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THE METAPHORS OF RETIREMENT: CUTTING CORDS, DISENTANGLING FROM WEBS, AND HEADING FOR PASTURE

STEVEN R. PHILLIPS
BETSY WACKERNAGEL BACH

Pondy (1983) states, "Metaphors help to organize the objective facts of the situation in the minds of the participants" (p. 157). This investigation sought to provide insight into how actors viewed retirement by uncovering and analyzing metaphors associated with retirement. Differences in the metaphors used by retirees and non-retirees were also examined. Retirees used metaphors which indicated that "Transition," "Emotion," "Freedom," and "Shedding Weight" are a significant part of the retirement experience. This study suggests that metaphor analysis provides a richly varied and salient source of information about social actors' perceptions of organizational retirement.

The *Wall Street Journal* reported "fully one-quarter of all U.S. adults are caught up in one aspect of retirement – either as retirees themselves or as dependents of retirees" (1989, p. B1). Longer life expectancies, early retirement incentives, and better retirement planning are only a few of the factors which have led to this dramatic rise in

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the number of retirees in the United States. While an employee's smooth disengagement from the workplace may serve as a springboard to a productive, fruitful retirement (or even prompt a retiree to begin a second career), a denigrating, disenchanting exit may leave a retiree feeling bitter, useless, and/or used. Furthermore, at the organizational level, a graceful handling of retirees sends important messages to workers about how the organization cares for its employees.

Despite its demonstrated importance, empirical research on the process of retirement has been sparse. While a plethora of popular articles exist on topics such as financial planning for retirement, anecdotal musings of recent retirees, and suggestions for individuals preparing for retirement (see Brown, 1982; Caraher, 1981; Carlson, 1989; Hallett, 1986), very little empirical research in the field of organizational communication has focused on how social actors – the retirees and the organizational members they leave behind – make sense of retirement.

Retirement falls within the rubric of organizational entry, assimilation, and exit, where the processes by which individuals join organizations, become socialized into organizations, and eventually disengage themselves from those organizations (c.f., Jablin, 1987) are examined. While substantial research has focused on entry and assimilation (see Bullis & Bach, 1989; Cheney, 1983, 1987; Feldman, 1987; Jablin, 1982, 1984, 1987; Louis, 1980, 1990; Miller & Jablin, 1991a, 1991b; Van Maanen, 1975, 1976; Wanous, 1980; Wilson, 1984), less attention has been paid to employees exiting organizations (Beehr, 1986, and Jablin, 1987 have been the exceptions). Furthermore, those studies which examine employee exit have focused on leave-taking phenomena such as disgruntled employees, job-hopping, and turnover rather than retirement (see Mowday, Porter, & Steers, 1982; Steers & Mowday, 1981; Wilson, 1983).



METAPHOR ANALYSIS IN ORGANIZATIONS

In this section we will argue that a metaphor analysis of organizational actors' talk about retirement will enable us to uncover how retirees and non-retirees come to make sense of the retirement process. We will define metaphors, discuss some of their functions and forms, and demonstrate that metaphor analysis has been shown fruitful in past organizational research. We follow Pundy's (1983) definition of metaphor, "the assertion, perhaps made indirectly and surreptitiously, that 'A is B,' where A and B belong manifestly to two different categories" (p. 159). Examples of metaphors include: "she is a star;" "the organization is a machine;" "retirement is a journey;" and "the institution is an ivory tower."

Metaphors prevalent in a social actor's field of experience may constrain and focus her/his perception of the social reality. A hypothetical organization, for example, has a corporate headquarters and several regional offices. Jim, a new employee in a regional office, walks up to Joan, a more established employee in the same office and announces that he is going to corporate headquarters next week to present his innovative idea. Joan reacts with, "Oh, so you're going to the 'Black Hole' for a week, huh?" While Jim would probably ask about the metaphor of the "Black Hole" to check his perception, he now is privy to the socially shared perception of the regional employees concerning corporate headquarters. For a contrast, consider the difference if Joan had referred to headquarters as the "Idea Factory" or "The Puzzle Palace."

As another example of how the communication of metaphor structures the reality of organizational actors, consider the different implications if the employees in a particular division refer to the boss (behind her back) as either Aunt Julia, General Julia, or Coach Julia. The use of either of these metaphors would provide insight into the actors' socially constructed reality and would provide clues to how the actors might structure their subsequent actions.

Metaphors reflect how individuals think about and view their world. Lakoff and Johnson (1980) describe this connection between metaphor and human experience:



Metaphor is not just a matter of language, that is, of mere words, . . . on the contrary, human thought processes are largely metaphorical. This is what we mean when we say that the human conceptual system is metaphorically structured and defined. Metaphors as linguistic expressions are possible precisely because there are metaphors in a person's conceptual system (p. 6).

Organizational realities are similarly described via metaphors. Metaphors are useful for providing uniqueness about one's experiences in an organization. Pondy (1983) has argued that:

the use of metaphors in organizational dialog[ue] plays a necessary role in helping organization participants to infuse their organizational experiences with meaning and to resolve apparent paradoxes and contradictions, and that this in-fusion of meaning or resolution of paradox is a form of organizing. In this sense, the use of metaphors helps to couple the organization, to tie its parts together into some kind of meaningful whole; that is, metaphors help to organize the objective facts of the situation in the minds of the participants (p. 157).

Metaphors, then, represent the conceptual systems of organizational actors, help organizational actors create meaning and resolve contradictions, aid the organizing process, tie together the organization, and provide organizing schemata for objective facts for organizational actors. Metaphors provide clues to how actors conceive and evaluate communication episodes (Albrecht & Adelman, 1986) and enable actors to express that which is difficult to express at the literal level (Baxter, 1992). As such, we believe that an understanding of a particular organization's cultural metaphors concerning retirement will enable us to uncover the symbolic form which helps the participants "make sense" of retirement.

Pondy (1983) has posited that metaphors function to place explanation beyond any doubt, and bridge from the familiar to the strange. Hence, it is likely that in times of organizational uncertainty, such as retirement, metaphors would be useful for organizational actors in both understanding and explaining retirement.

The phrases "retirement is freedom" and "retirement is getting out of prison" are examples of structural metaphors (Lakoff & Johnson, 1980). According to Deetz and Mumby (1984), structural



metaphors “perform the function of projecting the characteristics of one structure’s experience or activity onto another” (p. 11). They go on to explain that, “time is money is a dominant metaphor in which one structured experience (monetary transactions) is projected onto the concept of time” (Deetz & Mumby, 1984, p. 11).

Hence, metaphor analysis procures a description of the system of metaphors used by organizational actors to conceptualize their organizational experience. Because the description is presented in the actors’ own language, it retains the implications of their world independent of the researcher’s subjective inferences (Koch & Deetz, 1981; see also Deetz, 1984).

Smith and Eisenberg (1987) exemplified metaphor analysis when they identified inherent conflicts between the “drama” and “family” metaphors at Disneyland. Smith and Eisenberg demonstrated that the overt conflict between labor and management was rooted in the incompatibility of the two metaphors at the time of economic crisis. In other words, the “drama” and “family” metaphors instantiated different social realities which collided.

In this section we have articulated the benefits of engaging in metaphor analysis in order to uncover an organization’s social reality (as described by organizational actors). We defined metaphors and discussed some of their functions and forms. Finally, metaphor analysis has been shown fruitful in past organizational research.

We posit that a metaphor analysis of how organizational actors talk about retirement will enable us to uncover how retirees and non-retirees come to make sense of the retirement process. As such, we believe that a first necessary step is to identify the metaphors used by one set of social actors to describe retirement. Therefore, our primary research question is:

RQ1: What metaphors are used to describe the process of retirement?

Once the metaphors used to describe the process of retirement are identified, a logical next step is to determine how expecta-



tions and realities regarding retirement are different. As such, a follow-up question:

RQ2: Are there differences that exist between metaphors used by retirees and non-retirees?

METHODS

This section will outline how this study was conducted. Specifically, we describe the subjects utilized, articulate the procedures, and describe the method used to analyze the data.

Respondents

Thirty-nine respondents were interviewed. Two-thirds (n= 26) of the interviewees were retirees while the remaining one third (n=13) were coworkers of those who had retired. All respondents had been or currently were employees of a mid-sized Western University. We interviewed both retirees and non-retirees to understand all actors' views of the phenomenon of retirement, and to check for differences and similarities in the language of metaphors used.

Retirees

Of the 26 retirees interviewed, seventy-seven percent were men and twenty-three percent were women. Thirty-eight percent had been university professors, twelve percent had held administrative positions, and fifty percent had been staff. Length of retirement ranged from one to 18 months¹, while length of employment ranged from 5 to 41 years. The median length of employment was 23.5 years.

Non-retirees

Sixty-nine percent of the non-retirees were women, while 31% were men. All non-retirees (except for two who worked in Human Resources) had been colleagues of one of the retirees interviewed for this study. Fifteen percent were faculty, fifteen percent were administrators, and seventy percent were staff. Length of employ-



ment ranged from 3 to 24 years, with a median length of employment of 12 years.

Procedures

Contacts were made from three sources: a list of recent retirees obtained from the campus office of Human Resources, a banquet honoring retirees, and word-of-mouth. Every person who had retired within the previous year was contacted by one of the researchers and asked to participate in an interview on her/his perception of retirement. Interviewees were informed that we would need up to one hour of their time, that we would be taking detailed notes on their responses, and that confidentiality would be guaranteed.

We decided to limit our interviews to those who had retired in the last year in order to focus upon initial perceptions of retirement and facilitate recall of events which had happened within a 12 month period of time. This left us with 46 possible respondents. We contacted all but two of these retirees and were able to interview 26 (13 retirees were out of town; 5 declined). To obtain metaphors, respondents were asked the open-ended question, "Retirement at _____ is like ."

At the conclusion of each interview, retirees were asked to provide the researchers with the name(s) of former co-workers (e.g., non-retirees) still employed at the university with whom they had worked prior to their retirement. All but two retirees were able to provide at least one name. From the names supplied, we attempted to interview at least one co-worker for each retiree. These non-retirees were contacted in the manner described above. For a variety of reasons (e.g., refusals to be interviewed, out of town travel, inability to make contact before the end of data gathering) we interviewed only 13 of these non-retirees.

Data Analysis

To explore the types of metaphors used to describe retirement, the researchers employed the analytic procedures articulated by



Koch and Deetz (1981). The framework includes four steps: collecting metaphors by obtaining records of participants' talk, isolating metaphors, sorting the identified metaphors into coherent groups, and analyzing the metaphors by identifying their shared understanding. The final step of identifying shared understanding is accomplished by outlining each metaphor's organizational entailment (e.g., manifestation), displaying metaphors evidencing their entailment, and attempting to identify the shared entailments or external systematicity between metaphors.

Koch and Deetz (1981) provide an example by analyzing the "Organization is Machine" metaphor.

Main Metaphor:

ORGANIZATION IS MACHINE

Shared understanding:

machine has interlocking parts

Organizational entailment:

organization has interlocking parts

Metaphors evidencing entailment:

"Everything is going like clockwork."

"He really threw a wrench into the works."

"Their timing is off."

"Something is in the wrong gear" (p. 8).

Koch and Deetz (1981) also provide an example of identifying shared entailments.

Main metaphors:

ORGANIZATION IS A MACHINE

ORGANIZATION IS ORGANISM

Shared understandings:

organisms are material processors

machines are material processors

Mutual organization entailments:

organizations are material processors



Metaphors evidencing mutual entailment:

“We have to digest those statistics in order to turn out a reasonable decision.”

“Accounting is searching for more input on that.”

(p.10)

In sum, identifying shared understanding between metaphors involves outlining a metaphor's entailment, displaying the metaphors that evidence that entailment and trying to identify shared entailments between metaphors.

We also employed unitizing procedures similar to those described by Staton-Spicer and Marty-White (1981). To determine which responses should be coded, researchers read the responses to the question “Retirement at _____ is like” and transferred statements which contained metaphors to file cards. All responses to this question were coded and analyzed. Any additional elaborations to the question which contained similes or some form of the verb “to be” and adhered to Ponds's (1983) definition of a metaphor (e.g., A is B, where A and B belong to two different categories) were transferred to file cards and counted as metaphors. Eighty-two metaphor statements were isolated.

We then read through the metaphors and inductively derived categories for each by using Miles and Huberman's (1984) clustering technique (e.g., grouping, then conceptualizing objects that have similar patterns or characteristics). Precedent for use of this technique has been established by Baxter and Bullis (1986) and Bullis and Bach (1989). Eight metaphor categories were derived. Finally, we independently coded all 82 metaphors into the 8 categories. Absolute agreement was .96, while reliability using Scott's (1955) pi was .88. We then took four of the five most frequently used metaphor categories and applied the last three steps of Koch and Deetz' (1981) methodology for uncovering shared understanding across metaphor categories.



RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

This section provides a description of the results of the data analyzed, offering categories of the metaphors uncovered in the subjects' talk. We then compare metaphors used by retirees and non-retirees and offer further analysis of the key categories that emerged from the data.

Metaphor Categories

Seven metaphor categories were uncovered. These categories, displayed in Table 1, are: transition, shedding weight, freedom, family, emotion, negative or severed, and underutilized. Each category will be discussed.

Table 1: Retirement Metaphors

<u>Metaphor Type</u>	<u>Frequency</u>	<u>Percent</u>
Transition	24	.29
Shedding Weight	9	.11
Freedom	15	.18
Family	3	.04
Emotion	19	.23
Negative or Severed	8	.10
Underutilized	2	.02
Miscellaneous	2	.02
TOTAL	82	.99

Transition

Transition metaphors comprised the largest category (N=24; 29%) of metaphors elicited from the respondents. These transition metaphors reflected either a process of movement from one point to another or were perceived to be specific turning points or milestones. Process was reflected in statements such as "retirement is like moving to a new house, "starting a second life," "going into a whole different world," or "a flower reblossoming[sic]." Perhaps the best statement reflecting transition as a process came from a



recently retired staff member. She stated that “retirement is like a transition. It’s not an end, it is a beginning. [I’m] going on to something else – I have freedom to do more things.”

Other respondents seemed to perceive transitions as specific turning points which reflected a sense of accomplishment or finality – a sense of being finished with one life-stage and moving on to another. When responding to the question, “Retirement is like . . .,” one retired staff member noted, “I see retirement as another positive milestone. It’s just another thing you do. I looked forward to it and it’s rewarding. I’ve eliminated only one of my four jobs.” Another recently retired faculty member reported that “you have to face the fact that retirement is the death of an organizational relationship. It’s like a divorce – it may be pleasant or unpleasant. It’s a change, a loss to which you must adjust.”

Viewing retirement as a divorce suggests the worker and the organization are spouses/partners with the relationship hinging on commitment. Retirement, then, may signal the end of the relationship and the commitment.

Shedding Weight

Metaphors of shedding weight (n=9, 11%) reflected a sense of freedom and lack of pressure from daily organizational stresses and strains. Several respondents simply articulated the fact that retirement is “a big relief.” As one retired faculty member proclaimed, “retirement is the sense of a weight lifted off of you – I can speak my mind because I know that they can’t fire me.” Others noted that retirement was “shedding weight and tension from the job,” and “a breath of fresh air – a real relief of stress of the University system.”

If retirement is seen as a weight being lifted, we see the worker as a “beast of burden” and the organization as the master. The relationship between the two is one subservient the other a master. Thus, retirement may signal the fulfillment or ending of a labor contract.



2 Freedom

Fifteen metaphors (18%) were associated with a sense of personal freedom and independence. Respondents noted that retirement is “being able to come and go as I please,” and “being independent to manage my own affairs.” One retired faculty member provided two metaphors. He reported that retirement was like “being disentangled out of a web,” and like “getting out of jail.” When asked to describe these metaphors, he commented that “I’m free, grateful that I am disentangled out of a web. We want to be in a professional web of life but it’s too sticky, too confining. I’m less tense and strangled and more carefree.” To describe the jail metaphor he elaborated:

To a certain degree retirement is like getting out of jail. My office is like a cell and I have been let out in my 60-65th year. All work is a kind of imprisonment. Even though I like teaching and scholarship, I didn't like the rest – the meetings, etc. The departmental intrigue and politics were my confinement, while conferences and meetings were my jail.

Viewing retirement as getting out of jail suggests that the worker is a prisoner and the organization is the jail (or perhaps the warden). The relationship between the two is one of simply “serving time.” Retirement, then, signals having “done your time” or the end of your sentence.

Family

Three responses (4%) contained a reference to family, claiming the organization was akin to an extended family. One retired professor claimed that “when you retire you feel like you’re leaving a family and all its frustrations – good and bad.”

Emotion

By far the most diverse category, emotions (n=19, 23%) fell on a continuum from very positive to very negative. These metaphors were typically short (1-2 word responses) and were specific expressions of feeling. Most responses were rooted in personal ex-



perience. Some seemed organizationally-induced. Positive emotions were expressed in statements such as retirement is like a "superior high," a "jubilant expectation." Many reported metaphors which contained "mixed emotions." Characteristic of these mixed emotions was one staff member who claimed that retirement was like being "happy and sad," while a retired staff member posited that he "missed the people, but not the job."

Several negative emotions were also noted. Respondents reported that retirement was like "a fearful, interesting experience," "being very uncertain," and "being empty." One claimed that retirement was a "disappointment" because his retirement earnings were not what he expected, while a non-retiree claimed that retirement would be like a "rude-awakening" if one was forced out early.

Negative or Severed

Eight metaphors (10%) were coded as negative or severed. These responses were generally longer than the 1-2 word expressions of emotion noted above, and contained an element of permanence or finality not found in other metaphors.

It is interesting to note that all the responses coded into this category came from retirees. As such, they seemed to be based upon actual experience rather than the perception of what retirement might be like (e.g., as perceived by non-retirees). Perhaps the most descriptive metaphor was one where a retiree stated that retirement is like being "born into death; like being cast adrift and having the [organizational] umbilical cord severed." Other retirees reported being "cut-off," meeting a "dead-end," or feeling like his organization was claiming that "you are the grass and I'm the lawn mower."

Underutilized

Two metaphors were coded into this category. Reflected in these metaphors is a sense of still being viable, yet no longer having one's capabilities fully recognized by the organization. One retiree claimed that retirement is "like putting a thoroughbred out to pasture. You're in a good place, have food, etc., but are no



14 longer in the limelight," while another noted that retirement was like "being underutilized. My work was who I was. I had to get used to not being that person."

Comparison of Retirees with Non-Retirees

Eighty-one percent of the twenty-six metaphors provided by non-retirees fell into the "Transition" and "Emotion" categories. However, the metaphors used by non-retirees in these two categories were less specific than those used by retirees. It is very likely that experiences of transition and mixed emotion cannot be specifically explicated until one goes through the actual process of retirement; non-retirees' lack of tangible experience could account for the relative lack of detail in the articulation of retirement metaphors.

Retirees provided more metaphors than non-retirees in the categories of "Freedom" and "Negative of Severed" (12 to 3 and 8 to 0, respectively). The differences in metaphor use between retirees and non-retirees with regard to "Freedom" and "Negative or Severed" are also most likely brought upon by actual experiences of retirement. It is perhaps difficult to vocalize negative or severed feelings until one experiences the permanence many times associated with organizational exit.

Similar to the categories of "Transition" and "Emotion" discussed earlier, the metaphors provided by retirees in the categories of "Freedom" and "Negative or Severed" were much richer and more detailed. Obviously, retirees have the benefit of first-hand experience of the retirement process. Upon retirement, individuals are more cognizant of the lack of pressure from organizational stresses and strains and have a more clear idea of the personal freedom they now experience away from the workplace.

External Systematicity Between Metaphor Categories

Having collected, isolated, and sorted retirement metaphors into coherent categories, we analyzed the metaphors by identifying their shared understanding. This stage of metaphor analysis involves



outlining the organizational entailment of each metaphor, displaying metaphors which evidence this entailment and attempting to identify the shared entailments or external systematicity between metaphors (Koch & Deetz, 1981).

We have chosen the four largest categories and believe these categories are the most informative when analyzed. The analysis is intended to be illustrative rather than exhaustive.

We begin with the "Retirement is a Transition" category. There are several possible opportunities for shared understanding regarding this metaphor. For example:

Transitions have several stages.

Transitions take you from one state of being to another.

Transitions are a process.

Transitions involve uncertainty.

For illustrative purposes and because all transitions intuitively involve uncertainty we have chosen to focus on the shared understanding of "uncertainty" for further analysis. Using Koch and Deetz' (1981) methodology, the formulation becomes:

Main Metaphor: RETIREMENT IS A TRANSITION

Shared Understanding:

Transitions involve uncertainty.

Organizational entailment:

Retirement involves uncertainty.

Metaphors evidencing entailment:

"Retirement is like going into a whole different world."

"[Retirement] is similar to marriage; it changes your life."

"You have to face the fact that retirement is the death of an organizational relationship. It's like a divorce. It may be pleasant or unpleasant. It's a change to which you must adjust."

To see how "Retirement is a Transition" is related to other metaphors, we turn to the category of "Emotions." Over half of



the responses in the “Emotions” category dealt in some way with mixed emotions or feelings. One respondent actually stated that retirement “is like uncertainty.” The overriding aspect of these responses is that retirement is a confusing, uncertain event in most people’s lives.

To examine the shared entailments between these two categories, we outline the following details:

Main Metaphors:

RETIREMENT IS A TRANSITION
RETIREMENT IS AN EMOTION

Shared Understanding:

Transition involves uncertainty.
Emotions (related to retirement) involve uncertainty.

Mutual organizational entailments:

Retirement involves uncertainty.

Metaphors evidencing mutual entailment:

“Retirement is like going to the first grade – [a retiree needs the] teacher to walk him to the bathroom and wash his hands and [take him] out to the playground where he doesn’t get beaten up.”
“Retirement is like the end of a John Wayne movie. He didn’t die—life went on, but you never knew how. It’s a mixture of hero and villain; known and unknown. You just ride off into the sunset.”

From this illustrative analysis of shared entailments, we can suggest that many people will be uncertain regarding the process of retirement. Given concerns related to retirement such as continued health, increased time with one’s spouse, need to develop new interests and miscellaneous financial considerations, it is easy to see how uncertainty would play a vital role.

As another example of shared entailments, we examine the “Retirement is Freedom” and the “Retirement is Shedding Weight” categories. When outlining the “Retirement is Freedom” category, we arrive at the following:



Main Metaphor:

RETIREMENT IS FREEDOM

Shared Understanding:

Freedom means a lack of pressure.

Organizational Entailment:

Retirement means a lack of pressure.

Metaphors evidencing entailment:

“[I can have] Saturday and Sunday type of days on Wednesday.”

“[The] umbilical cord [has been] severed.”

“[Retirement is like] a breath of fresh air.”

We examine “Retirement is Freedom” and “Retirement is Shedding Weight” together:

Main Metaphors:

RETIREMENT IS FREEDOM

RETIREMENT IS SHEDDING WEIGHT

Shared Understanding:

Freedom means a lack of pressure.

Shedding weight means a lack of pressure.

Mutual Organizational Entailments:

Retirement means a lack of pressure.

Metaphors that evidence mutual entailment:

“I came home Friday night, took off my watch, and haven’t worn it since.”

“To a certain degree retirement is like getting out of jail. My office is like a cell and I have been let out in my 60-65th year.”

“I’m free, grateful that I am disentangled out of a web.”

The “Freedom” and “Shedding Weight” metaphors, then, share the entailment of “lack of pressure.” Since retirees often have no regular schedules that must be followed, no meetings to attend and no deadlines to meet, it is easy to see how a lack of pressure results from retirement.



IMPLICATIONS

We believe this study has implications for organizational researchers interested in metaphor analysis. Deetz (1984), Deetz and Mumby (1984), Koch and Deetz (1981) and Pepper (1987) have clearly specified how metaphor analysis may be conducted in organizations. Unfortunately, these well articulated and systematic procedures have not been applied to analyze actual lived experience of organizational members. In this study such application is provided, as we explicate and adapt Koch and Deetz (1981) in a way which may be easily replicated by other researchers of organizational metaphor.

The utility of metaphor analysis has also been demonstrated. Eighty-two metaphors from thirty-nine interviews were identified. While some respondents had an easier time relating metaphors and others were able to provide a larger number of rich, descriptive metaphors, the volume of metaphors identified indicates that they are salient to organizational actors, whether they are retirees or non-retirees. Furthermore, metaphors do serve a sense-making function for organizational actors. One may see where using a metaphor such as "retirement is like moving to a new house" enables an actor to transfer the essence of "moving to a new house" to "retirement," thereby easing what could be a difficult transition.

We have also demonstrated that metaphors can be reliably coded into meaningful categories, and grouped into mutual organizational entailments, enabling researchers to uncover the richly varied sense-making processes used by social actors to explain their perceptions of retirement.

This project also provides insights into the retirement process. By analyzing the shared organizational entailments of our four largest categories, we have learned that retirement from the organization we studied is perceived as an uncertain time that paradoxically lacks pressure. Perhaps it is often difficult to "find a place for oneself" in retirement (hence the uncertainty), yet the search may be carried out slowly (hence the lack of pressure). Pre- and post-retirement counseling might assist retirees with this inherent uncertainty.



We also found that while non-retirees can articulate a general sense of the retirement process, retirees are much more vivid and specific in their use of metaphor. "Freedom," and feeling "Negative or Severed" (and to a certain degree, "Shedding Weight") are an important part of the retirement experience. Perhaps the explanation of these categories (and the specific metaphors within these categories) to non-retirees may give them a more realistic view of the retirement experience. In addition, understanding the experiences of retiring may help ease the transition from being a productive, working, organizational member to a retired, but still valued, individual.

The differences in the reports of "Freedom," and "Negative or Severed," reinforce the fact that "the view of retirement held by working people doesn't always square with reality" (*Wall Street Journal*, 1989, B1). Perhaps the retirees were not expecting to feel such freedom or such a sense of being severed. It may be argued that these two feelings are opposite sides of the same coin. With severance comes freedom. Furthermore, freedom has its price (feeling severed). Working people may look forward to the freedom retirement brings without looking at the price concomitant with the freedom - a feeling of being severed from the flow of work and normal activity. Again, prior knowledge of this potential tension may assist retirees.

Limitations

Although we feel we've raised some interesting questions, several problems were evident in the study. First, three of the interviewees had been forced into early retirement. As such, their perceptions of organizational exit were likely much different from those who had planned in advance for retirement and had a less painful exit. It is likely that people who had expected retirements would be more highly identified with the organization than those who had been forced out. Further analysis should focus upon the metaphors used by these individuals to see how their experiences differ.

Six of the retirees were not "really" retired. All were faculty members who were on the post-retirement contracts. While these fac-



ulty were officially retired, all were active teachers and scholars, and were currently teaching one quarter per academic year. As such, while they were retired, they benefitted from having the “best of both worlds.” They were still vital organizational members, despite the fact that they were no longer as involved as they once were. They had the freedom to be as connected or as separate from the organization as they wished. Again, additional analyses should separate out these individuals to see how their accounts are different from those who have permanently exited from the organization.

Summary

In this study, we argued for the value of an analysis of the metaphors used by organizational actors to describe the process of retirement. Metaphors were systematically collected, identified and coded into categories. We discussed the resulting categories (“transition,” “shedding weight,” “freedom,” “family,” “emotion,” “negative or severed,” and “underutilized”) as well as the differences between the metaphors used by retirees and non-retirees. Next, we illustrated how shared entailments between metaphors can offer further insight into the process of retirement. We then discussed the implications of our study and shared its limitations. We hope this study draws attention to both the need and benefits of studying the sense-making involved in retirement.

NOTES

- 1 Six of the faculty interviewed were on post-retirement contracts. At this particular university, faculty have the option of “retiring,” yet are able to return to the university for one quarter per year to teach (for 3 - 7 years after they have “retired”). As such, although these “one-third timers” had retired, they were still actively engaged in teaching and research.



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