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# **FROM ORGANISATIONAL CHANGE TO ORG. TALK**

## **A STUDY OF EMPLOYEE NARRATIVES**

Submitted by

Melanie Bryant

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of the requirements for the degree of  
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Faculty of Business and Economics  
Monash University  
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## SUMMARY

This thesis is concerned with how employees interpret and talk about their experiences of organisational change. In management literature theoretical studies are consistently presented from a managerial or "top-down" perspective, which typically portrays change as a rational and linear process. A characteristic of top-down perspectives of change is that employee's voices are largely marginalised or not included in studies at all. This thesis focuses on change from a "bottom-up" perspective and seeks to explore the employee stories of change regardless of how irrational and ambiguous these may seem.

Within this study employees tell conflicting and ambiguous narratives of change, suggesting that they "package" their experiences in different ways. Conversion stories highlight a change in employees from lack of support for managers and organisations prior to change, to full support after change. Furthermore, those who tell conversion narratives argue that organisational change has provided career opportunities previously unavailable to them. Conversely, atrocity tales are replete with anecdotes of rejection and injustice and stories of workplace violence. Those who tell atrocity tales argue that organisational change has led to loss of career opportunities, demotion and, in most cases, exit. Regardless of the types of tales told, narratives are saturated with emotion. A closer investigation of emotion extends beyond discussing what people feel about organisational change, to understanding the invisible work that is performed managing emotions or manufacturing an opposite set of impressions.

Central themes across the different narratives suggest that employee's respond to organisational change through the use or suppression of voice. All respondents share a perception that voice is linked to career opportunities. Those who remained silent throughout the process of change were treated favourably, and reaped the rewards of career development and promotion prospects. Alternatively, employees who challenged managers were silenced with the removal of decision-making power and career opportunities, and were subjected to exclusion and harassment. However, this thesis argues that voice as a response to change is more complex and that voice suppressed in the workplace is manifested within the construction of retrospective narratives. Finally, this thesis explores the increasingly dramatic nature of organisational change narratives, which both lends support to and challenges the spectacle that organisational change has become.

## STATEMENT OF AUTHORSHIP

This thesis except with the committee's approval contains no material that has been accepted for the award of any other degree or diploma in any university or other institution.

To the best of my knowledge, the thesis contains no material previously published or written by another person, except where due reference is made in the text of the thesis.



Melanie Bryant

June 2003

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This study would not have been possible without the participation of the twenty-two men and women who agreed to be interviewed for this research. I am most thankful for the stories they shared with me that must have been very difficult to reconstruct. I also thank several managers from primary industries in the Latrobe Valley who took the time to meet with me to discuss the research. Surprisingly not all managers were "put off" by a bottom-up study of organisational change and several permitted me to conduct interviews with their staff within the organisation during work hours.

My family and friends have been supportive throughout the entire process of this research. My parents have been asked to read chapters to check for grammatical and typographical errors and to ensure that the thesis actually makes sense. My friends have been fortunate enough to avoid chapters landing on their doorsteps but have made certain that I have kept a sense of humour and maintained a balance between work and life over the past five years. My partner Vaughan Higgins had assisted me endlessly in helping to clarify the methodology, by reading chapters and providing constructive criticism and by listening to me complain!

An edited version of Chapter 9 was presented at the International Employment Relations Association Conference on the Gold Coast in July this year. I received some very useful feedback and encouragement from several colleagues in this forum. I would also like to thank the blind reviewers who made some helpful suggestions prior to the acceptance of the paper. An alternate version of this paper is currently under review for publication in Sociological Research Online. An alternate version of Chapter 8 co-authored by Julie Wolfram Cox has been accepted for publication in the Journal of Organizational Change Management, while the conversion stories featured in Chapter 7 have been developed into a paper accepted for presentation at the forthcoming Academy of Management conference in Seattle, USA.

Finally, it is important to recognise the value of the many "corridor conversations" I have had with colleagues both in the Department of Management and in other faculties across the university. These discussions

have at times been very thought provoking and provided me with a fresh view of my study. I am also extremely grateful for the encouragement and support of my colleagues who have already completed or are in the process of completing their doctorates. It makes life much easier when you are not the only one!

## Chapter 1

### Introduction

This study is concerned with how employees talk about their experiences at work. In particular, it focuses on the way that individuals understand and experience organisational change and how they report their experiences in retrospect. Although individual experiences of organisational change are subjective, managerial accounts tend to be at the forefront of organisational change literature with employee reports of change difficult to locate. It is likely that to some employees the process of change is a traumatic experience that an individual attempts to make sense of in retrospect. I also argue that making sense of organisational change through retrospective reporting is important to employees who may not consider change to be a traumatic event. A second aim of this thesis is to gain an understanding of the events that individual employees consider as important during the process of change. Exploring the particular incidents that are most significant to employees is fundamental in providing an insight into how changes impact on them and their positions in workplaces and how and why they react and respond to change in particular ways. In exploring individual accounts this thesis also aims to provide employees with a voice in a discipline of management research that is predominantly focused on managerially constructed accounts of organisational life.



In exploring employee voices, I am interested in the interpretations and frameworks that individuals use to comprehend and make sense of organisational change. I am particularly interested in exploring the types of narratives that employees construct in comparison to management narratives found within organisational change literature. My assumption is that from the individual perspective, organisational change, which is largely portrayed as a rational process, becomes intermeshed with the relational and emotional causing the experience of change to become highly ambiguous and confusing, and the experiences of individuals' unpredictable.

This thesis has evolved from several areas with the first of these from reading and researching organisational change literature. The "top-down" managerial account of change tends to be a tidied and sanitised version, portraying the organisation as a structure devoid of social activity, conflict and livelihood. It is not the aim of this thesis to criticise top-down studies but in order to progress and develop research within the management discipline it is essential to focus on additional perspectives. This thesis merely attempts to move away from the top-down approach and the emphasis on change from senior levels to highlight that other views from below are evident.

A second rationale for conducting this study is derived from my experiences of living in an industrial region of Australia in which constant large-scale organisational change has been the norm for the past two decades in the region's primary industries of electricity supply, paper manufacturing, water, education and health care. Organisational change in the form of restructuring,

downsizing, privatisation and amalgamation has led to the demise of careers and the loss of many jobs held down by residents of the Latrobe Valley. The secondary effects of such changes have also caused the closure and high turnover of small businesses and increased migration from the region. Since the implementation of large-scale change in the late 1980s the Latrobe Valley has changed from a thriving community to a region of high unemployment, parochialism and despondency.

This study is not specifically interested in the nature or effects of change within the Latrobe Valley itself. It merely uses the region as a geographic boundary for the research. My experiences of living in the Latrobe Valley indicate that top-down rational and sanitised accounts of change in the management literature do not adequately represent the experience of organisational change from the individual perspective. Rather, my interpretation of change is one of complexity, confusion and ambiguity in which some employees find success while others are met with loss.

By exploring employee accounts of organisational change this thesis aspires to contribute to an emergent area of bottom-up organisational research (Butcher and Atkinson, 2001; Boje, 1995; Wolfram Cox, 1997; 2001). Bottom-up approaches to organisational studies highlight competing interests and goals in organisations and draw attention to the multiple voices that exist within workplaces. Authors such as Boje (1995) and Butcher and Atkinson (2001) argue that stories are told at work that diverge from those constructed by management. On this basis, Boje (1995) argues that organisations consist

of a multitude of stories. However, organisations are predominantly registered as one story thus privileging the voice of management and marginalising those of employees.

The magnitude of organisational change studies that have been conducted over the past fifty years may raise concerns about the legitimacy of conducting a further study even from a bottom-up approach. This thesis aspires to provide further understanding of organisational change by picking up issues that are often overlooked, yet have serious implications for organisational studies. Firstly, this thesis argues that focus on the social aspect of organisational change is imperative to understanding what actually happens in organisations when change is implemented. This thesis picks up the social facet by exploring the views of individual human beings that are often lost and obscured in the process of theorising. I also argue that the way change is interpreted by individuals is partly caused by emotional factors. The rational view of change from above rarely takes into account the invisible ties that employees have to organisations or their jobs, the invisible efforts employees make to perform their jobs or the level of emotional investment that they have. However, such emotional factors are likely to impact on the way that a person thinks about and perceives organisational change.

Finally, this study is useful in that it highlights the importance of retrospective reporting as part of the experience of organisational change. I argue that the effects of change are not confined to the organisation. Rather, individuals construct and reconstruct their accounts in an attempt to understand and make

sense of events that they have experienced. I also believe that both successes and failures caused by change are renegotiated within present contexts thus leading to changing interpretations of change over time.

### **Overview of the Thesis**

The structure of this thesis has been more or less determined by the content of employees' stories. The primary aim of chapter 2 is to identify and discuss relevant theoretical models of organisational change. These models are included to provide an understanding of the origins of organisational change theory, the manner in which it has progressed over the past fifty-sixty years, and the direction in which it is headed, taking into consideration the limitations of organisational change literature. Chapter 2 also explores resistance and response literature as well as the 'linguistic turn' (Alvesson and Kärreman, 2000, p.136) that has been the subject of attention in contemporary organisational research. More specifically, the analyses of texts, language, narratives and discourses within organisations is explored in relation to incorporating the perspectives of staff at levels of the organisation other than senior management. Furthermore, the benefits of adding the linguistic turn to organisational change research are explored.

In Chapter 3 the research questions and the key assumptions of which the research methodology is founded are identified and explained. This thesis uses a constructivist approach and a qualitative methodology to obtain an understanding of both shared events and unique experiences across employee

reports. This chapter also highlights the inductive nature of the research and introduces, explains and justifies the primary methodological tools that have been used to generate the research data. Within this discussion the sampling framework used to obtain research participants is identified and the use of semi-structured interviews explained. Finally, this chapter explains how the data obtained during interview is explored and analysed.

Chapter 4 presents studies of employees involved in this study and briefly highlights different narrative plots that are featured within the employee narratives. Narratives are then analysed from the perspective of dramaturgy and region behaviour as a way of understanding how narratives of change are performed and presented. Chapters 5 and 6 explore narrative themes of responses and emotionality. In Chapter 5 the different ways in which employees respond to change are investigated in relation to the degree of personal stake that employees have in the process of change. Chapter 6 focuses in the analysis of emotions from the bottom-up perspective and highlights contradictory feelings that employees experience during organisational change, as well as the performance of impression management at work. As these chapters have been developed from themes that have emerged from narrative analysis, it is important to note that such chapters include discussion of theory that is relevant to the context of the narrative themes that has not necessarily been discussed in Chapter 2. The rationale for this approach is that using a constructivist epistemology, the researcher and participant "co-construct" narratives throughout the process of data collection, which are then further interpreted after the analysis of the data. In this sense,

the research is inductive, that is, the researcher does not predetermine responses by participants, and the relevant theory is discussed as the analysis unfolds throughout the thesis.

From the above themes derived from the data analysis, the data suggests that employees construct and "package" their experiences of organisational change according to different narrative types. Conversion stories highlight a change in employees from non-managerial lines of thinking prior to organisational change, to obvious support for management decision-making after organisational change. This chapter aims to gain an understanding of the rationale behind employees' sudden conversion from anti-management to pro-management thinking in the context of conversion literature and theories. Furthermore, it aims to explore the extent to which conversion stories are representative of employee experiences, or a reflection of the organisation's 'preferred narrative' (Frank, 1995, p.79). Chapter 8 explores atrocity tales that suggest that organisational change has led to the demise rather than progression of their employee careers. Atrocity tales are replete with anecdotes of disillusionment, injustice, rejection and disappointment and focus on tales of workplace bullying and similar to conversion stories, are discussed within the milieu of atrocity and violence literature.

The links between narrative themes are further explored in Chapter 9 in which voice as a response to organisational change is investigated. This chapter investigates the complexity of voice as a response to change by focusing on the perception that it is linked to career outcomes as well as suggesting that it

provides a vehicle for expression in retrospect. In addition, Chapter 9 explores the dramatic way in which both voice and narratives of change are presented and seeks to explore the spectacularisation of organisational change.

Chapter 10 concludes this thesis focusing on the ambiguous, confusing and irrational manner in which individual experiences of change are portrayed. It is suggested that further attention should be paid to the subjective nature of change and to varying accounts that do not necessarily support organisational narratives. Furthermore, limitations of this study are recognised and the possibilities for future research explored.

## Chapter 2

### **From Transformation to Talk**

This chapter identifies and explores organisational change and organisation studies literature. The first aim of the chapter is to discuss theoretical models of organisational change, ranging from organisational development (OD), to organisational transformation (OT) and the learning organisation. Within this discussion, the chapter focuses on definitions of change, the evolution and development of organisational change theory, and the limitations and critiques of theoretical models. A second aim of this chapter is to draw attention to literature concerning employee responses to organisational change. This section explores concepts such as resistance to change, exit, voice and loyalty as responses to change, as well as a brief investigation of stress and emotion. Finally, organisation studies literature is drawn upon to highlight how workplace incidences such as change are being increasingly investigated through the analysis of language, discourse and narratives.

#### **Defining Organisational Change**

There are a multitude of definitions for and explanations of organisational change within management literature. For example, Wacławski, (2002, p.290) argues that change is adjustment to 'the character of an organization that



significantly alters its performance', while Castle and Sir (2001) define change as the 'process of developing an organization to be more effective in accomplishing its goals'. While both definitions have been taken from recent publications, it is noteworthy that definitions of change provided by authors over the past five decades are not particularly different from each other. Earlier definitions refer to change as 'the strengthening of those human processes in organizations which improve the functioning of the organic system so as to achieve its objectives' (Lippitt, 1969, p.1). Alternatively, Margulies and Raia (1978, p.24) suggest that organisational change is 'a value based process of self-assessment and planned change, involving specific strategies and technology, aimed at improving the overall effectiveness of an organizational system'. Perhaps the most comprehensive definition is provided by Porras and Robertson (1992, p.722) who argue that organisational change is:

...Improvement in the organization's effectiveness (Beckhard, 1969; Huse and Cummings, 1985; Margulies and Raia, 1978; Robey and Altman, 1982), its ability to adapt (Bennis, 1966), its self-renewing processes (French and Bell, 1984) or capacity (Beer, 1980), its health (Beckhard, 1969), and its development of new and creative organizational solutions (Beckhard, 1969). Its *scope* is overall organizational or system wide change (Beckhard, 1969; Beer, 1980; Huse and Cummings, 1985). Its *conceptual underpinnings* derive from behavioral science theory, research, and technology (Beckhard, 1969; Beer, 1980; Burke, 1982; French and Bell, 1984; Huse and Cummings, 1985). Its *process* is planned (Beckhard, 1969; Burke, 1982; Huse and Cummings, 1985; Margulies and Raia, 1978), value based (Margulies and Raia, 1978, Robey and Altman, 1982), action research oriented (Beer, 1980; French and Bell, 1984; Margulies and Raia, 1978), technology driven (Margulies and Raia, 1978; Robey and Altman, 1982), consultant aided (Beer, 1980; French and Bell, 1984; Robey and Altman, 1982), and directed or supported by top management (Beckhard, 1969; French and Bell, 1984). And finally, its *targets* are the organization's culture (Bennis, 1966; Burke, 1982; French and Bell, 1994), structure (Bennis, 1966; Huse and Cummings,

1985), strategy (Huse and Cummings, 1985), processes (Beckhard, 1969; Huse and Cummings, 1985) and congruence among the various key organizational factors (Beer, 1980).

Regardless of the definitions used by different authors, it is agreed amongst most that organisational change theory is derived from the work of Lewin (1947; 1951) in the 1940s. Lewin's Field Theory (1947; 1951) suggests that individuals are subjected to a number of forces (personal, psychological and physical), which are 'mutually influential' (Rosch, 2002, p.10) in producing a changed behavioural state. This theory was tested amongst groups of individuals within laboratory settings to determine how personal, psychological and physical forces could promote permanent behavioural changes within participants. From the studies, Lewin (1947) determined that human behaviour is changed through three specific stages: unfreezing, changing and refreezing, in which equilibrium points within human clusters could be moved to a new desired level and then maintained (French, Bell and Zawacki, 1989). This three-step process has been used as the foundation for many organisational change theories, suggesting that employees are required to unfreeze their existing behaviours, change to the new behaviour, and refreeze new behavioural patterns through evaluation and feedback.

From Lewin's (1947; 1951) work a large body of literature concerning theoretical models of organisational change has developed, including studies that closely replicate Lewin's theories of change, through to others that critique his work and highlight the limitations of representing change as a three-step process. However, from this model, organisational change research

has been developed to incorporate terms such as "organisational development", "large-scale", and "organisational transformation", which reflect the various developments within the realm of the discipline, and well as highlighting the incremental and radical nature of change in organisations.

Jick (1993, pp.2-3) argues that workplaces operating within relatively stable external environments are likely to implement incremental, as opposed to radical, organisational change. Incremental change focuses on the 'improvement of a skill, method or condition that sometimes does not measure up to [an organisation's] current expectation'. Such change would be implemented into an organisation using 'small...steps...allowing organisational subsystems to be adjusted progressively' (Dunphy and Stace, 1990, p.69), thus highlighting organisational development.

French and Bell (1973, p.15) provide an early definition explaining that OD is 'a long-range effort to improve an organization's problem solving and renewal processes...with the assistance of a change agent...and the use of...applied behavioural science'. While the terms OD and organisational change are often used interchangeably, some researchers (Block, 2001; Worner, Ruddle and Moore, 1999) warn that there are some fundamental differences between the two. OD is centred predominantly on altering attitudes of staff to facilitate long-term change with the original focus on changing 'one component [of an organisation] at a time' (Block, 2001, p.71). In comparison, organisational

change attempts to alter the state of many parts of the organisation at one time, and recognises that change is cyclical and continual in nature (Block, 2001).

Alternatively, organisations operating within rapidly changing environments are likely to implement radical or transformational change. For some, OT differs from OD in that it involves large-scale, radical change and a 'complete break with the past and a major reconstruction of almost every element of the organization' (Nadler and Tushman, 1993, p.22). Furthermore, OT can differ from traditional change theory in that it may also focus on non-linear change in more complex organisational systems (Lichtenstein, 2000). Change of this nature requires 'massive, system wide, paradigm-shifting changes' (French, Bell and Zawacki, 2000, p.111) in the organisation.

Regardless of the terminology used and the different types of organisational change that have been developed, a common feature of theoretical models of change, with the exception of some transformational and emergent change theories, is that they are developed predominantly at senior levels of the organisation. Thus, the majority of studies have been conducted from a managerial or "top-down" perspective. I define top-down organisational change as reports, models, narratives or frameworks of organisational change constructed from a managerial perspective that affects levels of the organisational hierarchy beneath management. While these accounts of change may include discussion of the involvement and participation of employees, they tend to be constructed "away" from employees, that is,

without any direct input of employee dialogue. I do not consider top-down accounts of organisational change to be "wrong" or "incorrect" reports of organisational change. However, organisational change literature is lacking in bottom-up, or employee constructed accounts of change from lower levels of organisational hierarchies that would play a significant role in highlighting the different levels of voices and dialogues that are spoken in organisations.

From the top-down perspective, researchers have contributed to organisational change studies with many models and frameworks displaying different ways in which change programs can be implemented. Such models incorporate both OD and OT. However, more recent models of change tend to reflect the 'turbulence and variance' (Stuart, 1995, p.3) in the environments in which organisations operate, by focusing on continual learning and adaptation. This may be attributed to arguments such as those that by Dunphy and Stace (1990, p.70) that 'transformation...[is] the norm', or by D'Aunno, Succi and Alexander (2000, p.681) that organisations continually 'face strong, heterogeneous, institutional forces', which more or less dictate the actions of organisations.

It is relevant to explore the various models and theories of change within this thesis. While these will be reviewed separately in this chapter, it is noteworthy that the terms "organisational change", "change in organisations" and "change" will be used interchangeably throughout this research, incorporating elements of OD, organisational change and OT. The various

models reviewed in this chapter are discussed and explored in the following section.

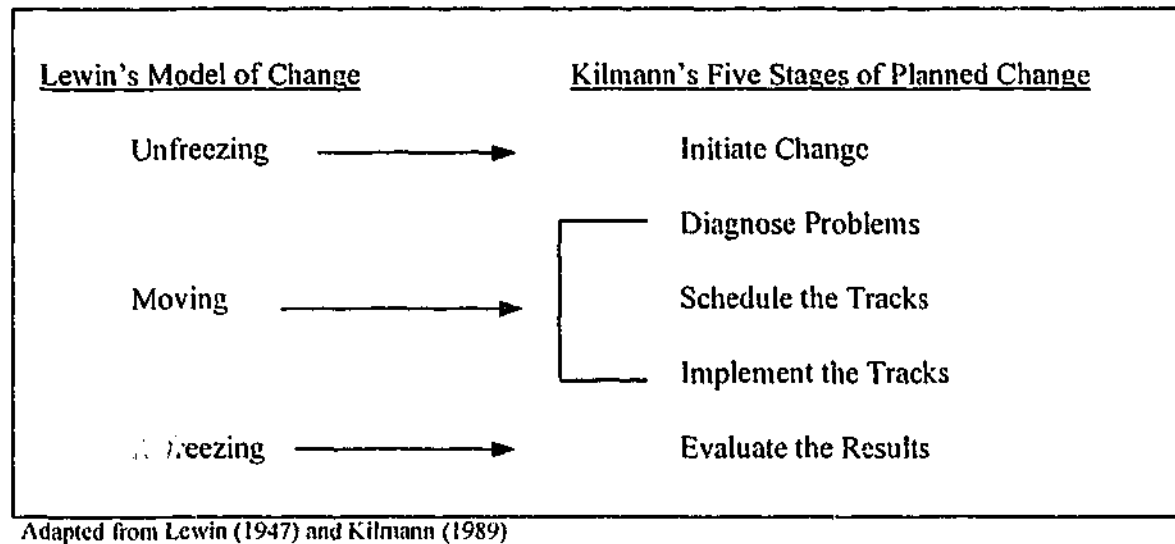
### **The Perspective From Above**

Many theoretical models of organisational change tend to be based on the work of Lewin (1947), following generic processes and implying that organisational change is successfully initiated in carefully planned and executed stages. For example, studies conducted in the 1960s and 1970s (Argyris, 1970; Beckhard, 1969; Cummings and Srivasta, 1977 and Likert, 1967) emphasise the importance of the Lewin's stages of change, highlighting the nature of unfreezing, changing and refreezing. Organisational change models developed in the 1980s and even the 1990s continue to largely replicate Lewin's (1947) studies and incorporate the work of Schein (1980; 1989) by also emphasising the importance of planned stages, but repackaging and promoting these on the basis that they provide a more sophisticated framework than models developed before them (Barzack, Smith and Wilemon, 1987; Beer, Eisenstat and Spector, 1990; Kilmann, 1989 and Kotter, 1995). Collins (1998) refers to models of change that emphasise different stages and the sequences in which change should be implemented as n-step guides. In addition, Porras and Robertson (1992, p.752) use the term procedure theory to describe such models of change, arguing that 'the description of major steps that must be taken into account in executing a complete change process' are the main focus in such publications.

Kilmann's (1989) model of organisational change provides an example of the emphasis on major steps that should be taken to successfully implement organisational change, and can also be compared with the work of Lewin (1947) to highlight the similarities between models that highlight procedure theory (see Figure 2.1). At first glance, Kilmann's (1989) framework appears to be more advanced than Lewin's (1947) as it recognises not only the various stages of organisational change, but also the interests of employees, stakeholders and community members that should be taken into consideration when developing organisational change plans.

The acknowledgment of employee and stakeholder interests highlight a major development in organisational change theory since Lewin (1947), who does not clearly draw attention to the benefits of change for individuals. However, when presented as a framework (such as in Figure 2.1), Kilmann's model does not specifically mention employees or stakeholders or their importance in the change process in any detail. Rather, it may be argued that when compared to Lewin's (1947) model of change, Kilmann's (1989) framework merely adds additional two stages to the sequence of unfreezing, changing and refreezing. Kilmann's additional stages of organisational change appear to be expansions of Lewin's (1947) theory. For example, Kilmann (1989) refers to the moving stage as diagnosing problems and implementing the various changes. This is not any different from Lewin's (1947) stage of change in which moving involves the identification of problems and the movement of the organisation towards ways in which such problems can be overcome.

**Figure 2.1. A Comparison of Lewin's (1947) and Kilmann's (1989) Models of Change**



In providing a critique of Kilmann's organisational change model, it is noteworthy that frameworks developed by others (Beer et al., 1990; Cummings and Worley, 1993; French and Bell, 1994 and Kotter, 1990) are also replications of the stages developed by Lewin (1947). The major difference between the Lewin and models developed by the above authors is that more in depth explanations and descriptions of each stage of change are provided.

Both Kilmann (1989) and Kotter (1990) also argue that change cannot be effectively implemented without the involvement of employees. Furthermore, both employees and managers need to develop a shared vision to ensure that change does not 'dissolve into a list of confusing...projects that can take the organization in the wrong direction' (p.63). Employees are further discussed



in both the works of Kotter and Kilmann (1989) in relation to the importance of employee commitment. Kotter (1990) recognises that employees are unlikely to commit to change programs unless they are convinced that change is both necessary and useful. Beer et al. (1990) also support this line of reasoning, and further argue that employee commitment is dependent upon managerial commitment and the provision of strong leadership.

Besides clearly planned and executed stages, commitment from employees, and strong leadership, the success of organisational change is also contingent on the skills and competencies of managerial staff. Often managers 'misunderstand what it takes to bring' (Beer et al., 1990, p.158) about change, and fail to comprehend that organisational change is a reflection of the need to 'cope with new competitive realities' (p.158). Both Beer et al. and Kilmann (1989) suggest that a lack of managerial skills and competencies in administering change, providing leadership, and guiding employees can lead to the failure of organisational change programs. This link between management competencies and unsuccessful organisational change is a point worthy of further consideration.

Advocates of participatory action research (PAR) suggest that the failure of organisational change programs can also be linked to the application of models and frameworks in which organisational change is portrayed as a process with clear beginnings and endings. PAR theory recognises that change is a cyclical process and also highlights the importance of employee

'participation and empowerment' (Dickens and Watkins, 1999, p.127).

French and Bell (1994, p.138) argue that action research involves:

Systematically collecting research data about an ongoing system...feeding these data back into the system, taking actions by altering selected variables within the system based both on the data and the hypotheses; and evaluating the results of actions by collecting more data.

By emphasising action research, change programs aim to 'build communities of people committed to enlightening themselves about the relationship between circumstance, action and the consequences of their own situation' (Dickens and Watkins, 1999, p.127).

Models of action research are in some ways similar to the procedure theory reviewed earlier in this section, but at the same time, claim to be more sophisticated (Chisolm and Elden, 1993; Greenwood, Whyte and Harkavy, 1993). For example, both suggest that successful change should follow a number of carefully planned stages. However, PAR models emphasise research and the collection of data after every stage to ensure that each is implemented successfully. Furthermore, the application of PAR into the organisation usually involves a senior manager or change agent who has an intricate knowledge of the culture and diversity of the workplace (Greenwood et al., 1993). Such involvement is thought to lower the boundaries between managers and employees, as well as consultants and employees to ensure that both are more accepting of each other (Santos, 1989).

Dickens and Watkins (1999) address a number of criticisms of action research programs. Citing the work of Foster (1972), the first criticism is that change programs of this nature can produce 'research with little action or action with little research' (Dickens and Watkins, 1999, p.5). Furthermore, they suggest that action research programs lack organisational control and are often aborted at the problem diagnosis stage, or after the implementation of a single solution, 'irrespective of whether it resolves the problem' (p.5). A further criticism from reviewing PAR literature is that similar to earlier research reviewed in this chapter, PAR models highlight the need to involve employees to ensure that organisational change is successful. However, employees are rarely included in anything but a brief discussion of gaining commitment of staff as a proactive strategy to avoid resistance and possible failure of change efforts.

Organisational transformation literature also emphasises the commitment and involvement of employees in the implementation of paradigmatic change. As mentioned earlier in this chapter, OT has several distinguishing features that separate it from conventional organisational change models. OT focuses on second order change, that is, the transformation of organisational missions and paradigms (Levy and Merry, 1986). Such core level changes reflect the 'shift in [the] global marketplace, increased competitiveness, and the rapid acceleration of change' (Neal, Lichtenstein and Banner, 1999, p.175). In addition, Fletcher (1990, p.2) argues that OT theory fulfils an unmet need that OD could not address with 'existing theory and practice'. However, similar to

Neal et al. (1999), OT is thought to have been developed from changes in society (Buckley and Perkins, 1984), macroeconomics and other environmental trends such as globalisation (Nadler and Shaw, 1993).

OT predominantly differs from other theories reviewed so far in relation to the size of change, the way in which change of this nature is described, and the language used to explain it. Firstly, OT is defined as 'a complete break with the past and a major reconstruction of almost every element of the organization. Vaille (1984, p.8) argues that change on the scale of OT involves the transformation of the 'deeper organizing principles which undergird everyday action'. Regardless of the definition provided, OT is considered to be 'wider, deeper, bigger or longer-term' (Tosey and Robinson, 2002, p.103) than OD or other planned change efforts. However, it is noteworthy that Newman (2000, p.603) defines OT as being 'intraorganizational change that leaves the organization better able to compete effectively in its competitive milieu'. Newman's definition differs from the above explanations of OT and she comments of the similarity between her interpretation of OT and the adaptive change as explained by Brown and Eisenhardt (1998).

Unlike other forms of change, OT is described using a number of metaphors that depict its enormity. Block (2001, p.68) describes OT as the 'emergence of a new state...out of the remains of the chaotic death of the old state'. Others refer to OT as reawakening (Fletcher, 1990), a spiritual course (Dehler

and Welsh, 1994), or a process comparable to birth and death (Ackerman, 1986). Neal et al. (1999) even argues that transformation has been referred to as grace, magic or a miracle. Consequently, the process of transformation may be perceived as being 'unreachable through logic [and] not tied to rationality' (p.179). However, Lichtenstein (1997, p.393) refers to OT as 'chaotic logic', reflecting the combination of logic and intuition that is required to implement it into an organisation. Furthermore, Neal et al. (1999, p.179) found that within research of organisations that had implemented transformational change, 'spirit was not at the core'. Rather, change agents used a 'theory to diagnose and design the initial stages of the change process', providing a 'rational logic for pushing the organization to the brink of transformation' (p.179).

Models of transformation reviewed in this chapter (Buckley and Perkins, 1984; Fletcher, 1990; Levy and Merry, 1986) further highlight the linearity and rationality of top-down models. Several emerging organisational change researchers have questioned the adequacy of top-down studies by arguing that organisational transformation is more complex than its rational representation (Butcher and Atkinson, 2001; Clarke and Meldrum, 1999; Finstad, 1998). However, the complex nature of transformation is merely reflected in the language used to describe each stage in the process of change. For example, Buckley and Perkins (1984, pp.59-60) argue that an organisation awakens to the prospective of change, suggesting that 'suddenly, the organizations awakens to...problems presented in the current situation...[and] the

organization is jolted to confront the existing environment'. However, it could be argued that awakening is not really any different from Lewin's (1947) unfreezing stage in which the organisation first becomes aware of the need to change.

Regardless of the terminology and explanations that are used to describe the various stages of change, it may be argued that many of the theoretical models of organisational change, PAR and OT reviewed in this chapter so far, are limited in that they are highly focused on logic, order and clearly planned stages. Collins (1998, p.1) argues that models of change that emphasise the different stages of change 'are assumed to be unproblematic, to be precisely, just "common sense"'. Furthermore, he argues that replications of such accounts of change do not realistically consider the complex and problematic nature of organisational change. For example:

Having read one account of 'what is change?' all subsequent accounts, no matter how well written, tend to be rather tiresome and repetitive...As a result, the basic frameworks for change offered...certainly represent rather simplified accounts of change (pp.34-35).

Rather than the emphasis on stages, Collins argues that the interests of groups and individual employees are more important in studies of change. While the importance of employees has been highlighted throughout a number of models reviewed in this section, it may be argued that explanations of how employees participate within organisational change are lacking within the literature. Literature concerning the Learning Organisation is reviewed in the following section. This literature is included in this chapter to illustrate that although

such programs are developed with employee participation in mind, they are also reports based on managerial perspectives, in which dialogue of employees are absent.

### **The Learning Organisation**

Where theoretical models of organisational change reviewed in the previous section emphasise the various stages in which change is implemented, theories of learning organisations focus on continual learning and the participation of employees. Lichtenstein (1997) suggests that the learning organisation is derived from organisational transformation. However, Senge (1994) and Thurbin (1994) argue that it is a product of the total quality management (TQM) movement.

Glassop (1995, p.9) defines TQM as 'the implementation of continuous improvement in all facets of the organization'. In addition, Hellsten and Klefsjo (2000, p.239) provide a definition of TQM from the ISO 8402 standard:

[TQM is a]...management approach of an organization, centred on quality, based on the participation of all its members and aiming at long-run success through customer satisfaction, and benefits to all members of the organization and society.

Regardless of the definition offered, the focus on TQM is on continual improvement, with emphasis on the involvement of employees (Gilmour and Hunt, 1995; Lau and Anderson, 1998). It is noteworthy that TQM also focuses on the gradual improvement of the organisation (Glasson, 1994; Lau

and Anderson, 1998), which is in some ways similar to definitions of organisational development reviewed earlier.

Although researchers debate from where the learning organisation evolved, it is noteworthy that the definitions and purposes of the learning organisation provided by authors are quite similar. Thurbin (1994, p.7) defines the learning organisation as an organisation 'which improves its knowledge and understanding of itself...by facilitating and making use of the learning of its individual members'. De Gues (1988) argues that the learning organisation aims to encourage superior performance, increase customer quality, and become adaptive to change through energised workforces. Senge (1994, p.60) supports this explanation of the aim of the learning organisation and adds that 'people, management and organizations have one unifying theme: to make continual learning a way of organizational life'. These explanations of what constitutes a learning organisation are supported by a number of further researchers within a vast body of literature (Garavan, 1997; Garvin, 1993; McGill and Slocum, 1994; Ortenblad, 2001, Slater and Narver, 1995; Swieringa and Wierdsma, 1992). Furthermore, all agree that the focus of the learning organisation is on learning competencies that the organisation requires for success in the future.

A major difference between learning organisations and other models of organisational change is that employees are included within the stages of planning and implementation. Senge, Kleiner, Roberts, Ross and Smith



(1994, p.354) argue that these stages are crucially important as they enable team building by 'including many people who have been traditionally excluded' from organisational change processes. As part of the process of change, the learning organisation not only claims to gather input from employees, but also review and communicate the benefits of change to staff (Senge, 1994).

Jankowicz (2000, p.471) provides a critique of the learning organisation by arguing that much of the research is 'unfocused and unproductive' and fails to distinguish between learning and adaptation. Furthermore, Jackson (2000, p.193) suggests that the term "learning organisation" has been overused in management literature and is not really a new concept. This argument is also evident in Garratt's (1995, p.25) study in which it is made clear that the necessary 'conditions to create...a learning organization were in place by 1947', which is approximately the time in which Lewin's (1947) studies of change were being conducted.

A common characteristic of learning organisation theories is that they claim to empower and include employees in the continuous learning and development of organisations (Applebaum and Gallagher, 2000; De Gues, 1988; Field, 1997; Senge, 1994). However, Ellinger, Watkins and Bostrom (2000) argue that managers, not employees, are responsible for the facilitation of learning and the unifying of themes within learning organisations, thus questioning the actual participation and role in change that employees actually have.

Furthermore, while the importance of employee participation is certainly mentioned in studies conducted by Senge (1994) and Thurbin (1994), such studies fail to incorporate the social nature of change in organisations, by focusing on employee opinions, or the divergent interests of individuals and groups and the organisation. Collins (1998, p.82) argues that by excluding the differing views of individual in organisations:

Many of the accounts of change...[become] based upon a limited, mechanistic and overly-rational view of organizations and of social interaction [causing accounts of change to be]...under-socialized [therefore]...fail[ing] to acknowledge change as a social activity.

From the review of literature in the chapter so far, it is evident that theoretical models of organisational change emphasise the importance of employee interests and participation in the planning and implementation of organisational change. While employee participation may not have been the focus of Lewin's (1947; 1951) force field analysis, the development of further models of organisational change, PAR, OT and learning organisations draw attention to the necessity of including individual members if change is to be successful. However, it may be argued that the top-down models reviewed merely mention employees with no evidence of their interests and opinions within the planning or implementation of organisational change. From these models, only an understanding of change from the managerial perspective and an idea of how managers talk about change from the top-down can be gained.

While employee perspectives of change are marginalised within theoretical models of change, studies of resistance and response within management

literature claim to recognise conflict, differing opinions and reactions to change that employees have. This literature is explored within the following section of the chapter.

### **Employees and Change: Studies of Resistance and Response**

Within top-down accounts of change, employee opinions and experiences appear to be marginalised unless change programs fail. The lack of employee representation within the literature in relation to the implementation of change is counteracted by the literature linking employee resistance to unsuccessful organisational change. Clarke and Meldrum (1999, p.70) argue that organisational change often fails because 'hierarchical organizations engender hierarchical behavior', in which managers seek to control and shape organisations without the input of employees. Such top-down approaches often lead to despondency and cynicism amongst staff at lower levels of the hierarchy (Butcher and Atkinson, 2001; Clarke and Meldrum, 1999), and thus, a lack of commitment and enthusiasm for the change process.

However, within management texts an assumption is often made that managers implement change and employees will resist it, thus leading to the failure of change programs (Daft, 2000; French, Bell and Zawacki, 2000; Waddell, Cummings and Worley, 2000). Resistance is considered as a natural and expected outcome of organisational change (Bovey and Hede, 2001a). However, it is often portrayed in the literature as being harmful to

organisations and a product of "troublemakers" (Dent and Goldberg, 1999a; 1999b; Krantz, 1999; Piderit, 2000). Piderit (2000) argues that although employees do resist change, the term "resistance" is fraught with negativity. Furthermore, 'potentially valid concerns' (p.784) of employees may be overlooked in organisations if managers assume that any act of challenging or seeking information is an act of resistance. Consequently, employees who are simply seeking answers in uncertain situations may be considered as resistant and thus treated 'as obstacles' (p.784).

Although employee resistance and the failure of change programs are still considered to be linked in contemporary studies, a number of researchers question the validity of such research. Dent and Goldberg (1999a, p.26) argue that a mental model of people resisting change is always encountered in research and argue that a limitation of such research is that 'conventional wisdom concerning resistance to change has not been significantly altered by academic work in the past 30 years'. Furthermore, a problem with resistance to change is that the term 'change' used by itself 'is too broad' (Dent and Goldberg, 1999b, p.46), incorporating larger and smaller scale changes that vary in their characteristics. Dent and Goldberg argue that individuals embrace some changes and resist others, but unless managers are aware of exactly what employees disagree with, assuming that they are resistant to change in general suggests that they 'lack an inherent capacity for change' (1999b, p.46). However, as Piderit (2000) argues, managers are often

unaware of the problems that employees have with change and simply assume that they are against it.

The fact that change is too broad a term to resist has led Dent and Goldberg (1999a) to the conclusion that very few employees resist change. Rather, subordinates are blamed for the failure of change when symptoms 'of the supervisor or the way change was implemented' (p.37) are listed within literature. Krantz (1999) disagrees with such a line of inquiry and argues that although the concept of resistance has been distorted, people at all organisational levels resist change. Moreover, people in organisations resist disruption, fear of the unknown and the anxieties that change can produce (Krantz, 1999). However, in response, Dent and Goldberg (1999b) argue that being resistant to such factors is not the same as being resistant to change. Regardless of such debates, Krantz (1999, p.42) argues that resistance to change has become a way of 'blaming the less powerful for unsatisfactory results of change efforts'. Both researchers have also accepted that resistance research should be developed so that the blame element is removed, and the relevant problems associated with change are given merit.

Studies conducted by Perren and Meggison (1996) and Waddell and Sohal (1998) suggest that employee resistance does not always have negative consequences for organisations. Rather, resistance can act as a mechanism for avoiding bad decision-making made by 'ill-informed senior managers' (Perren and Meggison, 1996, p.24). This argument is further supported in the exit-

voice literature. Exit, voice and loyalty as responses to dissatisfaction were explored in Hirschman's (1970; 1976; 1981) seminal work on consumer responses to supply firm decline. Hirschman's development of the concepts of exit, voice and loyalty refers specifically to the political and economic behaviour of consumers as a response to dissatisfaction caused by a decline in an organisation's performance.

In the event that the performance of organisations supplying goods and services to consumers begins to decline, consumers will signal performance lapses to companies by exercising exit or voice. In this context consumers who are dissatisfied 'can either exit by switching to a different supplier or voice their complaints' (Withey and Cooper, 1989, p.521). A third response is to enact loyalty by remaining with the company or organization 'but respond[ing] passively to their...dissatisfaction by accepting the status quo' (Zhou and George, 2001, p.683). It is noteworthy that voice is promoted as an active response to dissatisfaction, while exit does not provide the organisation with feedback about possible lapses in performance (Hirschman, 1970; Keeley and Graham, 1991; Rusbult et al., 1988). Furthermore, Keeley and Graham (1991, p.349) suggest that exit is a 'relatively neat' process, while voice is far more complex.

One of the more common uses of Hirschman's exit, voice and loyalty research is to focus on individual responses to job dissatisfaction caused by change within the organisation (Withey and Cooper, 1989; Zhou and George, 2001).

Within the exit-voice literature, it initially appears that responses can be chosen as alternatives. For example, Rusbult et al. (1988) present exit, voice, loyalty and a fourth response, neglect, as a somewhat tidy typological diagram and explain that voice and loyalty are constructive and preferable responses, while exit and neglect are destructive to the organisation. However, these reactions to job dissatisfaction should not be considered as separate alternatives.

Keeley and Graham (1991, p.351) complicate Hirschman's (1970) findings by arguing that a number of 'varieties and combinations of exit and voice' exist, including what they refer to as 'pseudo-exit and pseudo-voice'. Not only do employees seek to exit the organisation or respond with voice, they can also enact pseudo-exit through psychological escape, such as daydreaming and absenteeism. Furthermore, individuals can opt for pseudo-voice in situations where they perceive that they are unable to voice their concerns to management, thus leading to increased co-worker communication. Ackroyd and Thompson (1999, 21) suggest that employee actions not directed at organisational goals may be regarded simply as misbehaviour or irrational and dysfunctional behaviour that should be rectified as quickly as possible, providing further justification for the use of pseudo-voice.

Although studies of exit-voice and resistance are usually treated separately in management literature, a possible link between the two may be found in literature that considers voice to have the capacity to afflict negative

consequences on an individual (Boroff and Lewin, 1997; Feuille and Delaney, 1993; Keeley and Graham, 1991). Feuille and Delaney (1993) found that those who chose voice as a response to dissatisfaction were more likely to be subjected to exclusion in the form of lower promotion rates and have lower levels of performance in comparison to their non-voice using colleagues. While a relationship between voice and resistance is not discussed, Deetz (1998) argues that voice can be mistaken as resistance to change and therefore treated accordingly.

It is noteworthy that studies of resistance and response explored in this section are top-down perspectives of how employees behave during and after organisational change, or how they are expected and predicted to behave. Similar to models of organisational change discussed earlier, a limitation of the top-down approach to resistance and response is that it is difficult to obtain an understanding of how employees actually respond to organisational change and the rationale behind response choices. Lazarus (1993) argues that responses within stressful situations, such as change, are dependent upon an individual's level of personal investment, the amount of control they perceive to have over a situation and the degree to which they believe the situation can be changed. While Lazarus does not focus on organisational change specifically, his argument suggests that it is difficult to expect or predict a particular response or reaction from an individual as a consequence of organisational change.



Bottom-up organisational change research conducted by Wolfram Cox (1997; 2001) further highlights the unpredictable nature of employee responses to change. By focusing on the perspectives of employees, Wolfram Cox argues that organisational change is a highly emotional process for employees, thus leading to a range of responses, both positive and negative. The positive and negative responses of employees to organisational change are not recognised within the top-down literature reviewed in this section. Rather, the literature reviewed appears to draw attention to the negative reactions and responses to change, with the exception of voice, which is considered to be a constructive feedback mechanism for management.

Top-down studies of resistance and exit-voice reviewed in this section of the chapter represent a 'monologue' or 'meta-discourse' (Grant, Keenoy and Osrick, 1998, p.7) of change that is constructed at the levels of senior management. Consequently, 'monological approaches tend to construct the coherent story of the organization and the one which, usually, represents the perspectives of one actor or group of actors' (p.7), rather than the divergent views that different actors have, thus failing to highlight the highly subjective nature of organisational change. Furthermore, it may be argued that top-down monological accounts of employee responses to organisational change provide managerial perceptions of how employees are expected to react rather than how they actually react to change. Consequently, from the literature reviewed in this section of the chapter, it is difficult to learn how employees actually

respond to change, and thus virtually impossible to understand the rationale behind response choices.

However, exploring dialogue rather than monologue from organisations may enable a more adequate understanding of employee experiences of organisational change from the bottom-up perspective, as well as an understanding of how and why they respond to change in particular ways. The following section of this chapter focuses on the analysis of talk, and highlights the different ways that talk can be used to incorporate the perceptions and experiences of members within different hierarchical levels of organisations.

### **Organisational Talk**

Where top-down theoretical models of organisational change represent a monologue constructed at senior levels of the organisation, studies of talk in organisations recognise the competing dialogues that organisations consist of. The role of talk is an emergent field in organisation studies and has been described as 'taking a linguistic' turn (Alvesson and Kärreman, 2000, p.136). By studying organisations from the perspective of language, discourse, scripts, narratives and texts, researchers are able to incorporate the ambiguity and irrationality of processes such as change, by considering the talk generated at various levels of the organisations.

Talk in organisations has been studied from a number of perspectives including discourse analysis (Alvesson and Kärreman, 2000), the study of narratives (Aaltio-Marjosola, 1994; Czarniawska, 1997), storytelling in organisations (Boje, 1991; 1995; Boje, Luhman and Baack, 1999; Gabriel, 1995), conversations in the workplace (Ford, 1999), and the study of language (Butcher and Atkinson, 2001). This section focuses specifically on the role and analysis of discourse, stories and narratives within organisation studies, which will be discussed within the remainder of this section.

Alvesson and Kärreman (2000, p.4) argue that focusing on talk, more specifically discourse in organisations, enables researchers to 'make linguistic sense of organizations and organizational phenomena'. While there are a multitude of definitions and explanations of what constitutes discourse, Watson (1994, p.113) provides a clear definition by arguing that discourse is 'a connected set of statements, concepts, terms and expressions which constitutes a way of talking and writing about a particular issue, thus framing the way people understand and act with respect to that issue'. Alvesson and Kärreman (2000, p.5) suggest that when analysing discourse in organisations, 'the task is to study discourse as texts and talk in social practice [in which]...language is viewed as a medium for interaction'. In addition, Hardy, Palmer and Phillips (2000, p.1232) argue that meanings in discourses are 'supported and contested through the production of texts' and must be viewed 'in the context in which they arise'.

Alvesson and Kärreman (2000) recognise that there are four primary ways in which discourse may be examined. Using a micro-approach, discourse can be analysed according to the detailed manner in which social texts are performed, such as those performed by individuals in the workplace. However, to go beyond the micro level text and focus on larger patterns and trends within talk constitutes a meso-approach to discourse analysis. Within the meso-approach, trends may be observed from a group of people within an organisation. On a larger scale, Alvesson and Kärreman suggest that discourse may be analysed using either a grand discourse or a mega discourse approach. By focusing on discourse from a grand approach, texts and talk are presented as the one dominant story that may be used to communicate organisational reality from the top of the organisation. Alternatively, a mega approach enables a 'more or less universal connection of discourse material' (p.12) in which large-scale organisational phenomena, such as globalisation is addressed.

From these approaches to discourse analysis, it is evident that the majority of organisational change literature reviewed in the earlier parts of this chapter represents a grand discourse approach to organisational reality. That is, the experience of organisational change is 'ordered and presented as an integrated frame' (Alvesson and Kärreman, 2000, p.12), using dominant language constructed at managerial levels of the organisation. Such representations of change are also referred to as grand stories or grand narratives (Aaltio-Marjosola, 1994; Lyotard, 1989). At this point of the discussion it is necessary to draw attention to the observation that the terms "story" and

"narrative" are often used interchangeably within organisational research (Coffey and Atkinson, 1996; Czarniawska 1997; Ochs and Capp, 1996, Rhodes, 1996). However, Boje (2001) argues that there is a distinct difference between a story and a narrative and provides further clarification as to what is meant by each. The term story refers to 'an account of incidences or events' (p.1) that is often ambiguous, incoherent and fragmented. In comparison, 'narrative comes after [story] and adds 'plot' and 'coherence' to the story line' (p.1). From Boje's definitions, it may be argued that versions of organisational change constructed at management levels are narratives as they focus on sequence and rationality that would not necessarily be evident within a story.

While Boje distinguishes the difference between a story and a narrative, this thesis will use the term 'story', 'narrative' and 'tales' interchangeably to refer to individual's constructions of their experiences of change. The rationale for using all of these terms is that debate about the difference between story and narrative continues to emerge, is inconclusive and does not formulate part of this thesis' argument. Furthermore, while Boje (2001) argues that differences between stories and narratives should be taken into account, he does not clearly articulate when he is referring to a story and when he is referring to a narrative. It is also noteworthy that story is defined in the Webster's Universal Dictionary (1993, p.508) as 'a narrative of real or imaginary events', while the term "tale" is defined as 'a narrative of story' (p.521).

Within grand narratives of change, organisational meanings are constructed in the networks that usually involve senior managers, company owners and possibly 'some of the central innovators' (Aaltio-Marjosola, 1994, p.60), who speak on behalf of all members of the organisation (Salzer-Morling, 1998). That is, senior managers are the ones whose views are modelled and then re-enacted by organisational members.

The Grand Story...with its emphasis on efficiency, hierarchy, rationality and formal rules, still lives strongly in the heart of organizational culture, and has a lot of impact on life within organizational boundaries. Organizations may still behave much according to the grand assumptions about what an "Ideal, Proper and Healthy" organization is. Especially in circumstances of rapid organizational change, these basic, old metacultural ideals are easily adopted (pp.65-66).

Grand narratives are not new to organisational studies. Boje (1995) argues that grand narratives, which he also refers to as hegemonic stories, are often considered as more legitimate than those constructed at lower levels of the organisation. Therefore, grand narratives can act as a transmitter of organisational culture (Ogbor, 2001). In this manner, grand narratives based on the ideology of shared meaning amongst managers and employees, are constructed at managerial levels and communicated to employees (Ogbor, 2001; Trice and Beyer, 1993; Weick, 1995) as a way of defining acceptable behaviour and communicating positive images to the community.

However, Boje (1995, p.1022) argues that organisations consist of 'an official discourse and...many marginalized discourses'. Marginalizing employee voices for the sake of a managerial story represents a modernist approach to

organisational studies. 'Stories of modernist life depict...[an] administered, rationally planned, grand society' (Boje, 1995, p.1003) that is often evident in organisational change literature. Consequently, the voices of managers may dominate, rarely allowing 'any voice other than...[their] own to be heard (Boje, 1995, p.1020).

Other authors also recognise that managerial narratives are not necessarily representative of what happens in organisations and that other versions of change should be incorporated. Firstly, De Cock (1998, p.3) warns against the exclusion of employee version of change, and the total reliance on management constructed stories by arguing that:

No matter how strictly a case is argued, it will always be a story, an interpretation of some aspect of the world which is historically and culturally grounded and shaped by human personality.

Such an argument is supported by Hardy, Palmer and Phillips (2000) who argue that social reality in an organisation is created from numerous, rather than one, interpretation, thus highlighting the need to take stories and narratives from different levels of the organisation into account.

By incorporating dialogues of organisational change from divergent groups and individuals, researchers are able to 'search for "truths" [that are]...constructed through different and subjective frames of reference [rather than]...search for a single truth' (Palmer and Dunford, 1996, p.699) within managerially constructed narratives. Including employee voices and subjective experiences of organisational change introduces a postmodern

approach to organisation studies. Postmodern studies of organisations include micro-level perspectives (Boje, Luhman and Baack, 1999) in recognition that grand narratives are not necessarily representative of everybody's experience.

Drawing from the work of Rosenau (1992: xiv), Boje (1995, p.1020) suggests that postmodern theorists 'question the attribution of privilege or special status to any voice, authors, or a specific person or perspectives'. Focusing on the Disney play "Tamara-Land", Boje (1995) argues that when individual characters are watched in detail, their stories differ vastly from each other and often conflict with the organisation's narrative of what Tamara-Land is about. However, individual stories are often marginalised by 'powerful storytellers propagandising their version of reality as the reality that other storytellers are to live in' (De Cock, 1998, p.4). By focusing on the accounts of each actor Boje (1995, p.1008) found that while the official and non-official 'accounts [of Tamara-Land] played with the same story elements' and audience member could walk away with 'very different readings'. Consequently, Boje argues that when his findings from Tamara-Land are applied to the organisational setting:

Organizations cannot be registered as one story, but instead are a multiplicity, a plurality of stories and story interpretations in struggle with one another...more important, organizational life is more indeterminate, more differentiated, more chaotic, than it is simple, systematic, monological, and hierarchical.

Therefore, it may be argued that different narrative types may also be derived from organisational studies when individual members' voices are taken into consideration.



From his study of organisational redesign in a science laboratory (Science Lab), Boje (2001) found that organisational members constructed four particular narrative types. The first of these was the bureaucratic narrative in which predictable and rational stories, focusing on the argument that 'life is always getting better through successive reforms' (p. 130) in the organisation. Such narratives are comparable to grand narratives, or top-down managerial accounts of change that have been reviewed in this chapter so far. The second narrative type that Boje discusses is chaos in which irrational and ambiguous accounts diverge with the organisation's story. Such narratives highlight the 'out of control' (p.130) nature of organisations that is not easily accessible in management literature. In comparison, the quest narrative is more monological than the its chaos counterpart in that the individual constructing the narrative highlights overcoming adverse experiences to become successful, or 'the hero of the journey', thus drawing attention to the 'hero theme' (p.131). Finally, the postmodern narrative recognises that different voices exist in organisations and that individuals will tell 'fragments of some larger whole' (p.132), such as organisational change, which they do not necessarily understand or desire to understand, but within the contexts in which they understand change.

While Boje (1995; 2001) recognises that different stories and narrative types emerge from organisations, emergent bottom-up approaches to organisational change also accept that different languages are spoken throughout the process

of change (Butcher and Atkinson, 2001). Butcher and Atkinson (2001) argue that bottom-up approaches to organisational change not only consider organisations to consist of different stories, but also take into account politics, divergent interests between employees and managers and conflict (Pfeffer, 1992). Bottom-up models reflect an alternative view of organisation that 'challenges assumptions of rationality and hierarchy' (Butcher and Atkinson, 2001, p.559). While Butcher and Atkinson recognise that the aim of bottom-up models of change is to 'undermine the organizational status quo from within' (p.561), bottom-up models of change not only recognise that employees are affected by organisational change, they also seek to include them in challenging the legitimacy of top-down models.

This section of the chapter has explored literature concerning the use of discourse, stories and narratives in organisation studies as a way of gaining insight into experiences within organisations, from the perspectives of different groups and individuals. From this discussion it is evident that top-down models of change and literature focusing on employee responses is representative of managerially constructed grand narratives. Such grand narratives appear to be privileged above individual stories within the management literature. However, organisational theorists such as Boje (1995; 2001), de Cock (1998) and Palmer and Dunford (1996) recognise that organisations consist of competing discourses and thus, multiple truths that are determined by an individual's situation and context in which they operate. From multiple accounts of organisational experiences, Boje (2001) recognises

that narrative types other than those constructed at management levels exist. These narrative types draw attention to the different ways in which employee versions of organisational life are reported. While Boje's narrative types do not relate to organisational change specifically, further investigation of the different ways in which employees construct narratives and report their experiences of organisational change provides an opportunity for further research.

### **Conclusion**

This chapter has reviewed literature focusing on theoretical models of organisational change, resistance and responses to change, and the use of discourse, stories and narratives in organisation studies. While such studies have contributed to the development of organisational change research, a number of limitations have been identified which are worthy of further consideration. Top-down studies of change, from OD to learning organisations, tend to be sanitised, rational versions of change. The emphasis of such models is on sequence and the stages in which change should be implemented into organisations. Consequently, change is often portrayed as a process devoid of employees and social interaction. Furthermore, the models of change reviewed in this chapter highlight a managerial perspective, thus providing an understanding of how managers talk about or report organisational change, without any focus on how employees' talk about or perceive organisational change.

Top-down managerial accounts are also evident within the resistance and responses literature. A review of the literature in this chapter indicates that such literature emphasises how employees are expected or predicted to react to organisational change. However, it is evident that the contexts and situations in which employees operate in are not taken into account within the literature, thus making it difficult to establish how employees respond to organisational change, and more importantly why they respond in particular ways.

Finally, this chapter explored the use of discourse, stories and narratives in organisation studies as a way of highlighting the divergent voices and experiences that exist within organisations. From this literature it is evident that by including the stories of employees in studies such as organisational change, additional narrative types that differ from managerial accounts can be derived from organisations, thus highlighting a focus on dialogue rather than monologue that may be essential in obtaining a more thorough understanding of the process of change in organisations.

The limitations and opportunities for research that have been identified in this chapter provide the basis for the development of particular questions that this thesis attempts to answer. The following chapter focuses on the specific research questions and the aims of this study. In addition, Chapter 3 explains the methodologies and research approaches that this study takes to explore how employees talk about organisational change.

## Chapter 3

**Researching "Talk at Work"**

To understand how employees talk about organisational change, it is essential that an appropriate research approach and methodology be adopted. Collins (1998) argues that researchers can only get 'beneath the skin' (p.190) of organisations, and gain an understanding of what happens within them by adopting an appropriate research methodology:

Interpretive type approaches clearly suggest themselves as the new form of analysis for students who are committed to making a real contribution to the study and practice of change and its management. Potentially, these interpretive approaches offer a means to gain an understanding of the issues which surround change in organizations, and which influence the attitudes and behaviours of both groups and individuals (p.190).

Based on Collins (1998) arguments, the methodology employed in this research has a micro focus and attempts to record individual experiences often overlooked in grand theorising that is often characteristic of traditional approaches to understanding change in organisations. The focus of the study is not only on *what people do* in organisations, but also on *what they say they do*. In this context, the study of organisational change, as conceptualised in this thesis, is simultaneously a study about subjectivity and individual perceptions. The present chapter has four aims. Firstly, it identifies the aims of the research and outlines the questions that this study will address. Second, it examines some key assumptions on which the research methodology is founded. A third aim of the chapter is to introduce the primary

methodological tools used to generate data and finally, the fourth aim is to explain how the data have been analysed.

### **Research Aims and Questions**

In Chapter 2, I identified the linguistic turn in organisation studies in which discourses, narratives and stories have been included in research with a view to recognising the conflicting experiences, the ambiguity and irrationality that constitutes organisational life. The linguistic turn in organisation studies extends beyond grand narratives and includes experiences of organisational members below management levels to gain a further understanding of what happens at different levels of organisations. From the review of literature, it is also evident that accounts of organisational change tend to be hegemonic in nature, that is, dominating, powerful and taken for granted by employees (Boje, Luhman and Baack, 1999). Consequently, this thesis explores the version of change constructed by employees

From the limitations and opportunities for further research identified within the literature review, a number of research questions that this thesis will address have been developed:

- a) How do individual employees (from shopfloor to low-level supervisory positions), who were employed in Latrobe Valley primary industries in the past two decades when large-scale change was implemented, talk about their experiences of organisational change from the bottom-up?

- b) How do individual employees report their reactions and responses to large-scale organisational change, and what is the rationale for such reactions and responses?
- c) How are employee experiences constructed, reported, presented and packaged?

The research approach and methodologies adopted to address the research question are explored in the following section.

### **A Constructivist Approach**

To gain an understanding of individual experiences of organisational change, this thesis adopts a constructivist approach, in which relativist ontology and constructivist epistemologies guide the research. The aim of a constructivist approach in the context of this research is to seek an understanding of the different versions of organisational change and then reconstruct 'the constructions that people...initially hold, aiming towards consensus but...[being] open to new interpretations as information and sophistication improve' (Guba and Lincoln, 1998, p.211). Relativist ontology recognises that although respondents may share similar experiences of organisational change, individual realities are:

...Apprehendable in the form of multiple, intangible mental constructions, socially and experientially based, local and specific in nature...and dependable for their form and content on the individual persons or groups holding the constructions (p.206).

In other words, humans are social beings and their ideas about the world reflect their experiences and social relationships. Finally, using a constructivist epistemology to guide this research highlights the subjective

nature of individual realities and assumes that experiences of organisational change are constructed and created between the researcher and the respondent 'as the investigation proceeds' (Guba and Lincoln, 1998, p.207).

Schwandt (1998, p.236) argues that truth according to the constructivist 'is the result of perspective' and that 'we invent concepts, models, and schemes to make sense of experience...[which are constantly tested and modified] in the light of new experience'. Therefore, it may be argued that a constructivist approach to research and data collection embraces flexibility and maintains a heightened sense of how information can be manipulated, falsified or hypothesised both by the researcher and the researched (Guba and Lincoln, 1998). For this reason Guba and Lincoln (1998, p.207) note that the research methodology should be 'hermeneutical and dialectical'.

In this sense, the research is hermeneutical in that the researcher seeks to find meaning in the respondent's stories of organisational change, and dialectical since respondent's constructions of change 'can be elicited and refined only through interaction *between and among* investigator and respondent' (Guba and Lincoln, 1998, p.207). Only with such a methodology, can the participant and the researcher make sense of and interpret their shared understanding of organisational change. It is also noteworthy that a participant's construction of their experience is done in retrospect, thus drawing attention to the fact that versions of organisational change told by respondents are 'alterable, as are their associated "realities"' (p.206). Therefore, interpretations and constructions of change can vary according to the location or situation in



which the version is being constructed, or as the process of sense making develops (Weick, 1995).

As mentioned in Chapter 1, this thesis does not question the credibility of management stories of organisational change. Rather, it adds an employee dimension to an area of organisational studies that has a traditional managerial focus (Czarniawska, 1997). By incorporating the voices of employees, not only does the reader become 'clearly aware of the fact that there are different languages being spoken' (Czarniawska, 1997, p.197) in the organisation, they also become aware of the different issues that employees consider to be significant when organisational change is present.

### **Qualitative Research**

When using a constructivist approach to research, it is essential to also adopt a methodology that enables transaction between the researcher and the respondent (Lincoln and Guba, 2000). Furthermore, the methodology should ensure that such flexibility is maintained, and that the researcher does not discount unique experiences. The aim of qualitative inquiry is to provide representations of the social world, that should 'in some controllable way' reflect, rather than manipulate 'the social world that is being described' (Perakyla, 1997, p.201). Furthermore, a qualitative methodology enables the researcher to understand and collect data on the 'significance of an experience, or the sequence of events' (Denzin, 1989, p.83), while ensuring

that the varying interpretations and frameworks for understanding developed by employees are recognised and reported on.

While researchers differ on the actual research methods they use to collect qualitative data (see for example, Bryman and Burgess, 1999b), they agree on the central assumptions of what constitutes qualitative research. The primary aim of qualitative inquiry is to study how individuals understand and interpret social phenomena (Bryman and Burgess, 1999a). Furthermore, qualitative research has the ability to offer 'some of the richest and most rewarding explorations available in contemporary social science' (Gergen and Gergen, 2000, p.1025).

There is a multitude of definitions of what constitutes qualitative research. Schwartz and Jacobs (1979, p.7) define qualitative research as an effort to 'reconstruct the reality of a social scene in order to understand social phenomena by researching the actor's definition of the situation – his [sic] perceptions and interpretation of reality'. Denzin and Lincoln (1998, p.3) propose that 'qualitative researchers study things in their natural settings, attempting to make sense of, or interpret phenomena in terms of the meanings people bring to them'. In addition, qualitative inquiry enables the research focus to be placed on entire groups of people or social settings, thus making it more holistic than emphasising single variables (Taylor and Bogdan, 1984). However, the qualitative focus applies to the actual data that is collected as well as the methods researchers employ.

First and foremost, a qualitative methodology has the capacity to generate thick description and colourful detail of the setting or subject being researched (Neuman, 1997). While thick description is a term used by Geertz (1973; 1988) to describe ethnography and interpretive anthropology, it is noteworthy that thick description is considered within qualitative methodologies to capture the varying experiences of participants in organisational settings and the meanings that they attach to these experiences. Gaining a thick description of the subject being researched is considered as possible only using a qualitative methodology rather than a more "scientific" or quantitative research methods (Neuman, 1997). Denzin (1989, p.83) argues that qualitative research has a richness that is derived from the researcher's preoccupation with 'detail, context, emotion and the web of...relationships that join persons to one another'. The capacity to generate thick description enables the researcher to suspend their own personal beliefs and opinions in order to record those of the participant (Taylor and Bodgan, 1984). Not surprisingly, Gherardi and Turner (1999, p.105) warn that by its very nature, qualitative research can be very messy, convoluting and at times surprising.

A basic assumption of the present study is that an understanding of an employee's interpretation of reality can only enhance the overall understanding of change in organisations. An interpretive qualitative approach is therefore well suited to the research. Accordingly, a primary goal of the research has been to record and analyse the feelings, experiences and perceptions of employees. The aim was to record how they make sense of their own experiences of organisational change, rather than seek to 'impos[e]

a framework...which might distort the[ir] images' (Holloway and Wheeler, 1996, pp.4-5). In this sense, the research is inductive (Bryman, 1988). It begins with observations of specific instances and seeks to establish an understanding of 'the phenomenon under investigation' (Hyde 2000, p.82). It assumes that the participants are best placed to describe in their own words what they experienced at work and how they feel, regardless of how unclear or ambiguous their descriptions may be (Holloway and Wheeler, 1996, p.5). Indeed, this lack of clarity and apparent ambiguity in employee descriptions that are frequently dismissed by traditional deductive research, which include top-down studies of organisational change, as "unscientific" and "irrational", are crucial to understanding processes that occur in organisations.

### **The Research Site and Participants**

Within this study, the Latrobe Valley as a geographic region has been selected as the research site rather than a single industry or organisation for a number of reasons. Firstly, focusing on employees across a geographic region enables 'local and specific constructed realities' (Guba and Lincoln, 1998, p.203) to be featured in the research, rather than realities that are shaped by a specific type of change or organisational culture. Secondly, the nature and degree of change within the region over the past two decades enables access to a large number of individuals who have experienced different types of change within a single geographic location. Furthermore, being a resident in the Latrobe Valley, I have experienced the effects that change has had on the prosperity of the region. Finally, I believe that my local knowledge of the region, the

nature of change it had experienced, as well as knowledge of local reactions to change are beneficial in understanding the regional culture in which organisational change took place.

In focusing on a geographic region as a research site, it is important to acknowledge potential limitations. Similar to a specific industry or organisation, a danger associated with selecting participants from an industrial region is that experiences of organisational change may be influenced by the region's culture. Therefore, a limitation of this research is that the views and experiences of employees within the Latrobe Valley may be shaped by the region's culture and not representative of experiences of change in other regions across the world.

Twenty-two participants were selected from the primary industries in the Latrobe Valley, including electricity supply, paper manufacturing, water, education and health care once ethical approval of the study was granted by Monash University (see Appendix 1). To obtain a suitable sample for the research, appropriate characteristics of respondents were determined to ensure that individuals had experienced organisational change of a large-scale nature. Consequently, respondents included in the sample had to meet the following criteria: firstly, respondents were required to have been employed in a primary industry in the past five years; secondly, respondents had to have been employed within the organisation for a period of at least five to ten years; thirdly, respondents were required to have experienced large-scale organisational change, such as privatisation, amalgamation, restructuring or

downsizing. Finally, as the research focuses on bottom-up change, respondents had to be employed in jobs ranging from low level supervisory through to shop-floor positions.

All participants, with the exception of four, were recruited by means of a snowball sample. A form of non-probability sampling (Chadwick, Bahr and Albrecht, 1984), snowball sampling is performed when the initial participant selected plays a role in the research process in obtaining further potential participants (Zikmund, 1997, p.430). Also referred to as chain referral sampling (Neuman, 1997) and network sampling (Miller and Chandler, 2002), the snowball sampling technique is most appropriate when the researcher aims to locate rare populations (Sudman, 1976) or to study a specific group of people with particular experiences in common (Morse, 1994). For example, Maher, Sargent, Higgs and Croft (2001) used a snowball sample in an investigation of intravenous drug use in Sydney and Melbourne. Khavarpour and Rissel (1997) employ the same technique to explore mental health conditions of immigrants in Australia. Other researchers studying social situations such as problems in same-sex relationships (Sarantakos, 1996), the experiences of new fatherhood (Barclay and Lupton, 1999) and drug usage in female prostitutes (Cusick, 1998) also consider the snowball sample to be an appropriate procedure for obtaining and targeting a specific population. Therefore, the snowball sample is relevant in obtaining respondents who had been employed in Latrobe Valley primary industries for a specific period of time, and who had experienced large-scale change.

This research adopts a somewhat modified version of the snowball sample. Rather than obtaining all participants from a primary point of reference, such as an individual in an organisation or industry, several initial contacts were obtained through purposive sampling (Neuman, 1997) so that respondents with the appropriate characteristics could be targeted at the bottom of the organisation, rather than through senior levels of management. Purposive sampling enables 'cases that are especially informative' (Neuman, 1997, p.206) to be selected from the population. Employees who were known or introduced to the researcher and considered to have suitable characteristics to be included in the research were employed as initial contacts in the snowballing process. A disadvantage of using the two sampling techniques is that possible methodological issues could be raised in relation to how the data obtained through the different samples is analysed. For example, it is possible that more or less information about organisational change may have been shared in situation where the interviewee was known to the researcher compared to those previously unknown. However, following the doctrines of constructivist research, it is not the place of the researcher to determine whether or not some accounts of change are more accurate than other accounts. Rather, the constructivist researcher recognises the 'apprehendable...realities' (Guba and Lincoln, 1998, p.206) and that different accounts of change must be treated objectively (Schwandt, 1998).

Overall, the recruitment of an appropriate sample population was not particularly difficult to obtain given the nature and scale of organisational change in primary industries in the Latrobe Region. Although some participants were unable to provide information of further relevant

individuals, I found that simply by talking to people about the research in five cases led to the identification of new participants.

After identifying the target population, access was initially gained into the participating industries and organisations and contact made with respondents through an explanatory statement (see Appendix 2) and telephone call. Once the participant agreed to take part a final telephone call was made to organise a time and place in which interviews could be conducted.

### **Semi-Structured Interviews**

Twenty-two respondents who were recruited and consented (see Appendix 3) to the study were interviewed between June 1998 and October 1999 (see Appendix 4). All interviews were tape-recorded. Interview themes and questions were developed and designed so that participants were free to construct narratives of change under the guidance of the researcher concerning the affects of change of themselves and on the organisation. As answering research questions one and three relies upon the analysis and interpretation of participants' narratives rather than asking direct questions, the interview themes were developed to gain information about how individuals talk about their work, organisation and organisational change, as well as the types of issues that they perceived as most significant to them during and after change. The themes also discussed attitudes, reactions and responses to organisational change, providing information necessary to answer research question two. The interview themes were not emergent from specific pieces of research.



Rather, they were developed as a result of the gaps and opportunities that I identified in Chapter 2. For example, information about employees such as the type of work they do, their roles in the change process, and the effects of change before, during and after implementation is not readily accessible. To explore how employees talk about change it is essential to have access to such information, not only to determine how employees talk about change, but also to explore how and why they report their experiences in particular ways in retrospect. In addition, questions about attitudes to change during different periods of time (before, during and after) were developed from the lack of employee dialogue evident in reaction to change literature discussed in Chapter 2.

While I did not conduct data analysis until the completion of all interviews, observation within the interview setting indicated that the first twelve interviewees shared numerous characteristics and discussed similar themes. These characteristics and themes were also shared across a further ten interviews at which point particularly new or unique data was not being retrieved. While it is possible that this may have been caused by a limitation of interviewing only participants from the Latrobe Valley, Taylor and Bogdan (1998, p.93) suggest that failure to retrieve particularly different information from further interviews is a result of the interview process reaching 'saturation point', thus deeming the sample size to be adequate.

The semi-structured interview (Fontana and Frey, 2000) was the principal instrument used to gather data precisely because it enables participants to

report the richness of their experiences in a way that a more structured interview format merely succeeds in eliminating. This mode of interviewing also enables the researcher to 'treat people and situations as unique and to alter the research technique in the light of information fed back during the research process itself' (Schwartz and Jacobs, 1979, p.45). Researchers employ many different methods of data collection to investigate change in organisations. For example techniques such as in depth interviews (White, 1992), direct observation (Kotter, 1995), case study analysis (Goodstein and Burke, 1990), and questionnaires (Church, Wacławski and Burke, 1996; Seigall and McDonald, 1995) have been utilised in an attempt to understand various aspects of and the impact of change.

The interviews initially began in an informal (Chenitz, 1986) or conversational manner (Cahill and Eggleston, 1994) in order to build rapport between the participant and the researcher. Once rapport was established, the questions were asked in a somewhat improvised format (Janesick, 2000) to ensure that the interview remained flexible and that the participants were free to talk about their experiences of change without unnecessary interruption from the researcher.

The interviews also reflect Holstein and Gurbrium's (1999, p.113) concept of 'active interviewing' due to the construction of discourse between the participant and the researcher. Riessman, (1993, p.55) suggests that joint construction is inevitable as 'interviews are conversations in which both

Table 3.1

Research Participants

Month of Interview	Participant No. [P1]	Sex	Industry	Age	Location
Jul 1998	7	M	Paper	60-65	Monash Uni
Jul 1998	9	M	Power	25-29	Home
Jul 1998	12	M	Education	45-49	Home
Aug 1998	8	M	Water	50-54	Work
Aug 1998	16	F	Health	40-44	Home
Aug 1998	19	M	Power	40-44	Home
Oct 1998	3	F	Health	40-44	Work
Oct 1998	4	M	Paper	45-49	Work
Oct 1998	5	M	Water	45-49	Work
Oct 1998	6	M	Water	45-49	Work
Oct 1998	10	M	Paper	30-34	Monash Uni
Oct 1998	11	M	Power	40-44	Work
Oct 1998	14	M	Paper	45-49	Work
Oct 1998	15	M	Power	25-29	Work
Jul 1999	18	M	Power	45-49	Monash Uni
Aug 1999	1	M	Education	55-59	Work
Aug 1999	2	F	Health	25-29	Work
Aug 1999	13	F	Education	40-44	Work
Aug 1999	20	F	Health	30-34	Work
Aug 1999	21	F	Health	50-54	Work
Aug 1999	22	M	Power	40-44	Home
Sep 1999	17	F	Health	40-44	Home

participants - teller and listener/questioner - develop meaning together, a stance requiring interview practices that give considerable freedom to both'. Holstein and Gubrium (1999, p.113) further add that 'meaning reflects relatively enduring interpretive conditions, such as the research topics of the interviewer, biographical particulars and the local ways of orienting to those topics'. Therefore, the participant will construct his or her version of organisational change within the theoretical or subject boundaries applied by the researcher.

The interviews were conducted in several locations including the participants' home, the participants' place of work, or Monash University (see Table 3.1).

Although access to conduct interviews in the workplace was granted in most places, many employees were involved in shift-work, thus preferring to conduct the interview out of work hours. Furthermore, the nature of work for some, such as nursing and teaching, meant that many employees were unable to make time at work to participate in the research

Of the six respondents interviewed in their homes, four commented that they felt more comfortable taking part in the interview away from the workplace. Although the respondents did not explain clear justifications for this, two commented that talking about change at work had some limitations.

It's a bit difficult to talk freely about a lot of things [at work] because you feel like big brother is always watching [P14]<sup>1</sup>.

Some of these stories might seem extreme. And you know more things happened, but let's just say that some of these walls have ears! [P3].

In addition, one participant commented that being interviewed in his home made it easier for him to recall his experiences of organisational change:

I don't feel like I can really talk about these things while I'm at work because there's always pressure on you to do and say the right things. But at home, who cares? I can say what I like about the place [P22].

Such comments have the potential to raise methodological issues concerning interviewing employees in their place of work. For example, discussing organisational change at work may encourage employees to construct stories of change that may be considered as "organisationally acceptable" as compared to those who reconstruct their stories of change away from the

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<sup>1</sup> All participant comments appear in square brackets for this and subsequent quotations.

workplace. While the location of the interview may impose limitations on the data collected, significant differences in the narratives constructed by those interviewed in different locations were not apparent to the researcher. Furthermore, participants were asked to nominate a location for the interview that they felt was the most convenient and comfortable for them.

All of the interviews provided approximately one hour of interview transcripts. However, the flexible nature of the interview and the importance that I placed on the rapport building process meant that the time spent with each participant varied from one hour in some cases and up until two hours in other cases.

As a constructivist approach to the research was adopted, the interview questions were designed to encourage the creation of the individual version of change as the interview proceeded. Rather than address specific questions, the interview focused on themes (see Appendix 4). Using themes ensured that enough flexibility was given so that respondents were free to construct their versions of organisational change within the context of the research aims. The themes discussed within the interview setting focused firstly on the respondent's education and employment background so that an understanding of how they became employed in their occupations could be gained. This information also allowed cases of each participant to be developed. Other themes discussed within the interview focused on the nature of change,

involvement in the change process, and what the organisation was like after change had been implemented.

Researching organisational change using a qualitative methodology, and collecting data through semi-structured interviews has a number of limitations that need to be addressed. These are discussed in the following section.

### **Limitations of the Qualitative Approach to Data Collection**

Throughout my research, colleagues who are not familiar with qualitative methodologies have often raised questions such as, "how do you know your respondents are telling the truth", or "how can you measure their responses?" The simple answer is that as a researcher I do not possess the knowledge to determine whether or not the stories I am being told within the interview setting are in fact representative of the truth, nor do I seek to measure or quantify their responses. Rather, my concern is that when the versions of organisational change constructed by the respondents are reported within the written format, they should reflect 'factual accuracy' (Smith and Deemer, 2000, p.882), rather than a 'distorted' (Maxwell, 1992, p.285) account of organisational change. However, it is noteworthy that using a constructivist approach to the research, the transactional nature of constructions of organisational change may impact on the accuracy of the respondents version of change, as it is shaped by the influence of the researcher.

Questions raised about the validity of qualitative research and whether or not respondents are telling the truth, reflect a 'preoccupation with instrumentalism and measurement' (Avis, 1995, p.1205), when in fact the focus of validity should be on the interpretation and presentation of the data (Mishler, 1986). Consequently, a quantitative based 'criteria of reliability, internal and external validity' (Avis, 1995, p.1205) should not be used as the same 'yardstick' (King, 1994, p.30) to appraise qualitative research. Rather, the researcher should ensure that 'qualitative common-sense knowing is not replaced by quantitative knowing' (Mishler, 1986, p.113) and that the uniqueness of participant narratives is not overlooked in an attempt to generalise data (Stake, 1994).

In particular, issues such as recognition of error (Bailey, 1987) and memory bias (Kahn and Cannell, 1983) are frequently of concern when using interviews as the method of inquiry. Bailey (1987, p.207) suggests that error can be introduced in the interview setting by either the participant or the researcher. The researcher can bring bias into the interview by guiding questions in a somewhat deductive manner. In inductive research, such 'misconduct' (Sarantakos, 1993, p.191) can lead to manipulation or falsification (Guba and Lincoln, 1998) of the participant's narrative, thus leading to the construction of an unreliable story.

Alternatively, the interviewer may be misled by the participant's line of answering. For example, the researcher may misunderstand or misinterpret

the respondent's answer (Bailey, 1987), which may then in turn lead to an irrelevant line of questioning. Bailey (1987, p.208) argues that:

The quality of data gathered in interviews...may be weakened or biased by errors introduced by the interviewer by clerical error, interviewer cheating, or by aspects of the interviewer-respondent relationship, such as the social-desirability effect. Further, the respondent cannot consult records as a memory aid, and may not have sufficient time to prepare an adequate answer.

Research participants may also suffer from recall or memory difficulties (Kahn and Cannell, 1983) and thus accidentally omit information from their stories. Kahn and Cannell (1983) argue that this is often a criticism of semi-structured interviews as respondents can easily forget to answer part or whole questions, particularly if they consider these to be irrelevant to their experiences (Too, 1996). On a more negative note, participants can also show deceit during the interview process by purposely distorting interview data. Schwartz and Jacobs (1979, p.41) warn that while researchers make efforts to ensure reliability and validity of data, respondents 'do not always say what they mean or mean what they say'. As researchers cannot be completely sure that participants are not practising deceit, validity of the qualitative research process should focus on the reliability of the investigator's efficiency in accurately reporting the participants' experience.

Validity of qualitative information is demonstrated when the interview data contains 'reflexivity, credibility, rapport, coherence, complexity, consensus, relevance, honesty and mutuality' which are shaped by the participant's 'interests and values' (Avis, 1995, p.1206). By containing reflexivity, narratives of organisational change are asking to be accepted as 'authentic' as they have involved a 'conscientious effort to "tell the truth"' (Gergen and



Gergen, 2000, p.1028) and represent the participant's 'beliefs, interpretations and experiences' (Schwartz and Jacobs, 1979, p.72). Gergen and Gergen (2000) further argue that validity of qualitative data should take into account the multiple stories and voices that interviews and narratives can produce. By focusing on the multiple voices derived from data collection, researchers avoid reaching a singular, integrative conclusion' (Gergen and Gergen, 2000, p.1028) by incorporating and recognising that different participants have varying experiences. However, returning to the nature of constructivist research, the researcher must ensure that they do not confuse the voices of others with their voice, by determining which voices are relevant and which are not.

A singular conclusion can also be avoided if the research data is analysed in an appropriate manner. This research is concerned with the stories and narratives that respondents construct about organisational change and how these are reported in retrospect. The following section of the chapter outlines the strategies for data analysis that have been used to identify unique experiences as well as shared experiences of organisational change.

### **Analysis of Data**

The twenty-two transcribed interviews were analysed using two principle modes of analysis, each focusing on different aspects of what was being examined. Case study profiles of respondents were firstly developed in order to maintain a sense of the individual subjects that feature in this study and to contextualise their reports and interpretations. From the case studies,

narrative plots were briefly examined to loosely explore the types of narratives that respondents in this research construct. By focusing on plots, the events that are linked together to form the structure of the narrative are explored. Finally, common patterns and storylines (referred to as narrative themes (Boje, 2001)) were derived from the employee narratives and from across the various plots were explored. By relying on plots alone, this research would be concerned with the structure of narratives, without drawing attention to the shared experiences (Guba and Lincoln, 1998) that are evident across them. By including an analysis of narrative themes, the shared experiences derived from the narratives can be investigated. Each of these modes of analysis is explained in the following sections.

### **Case Studies**

Prior to conducting narrative analysis, it is essential that the individual employees' and their experiences of organisational change be recognised to ensure that the respondent - as a person - is not obscured and even lost in the process of data analysis. It was imperative for the present study to maintain the visibility of the individuals being studied to illustrate individuality, as well as the subjective nature of organisational change. This microscopic focus further seeks to highlight the specific issues and events of organisational change conveyed in the narratives in an effort to draw on these to illustrate not only the different types of talk that emerge from the process of organisational change, but also the different types of people.

Case studies aim to focus on the 'peculiarity and complexity' of individuals, groups or organisations in an effort to gain an understanding of their 'activity within important circumstances' (Stake, 1995, p.xi). Within this thesis, case studies of individual employees provide not only pictures of the experiences of change that people have in common, but also more importantly, pictures of the differences in experiencing change. However, to focus on the individuality of each case study it is essential that each person's social context (Hartley, 1994) at work be taken into account. This is also essential in addressing questions concerned with how individuals talk about organisational change, and how their versions are constructed and reported.

Yin (1994) suggests that the case study is the most appropriate strategy of data analysis when the research seeks to understand the relationship between the individuals being analysed and the context within which they operate. In addition to this, the case study aims merely to understand and explore thus is not interested in control or modification of the actions or behaviour of individuals. Rather, the researcher should aim to emphasise 'episodes of nuance, the sequentiality of happenings in context, [and] the wholeness of the individual' (Stake, 1995, p.xii).

The imposition of researcher plots and biases onto data is also a limitation of using case study as a form of analysis. When using case study analysis problems of rigour are more likely to arise from 'sloppy' (Yin, 1994, p.9) practices adopted by the researcher than problems within the process of data

collection. Questions of rigour and the generalisable nature of case studies raise the concept of validity. Triangulation is probably the most widely used 'heuristic tool' (Janesick, 1994, p.215) in determining the validity of case study research. Triangulation is considered to be 'a process of using multiple perceptions to clarify meaning' (Stake, 2000, p.443). However, Stake (1995, p.108) argues that triangulation can be complex 'because so many researchers [use a constructivist]...epistemology'.

Stake's (1995) argument provides a basis for questioning the ability to use triangulation as a means of providing reliability and validity across the narratives in this research. The basis of using an interpretivist paradigm is to focus on the differences between individuals rather than the characteristics that make each employee's experience the same. A concern is that triangulation may be used as a tool to discriminate between those who tell similar stories and those who do not. Consequently, the very nature of triangulating could possibly marginalise the voices of some, thus indirectly providing a grand narrative of employee experiences of change.

Richardson (2000, p.735) argues that triangulation assumes that 'there is a "fixed point" or "object" that can be triangulated' in interview data. However, such assumptions are inconsistent with postmodern and interpretivist approaches to research in which the varying perspectives of individuals should be taken into account. Rather, the concept of triangulation appears to be more at home in deductive styles of research, which may centre of one or more "fixed points". To overcome issues of validity in interpretivist research,

Richardson argues that researchers should "crystallise" findings rather than triangulate.

We recognize that there are more than "three sides" from which to approach the world...Crystallization, without losing structure, deconstructs the traditional idea of "validity"...and provides us with a deepened, complex, thoroughly partial understanding of the topic...What we see depends on our angle of repose (p.735).

In summary, Richardson argues that triangulation is too rigid and fixed a concept to be applicable to all methods of research. Furthermore, the use of triangulation as a tool to validate research findings is not necessarily appropriate when different methods of data collection are used.

Stake (1995, p.107) thus argues that researchers should take care and use 'common sense' when seeking clarification of qualitative results, and should use tools such as triangulation as a means of insuring that their interpretations of the data are as correct as possible. In addition, Yin (1994, p.92) argues that triangulation should be used to explore 'converging lines of inquiry' across multiple sources of data. By incorporating the experiences of twenty-two research participants, converging lines of inquiry can be explored. However, under the interpretivist paradigm, it is also essential that this research acknowledges and incorporates lines of inquiry that may appear to be unique and obscure.

To understand and explore bottom-up perspectives of organisational change and to address the aims of this research, case study analysis alone is insufficient. As this thesis is concerned with how employees talk about organisational change, it is necessary that the voices and stories of individual

employees be analysed in a more in depth manner. Therefore, narrative analysis has been conducted with a view to gain a further understanding of how respondents package their stories of change and present themselves as employees, as well as how they respond to change and justify these responses within their narratives.

### **Narrative Analysis**

As discussed in Chapter 2, Boje (2001) argues that there is a distinct difference between a story and a narrative. While I have clarified that both terms will be used interchangeably within this research, it is necessary to focus on the implications that the differences between the terms has on the process of analysing the data. Within this research, stories of organisational change are told throughout the process of interview. Consistent with Boje's findings, such stories are presented in a non-linear, fragmented and irrational manner, which can at times be very difficult to interpret and follow. It is when stories are given chronology and continuity in retrospect that they become narratives. However, Boje argues that the very act of providing the coherence of a narrative can in fact work against the nature of a story.

The act of turning story into narrative is a particularly difficult feat for researchers who wish to preserve the ambiguity of respondent's stories. By imposing a 'moral...[or] plot' (Boje, 2001, p.3) onto a set of stories the researcher runs the risk of losing specific details that the storyteller imparts as a means of making sense of a situation. Furthermore, stories could quite

easily be reduced to abstract accounts in the process of narrative analysis. Therefore, it is paramount that stories and narratives are analysed in a way that not only provides a sense of coherence and chronology for the reader, but also seeks to preserve the meaning intended by the storyteller.

To overcome the problem of destroying stories, Boje (2001) proposes alternative means of analysis that seek to avoid the 'single-voiced stories' (p.9) that are ever-present in management and organisational studies. His methods of analyses extend conventional forms of narrative analysis by including the investigation of stories 'that are too unconstructed and fragmented to be analysed' (p.1) in the traditional manner. This method enables researchers to perform analysis in a manner that ensures that some coherence can be provided without losing the sense of ambiguity and irrationality that occurs across different stories. Furthermore, applying narrative coherence to stories in this way ensures that a hegemonic narrative, or one 'true story' (de Cock, 1998, p.4), does not marginalise individual experiences, or lose the plurality of voices.

In this thesis, the term "narrative analysis" will be used to explain the combination of narrative and story analysis that is utilised in this study. This research adopts two specific methods of narrative analysis. Firstly, a plot analysis investigates the events that are linked together to form the structure of the narrative (Boje, 2001; Ricoeur, 1984). Secondly, an inductive thematic analysis explores how employees 'sort their stories' (Boje, 2001, p.123), thus focusing on the types of tales that they construct.

### *Narrative Plots*

Although I have recognised that the act of turning story into narrative can destroy meaning, several researchers suggest that this is the only way that human experiences can be imparted in a way that makes sense to others. Kermonde (1966, p.35) believe that people can only understand experiences by constructing a 'beginning, middle and end' to a story to give it coherence for teller and listener. Gergen (1988, p.94) explains that narratives need to be turned into stories that are more suitable for an audience, rather than the 'random sequences of action and reaction' that is evident in the retelling. Furthermore, Czarniawska (1998, p.2) claims that fragmented events 'require a *plot*, that is, some way to bring them into a meaningful whole'. In order to bring stories into a meaningful whole, researchers can turn their attention to narrative plots by adding dimensions of temporality and causality, thus emphasising the way in which events within stories are linked to each other.

To use plot analysis as a means of investigating narratives, it is essential that certain "rules" be recognised. Although narrative plot is often recognised simply as a series of events placed in a chronological frame (Boje, 2001; Frank, 1995), Boje argues that plot analysis requires more if both stories and narratives are to be considered. Consequently, to avoid grand theorising, researchers should focus on causality, the arrangements of events and the nature of temporality within the narrative (Boje, 2001). Furthermore, researchers require pre-understanding of the subject being researched in order



to follow stories and 'draw parallels between various patterns of experience' (p.120) required to form a plot.

Where plot focuses on 'what links events together into a narrative structure' (Boje, 2001, p.108), causality is an 'invention: a projection of our will onto an event, making some other event responsible for something that happens' (Culler, 1981, p.183 in Boje, 2001, p.93). By understanding what the events were that caused participants in this research to respond to organisational change in the way that they did, the reader is able to grasp a better understanding of how the plot was determined. Of equal importance is the discussion of temporality in narrative plot. Besides developing a pre-understanding of and finding parallels between patterns within stories, temporality enables researchers to understand the sequence of events that are discussed in stories.

Ricouer (1979) and Polkinghorne (1988) acknowledge the importance of temporality in reflecting the richness of subjective experience. However, Polkinghorne (1988, p.126) also argues that:

Original human experience is multilayered, hermeneutically organized and abundantly meaningful, and the reduction of this original experience to create [a scientific]...image of how reality actually is, independent of human experience, has produced a representation of time that is extremely thin compared to the thick and varied appearance of time in human experience. The sources of the temporal features of reality as experienced are found in the temporalizing activity of human beings, namely, narrative production.

Goffman (1969, p.26) regards a combination of temporality and 'performance' as essential to the narrative plot. By performing the plot of significant events within a sequential or temporal framework, important

situations are defined and communicated in a way that allows the audience to recognise and construe the key events 'from the flow of surrounding events' (Goffman, 1975, p.25). Goffman further adds that these events are presented 'as something to reexperience in a way that the audience can become involved in the retelling of the participants' (p.506) personal experience, rather than being required to try and make sense of fragmented storylines.

Bridger and Maines (1998, p.321) further clarify the importance of understanding temporality in reconstructing past experiences by suggesting that the central concern of narrative is to give 'representations and interpretations' of events in a sequential order that can be followed by others. Furthermore, they suggest that in the event that temporality is not imposed onto stories, audiences will not be able to identify causal processes, and thus not understand the plot. However, temporality within narratives should be treated with care. When reading the work of the above researchers it is easy to assume that narrative events are sequenced in a linear fashion that develops into the plot. However, this is not always so.

Ronai (1992, p.104) adds a twist to the temporality argument by suggesting that 'clearly demarcated, linear story lines' cannot be readily presented as the telling of personal history involves a 'circular process of interpretation that blurs and intertwines both cognitive and emotional understandings'. Furthermore, stories and time structures are likely to shift 'forward, backward, and sideways through time, space, and various attitudes'. In addition, Boje

(2001, p.121) argues that the temporality of narratives can easily include 'flashback, flash-forward, repetition and ellipsis'.

Plot analysis provides a meaningful way to explore both stories and narratives of organisational change in the Latrobe Valley. In particular, focus on causal processes seeks to not only highlight the most significant events discussed by employees and their relationships with each other, but also to understand how or why employees respond to change in specific ways. An investigation of narrative plots also enables a typology of plots to be developed as a means of providing partial understanding of the ways in which employees interpret and package their stories of organisational change. It is essential to recognise that performing a plot analysis can have its limitations in that it can be a somewhat 'narrow and reductionist' (Boje, 2001, p.121) way of analysing narratives. Consequently, this research also explores the inductive themes derived from the narratives.

#### *Narrative Themes*

By focusing on plot analysis alone, I risk reducing respondents' experiences into linear lines and narrative typologies without analysing the individual experiences in any detail. By adopting a theme analysis, the stories and narratives can be further explored according to the way that employees interpret and sort them (Boje, 2001), and according to the way that they are 'embedded contextually in [story] folds and refolds' (p.126). Inductive theme analysis is concerned with:

Narrative themes...[that are] developed with ethnographic professional sensitivity to emic (insider inductive or grounded situational usage).

The inductive approach to narrative theme analysis apes its taxonomy from the emic categories in use by people who tell stories. Emic is how insiders sort their stories (Boje, 2001, p.123).

While this study is primarily inductive in nature, it is noteworthy that the determination of narrative types does involve a degree of etic, or outsider, influence. Inductive stories and themes determine the shape of the research. However, the very act of reconstructing the narratives to write this thesis introduces a degree of etic into the study. This is particularly relevant in the act of determining what types of stories or narratives participants tell about organisational change. Although narrative types in this research are determined by emic stories, the act of turning story into narrative introduces etic. Boje (2001, p.127) refers to this act as 'etic/emic duality' and argues that in order to find meaning in stories, researchers are required to fill in the blanks and thus 'explore the referents that extend beyond the story' (p.127), which may involve looking for outside explanations. While this thesis is concerned with the stories told by the respondents, it is important to recognise the part that researchers play in their own act of sense making.

Focusing on the way in which employees sort and report their experiences of organisational change can assist in determining how participants use narratives as a retrospective sense-making tool. Within the sorting of stories, individuals are able to make sense of their experiences (Lempert, 1994) by renegotiating the past and attaching new meanings to difficult experiences at a distance (Dingwall, 1977). Lempert (1994) draws attention to the sorting of stories in her study of domestic abuse victims and highlights that sorting stories provides individuals with a sense-making tool.

Narratives are used by abused women as linguistic tools that serve to order their experiences, construct reality, and creatively make sense of their violent, intimate relationships. Through narrative constructions, abused women reflect retrospective assessments of their intimate situations...their own rationales for action and/or inaction, as well as the continuous erosions in notions of self...through their narrations, abused women contextualise the experiences of violence and explain their choices to themselves and others (pp.411-412).

Using both Lempert's explanation and semi-structured interviews, an inductive theme analysis of change narratives told in this study aims to find how employees retrospectively assess their behaviour in order to provide an understanding of their experiences, and the types of tales that they construct.

By using an inductive theme analysis in conjunction with narrative plot analysis, this study aims to preserve stories of change that differ from top-down perspectives by focusing on the causal events that determined the narrative plot, as well as the inductive themes that determine the narrative type. However, narrative analysis, like case studies and qualitative research in general, has been the subject of continuous debate, particularly with regard to reliability. More specifically, issues of rigour, generalisability and objectivity are introduced when qualitative methodologies are used as the basis for investigation. Exploring individual experiences, whether it is through narratives or case study often raises the notion of validity. Therefore, the question of how likely is the 'finding of the research independent of accidental circumstances' (Perakyla, 1997, p.203) needs to be addressed.

While studying narratives of individuals can introduce a further dimension into organisation studies, they are often considered as 'mythical' (Funnell, 1998, p.144), distorted accounts of reality (Lorenz, 1994), or

'methodologically unsound' (White, 1989, p.1). Extensive debate has surrounded the use of narrative focusing particularly on criticism of the temporal and interpretative nature of narratives. Mink (1978, p.145), for example, argues that narrative is a 'product of the imaginative construction' and by virtue of this fact is unable to 'defend its claim to truth by any accepted procedure of...authentication'. Mink adds that life stories cannot be told as they are lived due to the lack of temporal ordering of life experiences; biographies do not unfold in a predictable manner nor follow a set chronology. Denzin (1989, p.2) supports Mink's arguments, adding that there is 'no way to stuff a real life person between the covers of a text'. White (1981, p.4) questions the reliability of narrative analysis by questioning whether 'real events are properly represented when they...[are] shown to display the formal coherence of a story'. Furthermore, Boje (2001, p.122) argues that narrative 'degrades storytelling replacing it with new plots and more cohesion than inheres in the field of action'.

## **Conclusion**

Within this chapter, the methodological approach to this thesis has been explored, as have the various tools of data collection and data analysis. Criticisms from the review of literature have identified that for change in organisations to be adequately understood researchers need to adopt an interpretivist paradigm in which the varying narratives of individuals can be explored. Consequently, a relativist ontology and constructivist epistemological approach drawing upon a qualitative methodology has been

used in an attempt to investigate the varying realities that employees have of the experience of change in organisations.

An interpretive turn in qualitative research has legitimised the use of narratives as a formal approach to investigating organisational life. As well as providing a means of communicating experiences, narratives enable researchers to understand how people interpret and sort experiences and frame their understandings of social phenomena. The remainder of this thesis is founded on the narratives derived from the research participants. Starting with Chapter 4, I now turn my focus to the way employees talk about organisational change and organise their stories. Specifically, Chapter 4 introduces several of the research participants and identifies the variety of narratives that have been constructed within the interviews, drawing attention to the different narrative plots. Furthermore, the following chapter focuses on how employees perform their narratives of change within the interview setting using Goffman's (1984) front and back stage performance, dramaturgy and the theatrical metaphor as a basis of analysis.

## Chapter 4

### **Front Stage and Back Stage Talk**

Throughout the interview process participants evoked autobiographical memories and 'strips of personal experience' (Goffman, 1981, p.174) to develop narratives. Access to autobiographical memories enables the teller to 'construct coherent pasts that make sense of the present' (Svensson, 1997, pp.72-73). These memories are often centred on 'consequential events' (Riessman, 1993, p.3) or encounters that are of great significance to the storyteller. A feature of autobiography and narrative is the manner in which memories are presented to an audience. In the process of telling, events are recalled and told haphazardly (Ballis, 1999), often with little regard to order. Consequently, some memories may be distorted while new ones are created (Fivush, 1995).

This chapter introduces the reader to several of the employees included in this study and draws attention to the different perceptions and interpretations of organisational change. The experiences of employees in this chapter are presented as a series of case studies as a way of highlighting the issues and events that individual respondents consider as most significant to them. This chapter draws attention to the analysis of the data through case studies, in which the relationship between the employees being presented and the contexts in which they operate in is explored. In addition, the case study



analysis maintains the participants' visibility and highlights the subjective nature of their experiences. The analysis of narrative plots identifies the events that link the stories together (Boje, 2001). Following the presentation of employee narratives, this chapter explores the way in which employee experiences are ordered and reconstructed by focusing on the concepts of front and back region behaviour, dramatism, and dramaturgy as a way of explaining how narratives and stories were performed and presented within the interview setting.

### **Biographies of Change**

Van Maanen (1988) recognises that researchers construct different types of tales according to their interpretations and frameworks for understanding. Such tales represent ethnographies, or 'portraits of diversity in an increasingly homogenous world' (p. xiv), which are derived from the communities and cultures which humans function within. The research participants in this study construct narratives that are shaped and influenced by their experiences at work and the culture that they operate in, representing ethnographies of organisational change. The cases explored in this chapter are examples of the different types of narrative plots that feature in this research. These cases have been chosen in an attempt to highlight not only the structure of the narrative, but also the links between the employee's experience of change and the type of narrative they construct. The names of participants have been changed in order to maintain their anonymity. The versions of change provided in this chapter have been compressed from the original stories.

However, the author has ensured that the language used and the experiences discussed by the respondents are consistent with the taped recordings.

### **A Romance Tale: Catrina Keynton**

Catrina's career in the healthcare industry began in 1994 after the completion of her university studies. Prior to her employment, the workplace had experienced large-scale change with the amalgamation of three of the region's organisations. Several years into Catrina's employment, the State Government announced further plans to privatise the organisation and in conjunction with the new owners, relocated all of the operations to a central, newly built facility.

Initial plans to privatise the organisation were met with mixed responses from staff. Catrina remembers that she 'felt weary' of the changes primarily due to the lack of formal information. She also felt 'a bit excited...because it meant the beginning of something new'. In the early days poor communication led to an atmosphere of uncertainty and at times hostility between management and employees. During this time the organisation was also rife with 'out of control' rumours about organisational closure, job losses and sackings:

It [was] a very long process...we had no information from the government. So we didn't know where the [organisation] was going to be, we didn't know who was building it, we didn't know when it was going to open and that...process took about three years. We just really didn't know anything about what was going on...we knew we were going to close but there was nothing official and yeah that was...hard.

Catrina recalls that once the new company was announced 'everything happened really fast'. She believes that the aim of the company was to

implement 'change quickly and painlessly'. However, she also feels that groups of Latrobe Valley citizens who objected to the change and protested to governments hindered this process. As a result, 'rumours [went] on too long' and escalated feelings of job insecurity. While rumours did 'have some impact on staff at the start', Catrina suggests that 'you got so used to it that you'd be like...oh this rumour and that rumour...and nothing would ever come of it'. Furthermore, 'in the end I think the rumour mill was a way of letting of steam and trying to get information'. In hindsight, Catrina believes that 'the rumour mill is a normal process of change', adding that 'people get a bit excited' and consequently 'all sorts of misinformation gets thrown about'.

While Catrina was 'a bit scared' of the possibility of job loss she felt that she was 'entering exciting times'. The introduction of a new management team brought 'a new philosophy' into the workplace which she felt 'made people a bit more confident'. As well as 'having faith in management', Catrina considers that she was 'lucky' to be younger and have less 'outside responsibilities' than most staff. This enhanced her 'job flexibility' in 'the event that something drastic did go wrong' and she was faced with 'having to look for another job somewhere'. The combination of these factors gave Catrina 'some security in coping with change':

I didn't feel as under threat as some people might have. Mainly because I knew that if I did lose my job that I was young enough and didn't have the responsibilities that would stop me from getting another job elsewhere. Other people didn't have that. They had the families and single parent incomes to think about which would have been hard.

However, she argues says that at times 'while change was good' the coping was 'sometimes all...too much'. Catrina indicates that her colleagues were 'a

great strength in terms of support' and suggests that she 'probably could not have gotten through change without them.

[The work] can be really hard! There's...a sort of sharing of a lot of black humour. I mean when you deal with [things like] death and change on a daily basis you tend to get a really black sense of humour and...make jokes that probably the public would be appalled by. But as nurses we whisper in each other's ears and it's a way of releasing the stress and sharing the experience...and coping.

Catrina believes that the burden of dealing with death and terminal illness as part of the job, added to the stress of change, making relationships with other nurses 'extremely important'. She suggests that some nurses are 'around instinctively when the other one needs help' to support, debrief and 'just make life easier to deal with'. Having colleagues who also are experiencing change and with whom 'you can bounce ideas off is very beneficial'.

Having a 'working husband' also helped Katrina to cope with change. While she recalls that 'I was never so concerned about losing my job...rather more about where I would be relocated', her working husband did enable 'some peace of mind'. 'Not all of the women had' security in 'knowing that their husband works', which some nurses 'simply could not cope with'. The uncertainty at work and job insecurity meant that Katrina 'couldn't plan for the extra stuff...like the big overseas trip', but she found comfort in knowing that she 'still would have been able to go home and pay the bills'.

Even with the comfort of financial security Katrina believes that the experience of organisational change was an emotional time. 'Teething problems' such as 'culture clashes' between staff, 'bitchiness' between nurses from the different campuses, 'a lack of understanding' from patients, and a

'general feeling of not knowing what was going on' caused a great deal of stress and anxiety amongst employees. However, during this time Catrina 'still felt like change was the right way to go'. She explains that nurses have to 'deal with and internalise' a lot of problems while focusing 'on doing the job properly':

Patients do not want to know that we're having bad days. All they want is their tablets...and their iced water. They don't particularly want to know...And you've really got to adapt whether its another patient that you're dealing with, whether it's the organisational change that concerning you, or whether you may have been having marital troubles at home. You've got to sort of internalise it all and be able to do your job competently.

Prior to organisational change, such emotional control made Catrina feel 'undervalued' as a nurse. Catrina felt that she was not rewarded and recognised by the hospital hierarchy and that 'progression up [the organisational structure] was...slow' to the point that some nurses believed that 'someone had to die' before promotion opportunities became available. Management and senior staff under the government system could also be 'extremely patronising' and 'frustrating', especially towards 'university trained nurses'. Catrina recalls that culture clashes between hospital and university trained nurses were common with many hospital trained senior staff 'not liking' younger degree qualified nurses. Older staff would 'deny opportunities' to younger staff who were viewed as stealing 'their jobs from them'. Archaic managerial attitudes and lack of career opportunities made 'work very old very quickly'.

While all of the organisational changes that Catrina experienced were 'very daunting', she believes that life in the organisation is now 'much better' as a

result. Prior to change Catrina recalls questioning her future in the organisation. She 'loved her job' but 'could see no real progression in the future'. The new managers of the hospital were 'very much professionally orientated', whereas 'staff weren't encouraged in the same way' prior to change. While privatisation caused 'four years...of dramatic change', Catrina feels that the 'management philosophy' of the new owners outweighs the 'negative effects of change' that she experienced. New promotion processes enabled her to 'climb through' from a floor position to a management appointment that she 'would never have been able to get under the old system'. Under the government system Catrina recalls that 'there was no point applying for a [higher] position because [there were] three people ahead of you', and promotion 'wasn't done so much on merit as who's been there the longest':

I was one of the less experienced [employees] that went for the [position]. I got it because of different reasons other than seniority...To me that is a phenomenal climb through! For me that was a phenomenal change...So I have been changed dramatically and I quite enjoy the change process [but] probably because I've had positive experiences...so I probably have a more positive slant on the changing organisation.

The positive impact of change on her career advancement leads Catrina to believe that 'change is a very good thing'. She admits that she 'wouldn't be in such a good position career-wise'; not surprisingly, she now believes that 'organisational change is a necessary and good process...for the organisation and for the employees'. She recalls that those who 'failed to recognise the benefits of change' either 'couldn't cope and left', or were 'possibly out to undermine management'.

Catrina admits that while initial planning and implementing of organisational change was 'confusing', 'unclear', and lacking 'adequate formal communication' and 'could have been done a bit better', the privatisation process was 'quite smooth'. Believing that she was 'one of the lucky ones', while recognising that organisational change 'was not so good for some' employees, Katrina's primary concerns now are aimed more at changing the perception of Latrobe Valley nurses held by metropolitan medical practitioners and interns. It angers her that facilities within the region are considered as 'hick country' organisations with 'unqualified staff' who are 'resistant to change'. Katrina believes that privatisation of healthcare in the Latrobe Valley has not only led to increased professional service from medical staff, but also higher quality care and facilities that 'beat most Melbourne' facilities.

#### *Change as Rewarding and Beneficial*

Catrina's narrative emphasises organisational change as the event that caused her to achieve career success and higher rates of promotion that were not available prior to change. In order to discuss the narrative plot, it is necessary to explore how Katrina constructs and reports causality. It is evident from the narrative that Katrina considers organisational change as a positive process in which she benefited greatly. While the 'causal field is messy and often unfathomable' (Boje, 2001, p.94), Katrina's retrospective evaluation of organisational change may be a product of her subsequent ability to achieve promotions and advanced career status. However, the reason why Katrina was

able to gain career opportunities is not as clearly identified within the narrative.

It is noteworthy that in the interview setting, Catrina often mentioned that she considered herself to be hardworking throughout the change process, while others caused trouble for managers and themselves. While a link between her behaviour and her promotion is not easily established at this stage of the analysis, it may be that she perceives good behaviour to be the cause and promotion the effect, thus leading to a positive perception of organisational change. Within the narrative other possible causes of promotion and a perception of successful organisational change are evident. For example, Catrina highlights the introduction of the new managers as being responsible for changes in organisational culture, as well as the easing of promotion pathways. While these factors may be responsible for the type of narrative that Catrina constructs, it appears that success in gaining promotion in an organisation in which it was previously difficult is in itself the cause of Catrina's construction of organisational change as a story of success.

Once it has been established that promotion opportunities are linked to Catrina's perception of organisational change, it is evident that the structure of her narrative is typical of that of a romance (Boje, 2001; Ricoeur, 1984). The romance plot is 'symbolized by...[Catrina's] victory' over organisational change, in which she is 'redeemed and/or liberated' (Boje, 2001, p.108) through her experiences. Change is depicted as a gratifying process in which,



while at times difficult, the overall experience is one of reward, benefit and success.

Catrina's narrative of organisational change is also comparable to Frank's (1995) description of the restitution narrative in which individuals seek restitution of a healthy status during or after severe illness. In this study, Katrina's narrative may be a ploy to highlight that she has survived organisational change and that her status as a successful or worthy employee is intact, even though the process of change may have been confusing or frightening to her. Frank found in his research of illness narratives that the restitution narrative often dominates as it is a reflection of the 'person's own desire for restitution...compounded by the expectation that other people want to hear restitution stories' (p.77). This is further recognised in a comment made by Katrina prior to the interview commencing that she would attempt to 'tell [me] all that I think you want to know about change'. In addition, Katrina commented three times in the interview that I 'probably did not want to hear all the bad stuff' and that she was 'just happy at being able to be successful'.

Although Katrina does recognise that organisational change was at times difficult, her narrative focuses mainly on the benefits of change, which is representative of a 'model for how stories about...[organisational change] are told' (p.80) from the perspective of an organisation's grand discourse (Alvesson and Kärreman, 2000). Thus the restitution narrative may be the 'culturally preferred narrative' (Frank, 1995, p.83) of organisational change,

representing a story about the triumph of change itself within the story of Catrina's triumph.

Although Catrina's story represents only one interpretation of organisational change, it is noteworthy that five other employees across different industries also constructed narratives that are representative of the romance or restitution narrative. However, a further seven respondents tell opposing stories in which change is portrayed as a sinister and cruel process. Two of these narratives are explored in the following section.

#### **A Tale of Tragedy: Matthew Rodder**

Matthew commenced his career in the electricity supply industry after gaining entry through an annual apprentice intake, which he believes enabled 'virtually anyone' to secure employment in the industry. Shortly after obtaining his trade qualification, the State government announced plans to privatise and deregulate the electricity industry, and introduced a series of 'sweeping changes' into the Latrobe Valley, including the restructuring and eventual demise of the department in which he was employed.

Subsequent to the restructuring of Matthew's department, Matthew and his colleagues were relocated to 'different sections within the organisation'. Matthew remembers that during the restructuring of his section, 'no communication whatsoever' was given with regard to 'where we would be working and what we were doing'. Along with a group of colleagues, Matthew made the decision to join the maintenance section. In retrospect he

believes that this was 'probably the worst thing that could have happened' in relation to his career opportunities. He admits that he made this decision 'blindly' due to lack of communication and limited advice provided to staff by management.

They took us out of our shop, put us into this shed thing for a while...There were six of us...and it would have been probably three paces wide by about...half a dozen or more long and we were expected to sit there and we had no work. At first it was fun, you know it was good, like we played darts, cards, we occupied ourselves whichever way we wanted. Then after a while three months went by and its starting to get a bit monotonous you know. And we're thinking "well hang on a minute, we really don't have a future...we really don't have any meaningful work"...We had to get better conditions, better work. Otherwise it was just a waste of people sitting there rotting basically!

Without meaningful work, Matthew found himself 'spiralling down into self-doubt and a kind of depressed state'. He remembers himself and his colleagues asking management for information about their futures and being continually 'told absolutely nothing'. Matthew found the 'increasing feelings of job insecurity...extremely difficult to cope with', and recalls 'suffering extreme levels of boredom'.

Not only did the lack of work 'ruin...[Matthew's] livelihood, it also ruined the chance to gain more skills and further...[his] career'. Matthew recalls that he and his colleagues 'constantly asked management for work' as a way of proving their 'commitment to the organisation' and to ease their fears with the prospect of unemployment 'hanging over [their] heads'. When they were given work it was the 'dirtiest work that [management] could find...Basically the stuff that no one else would ever do'. Regardless, Matthew and his colleagues would 'just go flat out' and 'get the work done in half the time' to

impress management. Management did not de-code these expressions of commitment and continued to deny Matthew further work opportunities.

After 'a year or so' or such treatment Matthew concluded that 'nothing would change'. From this point he recalls that both himself and his colleagues devised various methods to 'cope with the nothingness...[and] stop from going insane':

Firstly...we'd...nick off during the day. We used to come to work, clock on make sure the boss saw us...But [he] didn't want to know us, we were a headache because they couldn't give us jobs...[Then] we used to turn up sort of "hi, goodbye", you know, nick off and then come back at four o'clock just in time to knock off and after a while we thought that they don't even miss us knocking off so we didn't come back!

Matthew suggests that he and his colleagues also coped with the effects of change by 'treating supervision in the same way we were being treated', by gaining control of the 'shop'. Some of Matthew's colleagues adopted abusive and 'downright threatening' behaviour towards managers:

It was a reckless feeling. It was a feeling of uncertainty, unsurety...a lot of frustration...Anyway, what eventually happened was someone threw a staunch...down three floors into a car...My mate was with me and we both went and had a look and there's a staunch straight through the window, through the seat and out through the door. And it had fallen with a lot of force...Another time...one of the guys who actually gave me a hard time and tried to give us the flick...was selling his house. This is pretty bad! Anyway the guys got wind of that and thought "we'll go and give it a paint for him". So they went and painted what they thought of him all over the road, out the front, on the house, the garage, the doors, the letterbox. They absolutely went berserk!

Matthew felt that he could not be abusive towards management 'no matter how bad they were', particularly as he still had hopes of remaining employed in the industry. He recalls feeling 'tied' between trying to obtain further

employment within the industry and looking outside the Latrobe Region. A combination of fear and unwillingness to move out of the region convinced him to stay. However, he also recalls experiencing feelings of 'extreme betrayal' at the hands of his employers:

The pressure was always on us to leave. It was always on us! They would never tell you that they wanted you to leave but they sure as hell made it known that you weren't wanted. You know that was something that was never in doubt...It was just amazing to see how people who were so committed to their work and in making a profit for the company which in turn keeps them viable, its amazing to see how the company would just turn them around...We sat for nearly three years in that box and you know it was a waste of our trade, it was a waste of our experience!

After three years Matthew believed he 'had to get out' of the organisation. He remembers that the workplace has 'gone completely insane' and consequently, he 'couldn't jump...hard enough' at a similar position that was advertised in a competing organisation. He explains that 'the first time the job came around' he was 'too scared' to apply for it 'out of...[his] own lack of confidence' and the belief that he 'wasn't up to it'. He also remembers experiencing feelings of guilt for leaving his 'mates behind'. Resigned to the fact that he 'would never get any more work where...[he] was', Matthew finally decided to 'throw the fat in the fire and go'.

While Matthew expresses pride at having been part of the electricity supply industry, the manner in which management 'handled organisational change' has led him to distrust management decisions 'especially to do with change':

You know the mistrust...that got to us...and you just lost all trust in management. So unfortunately...you would listen to them but don't worry too much about what they say. And so even today there's a lot of people who are just feeling disgruntled. Yeah I'm a sceptic. I don't trust anyone any more...I don't trust my management. I'm more

ready to look out for myself that for them. I don't have too much faith in them anymore. We tried to get things done, we tried to keep our industry viable, we tried to do the right thing...and we had no support!

Besides his 'harrowing experiences' of organisational change, Matthew now believes that 'the government has a lot to answer for'. He considers that 'excess unemployment', 'suicide rates', and drug and alcohol abuse in the region are by-products of privatisation in the electricity supply industry. Matthew believes that the government need to invest resources into the Latrobe Valley in an attempt to make it more 'communal' by 'building things and assisting with community projects and health and things...that' enhance the potential of the region. Without government assistance, Matthew questions whether the Latrobe Valley could remain viable in terms of future employment opportunities. However, it is noteworthy that Matthew also 'holds hope of a better future personally' in the Latrobe Valley with his new employers and is 'determined to let the experiences of change shape' his future rather than 'destroy' him.

#### **A Satirical Tale: Warren Bradford**

Similar to Matthew, Warren's commenced employment in the electricity supply industry as an apprentice and stayed on in view of developing a career afterwards. As Warren's family members had worked in the electricity supply industry before him, he believed that seeking employment in the industry was a 'natural progression into a career'. The industry was considered to be the major employer of apprentices during this time and was well known for its paternalistic qualities as an employer.

The old history is that once you get into [the industry] you had a job for life and even though you were low paid, money was there all the

time. Everybody tried to get into [the industry]...they treated you like a family...I was on the shift for just on nineteen years and the shift was always like a family, we always went out together...the shift always bound together.

Warren's job involved maintenance and machining of electrical components required for the generation and distribution of electricity. Workplace practices required one trades person to work on one job at a time where they were given responsibility for the whole job from start to finish. Early changes in the organisation were targeted at workplace productivity that increased the trade mix on the shopfloor and introduced deskilling and segregation of trades. These changes subsequently caused individual job changes.

You had to wait all the time. If you needed something welded you had to wait for the welder, so time was the essence and of course you had to wait and it blew the job right out of proportion...you didn't get the satisfaction of doing the whole job.

After the initial changes were introduced at a workplace level, a State Government announcement was made that the electricity supply industry was to be privatised. As part of the privatisation process the industry was faced with restructuring and downsizing of employees, which meant that all jobs in the industry were under threat of being made redundant.

It was scary...not having any other outside employment other than [the industry] I didn't know what to expect. You heard different stories, rumours went around, if you didn't get the job done in the shortest possible time you'd be out on your ear...I didn't know if I would be able to make it.

Warren recalls that the rumours associated with the process of organisational change lasted for five years before he saw any evidence of downsizing. Throughout this period, management avoided communicating with employees, only providing them with 'snippets of information...every now and then'. During this time Warren recalls that 'a lot senior staff including

managers' resigned from the industry fuelling rumours that 'managers didn't really have a clue what was going on either'.

One of the first strategies implemented to downsize the workforce was through a system of voluntary departure packages (VDP's). Warren recalls that the first round of VDPs was targeted at specific staff with a view to 'getting rid of those who were considered to be inefficient workers'. However, union representatives 'deemed the process as unsuitable and insisted that VDPs should be offered to staff in general'. After the introduction of VDPs staff were eventually told that the aim of the package was to minimise staff numbers as part of 'phase one of change'. Knowledge of this process affected Warren in various ways:

Basically I think yeah in the end...[I] got sick and tired of rumours and other things and...just plodded along...the not knowing what the future holds, whether I could make a go of the trade or a different career path, um making decisions that might or might not...help the family...low self esteem is a major factor especially when you've worked in the one job all your life. You don't think you can do anything else. It's very stressful because you don't know what, you don't know, you're sort of in limbo, you don't know whether you've got a future or not got a future. You don't know where you are. You don't know what's going to happen. Then, I mean we were looking at decisions like buying a new house and do we do it or do we not because we don't know what's going to happen. If we do do it we could be stuck and lose our home. Things like that so it's very stressful in coming home and every time you talk or you talk to other people it seems to be about the [industry]. Redundancies!

Warren applied for a trade position with one of the private companies that bought part of the industry. He remembers that two things impacted on him the most throughout this transition: the difference in organisational culture, and the lack of job security. Moving from a traditionally paternalistic culture, Warren experienced the pressure of having to complete all jobs with no



supervision in a minimal amount of time while being treated as a number rather than an employee. He recalls that during this time he felt like he 'was hanging onto employment by the skin of [his] teeth...not knowing which day was the day [he] would lose [his] job. After four and a half years of employment with the private company Warren's job was made redundant after another wave of downsizing was implemented.

While he has had some casual work 'from time to time', since being made redundant Warren has been 'virtually on the dole'<sup>2</sup>. When asked how he felt about other employees who kept their positions after downsizing he replies:

Well good luck to them! Unfortunately management had to make a decision also um but um they'll come their day will come very shortly because management won't take on as many people...[actually] I get angry. I get really angry...There's a man in our soccer club who still works for that company and I could gladly push him over! He really gets, he's management, he gets me so angry! And every time I see the cars of the company go by I get furious! I can't stand it! I just think to myself that they're all working, they're all okay, they're happy and we're sitting here wondering about our futures...I was happy! Now it's indecisive. Um I don't know whether, well again I have to look at ah retraining, a new career path...so I have to look at retraining into the same field or a different field, a totally different field which is ah scary! As so it's another hectic, mind-boggling type of situation!

Apart from the constant feelings of uncertainty, Warren's concerns are mainly for his lifestyle and ability to bring up his family as well as the further impact of organisational change on the region. Warren recalls being 'happy' and having the ability to make purchases if he wanted them. Now he lives his day-to-day life 'penny pinching' and budgeting 'right down to the last dollar'.

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<sup>2</sup> Unemployment benefits

Warren's lifestyle has gone from one of him and his wife living 'like King and Queen' to one where there have been times when they were unable to 'buy presents for people' because he 'just didn't know where the money was going to come from'.

Warren's experience of organisational change has left him feeling 'disillusioned' with his managers and the state government. He is of the opinion that the government made decisions to privatise the electricity supply industry in the region as a means to allowing the state of Victoria to repay debts without any consideration for the 'little guys like the workers'. Warren also expresses embarrassment regarding his relationships with ex-colleagues and friends from the workplace. Relationships with people he worked with for nineteen years had changed or severed, which Warren believes may either be a result of him being 'unemployable' or his attitude that 'you've got a job, you don't really want my woe is me attitude'.

Warren also expressed concern for the wellbeing of his family living in the Latrobe Valley. He feels that as a result of privatisation in the region the 'area's dead' and that when the region's public organisations were sold 'the whole area just went with it'. When looking at the process of organisational change in the Latrobe Valley in retrospect, Warren summarised that 'there's nothing any more! We're insignificant and they [the government] need to wake up to that'.

*Change as Preposterous*

The narratives constructed by Matthew and Warren represent organisational change in a different way when compared to Catrina's romantic tale. In their views, the methods used to implement change were inhumane and abominable, with manipulative and vindictive strategies devised by managers. However, it is noteworthy that the causal links to these views are different across both narratives. For Matthew, organisational change was shaped by lack of employment opportunities and meaningful work. Prior to the implementation of change, Matthew enjoyed his work and sought a career within the industry. However, the restructuring of his division led to his relocation to a shed in which he and his colleagues were more or less pressured to resign. The attitudes of managers and the demise of employment relations coinciding with organisational change may also be attributed to his perception of it and the construction of his narrative.

While Warren's narrative highlights that organisational change is also an unfair and preposterous process, his perception may initially be attributed to changes in work practices that made his work less meaningful. However, being sold to a private company and being made redundant are possibly the most likely causal links between his experience of organisational change and his perceptions of it. Like Catrina's narrative in the previous section, such links shape the structure of the narrative.

Matthew's narrative is symbolic of a tragedy (Boje, 2001), in which he has been defeated by organisational change. However, the final line of Matthew's

case study indicates that regardless of his experiences, he believes that he is able to achieve a better future within the Latrobe Valley, while remaining employed in his current organisation. This comment reflects 'hope...for those left behind...[and suggests that] liberation is possible' (p.109). Matthew's hope was also evident within the interview setting. His interview was different from Warren's in which Matthew appeared to be enthusiastic about his future. In comparison, Warren appeared to be despondent about his future.

In comparison with Matthew's narrative, Warren's experiences echo a story of satire and irony in which he too is overcome and defeated by organisational change. However, Warren is unable to see liberation from being unemployed. Furthermore, his narrative suggests that both he and the Latrobe Valley will not be able to 'get out of the abyss' (Boje, 2001, p.109) caused by change. Matthew and Warren's narratives reflect organisational change as chaos, which is not recognisable in managerial narratives of change. In particular, Warren's narrative plot 'imagines life never getting better' (Frank, 1995, p.97). Furthermore, the chaos narrative contradicts the restitution narrative and illustrates 'how easily any of us could be sucked under' (p.97) by organisational change. However, Matthew suggests that while change was not a positive experience, he is determined not to let organisational change destroy his future. This comment is representative of a quest narrative (Frank, 1995, p.115) in that Matthew accepts organisational change and suggests that 'something is to be gained through the experience' that can enhance his future.

In summary, and even though Warren and Matthew's narrative plots differ from each other and are not as clearly defined as Catrina's, they tell similar stories of the experiences of organisational change. The following two case studies illustrate further complication of narrative plots in which double stories of change are told, thus crossing the boundaries of different types of plots.

### **Multi-plotted Tales: Jack Tyler**

Jack commenced employment in the electricity supply industry after completing an apprenticeship as a boilermaker directly after leaving school. Although Jack enjoys 'mastering' his trade, he also aspires to reach a 'technical managerial level position', as a result of his experiences of supervising other tradespersons. However, he believes that the organisational culture prior to change was 'somewhat limiting in terms of getting any sort of promotion'. When Jack first learned that his organisation was going to be privatised and restructured he recalls feeling relief. Jack believes that he has a 'good work ethic' and 'healthy attitude to work' and therefore claims that the organisational culture prior to change hindered his ability to develop his career opportunities. Privatisation, organisational restructuring and a subsequent culture change made the organisation a 'better place to work' for Jack. He feels that new managers have encouraged 'team concepts for getting the work done', which has increased the 'enthusiasm levels of the employees'.

Jack suggests that he played a significant role in the change process. Being responsible for a group of employees he had to ensure that workers were kept

up to date with management information. As a supervisor, he was also required to carry out directives from senior management. The first change Jack recalls playing a role in was the restructuring of workgroups within his plant into separate units. While he had to deal with 'scepticism' from employees Jack remembers the change introducing 'healthy competition' which in turn 'kicked things along' and raised morale levels amongst his 'crew'.

Organisational change provided Jack with many new 'challenges' that motivated him to further progress his career in the organisation. The challenges were important in motivating him to take on future roles as 'boss cocky'<sup>3</sup>. He adds that 'all your experience that you have will ultimately lead you to where you want to go if you are motivated'. During the interview Jack often returned to the theme that change has been a very positive process for him both in terms of his career and his personal development. Prior to change Jack recalls being 'a stick in the mud' and 'quite resistant to change. However, organisational restructuring enabled him to 'move within the workplace', adding that if he had not lived through the experience of change he would not have 'had a successful future'. Prior to change he felt that he was inflexible and was too 'comfortable' in his environment:

I can remember when I was moved out to fuel handling I hated that. Then when I had to move out of fuel handling I hated that! But now I will move anywhere and it just doesn't phase me. So that's been excellent because it's taken me out of being a stick in the mud, you know comfortable environment where you know...I progressed at my own rate...But in terms of moving, I just pack the gear up and move, whereas...back [prior to change] there would have been a lot of resistance.

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<sup>3</sup> An Australian slang term referring to a manager.

An increase in flexibility within his work role has opened up many opportunities for Jack. Employment relationships with his fellow colleagues and management have been positively affected by change and have also enabled Jack to 'be seen' by 'the right people'. His role in the implementation of change has given him the confidence to 'market' himself to management so that his 'efforts are recognised in a positive manner'. Jack believes that this in itself symbolises a significant change in the culture and employment relations in the workplace. Prior to organisational change, Jack recalls that relations between management and employees were 'poor' and employees were 'remembered for one bad thing' for the 'rest of their working life'. However, the removal of hierarchies and bureaucratic procedures in the organisation allows employees to 'put processes in that help you develop yourself'. The opportunities for employees are far greater now.

Organisational change has been a process that has 'polished up' all of Jack's skills and knowledge. It also provided him with the opportunity to commence tertiary education with a view to gaining more knowledge about management theory. Jack believes that the opportunity to gain a tertiary qualification as part of his training was the most significant part of the change process. Education has given Jack a 'solid reinforcement' that the practices he had been following for years 'were the right things' while enabling him 'to develop...weaker areas and improve' them within his work roles.

In his narrative, Jack focuses in detail on the organisation's culture. The organisation traditionally was known for having a 'slack' culture, which hindered the company's ability to improve economically. Part of the change entailed transforming the organisation's culture, something which Jack believes to have only 'marginally improved' the workplace in 'some areas'. Jack argues that the 'slackness' and 'lack of enthusiasm' of employees in his work group caused constant problems throughout the change process. He also feels that the implementation of multi-skilling and job rotation added to problems with employee attitudes and morale. The whole concept of multi-skilling was 'overwhelming' to Jack. He remembers that management spent 'huge amounts of time and money' on a multi-skilling program that 'never really worked', but merely generated additional and unnecessary 'culture clashes' between work units.

Jack believes that changes to work roles increased levels of 'animosity' and 'uncertainty' in the workplace. He remembers feeling 'at a loss' due to continuous 'mixed communication and direction' from his managers. 'No matter how hard' he worked, management was 'always reminding' him that his 'existence' in the organisation was 'fragile'. Jack argues that 'that type of taunting' and job insecurity 'kicked some of the guys' into working harder, but other crew members would 'sit on their bum most of the day' and 'do nothing' but treat Jack 'like a complete dickhead'.

They would lie, slither and connive and treat you like you were stupid because you didn't know anything about their trade. I can remember an example...I took this gentleman up to have a look at a job...And he informed me that it would take at least eight hours to [do]...I said thank you very much and went to the apprentice, how long would it take you to do the job? The apprentice informed me two to three



hours! ...They just make life difficult...because I don't know jack about their trade! ...So you had that sort of resistance.

The most 'frustrating aspects' of change were his dealings with 'problem' staff and management. While he recognises that most staff were effected by 'fear and uncertainty', he also believes that some people were 'purely out to create mischief' because 'they resisted the changes'. However, changes to human resource policies meant that 'disciplinary procedures' were different. He recalls that staff were expected to act according to 'private enterprise culture', but did not have a 'disciplinary process as...in private enterprise'. As a result, Jack's anger and frustration got 'worse and worse' while there was 'nothing that could be done' to remove the 'trouble-makers' from his crew.

Some of them were very lucky that I didn't drag them out the back and give them a belt under the ear! ...It's frustrating because your organisation doesn't have a process to deal with that! ...And in the interim the rest of your people are being destroyed because if you've got one, as you know in there, you've got a group of people. Group dynamics! And you've got this problem child here, he's affecting and other people see that and that affects them!

When looking at the change process in retrospect, Jack feels that management could have used more 'humane methodologies for applying change'. He does not agree with the strategies that management used to change people. He feels that members of staff were not given enough information and were placed in a position where they either agreed with the change and 'went along' with what management was implementing or voluntarily resigned from the organisation. He also feels angered by the comments made by managers who admitted that the aim of the change process 'was to upset people and leave them out'. The attitude of management was that 'while people were comfortable they would

never change'. Although Jack thinks there is some truth in people not wanting to move outside their comfort zones, he believes that proper education and support from management would have eased the transition for many employees and caused 'far less' resistance and militancy. Such attitudes adopted by management 'split' the organisation further into the 'us and them' class division.

The experience of change has made Jack disrespectful of most of his managers. Although, he is 'grateful' for having 'opportunity to play a small part in the change process', the experience has left him 'personally very low'. The experience of change transformed him into a 'highly contributory person'. At the same time his confidence has been 'destroyed' by the behaviour of one of his managers.

I had a bad manager who knocked every sense of self worth out of me. Hated by everyone who worked for him! Hated by ninety percent of the rest of the staff...it would be nothing for him to walk into this room while you and I were talking and for him to abuse me in front of you! And he used to do that in front of my peers! Three of us wanted to take him out! He cannot deal with people!

Jack recalls that a manager would give him tasks and then criticise him for making errors, which were caused by 'lack of instruction'. He remembers having to repeat tasks 'five or six' times because they 'were not good enough' and 'constantly...ripped over the coals' when he had done 'everything humanly possible' to complete the task correctly. Such treatment of employees by managers was 'not uncommon...in fact it became the norm'. Change 'turned some managers into monsters' and the 'crew were treated shabbily as a result'. Consequently, Jack concludes that 'what is good for the

organisation is not necessarily good for employees...and change certainly wasn't good for many employees'.

Jack ended his story by explaining that management and employees need to stop 'seeing each other as the enemy' and that 'working together...would have benefits for both parties'. If employment relations were improved and each party 'stopped looking down on each other', Jack feels that organisational change could be implemented more 'smoothly'. However, if the company were to 'repeat the same process of change' in the future, support from employees will be 'non-existent'. What could have 'been a good thing' if managed appropriately, became a 'bloody living nightmare'.

#### **Multi-plotted Tales: Jessica Smith**

Jessica's narrative of organisational change is somewhat similar to Jack's in that she commences with praise for the organisation and the change process, only to end with tales of poor treatment by management, inability to attain desired promotions and aggression between staff. Jessica, who is employed in the health care industry, initially suggests that organisational change 'brought great benefits' for her. As a result of restructuring and amalgamation Jessica secured a promotion she could only 'dream about' under the previous structure. Her new position in the organisation requires her to be responsible for a team of staff as well as play a decision-making role in the strategic direction of the organisation. Jessica considers her promotion to be important for the staff as they can be supervised by someone who is 'in touch' with the

daily operations of the workplace. She also considers herself as 'one of the staff', an attitude that encourages a 'non-threatening' environment for other employees.

Similar to other regional workplaces, organisational change involved the introduction of a new management company. Jessica feels that the leadership of this company is 'fantastic' and she explains that she 'absolutely loves' the new executive director. Jessica believes that she has been able to develop a relationship with the executive director that has enabled her to gain self-confidence and 'challenge [and]...question things'. Because of this she feels 'more in tune' with the organisation and is 'willing to step in' to assist in any situation, regardless of whether it is her area of responsibility:

I just have taken on all this...with my role. You just think you can bloody well...walk into anywhere [and] I do! But that goes with the position. Like all of a sudden I've been given the right to talk to anyone and go anywhere. And I do!

As part of her role, Jessica is sympathetic to people who have been negatively affected by change and explains that she constantly tries to 'display the right behaviours'. Her own experience of change has been one of 'rationale' and knowledge of 'the principles of change' rather than 'how you do it'. As she recalls, 'some people adjust to change better than others'. Jessica believes her advantage in the change process is that she had previously moved around and is, unlike other staff, not attached to the region. Overall, she believes that organisational change was a very positive and necessary process:

I wasn't into how things were being done; I was interested more in why. And I sort of think that that's got a lot to do with it. Not only the person you are, but the experiences you've had. Yeah, so like change to me, it's funny. I mean some things would be a threat but if someone can give me good reason, if they convince me that there's a good

reason to change something then I'm quite happy to try...It's got more to do with personalities and the qualities of the people.

Jessica loves working with 'her staff' and believes that the quality of their work is 'fantastic'. Promoting group cohesion has provided a challenge to Jessica and has allowed her to become 'more comfortable with managerial' tasks such as delegating and leading. Her blend of supervision and shopfloor work allows her to gain a 'balance' which she sees as important in her own satisfaction as well as that of her staff.

Further into her story Jessica suggests that the experience of organisational change has left her feeling 'quite bitter' towards the attitudes of management. This indicates a change in the style of telling about her experiences of organisational change, which the rationale for was unclear within the interview setting. However, what was a story of the success of Jessica and organisational change became a story of the drawbacks that change caused in terms of Jessica's career. In particular, the reissuing of jobs and the mix of different cultures are significant issues that affected Jessica throughout the process of organisational change. Jessica recalls that the amalgamation of two completely different cultures caused many problems in the workplace with regards to the 'parochialism' and 'militancy' of each culture. Each culture had 'a way of doing things' and neither was willing to let go of the old ways to 'embrace the new'. Such parochialism, Jessica believes, has caused her to miss out on promotions and new positions in which she was 'clearly' the 'best person for the job'.

I think that the process wasn't really; I mean it must have been hard; there are over a thousand employees! But I don't think that it was

totally fair and equitable! I actually have since gone for another job and I didn't get it! And there was no doubt that I was clearly the best person for the job! No doubt! ...They advertised and interviewed for all jobs up to the manager level yet all the others were job matched. They weren't interviewed! ...So these people who are in with management, these five people are the wrong people! ...They preach this "we want the right people in the right job" but they don't actually practice it...I mean it would have been hard but fuck! They made some hard decisions with people like me. They said no you didn't get the job! So why not to them? Pretty demoralising! That stuck out in my mind as the most traumatic sort of thing.

Culture clashes also introduced what Jessica refers to as 'tall poppy syndrome'<sup>4</sup>, which 'drastically harmed' the organisations in terms of 'staff turnover and loss'. The promotion of some staff into middle and senior levels of management, while others were demoted was not well received by staff members. Jessica believes that the most senior levels of management encouraged in fighting and 'horizontal violence' between staff in an attempt to pressure targeted people to leave the organisation. Pressure tactics employed by management and staff 'severely upset' Jessica, as she believes that the organisation cannot operate without people like her. Reflecting on her experiences Jessica argues that management needs to develop and encourage more staff in order to maintain high quality people who can 'later lead the organisation in terms of change'. Without this encouragement Jessica feels that staff are threatened by those who 'achieve new positions' in the organisation:

You need to develop people into what's necessary, else you don't sustain people like me...All this enthusiasm and motivation eventually will where thin and they'll move onto where it's unused and appreciated...I think there's just big problems in the profession like that where people are threatened...the tall poppy syndrome and everything...My...colleagues that are the same level as me...don't like

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<sup>4</sup> An Australian term that refers to 'a divide between the commoner and a group of intellectuals, journalists and politicians referred to as the "elites"' (Author Unknown, 2002, p.1).

it! They don't like the fact that I'm there. It's like "how'd she get there", you know "why is she there". The old oh so and so likes her...stuff like this, the horizontal violence.

Because of the disapproving attitude of staff members towards her, Jessica feels obliged to take on extra work to 'prove' herself to colleagues. However, she feels that the need to demonstrate that she is able to do the job competently has negative ramifications on her family life. She currently spends at least ten hours a day at work and is unable to finish her workload throughout the week. As a result, Jessica spends most of her weekend working at home. Jessica believes that her family thinks she is 'mad' for taking on so much work. She further expresses concern that her husband believes that such a high workload will affect the upbringing of their children. To overcome the problem, Jessica attempts to 'quickly' get her work done as soon as her husband goes out.

While Jessica does not enjoy having to complete her work at home, she feels that it leads to 'less pressure' on her at the start of the next working week. Jessica's role in the organisation entails 'a certain amount of work' which has to be finished whether it requires 'twenty or sixty hours of work' a week. The existence of tall poppy syndrome makes Jessica feel guilty when attempting to delegate or manage her team. Jessica believes that her workmates are 'horrible' to herself and 'to their colleagues' and do not appreciate the work that has to be done. Rather than supporting her, Jessica's colleagues are 'ignorant' and 'bitchy' and do not like anybody else in the organisation 'to be successful'. Jessica believes that this culture within the organisation hinders her ability to work efficiently.

The most significant change to Jessica has been the re-issuing of jobs. Rather than being promoted on merit, Jessica believes that people were placed in jobs according to 'who they knew' in the organisation. Although Jessica considers herself to be fortunate in gaining a position in the organisation, she is 'bitter' because she feels as though she has been 'forced' to 'take a side step' away from the 'area' she hoped to work in. Prior to organisational change she believes she would have been promoted through seniority and length of service rather than through 'direct competition' with her colleagues. The introduction of new management has caused unnecessary problems with regard to unfair competition between colleagues.

Jessica argues that tactics used by management either 'pressure people' to look for work outside of the organisation or to 'compete with their friends' for jobs. Such tactics by management has led to a plethora of problems that Jessica feels has hindered teamwork and staff productivity. She believes that staff is more interested in 'undermining' each other and 'bitching behind each other's backs' than supporting each other and their leaders. Jessica's greatest fear is for the future of the organisation. She feels that while management encourages undermining of staff and horizontal violence between colleagues, the welfare of the organisation and its clients will be severely decreased and any positive effects of organisational change will be reversed.



*Change as Confusing*

Both Jack and Jessica's narratives appear to commence as romantic narratives. Initially, both narratives highlight the benefits and rewards of organisational change and feature it as being necessary for both the workplace and employees. This perception of change is attributed to a number of things. Jack suggests that he has gained more employment opportunities and the chance to commence tertiary education. Furthermore, his narrative centres on a change in organisational culture and improved relations with managerial staff. Jessica also attributes her story of change to promotion, increased responsibilities at work, better management and improved employment relations.

However, as the interview unfolded both Jessica and Jack began to talk about problems associated with change in a manner that contradicted what they said earlier. While the narratives begin as success stories of organisational change, by the end, both respondents portray themselves as victims of the organisational change process. The points that are attributed to the positive stories of change are later explained as disadvantages rather than benefits. Jack focuses on the poor implementation of organisation change, the failure of culture changes and poor employment relations with both staff and managers. In comparison, Jessica explains that the unfair redistribution of jobs, and increased levels of animosity between staff cause her negative perception of change. Thus, the triumphs of organisational change expressed within the first stages of narrative construction were overcome by tragedy at the end.

Consequently, both narratives are multi-plotted featuring romance, satire and tragedy.

The change in narrative plots within the interviews with Jack and Jessica may be attributed to reasons such as rapport and trust building. For example, both respondents may not have felt comfortable in revealing their experiences of change within the beginning of the narrative, but exposing these as trust and rapport were built over time. As a researcher, I am unable to provide an explanation as to why the narratives begin in one way and end in another. However, while in the interview it was almost as though both Jessica and Jack were seeking permission from me to construct their interpretations of change, rather than the grand narrative. This was highlighted with comments and questions such as 'am I telling you the right thing?' 'Is this okay?' and 'are these the sorts of stories you want to hear?' Once I reassured them that I was interested in their personal interpretations of organisational change, rather than the type of stories that I would be told by management, they appeared to become more relaxed and then constructed tales that were significant to them. This observation indicates that the researcher can play a powerful role in the construction of narratives even though they may not be aware of their influence.

While I have only provided five case studies of employees and a very brief overview of the types of narrative plots and the causal links that employees construct, it is important to note that employee experiences cannot easily be reduced into a particular narrative category. Although I have referred to the

romance, satire and tragedy plots that have been used by Boje (2001), it may be argued that the narratives featured in this chapter are more complicated than a simple plot description. For example, two narratives cross over plot boundaries, indicating that an experience may involve several causal links and different narrative plots. Furthermore, the chaotic narratives of change constructed by Matthew and Warren highlight that one employee can be destroyed by change while another can gain allow it to shape his future, even though both experiences of change were equally as daunting. Boje (2001) also argues that narratives and stories can contain different plots, further reiterating the subjective nature of personal experience, or in the case of this research, the subjective nature of organisational change. While this chapter has focused on individual case studies and narrative plots, it is also evident from the narratives and the interviews that individual employees perform their stories of change in different ways. The following section explores how narratives are performed and presented within this research as a way of further understanding individual experiences of organisational change.

### **Presentation and Performance in Narratives**

From the analysis of the case studies it is evident that employees can use multiple voices that tell conflicting stories. Sometimes the emerging voices are subtle and overpowered by the dominant voice. However, as depicted in the multi-plotted tales constructed by Jack and Jessica, two very different stories can emerge from the interview setting suggesting that an initially subtle voice does have the capacity to take over and re-shape the narrative. Where stories of change that reflect the organisational perspective may be told

in an attempt to normalise experiences (Ballis, 1999), stories within the personal context could be used by employees as sense-making tools. Alvesson (1999) suggests that this may be related to the fact that individual 'accounts are based upon and guided by one's self-definition, constructions of one's characteristics...and efforts to accomplish a feeling of coherence and direction'.

Alternatively, the narratives constructed during the interview may be performed so that they reflect stories of change that the respondent believes the audience should hear. Alvesson (1999) highlights the complexity of the interview setting in which the participant and the researcher, who are usually strangers, interact in order for the researcher to obtain data about the participant's life history and experiences. Within this setting, a 'complex interaction [takes place] in which the participants make efforts to produce' (p.7) an account of their experience using various clues and cues provided by the researcher.

A comparison of narrative construction and performance highlight a number of factors that we, as researchers, should take into consideration. During the interviews, four respondents made it quite clear that they felt it was necessary to reflect organisational values and norms in their narratives. This was evident from comments and questions about the nature of confidentiality within the interview setting, and concern that the data collected would be fed back to their managers or organisations. Furthermore, the imposition of a researcher into a respondent's domain may lead employees to believe that

they have to construct a particular type of story about organisational change. During one interview an employee commented to me that interviews with managers and consultants about change were not uncommon and that employees were expected to discuss the benefits rather than the negative consequences that change may have caused.

Finally, the sex of both the researcher and the respondent may also play a role in the stories constructed within the interview. I found that when interviewing women it was easy to build rapport and trust throughout the interview. While this is not to say that I was unable to build rapport with male participants, interviews with women reflected more of an informal conversation than an actual interview. Finch (1999, p.70) suggests that women participants are more receptive to female researchers and 'are more used...to accepting intrusions through questioning into the more private parts of their lives'. The ability to build better rapport with women may lead to the sharing of more information between them and myself as compared to the men involved in this research. Other than the more informal nature of the interview, I found that drastic differences between interviewing men and women were not apparent except that I felt more comfortable asking women more probing questions after responses were given. Subtle differences in interviewing different sexes possibly exist, which are likely to have an affect on the way that I interpreted the data. However, such differences were not recognisable to the researcher and are a limitation of constructivist research.

While it is important to recognise that sex, the nature of the interview and the imposition of a researcher may in fact impact on the construction of narratives, I was unable to recognise ways that these drastically affected the manner in which experiences of organisational change were retold. From the analysis of cases and the identification of narrative plots, it is evident that both men and women construct stories that are unique, but at the same time have several common experiences. What is important is that I reflect the nature of these narratives within the analysis as accurately as possible.

From the brief analysis of plots, it is evident that respondents perform their stories of organisational change and present themselves as employees in different ways. Such presentations and performances can be explained by focusing on the concept of region behaviour (Goffman, 1984), dramaturgy and the theatre. These concepts may be used as metaphors to assist in providing an explanation and understanding of how employees report their experiences of organisational change as per the third research question outlined in the previous chapter.

### **Regions, Dramatism and Performance**

The process of interviewing participants revealed that some participants constructed highly managed narratives of change, while others seemed to be more relaxed. This observation does not suggest that some narratives are more realistic or authentic than others are, however, it is noteworthy that the twelve participants who appeared to construct highly managed narratives

tended to tell stories of change that reflected success rather than drawbacks. This suggests that some participants construct stories of organisational change in a more dramatic and contrived manner than others, which may be caused by many factors including the persistent questioning of a researcher (Alvesson, 1999). The manner in which individuals perform or act in social life has been the subject of much analysis both within organisational and sociological studies.

The performance of individuals within society has been studied by a number of authors. Goffman (1984) focuses on the actions of individuals in their day-to-day lives and compares social life to a performance in which individuals have roles and scripts and performs on a stage. These performances are analysed according to the way 'an individual presents her/himself in day-to-day situations and seeks to control the impressions he/she causes' (Wood, 2002, p.13). Using the theatrical metaphor to explain individual's performances in everyday life, Mangham and Overington (1987, p.27) argue that:

Life is taken as theatre...We *dress up*... we *play roles*; we *stage* parties; we *entertain* friends; we *upstage* political opponents...we *act out* our emotional difficulties...and we do all these things with little sense that we are speaking metaphorically.

The concepts of dramaturgy (Mangham and Overington, 1982) and dramatism (Burke, 1962) have also been developed to study the performance of individuals in society. Wood (2002) suggests that dramaturgy focuses on the presentation of self on a day-to-day basis, whereas dramatism extends to encompass the dramatic acts of everyday life, including conflict, the settings,

the actors, and the contexts in which the acts occur. While different terms are used to define and describe individual performances in society, it is more or less argued by the above authors that 'people are actors who interpret characters in everyday scenes' (Wood, 2002, p.13).

Goffman (1984) has possibly conducted some of the most comprehensive studies of the performance of people in everyday life. In order to understand social performances, Goffman explains that human behaviour can be divided into front-stage and back-stage activities, that is, performances visible to the audience, and a range of activities concealed from view, but which are just as important to the overall performance. The narratives obtained throughout the present study can be analysed from the perspective of front and back stage region performances.

Czarniawska (1997) warns of possible limitations to using the dramaturgy and region behaviour in organisational studies. Specifically, she argues that by explaining organisational life according to performance and region behaviour, often an assumption is made that individuals have a 'true self as opposed to theatrical behavior' (p.30). Consequently, the 'notion of individual and social life as a narrative, or...the concept of modern identity as an institution' may be lost in the emphasis of 'the static, formal and ritualistic aspects of social life' (p.30). In the context of the present study, it must also be recognised that the use of region analysis may lead one to believe that the front stage narrative is an unreliable narrative of change, while those constructed in the back stage are more authentic. This study recognises that both front and back stage



constructions of organisational change are as authentic as each other. However, it may be argued that whether in the workplace or during interview the activities and talk of employees is deliberate and selective, both revealing and concealing information they consider necessary for generating desired impressions.

It is important to note that respondents do not produce at the one-time versions that equally divide into two different stories. Back region stories are not told as separate narratives. The point of discussing narratives within the different regions is to highlight to the reader the importance of not selecting one version above another, but developing a theoretical framework of organisational change that accommodates the conflicting reports – even of the same experience – told by the one respondent.

### **Front Stage Narratives**

Pin and Turndorf (1990, p.164) believe that when in front of an audience, individuals attempt to present 'their ideal selves [through]...tentative performances'. In addition, Frink and Ferris (1998, p.1261) argue that the presence of spectators causes individuals to highlight personal 'qualities and abilities' that would otherwise remain neutral. Referring specifically to the front stage performance, Goffman (1984, p.114) argues that when activities occur 'in the presence of other persons, some aspects of the activity are expressively accentuated and other aspects, which might discredit the fostered impression are suppressed'. Consequently, the front stage region is where

individuals perform in a 'general and fixed fashion to define the situation for those who observe the performance' (p.32).

Front-stage activities during interview would consist of reports of experiences and other biographical insights that present a respondent in a favourable light. In the front-stage, performances are managed and only tales deemed appropriate for the researcher to hear about an individual and their organisation are likely to emerge. Some narratives constructed within the present study, such as that told by Catrina, are constructed only in the front region, drawing attention to a single storyline that abounds with optimism and reflecting the employee as successful and victorious over organisational change. Language used presents the process of change as 'marvellous' [P2]', 'top-notch [P8]', and 'positive [P6]'. Front region narratives are also defined by participants' dialogue, from which I directly interpreted the region the narrative was being constructed in. For example, Catrina made the following comment at the beginning of the interview that indicates that it was to be constructed in the front region:

I can tell you about the effects that change has had on me but I don't want to say anything that may incriminate the organisation as they have been very good to all of us...Although there are some issues that other people [from the organisation] may have told you, I want to make sure that I tell you the right things.

Other comments made by participants that determined the interview was in the front stage included, 'it doesn't really matter what I think about change personally. I just have to make sure that I say the right thing by the company [P19]', and 'the company has done the right thing by me, so now I have to do the right thing by them here [P3]. Comments of this nature were made at the

beginning of the interview. However, several comments made by participants during the interview further supported my interpretation that the interviews were being constructed in the front region. For example, Catrina commented on 'how good the company has been' and 'how much better off we are after the changes' a number of times. In addition, she commented that while change was not beneficial to all employees, 'those who didn't get anything out of change were seen as managers as being sort of troublemakers...and once this was pointed out by management I could see that they just were out to make trouble' even though she later refers to the same people as 'hard working [staff]...who just simply didn't agree with some of the ways that change was being carried out...particularly the lack of information surrounding it'. Another characteristic of the front stage narrative is the use of particularly positive language. For example, organisational change is described as being 'marvellous [P2]', 'top-notch [P8]' and 'positive [P6]'. Managers who implemented change are referred to as being 'fantastic [P3]', 'encouraging [P1]', and as having 'insight [P21]' and 'foresight [P4]'.

Front region stories derived from the interviews appear to be executed 'within the limitations imposed by the choices of the director' (Mangham and Overington, 1982, p.210). That is, 'scripts...[and] texts' provided for employees may ensure that they have the 'same relationship' to the text 'as does the director' (Mangham and Overington, 1982, p.210). Perhaps employees perceive they are required to perform stories that reinforce the organisation's script and text when in the company of specific audiences. For example:

We have been asked so many questions by managers and consultants in settings such as this [interview settings] that we feel as though we have to give the answers they are looking for [P10].

You know we have had people coming in to ask us how we feel about change. But the problem is that when we tell them what we think we are told that what we are saying is incorrect! How is that so? [P14]

Managers want to hear one story. They're not really interested in what I think about the situation, they just want you to tell them that they have done a good job and that change is good. Not so, but that's what you tell them! [P4]

Performance in the front region may be the result of individuals being subjected to feedback and 'rehearsal' (Goffman, 1984, p.28). In the organisation, employees are provided with organisational narratives, legends and ceremonies, as well as human resource processes such as induction, training and performance appraisal (Salzer-Morling, 1998). With adequate rehearsal an employee may become 'sincerely convinced that the impression of reality which he [sic] stages is the real reality' (Goffman, 1984, 28). Furthermore, employees may feel the need to rehearse and thus perform narratives within the front region as they 'know full well' (Goffman, 1997a, p.195) the behaviour expected of them and the 'drama [that] will culminate' if they 'violate...the self-control...expected to [be] maintained' (Goffman, 1997a, p.195). Mumby (1987, p.113) argues that myths and legends are often told at the management level of the organisation to ensure that such behavioural standards are maintained. Additionally, he argues that:

Narratives provide [organisational] members with accounts of the process of organizing. Such accounts potentially legitimate dominant forms of organizational reality, and lead to discursive closure in the sense of restricting the interpretations and meanings that can be attached to organizational activity. Closure frames discourse in a distortive fashion, and often misrepresents the interests of particular groups within organizations (p.113).

Witten (1993) further recognises that managers can use narratives to reinforce obedience in the workplace. Organisational rules and expected patterns of behaviour are often communicated to new and existing employees through 'powerful and persuasive' organisational stories (Witten, 1993, p.105). In these ways employees are persuaded to communicate the content of authoritative narratives to colleagues to 'maintain the stability' of the workplace throughout 'periods...of...upheaval' (Polletta, 1998, p.422). Thus, collective stories (Boje, 1999) of change may also reinforce the idea of a 'coherent community' (Polletta, 1998, p.422) during times organisational change.

Front region narratives, of the kind reproduced in this chapter, may be thought of as reproducing a version (Rhodes, 1996) that is likely to be promoted by management. The following examples from the interviews suggest that this may hold true, at least for some of the respondents

We all have to agree on and support change otherwise nothing ever gets achieved...if people decide to act out against it then they are purely out to make trouble...We never got told a lot...but then it is up to managers to do all that side of things...People that didn't accept change just didn't know what was good for them [P2].

It doesn't really matter what I think about change...I have to say the good things about it because at the end of the day...it is [the organisation]...that are paying my salary...you just [have to] look like you support it and talk about it that way and you'll be okay...Otherwise not so good things can happen to you...and I am not prepared to take that risk...Change is a good and necessary thing [P22].

Regardless of the rationale behind constructing front stage narratives of change, it is evident that the various researchers agree that a performance within the front stage region is aimed at highlighting particular features of an

individual to an audience. Within the process of organisational change participants may attempt to display enthusiasm and support for management to ensure that their positions within the organisation remain secure. Within the interview setting a participants may attempt to show that they are in control of organisational change, therefore carefully constructing their stories in the presence of the researcher.

Narratives constructed within the back stage region are more likely to reveal the ambiguous and chaotic nature of organisational change as highlighted in the narratives constructed by Matthew and Warren. However, those constructed by Jack and Jessica commenced within the front region and ended within the back region, further highlighting the complex and sometimes contradictory nature of narrative construction. The following section focuses on the back stage narratives constructed within the present research.

### **Back Stage Narratives**

I have argued that the front stage narrative is a carefully constructed representation of what an individual wants their audience to hear. In comparison, the back stage narrative is more likely to include stories of organisational change that may discredit the participants, management, or the organisation. Here respondents narrate tales that are different from those told within public domains (Boje, Luhman and Baack, 1999, p.998), highlighting that fact that experiences of change are ambiguous and often chaotic. It is important to note that the narratives did not simply switch from a front to back

region performance. Where Matthew's narrative was performed predominantly in the back region from start to end, Jack's back region performance emerged gradually as the interview progressed. In Jack's case, the emergence of a back region account was not obvious until the researcher became aware that the beginning of Jack's narrative was substantially different from the story of change being reported toward the end of the interview, suggesting that the story constructed in the front region ceased to be managed (Bolino, 1999), or the voices in the back region became increasingly salient.

Similar to the front stage narrative, my interpretation of the difference between a back region narrative and a narrative in transition between front and back regions is determined by the types of comments made by participants in relation to what they are comfortable discussing within the interview. Matthew's back region narrative commences with negative comments made about the organisation and the way that change was implemented, communicated and managed. A specific statement made by Matthew at the beginning of the interview suggests that his narrative commenced in the back region rather than the front: 'I have nothing positive to say about the organisation and absolutely nothing to hide...why should I say nice things about them that are complete bullshit when they have treated me so appallingly?' Warren's narrative also commences with a "backstage" comment: 'I'll tell you the real story about change and what we have to put up with...most other people are too gutless to talk about what really happens or are too scared of being found out by management'. A third participant stated that

If I thought this information had some way of getting back [to the organisation] there's no way I'd tell you half of this...but I did a Masters and I know that when you say this is confidential, it is confidential, so I'll tell you what really happened! [P16]

Another participant who constructed a backstage narrative commented that:

The organisation may have thought it was doing the right thing...but failed to treat us humanely during change. I love my job, but there is no way I will sit here and tell you how great change was because firstly, that is what the organisation would expect me to tell you and secondly, it would be a pack of lies! I might have to lie on the job about these things, but in this setting where someone is actually interested in my story, no way! [P17]

Such backstage constructions of change differ from those in transition between regions in that narratives that commence in the front region tend to reflect comments such as those made by Catrina in her front stage narrative rather than those above. However, transitional front-backstage narratives end differently to how they begin. For example, Jack's narrative commences by exclaiming that 'change is the best thing that has happened to this place', and then later ends by explaining that change has made the organisation a 'bloody living nightmare'. My interpretation of the transition of narratives between regions is not so much based on conflicting comments of this nature, but by the way participants appear to "drop the façade" during the interviews:

You know I've been sitting here for the past half an hour telling you this story about how good change has been for the organisation and I'm thinking "what the hell am I talking about"...the organisation expects me to say things about change that I don't really agree with...Is it okay if I tell you the effects it has had on me? Is that the sort of thing you are interested in hearing? [P10]

Such comments indicate a "change in direction" within the narrative, which is a characteristic of six of the participants' stories. Four transitional narratives contain comments, such as the one above, that can be interpreted as moving



from front to back stage with a distinction between the construction of narratives in each region. The other two narratives are more subtle and the transition from front to back less obvious. However, these two narratives appeared to have more contradicting comments such as: 'I think change has been very good for most of the people...I don't really know what I think about it to be honest...I guess it has been good...but I'm not really sure what it has done for me other than make my job less secure [P8]' and 'I love the organisation and I love the job and management really know what they're doing...lately its as though the organisation doesn't have a clue about people which seems to have happened since they made all these changes [P3]. Comments made by these participants later in the interview indicate that a transition to backstage has occurred: 'yeah I'm sure change was good for some, but I've been saying its this and its that, but to be honest, its terrible...I've had nothing but problems since it all that I feel I can now tell you [P3]'; 'you know I was thinking when I came in [to the interview] that I've got to be so careful of what I say because I'm scared of losing my job...but if you are doing a study of change I think its important for you know that there are different sides to the story [P8]. Goffman (1984, p.114) suggests that individuals are likely to "step out character" in the back region and perform as though they are away from spectators. Furthermore, he defines the back region as:

A place, relative to a given performance, where the impression fostered by the performance is knowingly contradicted as a matter of course...It is here that the capacity of a performance to express something beyond itself may be painstakingly fabricated; it is here that illusions and impressions are openly constructed...Here...props and items of personal front can be stored in a kind of compact collapsing of whole repertoires of actions and characters.

Within the back region employees refer to organisational change as a process associated with 'angst [P17]', 'disillusionment [P16]', 'anger [P11]', and 'sadness [P20]'. Narratives told in the back region highlight emotions such as fear and feelings of uncertainty and confusion. In this region stories are not constructed for the benefit of stakeholders. Rather, they reflect organisational change as perceived by the individual respondents. They highlight a personal interpretation of change rather than carry out a performance that may be expected by management.

Back region comments also highlight a "darker" side of organisational change, referring to it as a vindictive [P8]' and 'cruel [P18]' process in which managers' use 'inhumane methodologies [P21]' and 'pressure tactics [P17]' to 'get employees to commit to change [P13]'. Respondents talk about the 'uncertainty [P14]' of the workplace and the 'anger [P5]' and 'animosity [P7]' created by the change process. Tales of the unfair manner in which jobs were distributed, 'backdoor deals [P8]' to 'get rid [P16]' of select staff, and abuse from managers are told.

Back stage narratives highlight Boje's (1995, p.1001) argument that organisations 'cannot be registered as one story' thus reinforcing the need to present different types of narratives. While support for organisational change was 'expressively accentuated' (Goffman, 1990, p.114) in the front region, back region comments highlight suppressed stories and emotions that vary significantly from those initially expressed. A possible explanation may be that the back region provides employees with a 'safe place to hide' (Goffman,

1990, p.116) away from the demands of management where they could cease acting and express personal experiences of change rather than reconstruct the organisational narrative.

In light of such arguments, one would argue that versions of change that praise the organisation and endorse the actions of management, in contrast to versions that focus on personal experience, are products of organisational propaganda or the result of 'the exercise of covert power and control' (Witten, 1993, p.104). However, Gabriel (1998) argues, versions of change that endorse the organisation, simultaneously reinforce a modernist view of employees who are depicted as inferior to the organisation. Such 'democratic inequality' (Boje, 1995, p.41) is also characteristic of modernist discourse in which employee voices are silenced (Gabriel, 1998) in order to communicate the management monologue (de Cock, 1998). It is important to note that employee experiences in this study are subjective and that in attempting to determine whether or not they are reflective or modernist or postmodernist discourse lies an (ironic) danger of grandly theorising and categorising individual narratives. However, it is noteworthy that one employee explains a need to remain silent about individual interpretations of change in order to favour the organisations' story.

The company wants us to tell a particular story that says how good the changes have been and how much better off we are...That's a really strange thing because I am expected to talk about all this stuff with other people and virtually lie about it...well maybe not lie, but certainly talk about how great it is. That is one perspective only. When you actually start to look at people individually...the story changes and you open up a completely different can of worms...or the real story of change [P18].

The above comment may imply that organisational narratives of change are representative of the modernist discourse in comparison to the individual stories of change. However, it is essential to recognise that a back stage narrative constructed in this research is not necessarily more realistic or truthful than a story told in the front stage. Back region narratives reflect what Boje (1995) considers to be a postmodern discourse of change in organisations. These narratives provide employees with a defence 'against the grand narrative, mechanical harmony and functional order' (Boje, 1995, p.42) which is reflected in the front region stories of change. Hence, the personal experiences of employees are brought back into the organisation (Best and Kellner, 1991) through the telling of micro level stories. By incorporating back region narratives into the organisational discourse an audience opens itself up to 'a very different set of stories' (Boje, 1995, p.39) that highlights the ambiguous and confusing nature of change in organisations.

From the analysis of case studies and narratives within this chapter, it is evident that those who manage performances and construct front stage narratives of change are more likely to construct "success stories" such as Catrina's. In comparison, those who perform their stories within the back region are more likely to reveal a darker side to organisational change, revealing tales of poor employment relations, exclusion and a lack of job opportunities. While it is difficult to theorise about the possible relationship between the management of impressions and the construction of particular narratives, it is certainly worthy of further investigation.

## Conclusion

This chapter has introduced five employees who were interviewed for the study. The five case studies were constructed from biographical information reported in the course of the interviews to highlight that respondents sometimes generate conflicting reports and opinions about organisational change, and that a number of different narrative plots are derived from individual experiences of change. Rather than eliminate or overlook contrary information, an attempt has been made in this chapter to take the conflicting reports into account.

From a brief exploration of the narrative plots it is evident that an emergent theme across the narratives is the way in which stories are told and performed. Drawing on Goffman's (1984) notion of region performance, dramaturgy and the theatrical metaphor, this chapter has found that dimensions of human interaction are performed in front or back stage regions. Front stage consists of reports that are favourable to the organisation. Front region performances reflect a narrative constructed to please managers, clients, organisational stakeholders and possibly also myself as a researcher. Narratives performed in the back region highlight impacts of personal experience. The chapter has shown that capturing this ambiguity, however subtle, is essential to understanding employee experiences and perceptions of organisational change. However, it has also highlighted that employee experiences of change cannot be simply categorised as a type of performance. Rather, narratives interplay between front and back stages, suggesting that the

ambiguity within them is more intriguing than trying to find a "real truth" by establishing a series of grand narratives from the bottom-up perspective.

From the narrative analysis conducted in this chapter, a tentative relationship between the way in which impressions are or are not managed within the performance and construction of the narratives could possibly be linked to the way that employees perceive organisational change. It is also evident that employees respond to organisational change in different ways. The following chapter "unpacks" the narratives further and focuses on how employees react to organisational change and explores the various response choices that employees use at work.

## Chapter 5

**Responding to Change**

Chapter 2 noted that individuals experience varying levels of stress when confronted with unfavourable situations (Lazarus, 1993). While this thesis does not focus on stress specifically, the work of Lazarus is relevant in that it considers stress as a natural response to situations such as organisational change, particularly when individuals perceive that change will impede or facilitate their goals (Smith and Lazarus, 1990). In the event that personal goals are thwarted by change, individuals are likely to adopt coping responses in an attempt to gain more control over personal circumstances and thus, attempt to change their situation at work (Folkman and Lazarus, 1980; Perrewe and Zellars, 1999).

This chapter aims to explore the reported coping strategies and responses to organisational change used by employees in this study. Chapter 2 highlighted that most of the literature concerning responses to change is top-down in nature and constructed from the managerial perspective. It also identified that employees often are expected to respond to organisational change without providing an adequate rationale for such behaviour. Findings from this research suggest that responses to change are more complicated. This chapter focuses initially on the Transactional Model of Stress (Lazarus, 1968; Lazarus and Folkman, 1984) as a way of drawing attention to employee responses to

organisational change. The Transactional Model of Stress highlights that employees will react to a situation depending on the level of harm, threat or challenge that they perceive a situation such as change will have on their positions within the organisation.

### **Stress and Coping**

When confronted with organisational change, the status quo in which individuals operate is altered and this affects the fit between the employee and the environment in which they operate. Lazarus (1993, p.8) argues that in the event of 'an unfavourable person-environment relationship' psychological stress is imminent. The degree of stress of organisational change on individuals is not easily identified. All the same, it is evident from this study that individuals do experience varying levels of stress depending on their level of personal investment in the job, the degree to which they perceive they can change the stressful situation, and the level of control they perceive to have over their circumstances (Lazarus, 1993). Even from the initial case study analysis, the narratives reveals diversity in the levels of stress experienced by employees. One employee argues that she experienced a 'slight amount of stress' throughout change, but felt that her situation 'was much better than others [P2]' for a number of reasons, including her relatively young age, her professional training and her husband having secure employment. To her, change was a situation that 'did cause some fear and anxieties' but not to the extent that 'some of the girls who were single mothers must have been experiencing [P2]'.



By comparison, change caused another employee 'extremely high levels of stress [P17]'. This respondent shares similar characteristics to the above respondent; she considers her age and professional training to be 'the very reason why change was so bad [P17]'. Her role as a union representative led to constant threats to job security, 'personal attacks by managers and some colleagues [P17]', which in turn caused her to suffer severe and long illnesses to the point that her doctor advised that she 'should quit work and get out of the [Latrobe] Valley [P17]'. Although she believed that she would 'easily find work elsewhere [P17]' in the event of losing her job, the respondent indicated that her 'professional reputation and dignity [P17]' were at stake, thus making the process of organisational change 'very personal and important [P17]'.

These two responses to organisational change suggest that individuals appraise change differently and according to the perceived levels of threat or harm that the change has for them (Lazarus and Folkman, 1984; Perrewe and Zellars, 1999). It is evident in the second employee's response that the perceived threat to her career and health was far greater than that of the first employee's, thus suggesting that the degree of stress experienced is more severe when one's assumption of security is threatened. Therefore, it is inappropriate to assume that events such as change would cause similar reactions or responses amongst employees. Furthermore, Lazarus (1993, p.3) argues that:

Stressful conditions...[do] not produce dependable effects; for some persons the stress aroused by a given condition was great, while for others it was small; and under stress conditions, depending on the task,

the performance for some was markedly impaired, for others it was improved, and for still others there was no demonstrable effect.

Lazarus' (1968) transactional model of stress indicates that individuals appraise situations through primary and secondary evaluations to determine whether or not a situation will cause them stress. Within the primary appraisal of organisational change employees evaluate if the process of change involves any 'personal stake' (Lazarus, 1993, p.6), or 'an encounter [that] generates the potential for emotion' (Perrewe and Zellars, 1999, p.740). In other words, employees faced with change appraise if it is likely to inhibit or enhance the attainment of personal goals, such as continuance of career or promotions. Positive and negative appraisals generate confronting stories of change as noted in the previous chapter.

Lazarus (1993) suggests that during the primary appraisal stage, employees either determine that an event such as organisational change is irrelevant to them and thus not likely to cause any immediate harm to them individually, or they will consider it to be a beneficial or harmful/stressful event. Respondents in this study tend to fall into the latter category, indicating that change is either beneficial or harmful to themselves and their positions within organisations. The initial case studies presented in Chapter 4 reveal that the two groups are blurred and not so easily distinguished according to whether they perceive the change to be negative or positive for them. Those who narrated change as a beneficial and positive process in retrospect also tell stories of varying degrees of harm and feeling threatened. In other words, while the outcomes of change may have been beneficial in the long-term,

these employees were initially faced with threats of job loss and harm to their careers in a similar manner to those who did not consider change to be beneficial. Consequently, all employees in this study are believed to have a personal stake in organisational change. Once a personal stake in organisational change has been determined, employees move into a stage of secondary appraisal in order to find ways of changing 'conditions to be undesirable' (Perrewe and Zellars, 1999, p.740).

The transactional model of stress suggests that individuals will develop coping responses to alter the 'perceived harm, threat, or challenge [of change] so that a more positive environment is created' (Perrewe and Zellars, 1999, p.740). Lazarus (1993) suggests that coping styles can be divided into two categories: problem-focused and emotional-focused. Those who adopt problem-focused styles of coping, such as voice, believe that 'something can be done to alter (change) a negative situation' (Perrewe and Zellars, 1999, p.747). In comparison, employees who adopt emotion-focused coping styles, such as passivity or loyalty, believe that they are unable to address or change the situation and therefore, seek to accept organisational change through 'distancing and escape/avoidance of the stressor' (p.747). The coping styles adopted by employees in this study fall into and around the margins of the types identified by Lazarus (1993). These are explored at length in the following section.

## Proactive Coping

In response to organisational change, nine of the twenty-two respondents in this study argue that they chose proactive strategies to respond to organisational change. These coping strategies refer predominantly to the use of voice (Hirschman, 1970) discussed in Chapter 2. It is also significant to note that voice, as a response to change is not discussed in narratives performed in the front stage. Rather, voice as a response was only evident in back stage stories and narratives that moved between both front and back stage performances. As reviewed in Chapter 2, voice is used as a way of expressing dissatisfaction caused by change, and may be drawn on by employees to alter unsatisfactory person-environment relationships. Furthermore, voice is an attempt 'to change, rather than escape from an objectionable state of affairs (p.30).

The nine employees explored in this section argue that voice was the only way they could cope with the ambiguity and confusion of organisational change. For them, voice was an attempt to 'take control [P20]', 'try and change the situation to something better [P16]', and inform management of the problems that change 'was causing the staff [P18]'. One respondent argues that it is 'more or less expected that we will sit on their bums and do nothing [P3]', further arguing that it is 'all the more reason for us to be proactive and resume some control [P3]'. Two employees describe change as 'a removal of power [P17]' and a change to the 'status quo that can cause a lot of stress and hardship [P2]'. Consequently, voice as a proactive response to change is justified as a means to 'try and change their current work situations' (Zhou

and George, 2001, p.682) or, an attempt to return the organisation to the status quo prior to change.

Although this thesis is not concerned with sex or gender differences in relation to the experience of organisational change, it is noteworthy that five of the six women included in the sample were proactive and sought solutions to their concerns at work by using voice. In sex and coping literature, women are often portrayed as being emotionally expressive rather than using control or problem solving approaches (Jick and Mitz, 1985). In organisations, it is often assumed that women are more likely to withdraw (Billings and Moos, 1981) rather than attempt to alter a power situation (Hobfoll, Dunahoo, Ben-Porath and Monnier, 1994, p.50). However, the narratives of women suggest that they are unable to 'be passive when we were not given enough information [P17]' as 'we have a right to know how change is going to effect our lives [P2]'. As one woman expresses, 'you don't find out if you don't challenge things or ask questions'. The same woman added that it was not uncommon for 'women to be running around trying to find out things...to try and make things better [P20]'. Another employee further rationalises her decision to challenge managers by explaining that:

I realise that we need organisational change and I don't have a problem with that providing you tell me the reason or the rationale behind it. And if I can't see a rationale behind a decision that effects a hundred people's lives then I will openly question it until you give me a logical answer [P3].

These comments are consistent with Lazarus' (1993, p.9) findings in which he argues that 'women and men show very similar coping patterns' when dealing with stress at work. The men who adopted problem-focused coping strategies

make similar comments to the women and argue that they 'were not prepared to commit to change without information from managers [P18]'. Regardless of how 'pissed off managers would get...we would badger them and not back down until we were told things [P9]'. Another male employee adds that he 'refused to be a "yes man" [P8]' and would not 'do anything that managers told me until they told me why [P8]'.

Rather than being 'quiet-like or mouse-like [P12]', or attempting to manage impressions, employees responded to organisational change by directing their concerns to management or colleagues verbally, which 'was often something that we would not normally do [P12]'. One respondent thought that 'the stress would make me crumble but I was wrong [P3]', while another adds that she 'felt like a warrior [P20]' during the period that her organisation was undergoing change, thus explaining that expressing concerns was not something that she would normally do. Change also made other respondents 'more authoritative [P12]', 'demanding [P18]' and 'less inclined to take shit from people [P9]'. The following two responses are typical of this group of employees, surprising even themselves of how they responded.

I think sometimes I scared the hell out of some of the managers...I think they thought I was really sort of quiet and wouldn't challenge them much with anything...but one day I just let go. Its like I found this inner thing and the stress and the unknowing all the time just changed me suddenly...I wasn't going to take their bullshit...I wanted clear answers and I damn well demanded them...whether it was the most senior manager I didn't care...their jaws dropped on more than one occasion that's for sure! [P3]

I was never seen to cause trouble or rock the boat so to speak...I was this good [employee] who just did what she was told...but when I found out that my future was under threat...and my seniors wouldn't tell me what was happening...I approached one of them and said "I want some response...I want some answers and I want them

now!"... You know I wonder was that me who said those things? But survival instincts kick in and you want some power back over your life [P12].

Besides finding a more authoritative voice, some found coping with change easier 'by showing how strong we were...in an attempt to change things for the better [P2]'. A number of employees were proactive and sought positions in unions and on executive boards in their endeavours to 'seek knowledge [P8]', and 'find out information that could be passed onto our colleagues [P20]' so that they could 'better their situations [P16]' and 'try to make work a bit easier [P18]'. One recalls that the changes she experienced were:

...Absolutely horrendous [but]...rather than sitting on my backside I wanted to do something...so I joined the union. I'd never been part of a union. Never in my whole life until I was thirty-nine years old...when someone said, "you could actually do this and speak out for [us]"...So I became a job rep and started representing [staff] because I had something to say...and I was scared for [our industry] and frightened of the changes that were occurring [P16].

Another respondent also displayed similar problem-focused coping with her role in the union. Although she recalls feeling 'bewildered [P17]' by organisational change, she felt that she 'just had to do something to try and help people who would be affected...by management actions [P17]'. While admitting that she did not really want to be involved in the union, the experience of organisational change convinced her that it was essential for the survival of both herself and other employees:

I'm a very motivated person but...I didn't really [want to be] a union rep at the time but I didn't think I could trust anyone else to do it. Not with five or six hundred people's careers there...it was my decision because I didn't morally feel like I could leave at the time [P17].

The very act of becoming involved in unions through representative roles, or through simply seeking assistance is considered by Rusbult et al. (1988) as a constructive way of responding to a situation that has caused dissatisfaction. 'Seeking help from an outside agency like a union...[or] taking action to solve problems' (p. 601) is thought to provide the organisation with important information as to what they are doing wrong and how their performance may be improved (Keeley and Graham, 1991).

While voice is considered as a constructive response to dissatisfaction (Rusbult et al., 1988; Zhou and George, 2001), employees in this study also suggest that using voice has been destructive to their careers. All nine respondents who used voice and problem-focused coping argue that 'it did not work [P8]' and that 'our pleas to management fell on deaf ears [P9]'. In addition, all of the employees explored in this section suggest that the way they responded to change is linked to various forms of punishment including 'harassment [P18]', 'bullying [P20]', 'threats from managers [P17]', and taunts about 'not knowing whether we would have a job [P9]'.

Even though voice is documented as being constructive and can be used to 'kick up a fuss' (Hirschman, 1970, p.30) about conditions at work, it appears from this research that voice can easily be ignored by managers or lead to 'negative returns' (p.31) for employees. Consequently, employees 'had to find another way to deal with change [P8]', such as 'seeking support elsewhere [P16]', 'looking for another job [P15]', or by 'pulling your head in and just getting on with your work [P18]'. Such comments are consistent



with Lazarus (1993, p.9) who argues that 'coping strategies change from one stage of a stressful encounter to another'. Strategies used to respond to change as a conscious choice, or in the event that voice failed are explored in the following sections.

### **Social Support**

Coping with change through discussion and debriefing with friends, family and colleagues can be a substitute for coping, or as an aid to other coping styles. Within the gender and coping literature, coping through social support is exemplified as a female response to dissatisfaction (Collis, 1999; Hobfoll et al., 1994; Kaunonen, Tarkka, Laippala and Paunonen-Illmonen, 2000). However, coping through social support at work is not necessarily gender segregated (Zhou and George, 2000). Co-workers who are faced with organisational change have the ability to understand the organisational climate and may be better able to 'provide encouragement and support' (p.685) to employees.

It is noteworthy that within this research only the women discuss coping and responding to change through social support within the interview setting. This is not to suggest that men do not use social support as a coping mechanism. While the men who took part in this research did not discuss social support as a means of coping with change during the interview, it is possible that it was discussed in a way that was not recognisable to the researcher. Participants who did discuss social support suggest that it

provided them with a means to express concerns to fellow workers and friends 'away from managers [P17]', and in a 'neutral environment [P2]', in order to 'help makes sense [P16]' of change. In addition, discussing the impacts of change at a distance from managers and/or the organisations meant that responses could be constructed in an environment in which employees would not be subjected to punishment for 'saying the wrong things [p3]'.

Armstrong-Stassen (1998, p.35) describes social support as a help-seeking strategy by means of which individuals 'seek assistance or information from others'. Kaunonen et al. (2000, p.184) argue that individuals coping with stressful situations may seek social support from 'informal sources to people connected with major life roles [as well as] professional...persons and groups who provide specific purposes'. Expressing voice or dissatisfaction to managers 'never seemed to do anything [P3]', and is described by two employees as 'making things much worse for yourself [P20]' by allowing managers to see that 'you disagreed with what they were doing [P12]'. Therefore, employees felt that they could only 'turn to colleagues for support or help [P3]', or family and friends who could give 'objective advice [P16]'. Social support at work or home enabled one woman to 'get things off my chest without being judged or punished or considered resistant to change [P16]':

I have one really good friend and one other and often the two come around...and sit out on the balcony drinking and I know it doesn't go any further. But with my own team on a day-to-day basis its great because its like I'll come back from a meeting and slam in like, "fuck you'll never believe what's happening!" And we all know it doesn't leave the room [P3].

There were probably...two girlfriends and we spent a fair bit of time together and you know just going to each other's places and...ringing and talking to each other on the phone. Our phone bills! We relied on each other heaps because whatever they were accusing us of they were accusing the whole group [P17].

Thiots (1986) contends that social support provides individuals with assistance in coping with and modifying stress. By employing the support of colleagues, friends and family members 'the strains of critical events' (Gutierrez-Lobos et al., 2001, p.70) on individuals may be decreased. Social support in response to stress caused by organisational change can be offered in the form of non-direct (Walkley, Seigert, McCormick and Taylor, 1987) or direct support (Cohen and Wills, 1985). Ducharme and Martin (2000) suggest that non-direct support concerns the emotional or esteem support offered to individuals, which they refer to as affective support, while direct support is more likely to offer material assistance.

The narratives suggest that affective support is greatly important to women throughout the process of organisational change. Without the emotional support provided by workmates, friends and family, one woman would have 'found it nearly impossible to deal with the stress of change on a day to day basis [P16]'. Having such emotional support allows employees to 'blow off steam [P17]' and 'deal with the daily grime of change [P2]' through actively voicing their dissatisfaction. Furthermore, 'trying to work and deal with daily stress as well as change stress cannot be very good for you...you need an outlet [P20]'. Duke (1998) argues that adopting affective social support as a means of coping can not only improve the health of an individual but also enables them to better tolerate a situation that may normally seem intolerable.

Wills (1985) argues that individuals call upon affective support in order to cope with everyday stresses in the workplace rather than relying on material or informational support. This is also evident within the narratives. For example: 'you don't necessarily need to know what's going on...you just need to have a good bitch to make yourself feel better [P17]'. Moreover, 'it's a girl thing I think...women have this need to talk about things...and then we get over it...its just a way to cope [P3]'. However, 'you need to be careful who you talk to about work things...because if people can't relate there's not much point and it doesn't help you [P12]'. Gutierrez-Lobos et al. (2001, p.70) argue that 'network members are usually the first to be confronted with difficulties and problems' by employees, rather than seeking assistance from outside sources. While the women did turn to friends and family outside of work for social support, they felt that organisational change was easier to cope with 'with the support of colleagues [P20]'.

We talk about stuff with husbands or significant others...but they don't get it. We don't feel necessarily supported by that conversation so we tend to debrief in the caf[eteria] and debrief in the [shift change]...We're the only ones who understand what we're talking about when we debrief with other people [P17].

The other day I gave this feedback to [my manager]. I left and went back to the girls and said "listen to this" and who should walk in the door but bloody her! And we all pissed ourselves laughing! What a scream! It was so funny. But yeah that type of debriefing happens a lot...but only with my team...other people don't get it! [P3]

Although the availability of social support enables employees to voice their dissatisfaction with organisational change, it is described as being 'a waste of time in the long-run [P3]' because it 'really does nothing to change the situation at work [P17]'. The support of colleagues makes life at work 'more

bearable [P16]', however, if managers 'cannot be swayed or refuse to listen to employee concerns [P3]', social support may not be 'enough to cope with change in the end [P12]'. In addition, one woman suggests that not being able to use voice in her situation is linked to the possibility of seeking work elsewhere:

You just get to this stage where you think, "I can't cope with this anymore". I can't be seen to say the wrong thing for fear of losing my job or being harassed, I can't seek any more comfort from friends and family because it doesn't really help anymore. Plus they have their own problems...so in the end you think that maybe its better to just get out of the place. You know it must be better than this somewhere else [P12].

All of the women indicate that over a period of time their strategies for responding to change altered. For example:

Voicing your opinions and concerns to managers over a long time becomes a time-wasting exercise. They simply do not care and they don't want to know what your problem is...The people you work with can only do so much and they have their problems to deal with as well...In the end you start to reappraise the situation and think "well I am clearly achieving bugger all by this and the more I try to do the more managers seem to hassle me". So you have to do something else...and that is either try and live with it or get out [P16].

Nothing helps you. Nothing works at all to make things better or for you to feel better. In the end I thought, "I can't live like this anymore". And so you do something about it [P3].

Such comments indicate that family members, friends and colleagues do not necessarily provide the long-term support that employees require to cope with organisational change. From this research it is evident that women who used social support either chose to continue being passive in front of their managers, or sought positions in external organisations. Of the women who used voice as a primary response to organisational change, three eventually

exited, while the other two remained in their organisation. These responses to change are explored in further detail later in this chapter.

The following section of the chapter is concerned with abuse and aggression as responses to change. While the women tended to seek emotional support, eleven of the men in this study were either involved in or subjected to abuse and aggression from colleagues.

### **Abuse and Aggression**

Prior to discussing aggression and abuse as responses to organisational change, it is noteworthy that such tales emerged indirectly from the interviews and were not derived from direct lines of questioning. The following narrative excerpts support this argument and illustrate how the theme of aggression and abuse as a response to change surfaced throughout the discussions with three participants:

Talk of aggression provides a slightly modified version of voice evident in this research. Hirschman (1970, p.33) argues that voice can have 'positive effects at first and destructive ones at a later stage'. In comparison to respondents who believe that voice directed to managers did not work, others perceive that initial attempts to change unfavourable situations at work through voice were 'not received too badly by managers [P11]'. Responding to change through voice is considered by five employees as a 'positive way to show we weren't happy [P9]', and a 'mature approach to let managers know we wanted to find a better way [P11]'. At first, management reactions to

voice were considered to be 'somewhat positive [P1]' and 'better than what we were expecting [P18]'. One employee explains that, 'it appeared that they [management] were grateful that we stated what we did and didn't like about change [P7]', thus suggesting that voicing concern was a 'good way to show managers that we cared about change but were not entirely happy [P7]'. However, another argues that, 'I think managers got sick of us questioning and challenging them all the time [P1]'. Three others believe that managers confused voice with 'resistance [P13]', 'unhappiness with the current situation [P8]' and 'just us trying to get in their way [P4]'. This misinterpretation of voice is thought by eight employees to have contributed to their destruction at work in relation to employment relationships between colleagues, co-workers and managers, career opportunities and their futures within the organisation.

One man argues that 'complaints to management fall on deaf ears...so in the end you start to get the shits with people around you [P11]'. In particular, 'you start to see things in people you have worked with for years...and all of a sudden they really drive you insane [P13]'. Furthermore, 'I think that trying to handle that sort of situation for such a long time brings out aggression in yourself and other people [P8]', particularly as 'it is not an uncommon thing for workers to be okay one minute and then all of a sudden snap [P7]'. These comments are consistent with the views of Duffy (1995) and Farrell (1999a; 1999b), who explain that employees will redirect frustration to their colleagues in the event that management cannot be directly challenged. Above all, Sweeny and McFarlin (1997) argue that men are more likely than women to react in such a way when situations at work become more stressful.

While the men do not report using coping strategies such as directing aggression towards managers, they argue that 'tiffs between blokes would happen all the time [P1]'. Two employees believe that 'such things happened not because you hated the bloke [P18]', but because they 'were merely a way of blowing off steam [P21]'. One man further adds that 'a lot of aggression between guys was your usual ego shit. Blokes don't want to back down and they are easily fired up...that's all it ever is at work really [P14]'. Two more respondents suggest that the climate created by organisational change was to blame for aggression between employees.

You just have this non-stop crap and then after a while its like you suddenly get pissed off at everything anyone does around you...It's not the guys' fault though...It's the constant bullshit of management not telling you what's going on and having to deal with change and coping with one change with another coming in straight away. What do people expect? I'm surprised that there was not a lot more going on between blokes...because they were all angry and a pack of angry blokes is not good to be around [P13].

It was bloody panicky...there. It was hatred! It was hatred for everyone. It didn't matter who you were. But you know I hated my boss and he hated me. And I hated my tradesman...you would hear information and you would interpret it the way you wanted to and...pass it down to someone else. So the [next] person misinterprets it and thinks you're having a shot at him. So there was a lot of that "you step out of the gate" type thing [P18].

Although aggression and abuse between men 'became the norm [P1]' during organisational change, aggression 'did not score any points with managers [P13]':

It was like you were considered to be a troublemaker even though you weren't...so managers targeted you and hassled you so that you wouldn't start any more problems. The thing is the aggression was not coming from me but that didn't matter. They'd decided that I was a troublemaker and they also decided that I would either be hassled into agreeing with everything they did, or I should leave [P13].



Another employee argues that 'it would probably have paid off to be more passive throughout change...because people who didn't were picked on as being troublemakers [P19]'. Furthermore, 'I thought that it would be better for me to be less aggressive...I may not have been given such a hard time by managers [P9]'. However, employees who expressed aggression as a response to change felt that they couldn't 'just drop it [P18]', or 'let change go by without a fight [P7]', adding that 'it is normal to voice your frustrations and anger when you are being lied to by management all the time [P11]'. In addition, the ongoing requirement of employees to manage their impressions and only display appropriate emotions 'gets to be too much [P9]' and is described as being 'unbearable after a while [P11]'. One employee explains that 'in the end...you've just got to let your feelings out [P13]'.

While aggression and abuse is considered a 'normal reaction to organisational change and the bullshit that goes with it [P15]' by one, others felt that they could not 'put up with infighting with your mates [P22]'. Therefore, coping through deviant behaviour at work is also highlighted in the narratives. Misbehaviour in the form of go-slows, work-to-rules, sabotage and destruction of property were also reported, justified as being a 'way of getting back at managers [P15]'.

### **Misbehaviour and Deviance**

In response to the dissatisfaction caused by organisational change and the inability to alter conditions at work, twelve of the twenty-two respondents

narrate tales of misbehaviour and deviance in which they were either actively involved in or witnessed acts of withdrawal from work activities, sabotage or destruction. Such acts are examples of organisational misbehaviour in which employees become involved in 'any intentional action...that defies and violates [organisational]...norms...values...and standards of proper conduct' (Vardi and Wiener, 1996, p.151). Similar to abuse and aggression, misbehaviour also appears to be a product of long-term emotion labour. One respondent involved in deviant behaviour at work explains that 'after years of trying to do the right things in front of managers you get to the stage where you just don't give a fuck [P22]', with a second adding that it is only natural that employees 'get to the point where they are willing to run amok [P11]'.

Organisational misbehaviour is not something that 'workers set out intentionally to do [P18]'. Rather, it is justified by one employee as a response to 'having no way of openly coping [P10]' with organisational change. As a result of the inability to express concerns at work, it was 'not uncommon for some people to start to do devious things...such as...go slow [P14]', 'only do what was in their job description [P13]', or 'just sit back and do bugger all [P15]'. By withdrawing from particular duties, quality of work 'began to slide [P22]' and 'productivity declined [P1]'. However, one respondent describes such consequences as being 'good because it let managers know that we wouldn't be pushed around [P11]'. Furthermore, managers 'had to sit up and listen when working conditions started to deteriorate [P9]'. Such comments are indicative of neglect (Rusbult et al., 1988; Turnley and Feldman, 1999), which was discussed in Chapter 2 as a

response to dissatisfaction caused by change. Rusbult et al. (1988, p.601) define neglect as 'passively allowing conditions to deteriorate through reduced interest or effort'. However, unlike voice, neglect is considered to be a destructive and passive response to dissatisfaction, that is unlikely to lead to favourable conditions (Turnley and Feldman, 1999), and does not provide the organisation with useful feedback about performance lapses.

One employee argues that 'while I didn't want to get involved in such things...things like bans, go slows...sabotages etcetera were always going on [P7]'. In addition, 'it was about the only way some people could cope with how management were treating them [P13]'. Consequently, 'some workers would be a bit sly...and accidentally sabotage a piece of machinery [P11]' or 'only do what was in their job description and nothing else [P4]'. Several of the men report 'inner turmoil at being involved in such activities [P22]', but justify deviant behaviour by arguing that 'managers could stuff us up...so why not us with them once in a while [P18]'. Besides, 'what are we meant to do? Sit back and let them destroy our lives and pretend that we're happy about it?' [P15]

Kaplan (1975) refers to such actions as employee deviance, involving behaviour that violates and threatens the norms and 'well-being of an organization' (Robinson and Bennett, 1995, p.556). While 'ruining the organisation was not the point of being unruly [P13]', one respondent argues that 'we would do these types of things because we were so sick of the state of the place [P22]'. Furthermore, 'we didn't want to wreck the livelihood of the

company...just be noticed by managers so they could see that we were pissed off and that we felt that we shouldn't have to take it [P9]'. 'Anyway, the things that we did were not that bad anyway [P11]'.

We didn't refuse duties, we'd just say it was too unsafe or that we didn't know this trade properly [P15].

I think the worst I got involved in was like a go-slow type of thing...I would just make sure that every single thing was done to perfection. It was funny because I remember the boss being so pissed off...but what could he do? The quality of what I was doing was perfect...I think he got the point though [P7].

Two more employees argue that 'things got to being really bad [P9]', suggesting that they 'had to do something to 'stop all the bullshit for at least five seconds [P11]'. While they recognise that 'there was probably no point in doing half the stuff that we did [P11]', it was a 'poor attempt to try and gain some control over the situation [P9]':

My reaction to all the change in the end was...don't do anything that will improve the company. If they're going to sack us they'll do it anyway. So I'll just plod along and not do the right things [P11].

The way that we coped...was we started to take small liberties...we used to come to work, clock on and make sure the boss saw us...nick off, then we'd come back at four o'clock in time to knock off [P9].

Strategies involving employee deviance may be considered as active rather than passive. However, the examples given in the comments above could be argued as being based on emotion. This is further supported by a comment made by one employee who argues that 'we couldn't do anything to solve problems...so we just tried to handle being there in general [P19]'.

All of the men involved in this research argue that coping with organisational change increased the levels of aggression and abuse between employees,

which was attributed to the attitudes of managers towards employees. Managers are described as 'exploiting staff for their own purposes [P18]', 'attempting to gain better things for themselves at the cost of staff happiness [P9]', and 'controlling so that they can make more money [P4]'. In addition, two more respondents argue that it is 'no wonder staff crack up [P13]', when they are being used as 'pawns in managers' games [P22]'. Jermier, Knights and Nord (1994) argue that resistance to change, such as the examples explained above, are not unusual when managers seek to control or exploit staff in order to gain in terms of capitalist production. Rather, acts of sabotage, resistance and misbehaviour are merely 'a reflection of the deep-rooted structural contradictions of capitalism' (p.10).

Aggression and misbehaviour at work is described as becoming 'very old very quickly [P18]', and 'mentally and physically exhausting [P1]'. Another employee explains that 'it gets so bad when you are fighting with colleagues and doing mischievous things all the time...that it all becomes boring [P22]'. Consequently, one respondent argues that it is not necessarily a 'good way to cope with change [P21]', while another adds that 'in the end you think "stuff it", I might as well just get my head down and get on with it [P19]'. Furthermore, 'it was definitely obvious that those who did work away without making too much noise were rewarded with more opportunities [P20]', in comparison to employees who were 'seen to be reactive and resistant [P3]'. Although passivity is regarded as a 'sign of weakness [P15]', and a strategy adopted by 'staff with no backbone and no ability to stand up for what was right [P16]' by two respondents, others describe it as being necessary if 'you

wanted a future in the organisation [P2]', or 'wished to remain employed [P19]'. Such comments are discussed at length in the following section.

### **Passivity and Withdrawal**

Passivity represents emotion-focused coping, which is adopted by individuals in the event that 'they have no means to change the situation' (Perrewe and Zellars, 1999, p.747). Coping of this nature usually involves acts of distancing, denial or avoidance (Lazarus, 1993). Furthermore, Collinson (1994, p.25) refers to this style of coping as 'resistance through distance', by means of employees attempting to escape the 'demands of authority...[by distancing] themselves...from the organization and its prevailing power structure'. However, it is evident from discussions in this chapter so far that passivity can also be a consequence of the failure of voice as a response to change, or a response to punishment from managers. In addition, passivity is recognised by some (Rusbult et al., 1988; Zhou and George, 2001) as being loyal to the organisation.

It is difficult to determine whether employees who were passive were actually engaging in resistance through distance. However, the following two narrative excerpts highlight passive resistance as a consequence of failed proactive coping:

You fight and try to be proactive and find out information for yourself as well as your colleagues...but it gets to a point where you just get tired of doing it anymore and the constant ignorance of managers wears you down. After a while you just think, "why bother?" That's when you start to think, "well maybe I might be better off somewhere else"...so you avoid caring about it all [P16].

I just got to the stage where nothing I did could achieve anything positive at all...really all I wanted was some security for myself, but it seemed like the more I tried, the more I would get shunted by managers. In the end I just let it all go and didn't bother anymore...people were like "why aren't you fighting anymore?" and I'm like "well what do you care anyway?" It's easier to sit in the background and just let it go over your head...and that was better because I was starting to resent people [P3].

Two other employees argue that 'constant questioning of change...caused resentment [P20]' and 'a negative perception towards managers and other staff [P17]'. Furthermore, 'when you start to feel as though you resent people...you have to take a step away from the situation [P17]'. As a result of increasing feelings of resentment towards managers and colleagues, four of the respondents adopted passive styles of coping with change, rather than continuing to be proactive.

Comments made by the respondents, such as those above, suggest that withdrawal and passivity is related to the inability to rebalance power between themselves and management staff. Furthermore, coping with increasing feelings of resentment may cause individuals to withdraw and seek to exit from the situation (Collis, 1999; Hobfoll et al., 1994).

Although some employees use passivity as a means of coping with prolonged attempts to control organisational change, others choose to consciously adopt passive coping styles or adopt them as a response to fear or to the belief that they lack power over organisational processes such as change. One respondent argues that 'I could have ranted and raved about change but at the end of the day I was too damn scared...how macho is that? I was scared I'd lose my job [P21]'. In addition, 'change put the fear of God into me. All of a

sudden I was looking down the barrel of a loaded gun and my life was relying on whether they'd pull the trigger [P4]'. Another employee contends that 'fear for your job and income...makes you agree with things that horrify you [P18]'. Two more argue that they 'had no power over anything at work let alone change [P5]', and that 'opinions from staff were not valid or wanted [P7]'.

We just worked there...we had no power over anything and that was made clear from the start...so it is a waste of time to try and protest about change because the decisions had been made by the powers that be...we had to carry them out and do the work...but at the end of it all we have no power [P6].

Snow-Turek, Norris and Tam (1996, p.455) argue that those who use passive coping styles 'relinquish control...to others' and thus form a dependency relationship with the individual or group perceived to have power. Anshel, Williams and Williams (2000) argue that when individuals perceive events to be beyond their control they are more likely to engage in passive coping. This is evident in comments such as, 'you can't do anything to help your problems so it is actually easier to switch off [P14]'. Engaging in acts such as 'switching off [P18]', 'disengaging [P6]' and 'turning your brain off from the situation [P1]' enabled some employees 'to better cope with the changes [P18]'. In particular, several employees emphasise that 'it is better for you to stay out of problems at work and deal with them in your own way [P19]'.

I was fairly concerned at the time...but I was still getting paid and there was no guarantee that [the organisation] wasn't going to shut down...so you just didn't know and it was virtually "well in the meantime I'll keep working and we'll keep going" [P5].

I felt that there was...threat there...and I guess that was one of the things that probably helped to motivate me [to keep working] because I felt that as long as I am doing things that minimises the threat...I'll be okay. If I sit back and take the hard line I felt that the threat got



bigger...I guess I was lucky I could cope that way. Some people didn't or couldn't [P7].

One employee argues that he adopted passive styles of coping 'because management had control over your future [P14]'. Others argue that 'there was no point trying to challenge managers [P6]', that 'it was better to just do what they said in many ways [P18]', particularly 'if you valued your future in the organisation [P22]'. Furthermore, a perception that 'you could be aggressive and abusive towards managers...but I saw where that got people, nowhere [P8]' existed across most of the employee's narratives.

You'd want to jump up and down and scream a lot but if you did you would just be out the door quick smart...so in order to deal with change you had to just stick your head down and work hard...try to be noticed for hard work not making a scene...then you were noticed for the wrong reasons [P1].

God some days you just wanted to go in there and beat the complete hell out of someone it got so bad...but what's the point? We learned very quickly that the best way to handle organisational change was to pretend that all was okay...Deal with it by pretending to deal with it...a bit weird hey? [P22]

One employee recalls a perception that 'you just couldn't find information out from management [P4]' with another contending that it was 'best to just do your own thing and avoid management at all costs [P15]'. Others argue that 'at times it felt like there was nothing you could do to try and handle change better [P11]' arguing that 'you were black listed if you went to the union [P7]', 'ridiculed if you sought the help of other workers [P5]' and 'verbally abused if we dared to ask managers for any information [P21]'. 'There was no way to cope other than avoid getting into trouble...we were unable to have any control over our situation [P9]'.

On the one hand, one could assume that the above comments are evidence of employees feeling 'compelled to remain silent' (Morrison and Milliken, 2000, p.706). However, on the other hand, passive behaviour may be the result of a conscious decision by employees to remain silent and manage their impressions at work. Three employees argue that the 'only way to get ahead in the organisation [P6]' was to 'stay out of trouble [P4]' and 'work in the best interests of yourself and the company [P7]'. Furthermore, one employee argues that he benefited greatly from 'being quiet [P7]' with another adding that managers perceived such behaviour during organisational change as being 'dedicated to the organisation [P6]' and therefore worthy of career advancement. Others who suggest that remaining silent or passive throughout the process of organisational change enabled them to 'receive great promotions [P2]', 'advance in the organisation [P4]' and 'be recognised by management as being a great employee [P21]' also support these comments.

Whether or not it is a conscious response to change and regardless of how individuals privately feel about the organisation, employee passivity may be considered an act of loyalty (Hirschman, 1970; Turnley and Feldman, 1999; Withey and Cooper, 1989). In the event that employees are dissatisfied with organisational change they may optimistically 'wait for conditions to improve' (Rusbult et al., 1988, p.601). Five employees in this study indicated that 'things would get better [P19]' and that they were 'better off just working as usual [P6]' and 'waiting for the storm of change to pass [P2]'. Of the five employees, one argues that he had to remain loyal to the organisation as there 'were not many job opportunities out there [P19]', while another adds that he

had strong ties to the organisation because 'my father, uncles and brothers had all had their careers here [P4]'. Such comments are further reflected in Withey and Cooper's (1989, p.525) argument that the 'loyalist [is]...a passive person with strong ties to the current setting who thinks that...things will get better on their own'. However, it is noteworthy that all five of the employees who exercised loyalty towards the organisation perceived this response to be linked to 'promotions [P19]', 'amazing climbs through the organisation [P2]', and 'advancement in careers [P4]'.

While some employees express loyalty to the organisation or respond with passivity, others seek exit as a means of coping with the dissent caused by organisational change. One employee explains that exit was 'a last resort [P17]' in situations where employees 'realised their limitations in the company [P17]'. Furthermore, 'you realised that you had to think about other job and career options if you wanted to have your mental and physical health intact [P20]'. Not all employees exited the organisation as a result of change. However, those who did describe it as being an extremely difficult decision to make.

### Exit

In the event that employees are unable or unwilling to cope with organisational change in constructive ways, they may seek exit as a final response. Withey and Cooper (1989, p.525) argue that an employee will seek to exit an organisation when the 'costs of exit are low and the costs of voice are high...and improvement is not likely'. Exit is considered as an active but

destructive response to dissatisfaction at work in organisational terms as it does little to resolve the problems experienced at work in that they are likely to remain constant for remaining employees (Rusbult et al., 1988). However, Ballis (1999) and Ebaugh (1988) both recognise that exit can be traumatic for individuals. The trauma of exit is also highlighted by employees in this study, who argue that exit was a result of 'unfair hardship [P9]', 'verbal and mental abuse from managers [P20]' and the 'removal of decision-making powers...and responsibilities [P17]'.

Pfeffer (1992, p.302) explains that during organisational change 'shifts in power are virtually guaranteed, and the likelihood is great that after acquiring power we will eventually lose it'. Three employees in this study add that with the loss of power caused by organisational change 'came the loss of career opportunities [P3]', and argue that 'you would do whatever you could to try and retain some power...and therefore some hope of meaningful work [P12]'.

A perception that 'having some power in the organisation equalled a future [P2]' was common within the women's narratives. For example:

It was clear early on in the piece that if you didn't have any power in the organisation...you were stuffed. There was this thing...I don't know, like a feeling, or some sort of underlying knowledge that if you did wrong by management...acted in the wrong ways...[or] did not appear to support them...then you would have [power] removed. And once you had power removed you virtually had no future there...Everyone knew that if you said and did the right thing by managers you were okay...if you tried to challenge or question too much they'd have it in for you [P12].

Five of the respondents suggest that they were in 'a position of having responsibility and decision-making power removed by management [P20]' as a consequence of using voice. While they recognise that 'challenging

management is not really all that good for you and your career [P12]', it is considered as inevitable 'when you have to stand back and watch people constantly being treated like complete shit [P3]'. As employee recalls:

I went and saw [my manager]...and I told her that her behaviour was unprofessional and it was aggressive and I didn't have any respect for her. Which isn't a good career move either. But the thing is I didn't have any career moves anyway. They'd already cut that leg off...for me! I'd already been given "the talk". The union people call it the talk when you realised the limitations of your career [P17].

Another adds that 'you can only handle so much of change and being treated appallingly all the time...in the end you need to make decisions that are right for you [P16]'. While an employee recognises that 'resigning from your job is not really a good way to cope with the effects of change [P2]' another recalls that 'after a while I started to withdraw into myself and wondered what the point of being here was [P12]'. Eventually 'after trying to deal with non-stop huge problems you start to think, "ah fuck it, what's the point"...you need to look after yourself [P3]'. Regardless of the styles of coping adopted by employees, four agree that 'change does destroy you in the end [P17]', and 'leaves you feeling wilted [P16]', 'unwanted [P3]' and 'extremely undervalued as a person [P20]'. Furthermore, 'no matter how you try to deal with [change]...in the end you need to look after yourself [P12]'. Two employees thought that 'resigning would be seen as the easy way out [P20]', but argue that 'it is the only way to really cope...when you are ignored [P17]'. Consequently, several employees made the decision to withdraw from the organisation 'in an attempt to keep some sanity [P17]' and 'to find something elsewhere...where I would be valued and appreciated [P20]':

My decision to leave was based on the fact that I didn't respect the people I...worked with. I didn't want to be part of a...team with the

decision-making that they were doing, which I thought was totally unethical. And I'd never been part of working with administrators who were doing devious things and treating people so abominably. So I decided to go. I wanted to go with integrity and that was all I wanted...I don't need to have anything to do with these people [P20].

I'm exhausted. I'm sick of fighting these people and being the one who has to stick up for everyone else...I don't want to be there with [staff] who are defeated, who feel unlistened to and unvalued because being around those people all the time eats away at you...One day you hear yourself and you go "oh my God! I sound exactly like that person I thought was a winging old bitch five years ago" and that's me now. Even though it may seem weak to just go...I'm still hurt and disillusioned by what happened to me and the way I was treated [and] I don't want to do it for them. And I'm too tired to do it for me [P17].

Such comments suggest that exit is not necessarily a passive coping strategy, rather a strategy that may be necessary for employees to continue their careers outside of the organisation. In comparison, two other employees exited the organisation because they 'were sick of organisational change and the bullshit that is associated with it [P11]' and 'because management was always on your back after change came in [P15]'.

Three more employees chose exit as a strategy to cope with change because 'change just became too much to cope with [P9]'. One explains that he 'didn't really want to leave as I thought it might be seen as the easy way out [P7]'. However, another adds that 'you just have to make the decision to go because you and your qualifications might be better appreciated elsewhere...even though others think it's a gutless move [P13]'. Yet another respondent suggests that 'some people left because they were not dedicated to their work let alone the organisation [P9], but contends that he resigned 'because another job where I might be actually valued came up [P9]'. One more employee 'agonised over making the decision to go for a job

elsewhere...but after a long time thinking about it I had to realise that my career was more important than this organisation [P13]’.

Even though some respondents who chose exit as a final strategy to cope with organisational change considered that others might have perceived them as being weak, other employees considered the actions by those who exited as strong. For example, ‘I wanted to leave but was scared...I envy those who did it [P4]’. Furthermore, ‘some people were just able to take the gamble and go and look after themselves...I wish them all well...because I wish I’d done it [P22]’. An additional respondent explains that she ‘is kicking herself [P3]’ for remaining in the organisation.

I just didn’t have the guts to get up and walk out...I wish I did and I envy the women who could do that. Some people thought they just couldn’t handle change and just left...but they fought for us and were given a really hard time by management because they were just sticking up for us...the other [staff]...don’t appreciate that at all...but I do! I think there is glory in that some of the women did what they could and then had the guts to say, “Fuck it. I’m getting out of this mess. I’m better than this”...they knew that they had the ability to do well anywhere else...I doubted my ability...and I wish I could be more like them [P3].

Another respondent argues that ‘actually getting up and leaving is as good a statement as telling management about how pissed off you are [P16]’. Furthermore, ‘making the decision to go and seek work elsewhere is a clear statement that you have had enough, and that you won’t be treated this way anymore [P12]’. Finally, ‘some people think those who left are weak...I think anyone who has the strength to stand up for herself and look after her career has great strength [P2]’.

### **Narrative Construction and Responses to Organisational Change**

The coping styles discussed in this chapter highlight that employees choose to respond to organisational change in ways that ensure the manipulations of impressions. Employees who respond and cope with change through social support and passivity may be perceived by managers as being loyal to the organisation. Only five employees expressed loyalty, while others argued that such response styles were selected as a consequence of the failure of voice, lack of knowledge about change or fear for job security. It is noteworthy that the five employees who expressed loyalty to the organisation constructed front stage narratives.

Employees who used voice as an initial response to organisational change constructed their stories predominantly within the back stage region. Such findings may suggest that the tales of coping and response are a building up of front and backstage narratives, or tales of impression management, that is, how employees perceive they are required to manage their emotions and behaviours at work. From this chapter it appears that a relationship exists between front stage narratives, impression management at work and passive response strategies. Such a relationship could highlight support for and loyalty to the organisation. Alternatively, employees who discussed responses such as voice, aggression, misbehaviour and exit constructed back stage narratives and appear to be less concerned about managing their impressions at work.



The narrative themes explored in this chapter suggest that a possible relationship exists between the way in which employees responded to organisational change and the benefits and punishment that they received. Employees who used voice suggest that this response is linked to bullying and verbal aggression. Furthermore, as voice was unsuccessful in gaining a better person-environment fit, respondents either became passive, aggressive or exited the organisation. Those who actively chose passivity and managed their impressions through the period of organisation change highlight the promotions and advancements that they perceive are linked to their behaviour choices. These perceived relationships are worthy of further consideration.

### **Conclusion**

This chapter has highlighted the different response styles that employees in this study used to react to organisational change. At first glance, the various responses are indicative of exit, voice, loyalty and neglect that were introduced and explored in Chapter 2. However, a more detailed analysis of the response styles suggests that each is a product of the way in which narratives were constructed and performed within the front and back stage regions. At the end of this chapter, I also argued that response styles are possibly related to the management (or lack) of impressions at work. Those employees who remained passive and managed impressions at work appear to have benefited from organisational change, while those who used responses that did not manage impressions were more likely to be harassed by managers.

From this chapter and the case studies presented Chapter 4, it is evident that the narratives contain different degrees of emotionality and tales of emotion and impression management. The following chapter investigates the theme of emotionality and explores the way in which respondents use emotion within the reporting of organisational change.

## Chapter 6

**Emotion Talk**

The very nature of organisational change poses challenges to workers (Mossholder et al., 2000). Mossholder et al (2000, p.222) argues that the increase in urgency combined with the scale of change has caused change in the workplace to be 'more severe and potentially more disruptive to employees'. However, Eccles and Nohria (1993, p.25) argue that 'every generation of management discourse portrays the present as especially challenging...and posits the coming of a new organization that will revolutionize the way people interact and work'. Regardless, emotion could be the first and most common reaction. Concern over issues such as job and financial security, are likely to cause an emotional response (Brockner, Grover, Reed and DeWitt, 1992) whether it involve negative or positive feelings.

In Chapter 5, I highlighted the different response styles amongst employees and suggested that a relationship exist between the regions in which the narrative was constructed and responses to organisational change. I also drew attention to a tentative relationship between the style of response and the benefits or drawbacks that employees experienced throughout the change process. From these findings it is evident that employees also respond to organisational change with emotionality and construct tales of the need to manage impressions and emotions. This chapter focuses on the theme of

emotionality in the context of organisational change. This chapter notes that some respondents use language and tell stories that suggest that they still feel resentment, anger and disappointment towards organisational change even though they have been distanced from the process through significant periods of time, while others use positive language signalling the benefits of change. However, all respondents use language that represents confusion, ambiguity and a sense of the unknown.

Ballis (1999) argues that retrospective accounts are abbreviated and shortened versions of an experience that is constructed within the context of the present situation. He also argues that they may be "sanitised" accounts of an experience, or relatively confined versions that report selectively so as to generate a desired reaction. In the retrospective narrative, the past is recalled with all the benefits of hindsight and in a manner that tells us simultaneously as much about present circumstances as well as past experiences. The narratives constructed after the event are not emotion free. Rather, it is evident that emotion is measured, muted, or contained within the reporting of organisational change. The very fact that the narratives reverberate emotionality even with the passing of time is worth reporting. One could argue that the experiences of emotion evident in the retelling are fingerprints signposting the impact of a particular experience on the individual. However, one could also argue that emotion is constructed in the telling of organisational change experiences. Regardless, the one thing that can be stated about organisational change, both from this research and the research of

others, is that change is not a process devoid of emotion (Carr, 2001; Frijda, 1993; Rafaeli and Sutton, 1989; Thoits, 1989).

The process of organisational change has been found to generate a variety of emotions within employees (Carr, 2001; Mossholder, Settoon, Armenakis and Harris, 2000). While a relationship between organisational change and emotion has been recognised and explored (Carr, 1999; Carr, 2001; Mossholder et al., 2000), there still appears to be a perception by researchers that the display of particular emotions in the workplace is either inappropriate (Mann, 1997; Mumby and Putman, 1992; Putman and Mumby, 1993) or does not have anything to contribute to a richer understanding of organisations. Many organisational studies continue to focus on organisations as being devoid of emotions (Carr, 2001; Fineman, 1993), or consider emotions to be 'idiosyncratic...disruptive...and...marginal...to life at work' (Hochschild, 1993, p.ix). Consequently, organisations have a tendency to de-emotionalise or present 'a sanitised and skewed understanding of what transpires' (Carr, 2001, p.422) in workplaces, thus focusing on a bland interpretation of organisational activity rather than understanding human behaviour.

From the case studies explored in Chapter 4, it is evident that regardless of the individual experience of organisational change, or the way in which the narrative is performed, emotion is prevalent both within the telling and the content of the narrative. This chapter aims to investigate the nature of emotions that employees express throughout the retrospective construction of their narratives. In particular, it focuses on and explores the manner in which

emotions and impressions are managed as part of the organisational change process.

### **Emotion Talk**

Organisational phenomena, such as change, typically cause a positive or negative reaction in employees (Frijda, 1993). As organisational change can directly impact on workers' career status, an assumption can be made that employees view change as either 'harmful or beneficial' (Mossholder et al., 2000, p.220). While research on emotions is vast, theorists tend to agree regarding the manner in which emotions are defined. Howard, Tuffin and Stephens (2000, pp.295-96) define emotions as 'intrapersonal realities which are experienced privately by the individual (sometimes in association with physiological change) and which may give rise to communicative expression'. Fiebig and Kramer (1998, p.536) suggest that emotion encapsulates 'feeling and its related thoughts, including its psychological and biological states and subsequent behaviors'. Putman and Mumby (1993, p.36) focus on emotion in the organisational setting and suggest that it is 'a process through which members constitute their work environment by negotiating a shared reality'.

Emotions have been explored in a number of arenas of the workplace. Thoits (1989, p.317) argues that employees form emotional attachments with others at work suggesting that humans are not 'motivated solely by rational-economic concerns'. Fineman (1993) adds that emotions in the workplace can be determined through social interaction between individuals, as well as personal historical experience. Literature focusing on emotion labour and the

management of impressions at work also focuses on the presence of emotions within organisational life. Concentrating specifically on the management of emotions and behavioural expectations in organisations, emotion labour is centred on 'emotions which ought to be expressed and which ought to be hidden' (Rafaeli and Sutton, 1989, p.8) in the workplace. Consequently, emotion labour also connotes both inconsistencies between the feelings that employees express and the emotions that they actually feel (Mann, 1997). However, Martin, Knopoff and Beckman (1998, p.434) suggest that both organisations and employees would benefit from the 'expression of a wider range of emotions than is usually condoned in traditional and normative organizations'.

Within their narratives, respondents both tell tales of emotion and use emotional talk when reporting their experiences of organisational change. Emotional tales focus on employees' feelings towards the process of organisational change, job insecurity and organisational uncertainty, the need to manage impressions in the workplace (emotional labour) and the inability to express their emotions to management. When telling tales of emotion, employees indulge in emotional talk. Specifically, employees use such talk when they discuss organisational change retrospectively.

In this chapter the term *emotion talk* (noun phrase) is used in preference to *emotional talk* (adjectival phrase) to highlight the fact that the focus is not merely on feelings and sentiments, but on activities that imply effort and involve action. This is a reflection of the respondents' narratives in which they argue that the effort involved in managing emotions and hiding

inappropriate feelings at work is on par with, and at times more difficult, than the physical and mental demands of their day-to-day job functions. The challenge in this chapter therefore extends beyond discussing simply what the respondents *feel* about organisational change, to attempting to explore and understand the invisible work that is being performed managing emotions or manufacturing an opposite set of impressions throughout the process of change.

### **Retrospective Emotion Talk**

During the narrative theme analysis, it became evident that participants focus on emotion during the process of sorting and constructing their stories. Employees tended to use emotional talk when they were asked to reflect on the process of change in retrospect. Within this talk the predominant emotions reflected continuous anger and resentment at the way in which change was implemented and managed. Many respondents continue to hold anger towards managers within their narratives:

I get so bloody angry when I think about the way we were treated and the way they did the change. God they treated us like shit! Absolute crap! Just thinking about it all again makes my blood boil [P15].

You know I can't even talk about it now...after this long without feeling really awful. I get to the point where I almost want to go and kill someone I get so mad...I never would but that's how it all makes me feel [P13].

Many respondents admit that the very act of reconstructing the events of change 'is enough to get really agitated [P16]'. Organisational change 'hurt some people so much [P3]' that 'even with time...it is still hard to handle



thinking about such things [P18]'. Employees suggest that they 'still get mad over...the way some issues were unfairly handled [P3]'. In particular, subjects such as the reorganisation of jobs, poor treatment by managers, lack of communication and information flow, the manner in which change was implemented and treatment by colleagues evoke emotion talk. Respondents argue that 'some things were handled so appallingly that you just never get over them [P12]', and suggest that 'it has been about five years since the change...and I dare say it will be another twenty five until I feel better about it [P9]'. Several suggest that they still get upset recalling and thinking about the past. Some respondents now appreciate and understand better the process of organisational change with 'the benefit of hindsight [P1]' but add that 'while it may make sense...it still makes me mad [P22]'.

For one employee it was the manner in which organisational change was implemented that even now makes her angry. She 'could see a sensible way in which change could be managed [P20]' but her capacity to make decisions and therefore affect change was removed from her by management. Furthermore, she comments that even though she 'had a voice [in the organisation], management took that voice away [P20]'. She recalls that organisational change was:

...So frustrating...and I get so mad thinking about change even now. There were ways in which they could have got the commitment and the support of the staff...but [management] were into contraction and elimination...which was completely out of kilter with effective human resource management...it didn't have to be this way...It was a dark day handled with complete incompetence [P20].

Strategies that management used to downsize and reissue jobs as part of the transformation process angers another employee. As well as 'getting mad

[P3]' at having to reapply for her job and missing out on promotion, she feels that those who were successful in obtaining jobs were 'clearly not the right people [P3]'.

[Managers] preach this "we want the right people in the right jobs" but they don't actually practice it...and then they take the easy way out. I mean it would be hard but fuck! They made hard decisions with people like me...as for the others [who got the jobs]...my first reaction was I hope they fuck up...Management are already seeing the effects now of having the wrong people in jobs...they've made a real mess of it...but who cares about the long-term stuff up this has had on my life? [P3]

Many employees consider that management 'failed to think too hard about the long term consequences of change [P7]'. While 'they may have achieved effective organisations [P18]' two respondents believe that the staff who have remained in the organisation 'have changed [P4]', and become much more 'angry, and cynical...and more likely to look after themselves [P9]'. One respondent confesses that long-term anger and cynicism 'eats away at you...and can ultimately destroy [P9]' relationships with managers and colleagues. He further adds that 'excess anger creates fear [and that] fear is a common thing now in organisations [P9]'. Describing organisational life subsequent to change he argues that:

Everyone is so scared...that they just think, "Oh I've got to look after myself". Nobody is prepared to stick their neck out. A bit like the old chook in the hen house you know...the chooks are getting less and less...and each of them are saying "oh well it wasn't me that time". And then you're the last chook in the hen house and the farmer's coming in with the axe and you're thinking, "hang on who's left to help me"? [P9]

While emotional talk is centred predominantly on the emotions of anger and fear, several respondents display sadness within their talk of organisational change. One employee describes her feelings after change as 'almost like a

grief thing [P3]'. Another suggests that the state of his relationships with his colleagues 'who used to be good mates' has left him 'feeling really sort of sad and a bit lonely [P18]':

You know I feel a bit weird about it all...I was part of the tradespeople that I used to drink with at the pub...but then I got promoted [and] the shop steward came up to me and said "you're the enemy so you don't associate with us at work"...Now I feel like I've got my wings clipped and I can't go anywhere. So it sort of feels like...you're the only person in the room where twenty thousand people go in and out all day [P18].

Another employee states that:

Although I didn't get my job I did get a slight promotion...more a side ways step. Anyway, I'd walk into a room and the staff would be like "God check her out, who does she think she is? She just walks in and out like she owns the place"...You know that makes me feel really lonely. I'm sad about change in a way because I loved my colleagues and now it seems they hate my guts...I never wanted it to be this way [P3].

In such situations as those above, employees suggest that they have suffered the 'repercussions of change...in situations that have not been our choice [P18]'. Across the narratives there is a perception 'that management made decisions that workers are paying for [P7]' in various ways including 'torment from other staff [P16]' and 'having their lifestyle taken away from them [P21]'. As one employee states, 'it is whether or not these decisions were made out of incompetence that is in question [P6]'. Some employees believe that management made 'many incompetent [P19]' or 'completely ridiculous decisions [P7]' during the process of change. While some respondents go so far as to suggest that 'some stupid decision saved the life of some workers [P22]' others believe that 'some really good people were lost [P12]'. Those who have since exited the organisation suggest that 'they were mad to let some of us go [P17]' but add that they 'feel really angry about the way in

which their [manager's] decisions ruined our working lives [P20]. However, they also argue that they found it very difficult to be on their 'best behaviour all the time [P17]' and make sure that they 'said and did the right things [P16]' when in the company of management.

One employee suggests that although he has developed a successful career after leaving the organisation, even 'seeing someone from there is enough to annoy you [P9]'. Another adds that 'it is difficult to see people who have destroyed your livelihood...and try to be normal about it [P5]'. For example:

There's a man in our [son's] soccer club who still works for the company and I could gladly push him over! He really gets, he's management, he gets me so angry! And every time I see the cars of the company go by I get furious! I can't stand it. I just think to myself that they're all...okay, they're happy and we're sitting here wondering about our futures [P11].

Respondents find it 'hard to talk about change [P18]'; with one arguing that 'I just get too emotional when I talk about it [P3]'. Another expresses puzzlement and question why he continues to feel emotional 'especially when it was a few years ago now and I'm quite okay in terms of my job and stuff [P9]'. Some respondents attribute the persistence of the feelings to the fact that 'change is such a confusing, devastating process...its no wonder we continue to feel annoyed [P6]', and that 'if you treated a dog the way we were treated you'd have the RSCPA onto you...so that would be why I'm scarred by it [P21]'.

While conducting the interviews, I perceived that for some employees, the interview itself was an opportunity for the expression of emotions that have

been suppressed since the experience of organisational change. During the interview, several employees also highlighted that they were unable to express their emotions at work or to family members as they 'didn't think it was the right thing to do [P3]', or were concerned that family members 'would get bored [P12]', or 'not understand [P18]'. While such comments indicate that for some, the opportunity to voice concerns and responses to change is rare, I am particularly interested in the perception of employees that expressing emotions at work is not appropriate. This concept is further discussed in the following section, in which tales of emotion constructed during the interviews are explored.

### **Emotional Tales (of Change)**

As well as being sated with emotions, employee narratives contain different tales of emotion and organisational change. In particular, these stories focus on the display of "appropriate emotions" and when such emotions should be activated at work. The first of such tales explores a common theme across the narratives that employees are required to hide inappropriate emotions in the workplace. Within these stories, a possible relationship between the display of inappropriate emotions and management retribution or reward is evident. Emotional labour and the management of impressions are exhibited in tales of emotion told within this research in different ways. Firstly, they are evident within the stories of change themselves. Secondly, emotion labour is highlighted in the way that stories of change are told, and thirdly, it is evident in the way in which stories of change were told within the interview setting,

drawing attention to the front and back stage nature of narratives. This chapter is concerned with the first and second constructions of emotion labour.

The concepts of emotion labour and impression management are well documented by researchers. Originating from the seminal work of Hochschild (1983), emotion labour focuses on the display of appropriate emotions as part of the work role. There are many definitions of emotion labour. Kunda and van Maanen (1999, p.65) define emotional labour as 'a publicly displayed investment and passion for the work [that employees]...do'. Morris and Feldman (1997, p.257) add to this with their definition by suggesting that emotion labour involves the 'act of expressing organizationally-desired emotions', while Wharton (1999, p.158) argues that emotion labour is 'the managed, and, hence more instrumental expression of emotion in the workplace'. Kruml and Geddes (2000, p.10) further explain that 'emotional laborers engage in communication that results from either the expression of felt emotions or a decision to disguise or manage them'.

From her study of flight attendants, Hochschild suggests that service work employees are required to follow certain standards and rules about how and when particular emotions should be expressed. For example, flight attendants should 'appear friendly and cheerful' (Morris and Feldman, 1996, p.989) regardless of the emotions they are experiencing. Subsequent to Hochschild's study, emotion labour research has focused on employees primarily in service industries (for example, Pierce, 1999; Wouters, 1989; Wharton, 1993) or in

'frontline service jobs' (Wharton, 1993, p.206). However, the application of Hochschild's insights to organisational change is immediately apparent.

Yanay and Shahar (1998, p.346) suggest that it is not uncommon for emotions to be 'underplayed, overplayed, neutralized, or changed according to organizational...rules'. Within their discourse, employees in this study talk about the need to internalise feelings in order to be 'rewarded for work [P18]' or 'to avoid the repercussions of being seen to not work correctly [P19]'. Conforming to the 'company's meaning of good work' often can lead to rewards of 'money and status' (Yanay and Shahar, 1998, p.347). However, employees suggest that 'looking like you were working properly was necessary to keep your job [14]' and 'was not done for any personal gains other than a small hint of job security [P3]'.

As discussed earlier in this chapter, it is evident that some emotions in the workplace may be considered to be inappropriate while others are deemed as appropriate (Mumby and Putman, 1992). Turning firstly to inappropriate emotions, the display of emotions such as fear, sadness and anger may be considered as 'disruptive [or] illogical...[or] inappropriate for organizational life' (Putman and Mumby, 1993, p.36) or weak and irrational (Mumby and Putman, 1992). Although Fineman (1993, p.1) argues that negative emotions are 'within the texture of organizing [and are]...obviously in the daily ephemera of organizational life', the employees included in this section of the chapter argue that the display of negative emotions at work is a punishable offence.

On the one hand employees are required to work at manufacturing what is considered as organisationally appropriate. On the other hand, employees experience concern for showing inappropriate emotions. Respondents argue that they 'were required to hide our real feelings at all times [P10]' and that 'internalising feelings...could be very hard [P16]'. But as one employee suggests:

No one wants to know that you are having bad days...You've really got to adapt no matter whether it's the [people] you are dealing with, whether its organisational change that's concerning you or whether you have marital problems at home. You've got to sort of internalise it all and be able to do your job competently [P2].

One respondent further adds that he felt expected to 'look good and be smiling in front of managers all the time [P4]. Mumby and Putman (1992, p.472) reinforce this perception by arguing that it is not uncommon for employees to have to 'exhibit forced niceness' at work, regardless of whether the behaviour displayed conflicts with what they actually feel. Employees argue that the display of "appropriate" emotions 'can be extremely difficult [especially] when you have just been severely reprimanded for something...and then you have to go out there and pretend everything is okay [P17]'. But they also argue that 'at the end of day who cares how employees feel? As long as we are working properly and the clients are happy who cares? [P12]'

Another point that respondents make is that 'managing emotions just becomes second nature after a while [P3]'. Some explain that 'sometimes it just goes with the job [P9]', particularly 'if you are employed in an area where you are looking after people [P20]'. However, they also argue that 'it is really



important that you have an outlet [P17]', otherwise 'you let your feelings build up and they eat away at you [P3]'. These responses suggest that emotion labour is the flip side of physical labour.

One employee explains that 'having to go to work day in and day out and hiding your feelings is an awfully difficult thing [P2]'. A second adds that 'no matter how hard you try you begin to get a bit bitter about it [P6]' and that 'you often take it out on people around you even though you don't mean to [P15]'. While 'debriefing with staff does provide some satisfaction [P17]', 'most people at home or around you...like friends and family haven't got a clue how you feel [P11]'. One respondent recalls 'biting my lip to hide my feelings [P16]' when her organisation relocated to a new site. Although 'a change in management meant that staff were being treated appallingly', she adds that 'we just had to make sure that public perception was good...regardless of what you thought about the place [P16]'. For example:

We just moved to a new site [and] people...ask you how you are going in the new [building]. And you say "oh its beautiful, its lovely" and you have to. You can't say to them that it's horrible. How could you explain to someone what's horrible about it? [P16]

Another employee argues that relocation was 'absolutely scary [P17]' and suggests that 'it is very hard to be trying to keep the world from falling in and make sure that people think or can see that the place looks okay [P17]':

When we moved...we had problems with the electrical circuits breaking down, the roof fell in, in one of the [rooms] the fire alarm is still going off seven or eight times a week [and] now we've got that problem that if we have a fire alert no-one really takes any notice of it! They hadn't printed phone directories...Its just like picking a lucky number and looking up a cardiac surgeon in the phone book...And we

had to pretend the whole time that everything was okay...and reassure people that came in here...with all that crap to deal with! [P17]

Within the narratives employees suggest that 'having to deal with bad things all the time and remain neutral [P19]' can lead to two major outcomes. For example, 'people will either go completely crazy [P14]', or 'you just end up becoming numb to it all and stop caring [P21]'. However, another employee adds that such reactions to emotion labour are 'a consequence of having no choice [P1]' in deciding which emotions at work are appropriate and which are not.

It is not uncommon for employees to 'completely detach from the situation [P22]' 'particularly when dealing with managers and customers [P13]'. Furthermore, respondents highlight that managers disapprove of inappropriate emotions and perceive a relationship between display of emotions and their future in the organisations. This is evident in the following comments:

You just have to show that you don't care and that you are able and willing to do the job regardless...because if you can't then you are abused, ridiculed and harassed by the boss [P10]

If employees show the slightest hint that they are pissed off or angry about change then you are virtually pushed out the door by management...They don't want those type of people here [P1]'.

Others add that 'it became fairly clear early [in the process of change] that those who did what they were told would be rewarded and those who did not...well seeya later [P9]'. 'So put simply, that's the reason why you have to hide your feelings about organisational change [P4]'.

Several respondents argue that 'after pretending all the time takes its toll on you...it's very difficult to stay sharp [P18]'. For example:

It's hard to stay focused...I mean there are so many rumours. This is going to happen, that is going to happen. Some were true and some were totally way off the beam...that is very destabilising in itself! Morale was incredibly low. People probably weren't as focused on what they were supposed to be focused on...but it didn't matter to managers providing you looked like you were [P5].

Erickson and Ritter (2001, p.147) argue that 'it remains unclear whether psychological well-being is affected by the experience of on-the-job management of emotion'. However, at the same time, there is sufficient evidence in the narratives of respondents to suggest that emotion labour can be intensive, taxing and detrimental on some employees and rewarding for others.

People manage emotions differently and the narratives indicate that emotion labour can have a number of different consequences for employees. As well as detrimental effects to well being, other employees argue that managing impressions can 'be a good thing [P2]' and can 'help you to handle stress a bit better [P19]'. Managing impressions may make some employees work harder, while others work less productively. For example, 'you get to the point where you just can't be stuffed. Bugger it...just go-slow, plod along, sabotage...whatever will stuff up management for a while [P15]'. Alternatively, 'we all feel the same way so you all just pull together to get each other through. And the harder you work the more productive we are and the more capable we look as well [P2]'. The following sections explore the ways in which employees suggest that emotion labour can affect them.

### **Dysfunctional Emotion Labour**

Employees' who consider emotion labour to be a dysfunctional part of the organisational change process, draw attention to the negative affects that the management of emotions had on them on a personal and career level. It is noteworthy that tales of dysfunctional emotional labour were only told by participants who constructed their narratives partially or wholly within the back stage region. Within this section of the chapter, respondents further highlight the need to manage their impressions at work by suggesting that they are 'reprimanded for showing how we feel about change [P22]' and 'would be in all sorts of trouble if we didn't turn up with a smile on your face all the time [P1]'. One employee recalls being 'completely humiliated [P17]' by a manager when she complained about the 'state of affairs we had to work in [P17]' when her organisation was moved to a new site before it was properly completed. As she recalls:

It was an absolute joke! We moved into the [new site] about three weeks before it was finished because the date had been set politically...So we got [in] and we didn't have stock, we didn't have linen...we didn't have dressings...It was like working in a third world [country]...The paging system...wasn't coming up on the pagers, the cardiac arrest system wasn't working properly so that people who were supposed to perform resuscitation weren't notified! Sometimes they'd hear it on an orderly's pager if an orderly happened to be near them. That's how they knew that they had to go and resuscitate someone! So professionally it was frightening...the whole thing was a goddamned nightmare! And if we complained or voiced out anger or annoyance we were verbally abused [P17].

Another employee adds that 'management could do whatever they liked, say whatever they liked, yet if you showed even a hint of frustration, anger,

anything, they'd be on you like a ton of bricks...they were just unreasonable [P6]'. Respondents suggest that 'management just didn't cater for the feelings of workers [P8]' during the planning stages of organisational change. 'I don't think they even thought about how change would effect the employees [P8]', yet 'they'll just implement anything and not give a damn about how we feel about it [P15]', while another adds that 'we were just these things that got in the way I think. And if we dared to deviate from management's grand plan then we were reprimanded for that [P21]'.

Employees suggest that they could be reprimanded in a number of different ways for displaying inappropriate emotions. The most common of these was verbal aggression or abuse from managers: 'God if you just showed that you were pissed off management would tear shreds off you verbally [P13]'. Another employee explains that 'to avoid being yelled at you would just avoid managers as much as possible and pretend that you felt okay [P22]'. Others suggest that 'trying to act normal changed some people at work [P11]', with 'some of the toughest men cowering when a manager came near them...[because] they were expecting to be abused all the time [P9]'. As one employee comments: 'you had to be careful about the type of response to change that you chose [P5]'. Several respondents questioned whether or not their ability to display appropriate emotions was caused by what Fiebig and Kramer (1998) refer to as personal inadequacies in the workplace. For example:

I thought maybe I kept getting in trouble for not acting properly because I couldn't separate my frustrations of change with my ability

to do the job well...it just gets really hard to hide your fear when you feel that way...but maybe I'm just a crap worker [P15].

I tried so hard to do the right thing...as I wanted to make sure I had a chance at keeping my job...but I just didn't seem to be able to get it right. My manager always had it in for me...accusing me of being low...and never happy at work...Really I was worried about what might happen to me with the change and all...and maybe I wasn't working as well [P6].

While some respondents blame their inability to show appropriate emotions at work on themselves, others suggest that management 'were far too hard on employees [P18]'. For example, 'some people just weren't given a chance. They were accused of not acting the right way and abused for it...really we were all a bit scared [P16]'; 'I know you're expected to act in a certain way but [the change] was so hard that how can they blame us for being a bit sad or angry or upset? [P3]'. Another employee recalls being told by managers to 'act in the interests of the organisation regardless [P17]' of the personal consequences of organisational change. Others suggest that management 'told us that if we had have had the right attitude about the place that we wouldn't feel fear about change [P15]'. However, 'how can you not have these so called bad feelings when they never tell you what the hell is going on? [P9]'

Practising impression management over long periods of time can be 'very tiring [P22]' and 'can become very old very quickly [P13]'. While several respondents explained that managing emotion in the workplace enhances their work, a common perception across the narratives is that 'hiding feelings for too long will definitely create problems [P3]'. Common consequences of emotion labour include feelings of resentment towards managers and the

organisation, as well changes in employee personalities at work from passive to aggressive.

Demotion, job insecurity and uncertainty caused by organisational change 'brought out aggression...in people who were usually quite placid [P7]'. One respondent explains, 'having to deal with those things and not show a reaction is terrible in the long run [P18]'. Hochschild (1990, p.132) found that individuals who engage in long-term emotion labour 'seemed to get sick more often...[and] often had to manage loss of self-esteem and depression'. This is also documented by employees in this study who suggest that the management of impressions is linked to 'constant colds and flus [P17]', 'feeling nauseous all the time [P20], and 'walking around vague and dizzy [P5]'. Employees in the present study also suggest that managing impressions made them 'more aggressive and less assertive [P17]', 'unmotivated and depleted [P20]', and 'low and depressed the whole time [P11]'.

Other researchers also recognise that prolonged management of emotions can be linked to poor health amongst employees (Morris and Feldman, 1996; Tolich, 1993; Waldron, 1994) and thus may be considered as dysfunctional, or detrimental to the long-term wellbeing of workers. Wharton (1999) suggests that emotional labour can lead to estrangement between employees and their roles. Ashforth and Humphrey (1993) refer to this as alienation and argue that the long-term management of emotions can cause employees to become alienated from themselves. Prolonged emotion labour may cause employees to 'appear false and ungenuine' (Mann, 1997, p.8) and thus become offensive

in their display of emotions (Thomas, 1976). Fineman (1993) and Sharrad (1992) argue that emotional labour can cause employees to become depressed in the performance of their work roles and consequently suffer problems such as poor self-esteem. This is evident in the narrative of a respondent who 'did the job competently for thirty years...and then felt like I couldn't do it anymore [P6]'. This respondent explains that 'having to pretend that everything was a-okay all the time made me question my coping ability [P6]':

I got disillusioned...and I couldn't really cope...so I engineered myself into a position [outside the organisation]. But because we were in a group I felt as if I was walking out on the other people who were looking for some...support. So I agonised over that for a fair while...but I wanted to go somewhere where I could be myself and again have confidence in my abilities [P6].

Another employee adds that 'no matter what you did you just couldn't get it right. You'd behave in one way and that wasn't good enough. So you'd behave in the way that they wanted and it still wasn't good enough. When does it end? [P16]'. Furthermore, another suggests that 'the inability to express how you were feeling was the downfall of the organisation. No one wanted to work there with managers who were like Nazis [P22]'.

Others felt that prolonged emotion labour caused them to act in ways that they normally would not.

I literally went to work one morning and I walked out...I thought about what had happened that morning with a concern by a very very dedicated [employee]...and the response she got [from her] manager. And I said, "I don't need to listen to this shit!" And I took my coat and walked out! Sometimes you just can't pretend that everything is okay anymore [P16].

Long-term impression management caused another employee to become more cynical of the organisation.



I think one of the first consequences is that I am much more cynical than I used to be! I'm much more concerned to stick up for what I believe in...I would be reluctant to invest the same commitment and interest into an organisation that I did. I think I...put in a lot of effort to the...detriment of my own health and external life and relations, whereas now I would have a much more pragmatic approach to...work life [P20].

Within their narratives, employees indicate that there may be a relationship between emotion labour and the decision to exit the organisation: 'you get to the point where you think "I just can't take this anymore" and sometimes it seems that the only way out of it is to leave [P15]'. In addition, 'I love my job and I never thought I'd look at resigning...but when you become a bottled up mess because it's not appropriate to vent your feelings...then you may look at getting out [P3]'. Another respondent suggests that 'a combination of factors including abuse and emotional exhaustion [P17]' led to her resignation:

A job came up for a...position...and I would have loved it...[but] my hearts not in it anymore. I don't want to be there. I'm exhausted...I'm still hurt and disillusioned by...the way I was treated...But I don't want to do it for them and I'm too tired to do it for me...I'm tired of pretending all the time...[Another job outside] came up and I jumped at it [P17].

If emotion labour undermines an individual's work ethic, it also can contribute to eroding relationships and social well-being, as the narratives noted above suggest.

### **Functional Emotion Labour**

From the previous section it is evident that employees perceive a relationship between the expression of inappropriate emotions and retribution from management. In this section of the chapter, employees suggest that

impression management is merely a part of organisational life and thus construct tales of emotion within the context of change predominantly in the front stage region. While research indicates that emotion labour can cause low levels of morale and depression, and can be destructive, there is also evidence to suggest when managed successfully, emotional labour can have a positive outcome, and thus may be considered by some employees as functional within their working lives. Morris and Feldman (1996, p.1003) argue that not all employees consider the 'expression of organizationally desired emotion particularly unpleasant'. Rather, some employees consider emotion labour to 'help you get on with the job [P13]' and 'forget about all the rubbish that is going on in the workplace [P4]'. To some, the process of organisational change 'was emotionally tiring, but also taught me how to manage those emotions on the job [P3]'. Often this was considered to be 'very hard [P1]', but employees also recognise that 'it is not uncommon in any life situation to have to act a certain way when you feel a bit ordinary [P19]'.

Change is difficult. It can be an awful thing actually and you really need to show that you are together and can handle it, otherwise managers don't think too highly of you. You just have to come to work and look able, and act competently and show that you can do your job regardless of the stress around you...And realistically, while change is a stress, there are four hundred other things that people will cop in their working lives that require you to cope with a lot of stress. Things like death, or splitting up with your wife. You don't come to work and blubber all over the place in those situations...so why is change any different? [P1]

Other employees add that 'sometimes I come to work feeling like shit, but having to be nice to people actually puts me in a better frame of mind [P19]', or 'getting on top of the way you feel can be rewarding in a way because it stops you from being an arsehole to everyone [P14]'. Some respondents feel

that managing their emotions increases their ability to conduct their jobs. For example: 'I think that part of the challenge in coming to work is knowing that you are able to put negative feelings aside and get on with your work [P2]' and that 'it may be considered a skill by some people to have the ability to manage yourself and the way you feel [P12]'. Another employee adds:

Who wants to come to work and have half the staff in a shit because they had a fight with their other half, or because they ran out of milk, or because they might be feeling a bit stressed about change? Teamwork does not work in those situations and we don't need that [P2].

Several employees also express a perception that emotional labour is not uncommon in the workplace. In particular one employee argues that:

There is nothing that I hate more than going into a shop of something and the person being really rude and arrogant towards you or bitching and moaning because they're having a bad day. My response to that is either to get a life or I'll refuse to go back there. If I acted like that at work I'd get the sack I'm sure...so why should I put up with that type of behaviour as a normal customer? To me it's simply put down to maturity. Yeah you might be having a crap time...but why should everyone else around you put up with it? [P6]

As well as increasing satisfaction (Tolich, 1993), the management of emotions in the workplace is found to increase well being. Shuler and Sypher (2000) suggest that managing emotions can enhance group cohesion and bring about an increased sense of community amongst employees. Ashforth and Humphrey (1993) argue that stress levels at work may be decreased when emotions are managed appropriately. While employees express conflicting opinions over having to manage their emotions throughout the process of organisational change, there is a perception across the narratives 'that actions have to be taken to cope with internalising your feelings [P2]'. One participant suggested that she and her colleagues used humour in an effort to

'momentarily cope [P16]' with the demands of organisational change. For example:

Last night I was standing at the desk and everything's real quiet and I started to sing. My voice, oh my God Melanie, you know if you heard it you would be mortified! It was really quite stupid but I started to sing "I want to go wandering" or something like that just out of the blue. and they all cracked up laughing. And I said "that's just what we need girls". Then we all carried on writing. People say that if someone had have walked into the [room] right at that time what would they see? Happy, good [staff] [P16].

In addition, employees suggest that 'you just have to laugh sometimes to get through [P1]' and that 'no matter how bad it gets you have to have a laugh and a joke to keep your sanity in check [P18]'. Others suggest that 'you have to hang shit on managers to not only get a bit of fun out of it but to feel normal [P11]'. In fact, 'making jokes at the bosses expense [P7]', 'playing jokes [P5]' on managers and 'cracking jokes about others at work [P18]' are common across narratives.

Employees use humour in the workplace to 'diffuse emotions in stressful situations or help people remain in difficult situations' (Moran and Massam, 1999, p.38). Leftcourt et al. (1995, p.388) also argues that humour can enhance an individual's ability to cope with events 'without becoming overwrought'. Rodrigues and Collinson (1995, p.743) go so far as to suggest that 'oppositional joking...[and] satire constitutes a non-threatening way for subordinates to 'blow off steam' and should therefore be encouraged by managers seeking to defuse workplace tension and conflict'. Arguing that humour is an important part of self-organisation (Ackroyd and Thompson, 1997), several employees suggest that 'we would be nothing without having a laugh [P16]':

You can't live...can't survive in a place going through change if you can't laugh at yourself and others. You have to break out and muck about a bit because usually you are acting so stern around managers...and worrying about change and stuff...without a sense of humour in those situations you would just die [P12].

Regardless of the consequences of emotion labour, (Mann, 1997) suggests that the behavioural expectations and rules determined by organisations ensure that employees actively display their support for organisational goals. The tales of both functional and dysfunctional emotion labours in this chapter suggest that despite the experience of emotion labour, or how the respondents feel about organisational change, all employees engage in impression management at some level to avoid the consequences of displaying inappropriate emotions at work. Furthermore, all employees commented at some stage during the construction of their narratives that it was difficult to endure organisational change while being required to manage their emotions at the same time.

### **Emotion Labour and Organisational Change**

The themes explored in the employee tales of emotion as well as their emotional talk certainly suggest that organisational rules and standards bind display of their emotions. A respondent made the point that 'you have to get all your emotions out in this type of [interview] setting because we are not allowed to talk about these things at work and our...[families] either get sick of it or don't really understand [P22]'. Another employee suggests that 'the organisation could be so much better...if they let us have some sort of system

where you could get all your worries out kind of...and then get on with your job [P9]' or 'if we were allowed to show some feelings on the job [P12]'. Some argue that a process of debriefing is 'part of the nature of the work [P16]' and that 'debrief means problems like coping with patients and clients who are dying...not talking about personal issues or change [P17]'. However, for others debriefing does not suffice 'you still can't say how you feel about things and you are still not allowed to express your concerns or worries [P2]'.

Throughout the data collection process it was evident to me that several of the interviews were representative of debriefing sessions for respondents. Two employees expressed that they had felt 'uptight [P5]' and 'constantly stressed [P11]' at not having the chance to talk about organisational change in a neutral setting. However, the interview seemed to provide them with a vehicle in which they could express their concerns about change and generally get things off their chest. At the end of the interview both respondents commented that it was 'extremely beneficial to speak to someone who is not judgemental [P5]', and that the interview had provided the opportunity to 'get everything out into the open once and for all [P11]'. From these comments, and my perceptions derived from the interview setting, it is as though the interview itself and the process of retrospective narrative construction provides a vehicle for respondents to voice their responses to change at a distance from the organisation.

To my surprise, one of the respondents emailed me later and thanked me again for the opportunity to tell his story and stated that being involved in this

research had enabled him to face a lot of his 'demons...and finally put them to rest [P5]'. A further five of the twenty-two respondents also thanked me for the opportunity to tell their stories and explained that nobody had been interested in their versions of change until now. In addition, three of these employees commented that managers should accept that staff will experience emotions such as fear, anger and grief, arguing that organisational change in many ways is comparable to 'death [P17]', 'divorce [P20]', and 'any other traumatic experience [P3]' and that 'grieving time is given for death...so why not change [P17]'.

The idea that emotions are somehow mediated and shaped by organisational contexts offers insight into the acceptance and understanding of emotions in the organisation. Employees make statements such as, 'I don't understand why we aren't allowed to show a reaction to change...especially as it is such a huge thing to deal with [P16]', and 'you would think that an outburst or an employee upset or angry over change would be normal and acceptable [P13]', which suggests that emotions in the organisation are not necessarily considered by employees as being irrational or inappropriate and, therefore, should be factored into theorising about organisational change. Rather, respondents argue that 'everyone copes with change differently [P1]' and that 'some people get upset by certain aspects of change which don't really faze others [P8]'. However, several employees do question the rationale behind management 'treating everyone's feelings about change as the same [P19]' suggesting that 'because we are workers and not managers it seems natural for

them [management] to assume that we all despise change and are out to make things hard [P21]’.

Meyerson (1998) advocates that organisations should be tolerant of ambiguity amongst employees and acknowledges that a plethora of contradictory emotions (Martin et al., 1998) exist in organisational life. Whereas one employee perceives organisational life as ‘everyone being the same...having to act the same, behaving in the same way and being seen to fully support the organisation’s goals [P5]’, another argues that ‘managers fail to see that we are different people and that we have different lives, skills and qualifications...to them we are just staff and should all be treated accordingly [P22]’. Others ‘worry about the effects of...feelings about change on...long-term health and attitude to work [P14]’ suggesting that ‘having to constantly monitor yourself just makes you tired and depressed a lot [P15]’.

While the experience of emotionality reported by employees in the Latrobe Valley is probably not greatly different in comparison to other regions, employee narratives indicate that some extensions to emotional research can be made. Within their tales of emotion several employees suggested that emotion labour and impression management contributed to behaviour that they would not normally engage in. Specifically, alienation from themselves, estrangement between employees and their work roles, and the inability to express their feelings at work led some employees to consider taking industrial action, become aggressive towards managers and other employees, and refuse to perform particular duties. However, from the discussion of



emotion labour it is evident that the display of such behaviours and actions led to verbal aggression and abuse from managers, thus causing employees to seek additional ways to respond and cope with organisational change, which were highlighted in the previous chapter.

On the other hand, alienation and impression management can be linked to responses such as passivity and withdrawal from potential conflict situations with management and other staff. Rather than becoming aggressive or displaying inappropriate behaviours, this group of employees suggests that organisational change in many ways became more bearable. It is also noteworthy that those who discuss emotion labour as functional do not discuss retribution or aggression from management. Such reactions to both organisational change and prolonged emotion labour are worthy of further consideration.

The focus on emotionality and emotion labour examined in this chapter highlight an important dimension of organisational change. At a most general level and contrary to the efforts of researchers to define and theorise smooth models of change, the tales of emotion in this chapter highlight the fact that change in organisations at the micro level is subjective and complex and not easily reduced to linear and rational experiences as is documented in many accounts of change discussed in Chapter 2. More than this, the discussion in this chapter confirms that studies of organisational change need to pay closer attention to emotions and experiences that are considered to be inappropriate

or illogical in order to provide an understanding of how change impacts on individual employees and those beyond management levels.

The bottom-up perspective of organisational change highlights the contradictory and elusive feelings of participants, the invisible "labour" the actors perform, and both the failed efforts and successful accomplishments of impression management. Furthermore, it complicates the simplicity of narratives that focus on how to overcome resistance to change such as those reviewed in Chapter 2 (Dent and Goldberg, 1999a; 1999b; Piderit, 2000). For example, Piderit (2000) suggests that resistance to change could be overcome through management understanding of the problems that employees have with change, while Dent and Goldberg (1999a) argue that managers should focus more on the manner in which change was implemented. From the findings discussed in this chapter, it is evident that reactions and emotions experienced before and after the process of change are far more complex than explanations offered in top-down management literature.

Last but not least, the discussion of emotion labour in relation to retribution from managers further highlights a possible relationship between narratives performed in the front and back stage noted in Chapter 4 and the perceptions that employees have of organisational change. It is noteworthy that the twelve employees who constructed narratives predominantly in the front region argue that emotion labour is a functional and necessary part of organisational change. In comparison, the ten narratives constructed primarily in the back region highlight the dysfunctional and difficult nature of emotion labour.

## Conclusion

This chapter has explored tales of emotion as well as emotional talk used by respondents within their narratives of organisational change. In these themes employees suggest that inappropriate emotions and feelings should not be displayed at work due to a perception that management consider such emotions as unprofessional and unsuitable. Employees also suggested that the display of negative emotions or behaviour in the workplace was likely to lead to some form of punishment, involving aggression or verbal abuse, while those who displayed the expected emotions and behaviour were rewarded.

Employees frame their experiences of emotion labour in two different ways. One group argues that the emotion labour, while at times difficult, is a normal and necessary part of organisational life. Furthermore, managing impressions at work are described as increasing job satisfaction, providing momentary coping strategies and enhancing well being. Alternatively, the other group indicates that emotion labour is dysfunctional and has led to a decline in employment relations, as well as physical and mental health, thus leading employees to seek alternative ways to cope and respond to change. The following chapter explores the coping and response styles of employees in more detail.

The perceived relationships between front and back stage narratives, tales of emotion labour, responses to organisational change and rewards and punishment highlight two distinct types of narratives that have been

constructed within this research. The first of these is the conversion narrative in which organisational change is constructed as a positive process, enabling progression and advancement in the organisation. In comparison, the atrocity tale focuses on the way in which organisational change contributed to the demise of employment relationships, increases in workplace violence and the termination of some employees' careers. The first of these narrative types is explored in the following chapter.

## Chapter 7

**Conversion Stories**

Chapter 6 highlighted how participants in this study construct highly emotional tales of organisational change. I argued that those who constructed narratives predominantly in the front stage region were more likely to consider the management of emotions as a natural part of organisational life, while those who constructed primarily back stage narratives argue that emotion labour is dysfunctional on a personal and career level. From the narrative themes and emotions explored in Chapters 5 and 6 it is also noted that a relationship exists between responses to organisational change and benefits or punishment that respondents received. Moreover, I alerted to the fact that participants tell two very different types of stories and "package" their narratives in vastly different ways. The present and following chapters further investigate the content and plot structure of the narratives to highlight the way in which employee reports of organisational change are packaged. The focus of this chapter is the conversion story.

The conversion story is one of two narrative types that are investigated in this thesis. As Frank (1995, p.75) explains, 'a narrative type is the most general storyline that can be recognized underlying the plot and tensions of particular stories'. Although individual stories of experiences such as change are unique, referring to such stories collectively as narrative types encourages:

Closer attention to the stories...to aid listening to the stories...[which] is difficult because [organisational change]...stories mix and weave different narrative threads. The rationale for proposing some general types of narratives is to sort out those threads...[rather than to provide another grand narrative or] general unifying view (p. 76).

Participants who report their experiences as a conversion narrative highlight a change in employees from anti-management thinking to obvious support for management decision-making. This conversion has coincided with change in organisations and, in some cases, the introduction of new managers. Conversion narratives suggest that participants who showed support for management were able to obtain opportunities for career and personal development that were previously unavailable to them. Consequently, a second aim of this chapter is to gain an understanding of the rationale behind participants' tales of conversion from anti-management to pro-management thinking. Finally, a third aim is to determine the extent to which conversion stories reflect the organisation's 'preferred narrative' (Frank, 1995, p.79).

### **The Conversion Narrative**

While employees construct a variety of narratives in relation to their experiences of organisational change, some appear to be constructed along more simple lines than others. Although the experiences of those who tell conversion stories are no less significant than others, conversion stories highlight a transformation in thought amongst employees as a consequence of change. The conversion story is merely a way of reporting organisational change. It represents a culmination of themes that have emerged in the course of this research. The following case study has been selected to not necessarily

theorise or represent all conversion stories, but to highlight the nature and structure of conversion stories told within this research.

### **David Carrol**

David commenced his employment in the electricity supply industry as a school leaver and enjoyed a career that spanned two decades. During his time in the industry various levels of organisational change have been introduced, ranging from 'the smaller internal type', through to privatisation and large-scale restructuring. David recalls that for as long as he 'can remember' there were 'big doubts' over the future operation of the organisation he was employed in. Consequently David felt compelled to continuously upgrade his trade qualifications and retrain into new areas that would allow him to 'be more competitive' in the event of downsizing or organisational closure.

Prior to the privatisation of the electricity supply industry, David suggests that the organisation's culture was one of parochialism, low productivity and poor employment relations:

You did your job and it wasn't expected of you to do any more at all. The culture was you'd sleep on nightshifts...do what else you had to do and off you went home...Everyone was always against management for management's sake...they wouldn't work for us and we didn't see any reason to work for them...its just the cultures that were there.

While such a culture had 'its advantages' David also argues that it was 'frustrating' and 'very difficult to get ahead' in terms of job advancement.

When David first heard of large-scale organisational change being introduced into the industry the majority of information was 'heard through rumours'. Initial rumours were focused particularly on the sale of the industry and the possible closure of the organisation. Throughout that time David recalls feeling a lot of 'gloom and doom' as well as fear and uncertainty at not knowing 'what the future held':

We were expecting the worst...The word at the time from management [was]...that Victoria had a glut in electricity, they didn't need as many power stations...because there was no viable market...for electricity...[And] we thought "oh God it's going to close the whole place down".

Over a two to three year period David recalls feeling 'really scared' and spent 'a lot of the time scour[ing] the local newspapers and *The Age* [newspaper]...for the employment section'. He also explains that he 'tried to act like everything was normal in front of the bosses' to ensure that he was considered to be a 'good worker under pressure'. David argues that regardless of how he felt during the initial stages of organisational change, it was important for him to 'respond in the right way'.

Although David 'probably looked as though he was coping with change well', he and many of his colleagues would spend their 'spare days' trying to 'weasel into [the] other power stations' so that if a 'job opportunity came up' they 'would have a reasonable chance at getting the job'. In the meantime David remembers feeling 'shocking' with 'not knowing what the future held'. However, he continued to 'keep working [and] keep going' regardless of 'how bad' he felt as he believed that the only way he could 'cope with the change'



and 'remain competitive' was to keep himself and the 'organisation viable...through hard work'.

David argues that 'one of the worst things' about organisational change was 'the not knowing what was ever really going on'. Although there was an abundance of rumours about change, he recalls that employees 'were never actually told whether we were going to change or not'. The 'us and them' relationship between managers and employees also affected David, as he was not sure whether to trust the small amounts of communication that came from management:

It was all this change, not change, we're going to change, we're not going to change, we're going to be sold, we're not going to be sold. In the end who knows? But then it is very difficult to be able to do your job properly when you don't know what is going on. It's like you go to work to pretend all the time...just a constant lack of communication and information. It's very trying.

He argues that the 'constant indecision' displayed by 'the government and management' affected 'not only the work' but also his family life. During this period David's marriage ended and he believes organisational change was partially to blame. He suggests that an increase in shift work and not having 'a set weekend' caused him and his wife to 'drift away' from each other. Even though change impacted on his personal life, David was determined not to let it 'affect me at work'. On several occasions throughout the interview David returns to the point that the way he responded to organisational change was imperative if he wanted to remain employed in the organisation.

David recalls that change was instigated with 'not a lot of information unless you count the rumours'. After the initial implementation he recalls that change 'hit the organisation like an explosion':

All of a sudden boom...Yeah once it started happening it got to go quicker and quicker and it really went zim and zoomed along!

'All of a sudden' he was also 'much better off' with the implementation of restructuring:

It was bloody fantastic! Things just changed...things that were terrible to work with previously just disappeared and were replaced by new ways and much better ways...it was just great!

Management structures became 'fairly flat' while other organisations within the industry remained 'towering high'. David remembers that the change to organisational structure 'dramatically' transformed the organisational culture, communication and relations between employees and managers. He also believes that his skills and training are better recognised by management and 'put to good use':

There's a lot of places that are becoming more multi-skilled nowadays and restructuring, where people with the skills that I've got are more desirable over someone who's just sort of single trade so to speak...I've been able to use all of the skills whenever I've needed to, it gives you a hell of a lot more job satisfaction...[I'm] much better off, yeah.

David believes that his career opportunities are 'far better off' as a result of organisational change and explains that any of the costs associated with change are 'outweighed by the benefits'. However, he also recognises that privatising the electricity supply industry has 'hurt' the Latrobe Valley:

I think it [organisational change] from my point of view had to be done...[what] they had was too many people working for not enough work and um just made jobs for people and tried employing people, which made a false culture in the area...[But] unfortunately they have sold all their assets, the government, and I don't think that's a good

move...I'm sure we could have kept some of our assets...instead of sending dollars out of the country.

In retrospect David argues that change could have been handled differently. He believes that the speed of change was 'too difficult' for some employees to 'understand'. While the actual implementation of change was 'extremely fast' the 'groundwork process' was 'too slow'. As a result, David feels that a lot of uncertainty and 'agony' was inflicted on employees 'for no reason'. However, David further adds that he 'adapted to the change instantly from working in one culture and then the next day...working in another culture'. While he understands that not all employees benefited from the change process, he feels that his life 'is far better off' than it was 'in the old organisation'.

From David's narrative it is evident that he considers life after change to be preferable to the conditions he endured prior to change. He argues that his workplace was rife with parochialism, low levels of labour productivity and poor employment relations. Within this culture opportunities for personal and career development were scarce. The introduction of new culture and structure as a consequence of organisational change has presented David with avenues for personal growth within the workplace. Accordingly, David's narrative suggests that he had undergone a transformation from not advocating management decision making to being clearly in favour of management actions. This process of personal transformation is the central focus of the conversion narrative discussed at length in this chapter.

## Conversion Theory

The term "conversion" is commonly used in conjunction with religious rather than organisational experiences (Pilarzyk, 1983) and has emerged primarily from studies of sociology and theology. For example, Pilarzyk (1983) centres his research on the conversion of youths into various cultic and sectarian groups, focusing predominantly on the Hare Krishna movement. Yang (1998) investigates the conversion of Chinese groups from traditional to Christian religions. Zinnbauer and Pargament (1998) add to conversion research with their exploration of the spiritual conversion of non-religious college students. The experience of conversion implies personal change, usually associated with a significant event (Yang, 1998) that enables people to transform thought systems or lifestyles (Snow and Machalek, 1983).

Researchers attach a variety of meanings and characteristics to their definitions of conversion. However, most agree that conversion entails 'personal change', which involves 'turning from one viewpoint to another' (Snow and Machalek, 1983:169). What is not so readily agreed upon is the degree of personal change required for an experience to be considered as a conversion. Pilarzyk (1983:54), for example, believes that conversion requires a 'complete and thorough transformation of the individual's world view', a transformation that is characterised by the radical 'reorganiz[ing] and reinterpretat[ion]' of one's identity. Snow and Machalek (1983), who argue that personal radical change provides the foundation of the conversion experience, lend support to Pilarzyk's work. Zinnbauer and Pargament (1998,

p.161) support these explanations, adding that the conversion experience can involve different levels of personal change from 'a rapid personality change to a reorientation of the soul'. They further note that other researchers (Schwartz and Kaslow, 1979) consider that a conversion experience can be characterised by a simple 'thought reform' (Zinnbauer and Pargament, 1998, p.161). In addition, Richardson (1983) suggests that conversion is often associated with social factors, such as an individual identifying with the values and goals of specific groups.

A problem with contemporary conversion theory is the way in which researchers usually fail to 'distinguish among different types of...conversion experiences' (Zinnbauer and Pargament, 1998, p.161). Little regard is given to the degree of personal transformation or the individual experiences surrounding the conversion event. Consequently, stories of conversion tend to focus on the substitution of one lifestyle for another. For example, the early works of Nock (1933, p.6) suggest that conversion requires a 'reorientation of the soul'. Such a radical change also requires an individual to deliberately turn their back on a previous lifestyle to replace it with a completely new belief system (Nock, 1933). Nock argues that a lesser experience should not be considered as a conversion. Individuals experiencing anything less than a conversion experience are actually involved in the process of adhesion. Also referred to as alternation (Travisano, 1970), adhesion enables an individual to participate in religious groups and rituals without 'assuming a new way of life' (Snow and Machalek, 1983, p.169). Specifically, individuals can adopt a belief system but do not necessarily have to develop a new 'conscience'

(Thomas, 2001, p.519). Therefore the adhesion process can 'supplement' rather than 'substitute' (Nock, 1933, p.7) a person's lifestyle.

In opposition to Nock's argument, Yang (1998) suggests that humans experience conversion as different levels of personal change in accordance to their socio-political situations. Those who experience a disturbance within their social or political ideologies are likely to seek enhancement of 'individual personalities...[or] interpersonal bonds' (Yang, 1998, p.238) rather than a reorientation of their lives. While the enhancement of interpersonal bonds is somewhat different from a reorientation of the soul, it has been recognised that the conversion experience entails different levels of personal change across individuals (Pilarzyk, 1983). Providing a person experiences 'emotional episodes of illumination' and can gain 'insight' (Pilarzyk, 1983, p.54) into the post-conversion world, it may be assumed that the process of conversion has occurred.

Although the discussion of conversion thus far has drawn on religious research, the basic insights also apply to the organisational setting. The alignment and identification of personal beliefs with those of other groups is not exclusively a religious phenomenon. Within organisational studies it has been documented that employees seek membership of groups that have 'emotional and value significance' to them (Abrams and Hogg, 1990, p.196). In order to be approved by group members appropriate identities are constructed. Thoits and Virshup (1997, pp.106-7) explain that the individual develops a 'socially constructed' identity that reflects the values of the group

above the values of the individual. Here the individual will make salient the expected behaviour (Abrams and Hogg, 1999) of the group into which he or she seeks conversion.

It is difficult to assess whether or not it is the intensity of an experience that generates the conversion story. The importance individuals attach to particular experiences is highly subjective, an experience considered as being "significant" and life transforming to one individual, may not be life changing to another. Rather, they equate conversion with a particular type of experience. In their study of different types of conversion experiences, Ballis and Richardson (1997) argue that when all is said and done, conversion is a way of reporting, that is, a way of framing personal stories. The salient feature of conversion narratives is sharp division of personal history into before and after. Respondents in my study tended to narrate two distinct stories of their experiences, or a pre and post narrative, so to speak. This structure supports what Ballis and Richardson (1997, p.110) refer to as the before and after sequence that is often found in the autobiographical context. In the next section the interviews are analysed to highlight this aspect of reporting of change in the workplace.

### **The Pre-Conversion Narrative**

Stories of organisational life are lined with tales of frustration and anger as well as lack of career opportunities and personal stagnation. The narratives suggest that the inability to reach personal goals within the workplace due to

'unfair promotion systems [P5]' or 'too many layers in the [organisational] hierarchy [P10]' was a concern to seven of the twelve participants who constructed conversion stories. In addition, all of the twelve participants who constructed conversion stories discuss the poor state of relationships between managers and employees prior to organisational change. Often referred to as 'us and them [P15]', a perceived class division is also considered as one of the determining factors in career progression. 'On the rare occasion that career opportunities [P21]' were made available to employees many expressed that they were unwilling to apply for promotion at the cost of being 'considered as a manager [P21]' by their peers. Employees who did rise to the management ranks may have been 'attacked as being insincere' (Thomas, 1997, p.527) or considered to be 'turning their backs on their mates [P1]'.

Poor employment relations were considered to be 'typical [P22]' in Latrobe Valley organisations prior to change. As one employee states, management 'wouldn't work with us so we didn't see any reason to work with them very much unless there was some way of benefiting both of us [P15]'. Respondents suggest that a combination of organisational culture and a 'unique type of management culture [P13]' in the Latrobe Valley led to problems with employment relations. One respondent suggested that 'management were mean [P18]', while another adds that 'it would be nothing for them to strip you of your self worth...just because they could [P7]'. Two employees suggest that their managers were 'downright abusive...most of the time [P10]'.

I had a bad manager that knocked every sense of self-worth out of me.  
I mean he would be a good example to put in the textbook! Hated by



everyone who worked for him, hated by ninety per cent of the rest of the staff...If I was still working for him now it would be nothing for him to walk into this room while you and I were talking and for him to abuse me in front of you! [P21]

In the early days we had a bloke...he was the...manager there for a while...and the guys hated him! He just walked into a group of fellows and would sort of say, "it's good to meet you all...and I dare say that within twelve months or two years only half of you will be here". And that sort of stuff...[He was] threatening to take your livelihood...away and I felt very uneasy about that. I couldn't understand how someone with less...common sense didn't walk in with a gun and try to knock him off! [P10]

An employee explains that 'not all managers are bad but there was always one or two who tried to ruin your life [P8]'. He further adds that he experienced 'constant clashes' between himself and 'a general manager of staff' because he refused 'to become a yes man...to senior level management...but just could never win' [P8]. A perception that 'management suffered from power problems [P12]' is apparent throughout the pre-conversion stories. Employees speak of 'unfair...violent abuse [P11]' and 'copping a hiding for whatever...because they'd feel like it [P4]' as 'common practice [P14]' prior to change. One respondent argues that 'no matter how hard you'd try...you just couldn't do right [P9]'. Another adds that 'you just had nowhere to go. No real future or opportunities where you were, but nothing outside either because you'd work here from day one of your career [P19]'.

Several employees felt that their efforts 'to work hard went unrewarded [P2]'.

Others suggested that 'no matter how hard we tried we were still wrong [P4]'.

For example:

I don't have a problem with workload but I'd produce a program and bring it in for [the manager] to look at. "This isn't good! Tell me why this isn't good! They're not doing the work. Why aren't they doing the work? Get out there and find out!" So I'd go out there and find

out. "This isn't good enough!" And I used to get ripped over the coals for it...[and] I've done everything humanely possible...I would do religiously the things that I needed to do and I'd do it in a timely manner as per his rules. But I would be violently abused for that and told I was useless and incompetent! [P21]

Some employees suggest that 'bureaucratic structures...always caused miscommunication [P5]' and that employees 'would always get stuck in the middle of managers bloody communication hassles [P3]'. As one respondent adds, 'if they got rid of the communication and structural errors half the [organisation's] problems would have been solved ages ago...and we could have stopped running around being treated like complete arses! [P12]'

In addition to poor employment relations, respondents suggest that the 'parochial nature [P19]' of organisational culture prior to change inhibited their workplace opportunities. One employee felt that he developed a 'strong work ethic...from being brought up on a farm [P4]'. However, he found that when moving from a farming environment to an industrial workplace his work ethic 'did not fit with the culture' of the organisation. Consequently he felt 'ostracised [P4]' by his colleagues:

A lot of times I felt really frustrated. You know the things that went on, that a lot of people who were born and bred in the Valley just took for granted because that's how their parents worked...and they'd always been brought up that way. You'd go to a job and they wouldn't even turn up! [P4]

Others suggest that colleagues who did arrive at work had 'no intentions of doing anything [P3]'. Another employee further documents the 'laziness and parochialism [P4]' of many workers. He recalls feeling 'quite jubilant' at having received a 'low-level promotion into a semi-supervisory role [P4]', but argues that his excitement was 'tarnished [P4]' by the attitudes of his

colleagues who took a dislike to him due to 'jealousy and other stupid reasons [P4]'. Consequently, he suffered from constant 'personal unrest...[and] frustration'. Bureaucratic management practices inhibited him from 'performing the supervisory role to the best of [his]...ability', due to 'excessive red tape...binding everything'. Low levels of morale and high levels of apathy amongst the employees he was supervising also made his job a 'living nightmare'. He further recalls that he 'couldn't do right' with management or staff:

It [was] so frustrating and difficult because...[the staff] were just purely out to create mischief and some of them were very lucky that I didn't drag them out the back and give them a belt under the ear...The organisation [did not] have a process to deal with that, a disciplinary process...You've got to manage that situation and that's difficult. You know the [staff] would come and say, "do you think you could get me some new [tools]" so they could do their jobs better. If you went out and bought \$50,000 worth of the latest technology for [them] you were still a bastard! [P4]

Other employees felt that an 'eager attitude [P10]' toward work was also 'knocked by colleagues [P12]'. One respondent recalls beginning an apprenticeship within the electricity supply industry and being very 'keen [P10]' towards beginning his career. He suggests that a gradual 'building up of boredom...caused by mundane or no work' caused 'anger' that grew into a 'constant simmer [P10]'. Not only did his workplace suffer from poor relations between management and workers, but employees were 'always out to get each other...[because] there was usually not enough work to go around [P10]'. Regardless of the nature or amount of work he did conflict with supervising staff, managers and workmates was inevitable.

Employees suggest that rather than pressure from managers to work harder; they received pressure from colleagues to perform less work. For some, a typical days work consists of 'no more than one hour'. After being dropped off at the work site, employees would 'read the paper...[or] play cards...rather than go out to work [P10]':

You knew you had no work, you couldn't leave the area, you couldn't go home, but you had to go out to the smoke room and that's where you stayed. I read a lot of Western's in those days! But in the end I though this is just crazy and so I got up a bit of guts one day and said, "no I'm not going". So in the end they had me working...flat out, all day, everyday...and they picked the dirtiest jobs possible! You couldn't walk out the gate without having a shower! [P10]

Clashes between employees of different ages also caused respondents to 'dislike work [P3]'. Employees recall 'constantly taking directions from older [staff]... who didn't actually have a clue, but just because they were older [P2]'. As one explains 'most of the promotion was based on seniority rather than merit...so there was no point applying because you've got three people ahead of you...and it was almost a wait your turn kind of thing [P2]'.

Respondents across all industries reported that aged-based promotion led to further clashes of culture. In particular, younger employees who held tertiary qualifications suggest that this was often 'used against them [P2]' and that 'people would think that we thought we were know-alls because we had a university degree [P14]'. Other employees also perceived that tertiary trained personnel were 'seen as a threat [P14]' to older staff. 'One of the things that changed was the number of university trained people coming in...the old boys bloody hated it! [P19]'. Others suggest that 'older staff were scared off by

people with qualifications [P22]' and 'would make life hell for you if you dared go to university [P14]'. For example:

When I did my...hospital training I was...told by a nurse the first day "I don't like you university trained nurses! You will sit in that chair and you will read the emergency procedures training book". And I did that for eight hours! I was ready to quit! [P2]

Other respondents expressed frustration at 'being victimised by older staff [P3]' who many considered were 'out of touch [P10]' with modern management. Several employees felt 'increasing annoyance [P14]' at being in a 'great profession [P2]' but being 'unable to progress due to management having not much idea about anything [P10]'. As one employee states, 'things had to change! [P21]'

Pilarzyk (1983, p.57) suggests that individuals who need to obtain 'symbolically meaningful alternatives' to their work situation often provoke 'feelings of estrangement, unrest, or crises'. Within the pre-conversion narrative such feelings are clearly stated by employees. In the search for alternatives individual are usually prepared to give up a perspective of their lives in order to take on another (Lofland and Stark, 1965). Lofland and Stark (1965) further add that predisposing conditions, such as an employee's upbringing, combined with situational factors will lead to an individual's decision to seek out a better lifestyle. Within the organisational setting the 'conditions [that] arise from confrontation and interaction' (Lofland and Stark, 1965, p.864) with others in the workplace may eventually cause the employee to desire a new style of working. Hence, reports of alienation or ostracism (Marlett, 1997) by respondents could form the basis for a way of

reporting personal experience that promote and reinforce management ways of thinking.

Reports of continuous poor relations with management and colleagues and parochial cultures may compel some employees to turn inside or outside the organisation to groups with similar values. Respondents suggest that they primarily 'looked for help from new managers who didn't know better' [P6]. Once employees could 'see that some of new managers were just like us [P8]' they 'started to look to them for support [P12]'. Once they could 'identify with what the new managers were talking about [P3]', several employees 'felt as though we could commit to the change [P21]' and 'trust that management were trying to do the right thing by us [P22]'. Hence it could be argued that organisational change, in particular the introduction of new management teams, provided a turning point for employees to commit to and support management decision-making. This identification with management is even more evident in comments reminiscent of a post-conversion experience.

### **The Post-Conversion Narrative**

In comparison to the pre-conversion story, the post-conversion tale tends to be more dramatic and representative of a front stage construction of organisational change. While it could be argued that the post-conversion narrative is an extreme of the romance plot explored in Chapter 4, in this research the it is merely reflective of the way in which the plot of conversion narratives unfold. Research conducted by Ballis and Richardson (1997),

Yang (1998) and Zinnbauer and Pargament (1998) highlight that post-conversion experiences are usually considered as a "better way of life" in comparison to the pre-conversion existence. Strauss (1959) argues that this is due to the very nature of conversion, in which individuals are introduced to new opportunities and benefits that previously were not available to them. Consistent with this argument, employee reports highlight transformations within the workplace as turning points that opened up opportunities for career and personal development, hence providing turning points in which they could depart from old ways. Lofland and Stark (1965, p.870) suggest that turning points become apparent when 'lines of action [are] complete, [have] failed or [have] been disrupted'. Within their stories, employees indicate that change in the organisation led to a 'sudden disruption [P21]' or a 'parting of old ways [P4]' in which 'old practices were suddenly replaced with new ones [P19]'. They suggest that organisational change 'provided the basis for us to change individually [P2]' and that 'from this point it felt as though we could move on [P3]'. Another employee adds that 'we literally had to adapt to a whole new thing from one day to the next...but if you did, a whole new world opened up to you [P19]'.

A common feature of the post-conversion story is the belief that support for management decision-making provided employees with career opportunities. Employees explain that 'if we were seen to be doing the right thing management would reward us [P14]' and that 'opportunities definitely came for those who were seen to commit to the changes [P8]'. Others added that 'some people were treated pretty badly...but that's what happens if you have

a run in with management [P22]'. Respondents argue that 'it was quite clear which employees got the good jobs [P4]', suggesting that 'it was a simply a matter of those who are seen to commit see good things...those who don't don't [P1]'.

Respondents suggest that restructuring, amalgamation and privatisation of Latrobe Valley organisations led to changes in structure, culture, promotion systems and employment relations that in turn altered career prospects for employees. For many, change has led to 'a good work situation [P21]' in which employees are able to 'gain a sense of fulfilment [P4]' from working with 'people who are very...self-motivated [P19]'. In particular, employees feel that they are 'able to be challenged [P2]' and 'develop self-confidence [P3]' within the 'new organisation [P8]'. Employees also recognise that changes to organisational structure have meant that 'staff numbers have been cut quite dramatically [P8]'. While respondents acknowledge that 'some very fine workers have lost their jobs [P22]', they also believe that downsizing has 'gotten rid of a lot of dead wood [P6]' from the organisation. There is a common perception in employee narratives that 'a lot of people could not cope with the changes and left [P2]'. Other respondents argue that the 'whittling away of staff...has been a welcome relief...in some cases [P4]' because it has 'removed a lot of people...that were holding everyone else back [P21]'. Several employees recall 'losing their cool [P4]' or 'becoming very annoyed and frustrated [P3]' with 'prick managers and slack workers...who now thank God are mostly gone [P8]'.



Stories of life subsequent to change are told virtually in opposition to those regarding the organisation prior to transformation. Whereas pre-conversion stories highlight poor employment relations, parochial organisational cultures and lack of career opportunities, post-conversion tales focus on improved workplace practices and new opportunities to advance personal careers. Specifically, respondents' discourses revolve around themes of sound leadership and management, job satisfaction, workplace harmony, organisational efficiency, and employee roles in daily operations and decision-making. When discussing change in retrospect, employees feel that 'the old [organisation] wasn't good for people [P4]' and 'didn't encourage people to really want to be there [P8]'. Respondents suggest that 'people were constantly being pulled up for things...[and] never told they were doing a good job [P22]'. 'Managers simply were not listening [P12]' and 'some employees would take advantage of the situation and create total havoc [P21]'. Prior to change 'nothing would get done...maybe three hours of effective work a day...and there'd be nothing you could do about it' [P4]. As one employee stated, 'I could have just banged my head against a brick wall for eight hours a day for all management could care! [P21]' Another suggests that 'the state of the organisation before [change] was enough to drive people insane [P1]', while others add that 'you can understand why the culture of the place was like it was...because you tried to create a better working atmosphere and management wouldn't even support you in that [P22]'.

Not surprisingly, employees describe organisational change as 'breaking the chains [P8]', 'cutting the red tape [P21]' and 'kicking the workplace into

reality [P12]'. While they recognise that 'change is tough [P14]', and that 'it hurts people [P4]' by 'breaking them out of their comfort zones [P21]' they can also 'understand the necessity of it [P3]' both for organisational and personal progression. For example: 'I hated the type of worker I had become. I was slack, lazy, militant because that's what the organisation was breeding. Deep down I was not like that at all...but I fear to think what I would be like now if the workplace hadn't been through massive change [P6]. Others suggest that 'people would complain about the security of their jobs. Sure it is scary, but to think if we had have kept going the way we were none of us would have jobs. The organisation would be dead! [P12]' Another employee adds that 'I went through it [change] and I'm okay, a bit scarred, still a bit shaken but quite okay really. I dread to think where I would have ended up if we didn't support change...I would have had to uproot everything in search of a new job, a new life...because this place certainly would not be here anymore [P4]'.

Respondents believe that 'things are lighter and brighter [P3]' as a result of change. They also feel that 'there's opportunity [P4]' and that 'the options are there [P22]' to 'use skills [P19]' and 'keep up to date with the latest changes in technology and management [P5]'. The flattening of hierarchies facilitated 'more communication and free speech [P22]' and made 'conversing with that person at the top [P21]' a lot easier. Others suggest that organisational change enabled employees to 'actually see a clear path of direction [that] the organisation is taking [P8]' and that 'smaller work groups...mean that management is actually listening to the workers now

[P3]'. Several employees describe the changed workplace as 'a more harmonious place to come to work [P2]', where 'we actually get along with each other without all the usual apathy and bickering [P12]'. The organisation is also described as livelier. For example, 'it feels more alive! You don't feel ashamed to say I work for [this organisation]. I feel proud of it! I would have been careful about saying who I work for in the past [P5]'.

Several employees perceive management changes as 'the best thing that could ever have happened to the workplace [P3]'. They admit that the introduction of new management teams 'did initially cause fear amongst the workers [P2]'. However, respondents suggest that new managers have 'changed the organisation for the better [P21]' and provided 'workers with much much more [P19]' in terms of job satisfaction. As one employee states, 'I just feel that new managers came in and sort of said, "Right, we're here to change and make this place better. You either support us and reap the benefits, or you resist change and look for work elsewhere". And it was right. If you did support them then they looked after you...which was great [P22]'. Other employees also felt more supported by new management teams. For example, 'it was like these people just came in and took over and all of a sudden the place was a million times better...you could actually approach them and they would help you [P8]'. Management was also perceived as playing a supportive role for employees seeking promotion or career development. 'If management knew that staff were interested they would take them seriously...and try to help you achieve your career goals [P14]'. 'They'd provide you with the steps you needed to actually get somewhere [P3]'. One

employee believes that such support and encouragement of staff is the most significant impact of change on her. For example:

The management philosophy...has been the most dramatic...change. The thing that has impacted most on me and my career is the philosophy! They are much more professionally orientated with their staff...[Before] it was pretty much if you didn't do it no one did it for you...management just ignored you. Now you are actually seen and appreciated [P2]'.

Another employee suggests that change has enabled him to 'be seen by management...and not be passed over for opportunities [P21]'. Rather than being 'held back [P22]' by seniority-based promotion systems, respondents feel that restructuring has enabled them to 'move forward into bigger and better jobs [P3]', rather than 'stagnate where we are [P8]'. Consequently, 'status and self-confidence increase [P3]' and employees are able to gain 'a sense of responsibility [P14]'.

As with all conversion stories, changes in the organisation are evaluated and judged in personal terms, impacting directly on individual employees. One employee feels that organisational change has enabled management to take him 'more seriously...and know that [he]...is serious about hard work [P22]'. While he recognises that some people were 'very hardly done by', he also believes that radical restructuring and downsizing have been 'nothing but good' for the organisation. He also feels that the implementation of change has provided him with 'a lot more autonomy and responsibility' and that hard work has been rewarded through a 'new promotion to a supervisory position'. Within the new position he is required to 'be responsible for three men in specialised positions' as well as 'look after the production budgets' for the department:

Over the last couple of months [I had to]...sit down and work out what I needed and how much money. And I'll be running those next year and monitoring where we're going and comparing it with what the forecasts were. And I've done it all myself! It's just a different lifestyle, a different scope...The job satisfaction is there...and I...enjoy life! [P22]

Another remembers 'getting very grumpy...and not coping well [P4]' with his colleagues and managers. He recalls 'making hundreds of requests...to be taken off shift work' as he felt it was having an adverse effect on his health and family life. After several years 'and no luck' he had 'just about given up...any chances of management listening'. However, the introduction of new managers provided him with the opportunity to move onto a permanent day shift:

I'd made mention to [previous] managers that I'd like to get off shift...with no response...And then out of the blue one of the [new] managers said "here's a position and there's these opportunities. We can talk turkey over the money, like we can offer you perhaps say a three year compensation for coming off shift". And it was into a job in operations...which to me was the exciting side of things. I didn't know if it was a hoax or not, it could have been! So I did it. I signed away and...its been a huge change, you know, and shown me a different world [P4].

This participant admitted to 'being very anti-management...until these opportunities were provided [P4]' to him. He further added that he 'didn't have much to do with managers before' change and was 'surprised that they were not all that bad' [P4].

This personal transformation in outlook, from anti to pro-management thinking suggests that the conversion narrative device enabled employees to proclaim 'social affiliation' (Richardson, 1983, p.4) with management, particularly when new executive teams are introduced into the organisation. As one employee stated, 'new managers just had this completely different

style, they were more like leaders, more inclusive in terms of they actually saw you there...The old ones just had this 'you jump when I tell you' management system...and wondered why we had no respect for them [P1]. Along the same line, respondents referred to new managers as 'fantastic leaders [P3]', and suggested that 'they didn't consider themselves above anyone else like the old ones did [P2]'. Another employee remembers getting recognition for his work a week after his manager was replaced: 'He told me I had done a really good job and that people like me were very valuable in the organisation. I nearly fell off my chair! I couldn't get over it. I swear I just had this stupid ear-to-ear grin on my face for the rest of the week! [P14]' Such positive recognition from managers can provide employees with the tools to 'affirm themselves rather than negate themselves' (Richardson, 1983, p.4). The reports highlighted above suggest that there is a social and relational dimension to the reporting of personal work histories in terms of conversion. Indeed, Richardson (1983, p.1) goes so far as to argue conversion stories are socially constructed and reflect 'social-situational factors such as peer pressure, affective ties, social networks or personal influence' (Richardson, 1983, p.1).

Perhaps the high point of the conversion narrative is that the convert now sees things differently and has a radical new way of seeking and knowing. 'Opening up opportunities [P14]', 'showing a totally different side to life [P2]', and 'completely opening my eyes [P12]' are common themes across post-conversion discourse. Respondents remark that transformation enabled them to 'go through significant personal change [P21]'. For example:

It [threw] in challenge...now I will move anywhere and it just doesn't faze me. So that's been excellent because its taken me out of being a stick in the mud...I've always been keen to move and advance...[but] this process has...allowed that to happen. And its smoothed and mellowed and matured me...your efforts are recognised in a positive manner [P21].

Other employees also make statements such as 'change completely changed me [P14]', 'I can't believe life before change even existed [P19]' and 'its hard to recognise the old way now...its like it never happened [P3]'. In religious terms, one could argue that these respondents have entered a "new heaven, and new earth".

Pilarzyk (1983, p.56) argues that people seek conversion to remove the 'all-pervasive anomic, alienating aspects' from their everyday lives. In this sense, the conversion narrative is a 'form of reductionism that inevitably distorts the past in favour of a particular interpretation of the present' (Ballis and Richardson, 1997, p.111). Thus in post-conversion stories, change takes the 'form of a tale of regeneration...[focusing on] how terrible life was before and how wonderful it is now' (Lofland and Stark, 1965, p.863). further highlighting the conversion story as an extreme romantic plot. This is demonstrated in the narrative excerpt below:

You know I really didn't like it much. No actually I hated it. Bugger it, I'll tell it like it is. I fucken hated it! I hated the place! I hated the other workers and managers were all just bastards out for personal gain. I never thought I would see the day where I could converse with a manager and actually have some respect for what they were doing and saying. I never could see myself supporting anything they had to say with all the fuck-ups they had provided in the past. But things changed. I started to see that if I wanted to have any sort of future I had to start listening to what they were saying...and some of the new ones [managers] were very reasonable. They actually gave a toss about us and asked us what we thought. The more I started to identify with them the more I could see bigger and better things happening for

me. I never I thought I would tell someone how much I love going to work now that all this has happened. [P6].

Ballis and Richardson (1997, p.111) suggest that 'both the experience and the language individuals use to describe conversion draw directly on the values and beliefs' of the group with which they seek identification. This is evident within post-conversion discourse in which employees clearly identify the benefits of organisational change, thus more than likely reflecting the values of management groups. Conversion narratives seek to convey positively the change process by comparing the state of the "old" organisation with that of the "new".

Several researchers suggest that caution should be exercised when determining whether experiences should be considered as conversion stories. For example, Lofland and Stark (1965, p.863) question whether individuals actually convert, 'take up a new perspective', or whether they simply alter their interpretations of organisational change during the reconstruction of their story. Frank (1995, p.89) suggests that 'a preference for the future' may also affect how organisational change is interpreted within narratives, thus arguing that it is not uncommon for employees to relay the organisation's story in rather than their own. Consequently, it may be wondered whether employees actually experience conversion throughout the process of organisational change, or if their narratives simply appropriate the organisation's dominant discourse.



### **The Organisation's Preferred Narrative?**

Similar to Ballis and Richardson's (1997) findings, the narratives of conversion impose a negative interpretation on organisational life prior to change. Change has provided increased career opportunities for those who support it, while 'making life very difficult for those who don't follow the change [P21]'. Similar to the front region narratives explored in the previous chapter, conversion stories replicate tales of organisational change that may be considered as socially acceptable and organisationally approved. Goffman (1963, p.193) argues that these stories may simply reflect the 'behavior of an individual while in a social situation...[which is] guided by social norms'. Ballis (1999, p.55) further adds that the retrospective reconstruction may combine 'personal experience with the expectations and symbolism of the group'. Hence, it would not be uncommon to expect management values and philosophies to be reinforced by employees in the telling, particularly if the favourable report is perceived to generate additional rewards to the teller.

While employees may narrate conversion narratives as part of their sense making process, sociologists warn against solely relying on such stories to gain an understanding of the process of change. Within his studies of illness narratives, Frank (1995, p.78) found that stories of personal transformation are preferable to the morbid stories told by terminally ill and dying patients and are a strategy to "avoid" the reality of illness. For example:

I heard a retrospective...story one evening at a cancer support group...Most regular group members are in remission from cancer, but this evening a woman attended who was currently in treatment. While she was describing the cancer she had, she broke into tears. The group

response was for the person sitting next to her...to interrupt with her own introduction...moving to a particular emphasis on "I'm fine!" No one returned...to acknowledge the distress of the person in treatment (Frank, 1995, p.78).

Conversion stories make easy listening and cast the individual as winner and hero. However, Frank argues that social phenomena cannot be understood fully without paying attention to the gruesome details of every day experience. Yet, within stories of interruption, whether through organisational change or as a result of illness, conversion stories tend to tell of restitution, or 'a "natural" desire to get well and stay well' through 'models of the stories patients ought to tell about their own illnesses' (Frank, 1995, pp.78-9).

Zinnbauer and Pargament (1998) caution that conversion stories should be treated with care. While not doubting the validity of the experience, they argue that stories of conversion 'tend to describe the past as being worse than it actually was to contrast with a present, more favourable...state' (p.176). In the present study, there are several obvious inconsistencies in employees' stories, which suggests that the narrative device of conversion is used to achieve particular outcomes. For example, one employee described the organisation prior to change as 'easygoing and relaxed with no real pressures on you to overexert yourself' and explained that 'unfortunately you'll never get an organisation as good as what we used to have ever again [P4]'. However, within his tale of post-conversion he suggests that 'the old organisation was terrible, people were so slack...you never had any work to do, and there was no real future [P4]'.

Both a lived reality and a reality constructed through narratives are frequent in employee stories. One respondent explained that, 'the culture of the place was great, you could just kick back and do whatever and get paid a shitload for it! But that all went out the window when change came through...they were the good old days [P22]'. Later in the same interview the respondent argued that 'now you have to work, work, work all the time. They [managers] keep you on your toes...but there is dignity in working like that. Unlike the lazy, bloody awful culture the place had before [P22]'. A third employee states that 'I never want to be like managers, to adopt their ways of thinking and working...they are awful all of the time and the only real comradeship is between the workers [P6]'. However, the same respondent subsequently suggests that 'most of the workers are bloody terrible, militant, parochial bastards...who can blame you for wanting to be more like management...when they [employees] stick together like glue and won't do a thing [P6]'.

The simplistic response is to discuss the multiple and competing versions or contradictions as unreliable. However, researchers such as Frank (1998) and Zinnbauer and Pargament (1998) suggest that inconsistent language is often the norm in conversion narratives, thus implying that there is a "reality" being "uncovered". The conversion narrative serves to place the organisation in a "positive light" to members of the public; a more affirmative comparison of life after change is likely to communicate the success of programs implemented by organisations. Frank (1995) adds that organisational stories are often reflected in ways other than through employees. In particular, he

focuses on the use of advertising material for an American based cancer hospital. Brochures given to patients show 'patients pursuing...gardening, sport and other hobbies...but no patient is shown in treatment or affected by treatment...[Therefore] institutional medicine is reflecting its preferred narrative' (Frank, 1995, p.79).

Evidence of the organisation's preferred narrative can be obtained from several of the employees' stories. For example, as the interview progressed several respondents suggested that they are 'not really sure what...they think about change [P8]' but 'like to say and do the right thing according to management [P19]'. Comments such as 'they gave me a chance so I feel I have to make them [managers] look good [P21]' and 'management are happy when we tell everyone how good organisational change has been for us [P22]' may suggest that respondents found it necessary to reflect the organisation's version of change rather than the reality that they experienced. This is evident in the following narrative excerpts:

You know the change has been good for me in terms of a new job here. But off the record I don't know if I really like it all that much. I'm just following management orders really because I know if I do I'll be okay here. As long as we are seen to do the right things and we show that we support change then they are happy [P12].

One of the problems with this place was the poor public perception. So when all this change came through it did start to make a difference in terms of what the public saw. That's what management considered to be important. They said it didn't really matter what we thought of change, as long as we let the public know that it was a good thing [P8].

You get caught up in the buzz of it...everyone seems to be happy with it [change] so I just do the right thing and go along with it. It is a bit better here in terms of organisation and I did get a pay rise but I'm not sure if I support the damage that it has done to the region in terms of employment and stuff. I just find that as long as I don't rock the boat I'm sort of looked after a bit better [P3].

You know I've often wondered...do any of us really care about change? I mean do we really like management and the new ways? Or is it just that we were so sick of the old that we clung to whatever seemed better at the time? I mean managers are still managers. They might seem okay but they still control the same way as they used to...I think we just became yes men to avoid sudden unemployment [P1].

These comments suggest that the employees knew what they were saying and why. Furthermore, they highlight that the conversion tale is different from the perceived "reality", indicating that conversion stories may merely represent a retrospective fiction.

While several of the respondents make it very clear that development of new identities and thought processes coincided with organisational change, others highlight a transformation in their thinking about change within the process of narrative construction. This returns to the question of "when does it become evident that a conversion has occurred". Firstly, it is important to note Beckford's (1978, p.260) thoughts about conversion narratives. He argues that:

Accounts of conversion are constructions (or reconstructions) of experiences which draw upon resources available *at the time of construction* to lend them sense. They are not fixed, once-and-for-all descriptions of phenomena as they occurred in the past. Rather their meaning emerges in the very process of construction, and this takes place at different times in different contexts.

This suggests that conversion experiences embody process within their own boundaries 'in a way which is known to them to be appropriate' (Beckford, 1978, p.260), which may not be too dissimilar to prior discussions of appropriate behaviour during the process of organisational change. It is also noteworthy that the very act of reconstructing the experience of change in the presence of myself as a student and teacher of management may also place its

own boundaries upon the narratives. However, Beckford's argument suggests that it is not the place of researchers to determine whether employees have or have not experienced a conversion based on inconsistencies within their narratives. Thus stories of conversion should be treated appropriately, rather than assuming that employees are simply reconstructing the organisation's preferred narrative.

Although some employees openly express their disillusion and question their belief in management activities, they also express that their lives have 'definitely changed for the better [P14]' as a consequence of change. Thomas (2001, p.527) argues that such transformation in employees is often a reflection of the 'manipulative and coercive' nature of management who inflict a 'type of cultural supremacy' over staff. . Hence, for managers to strategically target employees and compel them to adopt their belief systems is not uncommon. Nonetheless, on the basis of this argument and from the evidence provided above, one may argue that employees embrace transformation for reasons of group affiliation rather than value fulfilment.

The fact that six respondents who told conversion stories within the interview setting also told of continuing management grievances suggests that respondents may not be fully convinced of the motives of management teams, or embrace the rationale behind organisational change. The common perception that open support for management will lead to an increase in career opportunities supports this interpretation. This clearly does not illustrate a 'transformation of the individual's world view' as suggested by Pilarzyk

(1983, p.54). However, it does suggest that employees seek to re-balance their lives when their social or political ideologies have been disturbed (Yang, 1998). Conversion stories essentially are narratives of 'thought reform' (Zinnbauer and Pargament, 1998, p.161) and 'small shift[s] in the balance of...persistent conflict' (Marlett, 1997, p.676). As such it may be argued that the conversion experience, as documented in this research, is more 'out of material exigencies or opportunities rather than conviction of conscience' (Thomas, 2001, p.528).

### **Conclusion**

This chapter has drawn attention to the fact that some narratives of organisational change within this research are framed as conversion stories. Within these narratives it is evident that stories of conversion reflect the respondents' beliefs that alteration from a culture of parochialism, militancy and poor employment relations to open support for management has enabled them to benefit from career development opportunities in the workplace. Consequently, organisational change is told as a positive story in which the plot is focused on the success of the individual employee.

Respondents who told conversion stories also perceived that employees who did not support management activities had future career opportunities thwarted. Rather than a conversion narrative, the latter tell stories of injustice and isolation, which they perceive as occurring subsequent to organisational

change. Framed as atrocity tales, these narratives are explored in the following chapter.



## Chapter 8

**Atrocity Tales**

The conversion narratives explored in the previous chapter highlight stories in which organisational change has benefited employees. Success stories focus on career opportunities and hierarchical advancement. However, such stories of conversion are not representative of the stories told by all employees. There are also employees who perceive organisational change as a process fraught with aggression and abuse between managers and employees and, in some cases between colleagues. Whereas the conversion story is an account of personal triumph, the atrocity tale is dark and sinister, and often abounds with expressions of anger and even vitriol. The term atrocity has been used to describe a variety of experiences that involve some sort of infringement to an individual, whether it is physical or psychological. Bromley, Shupe and Ventimiglia (1979, p.43) define an atrocity as an 'event which is viewed as a flagrant violation of a fundamental cultural value'.

In these narratives organisational change is associated with tales of workplace violence, including bullying, verbal abuse, inter-group conflict and psychological violence. These tales challenge the more rational and non-ambiguous versions of change that are ever present within the literature (Boje, 2001). Using the term "atrocity tale" (Bromley, Shupe and Ventimiglia, 1979) to represent these stories, this chapter explores the narratives of

respondents who considered change as a process that ruined their careers, causing most to resign from their positions and seek employment elsewhere.

Atrocity narratives are replete with anecdotes of disillusionment and stories of rejection, disappointment and injustice. Consequently, a second aim of this chapter is to explore the causal association between talk of workplace violence and resignation choice. This chapter seeks to extend the theorising of organisational change into domains that are neither attractive nor progressive by focusing on narratives that expose violence in a number of different guises throughout the process of organisational change.

### **The Atrocity Narrative**

The following case study has been chosen to draw attention to the nature of atrocity tales I heard within the course of this research. While atrocity tales are unique across individual participants, the following tale highlights different experiences of violence and the relationship between violence at work and the decision to exit the organisation.

### **Sarah O'Brien**

Sarah was employed in the health care industry in the Latrobe Valley for over fifteen years. During this time she saw many changes made to the industry in general as well as her organisation in which she was involved in the role of supporting and representing her colleagues on executive and management boards. Up until the late 1980s, Sarah recalls the organisation being a 'very

stable, conservative and close knit community' with 'not a lot of radical changes', and comprising of staff that she describes as having 'not a lot of ambition'. Towards the late 1980s the organisation endured a leadership change, which Sarah believes enabled staff with ability to let go of 'old ways' and become 'liberated by' rather than be 'threatened by' change.

Ten years later Sarah's organisation was subjected to yet another major change with restructuring and amalgamation with another regional organisation. Prior to the implementation of this change, Sarah remembers the organisation suffering from 'stagnation' and 'regression', suggesting that transformation 'was a welcome relief from floundering around in no man's land'. Initial attempts to implement change were done with the support and consultation of employees. However, the introduction of an external management and executive board in the planning stages of change led to the creation of a different culture within the workplace:

That's when there was secrecy. That's when there were no decisions being made. That's when there was an attitude that local is second rate [and] not worth involving. In that [management] created a complete change to the commitment to the change process.

Sarah recalls that staff members were initially very receptive to change, particularly after the positive impact it had on the organisation in the late 1980s. The lack of participation and ongoing decrease in consultation, however, caused a lot of 'hurt and frustration' amongst the nursing staff, particularly as they learned that their 'thoughts and opinions weren't wanted'. Sarah argues that she and her colleagues were not 'resistant to change'. Rather, the staff 'were more interested in a productive change', which was

considered to 'be out of kilter with the new executive who were more interested in contraction and reduction and elimination'.

As part of the amalgamation process several 'duplicate positions' were made redundant. Sarah's her position was one of these duplicate jobs and was thus 'thrown open' so that other staff had the opportunity to apply for it. Similar to other staff in duplicate positions, Sarah was unsuccessful in obtaining her job and as a consequence became 'systematically demoted'. She also felt that having a successful 'track record' disadvantaged her with the new management executive:

People who got the newly appointed positions were the people who were quieter, who were less questioning, seen to be more puppet like and subservient to the new executive. They tended to be people who didn't have a vision of their own.

While functioning in the 'lower level' position, Sarah recalls that the daily operations of the organisation began to change around her. Initially, Sarah was ignored and excluded from making decisions related to operations and committees she was previously involved in. Eventually she was altogether 'barred' from becoming involved in issues relevant to her department. She was under constant pressure was placed on her to resign from the organisation. While such behaviour of management was initially 'quite subtle', management actions became more overt:

I was also subjected to quite a significant amount of bullying...to the extent that on one evening I was working towards the end of my allocated time on the first floor of a building that was relatively unoccupied. In fact...I was for an hour and three quarters...barred from exiting my door and was stood over by the executive director...and told in words of one syllable that it would be much better if I left. That I should sign to go, and that I wouldn't be able to get a job anywhere...Basically denying me of any future but wanting me out.

While bullying and harassment from management became a 'personal and vindictive situation' for Sarah she used several support mechanisms to help her cope. Along with confiding in her trusted colleagues, Sarah recalls the process of organisational change as a 'growing experience' in which she felt 'very strong' and 'powerful'. Regardless of the denial of career opportunities and increasing bullying, Sarah felt that she had to 'really assert and negotiate' in the best interests of herself and her colleagues in order to cope with change. The inability to influence the 'irrational and counterproductive' decisions that managers were making caused 'increasing frustration'. As a result Sarah found herself 'seriously unmotivated and depleted' finding that 'it took every ounce of willpower to get out of bed in the morning. She recalls waking up 'with palpitations' which she realised 'was part of the stress mechanism and coping'.

Sarah suggests that her treatment by management made her more determined to remain in the workplace. However, harassment from managers and 'infighting' amongst colleagues continued to escalate within the organisation. Sarah believes that management deliberately aimed to break up the prior cohesiveness of the nursing culture by 'manipulating' employees to 'compete with each other' for jobs. Throughout this process employees were 'taking camps, looking after themselves [and] making decisions that hurt others'. Such behaviour 'created tensions and problems' with people, many whom had been friends and close colleagues for years. Further manipulative behaviour from management finally caused Sarah to make the decision to resign:

My decision to leave was based on the fact that I didn't respect the people I worked [with]...I didn't want to be part of the...team with the decision making they were doing, which I thought was totally unethical...who were doing devious things and treating people so abominably. So I decided to go. I wanted to go with integrity and that was all I wanted.

Sarah has since sought employment in a different industry in the Latrobe Valley. While she has been successful within her new career, she still feels 'hurt' and 'angered' at the way organisational change was implemented and how she was treated. To Sarah the process of restructuring and amalgamation both within the health care industry and the Latrobe Valley have been 'terribly inefficient' and 'counterproductive': 'It was a dark day handled with incompetence and completely out of kilter with effective human resource management'. She ends her narrative arguing that changes in Latrobe Valley workplaces have left organisations 'burnt out...battered and bruised' with ongoing problems of 'poor morale', 'low productivity' and 'lack of organisational commitment'.

Sarah's narrative is lined with anecdotes of disillusionment and clearly identifies that the actual experience of organisational change is incongruent with her expectations, which have been developed from previous bouts of change. Within the atrocity narrative, organisational change could be considered as a violation of employee roles and responsibilities as a result of the unfair imposition of new organisational order. Sarah considers organisational change to have been the turning point in her career. She tells a tale of hurt, disappointment and rejection rather than one of success and heroism.

Prior to organisational change Sarah supported management actions and played a role in organisational decision making. However, power disparities caused by change drove a wedge between Sarah and her managers, and consequently led to the demise of her career. Because of the way in which organisational change was managed Sarah perceived that she was forced to leave an organisation and end a much-loved career against her wishes. Rejection, humiliation, hurt and disappointment are the central themes of atrocity tales. Beginning with a further explanation of atrocities and atrocity tales, these narratives are explored in detail throughout the remainder of this chapter.

### **Defining Atrocity Tales**

The term "atrocity tale" has been used in the past to explain traumatic social changes such as the holocaust (Wolman, 1996) terminal illness (Frank, 1995), prison riots (Porter, 1994), immoral medical practices (Dingwall, 1977) and factors contributing to attachment to religious sects (Bromley, Shupe and Ventimiglia, 1979). While the term easily conjures up strong images of violence, atrocities are also experienced within the organisational setting. Hunt and Benford (1994) explain that atrocity tales do not require strong lines of physical violence. Rather, they can simply reflect an 'account of negative experiences, abominations observed, or otherwise inhumane or immoral happenings' (p.499) that have some significance to the storyteller.

Atrocity tales can serve several purposes. Hunt and Benford (1994, p.499) suggest that these stories are told to 'evoke anger, disillusionment [or] a sense

of injustice'. Frank (1995) argues that atrocity tales provide people with a means of repairing the damage inflicted on them by traumatic change: they are a form of revenge. Explaining further, he adds that individuals become narrative wrecks after experiencing an atrocity and therefore tell such stories as a means of 'redrawing maps and finding new destinations' (Frank, 1995, p.53). In addition, Thomas, Smucker and Droppleman (1998, p.324) have established that atrocity tales are told in an effort to 'restore relationship reciprocity' of self rather than to 'exact revenge' on others.

Dingwall (1977) suggests that atrocity stories are retrospective accounts that enable storytellers to reconstruct damaging experiences away from possibly harmful consequences. Telling atrocity tales enables individuals to express the mix of emotions experienced during social change in an effort to deal with feelings of loss, imposed guilt and removal of personal power (Bromley, Shupe and Ventimiglia, 1979). Ballis (1999, p.57) argues that atrocity tales are often considered as secondary accounts of change in that they reflect stories and events that may highlight a side of social life that is deemed as unacceptable for the public to hear. However, he raises the question: 'are the tales of atrocity in social relationships to be accepted as secondary accounts'? Frank (1995, p.97) admits that atrocity tales are 'anxiety provoking...hard to hear' and quite often not considered as 'a "proper" story'. However, he also believes that atrocity tales need to be studied in order to understand social change in its entirety. Frank (1995, p.97) further adds that the act of telling an atrocity tale is similar to "reliving" the events:

The past is remembered with such arresting lucidity because it is not being experienced as past; the...experiences that are being told are



unassimilated fragments that refuse to become past, haunting the present...To turn the chaos into a verbal story is to have some reflective grasp on it. The chaos that can be told in story is already taking place at a distance and is being reflected on retrospectively. For a person to gain such a reflective grasp on her own life, distance is a prerequisite. In telling the events of one's life, events are mediated by the telling. But in the lived chaos there is no mediation, only immediacy.

The atrocity tales examined in this research suggest that individual experiences are fragmented, ambiguous and lacking in chronological sequence. As such, individuals are unable to make sense of atrocity events until they retell the tales with some order and sequence attached to them (Frank, 1995). Telling retrospective accounts of atrocities provides the storyteller with additional time and experience to 'reconstruct a story' (Charmaz, 1999, p.372) according to the present situation. Consequently narratives of atrocities may be reconstructed so that they reflect 'heroism without contamination' (Charmaz, 1999, p.372), highlighting the extreme circumstances that an individual has been able to live through.

Within organisations the telling of atrocity tales is often considered to be inappropriate due to their 'anxiety provoking' nature (Frank, 1995, p. 97). Frank further adds that 'in these stories the modernist bulwark of remedy, progress and professionalism cracks to reveal vulnerability, futility, and impotence' (1995, p.97) that the organisation may not want the public to see. The atrocity tales told in this research highlighted organisational flaws that are not readily communicated in organisational change literature. In particular, these flaws are revealed in tales of bullying, psychological and, in one case, physical violence.

### **Atrocities in the Workplace**

Atrocity tales that reflect the experience of psychological violence associated with organisational change embody a variety of organisational experiences including horizontal violence (Farrell, 1999a; 1999b), workplace bullying (Quine, 1999) and vertical conflict (Jehn, 1997). Regardless of the terminology used, psychological harassment or violence involves the perceived or felt aggression or abuse from colleagues or managers in the workplace (Farrell, 1999a; 1999b). Greenberg and Barling (1999, p.898) suggest that researchers need to be careful when using the term "violence". Often used interchangeably with aggression, the term violence assumes that a physical act has been carried out against another (Straus and Gelles, 1986). Aggression, however, may be used to describe behaviour that is carried out with the intent to hurt another psychologically (Greenberg and Barling, 1999).

In this research the term violence is used to describe psychological rather than physical aggression. Although Greenberg and Barling (1999) caution against this broader meaning, current research on psychological abuse in the workplace is referred to with such terms as "horizontal violence". Regardless of the terminology used, definitions and explanations of atrocities given earlier in the chapter suggest that the removal of power, imposition of guilt and feelings of loss are consistent with explanations of psychological abuse. In this research the terms violence and aggression will be used interchangeably with the emphasis on the psychological aggression experienced.

Another point that needs clarification is the difference between workplace violence and workplace bullying. While it has been determined that violence at work involves either aggressive verbal or physical behaviour, Rayner and Hoel (1997) suggest that acts of violence may only occur once, while bullying can consist of persistent and repeated attacks. Brodsky (1976, p.2) explains that bullying is 'treatment which persistently provokes, pressures, frightens, intimidates or otherwise discomforts another person'. The participants in this chapter were victims to both workplace bullying as well as random attacks of violence.

Workplaces are not immune to the presence of psychological violence (Thomas, 1992). While organisational change has not been linked directly to workplace violence (Greenberg and Barling, 1999), factors caused by organisational change, including job insecurity and perceived injustice in the workplace (Greenhalgh and Rosenblatt, 1984) are thought to be linked to personal changes in employees. For example, increased anxiety and lack of commitment that were previously not evident in employees may eventually lead to workplace aggression (Ashford, Lee and Bobko, 1989) and can subsequently lead to increases in absenteeism (Kivimaki, Elovainio and Vahtera, 2000) or employee turnover. Allcorn (1994, p.94) further suggests that the impersonal nature of organizations 'not only facilitate supervisors who strive for dominance and superiority over employees but also prevent employees from expressing their feelings of injustice, frustration and anger', thus causing disequilibrium in employment relations. Turbulence in the organisation's internal environment leading to a 'hostile work atmosphere'

(Mills, 1997, p.6) caused by such factors as organisational change is believed to foster violent relations and increases to workplace stress (Mills, 1997).

### **Organisational Change and Atrocity Stories**

Organisational research has tended to ignore reports of atrocities particularly in relation to organisational change. Talk or actions of uncooperative behaviour are dismissed as 'irrational' (Mumby and Putman, 1992, p.469) or reinterpreted as manifesting 'personal weakness' (Domagalski, 1999, p.835). Modernist approaches to organisational theory suggest that negative behaviours and emotions should either be suppressed or appropriately managed to ensure that they do not disrupt the running of the organisation (Flam, 1993) or conflict with the organisation's preferred narrative of change (Frank, 1995). However, a new breed of organisational researchers, including Boje (1995; 2001), argue that processes of organisational change cannot be properly understood if the multiple voices within workplaces continue to go unheard. Mumby and Putman (1992, p.474) suggest the recognising negative incidents and emotions are 'necessary...for understanding organisational experiences'.

While emotionality in the context of organisational change was discussed within Chapter 6, it may be argued that atrocity tales are extreme examples of emotionality narrated retrospectively through the present day lens (Charmaz, 1999). Atrocity tales are the mirror reverse of conversion stories, and are associated with anger, fear and sadness. Hart (1976) argues that individuals place a great deal of importance of their occupations, thus justifying the

variety of emotions that occur when occupational security is threatened. Additionally, events such as organisational change often lead to turning points in an employee's career, which also carries high levels of emotionality (Ebaugh, 1988).

As well as high levels of emotionality, several other themes dominate the atrocity tales. Firstly, respondents further reiterate the need to suppress and manage emotions in the workplace for fear of retribution. A second theme is that employees believe that violence in the workplace coincides with the implementation of large-scale change and consequently led to the demise of their careers. Another theme is found in the way in which respondents tell their atrocity tales. All agree that violence in the workplace was not initially overt. Rather, violence began as a covert, 'almost imagined thing [P20]', that eventually escalates to more direct and obvious behaviour. This section of the chapter aims to follow the narratives from the initial instances of violence through to the more aggressive acts that were experienced by employees.

### **The Context of Violence: Sanitation and Elimination**

Violence is not immediately recognisable in the interview narratives. Rather, respondents' stories told of 'unbalanced power situations' (Rayner and Hoel, 1997, p.182) that became evident between managers and employees. Allcorn (1994, p.97) suggests that it is not uncommon for managers to act in a manner that will 'bolster their self-esteem', whether such behaviour is intentional or not. Collins (1998, p.87) adds that conflict and basic antagonisms will always exist between managers and employees due to their 'divergent interests and

orientations'. Employees certainly recognise that 'conflict will always exist [P17]' and that 'daily run-ins with managers are just part of the process [P13]'. They also accept that 'these types of disagreements usually cause no hard feelings and are just part of being in that manager-worker relationship [P5]'. However, narratives of workplace violence go beyond the normalities of everyday conflict that is inherent within employment relations.

Respondents perceived that relationships with managers 'were very different after the change came through [P18]' and that managers 'that we worked side by side with for years didn't want anything to do with us all of a sudden [P11]'. Other employees add that 'managers started to treat us like dogs [P5]' and 'would pick you up for every little thing that wasn't done exactly right [P10]'. Respondents also talk about increased pressure that was placed on them to be more productive: 'There's this manager...and he's always like "you'll be doing what we expect you to do and I've got the right to hire and fire". I feel that there's always pressure on me...they're always watching me [P18]'; 'I get pissed off with the way they treated us...with the "you're multi-skilled now, you'll do everything" [P15]'. Another employee adds that the pressure associated with change was 'horrendous' and recalled 'everyday...I'd be in tears when I got in the car [and] I'd cry all the way back [home] [P17]'.

Employees' talk also focuses on the 'increasing mistrust [P15]' between managers and employees, lack of communication, 'rumours [that] went around that if you didn't get the job done in the shortest possible time you'd

be out on your ear [P11]' and 'the pressure [that was] always on us to leave [P9]'. In response, employees started to refer to managers as 'complete bastards [P18]', 'smart arse pricks [P15]' and in one case 'the Gestapo [P10]'. However, respondents also recognised that early after the implementation of change violence was not necessarily experienced in the form of blatant verbal aggression. They recall being excluded from responsibilities and decision making that was part of their daily role prior to change: 'Day to day working went on behind the scenes and I was excluded from the executives and the decision making that...I had been part of prior to that...Every step of the way [I was] ignored or denied opportunities [P20]'.

Many respondents suggest that exclusion often coincided with the introduction of 'new managers [P3]'. As one employee explains: 'that's when there was secrecy...that's when there was an attitude that local [staff] is second rate and not worth involving [P20]'. Another adds that 'management had not shown a lot of faith in Latrobe Valley [workers]...We were [considered as] incompetent. They were constantly telling us we couldn't do things and we were bad which made it easier for them to push us out because we were in defeatist mode by then [P17]'. While some employees recall 'not being quite sure if managers were ignoring me or not at first [P10]', others suggest that exclusion was more obvious: 'They took us out of the shop and put us in this shed...We got put in a rigger's drying room and there was six of us there and it would have been probably three paces wide by about a dozen or so long. We were expected to sit there and we had no work [P9]'.

As well as removal from decision making processes, respondents also believe that they were purposely excluded from career opportunities and promotions and suggested that this was a 'deliberate management strategy [P17]' to downsize the workforce. For example, subsequent to the amalgamation of two Latrobe Valley organisations, external management consultants were introduced to reissue jobs to existing employees. Two employees experienced this process and recall that the process of job reissuing was unfair. For example, 'you are sort of told in an obscure way "don't apply for your job". You had a conversation with someone who said "don't take this the wrong way but, and I'll deny it but..." [P17]'. 'The reissuing of jobs...I don't think that the way it was done is the way it should have been! I don't think it was totally fair and equitable...There was no doubt that I was the best person for [a particular] job. No doubt! And I didn't get the job...the frustrations were that...all the associate unit managers were job matched. They weren't even interviewed! [P3]'

Exclusion from responsibilities and decision making processes may be considered as an initial stage of workplace bullying (Quine, 1999) or vertical violence (Jehn, 1997) between managers and employees. While workplace violence is traditionally equated with anything from shouting to homicide (Slora, Joy and Terris, 1991), it is not uncommon for managers to attempt to destabilise and belittle employees (Rayner and Hoel, 1997) with the use of tyrannical management practices (Ashforth, 1994). Exclusion and isolation are simply a more passive form of aggression that may be directed at employees (Rayner and Hoel, 1997). Adams (1997, p.178) suggests that



exclusion of employees is usually 'designed to humiliate and to undermine and to reduce a person's input to a trivial and unrewarding level' (Adams, 1997, p.178). Additionally, Turnbull (1995, p.24) adds that 'access to opportunities, for example, promotion...being blocked' is a common way in which workplace bullying can manifest itself in a more passive form.

### **From Exclusion to Aggression**

Many respondents suggest that bullying in the workplace went hand in hand with management strategies to downsize the workforce. In addition to exclusion and isolation, atrocity tales suggest that deliberate efforts were made by managers to "push" employees out of the organisation. Respondents suggest that there were various strategies aimed at decreasing employee numbers and that managers displayed increasingly menacing or threatening behaviour. However, some of the most 'bewildering strategies used by management [P13]' was the 'withholding of vital information [P20]', 'refusal to pass on information [P10]' and a 'general lack of communication [P11]'. One employee explains, 'the lack of communication was bloody awful. It's like they would tell you some things and not others and just watch and wait for you to stuff up so they could abuse you [P15]'. Another suggests that the lack of information about the future of the organisation and individual careers was overwhelming. He recalls uncertainty and fear escalating to the point that 'blokes were going around and didn't know whether they were Arthur or Martha [P10]'.

Still others express confusion at the actions of management, especially as they considered themselves to 'work for the good of the company [P9]' and 'do everything...to keep the organisational viable [P5]'. Several respondents reacted to the behaviour of managers with industrial action. While employees either 'were not allowed to [P15]' or were 'too scared to go on strike [P11]' overt actions in the form of 'go slows [P11]' and work to rule bans were implemented by groups of employees. As one respondent explains, 'we didn't refuse duties. We'd just say that it was too unsafe or we didn't know this trade properly, or that we require [different staff] to do these duties [P15]'. However, respondents perceived that employees who became involved in industrial dispute 'were definitely the targets for abuse [P10]' afterwards.

Employees also felt that people with 'track record [P20]' or who were openly unsupportive of management goals were subjected to workplace violence. One respondent who believes management violence was aimed at him because of his lack of support commented: 'I hate empires. No matter what empire is there I [will try] to pull it down...[but] it can be like walking off a gallows sometimes [P18]'. He further explained that 'until I make it known to management that I support the decisions they make, they will continue to make my life hell. And they can because I refuse to leave [P18]'. Others add that 'no matter how hard you tried, if you made a comment about what you thought of change or management, it was hell for you from then on in [P5]'. However, rather than isolation or exclusion, respondents suggest that management became 'more sneaky, more abusive [P18]' and 'a lot more cruel towards employees [P15]'.

In particular, employees suggest that management tactics to downsize the workforce became 'more obvious [P5]'. As one respondent explains:

They employed human relations people to start what we call shaking the tree. They shake the tress and a lot of people just jump...We weren't privy to information anymore and we'd hear the rumours and try to sort [them] out...[You'd] come away with nothing but frustration, anger, despondent to the point where I'd say "well stuff it! I'm going to leave to!" [We] just got sick and tired of the bullshit. There was no other way and it was orchestrated bullshit! [P5]'

Another respondent suggests that management used even crueller tactics in his organisation, explaining that 'the actions of management were nothing but bastardry [P18]'. He recalls his organisation introduced voluntary departure packages (VDP's) in an attempt to persuade employees to resign. While the respondent 'does not have a problem with VDP's [P18]', he argues that management would 'play games with employees and their VDP's in the hope that they'd stuff up and leave [P18]'. For example:

But there was this one guy and they wanted to get him... and what the [organisation] did was...they sent everyone a letter to say this is a VDP form, fill it in and you've got the VDP, this is another form whereby if you fill it in it just tells you what it's worth. Nearly identical! So if you couldn't read properly you'd fill it in. And it wasn't one was red one was blue, they were both the same shade, the same format, there was only a couple of things different on the back. This guy filled it in for a read out and filled in the wrong one signed it and he was gone at four o'clock! And he tried to take them to court on that but bad luck! He'd signed it in the morning and he was out at four o'clock. They were just glad to see him go [P18].

A common theme across the atrocity tales is the perception that 'employees who minded their business [P3]' were more likely to benefit from career opportunities. Respondents suggest that workers who were 'quieter, less questioning...more puppet like, and subservient [P20]' and didn't 'appear to rock the boat...definitely got the jobs [P17]'. 'Everyone knew that if you

were seen to crawl and to pander to management that you would be rewarded. But why should we? Not when they treat us like this [P16]. As one employee adds: 'I know that if I pulled my head in management would leave me alone, but I just can't do it with all the things that go on [P18]'. While another suggests that 'its like you are going against the goals of the organisation is you voice your concerns...so really they try to get you for that somehow [P11]'

Victor, Trevino and Sharpiro (1993) suggest that management will punish employees who violate organisational norms. They also comment that such punishment is justified for the sake of maintaining 'behavioral standards' and symbolises the 'value of norm conformity' within the organisation (Victor, Trevino and Sharpiro, 1993, p.255). Mintzberg (1983) argues that the social order of the organisation will become unbalanced in the event that employees are not punished for deviating from organisational standards, hence further justifying the need for retribution in the workplace. However, employees do not believe that the violence they received from management was at all justified. Rather, they feel that management abused its power to develop manipulation strategies in an attempt to pressure workers to resign. As one respondent stated: 'management were downright bullies! And you think that removing your power and right to make decisions would be enough...but trust me it only got worse...that was only the start of the story! [P17]'

### From Managers to Monsters

While employees believe that hierarchical power differentials were evident prior to organisational change, they perceive altered employment dynamics with the implementation of change. Employees expressed shock and disbelief at the 'lengths that management would go to make workers known that they were not wanted [P9]'. One respondent stated that: 'I could handle most of it. I could handle the lack of work and being left out of things. I could even handle the bullshit schoolyard games and taunting that was going on from management. But when they started to directly play off against workers I couldn't handle that [P10]'. Another employee adds: 'what right do they have to bully us and pressure us to leave? This is my livelihood they're playing with. It's not just some game. This is my life! [P5]'

Employees suggest that 'management taunting got worse and worse [P15]' and 'they would constantly ridicule you about things like job security [P17]'. Respondents recall feeling 'very demoralised, very disappointed [and] very doubtful [P11]' about their futures and explain that they 'tried to get answers but just got aggression [P15]'. One recalls the actions of a manager who was responsible for downsizing his department:

We had a bloke...come through here and he was basically the hitman and the guys hated him. The blokes hated his guts! He just walked into a group and would sort of say "Well fellas, it's good to meet you all and you know we're entering an era of change and I dare say that within twelve months...only half of you will be here". I know the pressures that I felt at that time...I needed some sort of help. I couldn't understand how someone with less common sense...didn't walk in with a gun and try to knock him off! [P5]

Other employees suggest that they were subjected to 'constant badgering [P15]' and 'jokes, particularly about our futures [P3]'. Several were individually subjected to bullying from managers as they were 'considered to have some power over other staff [P20]'. Employees who played the role of union representatives found that they were subjected to 'constant, quite frightening attacks on a regular basis [P16]'. For example:

I was...subjected to quite a significant amount of bullying...to the extent that on one evening I was working towards the end of my allocated time...[and] for an hour and three quarters was barred from exiting my door and was stood over by the executive director...and told in words of one syllable that it would be much better if I left, that I should sign to go and that I wouldn't be able to get a job anywhere and I'd be ineligible to work...and basically denying me any future but wanting me out [P20].

I [would get] phone calls saying that [management]...have threatened to sue all of the individual job rep[resentatives] of all [our]...financial and physical assets if we went ahead with bans...So you had this ground in the middle...where you can't do anything and I'm being personally threatened on a monetary level, on a physical level and an emotional level, on a career level [P17].

Several narratives suggest that workplace violence and bullying 'got so bad that workers just had to retaliate [P11]'. One respondent in particular recalls being involved in a workgroup who 'were treated very very shabbily by management [P9]'. In reaction to ongoing vertical violence employees within the groups 'started to give them some of their own medicine [P9]'. For example:

I remember this one time...one morning I got to work and my mate comes up and says, "Come and have a look at this". So we go over and here is staunch, which is a lump of rigger's scaffolding, and it's been thrown over the edge and into this car. Someone threw a staunch down three floors into a car! And it had fallen with a lot of force! It went straight through the roof and out the side of the door...Unbelievable [P9].

Other employees also recall 'feeling frustration [P3]' at 'being constantly picked on [P15]' and at 'not being able to do anything to release your anger [P11]'. As they explain: 'you almost get to boiling point [P13]' and 'there's just no way you can get rid of what you're feeling, so what do you do? You find yourself getting more and more pissed off with the people next to you [P15]'.

The discussion of atrocity tales in this chapter so far has focused on vertical conflict between managers and employees. While such conflict is often characteristic of employment relations (Collins, 1998), further conflict may be manifested towards colleagues. When employees are 'controlled through a culture of suppression and fear' (Mantell and Albrecht, 1994, p.42), it is not uncommon for workers to turn to their colleagues to vent frustration (Roberts, 1983) when such frustrations cannot be directed at management.

### **Horizontal Violence**

Narratives of horizontal violence are traditionally found in nursing literature (for example Chaboyer, Najman and Dunn, 2001; Farrell, 1999a; 1999b; Freshwater, 2000; Jackson, Clare and Mannix, 2002). However, the narratives in this research suggest that horizontal violence is widespread throughout different industries. Horizontal violence is defined as 'overt and covert non-physical hostility such as criticism, sabotage, undermining, infighting, scapegoating and bickering' (Duffy, 1995, p.9) and is usually directed from one employee to another. It is believed that violence of this nature is caused by an inability to express anger at an oppressor (Roberts,

1983), thus leading employees to direct frustration towards those immediately surrounding them. Usually such behaviour results in distress and unrest between individuals within work groups (Farrell, 1999a; 1999b).

Respondents deemed vertical conflict between managers and employees 'not all that abnormal [P16]'. Employees considered that they were an oppressed group (Duffy, 1995) 'simply by being employees and not managers [P15]'. However, they felt that aggression between colleagues was unacceptable but realised that it was 'merely a by-product of management actions...as staff had no way of venting their anger [P17]'. Several respondents suggested that tyrannical management styles and practices, such as the reissuing of jobs and downsizing became the source of horizontal violence. For example: 'the situation was created where people were...manipulated into competing for the same positions...and that created problems...The whole process facilitated some people taking camps, looking after themselves, making decisions that hurt others [P20]'. Others suggest that they remember 'having to watch your back all the time [P16]' and that colleagues 'would make smart remarks like "look at that bitch, she thinks she owns the place" [P3]'. Another employee recalls that colleagues would 'constantly whisper and giggle behind my back every time I came into the room...and play jokes on others all the time [P17]'. Such behaviour is reminiscent of da Silva and L'Estrange's (2001, p.21) research, which suggests that workplace bullying encapsulates 'people whispering and giggling when someone walks in the office...[and] practical jokes designed to humiliate under the guise of humour.



A general perception that colleagues were being 'hostile and unsupportive (Allcorn, 1997, p.4) was also reported by respondents. 'All of a sudden these people who were your mates would just double cross you to look out for their own interests [P5]'. Denigrating treatment from colleagues was also obvious to some respondents: 'you'd just be doing the best you could to survive at work and there'd be these people there bitching and backstabbing and trying to sabotage things so that you couldn't do your job properly [P16]'. Another employee who had all job responsibilities removed recalls that his department were targeted because they would 'do other things to try to keep our minds off the boredom [P9]'. For example: 'what happened was there almost became sort of a personal thing against [us] in our section. They'd look at us and say "look at those pricks, they're having a good time...at our expense". But we weren't you know. We were stopping from going insane [P9]'.

While Duffy (1995) explained earlier in this section that horizontal violence is non-physical, one respondent's narrative refers to physical violence directed at him by a colleague. He argues that 'anger and fear just got so bad that people would just explode and attack the next thing closest to them [P9]'. As he recalls:

There was this guy...he picked me up one day and threw me clean across the room! He slammed another bloke! I actually ended up in hospital with a broken cheek. That was out of a dispute! And disputes were only brought up because people were frustrated [P9].

Stories of horizontal violence will more than likely continue to emerge while employees are 'excluded from the power structure' (Freshwater, 2000, p.482) within organisations. Freshwater further adds that 'the hardest acts of

aggression to deal with are not the acts of physical aggression...but the non-physical attacks, and the hostile undercurrent that prevails (2000, p.482). Farrell (1999a) suggests that the emergence of horizontal violence research in nursing is influenced by the fact that nurses are a traditionally oppressed group. Consequently, nurses are considered as controlled by a male dominated medical and administration arm of the healthcare industry (Farrell, 1999a; Freshwater, 2000). Roberts (1983) argues that nurses are no different from other oppressed groups in the way that they react to being controlled. Similar to other oppressed groups nurses 'are often self-effacing and masochistic in nature [and]...exhibit self-hatred and dislike for other nurses' (Farrell, 1999a, p.27).

While it is difficult to generalise across such a small sample, narratives within this research suggest that horizontal violence is not confined to nursing. Rather, excerpts of narratives discussed above indicate that regardless of occupation and gender, employees who are unable to vent their emotions at management are likely to direct frustration towards their colleagues. Rather than being oppressed by gender-oriented groups, respondents suggest that they are oppressed by hierarchical power. One employee states that 'the fear for your job is so great that you'll take the abuse from management [P13]', while another adds that 'unfortunately you then go and take it out on your workmates or friends and family [P11]'. Farrell (1999a, p.28) argues that 'staff conflict is seen as a result of...marginalisation vis-à-vis other more powerful...groups' such as management.

Although this research only considers the narratives of a few, findings so far suggest that research of horizontal violence in industries other than nursing merits closer examination. Several employees suggest: 'it's one thing for your manager to dig at you, but when you are being bullied by people who were your mates, it's just gone too far [P13]'; 'the scary part, the part that makes you not want to come to work is that you know you are going to be faced with constant shit from your colleagues. They are the one's who are meant to support you, but in the end they are also the one's who are more likely to destroy you [P3]'. 'It wrecks you. If you want to know what being wrecked is like, go to work and have your so-called workmates bag you out and bitch and gossip and whisper behind your back all day. It's soul-destroying [P17]'.

Employees suggest that violence did not exist in the workplace prior to organisational change. 'People think you are making things up or try and write it off by saying that managers are always like that...but they're not. This wasn't your everyday stuff that does on at work. This was nothing but cruelty...all because they wanted to make ridiculous changes and we wanted information about it before we would commit to anything [P9]'. Other employees add 'there was no way that this type of thing went on before change. It was like people just became totally unreasonable [P16]'; 'managers were hell bent on getting you out if you questioned their strategies. They didn't care about our welfare. They just wanted this change. So if you resisted, your life was made hell. And they would tell you that if you asked them [P17]'.

Respondents also suggest that they did not necessarily resist change, which supports literature reviewed in Chapter 2 that argues that employees are not necessarily resistant to change (Dent and Goldberg, 1999a; 1999b; Piderit, 2000). Rather, they 'simply wanted some explanations and answers to these things that were going on [P9]'. 'We understood that change was necessary. That's fine. Change is not an uncommon thing. But when you are victimised because you would like a few questions about your future answered, that's just wrong [P13]'. In addition, 'your livelihood is pulled from underneath your feet because you might challenge, or seek to represent someone. I loved that job. I loved the industry and to feel that you are being forced out is heartbreaking...just because you want some security for yourself and your fellow workers [P16]'. Another employee questions, 'how do you cope with that? How do you deal with managers who clearly don't want you there? Well basically you try every alternative available and then you leave...not 'cause you want to, but you have to [P13]'.

Most employees suggest that workplace violence 'made us leave the organisation in the end [P11]'. Narratives indicate that respondents 'get to a point where [they] are no longer willing to deal with constant abuse [P15]' and thus make the decision to exit the organisation. The following section of this chapter explores the links between atrocity tales and exit decisions.

### Atrocity Tales and Exit Decisions

All except for two respondents who told atrocity tales exited the workplace as a result of violence. However, what should be determined is whether atrocity tales are told to justify exit, or whether resignation stories are told in an attempt to account for the telling of such confronting stories. Employees perceive bullying, violence and aggression to be linked to the removal of power career opportunities and responsibility in the workplace. As occupational roles are usually considered as central to employees' lives (Hart, 1976), disruptions created by change may cause individuals to rethink their occupational status. For example: 'violence made me rethink my place in the organisation...and while I liked my job I realised that my future wasn't meant to stay here...It just wasn't worth the pain, not when there are other industries out there [P13]'.

Employees suggest that continuous bullying and violence led them to a turning point (Ebaugh, 1988) in their careers. Prior to change, employees expressed that they 'worked for the good of the company [P9]'. In most cases respondents 'loved the work [P20]' and enjoyed a 'sense of community [P3]' with their colleagues. However, they agreed that 'violence was starting to take its toll on people [P17]' and 'workers were starting to do things that they wouldn't normally do [P11]'. For example:

The worst thing I remember...we were so pissed off with our predicament that we used to wear these stickers on our hats that said "[Manager's name] Major Wanks"...He called us into a meeting and saw the hats and just grabbed them and smashed them off the desk and

he goes "I'm sick of this bullshit!" And that was good because we knew we could finally break him [P9].

Leymann (1990, p.122) argues that repeated episodes of violence could have a number of grave effects on a person's career standing and psychological health. Acts of isolation, stigmatising and verbal abuse can often cause individuals to become 'socially maladjusted' or 'voluntarily unemployed' (Leymann, 1990, p.122). Within this research, respondents state that continuous episodes of violence 'pushed them over the edge [P11]' and 'beyond the breaking point [P15]', thus causing employees to 'make the tough decision to eventually leave [P13]'.

Rayner and Hoel (1997) found that over a quarter of people bullied at work eventually exit the organisation. In most cases employees will firstly attempt to redefine the situation by confronting the attacker or approaching personnel management (Rayner and Hoel, 1997). However, if both strategies fail to provide a solution to violence, employees may feel that there is no option other than to resign. For example:

We went to our old supervisor...about our problems...we had to get some work, we had to get better conditions...other than that it was a waste of people rotting in a room basically. And that fell on deaf ears. And we obviously had nothing else to do, so after a while we came to the realisation that no matter what we did we weren't going to get any work...so really, what is the only other option you have? To leave [P9].

While situations such as the one explained above clearly contribute to the exit decision, six respondents suggest that the final decision to leave 'is not necessarily caused by the bigger picture. Rather, it was something that seems stupid and incidental [P13]'. Another employee who argues that 'one tiny

thing really pushed me over the edge that day [P20]' further explains this point:

I received a memo from one of the members of the executive questioning my integrity and my management of a fund that we'd been granted. And at that moment I thought my integrity is far superior to this! I don't need to have anything to do with these people! Even on the memo they've got the date and the details incorrect...they even spelled my name wrong. And I left on the spot. I literally did everything that I needed to do in about three hours...and I was gone [P20].

While such events may appear to be insignificant, Ebaugh (1988) suggests that it is often a small incident that encourages people to make the final decision to exit the organisation. She explains that after long periods of doubt and confusion a defining event in which 'the individual was ripe to make a decision...to take a firm stand' (Ebaugh, 1988, p.128) may reduce an individual's cognitive dissonance so that they can make the final decision to leave.

Another five respondents stated that they wanted to resign from the organisation earlier but felt unable to do so for a number of reasons. A union representative recalls that 'I didn't feel like I could morally leave with five or six hundred people's lives to consider [P17]'. Other employees had financial commitments: 'I'd just been married...we had kids...and a mortgage [P9]'; 'I had teenage kids at home and I wanted to have a bright future for them [P22]'. Most felt that they 'couldn't leave without any [other] employment to go to [P16]' arguing that there was 'dignity involved in working [P20]' and that they were not prepared to 'go on the dole and be seen as a dole-bludger<sup>5</sup> [P9]'.

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<sup>5</sup> "Dole-bludger" is an Australian slang term for a person who lives on unemployment benefits in preference to working.

Only three participants resigned from their positions without securing employment elsewhere. Of these three, one had established a successful career in a different industry, while the other two remained unemployed at the time of the interviews.

The difference between those who construct narratives of violence to account for resignation choices and those whose resignation outcomes are invoked to account for atrocity tales may be determined by the centrality of violence throughout their narratives of organisational change. Respondents who resigned as a result of ongoing violence position all of their stories around these experiences. While respondents' stories shift (Ford, 1999) forwards and backwards (Ronai, 1992), they always return to the theme of violence. The recurrence of violence within the stories provides a form of authentication (Gordon, 1997) and may be used as a linguistic tool (Lempert, 1994) to order and construct reality and make sense of resignation choices.

Alternatively, respondents who used the atrocity tale to justify their resignation tend to focus on violence only when accounting for their decision to resign. These respondents generally fail to centre their narratives on high points. Rather, they describe less direct workplace violence, and often focus on the experiences of other employees rather than their own. Consequently, Mink (1978, p.145) suggests that such stories may simply be a 'product of imaginative construction'. As well as focusing on the experience of others, these narratives have an underlying theme of dislike towards management. For example: 'I just couldn't be stuffed doing anything for them



[management] when change came in...I would try and make it as difficult as possible [P11]'. As another respondent added: 'change stuffed the joint...they [management] tried to explain it to me but I couldn't be bothered listening to anything they had to say...after all they are management [P15]'. When asked about their resignation choices these respondents suggest that management pressured them to voluntarily exit the organisation:

I was on Work Care<sup>6</sup> and I couldn't do my trade...So they had me teaching...a new computer system...I said to the department head, "will I have a job carrying on this line [of work] after the course finishes or will I be back on the tools?" He goes, "oh you'll definitely be back on the tools". And I said that I didn't want to be on the tools, I'd just had my knee done and he said, "Well you'd better leave then". So I did [P15].

In addition, these accounts of resignation choices differ from the central and direct accounts of bullying, intimidation and humiliation experienced by others in a third way. When reporting how they felt after their resignation, respondents who did not focus on violence as the narrative high point stated that, 'I drive past the place and think "you poor suckers. I wonder what crap you're up to in there today". I'm just so glad I don't have to work there any more [P15]'; 'I see the [company] cars and I just don't care. Good on them I say [P11]'.

However, respondents who resigned as a result of violence reflect on their workplaces in a different manner. Some reflect emotions such as sadness: 'I look back at the building and think well you know it might only be bricks and mortar but there's an awful lot more than that [P20]'. Others feel anguish and

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<sup>6</sup> An organisation that promotes occupational health and safety in Australian workplaces and provides financial assistance to individuals injured while performing occupational duties at work.

guilt: 'I know I'm better off but I feel so guilty about those poor guys I left who weren't able to get a job elsewhere [P9]'.

Overall, the narrative suggests that the resignation choices of those who experienced ongoing violence were not easy decisions to make. Rather, participants express feelings of guilt, sadness and concern for the welfare of colleagues and family members who may be affected by their choice. Regardless of the resignation choices made, respondents believe that the violence they experienced was not justified. Consequently, many respondents felt that they were forced to resign from careers and occupations in which they might have otherwise continued throughout their working lives. Accounts of workplace violence and recognition of atrocity tales offer rich opportunities for extending narrative flows and the theorising of organisational change by providing insight into accounts of organisational change that are not readily accessible in management literature. However, the pain associated with these tales should not be theorised into the background of future work. This chapter has revealed that, unlike the success stories told within conversion narratives of the previous chapter, Latrobe Valley talk may also be represented as violence talk. Like all atrocity tales, such talk is hard to tell and may also be difficult to hear.

### **Conclusion**

In this chapter atrocity tales have been explored in an attempt to highlight links between workplace violence and the process of organisational change. The narratives indicate that violence may be experienced covertly, for

example, isolation, removal of power or exclusion, through to more overt incidents such as intimidation, aggression and, in one case, physical violence. In addition, employees suggest that continuous and escalating episodes of bullying caused them to make resignation choices that, in many cases, forcibly removed them from chosen occupations. As opposed to the conversion narratives told in chapter six, a perception within the atrocity narrative is that employees who may be considered as "in the way" or "threatening" to management are more likely to be the targets of violence.

The conversion story highlights a narrative constructed within the front stage region by employees who ensured that appropriate responses to change were adopted and emotions and impressions were managed at work. In contrast, the atrocity tale is constructed predominantly in the back stage, drawing attention to the relationship between violence at work, poor selection of responses and poor management of emotions. It is evident from the exploration of both narrative types that voice as a response to organisational change is used in different ways. Those who told atrocity tales discussed the use of voice as a response to change within the physical boundaries of the workplace. Alternatively, employees who constructed conversion narratives use voice as a response to change in retrospect rather than in the actual situation of organisational change events unfolding. It seems that from the present and previous chapter voice used as a response to change at work is ultimately linked to retribution and in most cases, exit, whereas voice in retrospect is used at a distance from the organisation where impressions are carefully managed.

The following chapter explores the use of voice as a response to organisational change both in situ and in retrospect in more detail. The final chapter then discusses my interpretation of the dramatisation of organisational change narratives, that is, how narratives of change are reported in a manner so as to highlight selected issues to the audience regardless of whether they are constructed as conversion or atrocity narratives. The following chapter also argues that dramatic narratives of change both lend support to and challenge the spectacle that organisational change has become.

## Chapter 9

**Voice and the Dramatisation of Organisational Change**

In Chapters 7 and 8 I highlighted the conversion stories and atrocity tales that are drawn from the narrative plots and themes identified in the interviews. Within these narratives, relationships between responses to change, the management of impressions and the construction of narratives within front and back stage regions were identified. It was argued that the conversion tale draws attention to a relationship between the management of impressions and the ability to obtain career opportunities, while the atrocity tale highlights a relationship between poor impression management, proactive response choice and workplace violence. At the end of Chapter 8, I argued that in both narrative types, voice as a response to organisational change is used in different ways. Those who constructed atrocity tales suggest that the reported use of voice within the workplace in an attempt to change unfavourable conditions. Alternatively, those who constructed conversion stories report that they remained passive and suppressed voice at work.

This chapter explores the reported use of voice as a response to change within the physical boundaries of the organisation, and the relationship between voice, punishment or reward, and the way that narratives are constructed. This chapter also explores how the suppression of voice at work is manifested within the act of retrospectively constructing narratives of change, thus

providing a more complex side to voice than it revealed within the literature reviewed in Chapter 2.

Regardless of whether voice is used within the construction of a conversion story or atrocity tale, what is also evident from this study is that organisational change is increasingly dramatised in the telling. Both the literature reviewed in Chapter 2, and the narratives constructed for this research highlight the dramatic way in which experiences of change are portrayed and explained. For example, literature in Chapter 2 has progressed from the simplistic three-step model developed by Lewin (1947) to encompass more extravagant and extraordinary descriptions of how change is implemented into organisations (Block, 2001; Dehler and Welsh, 1994; Senge, 1994). Furthermore, narratives constructed within this thesis tend to be extreme versions of the romantic and chaos tales discussed in Chapter 4. A second aim of this chapter is to explore the dramatic nature of organisational change narratives, which both lend support to and challenge the spectacle that organisational change has become.

### **The Complexity of Voice in Studies of Change**

This chapter extends the discussion of voice, focusing in particular on the complexity of voice as a response to organisational change, both within the workplace and within the realms of narrative construction. The findings derived from this thesis highlight several limitations in the exit-voice literature, which was reviewed in Chapter 2, and discussed in the context of this research in Chapter 6. Firstly, voice is considered to be a response to dissatisfaction used in situ, within the confines of the organisation and

according to the events that unfold. The literature lacks discussion of how employees respond to change beyond the workplace. The exit-voice literature tends to be a top-down focus on how employees respond to change at work and how they are expected to respond. Findings in this thesis suggest that response choices are not necessarily dependent on the employee's level of commitment to the organisation. Rather, other contributing factors need to be considered and employee accounts included.

While Chapter 6 links five participants' passivity to loyalty, the remaining participants' choices appear to be linked more with retribution or reward than with levels of commitment to the organisation. While voice is reported by employees in Chapter 6 as being a proactive way in which respondents could alert management of their dissatisfaction, it is clear from this research that voice was not considered as a constructive response to change by managers. Rather, voice is interpreted as being destructive to employees, and linked to further response choice, such as aggression, passivity and exit, which appear to be a consequence of punishment from managers. Alternatively, employees who remained passive in the organisation linked this decision to factors such as fear, lack of power, being witnesses to others' retribution, and the ability to obtain rewards. This suggests that employee responses to organisational change are more likely to reflect personal rather than organisational interests. The relationship between voice and retribution or reward is explored in the following section in which voice used within the confines of the actual process of organisational change is discussed.

## Voice and the Atrocity Tale

In Chapter 2, I reviewed research conducted by Keeley and Graham (1991) who provide a more complicated version of Hirschman's (1970) concept of voice. While Keeley and Graham (1991) recognise that voice has the capacity to assist managers and organisations in improving their performance, they also argue that using voice can in fact hinder the individual employee. Boroff and Lewin (1997) and Feuille and Delaney (1993) support this view and argue that voice can lead to the demise of an employee's career in the event that it is used to express dissatisfaction. Both studies recognise that voice has the capacity to lead to exclusion and lower promotion rates (Feuille and Delaney, 1993), and in some cases, punishment and dismissal (Boroff and Lewin, 1997).

The relationship between voice and punishment is first evident in Chapter 5, in which several employees construct tales of voice as a proactive response to organisational change and suggest that it led to bullying, abuse and harassment. The relationship between voice and punishment is further highlighted in Chapter 6 in which participants told emotional tales and drew attention to the need to show appropriate emotions throughout the process of organisational change. The display of inappropriate emotions is reported as being subjected to aggression and verbal abuse from managers. Finally, Chapter 8 suggested that relationships between the use of voice at work and the construction of atrocity narratives exist. For example, employees who responded to change using voice believe that this very action is responsible for bullying, exclusion, lower promotion rates and exit.



I didn't want to leave my job...I loved it. However, I couldn't be quiet about organisational change and I constantly raised issues with managers about it...these were not welcome and after I first became active they started to push me out of the organisation. In the end it was the way I reacted to change that I think ultimately destroyed my career [P17].

The natural reaction to something like change I guess is to raise your voice and let the bosses know what you really think of it and them. But then people before me did that and I saw the problems that they had to deal with...like being harassed and picked on by managers all the time and told they were not welcome anymore. Thank God I saw that first! I would have done the same but decided that silence was the only way to keep my job...and I'm convinced to this day that's the reason why I kept mine [P4].

It is noteworthy that one case that constructed a conversion story made the second comment, highlighting that those who benefited from organisational change also perceive that a relationship between voice and punishment exists.

Several researchers reviewed in Chapter 2 argue that voice is a constructive response to change, signalling to the organisation that performance in one or more areas has lapsed. Employees in this study used voice to draw managers' attention to lapses in organisational conditions, job security and organisational change. However, in their narratives employees suggest that voice was not considered by managers as providing a feedback mechanism (Rusbult et al, 1988; Zhou and George, 2001), or an 'efficiency-enhancing function' (Keeley and Graham, 1991, p.352). Rather, the participants suggest that voice was perceived by management as being 'dysfunctional', a use of 'energy that could instead go into performing the organization's mission' (Mintzberg, 1983, p.446), or simply irrational and personalised behaviour seeking to enhance self-goals rather than organisational objectives.

From Chapter 6, it is evident that employees managed impressions and suppressed voice to ensure that behaviour in the workplace was considered functional and goal-directed by managers. Those who felt that they were punished for displaying inappropriate emotions at work suggest that the requirement to suppress voice had detrimental affects on their wellbeing. Prolonged suppression of voice at work was found in Chapter 6 to lead to mental strain and physical illness (Fineman, 1993; Sharrad, 1992) for several employees, including 'depression [P11]', 'lethargy and poor attitude to life [P18]', 'being teary and sad all the time [P16]' and 'aggression [P9]'.

Besides leading to punishment and mental and physical illness, voice is also perceived as being linked to the decision to exit the organisation. The concept of forced exit (Keeley and Graham, 1991) is discussed in the atrocity tales examined in Chapter 8, in which employees perceive that they were subjected to excessive punishment and thus had no choice but to exit the organisation. However, unlike Keeley and Graham's (1991) findings, employees suggest that they were pressured to exit as a result of being 'a popular voice to other staff [P20]', 'threatening to management [P17]', 'generally disruptive in the workplace [P15]', or 'constantly questioning our futures [P9]'.

While employees perceive that they 'did nothing wrong [P18]' by responding to change with voice, it is noteworthy that Deetz (1998, p.159) argues that voice can imply a 'presence of active resistance' within organisations, even though all of the employees, except for two, who exited felt 'no desire to

leave [P20]' a 'great job and great career [P17]'. Being forced to exit, caused resentment amongst employees, which is evident in the following comments:

Knowing that you are wanted out [of the organisation] is a terrible thing, especially when you have built up a lifetime of work and a career that you really enjoy...but I was seen to be too influential towards other [staff]...and regardless of the fact that I didn't really have a problem with change itself, the fact that I challenged it was enough for managers to force me out [P17].

You know I hate [the organisation] for doing what they did to me. I resent them! All I did was try and stand up for myself and tell them the things that weren't working for us as staff...but they didn't want to know. I was branded as a troublemaker for doing nothing but relaying the concerns of people to the boss. But for doing that I was more or less told to leave the place before they found a way to sack me [P5].

Such comments further contradict the argument that voice is a constructive response that can be used to assist organisations in obtaining productivity, high levels of performance and efficiency (Hirschman, 1970; Rusbult et al., 1988; Turnley and Feldman, 1999; Zhou and George, 2001). Furthermore, they also contradict Keeley and Graham's (1991) argument presented in Chapter 2 that, in comparison to voice, exit is a relatively simple and impersonal process that provides insufficient feedback to organisations.

From this section of the chapter, it is apparent that there is a relationship between the use of voice as a response to change at work, punishment and the construction of the atrocity tale. Furthermore, evidence from an employee who constructed a conversion story was used to further highlight the perception amongst employees that punishment is caused by voice at work. It is also necessary to explore the relationship between the suppression of voice, rewards and the construction of the conversion narrative.

### Silence and the Conversion Story

The suppression of voice and management of emotions is reported in Chapter 6 as being a conscious choice for some and a forced choice for others. Those who consciously chose to remain silent, whether as a consequence of fear, lack of power or loyalty, suggest that this decision is linked to promotions and career advancements and thus construct their stories as pre-change and post-change, or in the form of the conversion story. Regardless of why employees suppressed voice at work, a common perception across the narratives is that those who were passive argue that they achieved career opportunities due to 'loyalty [P21]', 'high levels of commitment [P22]', 'good behaviour [P7]', and 'level-headedness [P4]'. They also argue that some employees 'were simply out to make trouble [P2]' and consequently 'made things very difficult for themselves [P12]'. Other employees suggest that management 'did not look favourably at people who caused trouble [P19]' or 'challenged everything that they did all the time [P10]' and argue that 'some people just made the whole process of change harder for everyone with their behaviour [P14]'. One respondent admits that 'change is not an easy time for everyone and no one disputed how hard it was for some' but adds that 'if you valued your future in the company and wanted some security it wasn't in your interests to fight managers [P22]'.

Evidence of a perceived relationship between silence and career advancement is apparent in Chapter 5 and further confirmed in Chapter 7. Employees who exercised silence constructed emotion tales similar to their colleagues.

Furthermore, they argued that emotions and impressions had to be managed at work in order to avoid punishment or retribution. However, while frustration and anger at the change process may be highlighted within the construction of their narratives, these respondents were careful to ensure that such behaviour was not displayed at work. Moreover, this group of respondents was more likely to discuss emotion labour as a positive process, which enhanced the work experience rather than diminished it, in comparison to those who opted for voice.

Within the conversion narratives, employees further confirm that they benefited from organisational change by choosing not to enact voice. As one respondent suggests, 'my life has changed so much for the better and my job is great...all because I kept my mouth shut at the right time [P12]'. Others add that 'coming to work is so much better because you are taken so much more seriously [P21]' and that 'a new position has made me feel great about myself and my work [P4]'. A further respondent adds:

You know its like a new world at work now...I'm in a different part [of the organisation] and have a different job...the pay is heaps more and I am getting recognised as playing a part in the organisation's success...My manager also told me how well I performed when we went through change and that it's a pity others didn't act like me and just keep quiet and keep working...because they could have been rewarded too if they had have behaved [P14].

This comment could be argued as being representative of loyalty towards the organisation. However, it is noteworthy that within the conversion narratives, employees only display loyalty to the organisation and to the organisational change process in the post-conversion story. This suggests that loyalty

expressed by employees in this study may be a product of rewards, rather than rewards being a product of loyalty.

Prior to organisational change, those who constructed conversion stories suggest that they were not particularly loyal to the organisation and that organisational change itself provided the vehicle for becoming loyal, rather than employees passively accepting the status quo (Zhou and George, 2001).

I couldn't give a shit about the company before change...but then management dangled a carrot in front of me and offered me a better job and higher pay. But they reckon that was only because I shut my mouth when the changes were taking place and for that I was a more worthy employee to have...only after that time did I even contemplate feeling any sort of ties to this place [P22].

Management made this big speech about how loyal we were to the company, which is why we didn't kick up a stink during the times of change. That's utter bollocks...we were not, I certainly was not loyal at all...they were a bunch of wankers to work for I thought. But when they started to hand out the money to us and the jobs I started to rethink what I thought about them. But then who wouldn't? At the end of the day it's all about what you can get out of it really. Isn't it? [P4]

While my manager continues to promote me I'll continue to say how good organisational change was and how great the place is to work for. It's as simple as that! [P14]

These comments further confirm the fact that loyalty in this study, or more importantly the decision to suppress voice, is a product of the personal benefits that could be gained from the process of change. While loyalty itself is not the focus of this thesis, it is noteworthy that the decision to become loyal to the organisation may be more complicated than the level of individual commitment. The above comments further highlight the likelihood that employees who appear to be loyal are more likely to benefit from change and construct conversion narratives.

While atrocity tales and conversion stories focus on the decision to use (or not use) voice as a response to change at work, participants in this research reported that they were required to manage their impressions and enact emotion labour. Such reports of organisational change suggest that even those who constructed the atrocity tale were unable to express their concerns about change within the workplace. As a consequence, the narratives indicate that the suppression of voice at work is in many ways manifested within the construction of the retrospective narratives, extending voice as a response to change beyond the boundaries of the workplace.

### **Voice Beyond the Workplace**

In the beginning of this chapter I identified that the confinement of voice to the boundaries of the organisations is a limitation of the exit-voice literature. What employees in this research report that they say or do outside the workplace is not contemplated or identified as an area worthy of further investigation. As a consequence of talking with employees and analysing their stories, the narratives indicate that for some, organisational change is an experience that is on par with death, divorce and other traumatic events, particularly when the respondent is faced with job insecurity or is being forced to exit a much loved career. Therefore, it is difficult to believe that voice as a response to the uncertainty and dissatisfaction caused by organisational change ends in the workplace. For those who experienced change as a particularly traumatic event, I would assume that voice would be used continuously both as a response and as a way of coming to terms with

the impact of change, providing closure or renegotiating places within or outside the organisation.

Prior to discussing the use of voice through narrative construction, I believe that it is significant to explore Keeley and Graham's (1991) concept of pseudo-voice, which may provide a link between the use of voice in the workplace and the use of voice in narrative construction. In the event that employees perceive that they cannot use voice at work, or in the event that it has failed as a response strategy, voice may be redirected to other sources. Keeley and Graham (1991, p.351) argue that pseudo-voice is used when formal and upward communication pathways are unavailable to employees or are perceived as being 'too risky'. When the expression of discontent is unsuccessful, or cannot be aimed at management, individual are likely to accept at a passive level that conditions caused by organisational change are unlikely to be altered through protest, and thus seek to direct voice elsewhere.

What is of particular concern with Keeley and Graham's (1991) argument is that voice that is not directed at management is considered as pseudo, which could easily translate to voice being considered an unreal or artificial response to organisational change when used outside the organisation. From a narrative perspective, the expression of voice as a response to change through storytelling is in no way "unreal" or "pseudo". Rather, the narrative itself acts as a vehicle in which experiences of change are 'molded [and remolded] by all the rhetorical expectations that the [respondent]...has been internalising' (Frank, 1995, p.3) since his or her encounter with organisational change.



Retrospective narratives in this research are used as a form of revenge, closure, or renegotiation and reinterpretation of change at a distance.

In comparison to the conversion stories discussed in Chapter 7, atrocity tales tend to highlight the traumatic nature of change. While the atrocity tale has the capacity to provoke anxiety (Frank, 1995), it provides an interpretation of organisational change that is not easily accessible in the management literature, and provides a challenge to the grand society of organisations that is often presented (Boje, 1995). Even though the atrocity tale introduces subject matter that may be considered as irrational and not worthy for public display, it is essential to consider why individuals construct the atrocity tale in the first place.

From the narratives it is evident that these types of narratives serve a number of purposes for employees in this study. Firstly, the atrocity tale in retrospect enables the employee to express on an individual basis how they really feel about organisational change, rather than having to convey the organisation's preferred narrative. In this manner, the narratives may even be told as an act of revenge against the organisation and the managers involved. Secondly, employees indicate that the events they experienced were so shocking that that they need to tell and retell their stories in order to understand why they occurred, and as a way of putting closure on their past hurts. Finally, five respondents argue that in expressing their tales of organisational change to others, they are often met with disbelief, thus indicating a further need to

voice their experiences as a way of renegotiating and reinterpreting their experiences.

For respondents who told atrocity tales in this research, the opportunity to express how they continue to feel about organisational change is described as being 'important [P11]', 'detrimental for our wellbeing [P16]' and essential for 'coming to terms with what happened [P5]'. Furthermore, reconstructing and reliving events in the form of narratives and stories enables employees to renegotiate their experiences of organisational change within the present contexts of their employment and personal lives. Two employees comment that 'how you feel about change changes according to what you are doing at the time [P10]' and that 'when you think you are okay it sneaks up on you again [P16]'. Therefore, it is important to 'keep telling your stories...not for the sake of the person you are telling but for your own sanity [P9]'. Even with the benefit of hindsight, one employee reports that 'I need to continuously ask myself how I feel about everything that happened to me [P20]', indicating that sometimes 'I feel like I'm completely over the whole thing', while other times 'thoughts of it make me so angry and upset [P20]'.

Employees who told atrocity tales agree that telling stories about the process of change is the only way that they can 'actually believe what happened [P15]' and try to 'figure it all out in my head [P18]'. However, similar to those who constructed conversion stories, the opportunity to 'really tell it like it is [P11]' is reported as being rare. For example:

I welcomed the opportunity to talk to you because you are someone who is not judgemental and who won't give me the old "yeah, yeah I've heard it all before" saga [P9].

I wanted to come and talk to you to see what you wanted to know about change and I must say I am astounded that you want to know about me...I mean why am I so special that you would want to know about me? [P5]

You don't know how important it is for us to tell you these things...it all happened to me about four years ago...but these things simmer away under the surface, and telling you has almost been like some sort of therapy session! [P18]

Besides having limited opportunities to tell their tales, five respondents who constructed atrocity tales comment that they are often met with disbelief when they discuss their experiences of organisational change with others. Two employees state that they have been referred to as a 'bullshit artist [P18]' and a 'bloody liar [P11]' when telling their tales of change. Furthermore, three other employees recall being labelled as 'vindictive [P17]', a 'manipulative bitch [P16]' and a 'whistleblowing troublemaker [P15]' for telling others of the violence they were subjected to by managers:

People would just think you were bullshitting them and making up stuff about managers because you didn't get what you wanted out of change. But it was so much more than that as I have told you...They just thought they knew it all because so and so they knew had gone through change and it wasn't the same for them [P17].

Thus, reconstructing the atrocity tale in retrospect may also provide an important tool for employees to accept and believe that the events that experienced actually happened as well as make sense of them.

In comparison to the atrocity tale, conversion stories appear to be more tidy accounts of organisational change and representative of grand narratives.

However, it is important to note that while the moral or plot of the conversion story may be focused on success, discussions in Chapters 4, 5 and 6 indicate that organisational change is not necessarily experienced as an orderly and tidy process for such employees. Where the conversion story differs from the atrocity tale, the conversion story tends to focus on expressing why silence was used throughout the process of change. Therefore, the conversion narrative provides a vehicle to justify responses to change (or lack of responses) in retrospect, thus serving as a sense-making mechanism, while the atrocity tales may serve as a rationale for exiting the organisation and in some cases terminating a career.

When applied to organisational change, conversion stories may reflect a 'natural desire' (Frank, 1995, p.78) to express wellbeing as a result of change, which is consistent with the norms developed by the organisation. However, like the restitution narrative, conversion stories are not as clear-cut as they first appear. I believe that within the interview settings voice was used as a means of conveying to me that individuals had successfully survived organisational change and, in many ways, come out unscathed, this representing a more extreme romantic plot. Closer analysis of the backstage comments made at random throughout the conversion narrative indicate that the experience of conversion can also contain elements of atrocities (the situation from which the individual was saved), therefore using voice as a means to responding to and making sense of the need to be silent and manage impressions at work.

Back stage comments made within the conversion narratives mainly focus on the inability to use voice, and may be made as a justification as to why employees were not more proactive during the process of organisational change. In addition, employees who constructed conversion stories indicate that the need to respond to change through voice was great as, even though they may have enacted impressions that made them appear as though they were coping, organisational change caused stress, uncertainty and confusion

A further three respondents argue that they felt unable to express their experiences of change to others as they were either 'not interested in knowing about change [P4]', 'had their own problems to deal with [P6]', or simply 'did not understand [P22]'. Thus the retelling of their experiences in retrospect served as an important tool in which their understanding of change could be renegotiated and expressed, as well as the opportunity to simply tell their tale.

This is evident in the following comments:

This whole change thing has really affected me on a very deep level. I know I'm one of the lucky ones and that I have come out with a better job...but that doesn't mean it was any easier for me! I couldn't say what I thought to managers...my wife didn't seem to want to know and my mates were going through similar stresses...After five years you have actually provided me with an opportunity to express what I really think without having to worry about being questioned or ignored...having that opportunity is really important [P4].

Doing this interview has stirred up a lot of shit that I thought was all behind me...but now I realise how angry I am about everything that happened and how much it has impacted on me. You know, when change was going through I didn't say a word to anyone because I was so bloody scared. I came out all right but I still needed the chance to say what I really think about it all...just because I came all right doesn't mean that I didn't suffer [P22].

Sitting here talking to you has made me realise that although I preached that managers were doing the right thing, they weren't. I'm slowly starting to see what a bunch of bastards they were [P6].

Being able to voice my concerns and my feelings about how change affected me as an individual has allowed me to see where I fit into the organisation and how important my job really is in the scheme of things...I now realise that next time change happens there is no reason why I might not end up like some of them other poor bastards [P19].

Such comments indicate that while the conversion story may in many ways reflect organisational change as a tidy process, it provides respondents with a voice, which was not available to them in the organisation. Furthermore, the above comments highlight that organisational change can have ongoing affects in that individuals may not necessarily be aware of the impacts of change until they are reconstructed in retrospect. Therefore, in many ways, the conversion story enables employees to determine how they feel about organisational change even though it has been a positive experience with regard to advancing their careers.

By focusing on conversion stories and atrocity tales as a response to organisational change beyond the workplace, this study also incorporates the linguistic turn (Alvesson and Kärreman, 2000) in organisation studies discussed in Chapter 2. Exploring the experiences of employees through the analysis of narratives has not only provided a further opportunity for marginalised voices to be included in studies of organisational change, it has also added individual stories and a bottom-up perspective to the exit-voice literature. Exit-voice literature in Chapter 2 provides a top-down model of how employees should react to change and what the likely outcomes of such reactions will be. However, this does not provide an understanding of how individuals understand organisational change and act with respect to such situations (Watson, 1994). From this study it is evident that voice as a

response to change is far more complex and complicated than it is often presented, and is thus worthy of further research.

Exploring the way employees talk about change has provided a dark and sinister perspective on one hand, and a perspective on par with grand narratives on the other. Regardless of the narrative type or the perspective that either one expresses about change, the narratives constructed for this research tend to be more dramatised accounts of change than those presented in Chapter 2. The following section of the chapter explores the increasingly dramatic way that accounts of organisational change have been constructed, and investigates how some challenge top-down grand narratives, while others enhance the dramatic and spectacular nature of organisational change.

### **The Dramatisation of Organisational Change**

From the analysis of organisational change literature and narratives throughout the course of this research, I argue that both the literary and employees accounts of change are somewhat dramatised reports. Such accounts are dramatic in that the 'audience can lose themselves entirely in the appreciation' (Goodwin, 1996, p.19) of the narratives, which appear to be constructed in an attempt to highlight particular issues whilst downplaying others. It is possible that what I have interpreted as a dramatised narrative may be a result of my presence as an audience, compelling the participant to deliver a particular script. However, my interpretation of the dramatic nature

of change narratives is also based on the way that they are presented within the management literature.

. Within the organisational change literature change tends to be presented in the form of grand narratives, and is featured as a process that is extraordinary or outstanding, and privileged as being the ultimate way in which change should be viewed. Top-down models project a 'perfect image' (Debord, 1994, p.15) of organisational change, in which 'indispensable packaging...[and] a general gloss' (p.16) are placed on the process of change to highlight its rationality and order. The 'ruling order' (p.19) discourse is then conveyed to the public as the preferred image of change in which conflicting stories are marginalised or ignored.

Top-down accounts of organisational change are dramatic in that they are carefully scripted and performed accounts of change that are presented to the public. While the concept of dramatism presented in Chapter 4 is representative of the story constructed within the front stage region, I believe that bottom-up and traditionally marginalised accounts of change also have a dramatic nature. Atrocity tales reveal a back stage to organisational change that is not so easily accessible in the literature. However, the fact that these narratives are constructed within the interview setting increases the likelihood that they are solicited accounts that are also performed and scripted according to what the respondent believes the researcher should hear. Consequently, atrocity tales, like conversion stories, may be argued to be dramatised versions of change.



Prior to discussing the dramatic construction of narratives within this research, it is noteworthy that I interpret accounts of change reviewed in Chapter 2 to be dramatic. While I criticise top-down models of change as being too simplistic and based on logic and rationality, the development of top-down organisational change research has coincided with the development of extraordinary and spectacular language to describe it. Initial studies of change introduced the term "organisational development", focusing on the planned, rational and incremental manner in which change is implemented in the organisation (Block, 2001; French and Bell, 1973; Warren Muddle and Moore, 1999). However, as discussed in Chapter 2, the unpredictable environment in which organisations have to operate in called for an extension of change theory, which was introduced in the form of organisational transformation. Focusing on the terms alone, it is evident that transformation represents a more dramatic form of change than development (Block, 2001; Fletcher, 1990).

With OT theory, a new language and way of thinking about organisational change was introduced (Fletcher, 1990; Nadler and Tushman, 1993). Rather than relying on simple language such as "unfreezing, moving and refreezing", OT theory refers to organisational change as reawakening (Fletcher, 1990), rebirthing (Block, 2001), as magic or a miracle (Neal, Lichtenstein and Banner, 1999) and as being a highly spiritual experience for organisations and their members (Tosey and Robinson, 2002). I argued in Chapter 2, that although developing models of organisational change use dramatic language, the actual theories behind them are in many ways as simplistic as Lewin's

(1947) model of change. What I consider to be the major difference between models of OD and OT (other than the scale of change) is the way in which transformation theory appears to be extravagant when compared to earlier models of change. It is noteworthy that when the language and dramatic terminology is removed, models of organisational change appear to be quite one-dimensional and monotonous in their representation of what happens in organisations.

When applying the theatrical metaphor and focusing on the front and back stage performances of organisational change, it is arguable that the literature reviewed in Chapter 2 would be considered as a front stage performance. When applying the concept of dramatism, front stage performances are considered to be highly crafted and dramatic (Mangham and Overington, 1982), while those in the back reveal "natural" rather than artificial behaviour (Wood, 2002). Conversion stories are the types of narratives that would be found in a front stage performance as they highlight the benefits that change has brought to employees both in personal and organisational terms. In comparison, the atrocity tale at first glance appears to be not as carefully constructed as the conversion story, thus indicating that atrocity tales may be more representative of natural behaviour.

However, it is evident that the atrocity tale is used in different ways, such as to enact revenge, or to seek closure. From this perspective, such narratives may be as equally, if not more dramatic than those presented in the front region. Similar to top-down models of organisational change, when stripped

to their bare essentials, conversion stories are presented as predictable versions of organisational change in which managers and employees work harmoniously together and live happily ever after. Alternatively, atrocity tales are sated with drama, highlighting stormy relationships, violence, terminations and unhappy endings.

A question that this research raises is: why are narratives of organisational change becoming so dramatic? While I am unable to offer a response to such a question, Boorstin's (1972) work on society's obsession with image may provide a partial answer. Boorstin argues that we have created a world of unreality in which our expectations have become excessive. Therefore, we seek the extravagant, the 'bigger and better and more vivid' (p.6) illusions of what the world should be like. Images of organisational change are no different. Not only does the literature indicate a turn towards change becoming more theatrical and extraordinary, the narratives constructed within this thesis encompass forbidden and dramatic themes, and bigger and better stories and images that are usually unheard of in organisational change literature.

The theatrical metaphor explored in Chapter 4 has also become more dramatic to the extent that it has been replaced with the cinematic metaphor (Wood, 2002). Where the theatrical metaphor concentrates on performances that are considered to be ideal, the cinematic metaphor considers the individuality of each character. The cinematic metaphor 'captures the baffling sense of organization and of organizing within the society of spectacle' (p.11). Rather

than replacing the focus on performances in everyday life, the 'cinema metaphor seeks to stress...the phenomenon of spectacularization of social life...both are dramaturgical...and are related to a vision of the world' (p.16). However, unlike dramaturgy, cinema does not seek to separate behaviours into front and back stage regions, or assume that a conversion story is artificial, while an atrocity tale is representative of natural behaviour. Rather, the cinematic metaphor recognises that both conversion and atrocity tales are likely to contain both 'naturalness and artificiality as texts of an invisible whole' (p.17), therefore, blurring the boundaries between the performances of narrative types. Thus if applied to this study, the cinematic metaphor would be more likely to take individual experiences of change into account, rather than privilege the front stage story. However, it is noteworthy that Wood also recognises that individual accounts under the cinematic metaphor may be considered as superficial, thus suggesting that the top-down accounts of organisational change would still be given privilege, further highlighting the focus on change being presented as a spectacle, or a perfect image, rather than an assortment of ambiguous, confused and illogical accounts.

Society as a spectacle has been subjected to much discussion by authors such as Boorstin (1972) and Debord (1994). Boorstin (1972) argues that society has become spectacular to the point that individuals prefer imaginary to reality thus causing an aberration between what is real and what it perceived to be real. Debord (1994, p.12) also recognises this fascination with imagery and argues that society has an obsession with image, to the extent that 'everything that has directly lived has moved away into a representation'. Narratives

constructed as conversion story could possibly highlight the concern that individuals in this study have with image. Emotions and impressions at work are managed to ensure that a particular image is portrayed to management, contrary to how employees actually feel about the process of change. Similar to the spectacle, conversion narratives appear to put a gloss (Debord, 1994) on the experience of organisational change and draw attention to the benefits that change can provide.

Wood (2002, p.15) further explains Debord's (1967) concept of the spectacle, providing a more in depth understanding of how the spectacle is manifested as a representation:

The spectacle is manifested as grand narrative, totalizing, justifying, legitimizing and celebrating the system. It is not a superficial phenomenon. The whole of society and the social phenomena are based on and permeated by the spectacle. The spectacle is also a product of this same society, a product that results from and refines the system's reflexive rationality...the spectacle provides the script, the act and the speech, and even evaluates the performance. In the spectacle, the individual lacking in individuality seeks – and finds – comfort for her/his needs and her/his desires. In fact, the spectacle itself determines which needs and desires are valid and suitable.

### **Change as Spectacle**

When applied to the context of the present research, it is evident that organisations provide employees with the 'script, the act and the speech' (p.15) as to how change should be experienced and projected to the public. Within the spectacle of organisational change, the performance of employees is also evaluated with those performing correctly reaping rewards and those performing inappropriately suffering the consequences.

Like organisational change, in the event that the veneer of the spectacle is stripped away, it is unlikely that it is as glamorous as it is first depicted. Boje (2001b) supports this argument in his discussion of the spectacle of Las Vegas showgirls. Boje observes that even though the sex industry is stereotypically viewed as being 'degrading and exploitative' (p.202), the narratives constructed in many books and film scripts portray stripping as a glamour industry. However, Boje suggests that stripping, like organisational change, is probably in reality more alienating than it is glamorous or liberating. Ronai's (1992) self-narrative of exotic dancing further emphasises that what is portrayed on the outside is often very different from what happens on this inside. Her bottom-up narrative of dancing and stripping was far from spectacular, with her narrative detailing the disconcerting and dirty side of a performance that may be considered by many as being spectacular. Furthermore, Ronai focuses on the way in which dancers can be exploited by the organisation and violated by the audience, an account that is not readily available in the spectacle or organisational change literature.

The front stage performance or the conversion story, and the top-down narrative of change, can again be compared to the art of striptease and the work of showgirls. Barthes (1972, pp.85-86) argues that the striptease involves 'ritual gestures which have been seen a thousand times before'; using various movements as props and cosmetics that not only 'hides nudity' but also 'smothers the spectacle under a gaze of superfluous yet essential gestures'. When applied to the conversion story, it is evident that respondents

use the appropriate gestures and language that have also been heard a thousand times before within the top-down literature of change. Furthermore, the more a conversion story is constructed, the more likely an individual is to represent organisational change as a spectacle, thus providing the imagery and 'magic' (p.86) necessary to glamorise the change process.

By reading the conversion narrative at the beginning of Chapter 7, it is evident that such narratives lend support to the spectacle of organisational change, rather than seek to challenge it. In comparison, stories such as those constructed in Chapter 8, and the auto-ethnography of Ronai (1992) challenge the notion of the spectacle and draw increasing attention to a side of organisational life that is not explored, or seemingly permitted at the top of the organisation. However, drawing on the discussion of the dramatic nature of the atrocity tale in the previous section of this chapter, it may be argued that the atrocity tale itself is a spectacular narrative of organisational change. Therefore, it may be argued that organisational change as the spectacle does not necessarily have to involve glamour. Rather, highly dramatic tales of change that are of a chaotic or sinister nature, may also be representative of the spectacle from the bottom-up perspective.

While top-down studies of change that exclude the voices of employees continue to transpire, organisational change as a spectacle may only exist as long as studies of change continue to privilege the grand narrative over the stories of individual employees. Furthermore, citing Boje (1995), Oswick and Keenoy (2001, p.224) suggest that the spectacle may have its limitations in

that there is an 'analytic impossibility of sustaining any monological account of social reality'. As discussed in Chapter 2, the limitations of top-down approaches to change are being increasingly recognised. From this thesis it is evident that the experience of organisational change is highly subjective and much more complex and ambiguous than is reported within managerial accounts. Furthermore, it is essential to reinforce that the narratives of change constructed within the top-down literature are simply one interpretation (De Cock, 1998) of change, which should not be privileged at the expense of employee experiences.

Although researchers such as Boje (1995), Butcher and Atkinson (2001) and Collins (1998), amongst others discussed in Chapter 2 question and challenge the reliability and representation of top-down models of organisational change, the spectacularisation of change as a rational and linear process continues. This leads one to question how this can occur when narratives of employees clearly demonstrate the limitations of top-down change approaches to large-scale change within the context of their organisations. In Chapter 2, I reviewed the work of Boje (1995), Butcher and Atkinson (2001) and Collins (1998) who clearly address the limitations of top-down approaches to organisational change. Amongst other things they argue that top-down models focus too much on rationality and linearity (Butcher and Atkinson, 2001), impose stories constructed at management levels onto all employees, while excluding the employee voice (Boje, 1995), and are 'tiresome and repetitive...[while failing] to locate management as an ideology' (Collins, 1998, p.34). On the basis of such literature being available in organisational



and management studies, as well as the narratives constructed within this research, it is astounding to note that the top-down models of change continue to be sanitised and presented as glamorous accounts (for example Block, 2001; Ortenblad, 2001; Tosey and Robinson, 2002) and as frameworks that are applicable to all organisations.

## **Conclusion**

This chapter has focused on the relationships between the reported use of voice and the construction of retrospective narratives. The use of voice as a response to change as the events unfolded appears to be linked to punishment from managers and the construction of the atrocity tale. In comparison, those who suppressed voice and managed their impressions at work obtained rewards, such as promotion and career advancement, and consequently constructed conversion stories.

Although a possible relationship between the reported use of voice and the type of narrative constructed by participants has been identified, this chapter has also highlighted a perception across employees involved in this study that there is a need to manage emotions and responses to change at work. Consequently, employees in this study have indicated that voice as a response to change further manifests itself within the retrospective retelling of their experiences of organisational change.

Retrospective narrative construction provides employees with an opportunity to respond to organisational change at a distance from the organisation and

make sense of their experiences. Furthermore, this thesis has argued that narratives are used for various functions, such as enacting revenge, providing closure, or enabling an employee to renegotiate and reinterpret their experiences of change in the present situation.

A second aim of this chapter was to highlight the increasingly dramatic way in which accounts of change, both within the management literature and this research, are constructed. Conversion stories are representative of carefully scripted and performed organisational versions of change and may be constructed to project a particular image of the organisation to the audience. Although atrocity tales are more likely to be back stage accounts of change, they highlight a different image of change in which employees are victims of violence. Consequently, conversion narratives are supportive of the spectacle of organisational change, while atrocity tales challenge the top-down notion of glamour. However, I have argued that atrocity tales, while dark and sinister accounts of organisational change, may be representative of spectacle from the bottom-up perspective.

## Chapter 10

### **A Perspective From Below**

This thesis has explored how employees talk about their experiences at work and, in particular, how they interpret and construct narratives of organisational change. In conducting this research I have provided a view of how organisational change is experienced from the bottom-up perspective. In Chapter 1, I argued that individual experiences of organisational change are highly subjective and ambiguous and therefore the experiences of those at levels below management cannot be adequately represented by top-down, managerially constructed accounts. Rather, stories of change constructed at the lower levels of the organisation should be merited alongside those constructed at senior levels to provide an insight into how change impacts on employees at different hierarchical stages. In conducting this research, I have endeavoured to contribute to the emergent area of bottom-up organisation studies (Boje, 1995; 2001; Butcher and Atkinson, 2001; Collins, 1998; Wolfram Cox, 1997; 2001) by providing an insight into how employees experience change and what they consider to be the most significant part of the change process. Furthermore, I have explored how employees respond to organisational change, and justify these responses, and how these experiences are reported in retrospect.

Within this chapter, I outline how the methodologies explored in Chapter 3 have contributed to the research findings. The primary findings of the thesis are then investigated, followed by the limitations of the study, before turning to a brief discussion of the opportunities for future research that this thesis has developed.

### **The Research Methodology**

At the beginning of Chapter 3, I featured a quote by Collins (1998) who argues that an understanding of what happens in organisations can only be gained if an appropriate methodology is adopted. Consequently, I adopted a constructivist approach and qualitative methodology to study how individuals talk about and interpret their experiences of organisational change. The constructivist approach is useful in addressing the research questions as it recognises that individuals have multiple realities based on specific experiences (Guba and Lincoln, 1998), that make each person's construction of a process such as organisational change unique. Furthermore, it allowed me to maintain flexibility throughout the process of data collection so that differences amongst the respondents' stories could be preserved, while shared experiences could be explored.

As I was interested in understanding the different constructions of organisational change, I also ensured that the methodology I used did not obscure the respondents' stories of change. A qualitative methodology enabled me to highlight the various ways in which experiences of change

were reported. As argued in Chapter 3, the qualitative methodology provided me with a means of studying organisational change in a 'controllable way' (Perakyla, 1997, p.301) that could reflect rather than manipulate individual representations. As I was seeking to address particular aims and research questions, it was important that some control was exercised to ensure that the process of data collection was limited to the actual subject being researched. However, I did not want to manipulate or control the respondent's stories to the point that I was privileging my expectations or perceptions of bottom-up change above their actual experiences. The qualitative methodology also allowed me to obtain thick descriptions (Denzin, 1989) of organisational change, which contributed to the understanding of individual experiences and what each respondent considered to be significant during the process of change.

To guarantee that context was not lost in the process of placing boundaries on the subjects being discussed throughout the data collection phase, I employed a semi-structured interview format. Using a semi-structured format, I approached the interviews in an informal or conversational manner so that participants were free to construct their version of organisational change within the research boundaries applied by me. Interviews of this nature involved a degree of co-construction in that as the respondent told his or her story, I was able to develop meaning and an understanding of their experiences, or ask them to further explain or highlight particular areas. This mode of data collection suited the type of research questions being addressed as it provided me with the opportunity to ask direct questions when necessary

and seek further clarification of issues that I did not understand. In addition, the respondent was able to focus on the events that they considered to be most significant to them throughout the process of organisational change, further highlighting the ability to gain unique and rich data.

To preserve rather than lose individual stories within the process of data analysis, I adopted Boje's (2001) narrative plot and narrative theme analysis. This method of data analysis allowed me to focus on the ambiguity of organisational change narratives without losing the individual accounts and 'incidences or events' (p.1) that may be lost in the process of turning stories into narrative. While I have interpreted employee stories as conversion and atrocity tales, I have done so without excluding individual accounts. Rather, I have attempted to include rather than marginalise the voices of the respondents. By including their stories I have been able to address how employees talk about organisational change, while focusing on the different ways that each person constructs the narrative.

In Chapter 3, I cited research by Gherardi and Turner (1999) who argue that a limitation of qualitative methodology is that it can be messy and convoluted, and has the capacity to introduce unsuspected twists and turns. This very point supports my rationale for selecting such a methodology. As my primary argument is that employee experiences of organisational change are subjective and unique, a methodology that does not draw attention to the ambiguous and complex nature of social phenomenon would be highly inappropriate. The

primary findings that were derived from using a constructivist approach and qualitative methodology are explored in the following sections.

### **Primary Findings**

The findings from the analysis of narratives throughout this thesis are discussed at length in Chapters 4 to 9. However, in order to link the findings back to the original research questions proposed in Chapter 3, a summary of the research questions and findings is discussed as follows.

- a) How do individual employees (from shopfloor to low-level supervisory positions) who were employed in Latrobe Valley primary industries in the past two decades when large-scale change was implemented, talk about their experiences of organisational change from the bottom-up?

From the analysis of narratives and the subsequent discussions within this thesis, it is evident that organisational change talk within the context of this research is both highly subjective and ambiguous. While this finding is not surprising given the discussion of organisational talk in chapter 2, it is essential that the differences between bottom-up organisational change talk in this thesis, and top-down accounts within the organisational change literature are summarised. Top-down models of organisational change reviewed in Chapter 2 characterise change as being a simplistic and tidy process, in which change is implemented in carefully planned and executed stages. Another

characteristic of the top-down approach to change is that it appears to be based on rationality and linearity, suggesting that change is depicted as a series of logical, sequential stages. Furthermore, reference to employee perspectives is lacking and, in the event that employees are discussed in the literature at all, their opinions and perspectives are often discussed within the context of a managerially constructed narrative, rather than direct input of employee dialogue. In comparison to the models and theories of change discussed in Chapter 2, the narratives constructed by employees and analysed in this research add another perspective to organisational change that is unique to the lower levels of organisational hierarchies within primary industries in the Latrobe Valley.

Even though I have interpreted some of the employee's narratives as being representative of the conversion story, it is important to focus on the actual tales being told within the narrative. The analysis of front and back stage stories in Chapter 4 draws attention to the confusion, ambiguity and uncertainty as reported in participants' narratives that change can cause all employees regardless of whether or not they considered it to be a positive process. All of the employees involved in this study discussed fear of the unknown and insecurity in the workplace. Furthermore, all employees suggested that once large-scale change was introduced into their respective organisations, they became aware that their existence at work was fragile, and that no one could escape the possibility of becoming redundant. I argue that talk such as this is more likely to reflect organisational change discourses



from the bottom-up perspective than that developed in literature as reviewed in Chapter 2.

The findings from addressing this research question suggest that future organisational researchers should pay attention to the critiques of top-down studies and focus on what actually happens at levels other than management. I have only provided one perspective of bottom-up organisational change. However, I have done this on the basis that other researchers have identified the inefficiency of top-down literature in representing what actually happens in organisations. It is surprising that even though literature critiquing top-down studies was available in the mid to late 1990s (Boje, 1995; Collins, 1998) and other bottom-up studies were emerging (Wolfram Cox, 1997), top-down studies continue to emerge without any reference to the authors that have challenged them.

I do not claim to have discovered groundbreaking findings in the area of organisational change, nor do I seek to criticise the existence of top-down models. However, the ambiguity highlighted in this thesis challenges the representative nature of top-down models, while lending support to authors such as Boje (1995), Butcher and Atkinson (2001) and Collins (1998). Like these authors, I am resolute in arguing that further research needs to take into account the minor voices, the social interaction and the language of organisational change that may provide an extremely messy and confusing, but more realistic representation of change discourse in organisations.

- b) How do individual employees report their reactions and responses to large-scale organisational change and what is the rationale for such reactions and responses?

As this research suggests that organisational change talk from the bottom-up is ambiguous, subjective and difficult to predict, it may be safe to assume that employees respond and react to change in different ways, and more specifically, within the context in which they have experienced change. Responses to change were discussed at length in Chapters 5 and 6, highlighting some of the different strategies that individuals use to cope with change. At the beginning of Chapter 5 I drew from the work of Lazarus (1993) explaining that individuals perceive different levels of control over their circumstances causing them to react in different ways. This argument not only supports my findings that employees react and respond to change differently, but also lends greater support to the argument that that way in which individuals talk about organisational change is not adequately reflected in top-down literature.

Initial findings documented in Chapter 5 illustrated the different ways that employees in this research reported reacting and responding to change, focusing specifically on the discussion of voice, social support, abuse and aggression, misbehaviour and deviance, passivity and withdrawal and exit. Those who used voice attempted to change their circumstances through actively challenging managers, seeking information or becoming involved in union and employee boards to represent other staff. However, participants

who used voice as a response to change suggested that voice was perceived negatively by managers and was reported to result in workplace bullying and verbal aggression. As voice was considered by participants to be unsuccessful in gaining control over personal circumstances at work, individuals who initially used it to respond to change further reported becoming either passive or aggressive or eventually exited the organisation as an additional way of responding and coping. These additional strategies of responding and reacting to change were justified as responding to fear (passivity), to frustration caused by the inability to voice concerns without punishment (aggression), or to being "pushed" out of the organisation by management (exit).

Chapter 5 also discussed passivity or withdrawal as a reported response to organisational change. Within this discussion, participants suggested that remaining passive rather than attempting to control their circumstances by using voice was a preferable option for a number of reasons including fear of the unknown, a perceived lack of control over the post change work environment, lack of power, fear of the consequences of using voice and, in two cases, loyalty towards the organisation. Regardless of the rationale behind passivity as a response to change, employees in this research suggested that they were rewarded for remaining silent with career opportunities that were not made available to individuals who used voice, suggesting a preliminary relationship between the choice of response to change and career benefits and drawbacks.

It is noteworthy that all participants' narratives were sated with different types of emotions and all discussed the need to manage emotions regardless of whether or not they considered organisational change to be a success or a failure. The narratives specifically focused on emotions such as anger, fear and disillusionment, which many of the participants suggested were unable to be expressed at work. I found it interesting that even with the benefit of time and hindsight, discussion of organisational change in retrospect had the capacity to inflame such emotional responses, particularly in people who had moved onto more successful stages of their careers.

It is possible that emotional language in the narratives is a product of the ongoing need to manage emotions and behaviour at work when change was being implemented. As I argued in Chapter 6, the effort involved in managing emotions and hiding inappropriate feelings at work over a long period of time is both mentally and physically challenging, particularly as participants were often required to manufacture a set of emotions opposite to what they may have been feeling. Some participants suggested that managing emotions was functional in terms of allowing them to cope with change, while others suggested that it had detrimental effects on their emotional wellbeing. Regardless, all participants discussed the perceived need to manage their behaviour in order to survive in the organisation.

Chapter 6 further explored the relationship between response to change and career benefits and drawbacks. Within the discussion of emotion labour it became clear that participants who managed their emotions well and chose to

remain passive were likely to be targeted for promotions. On the other hand, employees who used voice perceived that managers did not consider them to be abiding by organisational rules and norms and were bullied, excluded from decision-making, had responsibilities removed from them and were pressured to resign from their positions. From this analysis, another important finding emerged initially from the narratives of those who remained passive throughout the implementation of organisational change. This finding highlighted the interview process as providing individuals with the opportunity to tell their stories of change and to "let go" of the stress and emotions they had been experiencing.

From comments documented on pages 191 and 192 I began to realise that responses and reactions to change continue at a distance from the actual events and beyond the physical boundaries of the organisation. Within the interview setting, participants were given an opportunity to use voice, to challenge management decisions, and to express their fears and anxieties about change in a confidential environment. To them, using voice within the boundaries of the organisation carried too many risks, which was confirmed in the narratives of those who actively used voice as a response to change. In Chapter 9 I discussed the use of voice as a response to change beyond the boundaries of the workplace and argued that it is an important finding that should be documented within literature concerning reactions and responses to employee dissatisfaction. I also argued that the exit-voice literature in Chapter 2 provides a top-down model of how employees should react to change and what the likely outcomes of such reactions should be. However,

such literature does not provide an adequate understanding of the context in which individuals develop responses to change. From this study, it is evident that voice as a response to change is far more complex than it is presented within the literature reviewed in Chapter 2, and is thus worthy of further exploration.

The expression of voice through the construction of retrospective narratives is argued throughout this thesis as providing a vehicle for individuals to respond to and remold (Frank, 1995) their experiences. Franks considers this to be important for sense-making purposes, and, based on the evidence from the narratives in this thesis, I argue that it is also important to enact revenge, to gain closure or for individuals to renegotiate and reinterpret change at a distance. The way in which such responses to organisational change were reported, presented and packaged was also of interest in this thesis and is summarised in response to the following research question.

- c) How are employee experiences constructed, reported, presented and packaged?

In analysing interview transcripts, it was initially found that the narratives of change comprise of "front stage" and "back stage" regions, sometimes communicating what is considered organisationally appropriate while at other times articulating views critical of the organisation. This analysis in Chapter 4 highlighted the ambiguous and vastly different ways that respondents report and present their experiences of organisational change. Employees who

constructed narratives of change in the front stage tended to construct stories that would be considered as appropriate at managerial levels of the organisation. Front region narratives focused on the benefits of organisational change to the workplace and to a lesser extent the benefits to the employee.

The content of front stage narratives varied according to the interpretation of change constructed by the employee. However, there were common characteristics across all of the front stage narratives. Impressions that may discredit the individual or the organisation were suppressed and only tales that could have been constructed in the presence of management emerged. Front stage narratives gave the researcher the impression that such stories of change were highly contrived and dramatised versions that tended to highlight the organisation's legitimacy for implementing change.

Narratives of change constructed in the back stage region characterised change as an ambiguous and confusing process. In contrast to the front stage narrative back stage tales focused on the disillusionment, anger and sadness experienced by employees and behaviour of management that would easily bring the organisation into disrepute. Back stage narratives are not constructed for the benefit of managers or the organisation. They highlight personal interpretations that mainly dismiss change as an unfair and unnecessary process that caused undue harm to employees. Front and back stage narrative analysis has provided a means of reporting stories of change in an attempt to highlight the unique interpretations across the individual participants. Moreover, it has revealed that employee descriptions of their

experiences of change are largely autobiographical, and focus on personal and individual experiences rather than organisational processes, which is an obvious contrast from the way in which change is evaluated from the top-down approach.

From the literature reviewed in Chapter 2, it is evident that top-down organisational change is evaluated in relation to positive organisational results (French, Bell and Zawacki, 2000; Tosey and Robinson, 2002; Thurbin, 1994; Watkins and Bostrom, 2000). Furthermore, it may be argued that the conventional OD and OT literature is a romantic tale of the "very good", while studies of resistance could represent the "very bad". However, from this research, I have found that organisational change is evaluated in relation to the benefits or drawbacks that employees experience as a consequence of it.

In their autobiographical narratives I found that employees appropriate existing narrative structures to communicate individual outcomes: they use conversion stories to communicate individual success stories, and atrocity tales simultaneously to highlight personal misfortune and the failings of the organisation and its managers. The conversion stories discussed in Chapter 7 focused on the reporting of narratives featuring organisational change as a turning point. A unique feature of the conversion story is that employees report experiences at work with a clear distinction between pre-organisational change and post-organisational change. Consequently, the conversion story is almost presented as two distinct stories. The post-change narrative is centred on the way in which the organisation has changed for the better and the



benefits that employees could gain from this process. In comparison, the narrative of organisational life pre-change highlights poor employment relations, parochialism and a lack of career advancement opportunities.

It is noteworthy that employees who constructed conversion stories highlight the impact of change on themselves, rather than on the organisation. While they discuss improved organisational cultures, employment relations and pathways for career advancement within their narratives, these are mainly discussed at a superficial level, with the narrative focusing on the benefits that were gained at the personal level. This is particularly evident in the post-conversion stories in Chapter 7. As post-conversion stories unfold, the relationship between response to change and personal gain is revealed. Comments made by employees in Chapter 7 also draw attention to the fact that employees are willing to support organisational change in the event that they can foresee advantages in supporting the process.

Employees who were harmed by organisational change argued that the process was unfair, cruel and inhumane, also reflecting organisational change as a personal process. Incidences of exclusion, bullying and humiliation caused damage to employees, thus leading them to appraise change in these terms. As I argued in Chapter 8, the atrocity tale is merely a way of reporting damage that has been done to an individual (Dingwall, 1977), providing the employee with an opportunity to deal with the removal of power and feelings of loss caused by organisational change. While employees who constructed atrocity tales within this research may be considered as being resistant to

change, the content of the narratives highlights the complexity of resistance and responses to organisational change. Therefore, from the reporting of atrocity tales, I argue that studies of resistance need to include bottom-up rather than only top-down accounts in an attempt to reveal the reasons why employees react and respond to change in the ways that they do, and to determine whether employees are actually resistant to change.

It is noteworthy that within their narratives, several of the employees who constructed atrocity tales argued that they could understand and support the need for change from a business or organisational perspective. However, it is obvious that the damage inflicted on employees far outweighs the benefits that they consider change can have at the organisational level. Rather, change is narrated as an experience of violence and pressure from management to exit.

Atrocity tales reported throughout the interviews were not as easy to understand and piece together when conducting the data analysis. Stories of workplace violence, exclusion, bullying and exit were not reported as linearly as conversion stories. Rather, such tales were representative of Frank's (1995) interpretation of the chaos narrative in that they were highly fragmented, jumping from one story to the next, often lacking any links between events that were being narrated. While conversion stories were not particularly tidy versions of organisational change, atrocity tales were highly ambiguous, muddled and confused narratives that required in-depth analysis.

As mentioned in Chapters 7 and 8, the packaging of employee stories into narrative types was done, not in an attempt to evaluate employee experiences

and stories of change, but to highlight the plots and themes that emerged from the data. Consequently, the construction of the conversion and atrocity narratives is my interpretation of how employee experiences were packaged.

### **Limitations of the Study**

In conducting a constructivist, qualitative study of bottom-up organisational change, there are a number of limitations that I have encountered that need to be addressed. Firstly, conducting qualitative research in itself provides several limitations that have the capacity of impact on the process of data collection, as well as the quality of data that is obtained. While the limitations of qualitative research have been discussed in Chapter 3, there are particular areas of discussion that are worthy of further consideration. Firstly, the nature of qualitative research and the size of the sample used in this study provide some limitations. As discussed in Chapter 3, individuals constructing retrospective accounts of events have the capacity to suffer from memory difficulties (Kahn and Cannell, 1983), thus forgetting to include important information. In addition, respondents may not always clearly articulate what they mean within the interview (Schwartz and Jacobs, 1979), consequently leaving the interviewer to interpret meaning from the narrative. This act could lead to a poor representation of the respondent's story in the written format.

The small sample size used in this research has further limitations in that the accounts of twenty-two respondents may not be considered enough for me to derive narrative plots and themes or develop relationships between different

aspects of the data. However, due to the scope and size of the research project, I believe that a sample size beyond twenty-two respondents would not have been beneficial as I felt that I had reached what Taylor and Bogdan (1998) refer to as the saturation point, in that substantial data had been obtained and new data would not advance the research into different areas of discussion.

The presence of the researcher also has the capacity to distort data. In discussing the work of Boje (2001) in Chapter 3, the researcher invades the individual being researched by placing *etic*, or their frameworks of understanding on the story being created. Therefore, it is essential to acknowledge that responses to change are solicited accounts and a product of an obtrusive exercise in which the researcher creates an artificial setting in which stories are told. Furthermore, respondents may feel compelled to talk about experiences that they either do not consider to be relevant, or they do not want to discuss within the interview at the insistence of the research.

Finally, the selection of the Latrobe Valley as a research site also introduces limitations to the research. While I was interested in individual employee responses to change, the culture in which the employees resided and worked may have impacted on their interpretations of change. Being part of an industrial region, the Latrobe Valley may be argued as being militant, parochial and heavily reliant upon government-generated employment. These characteristics make the Latrobe Valley unique in comparison to other regions in Australia and the world. Therefore, the interpretations of organisational

change provided by employees in the Latrobe Valley may not be representative of the interpretations of change by employees in others parts of the world.

### **Opportunities for Future Research**

As I have argued earlier in this chapter, this study has provided only one perspective of organisational change from the bottom-up. To obtain a further understanding of what happens in the organisation beneath management levels, it is essential that further studies be conducted beyond the Latrobe Valley and beyond the scope of this thesis. Such research would provide a further explanation as to what employees actually think about organisational change, what they consider to be the most significant part of the change process, and the rationale behind this thinking.

This thesis has also highlighted the need for further research in the subject of exit-voice and other responses to organisational change. I have attempted to provide a bottom-up explanation as to why employees chose to use or suppress voice at work. I have also argued that the exit-voice literature is top-down in its approach and therefore inadequate in providing an explanation as to why employees choose a particular response to dissatisfaction caused by change. While the majority of the literature considers voice to be a constructive response, providing useful feedback for managers and organisations, it is clearly evident from this research that voice is the cause of destruction for many employees. This relationship between voice at work and

the destruction of careers is an area that is certainly worthy of further consideration.

Finally, I have criticised top-down models of organisational change throughout this thesis as being simplistic, rational and linear and not at all representative of the bottom-up perspective. However, in studying the process of constructing retrospective narratives, I have come to realise that narrative often replaces fragmented and disjointed stories, bringing with it linearity, chronology and a sense of tidiness. With this knowledge, it is essential that I recognise that the often-simplistic nature of top-down models could be partially caused by the process of retrospective reporting, in which experiences of change from the managerial perspective are tidied and presented in a chronological format. With this in mind, an interpretive, qualitative study of top-down perspectives of organisational change may reveal that managerial experiences are not always as spectacular as the literature suggests.

### **A Final Word: My Retrospective Narrative**

In concluding this research I feel that it is relevant to retrospectively narrate my interpretation of the findings from this thesis. Even though I mentioned in Chapter 1 that a multitude of studies about change have been conducted, I believe that the last word has not been said about change in organisations. The findings from this study virtually require me to speculate about processes of change as seen by employees.

It is tempting for me to contemplate what an understanding of organisational change would look like if the narratives of employees were the only source of information about organisations that I had to draw on, or that researchers were required to develop theoretical models that privileged the perspective of employees above that of managers. While speculation of this type could be accused of doing with the voice of employees what much organisational research has done with that of managers, the exercise certainly would enable me to highlight the salient features of a perspective of organisational change "from below", that is, from the point of view of employees and subordinates in organisations.

If such a model were to be developed, the dominant feature of organisational change would be of a process overwhelmed with confusion and uncertainty. Managers and employees would operate with partial information and from an incomplete understanding, and would be making decisions critical to the organisation and their individual careers on the basis of the limited communication received from those in authority. Processes of change in the organisation, in such a perspective, would be neither organised nor understood, and employees and managers would be like actors on stage performing roles according to individual scripts known only to them. Key decisions would be made haphazardly and in order to service self-needs. Employees and managers would first act, and then construct accounts retrospectively – after the event – in their endeavours to make sense of their experiences for themselves and to justify to others how decisions and choices

were made and that the process of change were deliberate, rational, coordinated, and unfolded according to a carefully articulated pre-plan.

In such a model the participants of change would construct narratives that reflected and serviced vested interests and individual preferences: those who did well as a result of the changes would generate narratives of conversion that highlighted being saved from the unruliness of inefficient work practices, and at the same time speaking well of the organisation and praising the acts of management; those who lost out as a result of the changes, whose careers, sometimes spanning decades, were halted, or who have been demoted these individuals would generate stories of atrocities that highlighted the evils of management and the anguish that they had been forced to endure. They would condemn managers as being shortsighted, destructive, and lacking in compassion.

In such a scenario, researchers would still be collecting data so as to identify and better understand how change occurs in organizations. However, they would devote more time at the shop floor, spending time with employees, conducting interviews, and formally and informally listening to stories which at times may seem difficult to believe, and at other times leave them wondering about the relevance of the stories, and pondering how to make sense of these in the context of conventional wisdom about organisational change where change is staged and processes are rational. They would still endeavour to develop theoretical models of change, although they would find



it difficult to arrange the collected information within diagrams and clearly delineated categories of change.

Indeed, their models of organisational change would emphasise confusion, ambiguity, and the fact that organisations change despite the decisions being made by management. Moreover, researchers would be more alert to the fact that the information that they had collected consisted of retrospective narratives, and they would be well aware that retrospective narratives are social constructs and not neutral, and that retrospective narratives embody versions of past experiences that have been sanitised, "drycleaned" and ordered in the light of hindsight by respondents in order to generate a desired outcome that casts them in a favourable light while simultaneously defining the organisation and its management according to individual present circumstances.

## Appendix 1: Letter of Ethics Approval

6 July 1998

Dr. Harry Ballis  
Sociology  
Gippsland

Ms Melanie Bryant  
Management  
Gippsland

**Re: Project 98/176 – Reflecting on Change: Past and Continuing Employees  
Recollections of Organisational Change in the Latrobe Valley**

Thankyou for the information provided in relation to the above project which was approved by the Standing Committee on Ethics in Research on Humans subject to the provision of further information at meeting B3/98 on Tuesday 2 June 1998.

The items requiring attention have been resolved to the satisfaction of the committee. Accordingly this research is approved to proceed. The project has been approved as conforming to NH & MRC Guidelines. This approval of the project is submitted and if any changes are subsequently made, the Committee should be advised. Please quote the project number above in any further correspondence in include in it the complaints clause:

*Should you have any complaint concerning the manner in which this research (project no...) is conducted, please do not hesitate to contact The Standing Committee on Ethics in Research on Humans at the following address:*

*The Secretary  
The Standing Committee on Ethics in Research on Humans  
Monash University  
Wellington Road  
Clayton Victoria 3168  
Telephone (03) 9905 2052 Fax (03) 9905 1420*

Institutional Ethics Committees are required by the NH&MRC to monitor research projects until completion to ensure that they continue to conform with approved ethics standards. The Committee undertakes this role by means of annual progress reports and termination reports. Please ensure that the Committee is provided with a brief summary of the outcomes of your project when the project is concluded.

The Chief Investigators of approved projects are responsible for the storage and retention of data pertaining to a project, for a minimum period of five years. You are requested to comply with this requirement.

Ann Michael  
Human Ethics Officer  
Standing Committee on Ethics  
In Research on Humans

AM:am

## **Appendix 2: Explanatory Statement**

Date: July 1998

### **Project Title: From Organisational Change to Org. Talk: A Study of Employee Narratives (Project 98/176)**

My name is Melanie Bryant and I am studying for my Doctor of Philosophy at Monash University. A research project is an important component of the course and I am undertaking my research project under the supervision of Dr Harry Ballis, a senior lecturer in the School of Humanities and Social Sciences and Dr Julie Wolfram Cox, a lecturer in the Department of Management.

The aim of this research project is to explore employee accounts of organisational change to gain an understanding of how individuals experience the process of change and to investigate the most significant features of change to them. I believe that this information is imperative in providing a more thorough understanding of organisational change other than managerial perspectives that are usually the only accounts that are made public. I hope that the findings of this research project will be useful in contributing to knowledge in organisational change, organisation studies and management.

I am seeking adults who have experienced organisational change in the Latrobe Valley who are or have been employed in the electricity supply, health care, water, education or paper production industries who are prepared to be involved in an interview. If you are not or have not been experienced large-scale organisational change in one of these industries and/or under 18 years of age, you are unable to participate in this research project. The interview will take approximately one hour of your time, and will be undertaken at your convenience.

No findings which could identify any individual participant will be published. The anonymity of your participation is assured by our procedure, in which your name and/or the name of your organisation will not be used within the interview transcripts. Access to data is restricted to my supervisors and to me. Coded data are stored for five years, as prescribed by University regulations.

Participation in this research is entirely voluntary, and if you agree to participate, you may withdraw your consent at any time by contacting me by telephone or email. You may also decline to participate in any section of the interview, by not participating in particular questions.

If you have any queries or would like to be informed of the aggregate research finding, please contact me on telephone 03 9902 6618 or fax 03 9902 7154.

Should you have any complaint concerning the manner in which this research is conducted, please do not hesitate to contact The Standing Committee on Ethics in Research on Humans at the following address:

The Secretary  
The Standing Committee on Ethics in  
Research on Humans  
Monash University  
Wellington Road  
Clayton Victoria 3168  
Telephone (03) 9905 2052 Fax (03) 9905 1420

Thank You

Melanie Bryant  
03 9902 6618

### Appendix 3: Consent Form

**From Organisational Change to Org. Talk:  
A Study of Employee Narratives (Project 98/176)**

**Melanie Bryant  
Monash University**

I agree to take part in the above Monash University research project. I have had the project explained to me, and I have read and understood the Explanatory Statement which I have retained for my records.

I understand that any information provided by me is strictly confidential and will only be available to the researchers. I also understand that no information that could lead to the identification of any individual will be disclosed in any reports on the project, or to any other party.

I realise that my participation is voluntary and that I can choose not to participate, and that I can withdraw my participation at any stage of the project. I am also aware that recalling past events may at some stage cause psychological distress, in which event the interview may be terminated immediately at my request.

I may request to be shown a transcript of the taped interview so that I am able to modify my responses if I feel that it is necessary to add or withdraw information.

Name: .....(please print)

Signature: .....Date: .....

## Appendix 4: Interview Themes

Due to the nature of the semi-structured interviews themes rather than specific questions have been identified and approved by the Monash University ethics committee. Question based on the following themes were addressed by the participants.

1. Employment history in specified organisation prior to change:
  - occupation
  - length of time employed
  - specific roles
  - status
  - relationship with management and fellow employees
  - commitment to organisation
  - degree of job security
  - individuals' primary objectives within the organisation
2. Period of change in organisation:
  - initial reaction to the change process
  - personal attitudes towards change: feelings toward the change, fear of change, necessity of change, how change would benefit the organisation
  - personal experiences of the change process - most memorable experiences
  - degree of involvement in decision making
  - role played in the change process
  - degree of information about the change process
  - the nature of the change process - how the change was implemented
  - impact of change on identity - self and social
  - acceptance or resistance to change
  - change to work role or job - demotion/promotion, deskilling, multiskilling, increased or decreased job control, degree of autonomy
  - sequence of change events/transition through change process
  - attitudes to possible redundancy throughout the change process
  - degree of job security
  - individuals' primary objectives during the change process

3. After the change process:

- initial reaction to voluntarily departing the organisation (if applicable)
- initial reaction to redundancy (if applicable)
- attitude towards the change process
- change in status
- change in individual identity - self and social
- attitude towards individuals still employed in the organisation
- outcome of events
- attitudes towards redeployment/unemployment
- present attitudes towards redundancy/voluntary departure
- present identity - self and social

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