

**FUTURE PERFECT?
CONVERSION STORIES AND THE NARRATION OF
ORGANIZATIONAL CHANGE**

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Abstract

In this paper, we present a set of narratives about organizational change in which employees' experiences are presented as conversion stories. Within these stories, employees contrast their negative views on personal career, organizational culture and employment relations before major structural change with much more positive post-change perspectives. Organizational change appears to be a turning point, and conversion stories are associated with improved career prospects. We discuss the progressive, optimistic and dramatic nature of the conversion stories in the context of the optimism of the knowledge economy, shifts in the nature of organizational change theory, discursive preferences for successful change, presentational and attributional factors within interview settings, retrospective data collection, and the particular local context in which the stories were told. We suggest that all of these factors may complicate the representation of the conversion story as an example of extreme and positive transformational organizational change, and discuss their implications for both the theory and practice of narrative change research.

FUTURE PERFECT? CONVERSION STORIES AND THE NARRATION OF ORGANIZATIONAL CHANGE

This paper is concerned with how employees talk about their experiences of organizational change. In particular, it focuses on the interpretation and construction of particularly positive narratives about organizational change, narratives that we term conversion stories. As Boje (2001) has argued, people often tell stories in a non-linear, fragmented and irrational manner, which can at times be very difficult to interpret and follow. It is when stories are given chronology and continuity in retrospect that they become narratives. However, we use the terms story and narrative interchangeably in this paper, for our concern is primarily with a particular type of retrospective account: the conversion narrative.

In the context of organizational change, conversion narratives highlight a change in employees from non-managerial identifications prior to organizational change, to obvious support for management decision-making after organizational change. These narratives are referred to as conversion stories as organizational change is reported as a turning point (Snow & Machalek, 1983; Zinnbauer & Pargament, 1998) in people's careers. Employees who construct conversion narratives suggest that support for management decision-making and organizational change are related to the ability to obtain career opportunities and advancement in the organization - to approach a future perfect. Within the paper, we discuss a set of conversion stories that were told as part of a larger study of organizational change in an industrial region in Australia, and while these stories represent only some of those that were told, their extremity and their content inform discussion both of the progressive intent of organizational change theory and the increasing dramatization of that theory in contemporary times.

Despite the increasing popularity of action research and complexity theory in change management, it is noteworthy that managerial approaches to change continue to appear in contemporary change literature on organization development and change (Breu, 2001; Moran & Brightman, 2001; Prochaska, 2000). Such approaches tend to portray change as a tidy, linear and sanitized process in which employees support and commit to progressive, management-driven programs. Associated accounts of change are often presented as glamorous accounts (for example, Block, 2001; Ortenblad, 2001; Tosey & Robinson, 2002) and are hegemonic in the sense that they are dominating, powerful and taken for granted (Boje, Luhman & Baack, 1999).

Such accounts are often privileged over those of employees, whose voices are largely marginalized and ignored (cf. Czarniawska, 1997). However, researchers such as Boje (1995), Butcher & Atkinson (2001) and Collins (1998) have questioned and challenged the external validity and representation of top-down models of organizational change. For example, they argue that top-down models focus too much on rationality and linearity (Butcher & Atkinson, 2001), impose stories constructed at management levels onto all employees (Boje, 1995), and are "tiresome and repetitive...[while failing] to locate management as an ideology" (Collins, 1998: 34). In this paper, we too question such models. However, rather than presenting approaches that are more encompassing or oppositional to such thinking, our questioning comes through presentation and re-presentation of conversion stories; dramatic stories that, at first glance, appear to support organizational change and to do so with gusto.

THE DRAMATIZATION OF ORGANIZATIONAL CHANGE

Perhaps it is not surprising that dramatic times and dramatic theories produce dramatic accounts of change. While it can be argued that narratives of change constructed within the top-down literature are simply one interpretation (De Cock, 1998) that should not be privileged at the expense of employee experiences, it is also evident that recent representations of change have become far more dramatic than the account provided by Lewin (1947) in the 1940s. Initial studies of change introduced the term organization development ('OD'), focusing on the planned, rational

and incremental manner in which change is implemented in the organization (Block, 2001; French & Bell, 1984; Worren, Muddle, & Moore, 1999). However, the unpredictable environment in which organizations have to operate in called for an extension of change theory and the introduction of the term organizational transformation ('OT'). This may be because the increase in urgency combined with the scale of change has caused change in the workplace to be "more severe and potentially more disruptive to employees" (Mossholder, Settoon, Armenakis, & Harris, 2000: 222).

Whether or not this is the case, the language of transformation is certainly more extreme than that of development (Block, 2001; Fletcher, 1990; Nadler & Tushman, 1993). Whereas OD had emphasized and expanded on the Lewinian stages of unfreezing, moving and refreezing, OT theory refers to organizational change as reawakening (Fletcher, 1990), rebirthing (Block, 2001), as magic or a miracle (Neal, Lichtenstein, & Banner, 1999) and as being a highly spiritual experience for organizations and their members (Tosey & Robinson, 2002).

Thus, the development of top-down organizational change research has coincided with the development of more extraordinary and spectacular language to describe it. Not only is change presented in the form of grand narratives (see Boje, 2001), it is featured as a process that is extraordinary or outstanding, and privileged as being the ultimate way in which change should be viewed. Top-down models now project a "perfect image" (Debord, 1994: 15) of organizational change, in which "indispensable packaging...[and] a general gloss" (1994: 16) are placed on the process of change to highlight its rationality and order. The "ruling order" (194: 19) discourse is then conveyed to the public as the preferred image of change in which conflicting stories are discounted or suppressed.

Such dramatization is perhaps to be expected by those who believe that we have created a world of unreality in which expectations have become excessive (Boorstin, 1972). Accordingly, we seek extravagant, "bigger and better and more vivid" (1972: 6) illusions of what the world should be like. Boorstin (1972) argued that society has become spectacular to the point that individuals prefer imaginary to reality, and Debord has suggested that society has an obsession with image, to the extent that "the spectacle itself determines which needs and desires are valid and suitable" (Wood, 2002: 15) and that "everything that has directly lived has moved away into a representation" (Debord, 1994: 12). Even such representations have become more spectacular, for organizational life can be seen not only as theater but also as cinema (Wood, 2002).

Perhaps we should only anticipate more dramatic, univocal accounts of organizational change with the growth of the knowledge economy (Quinn, 1992) and the continued separation of the valued from the material (see, for example, Sveiby, 1997). However, citing Boje (1995), Oswick & Keenoy (2001: 224) suggest that the spectacle may have its limitations in that there is an "analytic impossibility of sustaining any monological account of social reality". In this paper, we sympathize with such a view by examining conversion stories, stories that appear to be particularly dramatic, positive accounts of organizational change. In the following sections, we introduce the study in which these conversion stories were told, arguing that rather than mirroring a managerialist narrative of progress, these particular stories instead illustrate the stifling of employee voice in a context where career success is dependent on silence and on sanitation. The dramatic nature of the stories, we argue, reflects both the extremities of the local context and the requirements of retrospective attributions for career progress. We suggest that transformational tales of change and transformational change are not necessarily associated, and call for further studies into the local experience of change.

THE STUDY

The research reported here was part of a larger study of the experience of workplace change within the Latrobe Valley, which is an industrial region in southeast Australia that has experienced extensive change over the last ten years in the form of privatization, downsizing, amalgamation and restructuring. In the late 1980s, the Latrobe Valley was regarded as a prosperous and thriving

district. The region's main source of revenue was derived from electricity generated from brown coal reserves, which was supplied to most of the state of Victoria as well as to parts of South Australia and New South Wales. The region is also home to a paper and pulp manufacturing facility, which, in conjunction with new power stations, contributed to a construction boom in the early 1980s.

Although the region held a monopoly in regional electricity supply and an oligopoly in national supply, excessive debt led to the privatization of the electricity supply industry, introducing the first wave of sweeping changes into the region. During the 1990s, organizational change was also implemented in other industries in the region. For example, the pulp and paper manufacturing industry was sold and local government operated water board privatized and amalgamated into one organization. The education sector was also experiencing change with the amalgamation of public schools into single colleges a merger between two tertiary education providers. The health care industry experienced a number of large-scale changes as a consequence of hospital amalgamations, closures and shifts in public and private ownership.

The nature and degree of such change within the old economy of the Valley enabled access to a large number of individuals who have experienced different types of change within a single geographic location. While experiences within the Valley may not be generalizable beyond its boundaries, this study was aimed at understanding change within a common context. As its aim was to record how people made sense of their own experiences of organizational change (Holloway & Wheeler, 1996), the research had a micro and interpretivist focus (Collins, 1998), and the focus of the study was not only on what people do in organizations, but also on what they say they do. In this sense, the research was qualitative and inductive (Bryman, 1988; Bryman & Burgess, 1999), seeking to establish an understanding of "the phenomenon under investigation" (Hyde 2000: 82) and assuming that the participants are best placed to describe in their own words what they experienced at work and how they feel (Holloway & Wheeler, 1996). It included the following research questions:

- (a) How do individual employees talk about organizational change from the bottom-up?
- (b) How are employee experiences reported, presented and packaged? and
- (c) How do individual employees respond to organizational change, and how are these responses justified?

It is important to note that the research did not compare versions of change across occupations or organizations. By focusing, instead, on a series of individual case studies, "local and specific constructed realities" (Guba & Lincoln, 1998: 203) were featured.

Semi-Structured Interviews

To guarantee that context was not lost in the process of gathering information about individual experiences of organizational change, a semi-structured interview format was the principal means of data collection (Fontana & Frey, 2000; Janesick, 2000). This mode of interviewing enables the researcher to "treat people and situations as unique and to alter the research technique in the light of information fed back during the research process itself" (Schwartz & Jacobs, 1979: 45). Based on the research questions, participants were invited to focus on the events that they considered to be most significant to them throughout the process of organizational change. Themes discussed within the interview included the participant's education and employment background, the nature of change, involvement in the change process, and what the organization was like after change had been implemented.

All interviews were conducted by the first author, who used an informal or conversational style to encourage participants to tell their own stories of organizational change in depth (Chenitz, 1986). The interviews involved a degree of active interviewing (Holstein & Gurbrium, 1999) and co-construction in that as the participant told his or her story, the interviewer was able to develop meaning and an understanding of their experiences, and to seek further clarification of issues that

she did not understand (Guba & Lincoln, 1998: 207; Riessman, 1993). The time spent with each participant varied from one to two hours.

Sampling

Participants were selected from the major Latrobe Valley industries of electricity supply, paper manufacturing, water, education and health care. In order to ensure that potential participants had experienced organizational change of a large-scale nature, the following sampling criteria were used: first, participants were required to have been employed in a target industry in the past five years; second, participants had to have been employed within an organization within the industry for a period of at least five to ten years; third, participants were required to have experienced large-scale organizational change, such as privatization, amalgamation, restructuring or downsizing. Finally, as the research focused on bottom-up change, participants had to be employed in jobs ranging from low level supervisory through to shop-floor positions.

A modified form of snowball sampling was used to recruit participants. A form of non-probability sampling (Chadwick, Bahr & Albrecht, 1984), snowball sampling is performed when the initial participant selected plays a role in the research process in obtaining further potential participants (Zikmund, 2002). Also referred to as chain referral sampling and network sampling, the snowball sampling technique is most appropriate when the researcher aims to locate rare populations or to study a specific group of people with particular experiences in common. Four initial contacts known to the first author, who is also a longtime resident within the Valley, were obtained to snowball into different industry groups of employees so that participants with the appropriate characteristics could be targeted at the bottom of the organization, rather than through senior levels of management. Thus, at this initial stage, a purposive sampling technique was used to select "cases that are especially informative...[from] a specialized population" (Neuman, 1997: 206; see also Zikmund, 2002). Snowball sampling led to the recruitment of a further 18 participants, with whom contact was made through an introductory letter and telephone call. Once a participant agreed to take part in the study, a final telephone call was made to organize a time and place in which interviews could be conducted.

All interviews took place between June 1998 and October 1999 and all were tape-recorded and transcribed. After conducting twelve interviews, it became evident that although the constructions of organizational change were unique, common elements of the experience of organizational change were shared among the participants (Guba & Lincoln, 1998). A further ten interviews further confirmed these elements, while providing another ten subjective versions of organizational change. After 22 interviews were completed, the interviews had reached a point of "saturation", where new information was not emerging (Taylor & Bogdan, 1998: 93), and the sample size was considered adequate.

Depending on participants' preferences, the interviews were conducted in several locations including the participants' home, the participants' place of work, or at the local University. Although most organizations allowed access for the interviews, many employees were involved in shift-work and preferred to conduct the interview out of work hours. Furthermore, the nature of work for some, such as nursing and teaching, meant that many employees were unable to make time to participate in the research while also at work.

Analysis

To preserve rather than lose individual stories within the process of data analysis, Boje's (2001) narrative plot and narrative theme analysis were adopted. First, a plot analysis investigated the events that are linked together to form the structure of individual case studies. From the case studies, narrative plots were examined in order to explore common story types across participants. Finally, themes derived from the employee narratives and from across the various plots were explored.

This combined approach to data analysis allowed a focus on organizational change narratives without loss of the individual accounts and “incidents or events” (Boje, 2001: 1). By relying on case studies alone, this research would be concerned with the structure of individual narratives, without drawing attention either to the shared experiences (Guba & Lincoln, 1998) that are evident across them. Alternatively, thematic analysis devoid of the context of storytelling may distance the researcher from particular stories and from their tellers. Third, concentration on common narrative plots may, as in individual narrative analysis, impose a linearity and causality that may not be present in the telling (Boje, 2001; Ronai, 1992 cf. Isabella, 1990) since causality is an “invention: a projection of our will onto an event, making some other event responsible for something that happens” (Culler, 1981: 183, cited in Boje, 2001: 93; see also Polkinghorne, 1988; Ricouer, 1984).

Recognizing this limitation, we argue that deliberate attention to the way in which employees sort and report their experiences of organizational change can assist in determining how participants use narratives as a retrospective sense-making tool (Dingwall, 1977; Lempert, 1994). Accordingly, we focus on common narrative plot analysis in this paper in an effort to gain understanding of how participants packaged a particular group of stories about change. This analysis revealed that employee experiences of organizational change were reported as two distinct narrative types. The first of these is the conversion story in which organizational change is constructed as a positive process, enabling progression and advancement in the organization. In comparison, the atrocity tale focuses on the way in which organizational change contributed to the demise of employment relationships, increases in workplace violence and the termination of some employees’ careers (citation suppressed).

It is the first of these narrative types that is explored in this paper, for it was evident for all but four participants. This is not to imply that conversion stories were the only stories told, but they are highlighted here because of their vivid and extremely positive nature. In the section that follows, we show how conversion stories highlight a transformation in thought among employees as a consequence of organizational change. Conscious of Bridger and Maines’ (1998: 321) claim that a central concern of narrative is to give “representations and interpretations” of events in a sequential order that can be followed by others (cf. Goffman, 1969), we were interested not only in the plot of these stories but also in how participants presented themselves as employees. Also conscious of the need avoid the “single-voiced stories” (Boje, 2001: 9) that are ever-present in management and organizational studies, we present both the coherence and the ambiguities of the conversion narrative (see also de Cock, 1998). We consider alternative explanations in an effort to gain an understanding employees’ sudden conversion from anti-management to pro-management thinking, and aim to explore the extent to which conversion stories may be representative of employee experiences, or a reflection of the organization’s “preferred narrative” (Frank, 1995: 79) of organizational change, or perhaps both.

THE CONVERSION NARRATIVE

Participants who report their experiences as a conversion narrative highlight their shift from anti-management thinking to obvious support for management decision-making. While the conversion has coincided with change in organizations and, in some cases, the introduction of new managers, conversion narratives suggest that participants who showed support for management were able to obtain opportunities for career and personal development that were previously unavailable to them. In this section, the content, structure and causal attribution of these narratives is discussed within the context of existing conversion theory.

The term “conversion” is commonly used in conjunction with religious rather than organizational experiences (Pilarzyk, 1983) and has emerged primarily from studies of sociology and theology (e.g., Yang, 1998; Zinnbauer & Pargament, 1998). The experience of conversion implies personal change, usually associated with a significant event (Yang, 1998), which enables people to transform thought systems or lifestyles and “turning from one viewpoint to another” (Snow & Machalek, 1983:169). While there are differences of opinion about the degree of personal change

required for an experience to be considered as a conversion, the conversion experience is a major one that can involve different levels of personal change from “a rapid personality change to a reorientation of the soul” (Zinnbauer & Pargament, 1998: 161; cf. Nock, 1933). However, it has been recognised that the conversion experience entails different levels of personal change across individuals, and that, providing a person experiences “emotional episodes of illumination” and can gain “insight” (Pilarzyk, 1983: 54) into the post-conversion world, it may be assumed that the process of conversion has occurred.

Arguably, such processes may also occur within the organizational setting, for the alignment and identification of personal beliefs with those of other groups is not exclusively a religious phenomenon. Within organizational studies it has been documented that employees seek membership of groups that have “emotional and value significance” to them (Abrams & Hogg, 1990: 196). In order to be approved by group members appropriate identities are constructed and the individual will make salient the expected behavior of the group into which he or she seeks conversion (Abrams & Hogg, 1999; see also Thoits and Virshup, 1997: 106-7).

In their study of different types of conversion experiences, Ballis and Richardson (1997) argue that conversion is a way of reporting and framing personal stories rather than a type of experience. For Ballis and Richardson (1997), the salient feature of conversion narratives was sharp division of experience into before and after, or pre- and post-conversion narratives. Such divisions were also apparent in this study. For example, one participant, David Carroll¹, spoke of his employment in the electricity supply industry over two decades. During his time in the industry various levels of organizational change have been introduced, ranging from “the smaller internal type”, through to privatization and large-scale restructuring. Prior to the privatization of the electricity supply industry, David suggested that the organization’s culture was one of parochialism, low productivity and poor employment relations. While such a culture had “its advantages”, David also found that it was “frustrating” and “very difficult to get ahead” in terms of job advancement. When David first learned that large-scale organizational change was being introduced into the industry, there was “not a lot of information unless you count the rumors” (cf. Isabella, 1990). Throughout that time David recalled feeling a lot of “gloom and doom” as well as fear and uncertainty at not knowing “what the future held”. However, he also explained that he “tried to act like everything was normal in front of the bosses” to ensure that he was considered to be a “good worker under pressure”.

After the initial implementation of privatization he recalled change “hitting the organization like an explosion”: “All of a sudden: Boom...Yeah, once it started happening it got to go quicker and quicker and it really went zim and zoomed along!”. David felt that he was “much better off”: “It was bloody fantastic! Things just changed...things that were terrible to work with previously just disappeared and were replaced by new ways and much better ways...it was just great!”. Management structures became “fairly flat”, and the change to organizational structure “dramatically” transformed the organizational culture, communication and relations between employees and managers. He also believed that his skills and training were better recognized by management and “put to good use”: “I’ve been able to use all of the skills whenever I’ve needed to. It gives you a hell of a lot more job satisfaction”. David felt that he was also “far better off” in terms of career opportunities as a result of organizational change and explained that any of the costs associated with change were “outweighed by the benefits”.

The Pre-Conversion Narrative

Similarly, many other stories of life prior to organizational change were lined with tales of frustration, anger, lack of career opportunities, and personal stagnation. A common subject of discussion was the inability to reach personal goals within the workplace due to “unfair promotion systems” [P5]² or “too many layers in the [organizational] hierarchy” [P10].

¹ The participant’s name has been changed.

² Quotations are identified by participant number in order to indicate where they are drawn from common interviews.

Another common subject of the pre-conversion narrative was the state of relationships between managers and employees. Often referred to as “us and them” [P15], a perceived class division was also considered as one of the factors determining a lack of career progression. Poor employment relations were also considered to be “typical” [P22] in Latrobe Valley organizations prior to change. As one employee stated, management “wouldn’t work with us so we didn’t see any reason to work with them very much unless there was some way of benefiting both of us” [P15]. Participants suggested that a combination of organizational culture and a “unique type of management culture” [P13] in the Latrobe Valley led to problems with employment relations. One participant suggested that “management were mean” [P18], while another added that “it would be nothing for them to strip you of your self worth...just because they could” [P7].

A perception that “management suffered from power problems” [P12] was also apparent throughout the pre-conversion stories. Employees spoke of “unfair...violent abuse” [P11] and “copping a hiding for whatever...because they’d feel like it” [P4] as “common practice” [P14] prior to change. One participant argued that “no matter how hard you’d try...you just couldn’t do right” [P9]. Another added that “you just had nowhere to go - no real future or opportunities where you were, but nothing outside either because you’d work here from day one of your career” [P19]. Several employees felt that their efforts “to work hard went unrewarded” [P2], that “no matter how hard we tried we were still wrong” [P4], and that employees “would always get stuck in the middle of managers’ bloody communication hassles” [P3].

Typically, employees felt that that “the old [organization] wasn’t good for people” [P4] and “didn’t encourage people to really want to be there” [P8]. “People were constantly being pulled up for things...[and] never told they were doing a good job” [P22]; “you can understand why the culture of the place was like it was...because you tried to create a better working atmosphere and management wouldn’t even support you in that” [P22]. “Managers simply were not listening” [P12] and “some employees would take advantage of the situation and create total havoc” [P21]. Prior to organizational change, “nothing would get done...maybe three hours of effective work a day...and there’d be nothing you could do about it” [P4]. One employee stated that “I could have just banged my head against a brick wall for eight hours a day for all management could care!” [P21]. Another even suggested that “the state of the organization before [change] was enough to drive people insane” [P1]. A further participant recalled beginning an apprenticeship within the electricity supply industry and being very “keen” [P10] to build his career. He suggested that a gradual “building up of boredom...caused by mundane or no work” caused “anger” that grew into a “constant simmer” [P10]. Not only did his workplace suffer from poor relations between management and workers, but employees were “always out to get each other...[because] there was usually not enough work to go around [P10]”. In this climate, an “eager attitude” [P10] toward work would be “knocked by colleagues” [P12].

On the “rare occasion” that career opportunities were made available to employees, many stated that they were unwilling to apply for promotion at the cost of being “considered as a manager” [P21] by their peers. Employees who did rise to the management ranks may have been “attacked as being insincere” (Thomas, 1997: 527) or considered to be “turning their backs on their mates” [P1]. Employees suggest that rather than pressure from managers to work harder; they received pressure from colleagues to perform less work. For some, a typical day’s work consisted of “no more than one hour”. After being dropped off at the work site, employees would “read the paper...[or] play cards...rather than go out to work” [P10].

Participants across all industries reported that aged-based promotion led to particular clashes. For example, younger employees who held tertiary qualifications suggested that these were often “used against them” [P2] and that “people would think that we thought we were know-alls because we had a university degree” [P14]. Other employees also perceived that tertiary trained personnel were “seen as a threat” [P14] to older staff.

In summary, pre-conversion narratives were replete with reports of continuous poor relations with management and colleagues and of parochial cultures, and it is important to note Pilarzyk’s (1983:

57) suggestion that individuals who need to obtain “symbolically meaningful alternatives” to their work situations often provoke “feelings of estrangement, unrest, or crisis”. Thus, organizational crisis or transformation may be constructed and even felt but not necessarily have been real in an empirical sense. For example, Lofland and Stark (1965: 863) questioned whether individuals actually convert and take up a new perspective, or whether, instead, they simply alter their interpretations of organizational change during the reconstruction of their story. Rather than dramatic organizational change being to cause of personal and/or organizational transformation, transformation (or, in this case, conversion) then becomes a retrospective phenomenon that is constructed in order to justify personal needs (cf. Meindl, 1993).

Despite management being associated with this dystopic past, it was interesting that several participants reported that it was to new managers and to new management teams that they looked for hope and for identification. For example, it was suggested that people “looked for help from new managers who didn’t know better” [P6]. Once employees could “see that some of new managers were just like us” [P8], they “started to look to them for support” [P12]. Once they could “identify with what the new managers were talking about” [P3], several employees “felt as though we could commit to the change” [P21] and “trust that management were trying to do the right thing by us” [P22].

Thus, rather than turning to a completely new source or group for identification, participants who told conversion stories told of conversion to managerial thinking, to the thinking of the very group with whom they had previously disagreed. Perhaps this is not surprising, for Ballis and Richardson (1997: 111) suggest that “both the experience and the language individuals use to describe conversion draw directly on the values and beliefs” of the group with which they seek identification, but whether this irony reflects identification with an aggressor or, instead, a profound shift in the realities of old and new managerial work is worthy of further attention. As this was a study into talk about organizational change rather than a specific investigation into shifting management values and behaviors, such explanations must both remain possibilities. What is particularly noteworthy is that this identification, reproduction and reinforcement of management ideology became even more evident in post-conversion accounts.

The Post-Conversion Narrative

In contrast with the pre-conversion story, the post-conversion tales tended to be both more dramatic and more positive. In line with other research into the post-conversion experience as a better way of life (Ballis & Richardson, 1997; Yang, 1998; Zinnbauer & Pargament, 1998), stories of organizational life subsequent to change in the Latrobe Valley are told virtually in opposition to those depicting earlier times. Whereas pre-conversion stories highlight poor employment relations, parochial organizational cultures and lack of career opportunities, post-conversion tales focus on improved workplace practices and new opportunities to advance personal careers.

Strauss (1959) argues that this is due to the very nature of conversion, in which individuals are introduced to new opportunities and benefits that previously were not available to them. Consistent with this argument, employee reports highlight transformations within the workplace as turning points (Lofland & Stark, 1965) that opened up opportunities for career and personal development and allowed them to depart from old ways. Within their stories, participants indicated such turning points by stating that change in the organization led to a “sudden disruption” [P21] or a “parting of old ways” [P4] in which “old practices were suddenly replaced with new ones” [P19]. They suggested that organizational change “provided the basis for us to change individually” [P2] and that “from this point it felt as though we could move on” [P3]. One employee stated that “we literally had to adapt to a whole new thing from one day to the next...but if you did, a whole new world opened up to you” [P19].

In particular, the introduction of the new management teams provided a turning point for employees to commit to and support management decision-making. Accordingly, employees described organizational change as “breaking the chains” [P8], “cutting the red tape” [P21] and

“kicking the workplace into reality” [P12]. While they recognized that “change is tough” [P14], and that “it hurts people” [P4] by “breaking them out of their comfort zones” [P21], they could also “understand the necessity of it” [P3], both for organizational and personal progression. Their new world was a world in which agency and career development were now possible, and participants suggested that restructuring, amalgamation and privatization of Latrobe Valley organizations led to changes in culture, promotion systems and employment relations that, in turn, altered career prospects for employees. Rather than being “held back” [P22] by seniority-based promotion systems, participants felt that restructuring had enabled them to “move forward into bigger and better jobs” [P3], rather than “stagnate where we are” [P8]. Consequently, “status and self-confidence increase” [P3] and employees were able to gain “a sense of responsibility” [P14] and to see “a different world” [P4]. For example:

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

This new world had a clear transactional basis, for post-conversion stories commonly featured the belief that support for management decision-making provided employees with improved career opportunities. Typically, participants explained that “if we were seen to be doing the right thing management would reward us” [P14] and that “opportunities definitely came for those who were seen to commit to the changes” [P8]. Similarly, “it was quite clear which employees got the good jobs” [P4], for “it was a simply a matter of those who are seen to commit see good things...those who don't don't” [P1]. Similarly:

I just feel that new managers came in and sort of said, “Right, we're here to change and make this place better. You either support us and reap the benefits, or you resist change and look for work elsewhere’. And it was right. If you did support them then they looked after you...which was great [P22].

This new attitude to management was not an unreflexive shift, for participants were well aware of the dramatic changes in their identifications. Although some employees openly expressed their disillusion and questioned their belief in management activities, they also commented that their lives had “definitely changed for the better” [P14] as a consequence of change. Thomas (2001: 527) argues that such transformation in employees is often a reflection of the “manipulative and coercive” nature of management who inflict a “type of cultural supremacy” over staff, and one participant admitted to “being very anti-management...until these opportunities were provided” [P4] to him. He further added that he “didn't have much to do with managers before' change and was “surprised that they were not all that bad” [P4]. Along with several others, he justified the extent of his conversion through reference to the potential for existential crisis had past life continued:

I went through it [change] and I'm okay, a bit scarred, still a bit shaken but quite okay really. I dread to think where I would have ended up if we didn't support change...I would have had to uproot everything in search of a new job, a new life...because this place certainly would not be here anymore [P4].

I hated the type of worker I had become. I was slack, lazy, militant because that's what the organization was breeding. Deep down I was not like that at all...but I fear to think what I would be like now if the workplace hadn't been through massive change [P6]. People would complain about the security of their jobs. Sure it is scary, but to think if we had have kept going the way we were none of us would have jobs. The organization would be dead! [P12].

While the introduction of new management teams “did initially cause fear amongst the workers” [P2], it was suggested that new managers have “changed the organization for the better” [P21] and provided “workers with much much more” [P19] in terms of job satisfaction. In their post-

conversion stories, employees also felt that they were more visible to the new management teams. For example, “it was like these people just came in and took over and all of a sudden the place was a million times better...you could actually approach them and they would help you” [P8]. Another employee suggested that change has enabled him to “be seen by management...and not be passed over for opportunities” [P21].

Post-conversion stories revealed common references to themes of sound leadership and management, job satisfaction, workplace harmony, organizational efficiency, and employee roles in daily operations and decision-making. Management was now perceived to play a supportive role for employees seeking promotion or career development: “If management knew that staff were interested, they would take them seriously...and try to help you achieve your career goals” [P14]; “They’d provide you with the steps you needed to actually get somewhere” [P3]. One employee stated that such support and encouragement of staff was the most significant impact of change on her, stating that: “The management philosophy...has been the most dramatic...change....Now you are actually seen and appreciated” [P2].

Several employees described the changed workplace as “a more harmonious place to come to work” [P2], where “we actually get along with each other without all the usual apathy and bickering” [P12]. In this post-conversion world “there’s opportunity” [P4] and “the options are there” [P22] to “use skills” [P19] and “keep up to date with the latest changes in technology and management” [P5]. The flattening of hierarchies facilitated “more communication and free speech” [P22] and made “conversing with that person at the top” [P21] a lot easier. “Smaller work groups...mean that management is actually listening to the workers now [P3]”.

More generally, change has led to “a good work situation” [P21] in which employees are able to “gain a sense of fulfillment” [P4] from working with “people who are very...self-motivated” [P19]. In particular, employees feel that they are “able to be challenged” [P2] and “develop self-confidence” [P3] within the “new organization” [P8]. Employees also recognized that changes to organizational structure meant that “staff numbers have been cut quite dramatically” [P8]. While “some very fine workers have lost their jobs” [P22], it was also suggested that downsizing has “gotten rid of a lot of dead wood” [P6] from the organization. This “whittling away of staff...has been a welcome relief...in some cases” [P4] because it has “removed a lot of people...that [sic] were holding everyone else back” [P21]. Several employees recalled “losing their cool” [P4] or “becoming very annoyed and frustrated” [P3] with “prick managers and slack workers...who now, thank God, are mostly gone” [P8].

This personal transformation in outlook, from anti to pro-management thinking suggests that the conversion narrative device enabled employees to proclaim social affiliation (Richards, 1983) with what was termed “new management”. As one employee stated, “new managers just had this completely different style, they were more like leaders, more inclusive in terms of they actually saw you there...The old ones just had this “you jump when I tell you” management system...and wondered why we had no respect for them” [P1]. Along the same lines, participants referred to new managers as “fantastic leaders” [P3], and suggested that “they didn’t consider themselves above anyone else like the old ones did” [P2]. Several employees perceived management changes as “the best thing that could ever have happened to the workplace” [P3], and one remembered gaining recognition for his work a week after his manager was replaced: “He told me I had done a really good job and that people like me were very valuable in the organization. I nearly fell off my chair! I couldn’t get over it. I swear I just had this stupid ear-to-ear grin on my face for the rest of the week!” [P14].

More literally, it was claimed that organizational change enabled employees to “actually see a clear path of direction [that] the organization is taking” [P8]. “Things are lighter and brighter” [P3] as a result of change, and the organization was also described as livelier: “it feels more alive! You don’t feel ashamed to say I work for [this organization]. I feel proud of it! I would have been careful about saying who I work for in the past” [P5]. Perhaps the high point of the conversion narrative is that the convert now sees things differently and has a radical new way of seeking and knowing.

“Opening up opportunities” [P14], “showing a totally different side to life” [P2], and “completely opening my eyes” [P12] are common themes across post-conversion discourse.

Participants also remarked that transformation enabled them to “go through significant personal change” [P21]. For example, “it’s smoothed and mellowed and matured me...your efforts are recognized in a positive manner” [P21]. Others also made statements such as “change completely changed me” [P14], “I can’t believe life before change even existed” [P19] and “it’s hard to recognize the old way now...its like it never happened” [P3]. While these statements may appear extraordinary, Pilarzyk (1983: 56) argues that people seek conversion to remove the “all-pervasive anomic, alienating aspects” from their everyday lives. In this sense, the conversion narrative is a “form of reductionism that inevitably distorts the past in favour of a particular interpretation of the present” (Ballis & Richardson, 1997: 111). Thus, in post-conversion stories, change takes the form of a tale of regeneration...[focusing on] how terrible life was before and how wonderful it is now (Lofland & Stark, 1965: 863):

You know I really didn’t like it much. No actually I hated it. Bugger it, I’ll tell it like it is. I fucken hated it! I hated the place! I hated the other workers and managers were all just bastards out for personal gain. I never thought I would see the day where I could converse with a manager and actually have some respect for what they were doing and saying. I never could see myself supporting anything they had to say with all the fuck-ups they had provided in the past. But things changed. I started to see that if I wanted to have any sort of future I had to start listening to what they were saying...and some of the new ones [managers] were very reasonable. They actually gave a toss about us and asked us what we thought. The more I started to identify with them the more I could see bigger and better things happening for me. I never I thought I would tell someone how much I love going to work now that all this has happened [P6].

Future Perfect: The Organization’s Preferred Narrative?

In summary, conversion narratives of organizational change compare the poor state of the “old” organization with the optimism of the “new” (cf. Ballis & Richardson, 1997). While not doubting the validity of the conversion experience, Zinnbauer and Pargament (1998) argue that stories of conversion may be exaggerated representations as they “tend to describe the past as being worse than it actually was to contrast with a present, more favourable...state” (Zinnbauer & Pargament, 1998: 176).

However, conversion tales may well represent more than exaggerations of a lived truth. Indeed, they may not have much to do with such a truth at all. For example, Frank (1995: 89) suggests that such “a preference for the future” is not uncommon in employee narratives, and that such narratives may well relay the organization’s preferred story rather than the employees’ own. Consequently, it may be wondered whether employees actually experience conversion throughout the process of organizational change, or if their narratives simply appropriate the organization’s dominant discourse and replicate tales of organizational change that may be considered as socially acceptable and organizationally approved. As Ballis (1999: 55) has argued, retrospective reconstruction may combine “personal experience with the expectations and symbolism of the group”. Hence, it should not be unexpected that management ideology is reinforced by employees in the telling, particularly if a favorable report is perceived to generate additional rewards to the teller.

Accounting for Inconsistencies

Miles and Huberman (1994) argue that one of the means of testing the validity of findings in qualitative research studies is to search for evidence of contradictory explanations. Similarly, Tagg (1985: 188) argues that:

[Qualitative] researchers should not be concerned about the reliability of life story methods in the abstract but rather should ask what the plausible rival explanations are, for example, forgetting or retrospective construction, and what defenses are possible against such interpretive competition.

In the present study, there are notable inconsistencies within some participants' stories, which may indicate unreliability of the participants and/or the method used in this study. For example, one employee described the organization prior to change as "easygoing and relaxed with no real pressures on you to overexert yourself" and explained that "unfortunately you'll never get an organization as good as what we used to have ever again" [P4]. However, within his tale of post-conversion he went on to suggest that "the old organization was terrible, people were so slack...you never had any work to do, and there was no real future" [P4]. A second participant explained that "the culture of the place was great, you could just kick back and do whatever and get paid a shitload for it! But that all went out the window when change came through...they were the good old days" [P22]. Later in the same interview the participant argued that "now you have to work, work, work all the time. They [managers] keep you on your toes...but there is dignity in working like that. Unlike the lazy, bloody awful culture the place had before" [P22]. A third employee stated that "I never want to be like managers, to adopt their ways of thinking and working...they are awful all of the time and the only real comradeship is between the workers" [P6]. However, the same participant subsequently suggests that "most of the workers are bloody terrible, militant, parochial bastards...who can blame you for wanting to be more like management...when they [employees] stick together like glue and won't do a thing" [P6].

The fact that six participants who told conversion stories within the interview setting also told of continuing management grievances suggests that they may not be fully convinced of the motives of management teams, or embrace the rationale behind organizational change. The common perception that open support for management will lead to increased career opportunities supports this interpretation. However, researchers such as Frank (1998) and Zinnbauer and Pargament (1998) have suggested that inconsistent accounts are often the norm in conversion narratives, and it may be possible that conversion narratives convey multiple truths and that both a lived reality and a constructed reality are evident in employee stories. Second, it may even be that the act of storytelling is an act of creating or uncovering or creating a reality during the telling. In this case, while the reality at the end of the story may be different at the end of the story from that at its beginning, it may be no less "real":

Accounts of conversion are constructions (or reconstructions) of experiences which draw upon resources available at the time of construction to lend them sense. They are not fixed, once-and-for-all descriptions of phenomena as they occurred in the past. Rather their meaning emerges in the very process of construction, and this takes place at different times in different contexts (Beckford, 1978: 260; emphasis in original).

In this way, versions of organizational change told by participants are "alterable, as are their associated 'realities'" (Guba & Lincoln, 1998: 206). Therefore, interpretations and constructions of change can vary according to the location or situation in which the version is being constructed, or as the process of sense-making develops (Weick, 1995).

Third, it may be that the narrative device of conversion has been used to attain particular outcomes such as a favorable impression on the interviewer, and that the perceived need for such impression management exceeds any requirement for internal consistency within the narrative. Conversion stories make easy listening and cast the individual as winner and hero. Perhaps organizational change success stories are the stories that employees ought to tell, just as stories of "a 'natural' desire to get well stay well" typify "the stories patients ought to tell about their own illnesses" (Frank, 1995: 78-9). As such, conversion stories may represent concern for or impression management of the listener, or even denial of an unpalatable present or future.

Similar to the spectacle, conversion narratives appear to put a gloss (Debord, 1994) on the experience of organizational change and draw attention to the benefits that change can provide. For example, as the interviews progressed several participants suggested that they are “not really sure what...[they] think about change” [P8] but “like to say and do the right thing according to management”[P19]. Comments such as “they gave me a chance so I feel I have to make them [managers] look good” [P21] and “management are happy when we tell everyone how good organizational change has been for us” [P22] may suggest that participants found it necessary to reflect the organization’s version of change rather than the reality that they experienced. This is evident in the following narrative excerpts:

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

You get caught up in the buzz of it...everyone seems to be happy with it [change] so I just do the right thing and go along with it. It is a bit better here in terms of organization and I did get a pay rise but I’m not sure if I support the damage that it has done to the region in terms of employment and stuff. I just find that as long as I don’t rock the boat I’m sort of looked after a bit better [P3].

You know I’ve often wondered...do any of us really care about change? I mean do we really like management and the new ways? Or is it just that we were so sick of the old that we clung to whatever seemed better at the time? I mean managers are still managers. They might seem okay but they still control the same way as they used to...I think we just became yes men to avoid sudden unemployment [P1].

One of the problems with this place was the poor public perception. So when all this change came through it did start to make a difference in terms of what the public saw. That’s what management considered to be important. They said it didn’t really matter what we thought of change, as long as we let the public know that it was a good thing [P8].

Fourth, it is noteworthy that employees who constructed conversion stories highlighted the impact of change on themselves, rather than on the organization. While they do discuss improved organizational cultures, employment relations and pathways for career advancement within their narratives, the main focus of the narrative is on the benefits that were gained at the personal level. Thus, stories of organizational change became translated into stories of individual change and may serve a self-protection/self enhancement function as well as an impression management one.

Thus, conversion stories may represent retrospective fiction or narratives of “thought reform” (Zinnbauer & Pargament, 1998: 161) rather than the “transformation of the individual’s world view” as suggested by Pilarzyk (1983: 54).

Silence and The Conversion Story

Whatever the case, conversion stories are relatively tidy tales in which participants conveyed that they had successfully survived organizational change and, in many ways, had come out unscathed. While such tales may be consistent with managerial norms, it is noteworthy that the tellers of conversion stories often spoke of their deliberate silence and of how their passivity and lack of voice assisted in career advancement.

As one participant suggested, “my life has changed so much for the better and my job is great...all because I kept my mouth shut at the right time” [P12]. A further participant added:

You know its like a new world at work now...I’m in a different part [of the organization] and have a different job...the pay is heaps more and I am getting recognized as playing a part

in the organization's success...My manager also told me how well I performed when we went through change and that it's a pity others didn't act like me and just keep quiet and keep working...because they could have been rewarded too if they had have behaved" [P14].

This suggests that loyalty may be a post hoc product of rewards, rather than rewards being a product of loyalty and passive acceptance of the status quo (Zhou & George, 2001). From the conversion stories it is evident that employees who remained silent during organizational change benefited from career opportunities. In comparison, and as we have documented elsewhere (Bryant and Wolfram Cox, 2003), those who reacted with voice constructed atrocity tales in which they were subjected to retribution.

Perhaps the conversion story is a sense-making attributional device in which participants used the happy ending both to justify their silence and establish their (newfound) loyalty. Prior to organizational change, those who constructed conversion stories suggest that they were not particularly loyal to the organization and that organizational change itself provided the vehicle for becoming loyal:

I couldn't give a shit about the company before change...but then management dangled a carrot in front of me and offered me a better job and higher pay. But they reckon that was only because I shut my mouth when the changes were taking place and for that I was a more worthy employee to have...only after that time did I even contemplate feeling any sort of ties to this place [P22].

Management made this big speech about how loyal we were to the company, which is why we didn't kick up a stink during the times of change. That's utter bollocks...we were not, I certainly was not loyal at all...they were a bunch of wankers to work for I thought. But when they started to hand out the money to us and the jobs I started to rethink what I thought about them. But then who wouldn't? At the end of the day it's all about what you can get out of it really. Isn't it? [P4]

While my manager continues to promote me I'll continue to say how good organizational change was and how great the place is to work for. It's a simple as that! [P14]

These comments further confirm the fact that loyalty, or more importantly, the decision to suppress voice, is a product of the personal benefits that could be gained from the process of change. While the general plot structure of the conversion is one that arguably reflects a "natural desire" (Frank, 1995: 78) to express wellbeing as a result of change, retrospective narratives may also assist in achieving closure, renegotiation or reinterpretation of change at a distance. Thus the retelling of experiences in retrospect served as an important tool in which participants' understanding of change could be renegotiated and expressed.

Furthermore, several participants indicated that they had felt unable to express their experiences of change to others at the time, commenting that those around them were either "not interested in knowing about change" [P4], "had their own problems to deal with" [P6], or simply "did not understand" [P22]. This is evident in the following comments:

This whole change thing has really affected me on a very deep level. I know I'm one of the lucky ones and that I have come out with a better job...but that doesn't mean it was any easier for me! I couldn't say what I thought to managers...my wife didn't seem to want to know and my mates were going through similar stresses...After five years you have actually provided me with an opportunity to express what I really think without having to worry about being questioned or ignored...having that opportunity is really important [P4].

Doing this interview has stirred up a lot of shit that I thought was all behind me...but now I realize how angry I am about everything that happened and how much it has impacted on

me. You know, when change was going through I didn't say a word to anyone because I was so bloody scared. I came out all right but I still needed the chance to say what I really think about it all...just because I came all right doesn't mean that I didn't suffer [P22].

Sitting here talking to you has made me realize that although I preached that managers were doing the right thing, they weren't. I'm slowly starting to see what a bunch of bastards they were [P6].

Being able to voice my concerns and my feelings about how change affected me as an individual has allowed me to see where I fit into the organization and how important my job really is in the scheme of things...I now realize that next time change happens there is no reason why I might not end up like some of them other poor bastards [P19].

In summary, Latrobe Valley conversion stories told of transformations from parochialism, militancy and poor employment relations to better futures. Within these stories, participants open support for management allowed them to benefit from career development opportunities in the workplace. Consequently, organizational change is told as a positive story in which the plot is focused on the success of the individual employee. However, we argue that such stories offer more than the simplistic tale of how the riding out of a difficult past may lead to a more optimistic future, and suggest that conversion stories are worthy of close analysis. First, rather than representing the possibility of future perfect, the contrast between the past and the present in the conversion story may be invoked to justify or rationalize a lack of employee voice during what may have been a particularly stressful period in the speaker's life. Second, rather than indicating loyalty, the lack of voice during past change may contrast with future plans for agency. If this is the case, the conversion story is rather different from what it appears, for rather than being a managerialist tale of past loyalty it is, instead, a game plan for future resistance – an ironic account in which career success is associated with silence and with shame.

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

The retrospective narratives in this study are abbreviated and shortened versions of longer accounts that are likely to be produced closer to the time when organizational change was experienced. They are also "sanitized" accounts of an experience, or relatively confined versions that report selectively so as to generate a desired reaction. In the retrospective narrative, the past is recalled with all the benefits of hindsight and in a manner that tells us simultaneously as much about present circumstances as well as past experiences.

While such retrospective research is not necessarily an accurate representation of the lived experience of work life in the Latrobe Valley, we believe that the particular tales that are told here illustrate important and ongoing issues for organizational change theory, practice and research. First, and in terms of theory, we have argued that dramatic tales may well be the consequence not only of dramatic times but of dramatic writing, and suggest that organization development and change theorists can become more aware of the potential for their language to influence their readership and more general followership. We also call for further complications of managerialism within organizational change and development theory, suggesting that such complications do not necessarily need to present alternative grand theories or anti-management stances in order to make a contribution. If the extremities of conversion and of resistance are both more problematic than they first appear (see, for example, Wolfram Cox, 1997), so may be other aspects of change management. And if the often-simplistic nature of top-down models can be partially caused by the process of retrospective reporting, managerial experiences of change may not be as spectacular as the literature suggests. Accordingly, we call for a shift of attention from the dramatic to the mundane, from the knowledge economy to the old economy, and from grand findings to small, local studies as these can still make a contribution to understanding.

Such small studies on small topics may also be more accessible to practitioners who are involved in the management and implementation of ongoing change. This is not to deny that organizational transformation has been an important phenomenon in many contemporary settings, including the Latrobe Valley. However, given our comments that transformational tales and transformational change may not necessarily be directly associated, we also call for renewed attention to the management of small-scale change and to a revisiting of the potential contributions (and potential limitations) of traditional, incremental OD theory.

Whether or not narrative change research is of assistance for such practitioners remains a moot point. In this study, we drew attention to the many factors that may affect the stories that are told in retrospective studies of change, including issues of ideology, presentation and impression management, attribution, self-protection and sense-making. However, we argue that such factors should increase rather than reduce interest in narrative studies of organizational change, for the extremities of the tales told here, including their inconsistencies, emotional content and degree of optimism illustrate just how important social and psychological factors may become in any study where organizational change is studied in context. While this was a small study of non-managerial employees within one local region, and while such extremities may not be so present in less extraordinary settings and with different methodologies, the dramatization of change depicted here is worthy of further attention as an indication of the extent to which people may go in their construction of favorable futures and reconstruction of the past, whether or not that past was a real one.

In conclusion, narratives are used for various functions, for through narrative storytellers may enact revenge, provide closure, enable the renegotiation and reinterpretation of the past within the context of the present, and provide a chance for speculation. As such, narratives may be considered as “mythical” (Funnell, 1998: 144), distorted accounts of reality (Lorenz, 1994), or “methodologically unsound” (White, 1989: 1). Extensive debate has surrounded the use of narrative focusing particularly on criticism of the temporal and interpretative nature of narratives. Mink (1978: 145), for example, argues that narrative is a “product of the imaginative construction” and by virtue of this fact is unable to “defend its claim to truth by any accepted procedure of...authentication”. Mink adds that life stories cannot be told as they are lived due to the lack of temporal ordering of life experiences; biographies do not unfold in a predictable manner nor follow a set chronology. Denzin (1989: 2) supports Mink’s arguments, adding that there is “no way to stuff a real life person between the covers of a text”. White (1989: 4) questions the reliability of narrative analysis by questioning whether “real events are properly represented when they...[are] shown to display the formal coherence of a story”. Furthermore, Boje (2001: 122) argues that narrative “degrades storytelling replacing it with new plots and more cohesion than inheres in the field of action”.

Gergen and Gergen (2000) argue that validity of qualitative data should take into account the multiple stories and voices that interviews and narratives can produce. By focusing on the multiple voices derived from data collection, researchers “avoid reaching a singular, integrative conclusion” (Gergen & Gergen, 2000: 1028). In this paper, we have argued that such multiplicity is possible even within extreme and apparently uniform narratives told by one group of employees within one setting, for the conversion narratives presented here are representative of carefully scripted and performed organizational versions of change that may be constructed to project a particular image of the organization and of the teller to the audience. However, as with all stories, they will be heard differently by different readers for they contain the often contradictory elements of progression, of self-interest, of loyalty, of suppression and of silence.

As such, the future perfect depicted here is both a comforting and discomfiting phenomenon that rests just as much in its juxtaposition with the past and the particularities of its telling as in its hope and optimism. Just as it should not be trusted, it should not be discounted, and we hope that others find it worthy of further study, and further complication, in the context of organizational change.

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