

TAKING RHETORIC TO WORK:
A DRAMATISTIC ANALYSIS OF ORGANIZATIONAL LEADERSHIP IN
THE OFFICE

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Abstract

This thesis focuses on ways that rhetorical theory can assist in better understanding the dysfunctions of the modern organizational environment. At its root, organizational dysfunction refers to those parts of our organizations that do not function as we think they should. Dysfunction points to “actions of organizational members that defies and violates shared organizational norms and expectations or core societal values, mores and standards of proper conduct.”¹ As an element of focus, this thesis uses Kenneth Burke’s theory of dramatism and dramatisitic methods such as pentadic criticism and cluster criticism to analyze leadership actions within the fictional BBC television programme *The Office*. Using *The Office* as a representative case study, the analysis applies Burke’s theories, and particularly the pentadic elements of Agent, Scene, and Act to gain a more complete picture of the role an office manager can play in an organization’s dysfunction. A more complete picture can then assist in finding solutions to that dysfunction.

Burke’s methods allow for a critic to gain multiple perspectives on the same situation by attributing different terms of the pentad to the same elements of the situation being described. When looking for causes of dysfunction in an organization, often formal leaders are held accountable. But what does it mean to blame the leader? What specific role have they played in the dysfunction? Using Burke’s pentad, this thesis explores three roles that office manager David Brent plays in the organizational dysfunction.

¹ Y. Vardi and Y. Weiner. “Misbehaviour in Organizations: A Motivational Framework”, Organizational Science, (7,1996) 151-65.

The first chapter explores office leader Brent as an Agent of dysfunction and analyzes his own dysfunctions in order to understand the office's dysfunctions. The second chapter looks at the ramifications for labeling Brent as part of the Scene and analyzes how Brent and other scenic elements combine to create office dysfunction. In the final analysis chapter, Brent is labeled as an Act of dysfunction himself which positions Brent as a mere symptom of a larger dysfunction within the organization. The perspectives are combined and contrasted to reveal insights that may have been previously hidden proving that rhetorical theory is a valuable approach to better understand organizations and the people within them.

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For my girls
Susan, Nadia, and Mariska

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Introduction: Taking Rhetoric to Work

Wherever you find yourself, it is hard to deny that ours has become a society of organizations. Despite the ubiquity of organizations, scholars and practitioners alike still work to understand how our modern day organizations function. As lauded Canadian organizational scholar Henry Mintzberg puts it,

We are born in organizations and are educated in organizations so that later we can work in organizations. At the same time, organizations supply us and entertain us, they govern and harass us (sometimes concurrently). Finally, we are buried by organizations. Yet aside from a small group of scholars called 'organization theorists' who study their management, few people really understand these strange collective beasts that so influence our daily lives.²

Given their prevalence, there is value in striving to understand organizations because, regardless of our backgrounds, organizational encounters are becoming a common part of the modern day human experience. Everyone can relate to discussions of organizational life, whether those discussions are about a particular experience with the human resource department at work, the customer service department at the grocery store, or an interaction with a government agency -- we all have stories to share about organizations. One particularly powerful experience that is often shared is when organizations fail to live up to expectations, that is, when they do not appear to function as we think they should.

These tales of dysfunction are interesting because we can all relate to them. We have all experienced dysfunctional organizations – from the company

² Henry Mintzberg, Mintzberg on Management: Inside our Strange World of Organizations (New York, NY: The Free Press, 1989) 1.

that misplaced our paycheque, to the store that provided us with lousy customer service, to the university that seemed to contradict its own policies. As Mintzberg suggests, what is often as prevalent as these acts of dysfunction is our collective lack of understanding of how these acts have occurred. As a central point of this thesis, I intend to explore dysfunctional acts that occur in organizations, particularly those acts associated with formal organizational leaders, with the intention of providing tools for studying organizational problems.

Every organization has leaders within them, and many are competent, intelligent, and hard-working individuals. Yet despite their competency and intelligence we can find a common theme of dysfunction within the organizations they lead and manage. Except in a few isolated cases, it is safe to assume that no one begins their tenure as an organizational leader with the intention of contributing to organizational dysfunction, yet dysfunction is ever-present in organizations. It is this contrasting notion that is of particular interest to study, for when functional people are associated with dysfunctional situations you know you are in the presence of powerful forces³. It is the intention of this thesis to provide a methodology to better understand these powerful forces that are associated with organizational dysfunction and to provide pathways to possible solutions to dysfunction.

In many theoretical approaches to organizations, organizations are treated as entities unto themselves; people attribute to them behaviours traditionally reserved for individuals, such as attitudes, quirks, likes, and dislikes. Although

³ Marshall Gregory, "Ethical Criticism: What it is and why it matters." Style, (Summer 1998) 231.

this approach may have merit when addressing some organizational issues, this thesis approaches organizations as a collective of individuals acting together for a common purpose. Karl Weick believed that studying the behaviour of organizations served no “useful guiding function”⁴ when looking for answers to organizational issues. He postulated that rather than look at organizations as a singular entity, we should instead look to the human acts of organizing, the “processes which create, maintain, and dissolve social collectivities”⁵. Effectively, in order to understand organizations, one needs to understand those individuals who act within them.

To analyse human behaviour within organizations, I have chosen to draw upon key theorists from the academic discipline known as rhetoric. Unfortunately, more often than not, modern definitions of rhetoric have become pejorative and the word itself is popularly understood as “talk without action, empty words with no substance, or flowery, ornamental speech”⁶, yet as a field of study with over 5000 years of rich history, rhetoric can offer a valuable perspective on human nature. At its essence, rhetorical theory is the “art, practice and study of all human communication”⁷ from how we overtly persuade one

⁴ Karl E. Weick, Social Psychology of Organization (New York: Columbia Publishing, 1969) 27.

⁵ Weick, Social Psychology 1.

⁶ Sonja K. Foss, Karen A. Foss, Robert Trapp, Contemporary Perspectives on Rhetoric, 2nd ed. (Prospect Heights, IL: Waveland Press, Inc., 1991) 1.

⁷ Andrea Lunsford in Wayne Booth The Rhetoric of Rhetoric (Malden MA: Blackwell Publishing, 2004) 8.

another⁸ to the study of our misunderstandings and their remedies⁹. Rhetoric is rooted in the essential function of language itself¹⁰ and to study rhetoric is to study how we use language to engage others in cooperative acts.

This thesis is primarily a rhetorical criticism of language used in organizations, particularly language associated with accounts of organizational dysfunction. The language used to describe an event is a shared expression, and like all shared expressions is anchored in “unquestioned beliefs” that a culture “takes for granted without hesitation”¹¹. Communication is dependent on sharing meaning among individuals and often these meanings are implicit and function “typically without our being aware” of them¹². Rhetorical theory can assist in uncovering these shared meanings and exploring the implications that these implicit perspectives can have on our understanding of an organizational situation.

⁸ See Aristotle, “The Rhetoric,” Rhetoric and On Poetics Ed. Freidrich Solmsen. Trans. W. Rhys Roberts. (Franklin Center, Pennsylvania: The Franklin Library, 1954).

⁹ I.A. Richards, The Philosophy of Rhetoric (1936; New York: Oxford University Press, 1965) 3.

¹⁰ Kenneth Burke, A Rhetoric of Motives (1950; Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1969) 41.

¹¹ Chaim H. Perelman and L. Olbrechts-Tyteca, The New Rhetoric: A Treatise on Arguments trans. John Wilkinson and Purcell Weaver (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1971) 21.

¹² Norman Fairclough, Language and Power (New York: Longman, 1989) 83.

When acknowledging a dysfunctional situation, we commonly look to attribute blame for that dysfunction. However, the very act of description of that situation usually contains implicit assumptions about its causes. To describe a dysfunctional act as “a result of poor leadership” as opposed to “a consequence of poor economic times” carries with it a whole host of assumptions about the situation and the individuals within it. This thesis argues that a thorough analysis of descriptions of organizational dysfunction can lead to a more complete understanding of what is occurring in these situations. My primary resource for this analysis is noted rhetorical theorist Kenneth Burke and his theory of the dramatistic pentad. This study will investigate the application of Burke’s pentad as a methodology for studying organizational communication. Burke established his dramatistic pentad as “the most direct route to the study of human relations and human motives via a methodical inquiry into cycles or clusters of terms and their functions”¹³. The method was designed to provide users with a means for understanding motives, attitudes and perspectives by analysing our language use. Although Burke’s methods have been used by scholars in many fields, few theorists have used Burke to directly analyze organizations¹⁴. It is the intent of this thesis to demonstrate that the pentad can be applied to the study of organizations and yield pragmatic results.

¹³ Kenneth Burke, Grammar of Motives (1945; Berkeley: University of California Press, 1969) 7.

¹⁴ See, for example, George Cheney, “The rhetoric of identification and the study of organizational communication”, Quarterly Journal of Speech, (1983); or Phillip K. Tompkins, Communication as Action: An Introduction to Rhetoric and Communication (Belmont, CA: Wadsworth Publishing Company, 1982)

The pentad, as the name implies, encompasses five elements that Burke states are present in every description of a situation. He states that when labeling an event, every description “must have some word that names the act (names what took place, in thought or deed), and another that names the scene (the background of the act, the situation in which it occurred); also, you must indicate what person or kind of person (Agent) performed the act, what means or instruments he used (agency) and the purpose”¹⁵. Burke also recognized that elements of the same event can be labeled in different ways, depending on the perspective held by the labeler. Each perspective holds a certain worldview and assumptions about the reasons behind the dysfunction. Within each perspective, the same elements may take on different labels attributing different motivations behind dysfunctional acts. I will show how Burke’s methods can not only be used to analyze overt descriptions but can also be used as a diagnostic tool to explore perspectives that may be more implicit than explicit.

For this thesis, I have chosen to focus on the analysis and ramifications of differing labels of a formal office leader. In my first chapter I intend to explore the effects of labeling the leader as an **Agent** of dysfunction. This perspective positions the leader as the primary cause behind the dysfunction of the office he leads. Using Burke’s methods, I intend to explain how they can be used to analyze the leader to determine specifically how he is causing, or at least contributing to, office dysfunction and, based on this perspective, what solutions are available to treat this dysfunction. In my next chapter, I will analyze the

¹⁵ Kenneth Burke, Grammar of Motives xxv.

ramifications of labeling the leader as part of the dysfunctional **Scene**. From this perspective, the leader is only one part of a number of elements that are coming together synergistically to cause office dysfunction. Drawing upon Burke, other rhetorical theorists, and organizational theorists, I will show how to determine key elements of the Scene and explain how they work together to create a dysfunctional situation.

In my final analysis chapter, I will examine the effects of labeling the leader as an **Act** of dysfunction himself. This perspective shifts the primary blame for dysfunction away from the leader and onto the individuals who hired him into the position. This perspective most appropriately shows the power of Burke's methodology for it views the leader in a non-traditional way which assists in shifting a critic out of a comfortable analytical approach. No longer the creator of dysfunction, the leader is now a mere symptom of larger organizational issues. This shift can serve the critic by allowing the pentad to "detect and correct for bias in an interpretation, serving as the basis for efforts to overcome the limitations of a single critical vocabulary"¹⁶. Purposefully analyzing perspectives not usually taken can reveal insights into the situation that were previously obscured.

As mentioned earlier, the dysfunctional organization is becoming part of the common human experience and this is evidenced through our popular culture. One of the accepted truths of rhetorical theory is that the popular expressions of a culture's public discourses reflect how that culture perceives

¹⁶ Foss, Foss, Trap, Contemporary Perspectives on Rhetoric 188.

itself and can even help define it. Our popular culture, even our fictional entertainment, reflects how we see ourselves and can be taken as an accurate reflection of our communal values.

One popular reflection of this common human experience of dysfunctional organizations is the television series, *The Office*. Although most readers are probably familiar with the American version of the series which, as of 2010, is entering into its sixth season, it began in England as a British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC) television series in 2001. The ubiquitous nature of the office experience has not only popularized a duplicate series in America but has spawned versions in France, Germany, Brazil, Norway, Chile, and even a French-Canadian version. Despite cultural and language differences, office dysfunction appears to strike a common chord with international audiences.

The Office displays many common organizational activities such as performance evaluations, training workshops, staff socials, and organizational restructuring. It also contains many familiar office archetypes. Josh Aiello outlines some of these characters we meet, or should avoid, in our office life in his book *60 People to Avoid at the Water Cooler*. He developed this list of archetypes when he realized that “each office he worked in was populated by the same terrible people”, and he says “I trust you’ll recognize them from your nightmares and company picnics”¹⁷. In *The Office*, we see “The Shockingly Incompetent Authority Figure”, David Brent, holding all the power but never quite

¹⁷ Josh Aiello, *60 People to Avoid at the Water Cooler* (Broadway Books, NY, 2004), xii.

understanding his staff. He will serve as the focus of my analysis as I apply Burke's pentad to determine how Brent contributes to organizational dysfunction. Other key archetypes present in the series are "The Brown Noser", Gareth Keenan, who is willing to follow Brent wherever he goes, despite Brent's incompetence. There is "The Disinterested Secretary" (Dawn Tinsely), "The Awkward Accountant" (Keith Bishop) and "The Temp" (Ricky). Other key characters in the series are Tim Canterbury, head salesman and foil to Gareth, Jennifer Taylor-Clarke, Brent's own boss and Neil Godwin, Brent's counterpart at the Swindon branch of Wernam-Hogg and competitor for Jennifer's attention.

Although the organization portrayed in the series is fictional, the situations depicted are altogether typical, and thus familiar to anyone who has spent time in such an environment. The "mockumentary" format is subtle enough to have been mistaken by viewers for a genuine documentary, especially during the early days of the series. While *The Office* setting depicted is specific – a small branch office of a fictional paper distributor, Wernam-Hogg– series creators Ricky Gervais and Stephan Merchant emphasize that the identification of the particular business was less important to them than the realistic depiction of the dynamics of office life¹⁸. *The Office* is a fictional drama, but what makes it important as a

¹⁸ "Ricky and Stephen's Definitive Guide to *The Office*". [BBC.co.uk](http://www.bbc.co.uk/comedy/theoffice/defguide/) ed Ricky Gervais, 2002, 16 Sept. 2004 <<http://www.bbc.co.uk/comedy/theoffice/defguide/>>.

rhetorical object is its function as part of what interpreters of rhetorical theorist Kenneth Burke have called “the drama of human relations”¹⁹.

Burke’s analytic system, known as “dramatism,” is intended to help us uncover, in any situation, “what people are doing and why they are doing it,”²⁰ and thus to “discover the full implications of the terms ‘act’ and ‘person’”²¹.

According to Burke, if we hope to understand human action, and in particular human motivation, we must understand those acts and motives as taking place within a particular scene. Burke explains that a scene not only provides a setting for a given event, but itself inscribes the meaning of that event. As Burke makes clear, the scene contributes more to the commission of the act than physical constraints and structure; it is an emotionally powerful component of its meaning. Thus, “scene both realistically *reflects* the course of the action and *symbolizes* it”²². Conversely, if we want to understand the nature of a given scene – for instance, the contemporary office – we can do so by studying the nature of the actions that typically take place and the lines of association and dissociation that are created within it.

¹⁹ William H. Reuckert, Kenneth Burke and the Drama of Human Relations, 2nd ed. (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1982).

²⁰ Kenneth Burke, A Grammar of Motives xviii.

²¹ Kenneth Burke, “Interaction: Dramatism” International Encyclopedia of the Social Sciences, Vol. 6 (New York: MacMillan Co and the Free Press, 1968) 449.

²² Burke, A Grammar of Motives 3.

In a sense, what Gervais and Merchant have provided is not simply an entertaining television programme, but a realistic “slice of life”: a case study of the interpersonal, social, and professional dynamics of a specific and ubiquitous kind of scene where many of us spend the majority of our time. The contemporary office environment is a powerfully influential scene, and one that shapes our actions at least as much as it is shaped by them. As Burke has pointed out, “the sheer nature of an office, or position, is said to produce important modifications in a man’s character”²³. Thus, I am interested in *The Office* not as an artistic drama so much as a drama of human relations, with much to teach us about the way human motivation and behaviour are shaped and enacted in a contemporary organization.

²³ Burke, Grammar of Motives 16.

Literature Review

The general focus of this thesis is to study dysfunctional actions within organizations. From the perspective of organizational communication, I intend to look at how responsibility is assigned for organizational dysfunction and particularly the ramifications those assignments have for the types of solutions to dysfunction. As a platform for my analysis, I have chosen to focus on the acclaimed BBC programme “The Office”, described as a “satire of TV’s ubiquitous fly-on-the-wall documentary [that dramatizes] the easily recognizable eccentricities, annoyances, and petty rivalries of office life”²⁴. The two years of the series, 12 episodes in total, treat several common organizational issues, including office restructuring, staff morale, office politics, and failures of leadership. To perform this analysis, I plan to approach the subject from a humanistic perspective calling upon theorists who use rhetorically-based methods to investigate human motivation.

Rhetorical Theory

To study rhetoric is to study the ways in which our interactions, and the messages used in those interactions, influence our behaviour toward one another. The study of rhetoric has always been an inquiry into the means and functioning of influence; Aristotle, whose *Rhetoric* is still the most influential treatise ever written on the subject, asserted that the only truly rhetorical

²⁴ “The Office”,_Mark Lewison, The BBC.co.uk Guide to Comedy, 2002 16, Sept., 2004
<http://www.bbc.co.uk/comedy/guide/articles/o/officethe_66602660.shmt>.

practices are those comprised of differing modes of influence, or persuasion.²⁵ Since Aristotle's time, nearly every way of understanding rhetoric has centred on the idea of influence²⁶. Whether rhetoric is described as "the moving of the will"²⁷, a technique for forming attitudes and inducing action in others²⁸, or simply "the art of adjusting people to ideas"²⁹, as different definitions of rhetoric are reviewed it becomes clear that "whenever influence is the end, rhetoric is present"³⁰.

At its most basic, to persuade others is to alter their attitudes or move them to action that they would not otherwise take if left to their own volition³¹. Persuasion achieves the audience's cooperation by appealing to their sensibilities and emotions. In his discussion of the mechanics of persuasion, Aristotle outlined three types of appeals that a speaker can use to influence an audience.

²⁵ Aristotle, "The Rhetoric," Rhetoric and On Poetics Ed. Friedrich Solmsen. Trans. W. Rhys Roberts, (Franklin Center, Pennsylvania: The Franklin Library, 1954) 1354a.

²⁶ Barry Brummett, Reading Rhetorical Theory (Fort Worth: Harcourt College Publishers, 2000) 2.

²⁷ Francis Bacon, "The Advancement of Learning" The Rhetorical Tradition: Readings from Classical Times to the Present, eds. Patricia Bizzell and Bruce Herzberg. 2nd ed. (Boston: Bedford, 2001) 561.

²⁸ Kenneth Burke, A Rhetoric of Motives (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1969) 41.

²⁹ Donald Bryant, "Rhetoric: Its Function and Its Scope" Quarterly Journal of Speech, 39 (December 1963) 401-404.

³⁰ George Kennedy, The Art of Persuasion in Greece (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1963) 7.

³¹ Kenneth Burke, Rhetoric of Motives, 45.

First, a speaker may persuade by appealing to the audience's sense of logic using sound and reasonable arguments. The speaker must construct the argument with care, avoid gaps in logic, and demonstrate a thorough knowledge of the issues being discussed. This mode of persuasion Aristotle calls "logos."

Second, a speaker may draw upon his own credibility or character --- called "ethos" by Aristotle --- to influence people. According to Aristotle, a speaker who communicates the essential qualities of ethos --- good will, good character, and good judgement --- will more readily gain the audience's trust and cooperation, making ethos "the most effective means of persuasion he possesses" (1356a)

Lastly, in order to persuade, a speaker may appeal to the audience's own emotional investment in the subject, a mode of persuasion that Aristotle called "pathos." By demonstrating how what is being asked is in line with values the audience already holds, the speaker incorporates their wants, needs, hopes, fears, and aspirations as an aid to persuasion.

The creation of identification between speaker and audience on which pathos depends is central to rhetorical effectiveness, and relies, as Aristotle explains, on a thorough understanding of "human emotions and goodness in their various forms" (1356a). Aristotle emphasized the importance of pathos appeals by devoting an entire book of his treatise to understanding those being addressed.³² His treatment of human analysis involves a study of various emotions and the means whereby these may be excited in a particular audience.

³² See Book II of Aristotle's "The Rhetoric" (1378a – 1391b).

He focuses on strategies that can assist a speaker in making both himself and his messages more appealing.

Aristotle's treatment of audience has been echoed in every theory of rhetoric since his time. Persuasion depends on securing the cooperation of others, a process that requires understanding of the audience's interests and preoccupations and an ability to appropriately adapt the message to those concerns. Contemporary scholars such as Wayne Booth emphasize that effective persuasion must accommodate the "interests and peculiarities of the audience"³³ regardless of the persuasive purpose. Kenneth Burke similarly explains one can only persuade an audience by speaking their language³⁴, a process that depends on accurately analyzing the individuals who comprise a specific audience. Lloyd Bitzer tells us that it is not enough to be knowledgeable about what moves an audience in general; a speaker must also understand the specific audience well enough to know if they are both willing and capable of effecting the change asked of them³⁵. In short, what Aristotle established and subsequent theorists have emphasized is that careful study of an addressed audience is necessary to effectively move that audience to action.

Clearly, an understanding of the audience's peculiarities, their needs, their 'language' – what moves them – is the foundation of effective persuasion. The

³³ Wayne Booth, "The Rhetorical Stance" (1963) The Essential Wayne Booth ed. Walter Jost, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2006) 58.

³⁴ Kenneth Burke, Rhetoric of Motives 55.

³⁵ Lloyd Bitzer, "The Rhetorical Situation." Philosophy and Rhetoric 1(1968) 3.

ends of rhetoric may be to induce action in an audience through persuasive appeals but the nature of persuasion is to understand those being addressed. In fact, as Perelman and Olbrechts-Tyteca emphasize, an understanding of audience and the ability to influence that audience are so intertwined that the two can hardly be conceived of independently: “knowledge of those one wishes to win over is a condition preliminary to all effective argumentation”³⁶. They argue that persuasion depends not only on a thorough knowledge of audience psychology, but also on the fact that persuasive messages provide a reliable “mirror” of the audience for whom they were created. As they explain, “the particular culture of a given audience shows so strongly through the [messages] addressed to it that we...can rely on them to a considerable extent for our knowledge of the character” of that audience³⁷. The key to understanding why this is so lies in the audience’s own “common sense,” a foundation of implicit values and assumptions that are, as contemporary theorist Norman Fairclough explains, “implicit, backgrounded, taken for granted, not things that people are consciously aware of, rarely explicitly formulated or examined or questioned”³⁸. Audiences are most readily persuaded by arguments that incorporate attitudes and beliefs that they have already accepted, since these arguments will sound

³⁶ Chaim H. Perelman and L. Olbrechts-Tyteca, The New Rhetoric: A Treatise on Argumentation trans. John Wilkinson and Purcell Weaver (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1971) 20.

³⁷ Perelman and Olbrechts-Tyteca, The New Rhetoric 21.

³⁸ Norman Fairclough, Language and Power (London: Longman, 1989) 77.

like common sense to them. Aristotle explains that commonly shared beliefs provide an effective foundation for persuasion “because they are commonplaces, everyone seems to agree with them, and therefore they are taken for truth”³⁹.

The Enthymeme and Implicit Assumptions

A persuasive argument based on common-sense is called an *enthymeme*, a participatory reasoning structure similar to the syllogism. Like the syllogism, the enthymeme links premise with conclusion, but it differs from the syllogism in that the key connection between ideas is left unstated, with the expectation that the audience will supply it from their own common sense. For example, we may know that X is a career politician and therefore believe that X does not always tell the truth. The implied premise in that logic statement is that politicians are generally dishonest. It is a premise that needs not be stated for it is logic generally accepted by our culture. The enthymeme gains its power from the fact that the audience actually helps construct the creator’s argument by supplying the “missing” information themselves. As Aristotle explains, “the enthymeme must consist of few propositions, fewer than those which make up the normal syllogism, for if any of these propositions is a familiar fact, there is no need even to mention it; the hearer adds it himself”⁴⁰. The filling in of the unstated premise requires that the audience participate in the argument, usually without

³⁹ Aristotle, “The Rhetoric,” Rhetoric and On Poetics Ed. Friedrich Solmsen. Trans. W. Rhys Roberts. (Franklin Center, Pennsylvania: The Franklin Library, 1954)1395a.

⁴⁰ Aristotle, Rhetoric and On Poetics 1357a.

recognizing that they are doing so, making it in Aristotle's view, the "heart and soul"⁴¹ of persuasive communication.

Enthymematic arguments are so pervasive a form of human reasoning that they are present in virtually any communicative context. Whether that communication be the nickname given to someone in the office that references a past event, the story that need only be invoked with the vocalizing of one word, or the unwritten rules we all follow when standing in line at the grocery store, enthymemes are there. Due to their pervasiveness, they have drawn the curiosity of researchers from a wide range of fields, including speech communication,⁴² composition studies,⁴³ psychology,⁴⁴ sociology,⁴⁵ politics,⁴⁶ and religious studies,⁴⁷ as well as literature, film and music⁴⁸.

⁴¹ Gerald A. Hauser, Introduction to Rhetorical Theory (Prospect Heights: Waveland Press Inc., 2002) 124.

⁴² See for example: Walter R. Fisher, "Uses of the Enthymeme" Speech Teacher 13 (1964): 197-203; Robert Hopper "Title: The Taken-For-Granted." Human Communication Research, 7:3 (1981) 195-211; L. L. Horwitz, "Blocking the Enthymeme: Does it Unblock Identity Problems in Argumentation" Sic Sat 7 (1999): 382-385; Earl Wiley, "The Enthymeme: The Idiom of Persuasion" Quarterly Journal of Speech, 42 (1956): 19-24.

⁴³ See for example: Wayne Booth and Marshall Gregory, Harper and Row Rhetoric: Writings as Thinking, Thinking as Writing 2nd ed. (New York: HarperCollins, 1991) [esp. 24-29]; Barbara Emmel, "Towards a Pedagogy of the Enthymeme: The Roles of Dialogue, Intention, and Function in Shaping Argument." Rhetoric Review 13:1 (1994) 132 – 150; John Gage. "Towards an Epistemology of Composition" Journal of Advanced Composition, 2 (1982) 1-10; Martin Jacobi. "Using Enthymemes to Teach Business Writing" Bulletin of the Association for Business Communication 49:1 (1986): 30-33; Jeffrey Walker. "The Body of Persuasion: A Theory of the Enthymeme" College English, 56:1 (1994): 46-65.

⁴⁴ See for example: Dale Bertram. "Missing Links: The Use of Enthymemes and Their Applications for Family Therapists" Family Process, 32:3

The implicit nature of enthymematic reasoning is the key to its power and its pervasiveness. The naturalized values upon which it depends are so deeply embedded that they are simply taken for granted by an audience even when they

(1993): 323-328; Erling Eng, "The Significance of the Rhetorical Tradition for the Self Understanding of Psychology" Human Context, 5 (1973) 569-575.; Theodore R. Sarbin "Schizophrenic Thinking: A Role Theoretical Analysis" Journal of Personality, 37 (1969) 190-206.

⁴⁵ See for example: Ricca Edmondson, Rhetoric in Sociology, (London : Macmillan, 1984); David Parkin, "Political Language" Annual Review of Anthropology, 13 (1984) 345-365; Edward Steele "Social Values, the Enthymeme, and Speech Criticism" Western Speech, 26 (1962) 70-76.

⁴⁶ See for example: Kathleen Hall Jameison, Erika Falk, and Susan Sherr, "The Enthymeme Gap in the 1996 Presidential Campaign" Political Science and Politics, 32:1 (1999) 12-17; Edward Steele and W. Charles Redding, "The American Value System: Premises for Persuasion" Western Speech, 26 (1962) 83-91.

⁴⁷ See for example: D. Hellholm, "Enthymematic Argumentation in Paul: The Case of Romans 6", In Paul in His Hellenistic Context, (T. Engberg-Pedersen. Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1995) 119-79; G.A. Kennedy, New Testament Interpretation through Rhetorical Criticism, (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1984); Vernon Robbins, Jesus the Teacher: A Socio-Rhetorical Interpretation of Mark, (1992; Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1984); W. Wuellner, "A Comparative Study of the Use of Enthymemes in the Synoptic Gospels" In Persuasive Artistry :Studies in New Testament Rhetoric in Honor of George A. Kennedy, ed. Duane Frederick Watson. (Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1991).

⁴⁸ See for example: Robert Arnett, "The Enthymeme and Contemporary Film Criticism." Paper presented at the 36th annual meeting of the International Communication Association, Chicago IL, May 22-26, 1986; M. Angela Carson, "Rhetorical Structure in 'The Owl and the Nightingale'" Speculum, 42:1 (1967) 92-103; Lorna Hutson, "Fortunate Travelers: Reading for Plot in Sixteenth Century England." Representations, 41 (1993) 83-103; Walter Jost, "'The Lurking Frost': Poetic and Rhetoric in 'Two Tramps in Mud Time'" American Literature, 60:2 (1988) 226-240; Phillip K. Tompkins "James Joyce and the Enthymeme: The Seventh Episode of Ulysses" James Joyce Quarterly, 5 (1968) 199-205; Thomas P. Walsh "'All's Right with the World': Pippa's Enthymeme" Studies in Browning and His Circle, 15 (1988) 24-34.

are not explicitly discussed. The implication is that an audience can make the leap from premise to conclusion often without realizing that any persuasive argument has been made at all.

Although the enthymeme plays an important role in overt persuasion, its power is best displayed in messages that are not explicitly persuasive. Messages may, on the surface, seem to be anything but persuasive; they may inform, entertain or even lament, but a closer examination reveals that these messages, too, contain persuasive elements that invite us to a shared view of the world. It is important to understand that persuasive intent is not always explicitly signalled; in fact, one of the basic tenets of rhetorical theory is that influence is exerted even – and perhaps most effectively – by discourses that do not appear overtly persuasive, such as office memos, annual reports, and news releases that are for “information only”. Yet each of these communication texts are created for a specific audience and are asking that audience to believe something.

It is for this reason that recent theorists like Sonja Foss have emphasized the persuasive influence inherent in *all* communication,⁴⁹ and have cautioned us, as Kenneth Burke does, to look for rhetoric’s influence even “in places where it is not thought to belong”⁵⁰. It is not simply the explicit argument that persuades, the implicit assumptions that shape the content of communication are just as influential as the content itself. In part, people look to the messages they are

⁴⁹ Sonja K. Foss, Rhetorical Criticism: Exploration and Practice (Prospect Heights, IL: Waveland, 1996) 4.

⁵⁰ Kenneth Burke, Grammar of Motives 15.

exposed to for cues to tell them how to view the world⁵¹. For example, news reports are largely seen as merely informative forms of communication but many critics have argued that even they possess naturalized values that position a story to support a particular opinion, thus attempting to persuade an audience to share that opinion⁵². We may look for objectivity and wish to remain objective ourselves, but as Richard Weaver explains, despite our best efforts, this task is “impossible and even ridiculous” because naturalized values are inherent in *all* communication, and therefore *all* communication promotes *some* world view⁵³.

Similarly, forms of communication that are considered to be mere entertainment, such as television programmes, can also persuade without seeming to do so. By their very nature television programmes resonate with an audience, dramatizing some situation or belief with which they can identify. This identification is also persuasive, because the dramatized experiences are “anchored in the same network of ‘commonsense assumptions’ that drive more

⁵¹ Edwin Black, “The Second Persona,” Quarterly Journal of Speech, 56, (1970) 112.

⁵² For example, Knowlton Nash, “‘Spinning’ the News,” Inside Language: A Canadian Language Reader eds Jennifer MacLennan and John Moffatt (Scarborough, ON: Prentice Hall Allyn and Bacon Canada, 2000) 220-225; or Jen Van Evra, “Headlines vs. the Bottom Line: Editors Aren’t the Only Ones Shaping the News”, Inside Language: A Canadian Language Reader, eds Jennifer MacLennan and John Moffatt (Scarborough, ON: Prentice Hall Allyn and Bacon Canada, 2000) 140-142.

⁵³ Richard Weaver, “Language is Sermonic” Reading Rhetorical Theory ed. Barry Brummett (Orlando: Harcourt Publishers, 2000) 783.

explicitly persuasive artefacts”⁵⁴. In designing a television programme to be entertaining, writers rely on naturalized values to make it appealing to an audience. Thus, as Marshall Gregory explains, “there is no such thing as being ‘merely’ entertained”⁵⁵ by television, since even entertainment requires an audience to assume, and accept, a writer’s point of view. So even a humorous television show about office life is only humorous because it reflects experiences, assumptions and judgements we are familiar with from our own life.

The prominence of implicit forms of persuasion has implications for understanding how influence works. Messages that are overtly persuasive clearly do not tell the whole story, and since so much persuasion is implicit, we must delve beneath the surface to see the implicit persuasions at work. The aim of rhetorical study is to uncover embedded values, these core elements on which we base our daily decisions. Rhetoric reveals these core elements which bring us closer to answering a basic human question: “What are people doing and why are they [really] doing it”⁵⁶?

Rhetoric in Organizational Study

One setting in which the answer to this question is especially significant is the modern organization. Although organizations have existed since early civilization, it is only in modern times that we find them performing virtually every

⁵⁴ Jennifer MacLennan, “Only in Canada, You Say? The Dynamics of Identity in Degrassi Junior High”, Everybody Wants Something: Writings on Degrassi, ed. Michelle Byers (Toronto: Sumach Press, 2005) 149-166.

⁵⁵ Marshall Gregory, “Ethical Criticism: What It Is and Why It Matters,” Style (Summer 1998) 231.

⁵⁶ Kenneth Burke, A Grammar of Motives xv.

task our society needs in order to function⁵⁷. Their very pervasiveness makes them significant, and it is in our own best interests to understand them and the people who comprise them.

Although many scholars have studied organizations, few have done so from a rhetorical perspective. As a method for studying persuasion, and in particularly implicit persuasion, a rhetorical approach can provide significant insight into what persuades us to work together even in organizational situations that are thought to be 'dysfunctional'. Organizational theorist Karl Weick wonders how organizations ever persist or continue to function given the complexity of the relationships they contain,⁵⁸ but the fact remains that organizations *do* persist---often in spite of their dysfunction. Rhetorical study can reveal the persuasive forces at work that bring, and more importantly keep, us together in highly complex organizational structures.

Bringing people together is an important function of communication. It is no coincidence that the word "communication" shares its roots with words like "common," "community," and "communion," for all are derived from the Latin prefix *co-* "meaning "with or together, to share"⁵⁹. The persuasive forces that keep us together, and that sometimes drive us apart, are the subjects of

⁵⁷ W.R. Scott, G.F. Davis, Organizations and Organizing: Rational, Natural, and Open System Perspectives (New Jersey: Pearson Education, Inc., 2007) 6.

⁵⁸ Karl Weick, Social Psychology of Organization (New York: Columbia Publishing, 1969) 35.

⁵⁹ "Communication Etymology", Monmouth College, 8 Oct. 2008 <<http://www.monm.edu/> >

rhetorical study. Many definitions of rhetoric, such as that provided by Roderick Hart, emphasize its primary function as “the building of community”⁶⁰. Kenneth Burke’s emphasis on identification as the “edenic motive” of rhetoric includes an understanding of rhetoric as a “means of inducing cooperation”⁶¹. For Burke as for Hart, the ultimate goal of persuasion is to link with another to achieve cooperation and connectedness. Burke’s concept of rhetoric is evoked even in one of the simplest definitions of an organization -- “a group of people who work together to pursue a goal”⁶².

Organizations are more than just places where people physically come together in order to perform their individual tasks; instead, human cooperation is a necessary part of organizational life, as individuals coordinate their efforts to perform group tasks. Through this cooperation, cultural discourses are produced and shared, enabling individuals to participate in a common worldview. It is this collection of common values in which a communal identity is formed, an identity that their very participation shapes and affirms.

This process of coming together and creating a shared identity is the key to understanding the motivations of organizational life and helps to explain the place of rhetorical study in organizations. By attempting to understand deeply embedded values that form the foundation of persuasion for any audience, we

⁶⁰ Roderick P. Hart, Modern Rhetorical Criticism (Glenview, IL: Scott Foresman & Company, 1990) 36.

⁶¹ Kenneth Burke, Rhetoric of Motives 43.

⁶² Hal. G Rainey, Understanding and Managing Public Organizations 4th ed, (San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass Publishing, 2009) 20.

must recognize that these values are part of a *common* sense; that these values must be, at least in part, shared amongst some group of people. By studying the embedded values of individuals we are given the tools to better understand the embedded values of the community -- or organization -- of which that individual is a part.

Studying commonly shared values can reveal the groups with which an individual most strongly identifies, but this deductive process can work inductively as well. By understanding the groups with which an individual strongly identifies, we gain clues to the values that that individual holds. This is why identification has long been used as a tool for persuasion. The politician who talks about his blue-collar roots is implicitly evoking a set of naturalized values, making implicit statements about his work ethic, his economic views, and even his moral stance⁶³. For example, the organization that uses employees who graduated from the University of Saskatchewan to recruit others from there are doing so to assist those new recruits in seeing themselves with that company. By identifying with a particular group, a communicator can evoke a whole series of ideas and values making "identification-with" a powerful persuasive tool.

Although identification is used as a tool to garner cooperation, Kenneth Burke argues that identification is even more fundamental to our human nature. Burke challenged the traditional views of persuasion, the assumptions that we create identification with others primarily in order to persuade. Burke argued that

⁶³ Kevin Roose, "The Blue Collar Myth" The Brown Daily Herald 9 Oct. 2008: 7.

rhetoric, properly understood, is not a secondary strategy, a means to engender the cooperation of others. Instead, it is our desire for cooperation from others that is secondary to our rhetorical efforts, which are chiefly aimed at fulfilling our most basic, or edenic goal, that of achieving a sense of identification⁶⁴. We need rhetoric because we are not fully identified, or connected, with others. If we could talk as others talk, think as others think, and understand as others understand all the time, there would be no need for persuasion, as everyone would already understand each other's perspectives. But we know we cannot understand each other all the time, and hence we must work to understand and identify with one another in order to even contemplate persuasion. Nowhere is the need for rhetorical analysis clearer than in the study of organizations.

Although rhetoric is heavily linked with the practical and explicit processes of persuasion, the essence of rhetoric is rooted in the implicit understanding of human nature. To understand how persuasion works one must understand those being persuaded. This is why a rhetorical study can do more than simply analyze explicit influence; it can be used to uncover the naturalized values upon which influential appeals are based. Once uncovered, these values can reveal perspectives and orientations that may be held regarding a given situation --- orientations that may not even be known to those who hold them. I will demonstrate in this thesis how a critical rhetorical perspective can be used to uncover and analyze these implicit orientations in an organizational situation,

⁶⁴ Kenneth Burke, A Rhetoric of Motives 46.

how they may affect the actions in that situation, and how they contribute to the function, or dysfunction, of that organization.

Rhetorical Criticism

Rhetorical criticism encompasses many distinct methods that rhetoricians use to examine discourses in order to understand how they work to influence an audience.⁶⁵ Its goal is to understand those rhetorical processes that “enable us to communicate with one another,”⁶⁶ not only to gain insights into the nature of persuasion, but also to understand those who are being persuaded. An array of critical methods provides tools to enable rhetoricians to discover and explain these insights in a systematic, comprehensive and efficient manner⁶⁷.

Established in the early part of the 20th century by Herbert Wichelns,⁶⁸ rhetorical criticism grew out of the study of pragmatic messages, specifically formalized speeches. Wichelns recognized speeches as targeted communication and hence viewed rhetorical criticism as “the analysis and appreciation of the orator’s method for imparting his idea on the hearers”⁶⁹. Since Wichelns’s time, the study of rhetoric, and hence rhetorical criticism, has

⁶⁵ Edwin Black, Rhetorical Criticism: A Study in Method (New York: Macmillan, 1965) 17.

⁶⁶ Sonja Foss, Rhetorical Criticism: Exploration and Practice 4.

⁶⁷ Roderick P. Hart, Modern Rhetorical Criticism (Glenview, Illinois: Scott Foresman & Company, 1990) 23.

⁶⁸ Herbert Wichelns, “The Literary Criticism of Oratory,” Studies in Rhetoric and Public Speaking in Honor of James A. Winans, ed A.M. Drummond (New York: Century, 1925) 181-216.

⁶⁹ Wichelns, The Literary Criticism of Oratory 42.

expanded to include a range of pragmatic forms. Modern rhetorical critic Barry Brummett explains that with the variety of sources of influence that exist today, the scope of rhetorical enquiry has evolved beyond the analysis of the traditional verbal, expository, and discrete texts represented by formal speechmaking⁷⁰. Modern communication media such as radio, television and the Internet have increased the range of those affected by public messages, while increasing the sheer volume and speed at which we are bombarded with persuasive messages.

As the complexity of influential messages increases, so too does their reliance on the enthymeme. Enthymematic arguments are efficient, for they rely on naturalized values and existing public knowledge that circulates freely through various zones and social registers⁷¹. As our understanding of enthymematic reasoning has increased, so has our recognition that persuasion takes place through messages that rely on nonverbal elements, on narrative structures, and on metonymy to “allow the public to ‘get a grasp’”⁷² of complex issues.

With the expansion of popular media, rhetorical critics have applied their craft to a variety of artefacts. Rhetorical criticism has been used to study historically significant documents such as Hitler’s *Mein Kampf*⁷³ and popular

⁷⁰ Barry Brummett, Rhetoric in Popular Culture (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 1994) 65.

⁷¹ Patrick J. McHenry, “Vanguard Assemblages: New Media and the Enthymeme”, KriktoS, (Vol. 2, Sept. 2005) 2.

⁷² Barry Brummett, Rhetoric in Popular Culture 64.

⁷³ Kenneth Burke, Philosophy of Literary Form (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1973).

works such as an advertising campaign for Nike shoes⁷⁴. It has been applied to cultural events, such as the 1999 Columbine shootings⁷⁵ and to the Iditarod, an Alaskan dog sled race⁷⁶. We also see it routinely applied to contemporary media like television shows and movies, such as John Fiske's analysis of *Hart to Hart*,⁷⁷ Barry Brummett's analysis of the *Wizard of Oz*⁷⁸, and Victoria A. Gillam's critique of the *Late Show with David Letterman*⁷⁹. This breadth of analysis is possible because "everyday actions, objects, and experiences are really battlefields, sites of struggle among political and social forces"⁸⁰, each of which invites rhetorical analysis. Rhetorical criticism's breadth of application illustrates its versatility as a method for analyzing persuasion in all of its forms and in all its contexts.

In addition to having been used to analyze different forms of persuasion, rhetorical criticism has also been approached from a variety of perspectives. For

⁷⁴ Darin Arsenault and Tamra Fawzy "Just buy it: Nike advertising aimed at Glamour readers: A critical feminist analysis" Journal of Critical Postmodern Organizational Science, 2001.

⁷⁵ David Blakesley, The Elements of Dramatism, (New York: Pearson Education Inc., 2002) 35-41.

⁷⁶ Colleen Parsons "The Cultural Identity and Resistance: the Symbolic Use of the Alaskan Dog Sled Race" Paper presented at the annual conference of the North West Communication Association, Coeur D'Alene, ID. April 1997.

⁷⁷ John Fiske, Television Culture, (London: Methuen & Co. Ltd., 1987).

⁷⁸ Barry Brummett, Rhetoric in Popular Culture 111-116.

⁷⁹ Victoria A. Gillam "Late Show with David Letterman An Ideological Critique" in Rhetorical Criticism: Exploration & Practice, ed. Sonja Foss. (Prospect Heights: Waveland, 1996) 346-353.

⁸⁰ Barry Brummett, Rhetoric of Popular Culture 5.

example, it is possible to analyze an artifact by focusing on issues of power, using the methods of Marxist criticism⁸¹ and feminist criticism⁸². Other methods can focus on how an artifact presents itself through the medium of story (narrative criticism,⁸³ dramatistic criticism⁸⁴ and fantasy-theme criticism⁸⁵). Yet another option is a text-based approach which uses a method of close reading such as metaphoric criticism⁸⁶ or cluster criticism⁸⁷.

Despite its variety of perspectives, all rhetorical criticism shares common characteristics. Typically, rhetorical criticism “starts from the observation that rhetorical acts are the responses of fallible human beings to situations in which

⁸¹ F. Corcoran, “Television as ideological apparatus: the power and the pleasure.” Critical Studies in Mass Communication, 1:131-45, 1984.

⁸² I.M.Young, Throwing like a girl and other essays in feminist philosophy and social theory, (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press 1990).

⁸³ Walter R. Fisher, Human Communication as Narration: Toward a Philosophy of Reason, Value, and Action, (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 1987) 143-191.

⁸⁴ Kenneth Burke, A Grammar of Motives (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1969).

⁸⁵ Ernest G Bormann, “A Fantasy-Theme Analysis of the Television Coverage of the Hostage Release and the Reagan Inaugural” Quarterly Journal of Speech, 68 (May 1982), 133-45.

⁸⁶ Jane Blankenship. “The Search for the 1972 Democratic Nomination: A Metaphorical perspective” Methods of Rhetorical Criticism: A Twentieth-Century Perspective, ed Bernard L. Brock and Robert L. Scott (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1980) 321-45.

⁸⁷ Kenneth Burke, A Grammar of Motives 3.

certain truth is unattainable and the assent of the audience is unpredictable”⁸⁸. All perspectives seek to understand what is taking place when people interact with one another and when the outcome of that interaction can be debated. The goal of all rhetorical criticism is to call attention to these interactive events, to interpret them, and then finally to judge them⁸⁹.

The value of a chosen rhetorical perspective is ultimately determined by the situation being analyzed and the purpose of the critique. Hart tells us that “there is nothing magical about good criticism. Good criticism is the art of developing and then using critical probes, which are nothing more than intelligent and specific questions to be asked about a given text”⁹⁰. Each rhetorical perspective provides us with different probes, different questions that lead us to our desired answers.

Rhetorical Criticism and Organizational Study

Although modern organizational theorists have developed many methods of study specifically geared towards organizations, there is no specific method of *rhetorical* criticism designed for the study of organizations. Organizational theorist Karl Weick believed that there is not much to be gained by developing methodologies specific to one setting. In his groundbreaking text *The Social Psychology of Organizing* he put forward the notion that organizational study

⁸⁸ Thomas W. Benson ed. ,Landmark Essays on Rhetorical Criticism (Anaheim: Hermagoras Press, 1993) xii.

⁸⁹ Bernard L. Brock and Robert L. Scott, Methods of Rhetorical Criticism (Detroit, MI: Wayne State University Press, 1980) 19.

⁹⁰ Roderick P. Hart, Modern Rhetorical Criticism 36.

should focus first on understanding the general human condition and only becomes *organizational* when that understanding is set against an organizational backdrop. Weick argues that “rather than searching for unique behaviors that occur within an organization and then building a theory about this uniqueness, it seems more useful to build theories about the particular ways that enduring individual dispositions are *expressed* in an organizational setting”⁹¹.

To understand how organizations work, then, we must begin by studying the expressions of human behaviour within an organizational setting. The object of study in this case would then be the acts associated with the day-to-day life of an organization. A focus on human action is appropriate because organizations are sites of constant action. In fact, Weick believed that organizations can only be conceived of in terms of the general act of organizing. He said that to learn about an organization you must “assume that there are processes which create, maintain, and dissolve social collectivities, that these processes constitute the work of organizing, and that the way in which these processes are continually executed *are the organization*”⁹². Organizations can be thought of as a collection of human actions, choices being made and remade through the process of organizing. A rhetorical criticism used to study organizations can then cite human action as an appropriate object of focus.

⁹¹ Karl E. Weick, *The Social Psychology of Organizing* (Reading, MA: Addison-Wesley Publishing Company, 1969) 26.

⁹² Karl E. Weick, *The Social Psychology of Organizing* 1.

Kenneth Burke's Dramatism

As the study of human choice and action and the motivations that drive them, rhetoric is especially suited to the critique of human action in organized contexts. One method of rhetorical criticism that is particularly appropriate to study human action is Kenneth Burke's method of dramatism. Specifically, Burke focused on how we use language to describe our actions. Burke theorized that how we communicate about actions assists in revealing how we perceive those actions; hence, dramatism is the belief that language is a strategic, motivated response to a specific situation⁹³. In dramatism, action is inextricably linked with the concept of choice; an act is the result of a strategic, purposeful choice being made. Burke recognized that the internal and external conflicts inherent in making one choice over another lend a dramatic nature to the human experience. To call life dramatic is then to acknowledge the multitude of choices made in the course of regular human interaction. To study something dramatically is then to study language choices used to describe our actions in order to ultimately uncover the motivations behind them. Put even more pointedly, the ultimate goal of dramatism is to study "what people are doing and why they are doing it"⁹⁴.

It is important to note that *purposeful* is not necessarily synonymous with *explicit* and it is here where the previous discussion about implicit assumptions

⁹³ Em Griffin, A First Look at Communication Theory, 6th ed. (New York, NY: McGraw-Hill, 2006).

⁹⁴ Kenneth Burke, A Grammar of Motives xvii.

bears repeating. Our choices may be grounded in a common sense that is “implicit, background, taken for granted, not things that people are consciously aware of, rarely explicitly formulated or examined or questioned”⁹⁵. Some choices are enthymematic and can become such a naturalized part of a culture that they are seen as being beyond question. Purposefully studying these choices in language can provide insight into the organizational culture and its naturalized assumptions.

The implications of human choices are found in all forms of communication from “systematically elaborated metaphysical structures, in legal judgements, in poetry, fiction, in political and scientific works, in news, and bits of gossip offered at random”⁹⁶. Dramatistic analysis is a strategic method for analyzing communication by focussing on how it attributes motivation to human acts. This is why “simple statements about why people do things, even what they did, are thus potential material for dramatistic analysis”⁹⁷. Dramatism is the systematic study of these language choices, these human acts, with the ultimate goal of understanding the motivation behind those choices

One of the most practical symbolic acts to analyze is the language we choose to use to describe a particular event. Analyzing the language chosen can provide insight into the underlying assumptions present and tease out their implications. This analysis of language choice will in turn assist a critic in

⁹⁵ Norman Fairclough, Language and Power 77.

⁹⁶ Kenneth Burke, Grammar of Motives xv.

⁹⁷ David Blakesley, The Elements of Dramatism 32.

understanding how the situation is perceived and in practical terms can also provide ideas for how to cope with the ramifications of the event.

For instance, consider a typical office situation where a supervisor has fired an employee. To describe that act as one that was ‘a long time coming’ as opposed to ‘completely out of left field’ evokes two completely different interpretations of the situation. In the first description the act appears justified and appropriate and leaves us with a sense that this decision will be good for the organization; in the second, the actions of management appear unpredictable and erratic. Comparing these different descriptions of the same act can provide insight into the culture of the organization, the perceptions of leadership, and the potential effects this act could have on others in the organization.

This deceptively simple act of labeling *what* has occurred affords insight into *why* it has occurred as well. By making a choice to describe an act in one way and not the other, we reveal our assumptions about the perceived motives behind those actions. It is for this very reason that Burke called motives “short hand terms for situations”⁹⁸; each description of motive provides us with a more complete understanding about the situation in which those motivations take place.

Burke views motives not as a phenomenon of psychology but rather a product of the complexities of the communication process, since human motives are created and implied through our symbolic choices. Although Burke is most interested in the way we craft our messages, “in the most fundamental sense,

⁹⁸ Kenneth Burke, Philosophy of Literary Form 64.

Burke's object of inquiry is motive⁹⁹. Accordingly, it is the systematic analysis of our language choice that leads us to understand the full implications associated with the ascribing of a particular motive. To follow from the example above, it is clear that how we describe the event of a colleague getting fired has implications for how we deal with the situation. Our descriptions and our acceptance of other's descriptions can provide insight into: how we should feel about the act; how we should respond to it; how our colleague who got fired is perceived; how our supervisor is perceived; and even the general culture of the office.

Dramatistic Tools: The Pentad

To assist him in his dramatistic analysis of language, Burke developed the five key terms of dramatism, otherwise known as the pentad. He states that when labeling an event, every description "must have some word that names the **Act** (names what took place, in thought or deed), and another that names the **Scene** (the background of the act, the situation in which it occurred); also, you must indicate what person or kind of person (**Agent**) performed the Act, what means or instruments he used (**Agency**) and the **Purpose**"¹⁰⁰. Through these terms Burke teases out the motive, implicit or otherwise, in a given situation. How the communicator has placed these terms assists the critic in better understanding his attitude to the situation.

Ratio and Circumference

⁹⁹ Michael Overington, "Kenneth Burke and the Method of Dramatism" Landmark Essays on Kenneth Burke, ed. Barry Brummett, (Anaheim, CA: Hermagoras Press, 1993) 94.

¹⁰⁰ Kenneth Burke, Grammar of Motives xxv.

The power of the pentad occurs not in the labeling itself but in two facets of the labeling process and subsequent analysis – Circumference and Ratios. **Circumference** refers to the scope of the terms, specifically “the scope of the analytical enterprise, the range of interest, the breadth of study to be undertaken”¹⁰¹. Using the previous example, let’s say it is a mid-level manager who fires an employee for being chronically late. The Act may be viewed in the terms of the immediate situation: a manager engages in the act of uttering certain words to another man (“You’re fired”). With a slightly altered circumference the Act may be defined as providing education about acceptable social roles; the firing of the employee becomes mere feedback on performance expectations in the company. Broaden the scope even more and you may find an Act of victimage, performed by an Agent (manager) wishing to enhance his position in the bureaucracy of the organization. Change the circumference even more and the act becomes the manager’s failure to practice virtues of charity and humility¹⁰². We have the ability to expand the Circumference quite broadly but for practical purposes it is often more appropriate to select a more limited scope.

Burke uses the term **Ratio** to describe an interrelationship among the terms. Invariably, when labeling a situation, one of the five terms will emerge as dominant when analyzing those labels. Discovery of the dominant term provides

¹⁰¹ Micheal George Feehan, *A Dramtistic Grammar of Literary Reception: Perspectives on ‘Leaves of Grass’*, diss. (University of Southern California, 1979) 55.

¹⁰² C. Ronald Kimberling, *Kenneth Burke’s Dramatism and Popular Arts* (Bowling Green, OH: Bowling Green State University Popular Press, 1982) 18.

insight into what dimension of the situation is important to those who perform the labeling¹⁰³. The application of the Ratios involves the pairing of dominant terms with less dominant ones to determine the impact each term has on one another. Using our example above, if we choose our Act to be the more immediate act of the manager firing the subordinate, Burke's Ratios allow a critic to ask how influential the Agent was in performing that Act (Agent-Act Ratio). Or it allows a critic to question the influence the overall Scene had on that Act (Scene-Act Ratio). It is through the Ratios that a critic can gain an understanding of the perspective implied through the labeling.

As the scope of the terms widens and narrows, the interrelationships – the Ratios - may also change. The widening and narrowing of scope and altering the dominance of the terms changes the quality of the motivations. Although seemingly simplistic upon first glance, one can “range far”¹⁰⁴ with these five terms. As a tool of analysis, the simplistic nature of the terms allows them to be accessible to all who may want to use them and they should be used “since all statements that assign motives can be shown to arise out of them and to terminate in them”¹⁰⁵. Yet despite their seemingly simplistic nature, as a critic alters the scope, and subsequently explores the change in dominant terms because of that shift, one can begin to see how Burke's pentad can provide a multi-perspective, multi-disciplinary view of any human interaction. The use of

¹⁰³ Foss, Rhetorical Criticism 460.

¹⁰⁴ Burke, Grammar xvi.

¹⁰⁵ Burke, Grammar xvi.

the pentad is not “steeped in the ideological paradigm of a single academic discipline” and while it may not be able to provide the answer to every problem the pentad “assuredly provides critical insight that cannot be generated by any other method”¹⁰⁶.

Dramatistic Tools: Cluster Analysis

The pentad is only one method available through Burke’s dramatistic theory. Although a few choice labels discovered through pentadic analysis can often be very telling, a thorough analysis of motivation often involves a study of many terms and specifically insight into the frequency and intensity of these terms. This is why Burke encourages critics to use dramatism as a “methodical inquiry into cycles or clusters of terms and their functions”¹⁰⁷. To this end, Burke developed another dramatistic tool that is often paired with pentadic analysis, called cluster criticism, otherwise known as key terms analysis. In this method a critic searches out associative links made in a specific discourse and examines the terms or ideas that cluster together. Cluster analysis is an important and much-practiced part of the dramatistic process that reveals the repetitive nature of a communicator’s associational logic¹⁰⁸. According to Burke, “the work of a writer contains a set of implicit equations. He uses ‘associated clusters’ and you may, by examining his work, find ‘what goes with what’ in these clusters – what

¹⁰⁶ C. Ronald Kimberling, Kenneth Burke’s Dramatism 13.

¹⁰⁷ Kenneth Burke, “Dramatism” International Encyclopaedia of the Social Sciences ed. David L. Sills (New York: The Macmillan Company & Free Press, 1968) 445.

¹⁰⁸ Blakesley, The Elements of Dramatism 103.

kinds of acts and images and personalities and situations go with his notions of heroism, villainy, consolation, and despair¹⁰⁹.

Analysis of the clusters reveal the attitude of the communicator by showing us the ideas that keep repeating through an individual's communication. The "implicit equations" that Burke refers to are Aristotle's enthymemes, the unspoken assumptions that the communicator and the audience share. By uncovering the pattern of enthymemes, a cluster analysis provides "a survey of the hills and valleys of the [communicators] mind"¹¹⁰ revealing insights that may not even be known to them¹¹¹.

When paired with pentadic analysis, cluster criticism can be used to uncover dominant terms when none seem evident. If no term seems particularly important Foss recommends that a critic "simply dives in and begins pairing elements"¹¹² of the pentad. The review of several of the Ratios will produce a pattern which the critic can use to identify a dominant term.

Dramatistic Tools and "The Office"

I intend to show how Burke's dramatistic tools, the pentad and cluster criticism can be employed to provide insight into the day-to-day struggles of organizational life. A rhetorical study requires a specific object; more

¹⁰⁹ Kenneth Burke, Philosophy of Literary Form 20.

¹¹⁰ Kenneth Burke, Attitudes Towards History (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1984) 232.

¹¹¹ Foss, Rhetorical Criticism 65.

¹¹² Foss, Rhetorical Criticism 460.

specifically, a rhetorical study of organizations needs a specific organizational object. To this end I have chosen to focus on the acclaimed BBC programme *The Office*, lauded as a satire of the popular documentary style that dramatizes the common experiences of office life.

Although the organization portrayed in the series is fictional, the situations depicted are altogether typical, and thus familiar to anyone who has spent time in such an environment. *The Office* is a fictional drama, but what makes it important as a rhetorical object is its function as part of what interpreters of Kenneth Burke have called “the drama of human relations”¹¹³. Burke uses the descriptor ‘drama’ not in reference to a literary genre but treats the term literally. Burke believes that human action is dramatic due to the multitude of choices we can make in a given situation. These choices lead to conflict as we must make decisions, explicit and implicit, in order to make one choice, take one path of action. Conflict *is* dramatic, hence Burke’s naming of dramatism.

Burke’s dramatism is intended to help us uncover, in any situation, “what people are doing and why they are doing it”¹¹⁴, and thus to “discover the full implications of the terms ‘act’ and ‘person’”¹¹⁵. According to Burke, if we hope to understand human action, and in particular human motivation, we must understand those acts and motives as taking place within a particular scene.

¹¹³ William H. Reuckert, Kenneth Burke and the Drama of Human Relations, 2nd ed. (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1982).

¹¹⁴ Kenneth Burke A Grammar of Motives (1945; Berkeley: University of California Press, 1969) xviii.

¹¹⁵ Kenneth Burke, “Interaction: Dramatism” IESS 445.

Burke explains that a scene not only provides a setting for a given event, but itself inscribes the meaning of that event. As Burke makes clear, the Scene contributes more to the commission of the Act than physical constraints and structure; it is an emotionally powerful component of its meaning. Thus, “Scene both realistically *reflects* the course of the action and *symbolizes* it”¹¹⁶.

Conversely, if we want to understand the nature of a given Scene – for instance, the contemporary office – we can do so by studying the nature of the actions that typically take place in an office and the lines of association and dissociation that are created within it.

In a sense, what Gervais and Merchant have provided is not simply an entertaining television programme, but a realistic “slice of life”: a case study of the interpersonal, social, and professional dynamics of a specific and ubiquitous kind of scene where many of us spend the majority of our time. The pervasiveness of this office scene produces many stories of office life, stories that can be used as fodder for analysis.

Rhetorical critics have long understood the power of story, in particular its role as “equipment for living”¹¹⁷. Ernest Boorman’s method of Fantasy Theme Criticism, Walter Fischer’s theories on the “Narrative Paradigm”, and Wayne Booth’s analysis in the Rhetoric of Fiction all explore how stories, fictional or otherwise, can assist society in better understanding itself. In The Philosophy

¹¹⁶ Kenneth Burke, Grammar 3.

¹¹⁷ Kenneth Burke, Philosophy of Literary Form (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1973).

of Literary Form, Burke discusses the idea of stories, specifically proverbs, as “medicine” – designed for a specific purpose to help address a specific problem. Proverbs name a reoccurring situation that people have learned from which in turn provide a general guideline for dealing with new situations. Burke asks the question, “why not extend such analysis of proverbs to include the whole field of literature?”¹¹⁸

The pragmatic nature of fiction is not merely relegated to rhetorical scholars, “many social scientists¹¹⁹ tell stories that look remarkably like the products of narrative fiction. Ethnographies and case studies, in particular, use the techniques and forms of narrative fiction to explore the social world in a way nearly indistinguishable from narrative fiction.”¹²⁰ Organizational practitioners also see the value in using fictional accounts as tools for better understanding real organizational life. The Harvard Business Review¹²¹ believes that the study of fictional case studies can offer insights into how real-life offices operate for

¹¹⁸ Kenneth Burke, Philosophy of Literary Form 253

¹¹⁹ For example, James Clifford and George E Marcus, Writing Culture: The Poetics and Politics of Ethnography. (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1986); Barabar Czarniawska, Narrating the Organization: Dramas of Institutional Identity, (Chicago, IL: The University of Chicago Free Press, 1997), Michael Rosen, “Coming to terms with the field: Understanding and doing organizational ethnography” Journal of Management Studies (28/1: 1991)

¹²⁰ Nelson Phillips, “Telling Organizational Tales: On the Role of Narrative Fiction in the Study of Organizations”, Organization Studies (16: 1996) 625.

¹²¹ Benjamin Demott, “Reading Fiction to the Bottom Line” Harvard Business Review (May/June, 1989) 128-134.

“narrative fiction can play an important role in the development of imagination for action”¹²² in organizations.

It’s important to note that fictional accounts, although they may depict real situations and occurrences, do not come without their analytical pitfalls. By their nature, fictional stories are designed to hold the attention of an audience which may result in certain aspects of chronology being compacted or characteristics being exaggerated. We know that *every* moment of office life cannot be fodder for pragmatists. We still need to order office supplies, make photocopies, fill out expense forms, activities that *may* provide no insight into organizational dynamics, and hence dysfunction. Fictional accounts often trim those parts that would not hold our attention and enhance others that do.

What is important to understand when using fiction as an artifact is to ensure the story has what Walter Fisher calls narrative fidelity.¹²³ Narrative fidelity requires a critic to ask: is this story like other stories that I have heard before? In this case specifically, is this story of *The Office* like other stories I have heard of organizational life? Recognizing that certain aspects may be exaggerated it is clear that the nature of the show’s pervasiveness across multiple cultures lends credibility that, as a society, we do recognize these ‘office

¹²² Barbara Czarniawska, Narrating the Organization: Dramas of Institutional Identity, (Chicago, IL: The University of Chicago Free Press, 1997) 27

¹²³ Walter R. Fisher, Human Communication as Narration: Toward a Philosophy of Reason, Value, and Action. (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 1987).

stories' and hence can use them to assist us in trying to understand what people are doing in organizations.

Trying to understand exactly what people are doing in organizations and why they are doing it is part of the modern human experience. As organizational theorist Henry Mintzberg states:

...there is a real thirst out there to understand organizations, in society at large no less than among the managers who try to run them (and who often seem as puzzled by their strange behaviour as the rest of us). Every time I have discussed organizations with people from diverse backgrounds – including self-employed professionals, homemakers, and others who have relatively little contact with them – I have been amazed at the interest in the subject. Someone recounts a bizarre experience in a hospital, another person an incident in an airplane or at an auto dealership. We all need desperately to comprehend these strange beasts that so affect us”¹²⁴.

Organizational Dysfunction

One particular aspect of organizations that critics often try to comprehend is dysfunctional behaviour in organizations. Dysfunctional behaviour is described as “any behaviour that brings harm, or is intended to bring harm, to an organization, its employees, or stakeholders”¹²⁵. This behaviour may range from “low levels of inappropriateness (e.g. inappropriate attire, alcohol use, smoking, inappropriate behaviors, loud talking or radio playing, and tardiness) all the way to sabotage or violent behavior directed toward one or more individuals or the

¹²⁴ Henry Mintzberg, Mintzberg on Management: Inside our Strange World of Organizations (New York, NY: The Free Press, 1989) 2.

¹²⁵ David D. Van Fleet and Ricky W. Griffin, “Dysfunctional Organizational Culture: The role of leadership in motivating dysfunctional work behaviours” Journal of Managerial Psychology, Vol. 21, Issue 8, 2006, 669.

organization as a whole"¹²⁶. The topic of dysfunction is so predominant that most organizational theories deal with the subject in one fashion or another. Weick goes even further by stating that most organizational theories have more to say about an organization's pathology than their normalcy and that nobody seems to know much about how organizations operate in untroubled times¹²⁷. Most theories deal with some facet of organizational dysfunction and seek to label its causes in order to prescribe solutions.

There is value to studying the labels used to describe organizational dysfunction, for it brings us closer to understanding these "strange beasts" and, in particular, to understanding those who inhabit them. As a central focus of my thesis I intend to use Burke's pentadic method to understand the implications for different labels of organizational leadership and their role in defining organizational dysfunction. When an organization is perceived to be dysfunctional, organizational leaders are often scrutinized for their role in the dysfunction, taking the brunt of the blame¹²⁸. Although blaming the leader may seem intuitively simple, even this assignment of responsibility has its

¹²⁶ Griffin Fleet, "Dysfunctional Organizational Culture" Journal of Managerial Psychology 670.

¹²⁷ Weick, Social Psychology of Organizing 34.

¹²⁸ See for example: Stephan Ackroyd and Paul Thompson, Organizational Misbehaviour (London: Sage Publications, 1999) 74-99; or E. Gaucher, E. and E. Kratochwill, "The leader's role in implementing total quality management" Quality Management in Health Care, (Vol. 1 No.3, pp.10-18, 1993); or James Kouzes and Barry Posner, The Leadership Challenge, (San Francisco, CA : Jossey Bass Publishers, 2002) .

complexities. What exactly is meant when it is said that the leader is labeled as responsible for the dysfunctions of an office? Is blame being placed on their actions? Is there dissatisfaction with their leadership style? Are they just not well liked? In attempting to analyze office dysfunction it behooves us to be as specific as possible about its cause in order to more effectively propose a path to functionality.

I intend to use Burke's dramatism to study the ramifications of the terminology used when affixing blame for organizational dysfunction. In assigning responsibility for organizational dysfunction to a formal leader, such as an office manager, the role the leader plays in that dysfunction must be clear. In complex social situations, like an office, any one individual's role is difficult to determine and can be debated; their role may be ambiguous. But it is in ambiguous situations where rhetoric is most appropriate, for a rhetorical approach seeks out situations where multiple perspectives can exist and provides tools to explore each one. In seeking out the cause of dysfunction in human relationships a good critic "uses all there is"¹²⁹ in order to understand what is going on. In an office environment, this understanding can include exploring the multiple roles one can play in contributing to the dysfunction. By looking at how individuals interact with the dysfunction from multiple perspectives, a critic is given a more complete picture of this individual's role.

As Burke states, any description of a situation must provide the answer to these five questions: "what was done (Act), when or where it was done (Scene),

¹²⁹ Kenneth Burke, The Philosophy of Literary Form 20.

who did it (Agent), how he did it (Agency), and why (Purpose)¹³⁰. Labeling with the terms is only the first part of the pentadic method for its true power lies not in where the labels are placed but what their placement can tell us about the situation and the implications for their attribution. In the case of this thesis, what are the ramifications for analysis by indentifying the office leader Brent as different parts of the pentad? What can each of these orientations say about the dysfunctional situation and how can they combine to provide us with a more complete picture of what is taking place?

Structure of Thesis

In my first analysis chapter, I intend to explore the ramifications for orienting Brent as the *Agent* of the organizational dysfunction. This perspective posits that, as the Agent of dysfunction, Brent is the principal cause of dysfunction in the office and therefore solutions to that dysfunction lie with him as well. I will explore the relationship between the Agent and his acts and specifically how Brent's acts lead to the dysfunctions present in the office (Act-Agent Ratio).

Chapter 2 will analyze the effects of identifying Brent as a primary component of the Scene of the organization. Taking this perspective, I will expand our scope to explore how Brent interacts with key aspects of the Scene in order to bring about dysfunction. This orientation still places great emphasis on Brent's acts but opens up the possibility that solutions to the dysfunction may lie within changes to other aspects of the scene as well. Through this analysis, I

¹³⁰ Kenneth Burke, A Grammar of Motives xvi.

intend to explore how the Scene can contain the Acts available to those Agents who are part of the Scene (Scene-Act Ratio).

The final analysis chapter will uncover the implications of orienting our perspective toward Brent as an *Act* of the organization. As an Act of a more powerful Agent, our scope widens even more, in that the role of the larger organization is considered. As an Act, Brent shifts from the cause of office dysfunction to a mere symptom of a broader organizational dysfunction. Solutions to dysfunction do not necessarily lie with Brent himself but in the Agents who put him in his position of leadership.

With the ability to widen the scope and explore different dominant terms, the same situation can be explored from many perspectives. Each orientation provides a different perspective on the same situation and each perspective offers valuable insight into better understanding what is taking place. This thesis will only cover these few perspectives but it is my hope it will serve as an example of how Burke's dramaturgical theories can be used to better understand these ubiquitous environments and bring us closer to finding solutions to organizational dysfunction.

Leader-as-Agent

When an organization is perceived to be dysfunctional, organizational leaders are often scrutinized for their role in the dysfunction, taking the brunt of the blame. Although blaming the leader may seem intuitively simple, even this assignment of responsibility has its complexities. What exactly is meant when it is said that the leader is responsible for the dysfunctions of an office? Is blame being placed on their actions? Is there dissatisfaction with their leadership style? Are they just not well liked? In attempting to analyze office dysfunction a critic has a responsibility to be as specific as possible about its causes in order to more effectively propose a path to functionality.

In assigning the leader responsibility for organizational dysfunction, the leader's role in that dysfunction must be clear. In seeking out the cause of dysfunction in human relationships, as stated in the previous chapter, a good rhetorical critic "uses all there is"¹³¹ in order to understand what is taking place. In an office environment, this may include exploring the multiple roles one can play in contributing to the dysfunction. By analyzing the multiple roles a leader can play in office dysfunction, a critic is given a more complete picture of the leader's true impact. As discussed in the previous chapter, a powerful rhetorical tool that is useful in exploring the same situation from multiple perspectives is Kenneth Burke's dramatic pentad.

¹³¹ Kenneth Burke, The Philosophy of Literary Form (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1941) 20.

The first step in pentadic analysis is to affix the pentadic terms, or labels, to appropriate aspects of the situation. Labeling with the terms is only the first step for true power of the method lies not in where the labels are placed, but in what their placement reveals about the situation. In the case of this thesis, what are the ramifications for analysis when the office leader Brent is described using differing dominant pentadic terms? What can each of these orientations say about their effect on the dysfunction and how can this information combine to provide us with a more complete picture of what is taking place?

To begin the pentadic analysis I will explore the orientation which labels Brent as the 'Agent' of the dysfunctional situation. This perspective puts forward the notion that Brent *the person* has the greatest effect on the functionality of the office environment. Agent-centred approaches stress that people are shapers of their reality and that a given reality exists because of a person or persons. The person and the situation share characteristics and they become consubstantial, in Burke's terms, with one another, for, by labeling Brent as the primary Agent of dysfunction, we are saying that the office is dysfunctional because is dysfunctional. Focusing on Brent as a primary Agent is appropriate because he is present in almost every scene of the series. His dominance, both in personality (as an attention-seeking glory hound) and position (as formal leader of the office), is felt through every plot of the series.

The very act of affixing a label to one of the pentadic terms begins to limit the scope of the other terms. The scope of all the terms is dictated by the scope of inquiry. In this instance, we are searching for reasons for office dysfunction

and identifying the leader, Brent, as the primary Agent of dysfunction both for his personality and his position. Given that it is his position that allows him to influence the office as much as he does it seems appropriate to label the **agency** of dysfunction as Brent's position of formal authority. Concordantly, if the agency is his position, the **scene** must be that part of the organizational hierarchy which Brent has direct influence over, in this case, the Wernam-Hogg Slough Branch office. The **Act** or **Acts** are intimately linked with the **Agent** and the scene and are therefore limited to those acts of dysfunction at that office, for which there are many examples to choose from for this *Agent*.

The final term of Burke's pentad is **Purpose**, or the critics "account of the protagonist's intentions, feelings, and values"¹³². When labeling the leader as Agent with the intent of analyzing his acts of dysfunctional leadership, his purpose is not immediately clear. One can safely take the approach that Brent is not performing acts of dysfunction for that purpose alone – a leader does not *want* to create a dysfunctional environment. So if he is not purposefully performing dysfunctional acts for their sake alone, what is his purpose? When analyzing the leader-as-Agent, purpose becomes important, for in order to find a solution to an Agent's acts it is of great assistance to understand *why* he is performing them. The purpose of a dramatistic study is to understand the motivations behind the actions presented – in this case the motivation behind the acts of dysfunction in this typical office environment. This task is especially

¹³² Sonja Foss, Rhetorical Criticism Exploration and Practice (Prospect Heights, IL: Waveland Press, 1996) 459.

significant in a situation such as this where the Agent's purpose seems ambiguous.

Often, when a leader is blamed for office dysfunction, little effort goes into understanding why the leader was dysfunctional, causing both managers and social scientists to studiously overlook a great deal of organizational misbehavior¹³³. The reasons why the dysfunction occurred are often not considered important, with the attention falling only on their resultant effect on the organization and, more often, on the bottom-line. Once dysfunction is identified, there are usually two oversimplified organizational responses: complicit acceptance of the acts or removal of the perceived dysfunctional Agent from the situation. Little, if any, effort goes into understanding what caused the leader to act in this way and what their intentions were. I posit that by uncovering Brent's purpose, we can complete the pentad and better understand the motivations that led to the acts of dysfunction. Only by attributing motive to the Agent's dysfunctional acts can we begin to seek out more sophisticated solutions to the dysfunction.

The following diagram can be used to illustrate this interpretation of the pentad. By focusing on the leader-as the Agent, the scene and agency are essentially a constant in this perspective and therefore have little ability to be changed to affect dysfunction. For this perspective, we must assume that the leader's formal position and its place in the organizational hierarchy are static. The Agent, at the centre of the situation, creates a series of acts that are

¹³³ Stephan Ackroyd and Paul Thompson, Organizational Misbehaviour (London: Sage Publications, 1999)14.

achieved through his purpose. Each Act, or cluster of Acts, remakes or reinforces the nature of the Agent which can subsequently remake or reinforce the nature of the acts. The following diagram (figure 1) shows the importance of the Purpose because each Act the Agent creates must spring from the Agent's

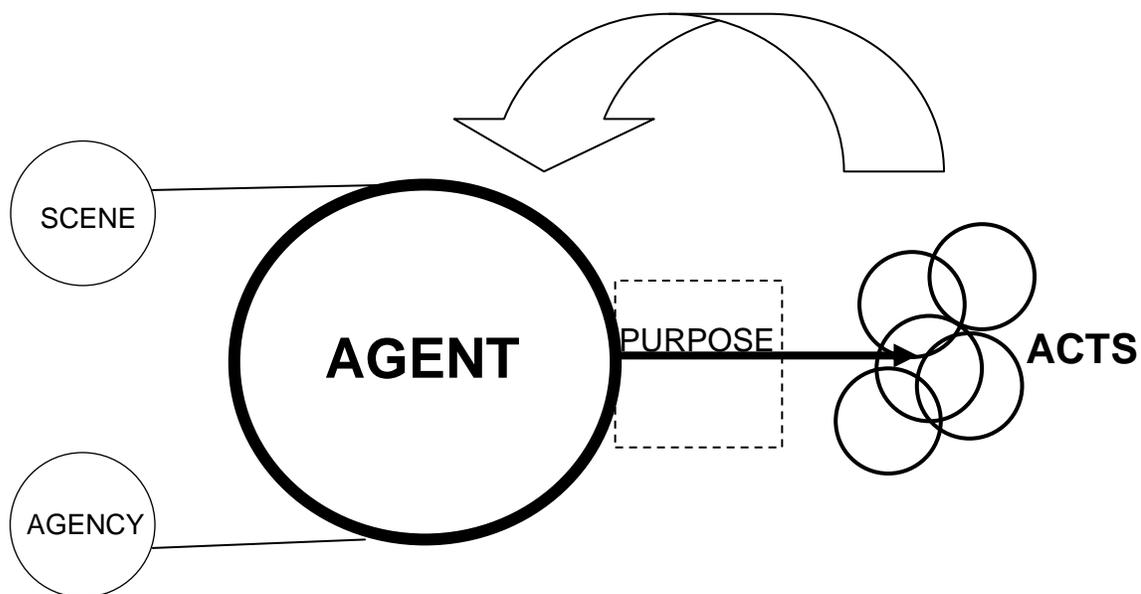


Fig. 1 – Agent Centred Pentad with Unknown Purpose

Purpose. Only by understanding the Agent's Purpose can a critic begin to understand the full relationship between the Agent and his Acts. Without an understanding of Purpose, there are few solutions available to address the dysfunction. Removal of the Agent removes the Agent's Purpose so understanding it becomes moot. Acceptance of the Agent's dysfunctional acts requires no need to understand Purpose. However, any solution that involves a *change* to the Agent's Acts requires an understanding of Purpose.

Once the Agent's Purpose is revealed there are at least two other options available to organizational practitioners. The first involves the altering of the

Agent's Purpose. Once the Purpose is revealed, effort can be put into assisting

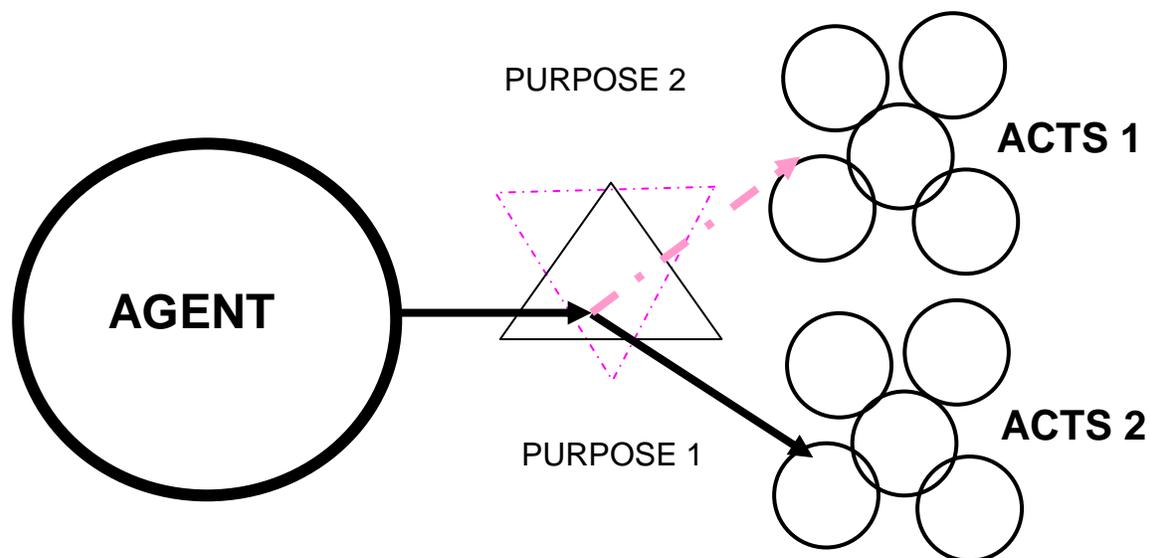


Figure 2 – Agent Centred Pentad with altering Purpose

the Agent to change his Purpose, even slightly, to make it more appropriate for the given work environment. In this case the purpose can be thought of as a prism, and the Agent performing an Act, as a beam of light. As the Agent's Purpose is shifted so to must the acts shift because they must flow through the Purpose in order to be created. If an Agent believes his Purpose as a leader is to maximize profit, he may perform different acts than if he believes his Purpose is to provide excellent customer service. Until the Agent's Purpose is revealed, his acts may seem out of place, even dysfunctional, if the audience's expectations of his actions differ. For example, if others believe the leader's goal is to provide excellent customer service, yet he believes he is there to maximize profits, they may be confused as to why he has reduced the customer service force by firing one of the customer service representatives. In the leader's mind

this may be an efficient way to save money, but the audience is left confused trying to understand this Act within the context of the Purpose geared towards customer service. Another solution available involves accepting the Agent's Purpose but changing the expectations regarding his acts. Changing expectations can involve changing the scope of the leader's position or perhaps moving him into an entirely different leadership position. So, for example, if his purpose is revealed to be 'maximization of profits' then moving the leader from customer relations to finance may seem more appropriate. His profit-motivated actions may make more sense in that part of the organization than in his current one and therefore not seem as dysfunctional. Regardless of the approach taken though, in order to even consider these options, an understanding of an Agent's current Purpose in his current situation is required.

In this study to determine how the Agent's Purpose leads to office dysfunction, we will begin in this chapter by seeking to understand his own personal intentions: what drives David Brent to do what he does? As discussed in the previous chapter, often we are not aware of the implicit assumptions that drive us. The enthymematic nature of our assumptions requires explicit analysis in order to reveal our true motivators. By uncovering the implicit purpose behind his acts, we will be able to understand what it is that makes Brent an "Agent of dysfunction". One clear way to understand Brent's intentions is to seek to resolve his words and his actions. How does Brent describe himself to others, how do his actions line up with his words, and what does their comparison reveal about the Purpose of his Acts?

A critic looks to analyze the connection between an Agent and his acts in terms of the “Act-Agent Ratio”. Burke uses the term “Ratios” not in any mathematical sense of the word but more so to describe an interrelationship between the terms. By pairing terms a critic is able to analyze the effect that each has on the other¹³⁴. The critic is searching for dominance among the terms, hoping to focus on the term, or terms, that may have the greatest effect on motivation within the situation. For the purposes of this chapter, we are looking to the Agent’s actions to explain his motivations in this broader office scene – hence the Act-Agent Ratio.

Burke believes that the relationship between the Agent and the Act “is not quite the same”¹³⁵ as the relationship between the other terms. It requires special attention to be brought to it for the simple fact that the perceived character of an Agent can greatly affect how we attribute the motivation of their actions. When attempting to understand what is going on in a situation, often, we will first turn to the Agent to make sense of it all. For example, when we hear that a man was shot, the knowledge that the shooter was a police officer greatly affects how we perceive the motivation of the Act. The Agent, in this case a police officer, may imply an intrinsic goodness of character that transfers itself to his acts. Aristotle tells us this is because “we believe good men more fully and more readily than others: this is true generally whatever the question is, and

¹³⁴ Sonja K. Foss, Rhetorical Criticism Exploration and Practice 460.

¹³⁵ Kenneth Burke, A Grammar of Motives (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1969) 16.

absolutely true where exact certainty is impossible and opinions are divided”¹³⁶. In situations where explanations are uncertain, we often turn to the character of the Agent to give us cues, believing that past acts are the most likely indicators of future ones.

Burke tells us this is so because “an Agent is an author of his acts”¹³⁷. The acts of a person are more readily considered good if he is good, bad if he is bad, laughable if he is laughable. Conversely though, a person’s acts can make, or remake, him in accordance with their nature¹³⁸. When we come across an individual for the first time, if we view him performing acts of politeness we regard him as polite; acts of anger cause us to label someone as angry; from this perspective it is his or her acts that guide our perceptions.

It is not uncommon that perceptions of our selves are often out of synch with how others perceive us, but when these perceptions cause dysfunction, as in the case of Brent, these disconnections merit further study. One of the most revealing ways to understand how an Agent perceives himself is by studying his acts of identification. What concepts, ideas, and people does the Agent most closely associate with? Burke believed that this need to be associated with other people and concepts stems from a universal need for a sense of belonging¹³⁹.

¹³⁶ Aristotle, “The Rhetoric,” Rhetoric and On Poetics Ed. Friedrich Solmsen. Trans. W. Rhys Roberts. (Franklin Center, Pennsylvania: The Franklin Library, 1954) 1356a

¹³⁷ Kenneth Burke, Grammar 16.

¹³⁸ Kenneth Burke, Grammar 16.

¹³⁹ Kenneth Burke, A Rhetoric of Motives (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1969) 146.

He said that our need for identification fuels all human motivation,¹⁴⁰ meaning that *what* we choose to associate with can lead us to *why* we have chosen those particular associations. Uncovering associations is important because each act of association says something about us revealing to others how we want to be regarded.

Often these associations are so strong that in our quest to achieve them we may fail to see their unintended consequences. Our associations map our “way of looking at the world” or, as Burke calls it, our orientation¹⁴¹. It is our orientation that allows us to focus on some issues while letting others fall outside our focus. In one sense, our orientations can function as a kind of blindness, since we are so focused on one goal, we may fail to see what is going on outside that focus. It is because of this blindness that it is important to uncover Brent’s associations because he is clearly not meeting a goal which seems appropriate for an organizational leader – running a functional office. If we assume that he is not deliberately intending to cause dysfunction, clearly he has associations that are strong enough to create blindness to the ongoing dysfunction that he is creating and ultimately perpetuating.

To determine Brent’s most significant associations I will use the dramatistic tool introduced in the previous chapter, called cluster analysis.

¹⁴⁰ Barry Brummett, Rhetoric and Popular Culture (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 1994) 165.

¹⁴¹ Jane Blankenship, Edward Murphy, and Marie Rosendwasser, “Pivotal Terms in the Early Work of Kenneth Burke”, Philosophy & Rhetoric, 7 (1974) 1-24.

Cluster analysis involves critically analyzing an Agent's communicative acts, specifically looking for elements that are often repeated or are particularly intense for the situation. This close examination can reveal "habitual patterns or unexpected contrasts of meaning"¹⁴² giving insight into his worldview of which he may not even be aware. Burke provides a simple example of this type of analysis: "If you kept a list of subjects, noting what was said [every time someone with a tic blinked] you would find out what the tic was symbolic of"¹⁴³. Cluster analysis allows us to expose these verbal tics and guide us to a greater understand of their meaning.

In cluster analysis, the critic searches for key terms within the discourse and examines other terms or ideas that frequently are associated, and disassociated, with the key terms. The clusters are analyzed for habitual patterns or unexpected contrasts of meaning. By doing so we begin to map out the connections among the terms that leads us to the premise that these formal connections express a logic rooted in the psychology of the communicator.¹⁴⁴

The first step in a cluster analysis is to identify key terms prevalent in the Agent's communication the selection of which is based on the frequency or intensity in the discourse¹⁴⁵. Terms are dictated by the form being analyzed. In discursive works, terms are the words or ideas presented; non-discursive works

¹⁴² David Blakesley, The Elements of Dramatism (New York: Pearson Education Inc., 2002) 104.

¹⁴³ Kenneth Burke, The Philosophy of Literary Form 20.

¹⁴⁴ David Blakesley, The Elements of Dramatism 104.

¹⁴⁵ Sonja Foss, Rhetorical Criticism 65.

may look to symbols or actions as ‘terms’. In our case we will look to both Brent’s actions and words to identify his key terms. The next step is to then chart clusters around those key terms. The critic examines the work of the communicator to identify occurrences of the key terms within the work and then organizes them to reveal patterns of association and disassociation.

Consequently, a critic explores two dimensions of a discourse being analyzed; he seeks out what terms go together (associations) and what terms oppose each other (disassociations). The final step in a cluster analysis is to then look at those patterns of association and disassociation and determine their implications for the situation. The clusters are interpreted to reveal what the Agent may be implicitly communicating which in turn leads to possible motives behind that communication¹⁴⁶.

It is my ultimate goal to use cluster analysis to uncover these motivations in order to gain a better understanding of the Agent and, not only to identify dysfunctional acts but also to explain how Brent’s motivations cause these acts to occur. By revealing Brent’s true purpose for performing these dysfunctional acts, I hope to provide a path to a solution to the office dysfunction.

Cluster Analysis: “Being a Great Boss”

As a focus of this chapter is to understand the Agent’s role as leader, I’ve identified appropriate clusters by mapping out Brent’s perceptions of leadership, or in his own words what it means to be a “great boss”. By identifying Brent’s most frequent and intense actions that he associates with leadership in general, I

¹⁴⁶ Kathleen Reid, “The Hay-Wain Cluster Analysis in Visual Communication”, Journal of Communication Inquiry (Summer, 1990) 45.

intend to reveal Brent's purpose behind his *own* acts of office leadership and ultimate dysfunction.

Through close reading and careful analysis I have identified two clusters that describe Brent's perceptions of being a great boss. The first of these clusters I call the "Funny/Entertaining" cluster for Brent believes being entertaining is a key characteristic of good leadership. The second I call the "Family/Friendship" cluster for Brent believes a family-type relationship with staff is essential to being a good leader.

Funny/Entertaining Cluster

There are many references in the series that associate Brent's perceptions of leadership with being entertaining. Brent states early on in the series: "When people say, 'Oh would you rather be thought of as a funny man or a great boss?' My answer's always the same: to me they're not mutually exclusive"¹⁴⁷. Brent continues in that monologue to say: "People say I'm the best boss. They go, 'Oh, we've never worked in a place like this before, you're such a laugh. You get the best out of us'"¹⁴⁸. In his own words he has described himself as "basically a chilled out entertainer"¹⁴⁹, "such a laugh"¹⁵⁰, and "mad"¹⁵¹. When

¹⁴⁷ Ricky Gervais, Stephen Merchant, The Office: the Scripts Series 1, (BBC Worldwide Ltd., London, 2002) Series 1, Episode 2, 69.

¹⁴⁸ Series 1, Episode 1, 22.

¹⁴⁹ Ricky Gervais and Stephan Merchant, The Office: The Scripts Series 2 (London: BBC Worldwide Limited, 2003) Episode 1, 47.

¹⁵⁰ Series 1, Episode 1, 22.

¹⁵¹ Series 1, Episode 1, 22 (mad as in "being silly", not "angry")

comparing the organization to an organism, he was asked what part he would be and referred to himself as “the humour.”¹⁵² When asked to identify geniuses he says that he “wouldn’t say Einstein, Newton... you know. I’d go, Milligan, Cleese, Everett”¹⁵³ -- all famous British comedians. He even indicates that he sees entertainment as a future career path if the paper business does not work out¹⁵⁴.

This cluster is significant because he identifies himself as ‘entertaining’ and sees ‘being entertaining’ as an equal to his other duties as office manager. He states that part of his job description is to be “a really good laugh”¹⁵⁵. He believes that his role at work is to ensure everyone is having a good laugh¹⁵⁶ and constantly refers to his attempts to be funny in the office as “keeping up morale”¹⁵⁷. He believes that the only thing that makes “the crazy ride [that is office life] worthwhile” is feeling good and making people laugh¹⁵⁸.

Rhetorical theorist Wayne Booth believed that communicators who focus too much on entertaining run a risk sacrificing of the overall effect of their communication. Booth states that communicators who focus too much on their own ability to entertain sacrifice substance and a true connection with their

¹⁵² Series 1, Episode 2, 89.

¹⁵³ Series 1, Episode 2, 69.

¹⁵⁴ Series 2, Episode 5, 193.

¹⁵⁵ Series 1, Episode 1, 35.

¹⁵⁶ Series 1, Episode 1, 35.

¹⁵⁷ Series 1, Episode 2, 81.

¹⁵⁸ Series 1, Episode 6, 267.

audience¹⁵⁹. There are times when this style is appropriate, most notably in a true entertainment situation, but an office environment is not usually one of them. Good communicators and leaders are often required to balance substance, an understanding of the audience's needs, and their own personal charm in order to achieve results. Based on this cluster, and subsequent clusters, it appears that Brent believes that being entertaining is a key component to being a good leader.

It is these beliefs that often turn Brent to entertainment and comedy as a means of providing leadership in the office. When orienting new employees to his branch, Brent spends the time together making up jokes about each department and pointing out sources of humour in the office such as the many cartoons on display, the stuffed animals, and "Billy Bigmouth" the electronic singing fish¹⁶⁰. When welcoming new employees brought over to his office in a company merger he chooses to welcome them by preparing a party and a comedy routine for them. Brent describes the experience as, "It's going to be very much a just chill-out-let's-get-to-know-each-other type of vibe"¹⁶¹.

Brent frequently wants to be identified with entertainers and always ensures he is part of entertaining situations. Although his attempts at humour are explicit, the close connection to entertainment-as-leadership is more implicit. His notions of leadership and entertainment are so connected that he sees

¹⁵⁹ Wayne Booth, "The Rhetorical Stance", College Composition and Communication, Vol. 14, No.3, Annual Meeting, Los Angeles, 1963: Toward a New Rhetoric, (Oct., 1963), 139-145.

¹⁶⁰ Series 1, Episode 1.

¹⁶¹ Series 2, Episode 1, 27.

comedy as a key leadership tool and an integral part of his job. The frequency and intensity of entertainment and comedy references are so prevalent it becomes a defining feature of David Brent-as-leader, unfortunately at the expense of *actual* leadership.

Friends and Family Cluster

A second cluster that appears around Brent's associations of a great boss is one that I will call the "friend/family cluster". All terms in this cluster are associated with Brent's relationship with his staff and his belief that a family-oriented approach to office life is important to being a great boss. In Brent's words a great boss is one who sees his staff as "family"¹⁶², and he places himself at the head of this family¹⁶³. As the head of the family he sees himself as responsible for sticking up for the staff when times are tough. Brent demonstrates this when the central office threatened his area office with layoffs. Brent tells his staff that he relayed to Central that "you're not going to fiddle with my children"¹⁶⁴. As part of a family David also invokes the loyalty that comes with being a member of a family. According to Brent, a great boss is someone who has "unconditional trust" from all of his staff¹⁶⁵.

Brent believes that this concept of office-as-family is the driving force behind his leadership decisions and a source of personal pride. When asked

¹⁶² Series 1, Episode 1, 50.

¹⁶³ Series 1, Episode 1, 50.

¹⁶⁴ Series 1, Episode 1, 50.

¹⁶⁵ Series 1, Episode 2, 65.

what his proudest moment as leader was he replied, “[it] wasn’t when I increased profits by seventeen percent, or cut expenditures without losing a single staff member. No. It was a young Greek guy, first job in the country, hardly spoke a word of English, but he came to me and he went, ‘Mr. Brent, will you be the Godfather to my child’”¹⁶⁶? Brent is clearly showing the importance that family plays in his role as leader of the office.

Brent also discusses his relationship with his staff as a friendship describing himself as someone who is “a friend first and a boss second”¹⁶⁷. He demonstrates this when he notices that his receptionist, Dawn, is having trouble with her boyfriend and Brent reaches out to her. “I am aware of your personal problem” says Brent, “and I wouldn’t be the boss or the man that I am if I didn’t lend, you know, some words of encouragement”¹⁶⁸. Through these words and actions Brent is indicating that he believes a great boss is one who takes the time to help his staff out with their personal problems – to be a friend to them.

Brent demonstrates this need for friendship with his staff by desperately trying to connect with them in any social situation he can get himself invited to. He will never turn down an offer for ‘drinks’ after work and never misses an opportunity to discuss that fact with anyone at work who will listen¹⁶⁹. He seems proud of the drinking he does, as if it is proof of the friendships he has with his

¹⁶⁶ Series 1, Episode 1, 62.

¹⁶⁷ Series 2, Episode 1, 59.

¹⁶⁸ Series 1, Episode 4, 175.

¹⁶⁹ Series 1, Episodes 1,3,5,6 and Series 2, Episodes 1, 3,4.

staff. Consequently, he uses drinks as the only way to connect with a new group of employees¹⁷⁰ because to him, good employees are good friends and good friends go for drinks. The frequency of Brent's need to connect socially with staff brings significance to this cluster. For Brent, a great boss is one who is friends with his staff and the instances of social activity, like drinking together, are in his mind a clear indication of successful friendship and therefore successful leadership.

By analyzing the associative clusters of words and actions of Brent we are able to develop a better understanding of the type of leader he strives to be. Brent strives to be a great boss, someone who sees his staff as family and is a friend to them; someone who incites loyalty through unconditional trust; someone who can make them laugh – all attributes he believes he espouses or embodies. Despite his own associations though, I posit that Brent's most significant patterns arise when he attempts to espouse his own stated virtues of being a great boss – and fails. What he says about leadership and how he leads are often in direct opposition to one another for although he believes he is a great boss, he does not embody any of the virtues that he identifies with being 'great'.

Cluster Analysis: Patterns of Disassociation

Seeking out concepts that associate is only part of a cluster analysis. A full cluster analysis must also look at patterns of disassociation as well. Concepts that are frequently or intensely opposed to one another can be just as revealing as concepts that connect, if not more so. Oppositions, or

¹⁷⁰ Series 2, Episode 2.

contradictions, by their very nature are more explicit because they often stand out from what would be considered normal for the situation and therefore may be considered more intense.

A sense of intensity is present whenever someone fails to meet expectations and in this case it is that failure that is an integral part of this analysis. In Brent's case, he lays the groundwork for his expectations by indicating that a great boss is one who treats his staff like family, is honest and loyal with them, and is entertaining. In order to fully understand the purpose behind Brent's actions, we need to look at how he lives up to his own self-imposed associations.

A fundamental component of Booth's quintessential Entertainer is his disassociation from anything substantive and a disassociation from his audience. In fact, Entertainers can be so narcissistic that they themselves become their own audience. As a "perversion"¹⁷¹ of communication, an Entertainer seeks to gauge a reaction from others. The reaction is so important Entertainers rarely are concerned with how they get the reaction or whom they get a reaction from; the reaction is paramount over content and audience. As their own audience, Entertainers only need to feel they are getting their much needed reaction, regardless of whether or not that reaction is *actually* garnered. I will show in the following section that Brent is Booth's typical Entertainer. Brent pontificates on many ideas of leadership but any sort of philosophy he does espouse is done so in sole servitude of a reaction from someone else – anyone else.

¹⁷¹ Wayne Booth, "The Rhetorical Stance", 143.

Brent's stated beliefs in relation to treating staff like family are also undermined in one particularly significant scene of the series. Brent is presented with the option of being promoted but only at the expense of his branch being closed down. If he were to stay in his position, his branch would not close; no one would lose their jobs. When his supervisor brings him the news of this potential promotion, she says that she knows it will be a tough decision because he is "very loyal to his family here"¹⁷². Without hesitation Brent accepts the promotion and explains his actions by twisting his concept of family to suit his needs; "I'd be loyal to all the whole family"¹⁷³, he says, trying to indicate that his promotion, although costing some members of his staff a job, will ultimately make his family even bigger as he will be supervisor to a much larger group. Later on in the episode, after giving it some more thought, Brent states that "If this is a family, then maybe it is time to cut the apron strings and let them stand on their own two feet"¹⁷⁴. His reaction redefines the metaphor to a point where it is incompatible with the values of trust and loyalty he earlier ascribed to it. Through his previous comments we have been led to believe that family is about caring and compassion but without hesitation Brent accepts the promotion knowing that it will result in one of the most symbolically mortifying acts of office life – the firing of staff.

¹⁷² Series 1, Episode 6, 248.

¹⁷³ Series 1, Episode 6, 248.

¹⁷⁴ Series 1, Episode 6, 256.

Perhaps the action that *most* reveals what Brent thinks of family is the one and only time we get a glimpse into Brent's real family life. In Episode 3, Series 1, we learn that Brent's mother has been dead for some time and that his father is in a long-term care facility suffering from some form of dementia. The episode centers on the annual office quiz night, a quiz won by Brent the last six years in a row¹⁷⁵. This night is clearly important to Brent as it is a chance for him to shine in front of his employees. In the middle of a round of questions, Brent receives a call from his father's care home worker. Apparently Brent's father is quite confused and is asking for his son. Not wanting to leave his quiz night, Brent lies to the care provider and tells him that he is "snowed under at work"¹⁷⁶ and asks if they can just sedate his father instead. Once the care provider agrees to the sedation, Brent takes it even one step further to then ask him if he knows an answer to one of the quiz questions, further demonstrating his complete lack of compassion for and identification with his 'real' family.

Once again, Brent's actions are disassociated from his words. As Booth's Entertainer, Brent's true motivation drives him to disregard real compassion towards his father, as it would take him away from the reaction he would receive from winning the quiz night. Brent's incessant need to be Booth's Entertainer, subsumes and real sense of family he may have. By focusing so intently on garnering a self-gratifying reaction from his workmates he fails to see the ramifications of his actions. Brent reveals, quite explicitly, his true feelings of

¹⁷⁵ Series 1, Episode 3.

¹⁷⁶ Series 1 Episode 3, 139.

family yet he has time and time again tried to convince his subordinates that they are family to him. Brent's complete lack of identification with his audience thus fosters dysfunctional leadership.

This example gives us a glimpse into the potential power of the cluster analysis in determining the purpose behind an Agent's acts. How can an individual be so contradictory, to state and firmly believe that his staff are like family, invoking a feeling of warmth and compassion, yet through his actions reveal how unimportant family truly is to him. Although it may be easy to slough this off as mere hypocrisy, doing so still does not reveal the purpose behind his acts nor bring us any closer to a solution to a sophisticated solution to the office dysfunction. What is it that drives Brent to act in this ambiguous manner?

Cluster Implications: Notoriety

The final step of a cluster analysis requires interpretation of the associations and disassociations that are revealed. What enthymemes are buried within the actions and their analysis? Once the associative and dissociative clusters are presented, the critic is required to explore their implications. It is the implications that reveal what potential messages are being presented and provide a possible explanation for the communicator's purpose for acting in this manner¹⁷⁷. In this case, we ask what the incongruity between Brent's stated perceptions of good leadership and his own acts of leadership can

¹⁷⁷ Kathleen Reid, "The Hay-Wain Cluster Analysis in Visual Communications" Journal of Communication Inquiry, (Summer, 1990), 14.

tell us about his purpose. Once the purpose is determined, we can then understand how his purpose leads to the acts of office dysfunction.

David Brent believes that he is a good boss: he is entertaining, trustworthy, and a friend to his staff, and yet his actions often communicate the exact opposite -- what can this tell us about his purpose? It is my position that these clusters reveal that Brent's primary motivation is not to be a great boss but to be popular, or more specifically, to *feel* popular. As he himself is his own audience, he only needs to convince him that he is achieving his required level of popularity, not actually achieve it.

For him, striving to be a great boss is merely a means to an end, a stepping stone to self-gratifying perception of popularity. To anyone who has watched the series, it is probably fairly clear that Brent tries desperately to fit in and be liked. In fact his own boss Neil comes to this observation and confronts Brent with it; "I get the impression that you'd rather be popular than steer the ship in the right direction"¹⁷⁸. Despite this quest to be popular, though, Brent is probably the least respected member of the office. If Brent sees being a great boss as a road to popularity, why does he not espouse any of the characteristics of a great boss? If he truly wanted to be well-liked he would *not* lie to his staff, he would *not* offend them with his humour, he *would* act like a friend, and he *would* act in such a way so that others could respect him. There is an ambiguity exposed here between what motivates Brent (popularity), and his actions that practically guarantee that no one will like him. Exploring ambiguity is an

¹⁷⁸ Series 2, Episode 4, 158 .

important part of a rhetorical criticism for rhetoric does not avoid ambiguity but clearly reveals “the strategic spots at which ambiguities arise”¹⁷⁹. Burke says that when we are faced with ambiguity we must not merely name it and move on, “we rather consider it our task to study and clarify the resources of ambiguity”¹⁸⁰. Rather than just accept the fact that there is uncertainty in Brent’s true motives, a good rhetorical critic attempts to explore possibilities and attempts to understand how Brent could pursue popularity while performing acts that ensure no one likes him.

With that, I propose that one of our resources to explain this ambiguous situation is to distinguish between real popularity and perceived popularity. In one scenario, an individual would be expected to be actually liked by others. As Booth’s Entertainer though, Brent only needs to *believe* he is liked in order to satiate his own desires – whether it be real to others or not. Being popular is most associated with being “liked or admired by people”, but it can also refer to merely “being known”¹⁸¹, for having notoriety. Under this second definition one does not need to be liked in order to feel popular; one simply needs to be known. It is this notoriety that Booth’s Entertainers confuse for popularity because to them, there is no difference between the two. Entertainers have no sense of their message or their own ethos to project that message, at its extreme,

¹⁷⁹ Burke Grammar of Motives xviii.

¹⁸⁰ Burke Grammar xix.

¹⁸¹ “Popular”, The Concise Oxford Dictionary, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1982).

Entertainers merely seek out a reaction from an audience, any audience that will provide one. Since all they seek is the reaction, the source of that reaction is not important; hence even reactions for negative acts are fodder for the Entertainer's stance. Notoriety *is* popularity for the Entertainer.

If we suppose that it is notoriety that Brent is seeking, it is this difference in definition that helps us make sense of Brent's actions, and ultimately explains his role in the office dysfunction. It is clear how Brent can perform all of these unlikable acts in his quest for popularity, for he is actually achieving his goal; he is definitely notorious.

Brent is demonstrating that he has no sense of his audience for his sole purpose is ultimately selfish. As discussed in the first chapter, audience is a critical component of communication and a good understanding of audience is a critical component of good communication. Without an ability to imagine the needs, hopes, and wants of his subordinates, Brent cannot truly communicate with them and is all but ensuring that dysfunction will occur. As Burke states, communication is about identification¹⁸² and the Entertainer works against identification as a rhetorical outcome; it is not important to them. As a leader-communicator then, Brent's approach shows that he really does not care about understanding his staff, only understanding how they can add to his notoriety.

A facet of notoriety is that it does not necessarily matter what one is well known for; merely that they *are* well known. This definition would explain the many manifestations of Brent's motivation. For Brent any Act, whether it is telling

¹⁸² See Kenneth Burke, *A Rhetoric of Motives* (1950; Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1969).

jokes, winning quiz shows, singing, being a great boss, or doing charity work, is merely a stepping stone to being famous. It explains why Brent is quick to abandon any one of these Acts if it is not moving him towards notoriety and it also explains why he clings desperately to any that do. When he is famous for something, like winning the annual quiz night, he obsesses about it to the point of abandoning his own self-declared principles. The way he treats his own debilitated father explains how he can abandon his own previous notions of family. At some point, treating his staff like family was one way for him to gain notoriety but when his real family potentially threatened his quest for fame through winning the quiz night, his motivations became clear -- family is not really important to Brent, unless it can make him popular. His stated interest in treating staff as family becomes subsumed in his quest for notoriety.

By revealing Brent's true purpose a critic can understand his actions and see how his quest for notoriety contributes to the dysfunctions of the office. In the opening sequence of the series Brent is seen interviewing a man for a position for which the man is clearly under-qualified. Despite the man's lack of qualifications, Brent wants to show off his authority by showing the interviewee that he can get him the job despite his shortcomings. Brent wants to show the man that he can "make [his] dream come true"¹⁸³ because he is "personal friends"¹⁸⁴ with the warehouse supervisor. Motivated by notoriety, Brent places

¹⁸³ Series 1, Episode 1, 20.

¹⁸⁴ Series 1, Episode 1, 20.

an under-qualified employee in the company, an Act that surely contributes to the dysfunction of the organization.

His quest for notoriety even impacts his stated goal of befriending his staff. When information is leaked that there could be possible downsizing at his branch, the staff of the office confronts Brent with the news. Rather than be the true friend to his staff, Brent lies to them, telling them that he will not let anyone be fired by promising his staff that their continued employment is still within his control when his boss explicitly states otherwise¹⁸⁵. Even though this is in complete contradiction to the facts of the situation, Brent's quest for notoriety leads him to falsify information to his staff about the potential lay-offs. The immediate need to not lose face with the staff trumped the long-term consequences of his lack of honesty. By lying about something so fundamental, and something that will so obviously be contradicted, Brent's motivation for notoriety has sown the seeds of future distrust between subordinate and supervisor, providing more fodder for office dysfunction.

We can see how even particularly confusing acts, once revealed, make sense when linked with Brent's motivation for notoriety. One particularly popular example of this intensity relates to a charity event that occurs in Episode 5 of Series 2. As part of a national day of charity, to raise money Brent's boss Neil entertains Brent's staff with a rehearsed dance from the movie *Saturday Night Fever*. Neil is decked out in full Travolta-esque clothing and clearly spent time on a choreographed routine. Neil's dance was stylish, entertaining, and elicited

¹⁸⁵ Series 1, Episode 1, 50.

applause, laughs, and money from the staff when it was done. Not to be outdone at being the most entertaining in the room, Brent improvised his own dance to compete with him -- with disastrous results. With no preparation and little talent, Brent's dance provided one of the most uncomfortable scenes of the whole series. The improvised dance is considered a particularly intense act by many viewers of the show and is often discussed among fans for the level of embarrassing discomfort it brings to those watching¹⁸⁶.

Brent's motivation for fame blinded him to the effects his one-upmanship would have on his relationship with his boss as well as how his staff would view him after this desperate act. Rather than gain anyone's applause all he did was show his desperation to be the most entertaining one in the room – unfortunately at the cost of his own dignity, unbeknownst to him though.

Brent's quest for notoriety becomes most explicit when he is offered a promotion within the organization. To take the promotion would mean that his branch would close down. He would have to betray his 'family' & 'friends'; he would have to go back on his word, breaking their 'unconditional trust'. Of course, without hesitation he accepts the promotion for it is the ultimate manifestation of his quest. Nothing he could do within his own branch could make him more famous so how could he turn this opportunity down? His actions make sense when he abandons all his previous statements of leadership, for the act of promotion is the ultimate realization of his dream for popularity. He is even so obsessed with being popular that he fixates not on the duties of the job, its

¹⁸⁶ Elliot Day, "The BrentDance" The World of the Office, 14 June 2008 <<http://homepage.mac.com/elliottday/theoffice/thedance.html>>.

pay, or even the consequences for his staff but on the number of board members who voted for his promotion:

TAYLOR-CLARKE. ...the board have voted five to two in favour of you taking the job

BRENT. Voted for me. Five- two. There's only seven on the board isn't there so it's five out of seven...What's five out of seven as a percentage?

TAYLOR-CLARKE: Er...seventy percent

BRENT. Seventy-one point four..so...

TAYLOR-CLARKE. Call Susan and arrange to meet the board and finalise all the details. Congratulations and good luck.

BRENT. You don't need luck, when you've got seventy-one point four percent of the population behind you¹⁸⁷.

Brent's focus on the notoriety his promotion can bring to him clearly reveals his motivations.

Conclusions

What has been demonstrated in this chapter is that the language we use to "simply" describe a situation can hold a multifaceted series of assumptions about that situation. A simple label of organizational dysfunction is rarely descriptive enough; the ramifications of those labels must be explored if a critic truly wants to understand what is taking place. It has been shown that Burke's pentadic method is a viable tool for exploring the ramifications of those labels. In particular, it was shown that labeling a leader-as-Agent involves a more complex understanding of the leader's motivation than at first glance. Merely calling a leader dysfunctional is not enough; if a critic is truly seeking solutions to

¹⁸⁷ Series 1, Episode 6, 248-249.

organizational dysfunction, he must seek to understand the roots of that dysfunction. Burke's pentad can uncover motivation and in particular motivation that may seem ambiguous.

Using cluster criticism to analyze the leader-as-Agent we have been able to show how Brent publicly perceives leadership. By observing the key terms in his communication it is clear that Brent believes that good leaders are entertaining, friendly, and treat staff like family. When contrasting those perceptions with his actions, though, we find a disconnection. Analyzing some of his most frequent and intense actions reveals that his staff rarely find him entertaining despite his constant attempts at humour. Often his humour is directed maliciously to his own staff, compromising any hope of a friendly atmosphere that he indicates he is trying to build. Finally, although Brent states that office mates should be treated like family, he is found time and time again to be the one responsible for creating an environment of mistrust and disloyalty.

When labeling the leader as the Agent of office dysfunction, we are placing blame on the person, equating their own dysfunction with the office's. Using Burke's methodology, makes clear that Brent's purpose, and subsequent actions in pursuit of that purpose, contribute greatly to the dysfunction of the office. His primary purpose to be well-known results in unqualified staff being hired, creates a mistrustful environment, interferes with proper employee training, and ultimately leads to the firing of some of his own staff. His own selfish need to be notorious interferes with many of the needs of a properly functioning office.

When one perceives the leader as the Agent of dysfunction there are very few remedies available to address problems. As stated above, the most common solutions involve removing the Agent from the situation or living with the dysfunction. By revealing the leader's purpose though, other venues are revealed. It is through Burke's rhetorical methods that we can see other opportunities for change.

Often, it is believed that removing the leader will rectify any dysfunctions present, though many organizations still find dysfunction even when identified leaders are removed. I believe dysfunction is still present because exploring only one perspective on leadership provides an incomplete picture of the situation. Revealing a leader's motivations is only one part of a complex picture I intend to show in subsequent chapters that an analysis of leader-as-Agent, albeit important, is only one of the rhetorical resources available to critics of organizations. Using dramatism to examine leadership through other pentadic orientations is important to establishing a more stable platform to address office dysfunction. Phillip K. Tompkins, an organizational scholar who employs Kenneth Burke in his study of organizational leadership states that "the most satisfactory theory of leadership would speak to each and all of the [pentadic] terms. Leadership will truly be understood only when all perspectives of human action are taken into account"¹⁸⁸. Exploring one perspective and revealing a leader's quest for notoriety is only the tip of the iceberg.

¹⁸⁸ Phillip K. Tompkins, Communication as Action An introduction to Rhetoric and Communication (Belmont, CA: Wadsworth Publishing Company, 1982) 154.

Leader-as-Scene

Dramatism is most useful when used in situations where it is unclear as to why an action has occurred. In essence, dramatism is used to interpret and describe the motivation behind certain acts. A critical component of Burke's dramatism is that it examines the same actions from multiple perspectives in order to determine motive¹⁸⁹. The approach is particularly valuable because it can offer new perspectives on conventional assumptions in criticism. For example, in dysfunctional organizations it is often easy to lay the blame solely on the actions (or inactions) of organizational leaders. This may be a common response to office dysfunction but it only provides a single perspective -- one explanation for dysfunctional acts occurring in an office.

Burke's dramatic method allows for a critic to uncover a more complete explanation of what is occurring in a given situation. The value of the method lies in the fact that it does not favour one perspective over another; rather it provides tools to explore each one. It is in the *comparison* of each perspective where the critic can gain a better understanding of what is occurring. Different perspectives may expose the types of interpersonal and group relationships within the organization. One motive may dominate, or each one may provide a valuable piece of the puzzle to explain what is actually taking place in a given situation. Only when a more complete understanding occurs one can build a more complete solution to the dysfunction identified.

¹⁸⁹ T. Crusius, "A Case for Kenneth Burke's Dialectic and Rhetoric," Philosophy and Rhetoric, 19 (1986), 23-27.

As a tool of dramatism, Burke's pentad allows critics to shift between the five terms and to explore the effects of each perspective on the interpretation of the situation. The complexity of the tool arises when one can then compare, combine, and contrast this new perspective with what previous ones uncovered. Even a slight shift in perspective can reveal issues that were not apparent before. It is the critic's job to explore the implications these new issues may present for understanding the entire situation.

As in the previous chapter, the leader's (or **Agent's**) actions and purpose were explored and directly linked to the dysfunctions of the office, but this is only one perspective. Using Burke's pentad, I propose to explore what occurs when David Brent is not viewed as the Agent of dysfunction but a primary facet of the dysfunctional organizational **Scene**. As a prominent member of the office, Brent is invariably part of the Scene, but a scenic perspective situates Brent as only *one* piece of the puzzle rather than the entire puzzle himself. As the Agent of dysfunction, the causes of, and solutions to, office unrest lay solely with Brent. By shifting the perspective to scene we can explore how the leader's interactions with other elements contributes to dysfunction. Solutions to that dysfunction then lie within changes to aspects of the environment of which the leader is only one part.

Generally speaking, a scenic approach seeks to understand how the environment has come to create the situation being analyzed. It is grounded in the belief that people are not entirely free, autonomous, self-defined individuals but rather are defined and constrained by the situations and conditions in which

they find themselves. Burke stresses the importance of understanding the Scene because it actually contains, or often constrains, the very Acts that Agents can perform¹⁹⁰, because a fundamental principle of drama is that the nature of Acts and Agents must be consistent with the nature of a Scene¹⁹¹. It's the definition of the Scene that dictates the appropriateness of the Acts and Agents within it. Using an example of dysfunction from the series; when Brent breaks out his guitar and starts singing, the Act alone is not inappropriate. It's when the Act is placed against the backdrop of an office training seminar that it seems out of place. In this case, playing guitar during a seminar is not a typical office Act, and therefore its motivation is suspect and deserving of further inquiry.

Figure 3 (below) imagines the Scene represented by the banks of a river. The banks contain the river, dictating where it should flow. Floating on the river are the Agents and their subsequent Acts, contained and constrained on where they can go and what they can do. Agency can then be likened to the flow of the river as the force that enables the event to be played out. Much like a real riverbank, the Scene can change, over time, but the process is a result of much time and effort. These changes can naturally occur with each change building slowly upon the next altering the flow of the river, or drastic measures can be taken, like in man-made diversion of rivers that occurs from time to time.

¹⁹⁰ Kenneth Burke, A Grammar of Motives (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1969) xv.

¹⁹¹ Kenneth Burke, Grammar of Motives 3.

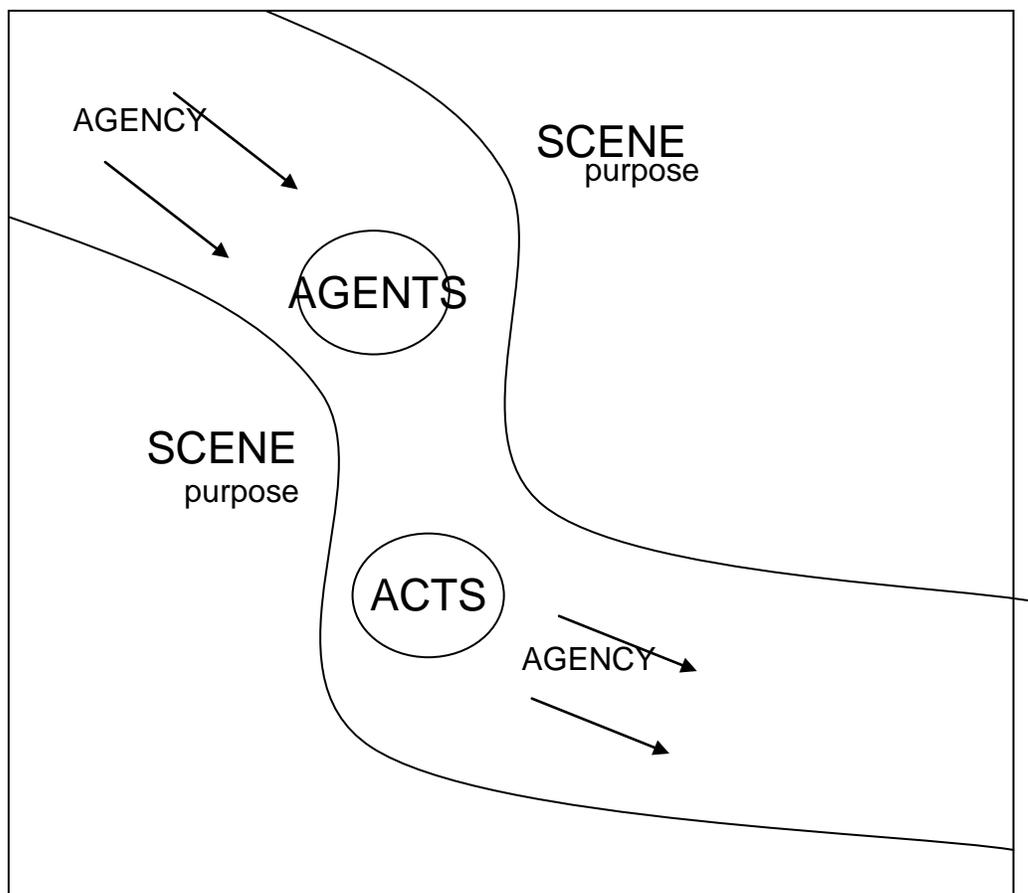


Fig. 3 Scenic-Dominated Event as a River Metaphor

Purpose plays a special, but much different, role in this perspective as well. Powerful scenes limit the scope of purpose drastically, to the point of servitude of the scene. Often, in scenic-dominated situations, the purpose behind action becomes the maintenance of the scene itself. A powerful Scene only allows for certain Acts and Purposes to reside within it and these elements serve to reinforce the very Scene that allowed them. Scene and motivations behind actions within that Scene become linked.

The connection between Scene and motivation is so powerful that Burke calls motives “shorthand terms for situations”¹⁹² for in describing a motive one is really describing, to some degree, the situation in which that motive took place. To describe Brent’s motivation for pulling out his guitar as ‘self-serving’, in fact describes a “complex set of signs, meanings, or stimuli”¹⁹³ that reflect the situation. For a ‘self-serving’ Act can only be labeled as such if it is compared to normative acts that define the situation. By naming a motive, we cannot help describing the situation in which the motivation occurs.

Burke’s emphasis on Scene is validated in many modern explanations of human motivation. He believed that the strong scenic connection to motive explained why many rival theories of motivation have developed in recent history. He said that “we have had people’s conduct explained by an endless variety of theories: ethnological, geographical, sociological, physiological, historical, endocrinological, economic, anatomical, mystical, pathological, and so on”¹⁹⁴. Each approach interprets the motive to originate in some aspect of the Scene.

Organizational theory often relies on scenic elements to explain what is occurring in an organization’s environment. Sometimes an organizational environment is described *externally* as “all those significant elements outside the

¹⁹² Kenneth Burke Permanence and Change: An anatomy of purpose 3rd ed. (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1954) 29.

¹⁹³ Burke, Permanence and Change 30.

¹⁹⁴ Burke, Permanence and Change 33.

organization that influence its ability to survive and achieve its ends”¹⁹⁵.

Sometimes it is described in terms of the organizational culture as “the set of beliefs, values, and norms, together with symbols like dramatized events and personalities that represents the unique character of an organization”¹⁹⁶. The organizational environment has also been described as the sum of many resources of power and coalitions, organizational structure, and collections of symbols ¹⁹⁷ as in Bolman and Deal’s organizational frames. All of these are valid descriptions but all only offer a partial explanation of the Scene.

Recognizing that the Scene can often be described in many ways, Burke suggested that in dramatism the most appropriate approach to describe a particular Scene must first lay with the intended Act to be analyzed. No complete picture can be given of a situation unless one has the corresponding term of action to define it -- a reference point to guide the description. The Scene may contain the Act but the Act is the generative term from which all others radiate. It

¹⁹⁵ W. Richard Scott and Gerald F. Davis Organizations and Organizing: Rational, Natural, and Open System Perspectives, (New Jersey: Pearson Education Inc., 2007)19.

¹⁹⁶ “Principles of Organizational Behaviour 4ed: Glossary”, Oxford University Press 18 July 2007
<<http://www.oup.com/uk/orc/bin/9780199253975/01student/glossary/glossary.htm>>.

¹⁹⁷ Lee G. Bolman and Terrance E. Deal Reframing Organizations Artistry, Choice, and Leadership (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, Inc., 1991) 186.

is then through the definition of the Act that we learn which scenic factors are most relevant for our analysis¹⁹⁸.

Rhetorical theorist Lloyd Bitzer believed in this pragmatic approach, stating that the scene can be anything in the environment that has the power to constrain decision and action needed to modify the problem being analyzed¹⁹⁹. In the case of this analysis, if we define our generative term of action as “office dysfunction” then the key elements of an organizational Scene should be described in terms of elements that can most impact this dysfunction. More specifically, by choosing to view the role of leader-as-scene, we are actually looking for those scenic elements that result in dysfunction when they interact with the leadership style of David Brent.

As dramatism is not a prescriptive method, the concept of Scene can be “widened and narrow”²⁰⁰ to include physical conditions, social and cultural influences, or historical causes²⁰¹. For the purposes of this thesis, I have chosen those elements which interact with Brent’s leadership style to assist in bringing about office dysfunction -- The “Sloughness” of the staff, physical office layout, and issues of downsizing.

¹⁹⁸ Kenneth Burke, “Interaction: Dramatism,” International Encyclopaedia of the Social Sciences, Vol. 6 (New York: MacMillan Co and The Free Press, 1968) 445-452.

¹⁹⁹ Lloyd Bitzer, “The Rhetorical Situation,” Philosophy and Rhetoric (1968) 8.

²⁰⁰ Kenneth Burke, “Interaction: Dramatism”, 445.

²⁰¹ Sonja K. Foss, Rhetorical Criticism Exploration & Practice (Prospect Heights, IL; Waveland Press, Inc., 1996) 459.

Key Scenic Elements of “The Office”

Slough

Although the Scene is often more than just the physical setting, the physical location of *The Office* is actually a significant contributor to the organizational dysfunction seen throughout the series. The series is set in the real English town of Slough, a town that carries some relevant symbolic associations in British culture. It is of no coincidence that the creators set the series here, for in reality Slough is home to the largest business park in Europe and is littered with 1970’s-style office buildings and roadways like the ones that are pictured in the opening sequence of the television series. The cubicle-style office life is synonymous with Slough but it is also brings with it other associations alluded to within the series.

In reality, Slough has a poor reputation amongst English towns receiving unfavorable attention in the popular media. Statements about Slough describe it as “glum and dreary”²⁰² and indicate that “Modern, attractive, [and] healthy – [are] not words usually associated with Slough”²⁰³. In recent years it has also been labeled as one of the most depressing towns in England – literally, which is the reason it was the focus of a BBC2 special titled: *Making Slough Happy*. The documentary brought together professionals from various fields who specialized

²⁰² Richard W. Rahn, “Out of the Slough of Happiness” 4 Dec. 2005 Freedom Works, 19 July 2007 <http://www.freedomworks.org/informed/issues_template.php?issue_id=2452>.

²⁰³ Kieran Fox “Slough Fights Those Friendly Bombs” 12 Feb. 2007 BBC News 19 July 2007 <http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/uk_news/england/berkshire/6279839.stm> .

in the “psychology of happiness”²⁰⁴ in order to determine if there was formula for improving the attitude of an entire community. It seems the belief was that if they could find a way to make Slough happier, that they could accomplish this with any community.

Its dull and dreary reputation appears to be connected with its focus on business and industry. Slough was once known for its many factories that sprouted up during World War I. Its focus on industry, and the effects thereof, was immortalized by the late English Poet Laureate John Betjeman in his poem titled, *Slough*. In the poem he writes:

Come friendly bombs and fall on Slough!
It isn't fit for humans now,
There isn't grass to graze a cow.
Swarm over, Death! ...²⁰⁵

Most factories were replaced with office buildings as the economy made the transition from manufacturing to information-based business²⁰⁶. This seemed to get rid of the pollution but expanded the concrete jungle that is today's Slough. Slough is *not* known for its greenery or sense of community. Even local businesses acknowledge its reputation. One business website states that, although an inexpensive location, thanks to its reputation, Slough will always be

²⁰⁴ “Path to True Happiness Revealed” 15 Nov. 2005, BBC News, 19, July 2007 <<http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/health/4436482.stm>>.

²⁰⁵ John Betjeman “Slough” Stanford University, 10 Aug 2010 <<http://www-cdr.stanford.edu/intuition/slough/html>>.

²⁰⁶ “Slough” Wikipedia, 20 July 2007 <<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Slough>>.

“associated with grey buildings, parochial people, and a commitment to total mediocrity”²⁰⁷.

Even the name Slough (pronounced Sl-au) helps to construct its reputation for dreariness. Named for the type of land it was built on, a slough is a “swamp or swamp-like region”. Ironically enough it also means “a condition of degradation, despair, or helplessness”²⁰⁸, adding to the milieu of symbolism in which *The Office* is physically located.

Slough’s reputation is significant because it sets the scene for the type of people we would expect to be working there. Burke states that “it is a principle of drama that the nature of the acts and agents should be consistent with the nature of the scene”²⁰⁹. Therefore a glum, depressed, mediocre city will tend to give rise to glum, depressed, mediocre people²¹⁰.

²⁰⁷ “Car Hire in Slough, UK” Car Hire Centre 20, July 2007 <<http://www.car-hire-centre.co.uk/rd-uk/slough.html>>.

²⁰⁸ “Slough” Dictionary.com 19 July 2007 <<http://dictionary.reference.com/browse/slough>>.

²⁰⁹ Burke, Grammar of Motives 23.

²¹⁰ The impact that a scene can have on people’s behavior was most recently reflected in reality in the 2010 hiring of a new Chief of Staff for Canadian Liberal Party leader Michael Ignatieff. As relayed in the Jan. 17th edition of the *Globe and Mail* (“More Professional Atmosphere Imposed on Ignatieff’s Office”) when Peter Donolo came into the roll of Chief of Staff in Jan. 2010 “the leader’s office was a more laid back workplace. Mr. Ignatieff’s closest aides were friends who’d recruited him to politics from academe and helped run his leadership campaigns. They addressed him informally by his first name and tended to dress casually.” Insiders stated that Donolo insisted that staffers begin to call the Liberal leader Mr. Ignatieff instead of Michael and instituted a dress code for those within his office. The reason this was done, says one insider, is because “when you’re casual and unstructured, you get casual and unstructured

Characters in the series are often seen commenting about their mediocrity of their lives. One of the main characters, Tim Canterbury, is described as the “classic under-achiever”²¹¹. When asked about his love life, Tim sarcastically describes himself as a “catch”: “I live in Slough...in a lovely house with my parents. I have my own room which I’ve had since I was born...I went to university for a year as well, before I dropped out so I am a quitter”²¹². When describing his job he states, “I’m a sales rep, which means that my job is to speak to clients on the phone about er...quantity and type of paper – whether we can supply it to them and whether they can pay it.... and I am boring myself talking about it.”²¹³ In contemplating his own reasons for working at Wernam-Hogg he states, “I don’t really enjoy the work I do here. I’m sorry. I feel a bit like I am wasting my time”²¹⁴.

One of the minor characters, Keith the Accountant, describes his complacent attitude towards his job with a Slough-like response. When asked what motivated him to work at Wernam-Hogg, he replies “This job is just a stop-

results.” Donolo realized that an office scene can directly influence the acts and agents within it – and we do see evidence of this phenomenon in the *The Office*.

²¹¹ “Tim Canterbury”. *The Office*, 2002, 7 Aug. 2007
<http://www.bbc.co.uk/comedy/theoffice/characters/tim_person_page.shtml>.

²¹² Series 2, episode 3, 123.

²¹³ Series 1, Episode 1, 25.

²¹⁴ Series 1, Episode 6, 241.

gap really...Job's not difficult. I mean, I don't take my work home with me, it's pretty brainless"²¹⁵.

Secretary Dawn Tinsley also describes her attitude towards the work environment saying that she doesn't "want to spend the rest of [her] life answering phones in some crappy sub-branch paper merchant's"²¹⁶. Her attitude is exhibited further when she describes how she hopes a branch merger may turn out: "I hope they get rid of me because then I might actually get off my arse and do something... It's better to be at the bottom of a ladder you want to climb than halfway up one you don't. I don't want to be treading water, you know, and wake up in another five years' time and say, 'Shit, done it again'"²¹⁷.

By their own admission, the depression and helplessness that is exuded by the image of Slough is expressed in the attitude of the characters who work at Wernam-Hogg. The staff do not feel their work is important and would rather be anywhere than working where they are. This facet of the scene is significant for how it interacts with the leadership style of Brent described in the previous chapter. As previously discussed, Brent is Wayne Booth's quintessential Entertainer – willing to sacrifice substance and content in order to receive a reaction from an audience. Popularity and notoriety become synonymous to the Entertainer for being well-liked is only one way to achieve the audience reaction, the Entertainer simple seeks out the reaction, however that may be achieved.

²¹⁵ Series 1, Episode 4, 167.

²¹⁶ Series 1, Episode 4, 178.

²¹⁷ Series 1, Episode 6, 244.

On a quest for notoriety; he is willing to be popular at any cost, sacrificing his own values and work-ethic to achieve his quest. We see many dysfunctional incidents at the intersection of Brent's quest for notoriety and the sloughness of the staff. One episode of the series focuses on a training day planned for the office staff. A typical organizational activity, the staff forego their regular tasks for the day to learn how be more effective in their work. The day is lead by an external consultant named Rowan, an MBA specializing in this sort of training exercise. He intends to cover such issues as: customer service, team building, forward planning, and motivation. The training takes place in a large room in their office complex. As part of the agenda for the day, the staff watch a video, do team exercises, and are asked to participate in role playing scenarios.

From the outset, staff do not appear particularly interested in attending the day. Those who do seem interested in the opportunity indicate that is more of an excuse to get away from their desks than to receive training. Some employees bring into question the relevance of the experience, wondering why they need someone to come in and tell them to say "please" to customers. Tim goes so far to as to state that "if they don't know that already, I'm sorry, they don't deserve a job"²¹⁸.

Brent's incessant need to be the centre of attention derails the training day. Throughout the day he continually undermines the trainer by adding in his unwanted leadership tips to every lesson the trainer gives. Half-way through the morning, the session is hijacked by Brent when it is revealed that he was once

²¹⁸ Series 1, Episode 4, 174.

the lead singer in a band. Rather than follow the agenda of the hired trainer, Brent opts to play his guitar and sing for the rest of the staff. Once again dysfunction reigns, for the training day effectively ends when Brent brings out his guitar. The trainer walks out in disgust, one of the employees hands in his resignation, and the rest of the staff leave the day without having learned anything they did not already know.

The scenic elements of Brent's leadership style and Slough-like nature of the staff, are significant in that they feed off each other, allowing each to contribute to the created dysfunction. The listlessness of the staff towards their work lives means that they are willing to accept any distraction from their daily grind – distractions that Brent is all too willing to provide. Unfortunately, distractions do not add up to building a rapport with staff, only to satiate the entertainer in Brent. If staff were more dedicated to their work they might succeed in discouraging Brent from his endless entertaining quest. If staff objected, Brent may come to realize that his disruptions actually affected his popularity and he *may* give them what they actually want – more training. Conversely, if Brent were to be less self-centered he could put the time and effort that is needed into training his staff and they might learn to like and be better at their jobs.

The combination of these two dysfunctional scenic elements pervades the series and the effects do not go unnoticed by some staff. One office member states “yeah, it's alright here but people do sometimes take advantage, because

it's so relaxed"²¹⁹. A newly appointed member of the staff points out to Brent the differences between her old branch and his: "Well, we're used to doing stuff like, working hard, you know, being motivated, but there's not much dynamism out there, is there? I mean people look like they are getting away with murder"²²⁰.

We often see office staff playing practical jokes on one another and hanging around talking to each other about non-work related activities. This avoidance of work goes so far as to include dancing competitions, joke telling one-upmanship, playing soccer in the open area, and numerous celebrations for birthdays and other events. One would think that most of these activities would be curtailed by a supervisor urging his staff to get back to work, but Brent's quest for popularity only exacerbates these events. Brent is the one trying to one-up everyone on the jokes, Brent is the one participating in the soccer playing, and Brent is the one wanting to schedule celebrations and "drinks" whenever possible—even during work hours.

Although leaders are charged with the responsibility for modeling the way²²¹ and setting the example for how staff should act in organizations, this task can be made invariably more difficult if those staff have no intrinsic motivation for working there. Leaders can alter situations but situations can also alter leadership since the environment can exert important effects on the leader's

²¹⁹ Series 1, Episode 1, 42.

²²⁰ Series 2, Episode 2 , 72.

²²¹ James M. Kouzes and Barry Z. Posner, The Leadership Challenge (San Francisco, CA: Jossey Bass, 1995).

behaviour²²². Individuals who simply show up for the paycheque will be *seeking out* opportunities to make their jobs less like work. It is when we combine this personality trait with a leadership style like Brent's that we see these disastrously dysfunctional results.

Physical Layout of the Office

Another important scenic office factor is the physical layout of the workspace in *The Office*. Physical space and communication patterns in organizations have been linked through many studies and can be critical factors in an organization's day-to-day activities: J.A. Seiler in the Harvard Business Review states that:

buildings influence behavior by structuring relationships among members of the organization. They encourage some communication patterns and discourage others. They assign positions of importance to units of the organization. They do these things according to a plan that fits the company's strategic design, or to a nonplan that doesn't. They have effects on behavior, planned or not²²³.

The layout of *The Office* is an open concept which is characterized by "modular furniture and moveable partitions which partially screen office occupants from co-workers occupying the same office space"²²⁴. Although Brent

²²² Bernard M. Bass, Bass & Stogdill's Handbook of Leadership: Theory, Research, and Managerial Applications, 3rd ed. (New York NY: The Free Press, 1990) 565.

²²³ J. A. Seiler, "Architecture at Work", Harvard Business Review, (1984). 62(5), 111-120.

²²⁴ Charles, K.E.; Veitch, J.A. "Environmental Satisfaction in Open-Plan Environments: 2 Effects of Workstation Size, Partition Height and Windows Internal Report for National Research Council Canada, April 2002.

Brent does have an office, all other *Office* employees are part of the open concept as seen in the figure 4:

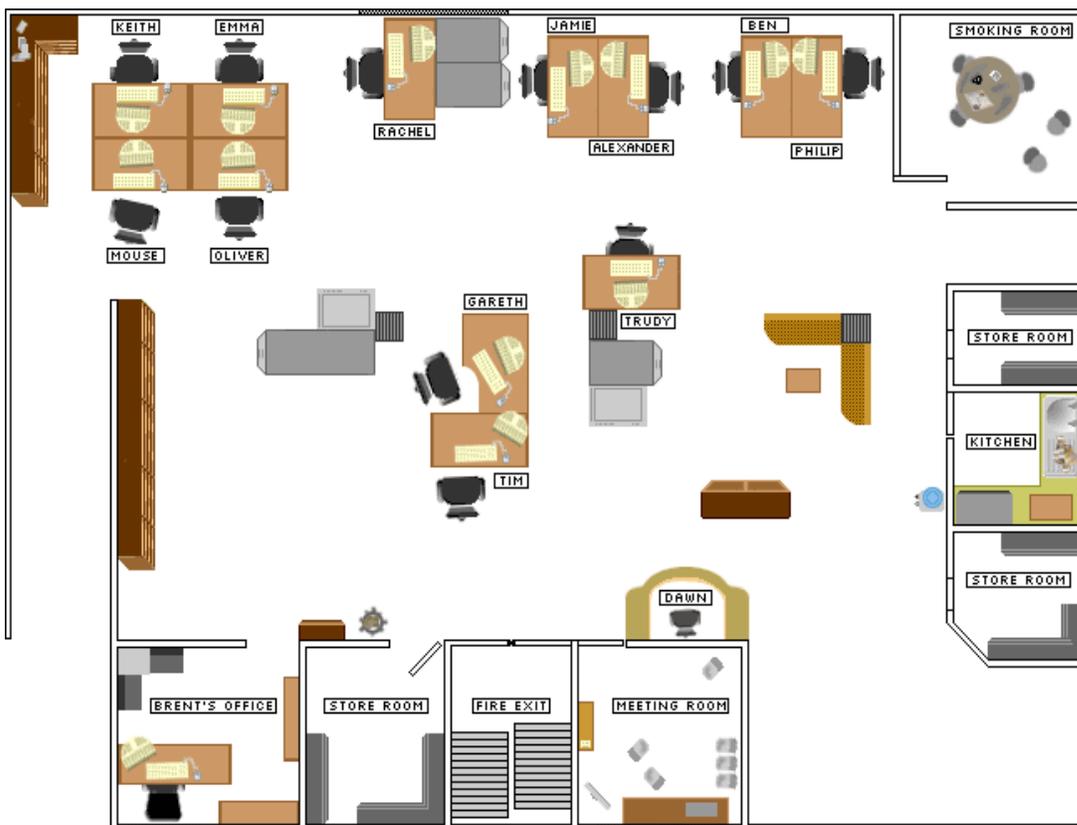


Fig. 4 – Slough Office Layout

In theory, the open concept is supposed to “create an egalitarian system with equal conditions for all employees”²²⁵ and enhance communication and social interaction which in turns promotes moral and organizational

²²⁵ Alan Hedge, “The Open-Plan Office: A Systematic Investigation of Employee Reactions to Their Work Environment”, Environment and Behavior 1982; 14, 519.

effectiveness²²⁶. In practice, the results have been mixed. Some researchers have found that the open concept can make employees feel like their work has less impact, decrease performance due to distractions, and actually negatively influence communication²²⁷. Regardless of the research, it is agreed that “open-plan offices may be more appropriate for certain types of employees or certain types of organizations than for others”²²⁸.

There are implications for the open-plan concept for Burke’s understanding of the role of hierarchy in human motivation. Office space is widely considered to incorporate symbols of status with those at the top having the largest and most private of the available space. The lack of privacy is meant to act as a democratizer for the staff but as previously stated, awareness of hierarchy is an inherent part of human nature and cannot be quashed, only distributed differently. The removal of one indicator of hierarchy will only make space for a new indicator to appear somewhere else²²⁹.

Generally speaking, we do see some immediate impacts the open-plan concept has on the proper functioning of our office artefact. The most ubiquitous impact is how the layout contributes to the petty rivalry between Tim and Gareth.

²²⁶ Charles, National Research Council.

²²⁷ G. R. Oldham,, & D. J. Brass, “Employee reactions to an open-plan office: A naturally occurring quasi-experiment”, Administrative Science Quarterly, 24, 267-284. (1979).

²²⁸ Oldham and Brass “Open-plan office”, 282.

²²⁹ One of Burke’s theories about human nature claims that hierarchy is a natural part of the human experience, and cannot be avoided no matter how hard we may try. See Burke’s “Definition of Man” in Language as Symbolic Action for further study of this concept.

With their desks facing one another and no physical barriers between them, tensions do arise as each attempts to exert his place in the hierarchy. Petty theft of staplers and other office symbols occurs, practical jokes run wild, and arguments are a daily occurrence. The frequency of these actions takes its toll on office functionality thus contributing to the general office dysfunction.

Despite the impact the open-plan concept may have on its own, the greatest dysfunction occurs when this scenic element interacts with another element of the scene -- Brent's leadership style. As an entertainer, the physical layout provides him with one thing that all entertainers need – a stage, and one thing a bad entertainer needs – a captive audience. As seen in the diagram of the office layout, Brent has immediate access to all of his staff by simply opening the door to his own office. This physical arrangement allows the attention-seeking Brent to interact with, and more specifically to interrupt, all his staff at one time, often with no real need to do so.

Most prominently, we see the open-plan concept contribute to Brent's incessant need for one-upmanship. Often, staff are seen joking around with one another while on a break and Brent literally pops out of his office to participate. Due to his need to come out on top of every experience, Brent often pushes these joke sessions past the brink of appropriateness into the realm of dysfunction.

In one instance he is asked by one employee to discipline another for his inappropriate joke and all Brent can do is try to come up with a better pun to

use²³⁰. Thanks to the open-plan concept, all staff are subject to Brent's interruption. In another instance, a new employee is meeting her colleagues for the first time and trying to fit in with them by telling them a joke. Brent sees this as an opportunity for himself and jumps in with what he thinks is a better joke. His joke ultimately fails, due to its poor delivery and even poorer taste, and he also ends up destroying the bonding moment between coworkers²³¹. Brent often creates opportunities to use his humour on the open-plan stage, simply popping out of his office and attempting to dazzle his staff with inappropriate and poorly delivered jokes²³². Each opportunity is simply another chance to disrupt employee tasks and reinforce their own supervisor's incompetence and personal lack of dedication to the job. The openness of the office facilitates unrestrained, careless behavior.

Brent's own lackluster job performance is reinforced when employees are disciplined in the open-plan concept. Brent takes many opportunities to exert his status as leader to discipline staff, but does so from the open-plan stage with other staff looking on. In one scene Brent attempts to discipline Tim for surfing the internet looking at pornography. Brent bawls out Tim in front of the entire staff, stating: "Stop taking advantage of my good nature, 'cos I could be like every other boss in this situation, okay, right? You're taking a piss and I'm

²³⁰ Series 1, Episode 1, 42.

²³¹ Series 1, Episode 2, 80.

²³² Series 1, Episode 3, 113, 129.

getting f---ing sick of it”²³³. Although this discipline could have taken place in private, Brent’s need for notoriety is ever present. As the Entertainer, he seeks out reaction from an audience, validation for acting like a real boss should. Unfortunately it is revealed that it was not in fact Tim who was guilty but Brent’s own drinking buddy, Chris Finch. Brent then back tracks on his earlier comments to Tim, downplaying the whole event and even apologizes to Tim for the mix-up, in front of the entire office.

The significance of the open-plan concept is that it greatly complicates the communication situation. Every act of communication involves risk – risk of losing credibility with those whom we have opened a communication channel with. Interacting with those that already know us requires us to meet their expectations with our acts of communication. When we do not, we run the risk of losing face, and possibly discrediting ourselves²³⁴. If Tim had had his own office, Brent could have gone through the whole scenario and only would have risked his relationship with Tim. By disciplining Tim within the open-plan concept, Brent has now included everyone within earshot and in the audience and thereby lost credibility with everyone in the office.

One last dysfunctional intersection of Brent’s leadership style and the open-plan concept involves the ability to keep organizational secrets. With an open-plan concept, staff have direct access to Brent and knowledge of whomever he is meeting. This knowledge proves problematic when it becomes

²³³ Series 1, Episode 2, 101.

²³⁴ Jennifer MacLennan, Effective Communication for the Technical Professions (Toronto: Prentice Hall, 2003) 15.

evident that there will be lay-offs occurring in the organization. Staff become concerned for their jobs and begin to hound Brent for information whenever they see him, which occurs often in the open-plan concept. As with other examples, the greatest dysfunction occurs because of Brent's ceaseless need to be popular. Because Brent is placed in a position where staff are aware something is afoot, he is forced to respond to staff in a most unprepared state. Not wanting to disappoint his staff, Brent communicates the message which will best ensure that his popularity will not wane – a lie assuring his staff that none of them will lose their jobs. The open-plan concept definitely exacerbates the situation by creating the right conditions for Brent to appear at his worst.

Lloyd Bitzer believed that the “right conditions” were a significant part of rhetorical communication. Bitzer states that communication is “called into existence by situation”²³⁵ and that the situation shapes the type of response that can be deemed appropriate. This shaping of the response can be seen as a guideline for the communicator or can also be described as a constraint. The open-plan concept places some unique constraints on the communication situation. First, the immediate knowledge staff have of who is coming and going from their supervisor's office causes staff to search for immediate answers about what is occurring. A closed concept may cause some staff to be unaware of developments unless others inform them of such occurrences. Second, when confronted, the open-plan concept prompts Brent to provide an immediate, single

²³⁵ Lloyd Bitzer, “The Rhetorical Situation”, Philosophy and Rhetoric. 1(1968) 9.

response to his staff. A closed concept may allow for different staff to be informed in different ways according to their positions, personalities, or personal situations. Combining these two elements with Brent's avoidance of face-loss greatly increases his potential for loss of credibility which directly impacts the proper functioning of the office.

Downsizing Issues

The last major scenic element introduced is the threat of downsizing of the Wernam-Hogg Branch. The element is significant for its intensity and for its frequency in almost every episode of the series. Brent's supervisor from head office, Jennifer Taylor-Clarke, informs him that "the board have decided that we can't justify a Swindon branch and a Slough branch...and a decision needs to be made to take on Swindon's people at this branch, or the other way around"²³⁶. Although the information is supposed to be confidential, it is not kept that way for long. As the information disseminates amongst the staff, work ceases and rumours begin.

The staff's preoccupation with understanding what is going on would greatly affect the communication patterns within the organization. Watzlawick, Beavin and Jackson tell us that "activity or inactivity, words or silence, all have message value"²³⁷ meaning that once a channel of communication is opened between two parties, like information being leaked about downsizing, all

²³⁶ Series 1, Episode 1 30-31.

²³⁷ Paul Watzlawick, Janet Helmick Beavin, Don D. Jackson Pragmatics of Human Communication: A Study of Interactional Patterns Pathologies, and Paradoxes (W.W. Norton & Company Inc.,1967) 48.

interaction between the two parties will be read as a message. Even acts of non-communication will be interpreted to mean something, which often will give rise to the “office rumour”. Ernest Bormann tells us that “whenever situations are so chaotic and indiscriminate that the community has no clear observational impression of the facts, people are given free rein to fantasize. Rumours are illustrations of the principle in action”²³⁸.

Because the threat of downsizing is such a pervasive issue, most interactions between the supervisor and the staff will be interpreted against the backdrop of the threat. In this situation of heightened sensitivities, staff will constantly look for resolution of this issue, requiring the leadership in the office to be as sensitive to what is, and is not, communicated in the office environment.

Dysfunction occurs when a situation requiring a heightened level of awareness is combined with the leadership style of David Brent. As office manager, Brent is the official bearer of this unpopular news, news that is the antithesis to Brent’s motivation to feel popular. Although told by his supervisor that “you and I don’t decide, I decide”²³⁹, Brent cannot accept the fact that this decision is out of his control. When questioned by his staff about responsibility for the final decisions, he chooses a response that will give him the most immediate popularity; “It won’t be out of my hands...and that’s a promise”²⁴⁰.

²³⁸ Ernest Bormann, “Fantasy and Rhetorical Vision: The Rhetorical Criticism of Social Reality” Quarterly Journal of Speech, Vol. 58, 4, (Dec. 1972) 405.

²³⁹ Series 1, Episode 1, 31.

²⁴⁰ Series 1, Episode 1, 50.

In a time of organizational crisis, when rumours abound and trust is at an all-time low, Brent lies about the single most important issue facing the organization -- all for the immediate need to save face and his popularity. The short-term effects are pointed out by Brent's boss Taylor-Clarke when she questions his decision to not only share this confidential information with his staff but then to misrepresent the situation:

BRENT. I gave a speech only this morning to my staff assuring them there would not be cutbacks at this branch and there certainly wouldn't be redundancies, so...

TAYLOR-CLARKE. Well, why on earth would you do that?

BRENT. Why? Oh, don't know. A little word I think's important in management called 'morale'.

TAYLOR-CLARKE. Well, surely it's going to be worse for morale in the long run when there are redundancies and you've told people that there won't be.²⁴¹

When one of his staff questions Brent about his deceptive attitude throughout this whole crisis, Brent explains that he "was just trying to keep the troops happy". His staff member replies, "Yeah, well, they'd be a lot happier if they knew they'd got jobs"²⁴². When staff do find out that their branch will be redundant and some of them will lose their jobs, staff focus their reactions on Brent's lie rather than the news itself:

EMPLOYEE #1. I can't believe it. After all the things he said, it's just....I'm in shock.

²⁴¹ Series 1. Episode 2, 85-86.

²⁴² Series 1, Episode 6, 237.

EMPLOYEE #2. Sold us out.

EMPLOYEE#3. Wanker²⁴³.

It is a given that no office environment would want to be under the threat of layoffs but Brent's style of notoriety-seeking has turned a bad scene to worse. By lying to staff, those who are not laid off have had their faith in the organizational management shattered. Those who weren't "Slough-like" and perhaps felt some intrinsic value in their jobs are certainly fated to have less faith in management and far less loyalty now that it has been revealed how management acts under pressure.

Conclusions

What has been shown here, again, is the significance of our choice of key critical terms. Using Burke's methods, we have shifted the scope of our inquiry from Agent to scene and been able to explore the ramifications of this new perspective. So, although a dysfunctional environment can be linked directly to a dysfunctional leader, ignoring situational constraints provides only a partial picture of dysfunction. Labeling the leader as part of the scene forces a critic to look at how the situational elements interact with leadership acts. With the pentad we find that in some cases, these situational elements are enough to cause their own dysfunction, in other cases these elements combine with the leadership style of Brent to create even more dysfunction.

²⁴³ Series 1, Episode 6, 252.

There are many different theories of leadership but most theorists agree that there are “types of leadership [that] are more specific to particular types of situations”²⁴⁴. What is required of leaders in a stressful situation, for example, is likely different from what is needed in calm and steady circumstances; leaders may need to deal differently with different types of subordinates; certain organizational structures may call for a certain type of leader²⁴⁵. Burke refers to the scene as a “container”²⁴⁶, for the Agent and the acts are contained by the boundaries of the scene. Changing the shape of the container will invariably change the shape of the most appropriate Agent to fill that container.

Good leaders are no doubt versatile but no leader can fit every container. As a result, when we look for solutions to organizational dysfunction we must not limit our perspective to changes in leadership -- it is worth exploring changes to the container as well. Good critics and good managers should ask themselves: are there scenic elements that could be changed that would limit or dispel office dysfunction?

This task may seem easier said than done, given the multitude of scenic elements to analyze in organizations. It appears that each element has given rise to a whole set of theories to deal with it. Organizational theorists have

²⁴⁴ J.K. Hemphill, Leaders Behavior Description (Columbus: Ohio State University, Personnel research Board, 1950).

²⁴⁵ Bernard M. Bass, Bass & Stogdill's Handbook of Leadership: Theory, Research, and Managerial Applications, 3rd ed. (New York NY: The Free Press, 1990) 563.

²⁴⁶ Kenneth Burke, Grammar of Motives xxv.

developed situational theories that focus on broad elements such as: organizational philosophy²⁴⁷, objectives and functions²⁴⁸, size and structure²⁴⁹, organizational stability²⁵⁰, and organizational culture²⁵¹ -- each one encompassing a series of environmental sub-elements. This chapter has shown that rhetorical theory can help us identify those elements worthy of study in individual scenes.

Bitzer tells us that the scenic elements that are important are ones that can be changed in order to solve our expressed problem.²⁵² If our problem is defined as “organizational dysfunction” then we should be drawn to those elements that frequently contribute to dysfunctional organizational acts. As laid out in the previous chapter, the leadership style of Brent is a frequent contributor

²⁴⁷ See D. McGregor, The Professional Manager (New York, NY: McGraw Hill, 1967); W. Ouchi, Theory Z: How American business can meet the Japanese Challenge, (Reading, MA: Addison Wesley, 1981).

²⁴⁸ See C.G. Browne & T.S. Cohn, The Study of Leadership (Danville, IL: Interstate 1958); A. Etzioni, A Comparative analysis of complex organizations (New York: Free Press, 1961); C.E. Kellogg & D.D. White, “Leader Behaviors and volunteer satisfaction with work: The effect of volunteer motivation level”, Academy of Management, (New Orleans, 1987).

²⁴⁹ R. Katz & J.J. Allen, “Project Performance and the locus of influence in the R & D Matrix”, Academy of Management Journal, (1985 67-87); R.M. Kanter, “Dilemmas of participation: Issues in implementing participatory quality-of-work-life programs”, National Forum (1982, 62(2)) 16-19.

²⁵⁰ T. Burns, “Management in action”, Operational Research Quarterly (1957, 8, 45-60); J.L Kerr, “Diversification strategies and managerial rewards: An empirical study”, Academy of Management Journal (1985, 28) 155-179.

²⁵¹ E.H. Schein, Organizational Culture and Leadership: A dynamic view (Jossey-Bass, San Francisco, 1985); P. Senge, “Systems thinking and the new management style”, Working Paper D-3263, (Cambridge, Massachusetts Institute of Technology, Systems Dynamics Group, 1980).

²⁵² Lloyd Bitzer, “The Rhetorical Situation” 3

to organizational dysfunction. Positioning the leaders as the Agent of dysfunction positions the primary solution to this dysfunction as the removal of Brent from the scene. This option is also afforded to us in the leader-as-scene approach but we are not limited to it.

The Scene is now comprised of four elements: Brent's leadership style, the Slough-like qualities of the staff, the physical layout of the office, and the issues of downsizing the branch. The circumference of the Agents then widens to include all members of the office for they all have a part to play in the office dysfunction. The scope of the Acts remain relatively the same, although it is now recognized that Brent is not the only one capable of producing those acts.

Agency and Purpose become less important for analysis in this perspective as the scene is quite dominant. Agency can be likened to the culture of the office for it is the collective nature of the scenic elements that allow these acts of dysfunction to occur. Purpose becomes largely subservient to the dominant scene, for scene severely limits the kind of acts that can occur. The reason the agents perform these acts is because they are the few acts that are afforded to them by the scene. The purpose behind acts is driven by the constraints of the scene and therefore less practical to analyze as a primary function.

Referring back to figure three, we see that the acts of dysfunction can really only change if the scene is altered. Like diverting the flow of a river, this can only be done by changing the surrounding environment. Although Brent is a large part of that environment he is not the only factor. The Scene-centred

approach allows a critic to ask questions about scenic elements and their contribution towards organizational dysfunction. If a manager did not want to immediately turn to the removal of the Agent, this perspective allows the question: What can be changed about the organization to best position Brent's leadership style? Given his propensity for entertaining, is it appropriate to place him in a physical layout that gives him access to a "stage" at work? If he is the type of leader who cannot deliver bad news, what should be expected of him during a time of financial crisis? Given that Brent will do anything to engage the attention of his staff, what occurs when he is coupled with staff who do not really care about their work?

If a decision is made to remove the leader, this perspective can also be useful in helping to position the next leader. Would a better leader be equally constrained by these scenic elements? Could these elements be turned to the advantage of the right kind of leader? Burke's methods provide a platform where multiple perspectives can be explored and questions such as these can be answered, but even these answers only offer a partial solution. It is only when perspectives are contrasted and combined that a more complete picture is developed. Burke's methods can also assist critics in exploring perspectives that may not seem readily obvious, yet their analysis may be crucial when combined with more conventional perspectives.

Leader-as-Act

In this thesis, I have chosen to use Brent as the focus of my analysis showing that he is a critical part of this office's dysfunction. I have been using Kenneth Burke's dramatic pentad to better explain Brent's role by showing the implications of labeling Brent with differing terms of the pentad. Despite the various labels that we affix to Brent, the common elements of analysis that link all potential perspectives are the many *acts* of dysfunction that occurred throughout the branch office and his role in those acts. Common organizational acts such as announcements of layoffs, training days, and employee orientations have been chosen for how each illustrates the dysfunctional milieu that is the Slough branch of Wernam-Hogg.

In dramatism, the '**Act**' is said to be pivotal; Burke considers it the "terministic centre from which many related considerations can be shown to radiate"²⁵³. When using pentadic analysis, an Act must first be identified for analysis for, it is only through the Act that one can then define the **Agent**, the **Scene** the **Agency**, and the **Purpose**. The other terms are vital, to be sure, but cannot exist if there is no Act to ground them. For instance, you cannot have a criminal if there was no crime committed. For that matter you cannot have a crime Scene, nor a weapon-of-crime (Agency). The potential may still exist; an Agent may have motive and opportunity to commit a crime, she may have the

²⁵³ Kenneth Burke, "Interaction: Dramatism," *International Encyclopaedia of the Social Sciences*, Vol. 6 (New York: MacMillan Co. and The Free Press, 1968) 445-47.

means and place to do so, but until a criminal *Act* occurs none, can be labeled nor analyzed as such.

The same can be said for Acts of organizational dysfunction. Only by identifying organizational Acts as dysfunctional can we best affix terms to an organizational leader like Brent to explore the role he plays within this dysfunction. In Chapter One, Brent was labeled as the Agent of dysfunction and therefore his personal acts were analyzed for their contribution to the office's acts of dysfunction. Brent was seen as the primary cause of the dysfunction and therefore the solution lay only with him. In Chapter Two, Brent was labeled as part of the dysfunctional Scene and the elements of analysis were the interplay of his actions and key scenic elements. Although Brent was still considered vital to the analysis, solutions to organizational dysfunction were expanded to include possible changes to the organizational scene.

In this final analysis chapter we will once again begin with the analysis of dysfunctional acts but I propose to analyze terminology that positions Brent's role in a manner significantly different than in the previous chapters. The purpose of this chapter is to argue that the various dysfunctional acts in the organization are all progeny of the ultimate dysfunctional act – the hiring of David Brent. I propose to use Burke's pentad to explore the implications of labeling the hiring, and continued employment, of Brent as the edenic dysfunctional act. This perspective is significantly different from the other perspectives, for up until now, Brent has been the ultimate catalyst of organizational dysfunction. Although Brent is still a key player, this perspective positions him as more of a symptom

than a catalyst of organizational dysfunction. Whether conscious or not, upper management is performing an important organizational act by not only hiring an individual like Brent but by continuing to prop up his dysfunctional leadership.

As demonstrated throughout this thesis, Burke's pentad allows for multiple perspectives of the same situation to be positioned for analysis. As mentioned earlier in the thesis, often perspectives can be taken that can push a critic out of a comfortable position of analysis. This jolt can serve the critic by using the pentad to "detect and correct for bias in an interpretation, serving as the basis for efforts to overcome the limitations of a single critical vocabulary"²⁵⁴. Purposefully analyzing perspectives not usually taken can reveal insights in to the situation that were previously obscured or overshadowed.

As the Agent of dysfunction, Brent was seen as solely responsible for the state of the current Wernam-Hogg branch and therefore solutions to dysfunction lie solely in the alteration or complete removal of him from the situation. As a part of the dysfunctional Scene, we still recognized Brent's pivotal role but recognized that possible solutions to the dysfunction may lie in the alteration of other scenic elements as well. In the leader-as-act approach, Brent is still a key part of the organizational dysfunction but we recognize that he is merely a symptom of larger dysfunction within the organization. There is no need to analyze Brent's dysfunctional actions for he is no longer an Agent of dysfunction in this perspective; those who have placed him in this position of power now play

²⁵⁴ Sonja K. Foss, Karen A. Foss, and Robert Trapp, Contemporary Perspectives on Rhetoric, 2nd ed. (Prospect Heights, IL: Waveland Press, Inc., 1991) 188.

that role. The units of analysis then are not Brent's actions but the actions that continue to keep a dysfunctional leader like Brent in his leadership role. From this perspective, the Agents (upper management/ The Board) and their Acts become the dominate terms of analysis. This perspective most effectively displays the power of the pentad, for moving Brent from creator of dysfunction to mere symptom of dysfunction drastically alters our perceptions of him, of the dysfunctional situation, and of the ultimate solutions to that dysfunction.

Pentad Positions

ACT:	Hiring, and ongoing employment, of a dysfunctional leader
AGENTS:	Upper Management/Board of Wernam-Hogg
SCENE:	The overall corporate culture of Wernam-Hogg
AGENCY:	Poor organizational policies, controls, and human resource practices
PURPOSE:	To maximize profits while minimizing organizational effort, especially on the part of the Agents

As Agents of dysfunction we must look to upper management's actions that lead to dysfunction. Since our study does not encompass the original Act of hiring Brent, we must analyze the Acts of Brent's superiors, Jennifer Taylor-Clarke, Neil Godwin, and the unnamed Board of Directors, that continue to keep a dysfunctional leader like Brent in power. When we use a fictional object as an artifact of analysis it may seem that some of these acts are exaggerated for dramatic effect but many examples of dysfunction that originate with upper management are unfortunately common place today. In recent history, many longstanding North American organizations have suffered with dysfunction with

blame being laid on upper management, leaving many pondering the question “How could this have gone on so long?” The economic crisis of recent times have shaken, and in some cases crumbled, the foundations of longstanding, blue-chip organizations such as General Motors, Lehmann Brothers, and Enron. The dysfunctions of these companies have been blamed on many factors both societal and economical, but the ultimate cause is “pure and simple bad management”²⁵⁵.

Examples of dysfunctional upper management do not necessarily need to involve the collapse of a whole organization, although there are well known examples to which we are often exposed²⁵⁶. The more common occurrence of the inept-leaders-kept-in-power-despite-their-ineptness lives through our expressions of popular culture for it is these “bosses on the brink” that we are forced to endure day in and day out. We do not hear these stories in the news because they are often so ubiquitous they are not newsworthy, but that makes their common theme ripe for popular culture. This theme is not only the cornerstone of *The Office* and its six other international versions but is seen in popular fictional works such as the cinema cult classic *Office Space*, and the long- running comic strip *Dilbert*. In fact, Dilbert author Scott Adams turned his

²⁵⁵ W. Edwards Deming, Out of the Crisis (MIT press, 1986) 7.

²⁵⁶ A well known example of dysfunctional leadership is American corporation Enron. The U.S. Senate’s Permanent Sub-Committee on Investigations prepared a report titled “The Role of the Board of Directors in Enron’s Collapse”. Some areas of the report contained so much data that they required their own headings in the table of contents including: “High risk accounting, inappropriate conflicts of interest, extensive undisclosed off-the-books activity, and excessive compensation”.

comic strip into a best-selling book called the “*Dilbert Principle*”, which essentially states that companies tend to systematically promote their least-competent employees to management in order to limit the amount of damage they're capable of doing²⁵⁷. Each example drawn from popular culture shows the day to day consequences of inept senior leadership. The consequences often are not large enough to rock the very fabric of a national economy, as in Enron's case, but they do focus on the regular, often minor, acts of dysfunction that are often performed by those in upper-management.

As described earlier in this thesis, we see Brent interact with his supervisor, Jennifer Taylor-Clarke where she informs Brent that there will be cutbacks in the organization. He is explicitly told to not share this information with his staff for fear of rumours and innuendos flying, an order he flat-out ignores Brent justifies his actions to Taylor-Clarke by indicating that it was all done for the sake of office morale, she rightly questions Brent asking “won't it be worse for morale in the long run there are redundancies and you've told people that there won't be”²⁵⁸? Although Brent has no response to this, other than being annoyed, Taylor-Clarke does nothing more to address this insubordinate and inappropriate behaviour.

Some organizations often dismiss dysfunctional behaviour like Brent's because “managerial efforts are geared towards all the concerns of the profitable

²⁵⁷ Scott Adams, *The Dilbert Principle* (New York, NY: Harper Business, 1996).

²⁵⁸ Season 1, Episode 2, 86.

organization, towards what has sometimes been called the ‘full circuit of capital’²⁵⁹. Essentially, as long as the branch is profitable, a high degree of leeway is given to how the branch may be run. Jennifer Taylor-Clarke may have a different approach to running an office but as long as Brent’s branch is making money there seems to be little objection to day-to-day dysfunctions.

When profits are threatened though, we see concern from upper management. Taylor-Clarke asks Brent about the cost-cutting solutions he has implemented since being told of potential cut-backs in the organization. She outlines what other branches have done to reduce costs and it becomes clear that Brent has not given any of these reductions a second thought. When she asks Brent if he has found any redundancies in the organization, to save face Brent does indicate that an individual has been fired from the warehouse. Taylor-Clarke, sensing something, pushes Brent on who has been fired and asks for confirmation from the warehouse supervisor. It is revealed that Brent has simply made up a name of the fired employee in order to save face with Taylor-Clarke.²⁶⁰ The action is not only one of dysfunctional management but is blatant insubordination. Brent has lied to his supervisor about a fairly serious organizational activity - the firing of an employee. All that we see of her reaction once this charade is revealed is slight disappointment on her part. Again, little is

²⁵⁹ Stephen Ackroyd and Paul Thompson, Organizational Misbehaviour, (London: Sage Publications, 1999) 86.

²⁶⁰ Season 1, Episode 2, 87.

done to punish Brent for his dysfunctional actions²⁶¹. So despite observing dysfunctional behaviour first-hand, upper management often weighs the pros and cons of acting on dysfunction. Sometimes dysfunction is overlooked due to ultimate profitability, sometimes it is overlooked because it is easier to get along with employees when a little dysfunction is tolerated, and sometimes it is overlooked because it would simply take too much time and energy to deal with. Often subordinates are not privy to the discussions that occur in the upper echelons of organizations and although active discussions may have occurred there that result in decisions to leave well enough alone, all that is seen by subordinates is the lack of action and continuation of dysfunctional acts that impact their daily lives.

Watzlawick, Beavin, and Jackson tell us that once a line of communication is opened between two parties, it cannot be closed – even non-communication may be taken as a message. They refer to this as the “impossibility of not communicating” and indicate that it is a basic property of human behavior that is often overlooked²⁶². Subordinates who are concerned about Brent’s

²⁶¹ For those readers who may be concerned that a major violation of trust such as this could be overlooked only in a work of fiction, one doesn’t have to venture far to see what is tolerated in the “real world”. L.R. Zeitlen (“A little larceny can do a lot for employee morale”, in C. Litter (Ed). The Experience of Work Aldershot: Gower, 1985) gives an example of a president of a US company who kept an office manager on despite his theft of over \$2,000 from the office’s petty cash. The rationale? The president thought the manager was worth at least another \$15,000.

²⁶² Paul Watzlawick, Janet Helmick Beavin, Don D. Jackson Pragmatics of Human Communication: A Study of Interactional Patterns Pathologies, and Paradoxes, (W.W. Norton & Company Inc, 1967) 48.

dysfunctional actions and see no reaction by upper management may perceive a message to have been communicated. By not acting on blatant dysfunctional behaviour, upper management is communicating to the entire staff that this type of behaviour is acceptable. Upper management may not be the ones creating the specific dysfunctional acts, but through their inaction they are allowing those acts to continue and most likely fester within the organization. In effect, blame for organizational dysfunction can no longer be placed solely upon Brent, if at all. Brent's dysfunctional acts have been observed by his superiors and have been tolerated. The inaction through toleration sends the message to their staff that Brent is the type of leader that is acceptable at Wernam-Hogg.

We see this sentiment proved true when Brent is not disciplined for his incompetence but actually offered a promotion within the organization. Those familiar with the popularized organizational concept known as the Peter Principle receive a further reinforced message. Made popular by Dr. Laurence J. Peter and Raymond Hull in their 1969 book *The Peter Principle*, the principle states that individuals in organizations are sooner or later promoted to a position in which they are no longer competent. Effectively, individuals who perform well in one position are promoted until they can no longer perform well, and there they stay due to their own incompetence²⁶³. Based on this principle, upper-management does not believe that Brent is incompetent, and in fact, by offering

²⁶³ Peter, Laurence J; Hull, Raymond The Peter Principle: why things always go wrong. (New York: William Morrow and Company, 1969).

this promotion, they are explicitly stating to their employees that he is actually exceeding expectations and should be rewarded.

Although this reaction may seem completely incongruent to the outsider, Burke believed that behaviour like this is often a result of an “occupational psychosis”²⁶⁴. Burke appropriated the term from psychologist John Dewey and used it to describe organizational situations when an individual made decisions that were predisposed to the occupation or position they held. Burke pointed out that “Professor Dewey does not use the word 'psychosis' in the psychiatric sense; it applies simply to a *pronounced character* of the mind”²⁶⁵. In this case, upper management’s primary role is to ensure profitability for the company and to create a sense of stability for stockholders and others outside the organization. Their concern is not the individual staff members within the organization, therefore their concerns would rarely factor into the situation – unless it interfered with their primary role. Despite the seemingly logical approach that upper management may feel it is taking, the communicative effect on subordinates in the organization can have unintended consequences.

It is particularly dangerous when the agents of dysfunction have a high degree of formal influence over a situation yet are the ones who are often least affected by their decisions. Upper management is not subjected to Brent’s style of leadership on a day-to-day basis. As is shown in the series, they only become involved in the branch’s operations when there are monetary troubles in the

²⁶⁴ Kenneth Burke, Permanence & Change 7.

²⁶⁵ Burke, Permanence & Change 49.

organization – when actions affect profitability. This situation can be dangerous because, if left unchecked, the actions or inactions of the upper management agents can create a cumulative effect that Burke refers to as “trained incapacity”²⁶⁶.

Burke borrowed the term from early organizational theorist Thorstein Veblen and used it to describe situations “whereby one’s very abilities can function as a blindness”²⁶⁷. As upper management continues to focus on profitability and perceived stability, they lose focus on other organizational factors such as employee productivity and wellness. This incapacity to see these other factors can actually train those in the organization to disregard them as well – even at levels where they are of paramount importance²⁶⁸. As upper management performs an act to hire a less-than qualified leader, and then continues to perform actions that keep and promote that type of leader in the organization, they are passing down their blindness to others further down the hierarchy.

As these acts become more ubiquitous and the message they communicate strengthens, there is potential for significant consequences within the organization. These acts of trained incapacity can become so pervasive that it can actually create scenic factors that contribute to organizational dysfunction.

²⁶⁶ Burke, Permanence & Change 6.

²⁶⁷ Burke, Permanence & Change 7.

²⁶⁸ Other theorists have developed similar concepts, most notably the idea of “deskilling” put forward by G. Gemmil and J. Oakley in , “Leadership: An Alienating Social Myth?”, Human Relations 1992; 45; 113.

Powerful acts, or acts performed by powerful agents, can become powerful factors of the organizational scene. Burke refers to this as a circular possibility in the terms. Through an Agent's Acts, he may change the nature of the Scene in accordance with his Acts, thereby establishing a unified state between himself and the world around him²⁶⁹. What this means is that given enough influence, Agents may Act in such an extreme way that they create a Scene that can only allow for those extreme Acts to occur. Their actions actually pollute the Scene to a point where, even if the offending agents are removed, the extreme Acts continue to be propelled no longer by the Agents but now by the scene.

So in our example, upper-management (the Agents) have hired Brent (the Act) to manage the Slough branch of Wernam-Hogg (the Scene). As Brent continues to create a dysfunctional environment with his leadership style each event that is ignored by upper-management sends a message of 'complicity' to the staff that are most affected by Brent's day-to-day actions. As each Act of Brent's dysfunction and subsequent upper-management complicity is observed by staff, with no other communication to dissuade them, the message that upper-management is communicating is that this type of leader and leadership is acceptable in the organization. As these observed complicit acts become the norm, they become something that is expected by staff within the organization. Essentially these expectations become the new organizational enthymemes on which office behavior is based. An Act that is deemed dysfunctional by the average staff member becomes seemingly less so because of the constant

²⁶⁹ Burke, Grammar of Motives 19.

acceptance of those Acts by those in power. As staff struggle to make sense of how these Acts could continue in their organization, upper management complicity often turns into staff complicity. Since subordinates have little power to change the Acts of upper management they too become complicit and ultimately accept the situation as normal. What once may have been considered an aberration now settles into the background assumptions, the enthymemes, of the office culture.

Karl Weick calls the phenomenon of normalizing seemingly implausible events “retrospective sensemaking” in organizations²⁷⁰. He believed that in order to make sense of what was taking place in organizations, individuals often look at actions occurring in an organization and uses those actions to develop a sense of what is normal, or acceptable. Future actions are then compared to this normative framework which may be altered as actions frequently or intensely move beyond what is considered normal. These frameworks of learning can act as the basis of what we call the culture of the organization for “to be aware of culture is to come to know that which the organization has learned”²⁷¹.

Normann states that “culture has two absolutely crucial functions in any organization: It acts as a symbol and storage of past learning, and it works as an

²⁷⁰ Karl E. Weick, Sensemaking in Organizations (California: Sage Publishing, Inc., 1995).

²⁷¹ R. Normann “Developing capabilities for organizational learning”. In J.M. Pennings & Associates (Eds) Organizational Strategy and change (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass 1985) 217-248.

instrument to communicate this learning through the organization”²⁷². So each act of complicity on the part of upper-management strengthens the staff’s understanding of what is acceptable within the organization. If Brent’s superiors allow him the leeway to perform his antics then surely those same antics should be acceptable to Brent’s subordinates -- complicity begets complicity; dysfunction begets dysfunction. More importantly though, as a form of communication, these acts of complicity become part of the cultural tapestry of the organization and are then taught to new members of the organization. What began as a series of complicit acts by upper-management agents now have become part of the scene into which new subordinates are indoctrinated.

This is a powerful organizational transformation for a few important reasons. If we extend Burke’s circularity of the terms we find that not only can powerful acts influence scenes, but powerful scenes can influence agents and acts. Essentially, an organization can enter into a pattern of continual renewal, for better or worse. Powerful agents and acts can influence a scene so dramatically that the scene then becomes the catalyst of change. Burke states that “the scene may call for a certain kind of act, which makes for a corresponding kind of Agent, thereby linking Agent to scene”²⁷³. If acts pollute a scene so much so that it creates a dysfunctional culture it may give rise to similarly dysfunctional agents.

²⁷² Normann, “Developing” 23.

²⁷³ Burke, Grammar 19.

Even new individuals brought in to change the cultural scene may get polluted. We see this in season 2 of the series when the hard-working, functional Swindon branch is absorbed into the dysfunctional Slough Branch. As mentioned in previous chapters, when first brought into the branch, the Swindon staff indicated that they were “actually used to doing stuff like, working hard...[Slough] people look like they’re getting away with murder”²⁷⁴. By the end of the second season we see Swindon people integrating into the work style of the Slough branch. Swindon folk are spending entire afternoons celebrating staff birthdays²⁷⁵, exchanging sexually-explicit gifts inappropriate for the workplace²⁷⁶, wasting time with insult one-upmanship²⁷⁷, and spending time on practical jokes²⁷⁸.

This transformation from act to scene is even more significant when upper-management fails to see its causal role in the organizational dysfunction. As the more dysfunction occurs, it may garner the attention of upper management when it affects profitability or public perception. The office dysfunction is now in a place where their trained incapacity can no longer shield it. Given their awareness, upper management must do something in response to organizational dysfunction. Due to their trained incapacity though, upper

²⁷⁴ Season 2, Episode 2, 72.

²⁷⁵ Season 2, Episode 3.

²⁷⁶ Season 2, Episode 3.

²⁷⁷ Season 2. Episode 4.

²⁷⁸ Season 2, Episode 6.

management often only sees the effect of the dysfunction and may not understand, or be willing to accept, their own role in the creation of the situation.

Subsequently, when Brent's poor leadership performance is finally recognized by upper-management, the solution that seems most obvious is to remove him from the dysfunctional environment. As explored in chapter 2, office dysfunction was placed solely at the feet of the leader closest to that dysfunction – David Brent. Seeking a solution to the organizational dysfunction, upper-management took the position that many in their role would do and chose to fire Brent. Still victims of their own trained incapacity though, the upper management of Wernam-Hogg failed to acknowledge their own role in creating the situation that allowed Brent to flourish. They also have failed to acknowledge that the scene that Brent was allowed to create now flourishes in the office. With the same powerful agents making hiring decisions and the same powerful scene influencing expectations of leadership within the office “the arrows of desire”²⁷⁹ all point to repeating the situation and simply replacing Brent with another Brent-like Agent. We see the arrows hit their mark when Brent is replaced with his sycophantic assistant, Gareth Keenan, ensuring a continuation of the same dysfunctional actions.

Conclusion

When describing the leader-as-Act, we affix David Brent's responsibility for office dysfunction slightly adjacent to previous positions. As a mere symptom of a greater dysfunction, solutions to that dysfunction do not necessarily lie with

²⁷⁹ Kenneth Burke, Counter Statement (1931; Berkeley: University of California Press, 1968) 125.

Brent himself but rather with the Agents who put him there – upper management. When using the pentad to analyze an organization, an Act-centred approach may stress management's role in discussing solutions to organizational dysfunction²⁸⁰. More specifically, Acts or counter-Acts by those in power are the most probable solution to Act-centred dysfunction. The more wide-spread, or formal, an Act may be in an organization, the more authority to act may be required. If we take a position similar to that of our first analysis, that the dysfunctional Acts that are occurring in the situation are a direct result of Brent as leader of the office, one can surmise that the act of hiring Brent is the ultimate action to address. For an authoritative and formal act such as this, only those who placed Brent in this position can be looked to for counter-acts.

When upper management fails to recognize the impact its actions (or inactions) can have on the organization there is a risk that they may repeat the same actions that have brought them to dysfunction. As well, there is an even greater danger that their acts could become consubstantial with the scene and begin to take on a life of their own. Powerful acts can create powerful scenes – scenes that can perpetuate even themselves if the original catalysts are removed. This phenomenon can be found in many organizations as it can be seen in complex organizational actions such as job restructuring or in simpler organizational acts such as the creation of a policy. In the recent anthology of

²⁸⁰ Terista Garza, Organizing from a Dramatisitic Perspective: A Pentadic Analysis of Organizational Communication, Master's Thesis, University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee, 1991, 25.

organizationally dysfunction titled “*Strategy Bites Back*”, this phenomenon was illustrated by the following analogy:

Start with a cage containing five monkeys. Inside the cage, hang a banana on a string and place a set of stairs under it. Before long, a monkey will go to the stairs and start to climb towards the banana. As soon as he touches the stairs, spray all of the other monkeys with cold water. After a while, another monkey makes an attempt with the same result, all the other monkeys are sprayed with the cold water. Pretty soon, when another monkey tries to climb the stairs, the other monkeys will prevent it.

Now, put away the water. Remove a monkey from the cage and replace it with a new one. The new monkey sees the banana and wants to climb the stairs. To his surprise and horror, all the other monkeys attack him. After another attempt and attack, he knows that if he tries to climb the stairs he will be assaulted.

Next, remove another of the original five monkeys and replace it with a new one. The newcomer goes on the stairs and is attacked. The previous newcomer takes part in the punishment with enthusiasm! Likewise, replace a third original monkey with a new one, then a fourth, then the fifth. Every time the newest monkey takes to the stairs, he is attacked. By this point, all the monkeys that are beating him have no idea why they were not permitted to climb the stairs or why they are participating in the beating of the newest monkey. After replacing all the original monkeys, none of the remaining monkeys have ever been sprayed with cold water. Nevertheless, no monkey ever again approaches the stairs to try for a banana.

Why not? Because as far as they know that’s the way it’s always been done around here. And that, my friends, is how company policy begins.²⁸¹

Exploring the leader-as-Act can be a significant perspective not merely because of the impact it can have on an organizational culture but for the fact that its implicit nature usually keeps it hidden. This is why Burke’s pentad is such

²⁸¹ Tommy Wiseman, “How Destructive Cultures Develop”, *Strategy Bites Back* Eds. Henry Mintzberg, Joseph Lampel, Bruce Ahlstrand. (Great Britain : Prentice Hall Financial Times, 2008) 207.

a powerful tool, by moving a critic out of a comfortable approach, such as laying blame solely with the leader closest to the dysfunction, in order that different solutions can be explored, tried, and evaluated. Karl Weick states that many organizational theories focus on the pathology of organizations rather than their normalcy. In the world of organizational theories, “organizations seem to lope along from crisis to crisis and to do nothing very interesting in between”²⁸². Perhaps it’s because theorists and organizational managers are often relegated to only one perspective, only one way to offer solutions to organizational problems are often the one most easily accessible. Often these accessible solutions are implemented leaving the underlying acts still unaddressed, causing dysfunction to repeat itself and crises to reoccur.

²⁸² Karl Weick, Social Psychology of Organizing (Boston MA:Addison-Wesley Publishing Company, 1969) 34.

Conclusion

In this thesis I have argued that there is value in analyzing the terminology used to describe dysfunctional situations in organizations. In particular, I've argued that there is value in using Kenneth Burke's dramatic pentad as a primary method of analysis of this language. I've shown that the language we use in our analysis of an event has implications for the analysis itself, implications of which we may not even be aware. Burke's methods help us reveal our most implicit assumptions, the enthymemes that are associated with the terminology we choose. By analyzing terminology associated with analytical descriptions of organizational dysfunctions, these revealed implications can then be used by pragmatists to further explore solutions to that dysfunction.

In addition to providing a method of analysis, Burke's pentad operates as a meta-method as well. The pentad can be used to analyze past descriptions of events but is useful in exploring other possible descriptions, and their implications, for the same event. By taking a commonly held description of an event, such as a dysfunctional **Act**, the terms of the pentad can be shifted, even slightly, to reveal other possible explanations for that dysfunction. These explanations can then be combined and contrasted to offer a more complete picture of what is taking place in this drama of human relations.

To illustrate this process, I've analyzed the terminology used to describe the role of the formal leader of an organization that was deemed to be dysfunctional. In particular, I explored three descriptions of the role office manager Brent played in dysfunction of the television series "*The Office*".

In the first analysis chapter, I positioned Brent as the Agent of dysfunction. Agent-centred approaches emphasize that people are responsible for their own destiny and that a given situation exists because of how they do and do not act. In plain terms, blame for the dysfunction of the Slough branch of Wernam-Hogg lies solely with Brent. This is an approach that is commonly invoked in many organizations as expectations of leaders are high. Leaders are seen as the final authority on all activity that occurs within their domain, as epitomized in the popular leadership phrase “the buck stops here”. When an organization is perceived to be dysfunctional, organizational leaders are often scrutinized for their role in the dysfunction, taking the brunt of the blame²⁸³.

With an Agent-centred focus, the organization is dysfunctional because the leader is dysfunctional. Burke states that “an agent is an author of his acts”²⁸⁴, meaning that as a shaper of an office’s reality, if it is dysfunctional it must be at least to some extent due to the dysfunctional acts of the leader. However, the Agent and the Scene can become consubstantial with one another so much so that you cannot address one without the other.

Based on this approach, I’ve shown that an analysis of the dysfunctions of the leader is also an analysis of the dysfunctions of the office. In fully applying

²⁸³ See for example: David D. Dan Fleet, Ricky W. Griffin, “Dysfunctional organization culture: The role of leadership in motivating dysfunctional work behaviours” Journal of Managerial Psychology, Vol. 21, Issue 8, 2006; or Stephan Ackroyd and Paul Thompson, Organizational Misbehaviour (London :Sage Publications, 1999)74-99; or E. Gaucher, E. Kratochwill, "The leader's role in implementing total quality management", Quality Management in Health Care, Vol. 1 No.3,1993,.10-18.

²⁸⁴ Kenneth Burke, Grammar of Motives 16.

Burke's pentadic method, the other terms may be affixed to aspects of the situation using the leader-as-agent as an anchor point. The following terms were affixed accordingly:

Agent:	Formal office leader, David Brent
Act(s):	Acts of dysfunction as seen in <i>The Office</i>
Scene:	The part of the organization over which Brent has authority, the Slough branch of Wernam-Hogg
Agency:	The organizational structure that gives Brent formal authority over that branch.

One of the advantages of using Burke's methods is that the terms can "range far"²⁸⁵ by adjusting their scope and/or circumference, depending on the analysis one wants to take. As an anchor point, affixing one of the terms invariably limits the scope and circumference of the other terms. By labeling Brent as the Agent of dysfunction due to his role as formal leader of the office, the Acts we must attribute to the Agent must be his own dysfunctional organizational Acts. Subsequently the Scene is limited to the place where he performs those Acts and the Agency must be limited to the tools that give him the authority to perform them.

One crucial piece of information missing from the pentad was the reason, or Purpose, behind the Acts of dysfunction. Assuming that Brent was not purposefully performing dysfunctional Acts, what was it that made him create such a dysfunctional environment? Uncovering the Purpose is crucial, not just to complete the pentad, but to uncover the reasons behind the office dysfunction.

²⁸⁵ Kenneth Burke, Grammar of Motives 5.

By uncovering *why* Brent is dysfunctional, we can begin to understand how to address the ramifications for the office. Another of Burke's dramatic tools, cluster analysis, was used to uncover his purpose for performing the dysfunctional acts.

In cluster analysis, the critic searches for key terms within a specific discourse and examines other terms or ideas that frequently are associated, and disassociated, with those key terms. The clusters are analyzed for habitual patterns or unexpected contrasts of meaning. By doing so a map is created of the connections among the terms, which leads us to the premise that these formal connections express a logic rooted in the psychology of the communicator²⁸⁶. By analyzing a series of Brent's dysfunctional actions, including language acts involving how he described himself as a leader, I revealed that Brent is on a constant quest for notoriety. As a primary part of his personality, he is willing to use any means possible, including his formal authority at work, to achieve a sense of notoriety. Therefore his Purpose in performing these Acts that are deemed dysfunction is 'to achieve fame'.

By using Burke's pentad to uncover Brent's Purpose, it is more clearly revealed how Brent's actions lead to dysfunction within the office. By searching for popularity, Brent is preoccupied with his own interests and agenda. He is willing to sacrifice any long-term meaningful connection with his office mates for the short term gains of notoriety. This sacrifice is translated into actions such as the deterioration of staff training, the bleeding of any meaning from staff

²⁸⁶ David Blakesley, The Elements of Dramatism 104.

evaluations, the creation of a distrustful environment, and the eventual firing of some of the branch's employees.

Although solutions to dysfunction may not be easy to implement, revealing Brent's purpose has opened up more venues to explore change. Revealing Brent's base motivation means that steps can be taken to either assist him with his issues or to better tailor the job to his unique take on life. Until his purpose was revealed, the only practical options afforded to the organization were to remove Brent altogether or simply tolerate his dysfunctional leadership style – two options that can be extreme in their own right.

In the second pentadic analysis, I've labeled Brent as part of the dysfunctional Scene. Burke's methods are used to determine key elements of the scene that contributed to dysfunction and each of these elements are analyzed to see how they interact with one another. Rather than being the complete cause of organizational dysfunction, Brent is now positioned as only one part of a number of dysfunctional elements, each contributing to the ongoing dysfunction. By describing the situation from a scenic perspective, the individuals within the situation are not seen as self-defined; rather they are constrained by the conditions within which they find themselves. At its extreme this perspective could be used to explain individuals actions as though they were victims of circumstance, bound tightly by the elements of the scene. At its more practical, though, the scenic perspective is most useful in assessing many elements that may be affecting the situation.

Since Brent's leadership style is an important part of the organizational Scene, I've analyzed elements of the scene that combine synergistically with his style. I've found that there are three other critical elements that work with Brent's leadership style to create dysfunction within the office. The first is the general attitude of the staff that work at the branch. This is described as the "Sloughness" of the staff, so labeled for the glum, dreary, and mediocre tenor of the city itself. Generally speaking, the staff does not enjoy working for Wernam-Hogg and therefore look for opportunities to do other things they enjoy. When this mindset is coupled with a boss who is willing to engage his staff on anything that will result in his own notoriety, this engagement often does not result in performing the work of the organization.

The second scenic element is associated with the physical layout of the office. As an open plan concept, no one is given any privacy, save for the office manager. As it were, little could be kept from anyone in the office as communication patterns are affected in the open plan concept. Most importantly, when this element is combined with a leader who is constantly looking for a platform to entertain anyone who will listen, distractions often occur in the office that continually contribute to the dysfunction of the office.

Lastly, the final significant scenic element is the economic circumstances that Wernam-Hogg finds itself in. Hit with some financial difficulties, the organization is required to re-evaluate its current processes including costs and organizational structure. This cost evaluation requires a very tight rein on communication about upper-level discussions and also requires the delivery of

unpopular news. Since Brent is willing to do anything to be seen as popular, he is not well suited for these types of circumstances. In fact, as we see in the series, he fails to deliver required news if it is the least bit bad and cannot keep any confidential information to himself due to his incessant need to be the centre of attention. The circumstances, the attitude of the staff, and the leadership of Brent all combine to create an even more distrustful and uninspired office.

With the key scenic elements identified, the pentadic positions for leader-as-scene can be laid out as follows:

Scene:	The synergistic effects of: David Brent's leadership style, Slough-like qualities of the staff, the ramifications of the physical layout of the office, and issues of downsizing at Wernam-Hogg
Agents:	All members of the Slough branch of Wernam-Hogg
Acts:	Acts of dysfunction as seen in <i>The Office</i>
Agency:	Culture of Wernam-Hogg that allows these elements to exist
Purpose:	To follow the norms of the organizational culture, as constrained by the key elements of the scene

As part of the Scene, the leader is no longer the sole progenitor of dysfunction. Although Brent is a key element of the Scene of *The Office*, all who work there are now seen to contribute to the dysfunction and therefore they are all Agents of dysfunction. The acts remain consistent from the previous example as we are retrospectively analyzing what has occurred in the office. The Agency is that which has allowed these Acts to occur: in this case it can be described as the general milieu of issues that have persisted and created a culture of

mediocrity and low expectations. The Agents are then committing these Acts in order to simply meet the standards of the organizational culture.

In situations largely dominated by the scene, changes to the situation are usually limited to changes in the Scene. Because the Scene contains both the Agents and their Acts, scenic changes *must* be taken into account. Despite the rigidity of the scenic elements, what we see using this perspective are more ways to possibly affect change to the situation. Removal of Brent is still an option for pragmatists, but as he is only part of the Scene, we can at least explore altering other elements in order to affect change. These options are only revealed by assuming this perspective and applying rhetorical theories to analyze the situation.

Using Burke's pentad and shifting perspectives, permits a critic to see things that they have not seen before. By positioning Brent as part of the Scene there are elements of dysfunction that can be used by pragmatists to explore possible solutions to dysfunction. While all solutions, especially of a scenic nature, may not be easily achieved, one is not painted into a corner and forced to choose potentially limited and undesirable options, such as the firing of an employee. By revealing those scenic elements that are affecting the proper functioning of the office, organizational resources could be put into correcting some or all of these elements.

In the third and final analysis, Brent is labeled in an atypical fashion. As an Agent of dysfunction, total blame for the office chaos lies with him and his Acts. As part of the dysfunctional Scene, his leadership style is analyzed for how

it interacts with other key scenic elements to create dysfunction. However, to show the versatility of Burke's pentad, I've explored the repercussions of labeling Brent, or rather his hiring and ongoing employment, as an actual Act of dysfunction. As an Act, blame for dysfunction shifts from Brent to those who placed him in his position. In more plain terms, when dysfunctional Acts occur in a leader-as-act perspective, staff do not question Brent himself but rather wonder why Brent's boss would continue to let him act in this way. The pentadic positions are now labeled:

Act:	Hiring, and ongoing employment, of a David Brent
Agent(s):	Upper Management/Board of Wernam-Hogg
Scene:	The overall corporate culture of Wernam-Hogg
Agency:	Poor organizational policies, controls, and human resource practices
Purpose:	To maximize profits while minimizing organizational effort, especially on the part of the agents

If Brent is considered the ultimate Act of office dysfunction, then only those who placed him there and keep him there could be the Agents of that dysfunction. This Act of placement is allowed to happen (Agency) because the organization clearly has poor policies and controls for identifying and dealing with dysfunction. The Act is so far-reaching that it actually pollutes the Scene of the organization where expectations are set low for staff on what to expect from their leaders within the organization. Again, though, there is a belief that there is no malicious intent here: the Board of Wernam-Hogg is not purposefully trying to create a dysfunctional environment for its staff, but rather it is their ignorance of

the needs of their staff that is driving the dysfunction. Upper management appears to be solely concerned with creating a profitable organization and it is only the lack of profits, and not the dissatisfaction of their staff, that would cause them to review their hiring of Brent.

This perspective also reveals a particular danger that can occur in organizations. As the hiring of a leader is a significant act, its own dysfunction can ripple through the organizational ether. As each dysfunctional act is implicitly allowed, expectations of leadership, bad or otherwise, become more entrenched. As individuals begin to see more dysfunctional acts, with no ramifications to those performing them, the acts pollute the scene so much that they can change the scene itself. What began as a series of dysfunctional acts has now dictated the expected culture of the organization.

Solutions to such powerful Acts are often limited to equally powerful counter-Acts. As well, if these powerful Acts have continued on enough to pollute the Scene, an even more powerful counter-Act may be required to make up for the harm the original Act created. Often powerful acts such as firing, restructuring, or even bankruptcy must be explored if the original acts are powerful enough or have strengthened over a lengthy period of time. In this particular case, in order to rectify the ultimate Act of dysfunction there may be a need to replace the original Agents themselves –upper management or the board of Wernam-Hogg.

In this thesis I have only explored three possible perspectives, although many more are available to us. As discussed earlier, the power of the pentad

lies in our ability to shift the scope and the circumference of the terms. Due to the connectivity of the terms, an alteration in one term can result in alteration of the other terms so that even a small shift in perspective may yield perspectives that we cannot see any other way. In this thesis I chose to focus primarily on the office manager Brent and to explore the terms used to study his role in the explicit dysfunction of the office, but we could conceivably focus on other elements.

For example, we could choose to begin with the overall description of the Scene and expand the scope to include the entire paper industry in London and explore what effects the industry may have on the proper functioning of the Slough branch of Wernam-Hogg. We could shift the circumference of the Scene to something a little more philosophical and describe it as an environment of common expectations of business leaders in a modern society and see how that Scene contributes to dysfunctions in the office. We could focus on the Purpose of profit corporations to explore the ramifications of profit-hungry businesses on office productivity. We could also treat the customers of Wernam-Hogg as Agents of dysfunction and see how the other terms, and ramifications of them, were developed. These examples are but a few options available for further study.

Burke agrees that there are many ways to approach how a situation is described, and by default analyzed, but regardless of the choice of critical terminology they are all described using the same basic elements. He states “men may violently disagree about the purposes behind a given act, or about the

character of the person who did it, or how he did it, or in what kind of situation he acted; or they may even insist upon totally different words to name the act itself. But be that as it may, any complete statement of motives will offer some answers to these five questions²⁸⁷ of the pentad. The pentad gives us a common grammar for analyzing our language choices and even though our terminology can and will be different, or we do so explicitly or implicitly, the choices we make to describe a situation hold implications for our belief of the reasons the situation has arisen.

A key benefit of the pentad is that it is not prescriptive. Burke did not develop it with any preconceived hierarchy of terms or application. The pentad does not contain any inherent biases about how a problem should be approached. It is an “instrumental logic which may be used to investigate hypotheses about particular problems”²⁸⁸. Free from prescription, a critic is allowed to take advantage of multiple ideologies and to sometimes expose his or her own blind spots. Ideally, a method like the pentad can be used to provide a more complete picture of what is taking place in situations where ambiguity is present. For Burke, dramatic analysis is best used in ambiguous situations, where there can be more than one answer to explain human motivation. Rather than trying to merely label ambiguity and move on, Burke believed that

²⁸⁷ Kenneth Burke, Grammar of Motives xii.

²⁸⁸ Michael A. Overington, “Kenneth Burke and the Method of Dramatism” Theory and Society 4, 1977.

dramatism should be used to clarify the “resources of ambiguity”²⁸⁹ by fully explaining the possible ways a situation can be described differently.

Although Burke provides us with a method to analyze situations from differing perspectives his approach can also be used as a meta-method. Once certain perspectives are taken and analyzed, a critic can begin to contrast and compare each perspective with the others. Burke does not suggest that an analysis of one perspective can provide all the answers; in fact he would urge a critic to garner many perspectives in order to find a solution to a problem. Often that means exploring solutions and determining their ramifications within each perspective explored.

For instance, as mentioned throughout this thesis, one solution to dysfunction of *The Office* is to fire Brent. In our first analysis, this solution looks most appropriate and may be seen as the most effective course of action. When we apply it against the other two analyses we are forced to consider other possibilities. In the second analysis, getting rid of Brent may be a possible solution as well but special steps need to be taken when hiring his replacement. There are scenic factors that may negatively interact with his replacement which may put the Slough branch back into the same dysfunctional situation. In the third analysis, we see that removing Brent would do little to effect dysfunction for the dysfunction stems from higher up the organizational hierarchy. Without addressing the issues with upper management there is a good chance that the

²⁸⁹ Burke, Grammar xix.

dysfunction will continue to occur even if he is replaced (and we see that situation occur within the series).

A good pragmatist would take each perspective and weigh the possible ramifications of a proposed solution and perhaps develop a multi-pronged approach to the problem. Perhaps Brent does need to be replaced, but at the same time perhaps the issues involving the attitude of the staff and the approach to leadership of the board need to be addressed as well? I am confident the Burke would attest that there is no perfect solution to any issues involving human interaction but he would agree that there are better and worse solutions. By using the pentad to provide a more complete analysis of the situation, a critic can attempt to seek out better answers to the common questions that plague the organizations we interact with every day.

Human communication, and hence interaction, by its nature is a complex process. It is difficult to determine the entire rationale behind an individual's acts, even those acts that we perform ourselves. But how we communicate to and about each other holds the clues as to *why* we communicate in the ways that we do. Rhetorical theory provides the tools and methods to analyze our overt communication as well as the implicit assumptions embedded within it. In this thesis I have shown that Burke's rhetorical methods are a practical approach to understanding dysfunction in situations. By analyzing how we communicate about dysfunction, and in particular a leader's role in that dysfunction, I have shown how exploring multiple perspectives of ambiguous problems can provide more complete solutions to those problems.

I have shown that rhetorical methods can successful be applied to the study of modern organizations, and specifically to the terminology used to describe them. I also have confirmed the pragmatics of Burke's methodology, in particular, and have shown that Burke's terms can indeed "range far" to assist us when needed. Lastly, this thesis has revealed that in their travels, Burke's terms provide us with valuable information about these strange beasts called organizations that nurture, educate, entertain, employee, and often frustrate us so.

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