes it from the normal rigors of discursive
validity testing. (125)

Unlike practitioners, he is critical of the use of stories in organizational
communication because he sees organizational narratives as functioning
ideologically, presenting events as moral dramas that reinforce particular values
and behaviors: “power relations are reproduced discursively insofar as narrative
strives for closure by portraying events as essentially moral dramas—dramas in
which a particular set of values are given legitimacy and authority. Stories, in
this sense, embody the ideal of the political reality they portray” (114). But stories
do more than merely acculturate members, according to Mumby: they
potentially “serve the dominant ideology by interpellating subjects and
qualifying them for certain kinds of participation in organizational life. Such participation may involve the acceptance of and commitment to interests that serve only a small number of organizational members—those in positions of power” (104).

Mumby articulates the key role that stories play in socializing organizational members and inculcating values: “Much of the process of relating group experience and intelligence takes place in the form of ritual. The ritualistic quality of narrative is important not so much for its information value, but rather for the role that it plays in instantiating and legitimating a particular set of morals and values” (112). Zachry also argues that organizational narratives inscribe subject positions for employees: “In addition to establishing control, the stories that circulate in the workplace form identities for individuals by introducing subject roles that can be occupied by organizational participants” (114).

In addition to these general tenets, Zachry identifies three stock scenarios associated with the discourse of TQM, two of which are also featured throughout AFC’s town hall meetings: (1) the resurrection of the fallen and (2) the survival of the fittest (which encompasses the exercise of patriotic duty). The first stock scenario is evident in many of the speeches given at the meetings that refer to AFC Canada prospering after having experienced difficulty in the early nineties. This “resurrection” scenario is linked to the second and even more prominent stock scenario: the survival of the fittest. This scenario is most relevant to employee communication because it constructs AFC’s success in outperforming competitors in a volatile global marketplace as contingent on its employees.
Leading a Global Organization

AFC Canada’s dependence on its American parent company presents certain communication challenges for the organization such as fostering employee identification across distance and national borders. Because AFC Canada’s compensation structure is tied to the international organization’s performance, for example, the Canadian executive team must find a way to help employees understand the implications of the international business without making the success of the Canadian company seem unimportant: “If people keep hearing over and over again how successful Canada is then they want compensation, but the problem is that the rest of the world isn’t necessarily doing well” (31 July 1998 3). In a sense, the communication group must act as cultural translators. So how does the communication group address this problem?

They do so first by encouraging employees to see themselves not only as Canadians but as AFC ambassadors or representatives for the organization. In a newsmagazine from the same quarter as the theme of the “employee ambassador” town hall I described earlier, employees are urged to become “ambassadors” for the worldwide brand and company (AFC Press June 1998 1). The use of the term “ambassador” is telling for it implicitly asks employees to pledge a form of allegiance to the international brand (employees are not asked to pledge allegiance to “AFC Canada” but “AFC Worldwide”), ignoring or at least subsuming the national (and regional) contexts with which individuals...
In other words, the communication program asks employees to be loyal to the global brand rather than the local organization. At the same time, the discourse of the town halls conflates citizens with consumers: a key part of the inducement to employees to become ambassadors of the organization is inviting them to become AFC customers, using its products and services: "We want each and every one of our 3,000 employees (a.k.a. Ambassadors) in Canada to carry and use [our products] to experience firsthand what it means to be an AFC member and to be advocates for our products and our Company" (AFC Press June 1998).

A second way the communication program attempts to foster identification across national boundaries is through company leaders, both at the national (Canadian) and international level. Many practitioners argue for the increasing value of the organizational leader (usually the CEO) as symbolic communicator, whose job "is not sending out a lot of words; it is walking the dog and doing very carefully characterized things that truly symbolize the values, or the mission, or whatever it is you are up to at the moment" (Jackson qtd. in "Practitioner Interviews" 316). At AFC the company leaders personalize employees' obligation, so that employee duty is not merely to an impersonal corporation but to the leaders themselves:

over the next couple of months we will be refining our thinking and filling in some of the details of what all this means for us in Canada [...]. You will be hearing more about this as we bring our goals for Canada into sharper focus and to [sic] make sure everyone in our organization understands what this will mean for them and what role they can play. I can tell you that the corporation is expecting a lot from

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19 For a discussion of how globalization, in forging alliances from commodity culture, has displaced geographical communities, see Rosemary Coombe.

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us. We have enjoyed some great success and the senior management of the International business and Lester Grey and Dan Jardine have come to rely on us to deliver. (President's speech 23 October 1998 16-17)

French theorist Pierre Bourdieu provides an important insight about the symbolic importance of organizational leaders. He argues that the authority of language resides not in any intrinsic properties of discourse itself but in the social conditions of production and reproduction, what he terms "authorized" language acts (Language and Symbolic Power 115). The power of the President and other executives therefore lies not in their discourse itself but in their role of agents as delegates (representing the American-based global organization) of the town hall ritual. By authorizing the foreign (that is, outside of Canada) organizational leaders and power structure. The town halls perform (using Dale Sullivan's terms) the "legitimation" function of epideictic rhetoric.

As I outlined in chapter 2, the change in corporate structure at AFC several years ago transformed the role of the Canadian President to essentially that of a figurehead. After the Canadian company had been losing money, the American parent company took some of the subsidiary's decision-making power away and instead dispersed power across the organization globally. Although the Canadian executive team is consistently visible and accessible at the town hall meetings and other events, the connection to the parent company is emphasized through the actual and video presence of executive representatives from headquarters. During the meeting when the industry award was announced, for example, a American executive offered congratulations to the Canadian company through a videotaped message. The Canadian executive team,
including the President, also makes clear the subordinate role of the Canadian
company, deferring to the American headquarters: "The starting point [for our
vision] is to be the strategic direction for AFC Company overall. That has to give
us our lead as to where we should take the Canadian business" (23 October 1998 3).

AFC's functional rather than geographic corporate structure (as I showed in
chapter 2, some executives report to London, others to New York or Paris)
reinforces loyalty to the organization over and above local, regional or national
affiliations. As Stuart Hall and other cultural critics argue, the new capitalist
strategy of globalization, in the form of Americanization or American hegemony,
relies on local leaders to maintain the illusion that the subsidiary has some
autonomy. According to Hall, transnational corporations such as AFC constitute
an example of economic elites that operate through local (and national)
frameworks, "stage-managing," so to speak, the pseudo-independence of the
subsidiaries. In other words, the local leaders (in the case of AFC, the Canadian
executives) appear to represent local interests but are really in the pocket of the
organization's international leaders (29). Fred Buell uses the term "global
cosmopolitans" to describe the new breed of managers whose primary
allegiances or identifications are organizational rather than geographical (291).
According to Buell, they represent "a new breed of identities based on mobility.
They were usually not émigrés or exiles, and never migrants. Instead, they are
'organization' people [. . .]." (291-92). They are members of multiple and
conflicting communities under global capitalism: "The individual is inserted into
heterogeneous and potentially conflicting contexts—nation, ethnic group,
occupational culture, gender, religion, class, and so forth—and thus participates in disjunctive, mutually interrupting imagined communities, each of which generates different mappings of the globe" (319). Tellingly, both the AFC Canada President and Michael, the VP of Communication, are from the United Kingdom so even the “local” stage managers of the Canadian organization’s independence are not Canadian, reflecting the high mobility within the organization at the level of senior management. The downside of this power structure is that the organization’s global strategy risks taking precedence over the interests of Canadian employees. For example, decisions about lay-offs, compensation and benefits, and communication practices are for the most part decided outside of Canada. AFC Canada’s lack of autonomy likely has an impact on employee satisfaction, the key indicator of the success of the employee communication. The communication group would therefore do well to address this issue.

Although the Canadian executive team is diverse in terms of gender and nationality (almost half of the executives women and at least two members were not Canadians) their language use and delivery, while far from homogeneous, is nonetheless distinctive from those of the American visitors. The “Canadian” executives (several of whom are not originally from Canada) rely heavily on humor—much of it self-deprecating—to establish their ethos. For example, Michael, a British national who has lived in Canada for six years, at one town hall approached the lectern with the remark, “Oh dear, I just stabbed myself with a pencil. Now you can see what lengths we’ll go to to bring these presentations to you!” In stark contrast, a newly appointed executive from the United States introduced himself by reeling off his accomplishments, “Before assuming this
role, I grew Business [X] and turned around Business [Y].” Describing his personal attributes, he referred to himself in highly individualistic and militaristic terms, as “aggressive, with a will to win, and fiercely competitive.” However, such attempts to use international leaders to unify employees can backfire. Whereas the Canadian audience clearly enjoyed Michael’s self-deprecating and ironic approach to his presentation (they seemed to laugh when he did), they guffawed and rolled their eyes at the US executive, perhaps because his thick Brooklyn accent was unfamiliar. In addition, his self-aggrandizing leadership style likely came across as bragging and clashed with Canadians’ more self-effacing one. In contrast, the leaders of the Canadian company, whether British or Canadian, were less overtly self-aggrandizing and in fact played down their role in the company’s achievements. Instead, they emphasized that the company’s achievements were due to the hard work of all employees. Moreover, just as Canadians are less inclined to and less comfortable with overt shows of patriotism such as displaying flags, they are less likely to embrace some of the corporate boosterism that American organizations employ. A better awareness of the lower-key Canadian style of leadership would undoubtedly make the town hall speakers more convincing to the Canadian audience.

Just as the texts (presented as speeches) and the delivery of these same texts highlights the organization’s dual identity as both a Canadian company and a global brand, so do the visuals presented at the meetings. Kenneth Burke argues that the force of visual appeals potentially enables them to defy logic and present
multiple (and potentially contradictory) meanings of images that function as implicit arguments:

there is a difference between an abstract term naming the "idea" of, say, security and a concrete image designed to stand for this idea, and to "place it before our very eyes." For one thing, if the image employs the full resources of the imagination, it will not represent merely one idea, but will contain a whole bundle of principles, even ones that would be mutually contradictory if reduced to their purely ideational equivalents. (*A Rhetoric of Motives* 87)

The graphics on the PowerPoint presentations reinforce the organization's dual identity as Canadian company and global brand with the Canadian flag often used in conjunction with the global logo. At one town hall meeting, a slide reads, "AFC Canada [...] one of the best companies in Canada." On the background of the slide is the Canadian flag and in the upper left hand corner is the AFC logo.

**Managing Dissent and Disidentification: the AFC "Q-and-A"**

Perelman and Olbrechts-Tyteca associate epideictic rhetoric with "those who, in a society, defend the traditional and accepted values, those which are the object of education, not the new and revolutionary values which stir up controversy and polemic" (48). We have seen that both the newsmagazine and AFC town halls function as epideictic rhetoric, upholding the organizational hierarchy and values. However, there is at least one important difference between them: as an oral rather than written medium, the town hall meetings cannot be entirely scripted. In the final segment of the meeting, the "Q-and-A" (question-and-answer period) the town halls allow for dissent, which the newsmagazine does not permit, although it could if it accepted letters to the editor and "op-ed" pieces and other articles with divergent viewpoints.
While the agenda of each of the town halls is set by the company leaders, rank-and-file employees are allowed to raise questions and concerns about company policies through the Q-and-A. Blank index cards and pencils for recording questions are distributed by members of the communication group to employees at the beginning of each meeting to ensure that questions can be asked with complete anonymity. The questions are then read aloud by members of the executive team and often by the President himself. These same executives attempt to answer the questions on the spot. Questions that are not answered at the meeting (from what I observed due to time constraints rather than censorship) are later answered in AFC Press.

Employees seemed to feel comfortable in asking the executives difficult questions. From issues of pay to parking, the Q-and-A disrupts—if only temporarily—the drive towards consensus that otherwise characterizes the meetings. Many employees openly expressed frustrations or dissatisfaction. At one meeting, after a rousing speech about AFC becoming "the number one service brand," the President read aloud from a cue card the following question from an employee: "It’s great to receive an award for being the best run company but when will we be the best paying company?" (23 October 1998 Field Notes Notebook 2, 6). The President’s muted response (in contrast to his usual jocularity) suggested that he was taken off guard: he remarked, “Well, there’s a connection between the two . . . I don’t know, maybe we’ll never be the best paying company . . .” (23 October 1998 Field Notes Notebook 2, 6) to which the audience visibly laughed and snickered.
That such questions are invited and read aloud might be interpreted as an attempt to democratize the decision-making process, except that major decisions are not being made; rather, they are simply being "sold." With respect to the issue of compensation that was raised repeatedly during the meetings, for example, no new policy was implemented during the time of my visits to AFC. However, the lack of available employee parking raised at one meeting was addressed several months later when the organization purchased new land and began building another parking lot. Although doing so was less costly to the organization than giving salary increases across the board, it nonetheless gave the impression to at least some employees that they were being heard by company leaders.

On a practical level, the Q-and-A sessions at AFC address a common organizational pitfall, namely, the dearth of opportunities for rank-and-file employees to be heard by management. According to Argenti, "The single largest criticism employees have of companies is that they do not encourage upward as well as downward communication" ("Strategic" 202). One of the communications executives Argenti interviewed emphasizes the importance of dialogue with employees, something that has until recently been ignored:

Traditional corporate communications, traditional internal or employee communication vehicles, are one-way. We have become such an interactive society that the opportunity to give feedback, the opportunity to respond back, is as critical in your employee communications as it is with customer communications. You've got to have vehicles that enable you to collect those questions; that's why two-way, whether it's face-to-face, teleconferencing, or video conferencing, enables you to have a real dialogue instead of the deployment of a message. I think that is a big distinction. We don't deploy messages; we deploy communications. We try to inspire dialogue. (Dulye qtd. in Argenti "Practitioner Interviews" 309)
Such dialogue is particularly important given the competing demands on employees’ time, attention and loyalty. Ashforth and Mael posit a postmodern notion of the individual as a constellation of complex and porous selves, which can engender ambivalence and resistance towards the often constraining definitions of self that organizations impose:

Individuals are embedded in a rich organizational context that more or less imposes definitions of self, although organizations differ widely in the degree to which the imposition is deliberate and the definitions are complete. Individuals, however, have multiple social and personal identities and so must limit the breadth and depth of any given identity. Thus, because the individual is not a tabula rasa onto which the organization can simply inscribe an identity, ambivalence and resistance tend to result. (99).

Ashford and Mael see resistance as an interpretive struggle that is waged between individuals and organizations: “a contest for meaning, a way of asserting or preserving a valued sense of identity independent of—or antagonistic to—the organization’s definition” (113). By including the Q-and-A period in the town hall meetings, AFC offers employees an opportunity for what Ashford and Mael term “authorized” resistance: “acts that are within the normative limits set by the organization itself [. . .].” (101). In other words, the issues raised by employees at the Q-and-A are authorized in that they are articulated by means of a forum sanctioned by the organization. However, to assume that the audience acts as passive and uncritical spectators would be to simplify the act of communication and deny employees agency. For as Zachry argues in his study of management narratives, employees are not passive dupes: “managers are not the sole storytellers at work—the managed are also participants in the shared exchange” (118).
Conclusion

Both the AFC newsmagazine and the town hall meetings function as epideictic genres within AFC Canada, designed to strengthen employees' adherence to the organization's values. Both these genres, in instantiating specific organizational values, interpellate particular subjectivities for employees: hardworking, dedicated employees who put the needs of customers—and thus AFC—before their own. Such internal strategies of control give employees the illusion that they have a choice in the matter: they can "choose" to be ambassadors for AFC. AFC uses strategies of identification not only to attract and retain employees and make existing employees work harder, but also to unify its geographically dispersed members. The newsletters and town hall meetings draw on several identification strategies that Cheney identified, such as stories about employees and employee testimonials to reinforce AFC's corporate identity as a caring family and good corporate citizen. The entertainment form of these events emphasizes the ritual and transformational rather than strictly informational role they play in AFC's corporate culture as well as tying the Canadian company to its American parent company.

In constructing the town halls as democratic forums (including the Q-and-A session at the end of the meeting), upper management suppresses dissent and disidentification, yet misses an opportunity for genuine deliberation or even conversation. While the meetings allow employees to blow off steam, they do not permit more meaningful exchange since they are almost exclusively monologic rather than dialogic, disseminating corporate strategy downward. Like the
newsmagazine, the town halls borrow the trappings of democracy without the substance. The AFC Ambassador Program (the campaign carried out by the communication group) defines employee involvement almost exclusively in terms of consumption: “If you work for AFC, you use AFC products.” In so doing the employee communication program not only commodifies employees but misses an opportunity to inscribe a more meaningful kind of organizational participation.
CHAPTER 6

CONCLUSIONS AND IMPLICATIONS

This study of employee communication matters not merely for business communication research but also for a broader understanding of the organizational cultures where many of us—our students included—spend our working lives. The organizational theorist, Deetz, argues that corporate values and practices matter because they are not confined to corporations; rather, they extend to life outside work, “providing personal identities, structuring time, constraining child rearing practices, influencing education and knowledge production, directing entertainment and news production, and defining and giving preference to consumption-based life styles” (32).

As Burke points out, because language shapes our reality, it is impossible to see without a “terministic screen” and its attendant ideology. In the organization I studied, one of the dominant terministic screens, and its underlying ideology, was a belief in the market and market forces as ends in themselves (what some have termed “neoliberalism”). Bourdieu argues that the role of the researcher/intellectual is to counter dominant discourses such as neoliberalism through the analysis of their production and circulation: “Against the doxa of neoliberalism, one has to try and defend oneself [. . .] by analyzing it and trying
to understand the mechanisms through which it is produced and imposed” (*Acts of Resistance* 31). A rhetorical approach to the study of corporate communication such as this one offers a means of not only understanding but also critiquing dominant value systems and power and knowledge structures.

I could have studied the communication group and the “vehicles” they compose from the perspective of how effective they are in “informing and motivating” employees, to use a catch phrase from management discourse. However, such an instrumental approach ignores the broader ethical and political implications of language use. By providing a picture of the writers and editors of the key genres of employee communication I have complemented DiSanza and Bullis’ and Foster’s work on the reception of employee publications. My findings show the difficulty organizational spokespersons can face in trying to serve the interests of both their all-employee audience and their “clients” (managers in other divisions). In showing how the role of the organizational spokesperson in a specific organization works and the tension between spokespersons and other organizational members concerning access to information, I have extended and complicated Debs’ theorizing of the “agency” relationship between writer and organization. Building also on Kleimann’s work, I have demonstrated how official spokespersons can be constrained in the document review process by more powerful senior managers, in what is a hierarchical mode of collaboration. While the vice president of communication and the communication group espoused an “open and honest” communication, they were constrained by other organizational members and their position within the organization.
Despite the constraints my participants faced, they were able to articulate their theories of writing and the relationship of writing to the corporate culture to a remarkable degree, particularly given the context of the workplace, which provides little occasion for reflection or reflexivity compared to writing in the academy. While scholars in business communication and rhetoric and composition have long argued for the need for student writers and writers in the workplace to understand discourse community and corporate culture, the group of workplace writers I studied understood that for their messages to pass the gate-keeping managers and resonate with the employee audience, they had to reflect the goals and values of AFC. At the same time, the broader education of the corporate communicators I studied (seen as a deficit by those who question their ability “to think like business people first”) made them attempt to think, write, and act as advocates for employees, arguing for greater information sharing and for greater sensitivity to the needs of the employee audience. Nonetheless, the group also had blind spots: some members expressed a rather naïve belief in AFC Press’s “independent” editorial stance.

This study of the newsmagazine and town hall meetings also suggests some of the very real ethical limits of key tenets of business communication: positive emphasis and negative messages. Like the metaphors of the organization as machine, positive emphasis (which accentuates the positive aspects rather than the negative aspects of a situation or a result) can serve to elide the human consequences of “downsizing” or lay-offs or of other corporate decisions. My analysis of the newsmagazine and town hall meetings shows how particular terminologies and metaphors can obscure agency and corporate responsibility. I
have emphasized how the mechanical metaphors of the organization and of organizational change such as reengineering elide the effects of corporate "strategy" on peoples' lives, letting the company off the hook for decisions that affect its employees adversely. For example, the "outsourcing" or closure of the mailroom entailed the loss of jobs for many employees. However, the decision was framed as a logical and inevitable course of action and blamed on the parent company.

But managers should be cautious about not only negative messages but positive ones as well because they (1) wish to avoid making false promises and (2) fear that too much good news could make employees complacent or raise expectations about compensation. In the case of AFC, layoffs during the early 1990s left employees feeling betrayed by the organization after having been assured by upper management that the future was golden. As a result, managers like Michael were circumspect about the organization's future prospects, even during a boom time. In addition, Michael was all too aware that employees have come to expect to share in their organization's success not only symbolically but financially.

This study also provides further support to Crombie and Samujh's work on how negative messages are used strategically to make writers (or in this case their "clients") appear to be problem solvers. For example, the story about the systems error emphasized how well the unit was fixing the problem. While a forthright approach to negative messages is important in securing employees' trust, I have shown that it can also be used to boost productivity by playing on employees' very real fears about losing their jobs. Moreover, I showed that most 208
of the negative messages in AFC Press do not contain new information. Thus, rather than breaking the bad news to employees, these articles instead "spin" the events, framing them in terms of the organizational master narrative.

In addition to understanding how such tenets of business communication work, I add to our understanding of narrative in business communication by demonstrating how stories instantiate particular organizational values and codify employee behavior. I show, for example, how narratives are used to construct notions of the good (and sometimes heroic) employee. I demonstrate how such narratives can reinscribe gender and class hierarchies by emphasizing, for example, the role of female service employees at the beck and call of male clients from the professional class. These female customer service employees are lauded for working evenings and weekends so that the (male) businessman can clinch his deal or the (male) professor can make it to his family reunion. In short, the face of the AFC service ideal is female.

Building on Zachry's analysis of the dominant management discourse of Total Quality Management, I show how AFC's employee communication program reinforces some of the tenets of TQM. First, the notion that economic survival in "turbulent times" requires the commitment of employees who make no distinction between their own welfare and the welfare of the firm is conveyed through stories of hardworking employees. Secondly, the TQM tenet that shared values and emotional commitment foster financial growth is emphasized by members of the communication group who claim that "this is a company we pour our hearts and souls into" (Parin 16 September 1998 2).
AFC Press is understood by all to function as official organizational discourse, a management tool supporting the organization’s business strategy. AFC Press competes with commercial mass media not only for the time and attention of the employee audience, but in some cases (such as the reports of AFC selling consumer information) with the media’s version of events. Since management cannot control all the information to which employees have access, it uses AFC Press to present its version, which it tries to present as “reality,” discounting the rumor mill and negative media reports as “spin.” In short, although AFC Press can clearly not serve the larger cultural function of a free press, it has adopted some of the form, format, and ethos of mass media in order to gain attention and boost its credibility.

My findings concerning the employee newsmagazine and the town hall meetings point out some of the ethical problems associated with the dominant instrumentalist notion that “good communication” is strictly about creating a favorable image of the organization and thereby boosting productivity. I showed how AFC’s newsmagazine and speeches inscribe a normative subject position for employees as dedicated, self-sacrificing workers who “choose” to place the organization’s interests first but also to act as “ambassadors” on its behalf, using and promoting its products and services. In defining employee involvement in terms of consumption, “If you work for AFC, you use AFC products,” the AFC Ambassador Program commodifies employee involvement and misses an opportunity to inscribe a more meaningful kind of organizational participation.

My analysis emphasized identification strategies in both the newsmagazine and town meetings. I explored the use of three identification strategies: employee
testimonials; the espousal of shared values equating family, organization, and nation; and the expression of concern for the individual member. In addition, I identified the strategy of stories told in the third person about exemplary employees. In her 1998 MLA Presidential address Elaine Showalter argues that academe can learn from corporations' emphasis on belonging:

Ironically, while academics have disdain for the supposedly corrupt values of business and for managers' manipulation techniques, the corporate world is far more attentive to human relations than the university is. In the corporate world executives understand that people must be able to work together, to share goals, to create community, in order to do their best, and modern management is largely about acquiring and applying the skills variously called "emotional intelligence," "team building," or "leadership." (326)

Showalter rightly calls into question some of academe's contempt for corporations; the very existence of the employee communication program at AFC and at other corporations supports Showalter's claim that corporations understand the importance of shared goals and a sense of community. Large organizations such as AFC have recognized the need for formal programs to help counteract the fragmentation and alienation that many employees experience. However, we need to examine carefully the nature of the goals and the kind of community being fostered and the uses to which they are put: do they contribute to the well-being of employees and their communities or are they simply a management tool designed to gain employee adherence and thereby increase efficiency and profits? While good morale may require that employees "feel they are insiders," true employee involvement is more than a feeling; it requires active participation—not a "pseudo-democracy," as Cheney argues (Values at Work xi).
My study provides support for Cheney’s (and Burke’s) theories about the workings of organizational identification. Whereas Cheney’s exploratory study of newsletters gave an overview of the identification strategies and tactics he found, my detailed analysis shows how one organization has alternatively constructed itself as a family, a member of the community, and a good corporate citizen using employee testimonials and other strategies to strengthen its identity and encourage employee identification. I also found an additional identification strategy: third-person stories. I showed how lower-ranking service employees were “spoken about” in the third person whereas senior management was allowed to speak for itself in the first person. Finally, I show the complexities of organizational identification for transnational and transcultural companies where cultural and national identities are in tension with that of the “global” (or at least the parent) organization. Because subsidiaries by nature have little autonomy, the parent company’s strategy does not necessarily consider the interests of employees in far-flung locations. Moreover, local leaders such as the Canadian president are often in the position of justifying to employees decisions made at the international level rather than addressing employees’ concerns. While organizations may encourage employees to identify not only with local but international leaders as a means of personalizing the organization, such efforts are difficult given cultural differences that inform leadership style.

This may well be the first study of corporate town halls from a rhetorical perspective. Building on Thralls’ work on corporate rituals, I have shown how the town meetings are a step towards socializing and unifying employees across geographical and cultural divides such as that between Operations employees.
and the white-collar employees in other divisions. These ceremonial occasions, structured as entertainment events, encourage employee identification with the organization but discourage the discussion and debate that Postman has argued are essential to meaningful participation. I have demonstrated that the emphasis on the recognition of employee “performers” suggests that the symbolic order is sometimes intended to compensate for rather than complement the practical order, including monetary compensation. As an AFC employee asked at a town hall meeting, “It’s great to win an award for being the best service brand, but when will we be the best paying one?” (Field Notes 23 October 1998 Notebook 2, 6).

Both AFC’s town hall meetings and employee publication function as epideictic rhetoric, reinforcing key values. My analysis has demonstrated how the “legitimation” function of epideictic rhetoric that Sullivan identified works in an organizational context, authorizing organizational goals or strategy as well as leaders who speak through these vehicles. The goals (“The Strategic Steps”) and values (the AFC Service Ideal) that these meetings instantiate are those that have been determined at the top of the corporate hierarchy by the parent company. The primary goal of the employee communication program is to unite employees around these goals, values, and leaders. I have shown that by representing the parent company and reminding employees of AFC Canada’s status as a subsidiary the leaders of the Canadian organization authorize the international organizational hierarchy. These leaders reinforce identification with the “global” (but what is in reality American) organization over and above national or regional affiliations. In addition, while the town halls function as “self-
confirming rituals” that bring employees together (Cheney, *Values at Work* 21), the employee newsmagazine offers the official version of organizational stories including the employee protagonists.

My study has demonstrated the renewed importance of epideictic rhetoric in organizational settings. I have shown that epideictic rhetoric can be antidemocratic, suppressing dissent since little, if any, formal rejoinder is permitted. This suppression of dissent makes it particularly attractive for organizational rhetoric, characterized by its drive to consensus. Notably, AFC’s epideictic rhetoric masquerades as deliberative rhetoric: most of the information is not new and the decisions have already been made. Therefore one of the most striking characteristics of AFC’s employee communication program is how it borrows heavily from the language of democracy without incorporating any of the practices of democracy. Corporations talk of being good “citizens,” serving the needs of their “constituencies,” and making employees “ambassadors.” At AFC, both the town meetings and *AFC Press* use not only the names but some of the formal characteristics of potent symbols of Western democracy (town meetings and the free press). As Kenneth Burke and Uwe Poerksen have shown, the transposition of language and metaphors from one field to another is not innocent. To begin with, such language masks the degree to which senior managers fail to give all employees adequate opportunities to participate in decision-making. Democratic language and rituals without the attendant practices give the impression that employees have a say when in fact they do not.

In addition to the “legitimation” function, education is an important function of epideictic rhetoric. Notably, the corporate communication
practitioner literature and the communication group defined "education" in terms of serving the organization's interests alone (rather than the interests of individual members or of the community).

My study contributes to the growing body of theoretical work in qualitative research in business communication and rhetoric and composition. The January 2002 special issue of *The Journal of Business Communication* on qualitative methods refers to a theoretical turn in business communication. My study contributes to and extends the growing body of work in business communication that draws on rhetorical and literary theory to theorize business communication practices. Like Sharon Livesey's "Global Warming Wars" that draws on Burke (and Foucault) to theorize business communication, my study uses rhetorical interpretive methods. I have also drawn on empirical data in the form of interviews and observation as well as an expanded notion of text that includes events (such as the town hall meetings) to complement my interpretive work.

Because the power relations between researcher and participants in the study of organizational rhetoric are different from other kinds of field work, organizational research presents several methodological challenges. Gaining access and maintaining ties with participants while engaging in a critique can prove difficult. Corporations are well positioned to deny or at least control access and thereby shape the outcome of research in ways that are not possible for less powerful groups such as students. For example, wealthy and powerful organizations are armed with legal departments that can be intimidating to researchers. Moreover, engaging in cultural critique risks betraying and or alienating participants and therefore compromising future research projects for 215
other scholars. This risk must, however, be weighed against the alternative of not undertaking such studies at all.

**Suggestions for Further Research**

Throughout the course of my research, I found myself wondering, "how does AFC's employee communication program compare to those of other corporations?" and after my presentation to the communication group a member asked me about "benchmarking,"—whether I had compared their employee communication program to those in other organizations. A logical follow-up study would be to undertake the same kind of analysis at other organizations, including nonprofits. A comparative study of employee communication programs would enrich our understanding of these genres.

Since my data collection at AFC in 1998, the economies of both the United States and Canada have slowed considerably. The financial services and travel industries have been hit particularly hard and AFC along with them. How are employee communication programs such as AFC’s different during times of economic boom and times of recession?

Because my study was authorized by senior management, I was able to obtain access to those responsible for shaping employee communication at AFC. However, the disadvantage of such management-sponsored research is that those lower down in the hierarchy are overlooked. Consequently, the study of the reception of an employee communication program would be a useful complementary study. How do employees view such programs and how are their views informed by their position within the organization? How do
Operations employees, for example read AFC Press and do they experience the town hall meetings differently than members of the organization in a different division or at a different level? Would the employees in the mailroom (or elsewhere) have preferred Peter's longer version of the article on the closure? Do the town hall meetings succeed in their goals? And what role does national identity and culture play in reception? How do national culture, corporate culture, and personal culture interact to shape reception?

All members of the communication group but one attended the same program in Public Relations. How did their education inform their understanding of their role within the organization and their rhetorical and collaborative practices?

A related issue is hierarchical collaboration, which needs to be examined, if only because of its ubiquity in the workplace.

I have explored how the language of the employee communication program constructs AFC's organizational identity, shaping its values and culture and interpellating employees. I cannot claim that AFC's employee communication program can be generalized to all large organizations. However, my findings show that AFC's communication program is informed by popular management discourses such as reengineering and Total Quality Management, which suggests that AFC's program at least in some respects typifies those of other large organizations. Moreover, because the notions of good communication (and how to achieve it) articulated by my participants mirrored so closely those expressed in the practitioner literature, an interesting follow-up study would be an examination of the reading practices of corporate communication.
professionals. For example, how (if at all) are they influenced by popular management discourse?

Some have questioned the future of the printed employee newsmagazine, arguing that it may be rendered obsolete as employees demand more personal and tailored information, which new technologies are capable of delivering via video and other electronic channels such as Intranets ("Paperless Companies?" 11). How are these emerging technologies transforming traditional print employee publications? While employee communication as it is practiced at AFC is primarily monologic, will it of necessity adapt to become more dialogic in the age of the Internet where employees have much easier access to external sources of information about the organization?

Given that much of the information communicated through the employee communication program at AFC is already known—including the negative messages—how are negative messages about information that is already known to readers different from those that present "news" (new information)? What, if any, different strategies are used and rules apply in such cases?

This study looked at identification in the Canadian subsidiary of a multinational, but does identification work differently in cultural contexts where there are even more pronounced differences between the national context of the subsidiary and that of the parent company? In a different manner, how does identification work in a purely national organization? And do the same critiques apply in different kinds of organizations?

The identification strategies and tactics Cheney identified and which I have built on included first- and third-person testimonials and stories. Further
attention is needed concerning how these strategies are used throughout organizational hierarchies. Who is entitled to “speak” in the first person and who in contrast is “scripted” by others?

A related intercultural question concerns the degree to which AFC adapts to other national and cultural contexts. Is AFC more sensitive about cultural differences with other countries such as Japan or France because the differences between the United States and Canada are more subtle?

Do the organizational identifications I analyzed at AFC preempt or squeeze out other identifications and therefore contribute to the decline in civic engagement that Robert Putnam outlines? Alternatively, do such organizational identifications strengthen existing identifications with family and community?

Implications for Practice

Although those who work in employee communication, as I have shown, may wish to act as advocates, they do not always the power. Nonetheless, they play an important role, particularly in bringing a broader perspective to the organization by helping to balance senior management’s narrow focus on strategy. Professional communicators who do not wish to be merely tools of management need to put a greater emphasis on listening to employees rather than merely presenting senior management’s official stories. While the communication group at AFC emphasized the importance of cultivating relationships with managers, few mentioned the value of connecting with rank-and-file employees. Cultivating relationships with employees at all levels of the organization would provide communication professionals with valuable insight,
which they could use to influence senior management. Finally, communication professionals need to educate senior management about the value of diverse points of view and authorized dissent within organizations.

I have shown that AFC (senior managers in particular) sometimes confuse disseminating information with engaging in communication. At AFC, "communication" almost inevitably involves top-down and one-way directives. However, managers would do well to reconceptualize communication as dialogic rather than monologic. Organizations like AFC could benefit by (1) continuing to hire communication professionals who are not "business people first"; (2) finding more ways of listening to employees than merely through surveys, which are often designed simply to confirm employee satisfaction rather than elicit meaningful feedback; and (3) adopting a broader notion of employee involvement, that is, one that does more than simply ask employees to become walking and talking advertisements for the company. In other words, senior managers in particular and organizations in general would benefit from borrowing not only the terminology of democracy but also some of its practices. For people will not suggest ideas if there is not a genuine invitation and if at least some of these ideas are not acted upon. To this end, AFC Press would be enriched by including not only letters from to the editor but also divergent view points on occasion. Moreover, rather than rigidly adhering to a predetermined agenda at every town hall, AFC would benefit from setting an agenda for only part of the meeting and allowing employees from various divisions to set the rest of the agenda on a rotating basis. In addition, the Q & A session should be expanded so that it becomes a more important part of the meeting rather than being tacked
onto the end. Particularly important for the Canadian company would be greater autonomy so that employees could shape local practices. Simply put, employees need a greater say in their organizations. As Cheney argues, “Though we may decide that it’s unrealistic in a particular case for all employees to have a shaping influence on corporate or organizational policy, we can say more confidently that everyone ought to have some capacity to affect the conditions and requirements of work” (Values at Work 160).

**Implications for Pedagogy**

My study has five main implications for business communication and rhetoric and composition pedagogy: (1) business communication pedagogy must continue to make ethical questions central rather than ancillary; (2) rhetoric and composition needs to broaden its notions of texts and “public” discourse; (3) epideictic rhetoric deserves greater attention in both business communication and rhetoric and composition; (4) both rhetoric and composition pedagogy and business communication pedagogy need to explore more thoroughly hierarchical collaboration; and (5) business communication pedagogy would benefit from the examination of power relations that has enriched rhetoric and composition pedagogy.

First, business communication needs to continue to integrate ethics into its pedagogy. Scholars such as Lamar Reinsch and Rentz and Debs have been calling for the inclusion of ethical issues into the business communication curriculum for some time. In recent years the some of the most well respected journals in business communication have devoted special issues to the subject.
The Journal of Business Communication devoted the Summer 1990 and April 1997 issues to ethics and Technical Communication Quarterly devoted its Summer 2001 issue to ethics. In terms of classroom publications, every major textbook discusses ethics. Nevertheless, in an already crowded and ever burgeoning curriculum it is difficult for teachers to cover all the content that students need to know. Consequently, it is all too easy to bypass altogether or approach the subject in a superficial way. A two-course sequence of business communication classes might alleviate the pressure somewhat, but a better way to address the problem would be abandon the goal of coverage in favor of a more detailed exploration of one or two genres such as a report or a proposal.

An additional means of contending with the overburdened curriculum would be to have students undertake case studies as part of a two-course sequence. The first course could lay some of the theoretical ground for the second course, which would involve field work. The major writing assignments would come out of the genres that the student encountered in the organization she or he studied. Such mini-internships could provide the opportunity for students to learn about reading organizations as well as their texts.

We must be careful not to turn universities into workplace training grounds, uncritically imitating forms without interrogating them. Nancy Roundy Blyler, for example, argues that we need to study employee publications simply to train our students to write them: "[the] discrepancy between newsletter practice and rhetorical theory should concern us because, as specialists in professional communication, we train the persons in organizations who compose for this growing number of newsletters. Such practitioners would be better off if
newsletter writing were better understood” (140). While I agree with Blyler that we need to better understand genres of business communication such as the newsletter, we need to do so not only to teach our students how to write newsletters, but to help them understand the ideologically inflected nature of these genres.

Instead of trying to replicate workplace “best practices” (to borrow a phrase from Total Quality Management) we need to encourage reflective practice in the classroom. For example, we make reflecting (in the form of a letter or journal entry) on the process of collaboration part of collaborative writing assignments where students have been assigned roles such as manager, supervisor, assistant, etc. By providing students with the tools for critical rather than merely instrumental literacy, we can lay the groundwork for such reflective practice in the workplace. Dias, Freedman, Medway, and Paré assert the value to the workplace of what happens in schools:

Schools afford space and time to acquire and fully understand theoretical concepts required for the workplace, concepts that can be learned, if at all, only on the run in the workplace and in the context of other work. Schools provide the opportunity as well, at certain levels at least, for learners to be critical of received notions, to consider alternatives, to speculate and hypothesize—options that are likely to be regarded as disruptive or simply unwarranted in most workplaces. (233)

In short, school can offer what many workplaces often do not: the occasion for critical reflection.

Secondly, rhetoric and composition pedagogies have long embraced critical reflection; however, the texts that have been deemed worthy of this attention have been too narrow in scope. The curriculum needs to reflect the wide array of
texts that students encounter in their daily lives. While many rhetoric and composition assignments ask students to analyze advertisements, students are seldom expected to analyze more subtle and, I would argue, equally insidious forms of advertising and marketing such as employee communication. After all, most of our students are employees even before they attend college. Moreover, while many composition and rhetoric anthologies and readers include political speeches, few, if any, include messages from CEOs (especially those that aim to influence public policy) who arguably wield as much if not more influence than many politicians. In short, we should examine business genres even in general rhetoric and composition classes.

Third, in addition to foregrounding political and ethical concerns, the business communication curriculum would do well to attend to epideictic genres such as newsletters, which have been largely overlooked. We would do well to include corporate communication genres such as newsmagazines into our curriculum, not necessarily writing them but at least analyzing them. Eisabeth M. Alford argues that although epideictic rhetoric has been devalued and outright neglected in composition, epideictic (as Perelman has shown) plays an important social role:

In the composition field, we do not fully appreciate the critical function of epideictic rhetoric, and we neglect to teach it. Indeed, we often disparage it, calling it slanted prose, propaganda, and similar epithets. All societies rely on epideictic rhetoric to reinforce adherence to values that are critical to the existence of the group. Without this constant reinforcement, values might “not prevail against other values that might come into conflict with them.” (146)

Alford rightly points out that epideictic rhetoric is not necessarily unethical and that the almost exclusive pedagogical focus on deliberative and forensic rhetorics...
has shortchanged students. Renewed attention to this genre, particularly how it is used to authorize or legitimate (as Sullivan argues) individuals and organizations, would enrich our students' understanding of rhetoric.

Furthermore, while "deliberative," "epideictic," and "forensic" are useful analytical categories, it would also be helpful to ask students to explore how they overlap. For example, how do discussions about values sometimes function as calls for action and vice versa?

Fourth, we need to teach students about the different kinds of collaboration, encouraging them to reflect on both dialogic and hierarchical modes. Understandably, rhetoric and composition pedagogy has emphasized dialogic collaboration but, as I have shown, workplace collaboration is often hierarchical in nature. It would be helpful for students to gain experience with this kind of collaborative model as well. We might design collaborative writing assignments where one or more students are given authority in the review cycle. As part of the assignment, group members would have to write about how the group's power dynamic affected the document and what they learned as a result.

Finally, given the disparate understandings of "education" and "literacy" and "good communication" held by corporate communication professionals at AFC on the one hand, and educators in academic settings on the other hand, the issue of our responsibilities to students is a complex one. Business communication pedagogy, even more than composition and rhetoric, embodies a tension between practical concerns—getting the job done—and broader social, political and ethical issues. This is an irreconcilable tension and one we therefore
need to foreground in our teaching by exploring not only the "how to" but also "To what purposes and to what effects?"

Because of this tension, business communication would benefit from the kind of attention to the way that language is ideologically inflected that the composition classroom has seen in recent years. Rhetoricians and compositionists have interrogated issues of "voice," "academic discourse," and "authorship" and many others. In a similar manner, business communication teachers need to explore with students what it means to write in a "corporate voice," to use "positive emphasis," or to "implement strategy." To examine these "key words" and phrases of business communication is to raise not only political but ethical issues. These issues can be addressed through assignments that ask students to not only analyze different documents but to experiment in adopting different "voices" or "personae" in a rhetorical role play. The entire class might be asked to announce lay-offs within the organization, but different groups would have to assume different "voices" and employ different rhetorical strategies to convey the news. Such an assignments would help demonstrate to students that they have choices available to them.

When I interviewed for a position in professional writing in a department of English, several members of the search committee told me that they found my study interesting, but they had serious reservations about my teaching business and technical writing because my research involved a critique of theories and practices of business writing. They saw critique as incommensurate with business communication pedagogy. Ironically, some of these same scholars and teachers seemed to advocate a critical approach to the teaching of literature and

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rhetoric and composition. They saw ethics as incommensurate with teaching business communication, but this is so only if the goal of business communication pedagogy is to teach students how to write “better” in a strictly pragmatic sense. Professional communication is a powerful place to teach both ethics and ethos.

What pedagogical strategies would help our students examine the workings and effects of language and power relations? We can design assignments that ask students not only to produce (and reproduce) discourse but to analyze it; in other words, we need to take a metacritical approach. For example, we can have students not only produce genres of business communication but at the same time analyze how these genres inscribe the ethos of the writer, the organization, and the audiences and the relations among these. Moreover, we can, as Rentz and Debs have suggested, through the use of rhetorical analysis, help students to realize the power of language in sustaining or challenging an individual’s or an organization’s view. By connecting ethos to ethics, Rentz and Debs emphasize both individual and corporate responsibility.

Because newsmagazines are so pervasive, writing teachers (and not only those who teach business communication) must help provide students with critical reading strategies that look beyond surface features and instead probe the power relations of texts. We need to encourage our students to ask questions such as “whose interests are served by this text?” and “how does this text position readers?” Such reading strategies will help students become more astute readers not only of organizational texts, but also the cultures they inscribe.
If one of our primary goals is to encourage students to become good citizens not only of their "organizational worlds" but of society at large, then critique is part of civic responsibility and social change. This goal requires a pedagogy that foregrounds power relations, what Herndl and Nahrwold call "pedagogical strategies of praxis for introducing issues of power and the connection of discourse to social change—strategies that help students come to the understanding that language is value laden and context specific and that their uses of such language have ethical consequences" (291). As educators we need to use research on language practice in nonacademic settings to help students understand as well as critique the goals and values of the corporate cultures to which many of them aspire. Rather than simply preparing students to adapt to new discourse communities, we need to help them to become critics of these same communities so that they may, if they choose and if they are able, act as agents of change.
BIBLIOGRAPHY


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APPENDIX A:

NON-DISCLOSURE AGREEMENT

This shall confirm that in consideration of your providing to me various employee communication materials, scripts, management communiqués and the like which contain confidential, proprietary information of AFC Canada Inc. or their affiliates (collectively, “AFC”), I agree as follows:

- The term “Confidential Information” shall mean all information relating to the businesses, employees, strategy plans, pricing, methods, processes, financial data, lists, customers, apparatus, statistics, programs, research, development, business concepts, marketing strategy or related information of AFC, including past, present or future activities of AFC.

- I will regard and preserve as confidential all Confidential Information which may be obtained by me from any source. I shall not disclose to any third party Confidential Information or use any Confidential Information without first obtaining the written consent of AFC.

- I will provide to Michael Jones of AFC, or his designated representative, all papers or documents prepared by me which includes information obtained from AFC, for AFC’s prior review and approval so that any Confidential Information contained therein may be deleted by AFC before I provide them to any third party. I will make all deletions and/or changes requested by AFC.

- All Confidential Information and all rights, title and interest thereto shall remain the property of AFC.

- Upon the request of AFC, I shall promptly return to AFC all Confidential Information and copies thereof susceptible of being returned, or shall destroy such information and copies as directed by AFC.

- I further acknowledge and agree that, in the event of a breach or threatened breach by me of the provisions of this Agreement, AFC will have no adequate remedy in money or damages, and, accordingly, shall be entitled to an injunction against such breach. However, no specification in this Agreement of a specific legal or equitable remedy
- shall be construed as a waiver or prohibition of any legal or equitable remedies in the event of a breach of a provision of this Agreement.

- This Agreement shall be governed and interpreted in accordance with the laws applicable to the Province of Ontario.

- If any provision or any part of any provision of this Agreement is held to be unenforceable, invalid or illegal, then it shall be severable and deemed to be deleted and the remaining provisions shall remain valid and binding.

- My obligations under this Agreement may not be changed, released, discharged, abandoned or terminated, in whole or in part, except by an instrument in writing signed by AFC.

__________________________
Andrea Williams
CONSENT FOR PARTICIPATION IN SOCIAL AND BEHAVIORAL RESEARCH

I consent to participating in research entitled:

A Case Study of Corporate communication

Kitty O. Locker has...
(Principal Investigator)

explained the purpose of this study, the procedures to be followed, and the expected duration of my participation. Possible benefits of the study have been described.

I acknowledge that I have had the opportunity to obtain additional information regarding the study and that any questions I have raised have been answered to my full satisfaction. Further, I understand that I am free to withdraw consent at any time and to discontinue participation in the study without prejudice to me.

Finally, I acknowledge that I have read and fully understand the consent form. I sign it freely and voluntarily. A copy has been given to me.

Date: __________________________
Signed: _________________________

Signed: _________________________
(Principal Investigator)

Witness: ________________________

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APPENDIX C:
Written Summary of the Oral Presentation to Subjects
Concerning the Research Agreement

I agree to participate in Andrea Williams' dissertation project (with her advisor Kitty O. Locker serving as principal investigator), "A Case Study of Corporate Communication." The study proposes to examine the communications practices of a team of corporate communication specialists situated in a large, multinational financial services organization.

My participation will involve

• interviews with Andrea which she will audio tape only with my permission
• provision of documents—at my discretion—such as employee magazines, quarterly reports, and scripts of presentations
• observation of my communication practices such as presentations at meetings or my composing process

I have been informed that the data collection will be completed by the end of 1998.

Pseudonyms will be used in the write-up of this study to ensure the confidentiality of participants. Any identifying details, including those concerning the organization itself, will be altered to ensure confidentiality. A copy of the findings will be made available to me if I wish.

Date: ___________________________  Signed: ___________________________
       (Participant)

Signed: ___________________________
       (Principal Investigator)