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The Application of Rhetorical Theory in Managerial Research

A Literature Review

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Recent management research imports rhetorical scholarship into the study of
organizations. Although this cross-disciplinarity is heuristically promising, it
presents significant challenges. This article interrogates management's use of
rhetoric, contrasting it with communication studies. Five themes from manage-
ment research identify how rhetoric is used as an organizational hermeneutic:
The article demonstrates that management research conceptualizes rhetoric as
a theory and as an action; as the substance that maintains and/or challenges
organizational order; as being constitutive of individual and organizational
identity; as a managerial strategy for persuading followers; and as a frame-
work for narrative and rational organizational discourses. The authors argue
that organizational researchers who study rhetoric characterize persuasive
strategies as managers' most important actions.

Keywords: rhetoric; practicality; symbolism; enthymeme; rationality; narrative

R ecent work by management and organizational researchers draws heav-
ily on rhetorical scholarship. It imports well-established ideas such as
persuasion, power, ideology, argument, and manipulation into the study of
organizations. Although these uses of the rhetorical discipline are heuristi-
cally promising, they present several complications. Translating theory and
methodology from one scholarly enterprise to another creates challenges; it
is no simple matter transferring theories from one discipline to another—
specifically, the examination of speaking and writing to the study of how

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managers organize and lead. One important problem is that managerial journals frequently neglect to theorize their use of rhetorical concepts. The vocabulary is divorced from its original and requisite context. This separation leads to reliance on a theoretical framework that does not fulfill its interpretive potential. The initiative of interdisciplinarity is good; fine-tuning its practice would be even better.

Rhetorical scholarship's gravitational pull on management comes from language.[1] Specifically, rhetorical studies and management are concerned with power as it relates to language. There is an important tension within management's approaches to language and control. Many management scholars who use rhetorical terminology seem to be torn between different understandings of the rhetoric. On one hand, some scholars draw on rhetoric's centrality in organizational language writ large and treat it as a source of influence. On the other, many management scholars relegate it to a marginal position in human interactions and theorize it as being superficial or supplementary to substance (Goldberg & Markóczy, 2000; Hunt, 1994). For example, Kamoche (1995) distinguishes between rhetoric and plain speaking and thus creates a rift between language that is straightforward and perfunctory—with pure content being transferred from sender to receiver in line with the traditional conduit model of communication—and language that is used to control and possibly deceive. This recurring distinction classifies rhetoric as being separable from content, thus rendering it superfluous and even "impoverished" (Hunt, 1994, p. 222).

Our purpose in this article is to analyze and critique management's use of rhetoric.[2] As a point of departure for this literature review, we use the mere rhetoric position. Specifically, we begin by explaining the attitude that rhetoric is primarily manipulation and control. We respond to this view by contrasting it with communication studies. We spend most of the article surveying research in management that features alternative approaches to rhetoric—that is, those that use it heuristically to analyze organizations. To focus the scope of our inquiry, we do not include communication researchers or communication journals that use rhetoric to examine organizational communication. Such authors and journals are typically rooted in the history of rhetorical theory (Meisenbach & McMillan, 2006). Simply put, our main research question is, when management scholars observe the potential of rhetoric, rather than discard it as deception, how do they conceptualize and operationalize it? And what accounts for recent trends in these literatures that use a rhetorical approach to organizational communication? In our responses to these questions, we contend that a literature review is well warranted to trace emergent trends and to show how rhetoric is interpreted in managerial journals.

To pursue these questions, we organize the article along five themes extracted from the relevant literature in management and administrative policy journals. Following this logic, we invoke the assumptions of grounded theory and apply them to the management literature on rhetoric. Grounded theory analysis moves sequentially toward increasingly abstract representations of texts. Its aim is integration, which involves searching for the underlying uniformities in a set of themes produced by the analysis and formulating an idea with a smaller set of high-level concepts. This step "elaborates upon the category system by abstracting from it" (Glaser & Strauss, 1967, p. 110). It identifies core categories that account for most of the variation while maximizing the parsimony and scope of the theory (Strauss & Corbin, 1990). Each theme comprises a recurring way in which rhetoric is approached, theorized, and/or operationalized. Note that the themes are descriptive rather than prescriptive: They identify and explicate an existing trend.[3]

Integrated into each theme are references to relevant theorists and ideas in rhetorical studies. These references establish a contextual framework for those ideas that have most attracted management researchers. Their occasionally pedagogical tone comes from our conviction that management and communication scholars can be mutually productive allies, provided they are receptive to each other's theoretical foundations. The interdisciplinary form of our coauthorship facilitates a productive dialectical analysis: By drawing on our respective areas of expertise, we review the most common practices in organizational and management research and relate them to classical and contemporary rhetorical scholarship. The article turns now to the most important tie between rhetoric and organizations—the preoccupation with the language of control.

Rhetoric as Control and Manipulation

Management and administration scholars frequently express a concern that supervisors use rhetoric to control employees (Barley & Kunda, 1992; David & Strang 2006; Oakes, Townley, & Cooper, 1998). Rhetoric is treated as a means of manipulation. This concern is not always explicitly stated; in studies that focus on managers' strategic language, rhetoric is simply conceptualized as a powerful tool. It is up to the reader to infer the tool's primary uses. Furthermore, rhetoric is integral to self-control and self-realization. For example, Fine's analysis (1996) of occupational rhetoric among chefs identifies a "large rhetorical 'toolkit'" with which the participants

construct their identities. A common way of establishing those identities is by "continually justifying and legitimating their work through analogies" (p. 95). As such, rhetoric is used to make symbolic and indirect connections through powerful language. Fine's tool metaphor suggests deliberate practice; the indictment of rhetoric's being manipulative is clear.

Another example is Markel's investigation (2005) of rhetoric as a kind of misdirection in privacy–policy statements. His approach to the concept of rhetoric, more so than his explicit definition of the term, implies a view of rhetoric closely akin to deception. This indictment of rhetoric as manipulation has a long history in writings on the topic. Ever since Plato (1987) and other classical philosophers, rhetoric has been haunted by a disciplinary anxiety.[4] Plato, who was one of the first philosophers to use the concept, frequently pitted it against his preferred philosophical practice, dialectic, which is a form of communication directed toward knowledge and insight. He insisted that only dialectic could arrive at absolute truth. In contrast, rhetoric could produce only conviction without knowledge. The *Gorgias*, one of Plato's more scathing critiques of rhetoric, depicts Socrates and the Sophist Gorgias arguing over rhetoric's definition and scope. Plato uses Socrates as his mouthpiece to claim analogically that rhetoric is to justice as cosmetics is to gymnastics or pastry baking is to medicine. Sham arts such as rhetoric and baking, he states, create only the appearance of beauty and knowledge. They are pleasurable simulations, mimicking on the surface what they lack in substance (Hamilton, 1998; Molina & Spicer, 2004).

Plato's argument (1987) soon moves into a discussion of false manipulation. His accusation, which has resonated in rhetorical studies, is that the artful use of language poses the threat of deception. It can manipulate an audience (or members of an organization). To Plato, an orator who can produce conviction and pleasure without substantial knowledge and experience is dangerous. Says Socrates, "When an orator is more persuasive than a doctor, a non-knower will be more persuasive than a knower among non-knowers" (quoted in Plato, 1987, p. 18). The ancient charge against rhetoric is that its powerful potential conceals its own shortcoming. Some users of language are knowledgeable and wise; some are not. Some users of language are morally sound; some are not. The thrust of Platonic skepticism is that persuasion, by definition, renders onto its user immense power and control.

Management scholars who characterize rhetoric as being supplemental to theory building and research preserve the Platonic assumption that it is either deceptive or superfluous. Not only do they imply that unambiguous communication exists, but they suggest that it is possible to achieve it by stripping away the rhetoric. This argument commonly arises in discussions

of manager–employee communication; that is, there is an underlying fantasy of creating pure dialogue, a moment in which the risk of miscommunication is eliminated (Goldberg & Markóczy, 2000). At other times, scholars are concerned with critiquing one another. They accuse each other of using rhetoric in research for which something else (data? values?) would be more legitimate. For example, Goldberg and Markóczy (2000), who apply complexity theory to management, write,

> Our critique of complexity/chaos has been concerned with the rhetoric and with incorrect claims about what they entail. Once the rhetoric has been removed and the real tools are seen for what they are, we see true value in applying them to the study of management. (pp. 93-94)

There are a few exceptions to the manipulation view of rhetoric in management research. For instance, Feldman and Sköldberg (2002) employ the term's theoretical, rather than pejorative, meaning. They use rhetorical theory to demonstrate how special features of communicative practice, such as the enthymeme, function in a narrative sequence. Lawrence and Suddaby (2006) treat rhetoric as the persuasive dimension of language in discourse analysis.[5] Sillince (1999) offers a position close to this article's thesis. He argues that rhetoric has frequently been used in managerial research to represent something unreal or manipulative and that it deserves to be used in the classical sense, as a stylistic resource. According to Sillince, human communication cannot avoid being rhetorical.

One way to approach management's seemingly conflicted use of rhetoric is to note a terminological confusion. Terms such as *ideology*, *discourse*, and *rhetoric* appear interchangeable at times and incommensurate at others. Barley and Kunda (1992) set the tone in the most widely recognized rhetorical analysis of management:

> Although managerial theories can be assessed as a set of propositions, they may also be treated as rhetorics or ideologies. By ideology we mean a stream of discourse that promulgates, however unwittingly, a set of assumptions about the nature of the objects with which it deals. In this sense, all theories have an ideological component, since all theories must adopt some ontological stance in order to proceed with their work. The objects of rhetorical construction in managerial theories have typically been corporations, employees, managers, and the means by which the later can direct the other two. (p. 363)

In other words, rhetoric is conceptualized as the spoken dimension of management's ideological practices.

Rhetorical studies in management typically follow Barley and Kunda's lead (1992). The three terms are defined in certain ways: Discourse focuses on the words spoken or written, with special attention to the content of the communication. Rhetoric is a kind of discourse, the speaking arm of ideology (Lawrence & Suddaby, 2006). The data from managerial research on rhetoric are frequently taken from interview transcripts of leaders' espoused values (Cliff, Langton, & Aldrich, 2005), from speeches (Emrich, Brower, Feldman & Garland, 2001), and from documents such as training manuals and value statements (Grint & Case, 1998). Rhetoric is seen as the attempt to purposefully communicate the values of the organization and the preferences of leaders. For example, Zbaracki (1998) defines rhetoric as "a stream of discourse used to construct, spread, or sustain a set of assumptions" (p. 609). Ideology is seen as the larger collection of beliefs, offered as values, paradigms, codes, and other sets of ideas and rule structures that make up the guide for how to act (Amernic & Craig, 2004; Heracleous & Barrett, 2001; Holt, 2006). As Clifford (1988) defines the term, discourse is the overall communication scheme. There is some consistency among these terms: Ideology represents values; discourse serves as the overarching term for communication; and rhetoric is the tool for persuading others to take up ideas and practices. Rhetoric is manipulative and nonsubstantive.

In rhetorical scholarship, there are a variety of definitions to choose from regarding such complex terms as *rhetoric*, *discourse*, and *ideology*. Some definitions concur more or less with the discussion cited above. For the purposes of this article, we align ourselves with the following: A discourse is the set of rules, understandings, and practices for how language constitutes a human activity (Brummett, 2000). For example, running a fine-dining restaurant is highly complex human activity in which language plays an important role. There are certain rules for how the head chef interacts and communicates with fellow employees and the patrons; all the participants—the hosts, waitstaff, and delivery personnel—have parts to play in the restaurant organization. Participating in those rules and practices is what constitutes the restaurant as discourse. Similarly, an ideology comprises the conditions for a society's material and social reproduction (Althusser, 1960/1984). It emanates from established institutions such as churches, schools, media, and popular culture.

Rhetoric itself has a multitude of definitions, from the pre-Socratics into modern times. Even though some of the Platonic legacy still lingers, a variety of other approaches have taken hold. Modern theorists do not dismiss rhetoric as a sham art, as Plato did. For the most part, they do not subscribe to the mere rhetoric view. Contemporary theorists emphasize rhetoric's

good and bad qualities, its potential to be used for productive and destructive ends. Moreover, instead of approaching rhetoric as a deceptive tactic that only elites use, contemporary rhetoricians expand the notion. Rhetoric is a symbolic inducement that everyone participates in—managers and employees alike (Ehninger, 1968). Everyone uses language persuasively as a means of "inducing cooperation in beings that by nature respond to symbols" (Burke, 1969, p. 43). In other words, it is not just that rhetoric can be good or bad; it is that rhetoric permeates human interaction as long as language is used deliberately. Thus defined, rhetoric is persuasion that is in some way available to every symbolic being—every human being. As such, it is a practical art and the faculty of theorizing.

Theme 1: Rhetoric Is Theoretical and Practical

This first theme draws attention to management scholars' stated motivation for using the framework of rhetorical studies. It indicates what makes rhetoric a versatile scholarly method. The payoff is that rhetoric is at once a lens for interpreting the world and a concrete strategy for intervening in it. Rhetoric, in short, has hermeneutic and pragmatic potential (Heracleous & Barrett, 2001). Those management scholars who espouse a postmodern worldview subscribe to the constructivist view of rhetoric, acknowledging the extent to which language creates reality (Phillips & Brown, 1993; Sköldberg, 1994). Heracleous and Barrett (2001) summarize this shift from the modernist scientific paradigm:

> The linguistic turn in the social sciences prompted calls for more complex understandings of organizations that would emphasize language not only as an enabling information exchange but also as constructing social and organizational reality. (p. 755)

Holt (2006) likewise emphasizes that rhetoric is particularly useful for capturing the "mystery, fluidity, habit, tradition, and other atmospheric annoyances of everyday life" (p. 1662). An examination of rhetoric's role in communicating change illustrates such reality construction but sometimes places rhetoric as the opposite of reality. In those cases, rhetoric is described as "expansive" and "unmet by the reality" of what actually happens (Zbaracki, 1998, p. 603).

In a likewise meta-analytical publication, Gergen and Thatchenkery (2004) survey the major tenets of a modernist organizational science and so

posit alternatives. They preview organizational science after the postmodern turn, specifically considering how it might become productive rather than exclusively critical. The postmodern context, they claim, expands the concept of research because it allows for critical self-reflection. Organizational scientists cannot extricate themselves from moral and political debate because they themselves are implicated. Gergen and Thatchenkery argue that such scientists ought to "participate actively within a set of subcultural relationships" (p. 236). According to these scholars, scientists compose a subculture of their own. To produce scientific data is to participate in a type of discourse. For these and likeminded scholars, language is inseparable from inquiry and knowledge; as such, rhetoric as a discipline is a theoretical framework for such inquiry.[6]

There is also a practical side to rhetoric that management science imports—particularly, its intervention in human affairs that cause or facilitate change. The analysis of reengineering by Grint and Case (1998) characterizes rhetoric as the language used to promote managerial change. For example, when a manager persuasively leads her or his team through a challenging task, her or his rhetorical strategies are a major aspect of the activity. The manager uses symbols to generate material change. Thus, the symbols that managers and employees use in their institutional language games (Rindova, Becerra, & Contardo, 2004; Sköldberg, 1994) are integral to the life of an organization. Managerial rhetorical analyses typically feature one person or a group of persons working as an organizational agent; as such, they are more concrete than analyses conducted in rhetorical studies. For example, Cliff et al. (2005) examined the espoused values versus the real values of male and female leaders and found no significant gender differences. In their study, the notion of rhetoric has a methodological focus, oscillating between theory and practice.

The term *symbol* is a central tenet of traditional rhetorical studies; it straddles the line between the practical and the theoretical. Its position in rhetorical theory acknowledges the realization that there are things influencing human beings beyond traditional rhetorical phenomena such as arguments and tropes. In rhetorical studies, the symbol can arise from a variety of things: A word is a symbol, as is a speech, a film, a building, or any culturally significant artifact. To unpack this argument, consider the example of a banking operation that has been established by the government to provide financing to farmers. To attract investors, the bank might emphasize its business identity and refer to the local community as a resource of social capital. Yet when the bank needs to advertise, it might refer to the business as a resource for farmers who can be assured of the

operation's permanence and stability (Sillince & Mueller, 2007). Furthermore, a word such as *investment* is symbolic for business organizations worldwide. It stands for and constitutes an identity, a way of life, a relationship between those who provide resources and those who use them.

An overview of the symbol's place in rhetorical theory notes two trends: Either the concept is attributed to a theorist—most commonly, Kenneth Burke—or it is analyzed in terms of its cultural effects (Sköldberg, 1994). In the latter case, the symbol is associated with comparable concepts, such as archetype and icon. For example, scholars of visual rhetoric may argue that the Macintosh apple symbolizes a new generation of high-tech industry and IT use. Another set of rhetoricians identify the power of rhetorical symbols in the political rhetoric of social movements (Goodnow, 2006; Kaufer & Carley, 1993; Zompetti, 2006).

A review of conceptualizations of the symbol suggests that it plays a central but contested role in rhetorical studies of organizations. In *A Rhetoric of Motives*, Burke (1969) defines rhetoric as "the use of language as a symbolic means of inducing cooperation in beings that by nature respond to symbols" (p. 43). In *Counter-Statement* (1968), he characterizes the symbol as "the verbal parallel to a pattern of experience" (p. 152). To bring these pieces of Burkean language philosophy together, we ought first inquire about a pattern of experience that the speaker and audience share. If one seeks to induce cooperation among human beings, how might one use symbols to attain the greatest amount of success? The appeal of the symbol, Burke explains, is that it can bring order and clarity to a situation by revealing the social experiences that humans share. This social space is the scene of persuasion. More important, we all select certain symbols over others. As Burke notes, "a pattern of experience is an interpretation of life. Life being open to many interpretations, the reader is open to many interpretations" (p. 176). The artist's or rhetor's challenge lies in persuading the audience to accept his or her interpretation, as defined by Burke's strategic use of symbols.[7] The symbol is important to managerial studies because it is efficient. It captures and communicates a culture or an idea to an audience with a few words that have significant consequences.

The first theme that we have identified in management's use of rhetorical studies is that of a dialectic—the theoretical and the practical. In short, the idea that it is a theoretical ability and a practical mode of action makes rhetoric quite useful. Management research is well served by using a rhetorical framework because of this versatility. On one hand, rhetoric affords a meta-analytical opportunity to reflect on organizational scholarship and the language that sustains it. On the other, rhetoric as an interpretive

lens allows management scholars to study how organizational members use language—particularly, powerful symbols—in concrete ways. Organizational rhetoric as a concept is about theory building and interpersonal activity in the workplace. Both dimensions, the theoretical and the practical, are integral to institutional order.

Theme 2: Rhetoric Creates, Sustains, and Challenges Organizational Orders

To this point, our discussion of rhetoric's social constructivist function suggests that language creates reality. In management literature, rhetoric is regularly approached as a form of organizational culture (Barley, 1983), order (Gal, 1989), and social construction (Heracleous & Barrett, 2001). It is an organization's way of being; without language, no organization can succeed or even operate. Wittgenstein's theory of the language game is a popular template for analyzing organizational practices. According to language game theory,

> Words derive their meaning not from the actions or objects that they denote, but from the historical context of discourse, or language game, in which they are used. . . . The notion of a language game draws attention to the importance of specialized forms of discourse engaged in by members of a particular community. (Astley & Zammuto, 1992, p. 444)

Astley and Zammuto argue that the primary objective of the managerial language game is to facilitate practical action. They characterize leadership as a language game aimed largely at preserving organizational coherence. Gardner and Avolio (1998) similarly claim that charisma is a language game in which leaders use rhetorical tropes such as "rhythm, repetition, balance, and alliteration" (p. 42) to influence their followers. These tropes become part of the organization's language and culture.

In rhetorical studies, the relationship between language and reality or that between language and order has been long contested. At stake is the extent to which order is preestablished, or the result of larger-than-human forces. For instance, those of a religious faith may believe that God prefers a certain order in the universe and that human beings are inevitably subject to his plan. Conversely, Marxists may insist that material means of production generate a social order that organizes society and that workers and citizens are constrained by this order. According to Plato, order belongs to the

world of ideal forms beyond human creation; it is inseparable from other superior things, such as truth and knowledge. Platonic order is both a means and an end; it is the dialectician's method of accessing wisdom and the discovery that the dialectician makes in that perfect realm. Both in the case of means and ends, order is static in its disciplinary principles and absoluteness. Finally, order is that which the dialectician may be able to implement in this imperfect world of lesser beings.

In contrast, the Sophists were much more aligned with the contemporary view of social order. Their philosophy posited rhetoric as the interactive way in which humans create their order. The Sophists argued that the dynamic negotiation of socially constructed truths governs civic community. Language is a means of manipulating the polis; it is the creative process by which we enable shared grounds for action. Order is the fusion of discursive strategies—poetry, logic, and narrative—used deliberately by the skilled persuader. Power is negotiated in the public spaces. According to the Sophists, this order is the one with which we ought to concern ourselves.

This second theme in management research reflects the realization that an organization's discourse provides its institutional logic. Put differently, management scholars emphasize the role of language in organizational culture. Rhetoric is what sustains the rituals that characterize organizations and distinguish their identities. Language draws on and perpetuates a view of reality, even when such reality includes violence (Grint & Case, 1998) and when language and reality diverge (Zbaracki, 1998). In short, rhetoric entails the values and sense of self that permeate an organization, provide praxis, and give purpose (Deforest Molina & Spicer, 2004).

One way to study the rhetoric of institutional logic is to examine its effects. By focusing on indirect communication, for example, some management scholars have discovered the strategy of using obliqueness to achieve their goals. Indirect communication is a way of relying on the unspoken as much as the spoken. It is the considerable amount of communication void of visual or auditory cue that takes place in an organizational context. Along these lines, Sillince (1999) claims that implicit arguments are often the most persuasive. Within any organization, familiarity with the established culture allows participants to communicate effectively, even when some messages remain unstated. It makes them proficient members of a unique culture. The rhetorical term for this type of indirect communication is *enthymeme*.

In classical rhetorical theory, an enthymeme is a truncated syllogism (a set of premises and a conclusion, used in formal logic); that is, it is a syllogism with a missing premise. The audience participates by supplying the missing premise via its cultural identification with the rhetor (McAdon,

2003; Walton, 2001; Walton & Macagno, 2006). For example, imagine a conversation between two managers. One says, "I just got a recent Harvard graduate on my team. So I guess we know who the team of the month is going to be!" The other manager supplies the missing premise on the basis of a shared experience of supervising teams and having familiarity with college reputations: Harvard graduates equal success. Note, however, that the missing premise is not always positive. Because missing premises remain unstated, biases and negative stereotypes go unquestioned in an enthymematic form. For instance, consider a manager who says, "I have an immigrant in my unit this year, so I guess she'll be having language problems." This premise can clearly be misconceived and objectionable. The point is that a common experience facilitates mutual understanding between communicants; it is what allows communication to take place even when speakers do not make all premises of a statement explicit.

Literally, the word *enthymeme* means "something in the mind" (Aristotle, 1991, p. 33).[8] When the audience and the rhetor share a cultural identity, they can communicate without making every assumption explicit. For example, Amernic and Craig (2004) argue that September 11 has become an ideograph in American culture. Specifically, they demonstrate how this ideograph was used enthymematically by Southwest Airlines to serve an organizational ideology—in this case, directing a message to the airline's shareholders. Through enthymemes, the organization persuades the audience by drawing on its cultural beliefs and attitudes. It invites the audience to complete the argument based on identification with the rhetor's background. In its simplest form, the enthymeme is an inside joke between rhetor and audience. In its most powerful conceptualization, it is the basis for persuasion. This form of persuasion is compatible with Green's treatment (2004) of the manager as rhetor who uses the organization's taken-for-granteds to justify new practices. Enthymemes are a powerful tool of persuasion because they allow audience members to draw on their preexisting beliefs—those that are integral to the institutional order.

Many management scholars who posit rhetoric as an integral force to institutional order note that changing this order requires a persuasive effort (Finstad, 1998; Heracleous & Barrett, 2001; Zbaracki, 1998). Suddaby and Greenwood (2005) write,

> Profound institutional change, such as that necessary to create a new form of organizing, is accompanied by a shift in the dominant institutional logic. Shifts in logic, however, are highly contested, and because logics are abstractions, such contestations are often a function of rhetoric in which the legitimacy of competing logics is openly debated. (p. 41)

The authors surveyed theories of institutional change focusing on "the arguments and language used to connect competing conceptions of the new organizational form to broader templates about the nature of professions and their role in society" (p. 36). In connecting organizational change with theories of social change, management scholars attribute remarkable influence to rhetorical practice (Rude, 2004; Sköldberg, 1994). The enthymeme informs managerial practice because it is one type of organizational participation that involves the speaker and the audience (Weick & Browning, 1986). When the speaker leaves space for the audience to fill in missing information, she or he draws the audience into the argument and creates ownership for the communication.

This second theme in management research's use of rhetoric focuses on institutional order. It reflects the idea that every organization houses its own culture; that is, every organizational culture has a sense of order and logic, and language is what sustains and negotiates that order. When members perpetuate institutional logic and when they challenge it, rhetorical strategies are inevitably present. To connect this theme in the management literature with the rhetorical tradition, we use the notion of an *enthymeme*, which denotes a rhetorical interaction between rhetors and audiences—managers and employees—that draws on organizational order. In such interactions, rhetoric becomes constructive of an identity that is grounded in organizational membership.

Theme 3: Rhetoric Is Constructive and Constitutive of Identity

As the two aforementioned themes suggest, rhetoric is fundamental to the construction of identity (Heracleous & Barrett, 2001). A recurring insight in management scholarship is that this rhetorical construction happens individually and collectively. Moreover, it "has an inherently contextual and pragmatic orientation" (p. 760). Just as individuals garner a sense of self through language and social interaction, organizations acquire an identity via discursive practices. By participating in such practices, participants engage in sense-making "identity work" (Musson & Duberly, 2007, p. 147). As Brown (2006) explains, organizational collective identities are "multi-voiced, quasi-fictional, plurivocal and reflexive constructions that unfold over time and are embedded in broader discursive (cultural) practices" (p. 732). According to Brown, this gradual unfolding primarily takes place in narrative. Human beings belong to a variety of collectives, most of which are held together by

shared experiences mediated in language. Some of those identities operate and contend within the context of professional and organizational memberships (Sillince & Jarzabkowski, 2004). At times, professional and personal identities interact: Actors are simultaneously bosses and coworkers, sisters and brothers, sons and daughters, friends and teachers.

Burke (1969) notes that identity formation is about individuality and sameness: "In being identified with B, A is 'substantially one' with an individual other than one's self" (p. 21). Burke further states that a person "remains unique, an individual locus of motives," and for that reason a person "is both joined and separate, at once a distinct substance and consubstantial with another" (p. 21). Consider the kinds of internal tension that can arise within a workplace team. Every member ideally experiences a sense of shared identity, or sameness, with the other team members. All members want the team to be successful and rewarded. From management's perspective, it is beneficial to emphasize this collective identity.

When the team's cooperative identity is more salient than competing identities, such as the socioemotional bonds that facilitate community among members, the organization earns a competitive advantage. At the same time, individual motives remain as long as each employee protects his or her interests. After all, salary and benefits are individual rewards that the employee evaluates in light of other collectives, such as family. Every membership is a function of rhetorical practices that delineate social connections and divisions.

Ashforth and Humphrey (1997) address this significant concern in organizational literature. They claim that organizations are interpretive structures in which identity is socially constructed and symbolically mediated. Having reviewed the basic tenets of categorization theory, semiotics, and labeling theory, Ashforth and Humphrey present a labeling framework for analyzing various interactions at the individual, group, and organizational levels. A label, they explain, is a "signifier of a given object, and typically activates a set of cognitions (and related affect) about the object" (p. 43). It is a way of facilitating individuals' interpretation and communication of different experiences. According to Ashforth and Humphrey's model,

> the labeling framework can be applied to the organizational level of analysis because organizations per se can be viewed as social categories. . . . Labels such as "innovative manufacturer," "fiscally responsible," "fair employer," and "good corporate citizen" succinctly embody what the organization means—or is hoped or intended to mean—to individuals and groups. (p. 53)

In short, labels are a rhetorically constructed way of sorting organizational members into groups by assigning identity. In addition to ourselves, other scholars have explored the relationship between identity and professionalization (Covaleski, Dirsmith, & Rittenberg, 2003), the tension between autonomy and conformity in organizational identity (Covaleski, Dirsmith, Heian, & Samuel, 1998), and the process by which occupational identity is rhetorically ascribed (Fine, 1996).

A number of rhetorical scholars following Burke have explored notions of identity and identification. Notably, much of this work comes from the areas of political rhetoric (Beasley, 2004; Stuckey, 2005), the rhetoric of gender and sexuality (Sloop, 2004), and rhetorics of race (Gordon, 2003; Ogbar, 2004). As our discussion of this third theme demonstrates, identity is a rhetorical construct: It is a continual negotiation and performance that take place in a social context. For rhetorical and management researchers alike, the role of language in understanding individual identity ("This is who I am") and membership ("This is the group I belong to") is crucial because different identities are easily at odds. Rhetoric resolves and retains the tension between these forces. To explore this tension, it is important to understand when and how managers become rhetors; that is, it serves scholars of management to approach the manager as strategic, self-reflective communicator and speaker.

Theme 4: Managers Are Rhetors

Studying managers' identity and practices by approaching them as rhetors is yet another recurring tendency in management's use of the rhetorical discipline. In short, this theme concerns a way to analyze how managers strategically communicate with members of an organization. The notion of a rhetor that has been imported into management research extends beyond the conventional speaker because the word *rhetor* does not merely refer to an orator or public performer; rather, it denotes a complex set of meanings that have to do with audience analysis, contextual sensitivity, and message structure. The rhetor is a protagonist; she or he is the primary vehicle for rhetorical and material transformation. A rhetor's task encompasses all dimensions of the rhetorical canon: invention, arrangement, style, memory, and delivery (Hamilton, 1998). Classifying a person in a management position as a rhetor draws attention to the ways in which she or he faces many of the same challenges as does the classical orator. It emphasizes one's ability and need to master language in context (Gardner & Avolio, 1998).[9]

The manager-as-rhetor notion is a way of understanding how persuasion is part of an organizational leader's role. Any leader—political, spiritual, entrepreneurial—uses language to communicate ideas and direct followers. Just as an effective public speaker uses rhetorical tactics, a manager must construct a persuasive message that reflects the organization's need and goals (Abrahamson, 1997). In doing so, he or she assesses and draws on an array of available tropes, argument, and imageries (Emrich et al., 2001; Gardner & Avolio, 1998; Pinder & Bourgeois, 1982). Recall that Aristotle (1991) defines rhetoric as the ability to discern, in any given situation, the available means of persuasion.[10]

Green (2004) illustrates this rhetorical approach to studying managers as innovators while calling for cross-pollination between organizational studies and the rhetorical discipline:

> Rhetorical theory has been underutilized in organizational studies, and, thus, may contribute to this field of inquiry. . . . A rhetorical perspective suggests that managers play an active role in the diffusion process, because what managers say and how they say it matter a great deal. (p. 654)

According to Green, part of the manager's rhetorical task is to propagate new ideas throughout an organization. A manager's communicative practices determine how, for example, organizational change and innovation reverberate. Managers deliberately legitimate and delegitimate organizational practices via their linguistic choices (Suddaby & Greenwood, 2005). The application of rhetorical theory focuses on the power of the communicator. Green claims, "A rhetorical theory of diffusion highlights the causal potency of language in shaping organizational life and behavior. . . . Moreover, rhetorical theory portrays the manager as rhetor and suggests that his or her most influential tool is language" (p. 665). As Green and others suggest, rhetorical strategies are integral to organizational management.

Specifically, the classical notions of ethos, pathos, and logos are the most fundamental concepts in rhetorical theory (Haskins, 2004; Hyde, 2004; Wisse, 1989). According to Aristotle, Isocrates, and many later theorists, these are functions of the rhetor's personal credibility, one's capacity for activating the audience's emotions, and one's use of logical appeals. Green (2004) draws on this familiar triad from the rhetorical tradition and concludes his analysis by noting that "a managerial practice for which the diffusion process follows a rhetorical sequence that starts with pathos, moves to logos, and ends with ethos will have a rapid rate of initial adoption, a broad diffusion, and a slow abandonment" (p. 661). Although Green's

insight is significant in explaining the diffusion of innovations, its implications might have extended further if the concepts themselves were thoroughly examined. For example, the manager–rhetor is indeed subject to ethical—or ethos-based—concerns. His or her ethos is a function of an adaptive performance of character in any rhetorical moment. Ethos invites the audience members to grant credibility and trustworthiness to a speaker—or, in this case, a manager. Ethos also asks the audience to confer some measure of authority to the speaker on the basis of one's perceived competence, virtue, and goodwill—*phronesis, arete*, and *eunoia*, in the classical Greek terminology (McCroskey & Teven, 1999; Noel, 1999). If a rhetor's or manager's ethical appeals are successful, so are her or his substantive claims and initiatives. If, however, her or his personal credibility fails to persuade the audience or the followers, she or he will have limited impact as a leader.

One of the challenges that managers face in the processes of diffusion lies in dealing with ambiguity. Organizational scholars who approach this issue from a communication standpoint examine how such ambiguity is negotiated in language (Hamilton, 2000; Lascarides, Copestake, & Briscoe, 1996). Entrepreneurs are representative individuals who operate in the context of conceptual ambiguity. Their visions begin with intuitive and affectively loaded ideas that are difficult to communicate and realize. For example, while hearing a funding pitch, it is not unusual for a venture capitalist to simply reach over, close the entrepreneur's laptop presentation, and say, "Tell me your idea in simple terms!" Hill and Levenhagen (1995) write, "An entrepreneur could have a valid and workable concept or mental model and not be able to fully implement it due to the lack of an adequate means of articulating it in evocative terms" (p. 1058). In other words, it is difficult to communicate novel ideas in the absence of an established vocabulary. As the manager-as-rhetor theme suggests, this problem is rhetorical.

To manage ambiguity and conceptual novelty, managers turn to tropes and metaphors that concretize and communicate ineffable ideas. Metaphors, Hill and Levenhagen (1995) argue, facilitate the entrepreneur's sense making (the construction of a formal model in the entrepreneur's mind) and sense giving (one's ability to communicate the idea within an organization). The authors state that "metaphors provide helpful interpretive schemes to aid in the reduction of equivocality" (p. 1058). They further explain that "metaphors are useful in coping with ambiguity and in interpreting large amounts of data. More importantly, perhaps, metaphors are an effective and evocative means of articulation and premise setting within an organization" (p. 1058). Metaphors are but one dimension of a manager's rhetorical strategies.

Another dimension involves the rhetor's use of *enargeia*. This idea from rhetorical theory fits with entrepreneurs' challenge to convey innovation insofar as it serves to concretize the ineffable. Enargeia is a sensory aspect of rhetoric that buttresses rhetoric's persuasive influence. It is "the power of language to create a vivid presence of that which is set forth in words" (Lunde, 2004, p. 49). The rhetor uses compelling imagery, inviting the audience to visualize something so realistically that it becomes moved by the description. For example, a study by Emrich et al. (2001) regarding the relationship between charisma and evocative words exemplifies this research in management. The researchers focused on how the use of evocative words ("I have a dream" versus "I have an idea") makes a speech more real, thus more appealing to followers. This connection between the ephemeral or the abstract and the concretely compelling serves managers well. As another illustration, consider a highly graphical description of a completely new production operation called a *greenfield site*. Given adequate skills, a rhetor can make audiences feel the power of action, visualize the new production plant, and imagine the promise and the problem of bringing the new plant to fruition. This rhetorical experience mimics or simulates being a part of the described action. As a trope, enargeia belongs in theories of invention and visual rhetoric.

Visual rhetoric is a related term that has become increasingly fashionable in rhetorical studies (Evans & Hall, 1999; Faigley, George, Palchik, & Selfe, 2004; Farmer, 2002; Sturken & Cartwright, 2001). It refers to a function of nonverbal and nonliteral symbols, such as the World Trade Center (Farmer, 2002). When we notice an appealing presentation graphic or are seduced by a photograph, we respond to visual rhetoric. We engage the creator of the imagery much the same way as we would the creator of a text. Simply put, visual rhetoric is persuasion beyond the word. Enargeia, however, is the creation of visual experiences. The imagery exists as a result of the rhetor's speech, not of any visual representations that are physically present (Sharpling, 2002). Thus, enargeia is as grand in its persuasive influence as the size of the audience's imagination and the rhetor's ability to produce compelling figurative language.

The fourth theme in management's use of rhetorical studies characterizes managers as rhetors. It entails the realization that managers, when faced with organizational challenges such as innovation or a new production site, negotiate much of the same conditions as does the classical orator. Managers use tropes and figures, arguments and persuasive appeals, in a strategic manner to achieve goals. By analyzing managers as rhetors, management researchers discover new dimensions of organizational leadership.

One of these dimensions centers on a manager–rhetor's reliance on rational and narrative forms of communication.

Theme 5: Rhetoric Is Inextricably Linked to Both Rationality and Narrative Form

Organizational scholars have long recognized the importance of rational and narrative language. They have studied the ways in which language practices facilitate coherence and change within organizations (Feldman & Sköldberg, 2002). Weick and Browning (1986) examined how different types of communication produce different organizational forms. For example, the argumentative paradigm matches criteria for classical argumentation and its assumptions about rationality: goal clarity, means and ends consistency, hierarchical integration, and so on. In contrast, the narrative paradigm "connects facts, [stores] complex summaries in retrievable form, and [helps] people comprehend complex environments" (p. 255). Stories and storytelling are not merely entertainment or diversion; they are ways of interpreting and evaluating ontological experience in an organizational setting.

Management and administration scholars study the narrative structure of organizational communication (Barry, 1997; Boje, 1995; Hopkinson, 2003). They theorize that rhetoric is at once a means of participating in rational discourse and organizational myth and an underlying structure supporting both practices. In short, rationality and myth are language games, modes of participating in and making sense of cultural life (Gergen & Thatchenkery, 2004; Patriotta, 2003). The relationship between myth and rationality is theoretically complex. On one level, it is generally recognized that a good storyteller is likely to make a good boss; by drawing on a shared past and by outlining a future, a leader is able to tell compelling stories that motivate followers (Boje, 1995). At another level, a shared narrative provides the fundamental social cohesion within any organizational environment. It is a rhetorical form of identification and collective purpose.

The relationship between narrative and rationality, or argument, is as contested in rhetorical studies as it is in management science (Weick & Browning, 1986). The classical rhetoricians framed this dialectical tension in terms of popular belief and formal logic. They used the term *endoxa*, which is a Greek word meaning "commonly held opinions." Endoxa is central to a variety of theoretical concerns, including the rhetorics of politics, memory, science, and argument. According to Plato's worldview, commonly held opinions were as good as the people who embraced them; that

is, most people forego the trouble that proper philosophical inquiry requires—therefore, opinions are flawed at best. In other words, Plato had little regard for popular belief. However, Aristotle, who developed his teacher's position (i.e., Plato's), noted that dialectic and rhetoric draw on commonly held beliefs, dealing only in probabilities that sense making requires. Neither operates with scientific certainty. The distinction, he explained, lies in the practitioner's agenda. For rhetoric, popular belief is a resource.

Contemporary rhetorical scholars analyze the tension between rationality and narrative in terms of functionality and motives (Beck, 1994; Fisher, 1978, 1984). They theorize that discursive practices serve as hermeneutics, or logics of interpretation. For example, some theorists assert that some arguments are more effective in a narrative form, depending on the audience and the types of appeals being advanced. For organizational members, experiences such as discrimination and workplace marginalization may be communicable only in narrative form. Other theorists maintain that narrative and argumentation—a form of rationality—are different and incommensurate mental activities (Gronbeck, 1983; Warnick, 1987).

It is important for our purposes to note the conceptual relationships among common sense, narrative communication, endoxa, and social constructionism. Endoxa is a measure of cultural assumptions; it denotes collective identity and social collaboration. These are notions that without which the study of organizations would be moot. By addressing this notion from a rhetorical standpoint, we identify its continued centrality to human interactions, including those that take place in an organizational context.

In other words, every organization has its own endoxa. It comprises that organization's history, interpersonal dynamics, hierarchies, goals, successes, and failures. As Green (2004) suggests, a manager must be able to draw on employees' collective beliefs and attitudes in coordinating the group. The manager must relate "persuasive justifications" for new practices to the staff's "taken-for-granted's" (p. 655). The manager as rhetor treated earlier obligates a certain familiarity with endoxa.

The fifth and final theme in this review of management research concerns rhetorical forms. Because of the considerable effort that rhetorical studies have devoted to the issue, management scholars draw on rhetorical theories of common sense versus logical reasoning. Broadly defined, rhetorical theory addresses and encompasses narrative and rational discourses as the giving of good reasons (Wallace, 1963). Within this basic but productive definition is the important insight that organizational rhetoric includes the presentation of sound argument as well as the telling of good stories.

Conclusion

In this concluding section, we revisit the framing questions that provide the point of departure for our article: how rhetoric is conceptualized, why it is currently popular in organizational research, and what useful intersections exist between rhetoric and organizational research. Considering the five themes laid out in our literature review, we suggest that management research conceptualize rhetoric as a theoretical lens focused on organizational interactions, as well as a practical mode of intervening in those interactions; the substance that maintains organizational order and institutional logic, as well as the means of challenging that order; a producer and facilitator of individual and organizational identity; the manager's major strategy for persuading followers to enact management philosophies; and a framework for understanding the role of narrative and rational organizational discourses. In sum, rhetoric is a strategy of the powerful, a form of control. The power of managers' words accounts for the increasing interest of organizational scholars in rhetoric. At the same time, rhetoric is used to designate linguistic indirectness and other symbolic processes. Rhetoric is a deliberate means of participating in organizational interactions for all members.

Our review shows that the combination of rhetorical theory and the practical topics of organizational research are natural allies. The articles that follow illustrate this alliance by demonstrating its critical potential. The scholars exemplify the use of rhetorical theories and concepts in the study of management and administration. Their impressive work is particularly applicable when one considers the ideas of two prominent organizational theorists: James G. March and Karl Weick. March and Olsen (1998) assert that because environments are ever changing, they are essentially sites of interpretation. Weick's theory (1996) has as its basic assumption the law of requisite variety, which states that when organizational conditions are uncertain and equivocal, the response to those conditions must be likewise equivocal. Rhetoric, with its artful and changing qualities, is often the proper response to those environments. In the end, this article demonstrates that the possibility is high for fruitful cross-pollination between rhetoric and management science. When the best of both epistemologies is employed, interdisciplinary scholarship reaches its full potential.

Notes

1. In this article, we consider language and rhetoric to be intimately connected concepts, though not synonymous. All language is to some extent rhetorical, but not all rhetoric is

language. There is, for example, a large area of rhetorical studies devoted to visual rhetoric. A photograph or a memorial site can be rhetorical beyond its linguistic elements. As such, we provide a functional definition of rhetoric by coming at the notion from different angles. Because the objective of the article is to compare and contrast management research's use of rhetoric with communication studies, including organizational communication and rhetorical studies, a single definition would be ill-advised; it would preclude insights about the concepts' different meanings and implications, depending on context.

2. Note that the term *rhetoric* here refers to a variety of practices: rhetorical analysis, rhetorical theory, rhetorical vocabulary, rhetorical performance. We are casting a broad net to include all the dimensions of rhetoric that management research imports. The trend in management is not only to use rhetorical theories to analyze organizations but also to analyze rhetorical practices within organizations using traditional methods of management scholarship. Thus, our scope deliberately encompasses the various meanings of the term *rhetoric*.

3. This point is noted to distinguish the article from, for example, a prescriptive project that might have outlined six ways in which management research ought to employ rhetorical theories and concepts.

4. As a discipline, rhetoric is still profoundly influenced by its roots in classical antiquity. Greek and Roman thought continue to shape the ways in which rhetoric is used to interpret symbolic interactions. For this reason, a fair amount of the rhetorical theory that is used to contrast with management research comes from classical thinkers.

5. Our discussion later returns to this concept in further treatment.

6. The academic conversation about the role of rhetoric in shaping knowledge and scholarly practices is usually referred to as the rhetoric of inquiry. It originated with a 1984 conference held at the University of Iowa and attended by humanists and social scientists. Analyses of this discussion as well as its implications are found in the work of Hikins and Zagacki, (1988), Lyne (1985), Nelson and Megill (1986), and a special issue of *Southern Communication Journal* (Keith, 1993) on the topic of rhetoric in the rhetoric of science.

7. For recent Burkean analyses of organizational communication, see Mangham (2005) and Walker and Monin (2001).

8. Note in this case, however, that the classical conception of mind is not synonymous with cognition. The mind that Aristotle references encompasses affect and emotion. Thus, enthymemes are appeals to faculties both intellectual and emotional (Miller & Bee, 1972).

9. It is worth noting that the participants for management science research studies are frequently individuals and groups in powerful positions. Textual artifacts (commission reports, interviews, pamphlets, training manuals, newspaper articles, etc.) are selected precisely because of the power of their authors. This line of work partly fulfills the urge from ethnographers, discussed in a methods review edition of the *Journal of Contemporary Ethnography* in 1987 (volume 16, number 1), to avoid settling for the study of the powerless and to focus more on those who make decisions and allocate resources.

10. The manager-as-rhetor theme recalls the anxiety discussed earlier regarding rhetoric's potentially manipulative tendencies. In other words, management scholars who are skeptical toward rhetoric are concerned that managers might use their powers for ill rather than for good (Kieser, 1997). If one concedes that managers are influential in organizations and that their rhetorical strategies are powerful, then it is not a far leap to recognize that they may abuse this power. As rhetorical theorists have long attested, rhetoric can be used just as effectively by those with bad intentions as it can by those with good ones.

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